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Comment

Advantage Alliance, If Any

LECTORAL arithmetic is never simple. Nothing adds up the way it ought to. But that doesn't stop pollsters and pundits from constantly adding and subtracting constituencies and communities as if they were bright beads on a straight string. The Kumbha mela of all polls is at hand—the Uttar Pradesh assembly election so completely overshadows the ones in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur that only political correctness can force us to bring them into the conversation. UP, the most populous state, has some sort of a snob value that makes it more important than the numbers it brings in. This is the state that makes and mars prime ministers (and its social and financial backwardness is a measure of the effectiveness of our political leadership).

Well, there is no doubt that the Narendra Modi wave swept all its rivals off in 2014, winning 71 seats (two more for its allies) and 42.3% votes. If the party repeats this feat in the next few months, it ought to bag over 320 seats in the 403-seat-strong assembly. But the BJP had come down from a high of almost 30% in 2014 to 24.4% the very next year in the Bihar assembly polls, resulting in a miserable show of just 53 seats. In West Bengal, it had come down from 17% to just 10% in 2016. This fall from the peak of 2014 has been visible across the country, even in Assam, where the BJP won the 2016 assembly election despite a loss of about 7% vote share.

In this context, it is difficult to assume that the BJP would retain the 42.3% vote share that it secured in 2014 in UP, unless of course the demonetisation drive has triggered a tsunami of sorts in favour of the BJP. But that seems highly unlikely as well. If the waters are placid, the sailing would ironically get tough for the BJP. And then a Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance could make the going really tough. At their weakest in 2014, the SP and the Congress had polled 22.2% and 7.5% and put together that is an impressive 30% vote share. If that is the base minimum for the two parties, they could really benefit out of the alliance because of the message it sends across to the third largest community: the Muslims.

UP has about 18.5% Muslims who can determine the winner, if there is a consolidation of votes. The SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav tried his best to ensure the split of Muslim votes among SP, Congress and BSP. But with Akhilesh Yadav expected to tie up with Rahul Gandhi, the optics of the polls has changed. Now, there is no real reason for the Muslim voter to favour the BSP, though the Dalit party has fielded the maximum number of Muslim candidates (earlier Mayawati had done a similar favour to the Brahmins). Sure, alliance politics did not work wonders in West Bengal where a Left-Congress poll tie-up failed miserably. In fact, the Bengal model is closer to the UP situation because a four-way split was turned only into a three-way fight there, unlike Bihar, which had a bipolar contest between the NDA and the rest.

RAJESH RAMACHANDRAN





SEEKING JUSTICE Binny Devassia with her daughter's photograph

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In the Valley, a father's pursuit of justice for his dead son killed by the police years ago gets entangled in farcical webs of 'inquiries'.

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Ahead of assembly elections in UP, new alliances and community outlook

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Seasonal Affective Disorder is more common to countries with extreme winters but not exclusive to them. If you find yourself moody, sad and irritable, you can blame the weather.

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Cover: R. Prasad

Online



NATIONAL

Amazon's officials had secured visas through proper paperwork, under what rule or law was Sushma Swaraj threatening to cancel them?

by AAKAR PATEL



After rewards, the Nitish government should not let Bihar officials behind boat tragedy go scot-free

by GIRIDHAR JHA



Few US President-elects have caused as much consternation around the world as Donald J. Trump

by PRANAY SHARMA



SOCIETY

Dangal girl Zaira's trolls prove that the Kashmiri youth are angry with anything that steals their Azadi narrative

by NASEER GANAI



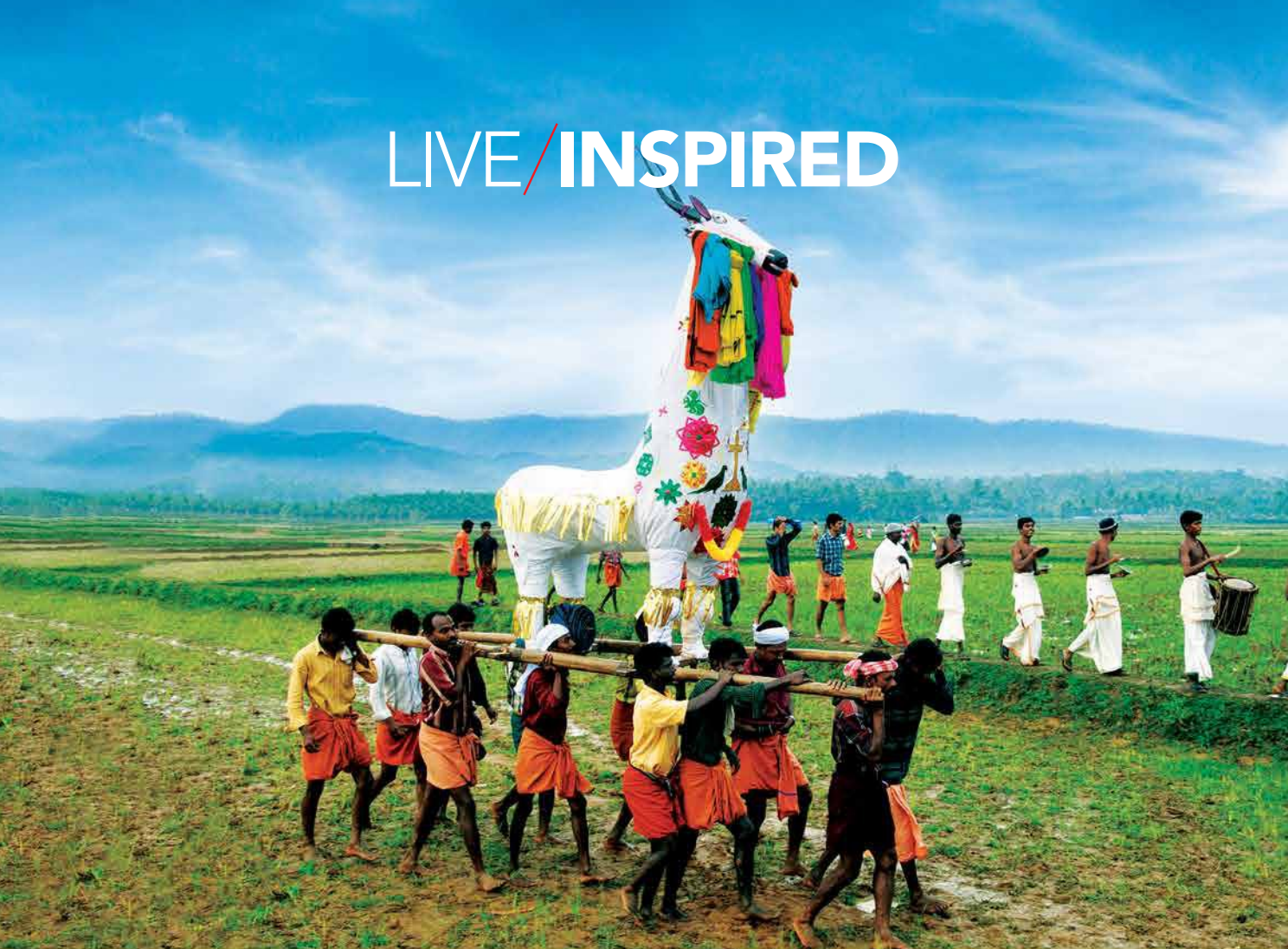
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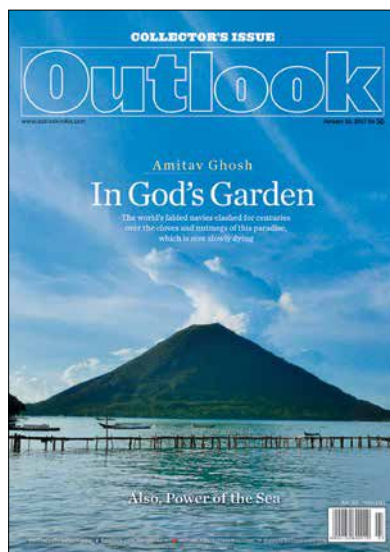
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Sea Changes

OMAN Ramachandran Nair: *Outlook's* collector's issue articles on Power of the Sea, (Jan 16) were a great read. Rana Mitter's *Anything But Pacific*, on the future of the Asia-Pacific, reminds me of the many reasons as to why the US had to go nuclear to combat Japanese aggression. Obviously, the Trump presidency is expected to make some changes in the new era of US leadership, yet I don't think there would be any key strategic changes of note. One reason is that the US still wants to 'lead' the world in the same way. The one thing to guard against are misunderstandings that lead to conflicts. Unfortunately, they are still continuing.

BELGAUM Aditya Mookerjee: China and India are in a shadow antagonistic position today because of their interaction with the West. The tension in the South China Sea seems to be the fallout of a conflict between China and the US, which is playing proxy to the other nations who rim the sea. All this wouldn't have happened if the two nations had confidence in each other. China today is distrustful of its neighbours because of their cosy ties with the US.

BANGALORE H.N. Ramakrishna: China flexes its arms in the South China Sea. The rules-based order that is vital for the world would fall apart if countries pick and choose the rules they wish to live by, like China dangerously seeks to do. Indians have been sailing east for ages, having trade links with China, Thailand, Cambodia etc. The Indian Ocean is one of the world's important maritime routes, and is emerging as China's playing field under the maritime silk route (MSR). Whether the proposed One-Belt-One-Road or the MSR will establish trade and friendly relations or create new rivalries will need to be watched.



January 16, 2017

CALCUTTA Lt Col Ranjit Sinha (ret'd): Raja Menon's article on the impending rivalry in the 'Indo-Pacific' (The Reborn Armada of Cheng Ho) was an illuminating read. Though India had made remarkable progress in ship-building during the Maratha regime and had traded across the sea with Arabia and African countries for a millennium before that, they didn't venture into mastering the art of building war ships. There are two reasons for this—all invasion routes into India was land routes, and two, India is a vast, rich and self-sufficient, and thus any of the emperors didn't feel the need to strike out across the seas for new territory. However, Shivaji and Tipu Sultan realised the importance of sea power. Around 1674, the Maratha navy under Kanhoji Angre made remarkable progress on ship-building.

MUMBAI Ramesh Marathe: Raja Menon mentions Tipu Sultan's vision of being a maritime power. Actually, a hundred years before Tipu, Shivaji was

the first to understand the importance of naval power, and had raised a formidable navy headed by Kanhoji Angre. He revamped some old sea forts and built a strong one called Sindhudurg at Malvan, near Goa. Kanhoji kept both the Portuguese and British navy in check. Unfortunately, later the Peshwas did not realise the navy's importance in holding back the British.

BANGALORE P. Ramachandran: Your January 16 issue might be a 'collector's' delight, but for an ordinary mortal like me it was indeed torture. For the first time I enjoyed the last page of the issue.

LUCKNOW M.C. Joshi: *Outlook's* cover story on the spice islands, written by Amitav Ghosh (*In Meluku, East of Eden*, Jan 16), made a gripping read. Spices have been an integral part of human food since time immemorial and India has been a spice exporter since ages. We all like spicy food, but many of us are unaware that other than adding distinctive taste, every spice is also an effective home remedy for some health problem. Concise information about the health benefits of various spices would have been useful.

ON E-MAIL Karthik: *Outlook's* Power of the Sea issue is a great collection of articles on maritime history, power and future strategy. However, I have an issue with two sentences in Raja Menon's article, pertaining to Brahmins. He mentions that since non-Brahmins were kept outside the ambit of knowledge, India could not progress in many fields. This biased statement should have found no place in the article. Indians were divided on varnas and this enabled them to lead regimented lives and to peacefully cohabit. Indeed, what has carpenters unable to scale up ship-making got to do with Brahmins? And so many Indian

one-liner

NAGPUR N. Namasivayan

Modi has a stable job as PM, but when will the people of the country get jobs?

letters

temples were built with precise calculations—didn't Brahmins help out then?

Age of Despair

ONE-MAIL M.Y.S.: This refers to *The Plutocrats and Their Angry Sheep* (Jan 16) by Pranab Bardhan on the rise of the populist right-wing across the world. We read about three 'isms'—capitalism, communism and socialism—and saw them being experimented with in different countries under the overall rubric of democracy. Now the models are all mixed up and there is no country left that is purely capitalist, or purely communist or even purely socialist. Political leaders are now talking of nationalism and patriotism to touch the souls of voters and divert their attention from deficits in governance. They are also talking about liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation as ways to take the country forward, but not about multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. They talk about justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, but never practise it in letter and spirit. They also try to restrict, thwart and punish those who exercise the right to free speech for criticising the government. The days of despotism and dictatorship may be over, but ele-



LOTUS-GAZING What the future holds

INBOXED



Mind Your Manu

PUNE G.L. Karkal: This refers to Shiv Visvanathan's column *The Dirty Indian Male* (January 2). I think 'The Dirty Mind of the Indian Male' would have made a better headline. That is because our social thinking is mainly based on various old texts such as the *Manusmriti*. Let me quote from the text. Here's chapter nine, verse three: "Father takes care of young girls, husband takes care of grown-up girls, sons take care of elderly mothers. Never should a woman be given any freedom." Or take verse 13: "Drinking wine, mixing with bad people, separating from husband, travelling, dreaming, living at somebody else's house—all six spoil women." So, what about men? Verse 17 reads, "Sleeping, doing make-up to look attractive, anger, deceit, bad habits—these aspects are inherent in women." Does that mean men do not have these traits? According to verse 146, "A Brahmin man can have four wives from different castes." What a privilege! Are Brahmin women allowed to marry four men from different castes? There are many such gems of gender discrimination in the *Manusmriti*.

ments of both are found in what passes for democracy in our time. We are seeing majoritarian rule over minorities—religious, economic, cultural, linguistic, racial and regional—and the first casualty is humanity and the rights of minorities.

Not Even a Quarter

HEMPUR Vijay Pant: Halfway Modi's tenure, the average Indians' life remains devoid of any perceptible change. The government has done precious little beyond dishing out catchy phrases. The November 8 pullout of two high-value banknotes is a welcome move, but its follow-up has been extremely shoddy. Yearning for achhe din has become like waiting for Godot.

HYDERABAD J.S. Acharya: Modi's idea of India is still in the making. He is greatly influenced by his upbringing in

the RSS from an early age, transformed by his stints as the chief minister of his native Gujarat, and now the highest political office of the land. Maybe he is trying to project himself as a suave leader, but then no BJP PM can stray very much away from the Sangh ideology. That dilemma will always check Modi from performing to his potential.

Judge Not Too Soon

CHENNAI Kangayam R. Narasimhan: While party functionaries in the AIADMK are singing paeans to 'Chinna amma', it was the late Jayalalitha who selected O. Panneerselvam twice in the past to act as CM. Panneerselvam should be given enough time to function before he is judged. So far, he has not done badly as CM. The Tamil Nadu government may lose credibility if his constitutional posi-

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tion is continuously challenged by Sasikala's sycophants in the party.

The Outsiders

CHENNAI Shariff: Agreed, Tamil Nadu has for a while now revelled in the culture of treating certain public figures as gods (*The Worshipful Leader*, Dec 19). But then, such icons have also been from outside of the state. Late chief minister M.G. Ramachandran was originally from Kerala. His successor Jayalalitha was a native of Karnataka. Tamil cinema's king Rajnikanth is of Marathi origin.

On The Defence

SECUNDERABAD K.R.

Srinivasan: Going by Pakistan's track record, General Qamar Bajwa taking over as the country's new army chief can exist only in the realm of imagination (*Even His Epaulette Weighs Heavy*, Jan 9). As for relations with India, he would, if anything, be only forced to toe the hawkish line of his predecessors. Since Bajwa is from the Ahmadiya sect, the administration in Islamabad will be viewing his actions with suspicion.

LONDON George: Almost every major incident of global terrorism in the Indian subcontinent has its origin in Pakistan, yet India's politicians won't go beyond the clichéd broad hint—'a foreign hand'—when they accuse Islamabad of perpetuating turbulence in the region. That country should end its wrong assumption that it itself is a 'universal victim' of terror.

ON E-MAIL A.M.: Doesn't the Pakistan Army see that organisations like the Jaish-e-Mohammed, if allowed to propagate their message, will give rise to other similar organisations, which will be disgruntled with the Pakistani establishment just as JeM is with India. For all we know, dissatisfied JeM members might be breaking ranks and fighting against the Pakistani army during Operation Zarb-e-Azb. What does Pakistan have to say to home grown militants who fight against the State? What does the common man in Pakistan think about the JeM?

Bicycle Thief

MUMBAI Ghai: Once during the ongoing Samajwadi Party feud, Mulayam Singh Yadav had to go to the Election Commission in order to pro-

tect his party's well-known symbol, the bicycle, which his son UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav has now taken away from him (*The Chachas And Chanakyas*, Jan 9). What a fall for the grand old man of SP!

Scary Stunt

BANGALORE Vijay Padaki: Apropos *Heart For Mart Sake* (Dec 26), there is another aspect of stunts not mentioned in your cover story but covered early in western media. The real effectiveness of the stunt has never been proved at all, nor have its side effects been mapped. It has simply been pushed into mainstream medical practice by aggressive hard-sell.

Three Cheers

BANGALORE J. Akshay: Karun Nair has the potential to be India's next batting superstar, going by his elegant strokeplay (*Eleven Strong Against Invaders*, Jan 9). The triple ton he scored was replete with a range of shots that had the class of greats like Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid.



HEIRLOOM Akhilesh takes the cycle

New Age Impotency

BANGALORE M. Stanes: This refers to your special year-end issue *Partnership & Pleasure* (Jan 2). In excess, even nectar becomes poison. I am an old-fashioned senior citizen who thinks highly of the good old days when sex was hush-hush even in British society. How Audrey Hepburn's swear words at the race course in *My Fair Lady* made society ladies swoon! Sex in those days had its own exquisite charm. Now even a schoolboy knows everything about the birds and the bees. Your special issue gave sex an even more pedestrian spin. Too much exposure could make sex in the future 'untouchable'. In the days when sex was a subject to be secretive about, men were virile, whereas in these

times of overexposure to all things sexual, the prevalence of impotency is alarmingly high. Secrecy about sex makes it more attractive and natural.

Rahul Raga

AMRITSAR L.J.S. Panesar: Rahul Gandhi accusing Modi of receiving nine kickbacks from corporates while he was CM of Gujarat is no laughing matter (*Chances Of Lightning, Or Just Thunder*, Dec 26). The Congress vice-president has questioned the integrity of the prime minister of the country and the matter should be properly investigated. Instead of laughing it off, the PM and the BJP must come out with the whole truth in their defence, so that the matter is put to rest once and for all. If they know the PM is clean, then why have any qualms about the matter being investigated?

BANGALORE K.S. Jayatheertha:

By playing the politics of allegation and innuendo, Rahul Gandhi is giving the BJP a taste of their own medicine. In the past, as in the present, the BJP loses no opportunity in citing the scams which took place under the Congress' regime. And when it comes to Modi, the BJP always tries to portray him as a 'pure', 'uncorrupted' politician. It seems Rahul wants to rupture this aura of moral superiority that the PM and his team spend so much time building. But, whatever his motive, Rahul should be clear and sharp about his accusations rather than building a sensational mystery around them.

Magic Sim-Sim

MUMBAI Kamal Anil Kapadia: Jio's master plan hit the other players in the telecom industry so hard, that it has become increasingly difficult for them to hold their own in the market (*Free Dole Spurs Magic Sim Growth*, Dec 26). By giving premium services such as 4G internet for free up till a stipulated time and making calls completely free, Jio has changed the rules of the game forever. Reliance Jio will be looking to slowly make other telecom operators redundant in the near future.

Corrigendum

In the issue dated January 16, the photo feature (*The Year That Just Flashed By*) had no picture for the caption "Cyrus Mistry tries to calm the press in Mumbai". The error is regretted.



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HEALTH IS POLITICAL WEALTH

Food minister Ram Vilas Paswan is busy setting his health record straight. This past week he was admitted to the ICU of a Patna hospital because of respiratory trouble. What bothered Paswan more was that news spread through Bihar that he had been seriously ill. Paswan took to Twitter to say he was fine. His party blamed his local detractors. Once out of hospital a day later, he sent out more tweets to say he was back at work. Back in Delhi, his staff invited journalists to have tea with him. The idea was to demonstrate that he was in fine fettle and stop the rumours about his health.

COZYING UP TO OPPONENTS

A subtle recalibration of the tie-up between Nitish Kumar and Laloo Prasad Yadav seems to be in the process. While Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is said to be cozying up to PM Narendra Modi and the BJP apparently to keep his future options open, Laloo is not to be left behind. In an apparent bid to counter-balance equations, Laloo recently visited Sadaquat Ashram, Congress HQ in Patna, ostensibly for the release of a book on a freedom fighter. He came down heavily on a "divisive" BJP and Modi. Laloo is believed to be unhappy about the CM's overtures to the BJP. Nitish had invited BJP leaders for Makar Sakranti celebrations on January 15—which got cancelled because of the boat mishap—and to form a human chain on January 21 in support of prohibition.

BABUS ON A TIGHT LEASH

The Narendra Modi government has finally managed to shake up the country's entrenched bureaucracy with the dismissal of two IPS officers for poor performance after an extensive evaluation found them "not fit" to continue in the service. The buzz in bureaucratic circles is that this might be the beginning of linking promotions and increments of government servants to their performance, much like in the private sector. Government sources say that the message to the bureaucracy is clear—perform or perish. There is going to be a zero-tolerance policy towards laggards and the corrupt.

OVERHEARD A Trinamool MP who is in jail in connection with the Rose Valley fraud case is reportedly sulking in prison. He refuses to eat or speak to anyone and has even been spotted crying.



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The Bullet Resonates A 'Cruel Joke'

A teenager's death in 2010 led to five months' protest, killing 112 people. Now the probe panel says, 'call CBI'.

BY NASEER GANAI

NO less than six-and-a-half years had passed by this peak winter when Mohammad Ashraf Mattoo thought he was to learn something decisive about the killing of his teenage son. The middle-aged Srinagar resident, who has been fighting an excruciating legal battle over 17-year-old Tufail Mattoo's death at the hands of the police, lost no time after news broke that a panel probing the 2010 incident had submitted its report to the government. At the office of the Koul Commission that had handed over chief minister Mehbooba Mufti a 320-page document the previous day, Ashraf was given a small chit. Its content only added insult to his injury.

"The commission has recommended a CBI inquiry into the petition of Mohammad Ashraf Mattoo, f/o Tufail Mattoo, Said Kadal, Srinagar." That was all the 53-year-old father found written on the note he received from Habibullah Bhat, the registrar of the inquiry body headed by retired judge M.L. Koul.

"What a cruel joke! This has reopened our wounds; we have again started bleeding," says Ashraf, about the 'finding' of the one-man panel that was constituted in June 2014 by the then Omar Abdullah government to inquire into the killings of 100-plus civilians in protests that swept the state capital four years prior to it. "If the commission simply recommends a CBI inquiry, then what is its own finding?"

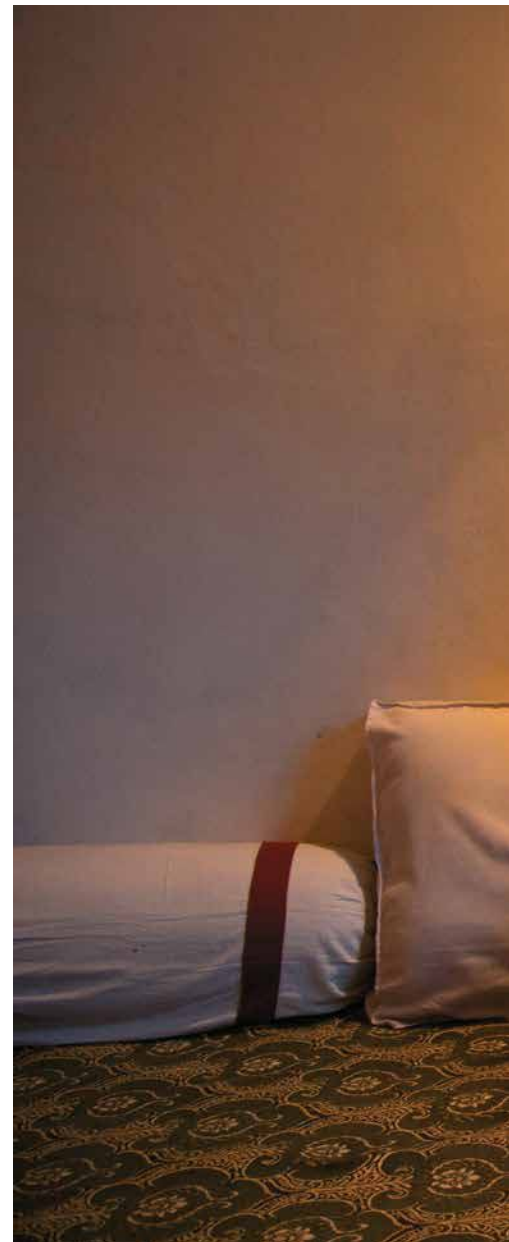
In all earnestness, Ashraf was expecting the commission would name the police personnel and their seniors responsible for

the firing at his son and others. "I feel, all these years I was chasing a mirage. Turns out that those who didn't go before the panel were right—for, it has not identified any armed forces personnel or policemen (responsible for the loss of lives)," he sighs. "We may go to some international forums now. We have exhausted every option in Jammu and Kashmir."

Ashraf's son died on June 11, 2010, when—according to an eyewitness—certain personnel at Maharaj Gunj police station fired at him that summer evening. Tufail's killing evoked protests, leading to a five-month-long agitation that claimed the lives of 112 civilian protesters besides wounding hundreds in firing by government forces. Four years later was formed the Koul commission to look into the entire episode and submit its report in three months. The panel was also asked to recommend action against persons and authorities responsible for using excessive force during the violent upsurge.

The commission earned several extensions and took two-and-a-half years to eventually come up with a report, which it submitted to the CM on December 30, 2016. It did not name any person, while holding security forces and the police responsible for using "excessive forces in 80 per cent cases of 63 civilian killings" the

The bereaved family feels insulted by government's talk about charity. "We may now go to international forums to get justice," fumes late Tufail Mattoo's father, a fighter.



panel investigated. (The rest 49 families did not appear before the panel.) In two cases, according to registrar Bhat, the commission has identified as many police stations responsible for the killing of a couple of youngsters. The Tufail case merits a CBI inquiry, the panel recommended to the government.

Ashraf is shocked even as Bhat refuses to share a copy of the report with the families of the victims. Tufail was his only child, whose killing in mid-2010 made Ashraf's life single-tracked. His only mission since then has been to bring the killers of his son to justice. The outcome of Tufail's case will



Photograph: JAVED AHAMAD

have a major impact on the fate of hundreds of other civilians bereaved by the government forces since 2008, he believes. That way, Ashraf stands out on the legal map of the Valley, where families often refrain to move court against the armed forces and police when it comes to human-rights violations, which entail long legal procedures.

Ashraf's fate changed—for the worse—the year he was looking for a bright future. In 2010, he was to travel to West Asia to do business in Oman. Ahead of it, the man gave up his flourishing trade in Kashmiri handicrafts. It was at this juncture his son was killed. Ashraf plunged into a legal battle

that actually proved to be time-consuming. His very life got centred around the litigation. Every day, Ashraf would go through the case file, jot down points and inform his visitors—mostly journalists these days—how the police “messed up” an investigation to “save its men”.

Tufail was a 12th-standard student in 2010 when he was heading home at the Old City of Said Kadal from a tutorial. The day was June 11, and the time 6.30 p.m. With his school bag slung from his shoulder, the boy was walking through Gani Memorial stadium when he was fired at from a close range. The gunshot spluttered his brain.

DOWNCAST Ashraf Mattoo at Srinagar home, with a photo of his late son Tufail

People gathered and recovered a five-rupee coin from his closed fist. The father, shattered, preserves the poignant copper-nickel ‘souvenir’ at his residence. Such was the display of public sentiment associated with Tufail's death that locals buried the split parts of his brain separately. His schoolbag is still in police custody.

Tufail's end evoked massive outrage that translated into five months of agitation—till the end of autumn that year, by when instances of firing killed 112 people

and wounded hundreds of others. Ashraf clung to his firm faith in law, justice and democracy. He approached the police to file a complaint against the uniformed men involved in his son's killing. The cops refused, prompting him to appeal to Srinagar's chief judicial magistrate (CJM). The official directed the police to do what Ashraf wanted: register a first information report. That was finally done at the Nowhatta police station, 36 days after Tufail's death.

A lengthy legal contest was only beginning. The CJM, in 2011, asked the police to constitute a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the killing. The SIT's pace was so slow that the CJM censured it. In September 2011, Ashraf approached Jammu and Kashmir High Court for speedy investigation.

The court directed the police director-general to constitute an SIT headed by an officer of the superintendent rank and report to it within three weeks. The team eventually came with a closure report that, in December 2012, said "...all the possibility of collecting evidence in this case was explored to reach some conclusion, but SIT was not able to find any conclusive evidence." The team, however, said it will continue a "secret search" and re-investigate the case on finding something incriminating or suspicious.

The high court trashed the report, observing that "it appears as if an attempt has been made to save certain police officials". The bench directed that the case be reopened and handed over to the Crime Branch, which began probing the matter. In May 2015, the Crime Branch's closure report before the trial court termed the circumstances leading to Tufail's end "shrouded in mystery". Ashraf, already greyed beyond his age, challenged this report; the case is pending before the trial court.

It was in 2014 the Omar administration constituted the Koul Commission. That instilled fresh hope in Ashraf. "I thought I will now get justice," he recalls. Justice is the word he often repeats. The chit Ashraf got from the Koul panel office three weeks ago has added to his exacerbation.

Justice Koul refused talk to *Outlook*, while Bhat says the inquiry commission has been "categorical" in its report that Tufail was killed by policemen of Maharaj

Gunj police station—and has hence recommended a CBI probe. "But, we don't know identity of the policemen," he adds, sitting in his office at Samandar Bagh in Lal Chowk.

In the second case, 17-year-old Umar Qayoom was beaten in Soura police station on the outskirts of Srinagar on August 20, 2010. The class-11 student died in the hospital five days later. The Koul commission has held the police personnel responsible for the boy's end. "We have established that he was beaten by the cops and he died. We have identified the police station but not the SHO or any other personnel," Bhat adds.

According to him, in most of the cases, the commission has held the police, the paramilitary, Border Security Force and Railway Protection Force responsible for opening fire in the absence of a senior officer and without the orders of the magis-



PILED UP J&K CM Mehbooba Mufti receives the M.L. Koul panel report

trate. "Whether or not the firing was justified, we couldn't get any evidence of it," Bhat says. "But we have established that law and order was managed by the police constabulary and the CRPF personnel. Not even an inspector-rank officer was with them during the duty. That makes it difficult to identify the jawans who opened fire."

The commission insists against deployment of the CRPF, which perceives it has impunity under several central laws, to tackle law and order situation. It has also sought the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that gives added authority to the military in "disturbed" areas. The Koul panel has put a caveat on it, says Bhat. "We have said 'remove the AFSPA wherever it is not needed.'"

The Koul commission did not call any senior government official such as the IGP or DGP before it, rues Ashraf. "It didn't

even call the (then) chief minister or the home minister," he adds. Bhat counters it: "We were not supposed to call any such politician or administrator as they were not involved in any case."

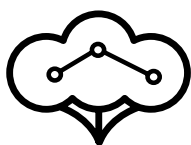
Six years after the post-Tufail unrest, Kashmir witnessed a similar turmoil following the killing of young militant Burhan Wani on July 8. That agitation in the second half of 2016 warrants an inquiry by a judicial commission headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, according to National Conference, which is now the chief Opposition party in the border state. The ruling Peoples Democratic Party has other views. It is keener on providing ex-gratia to the families of those killed, but its coalition partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party, is objecting to it, calling it as an "incentive on terror".

Unlike ex-CM Omar, who admits making mistakes while handling the flare-up in 2010, his successor says the summer protests of 2016 were "planned and well executed", during which children were made shield to attack police and army camps. Mehbooba, however, says a deputy and additional superintendent of police will head a district-level SIT tasked with carrying out a "time-bound" investigation into the 2016 civilian killings. The government pegs the deaths at 76—a figure human-rights activists claim is conservative.

Parvez Imroz, a known human rights defender of the Valley, says the Koul commission is vague in its report "like all the previous ones". According to newspaper reports, the panel "has not indicted anyone, has not named anyone expect two police stations", he says. "It has even denied a copy of the report to the families of the victims. This has deepened the distrust Kashmiris have on the commissions." What's more, he says, the present government is making mockery by asking district SPs, who "are equally responsible" for the killings, to investigate the 2016 civilian killings.

As the Koul commission has recommended the government to provide Rs 10 lakh each to the families of the civilians killed in 2010, including that of Tufail, as a "moral obligation" of the state, Ashraf is seething with anger. "Tufail was born to me after our first three sons died in infancy," he points out. "I have been asking for justice and they are insulting me by talking about charity. Take my word: I will fight the case till I am alive." ■

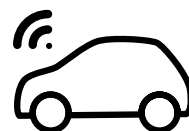
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**ANUP J.
BHAMBHANI**

THE NATION IS NOT A LAB

It's not the duty of citizens to suffer the 'live-testing' of policies

THE demonetisation policy has engaged the whole country over the last two-and-a-half months. Reactions have been strong and conflicting. But no one can say the purpose was wrong if eradicating illicit wealth, corruption or controlling use of money for nefarious purposes was indeed the government's main intent. However, there are some basic principles of governance to which sovereign, democratic republics subscribe: 'ownership' of country vests only in the collectivity of citizens, and we have chosen to be governed by the 'rule of law' and not the rule of men.

If the intention is noble, does it mean the means can never be faulted? How does it fit with the concept of the people's sovereignty and the rule of law? Can a government employ just about any means to achieve a valid purpose, and yet not violate these overarching principles? Can it impose measures, procedures and practices that curtail the basic freedoms of citizens in the process of implementing what may even be a munificent scheme? Can the government, of whichever hue, impose all-round, manufactured hardship upon its people to achieve what it considers necessary for the greater good?

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees that no person, citizen or otherwise, shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty, except according to procedure established by law. Our Supreme Court has drawn on this provision as the fountainhead of several more meaningful aspects of life, in effect saying that 'life' does not connote mere animal existence or continued drudgery, but that the right to life includes the right to live with dignity, safety, privacy and a clean environment. Even the right to sleep (2012 decision in the case of forcible eviction by the police of people sleeping in Baba Ramdev's camp at Ramlila Maidan) and the right to essential medical and other facilities for pilgrims (2013 decision in a case related to the Amarnath Yatra) have been read into the right to life.

I should think that 'life' within the meaning of Article 21 must then also include the right to live without being foisted with government-created privation and inflictions, forcing people to upset their already complex lives, especially when the predominant majority of us have nothing to do with the generation of black money, or with funding of

terrorism or drug-running or any other malady the government seeks to solve.

The larger question is this: the rule of law doctrine says a civilised society will be governed by a set of laws and rules, and not by a set of men, so personal predilections, perceptions and brainwaves of the 'rulers' will not dominate individual conduct. Ergo, there may be many well-meaning policies a government may conceive but not implement because of supervening considerations of the rule of law. There may be instant-coffee solutions to social evils available to policymakers, which, however, they may be hamstrung to employ—to avoid breaking a written or unwritten code that says there are some basic, inalienable entitlements of people that simply cannot be curtailed or hindered, no matter how noble the motive. Can the government, for example, restrict marriages or enforce sterilisation to prevent increase in population, or impose dietary restrictions to solve food shortage, or confiscate all cough syrup bottles to solve the problem of substance abuse?

Policy must be tested on the actual effects it has on the people, not only on the nobility of the policymaker's intentions. When citizens elect governments, they do not hand over the reins of their lives, with a carte blanche to expose them to any hardship, for any reason, and then leave them to firefight for themselves, with the policy motivation and implementation being moving goalposts.

A government must be clear that its role is to run the country, as a team of executives is chosen to run a company; governments must not aspire to 'ownership' of the country, which in a sovereign, democratic republic vests only in the collectivity of citizens and in no one else. A government must conduct itself responsibly when implementing any scheme or idea. It is not the bounden, nationalistic duty of citizens to suffer whatever policy the government imposes. Nor is people's suffering to be dismissed merely as collateral damage. In a representative democracy like ours, the government must justify the imposition of any distress upon its citizens. Policies cannot be 'live-tested' on ordinary people, since that is antithetical to the role of the government in a welfare state. And that is what accountability is all about. □

(The writer is a senior advocate practising in Delhi)

Citizens don't give a carte blanche to governments to expose them to hardships and then leave them to firefight for themselves.

The House Of Flying Daggers

Donald Trump's public run-in with the US intelligence community bodes ill for the future



Illustration by R. PRASAD

BY PRANAY SHARMA

DESPITE occasional bouts of distrust, differences on policies and ground assessments, US presidents, right from George Washington, have relied heavily on their spooks to win wars, successfully implement foreign policy and project America's global power. Over the years, and particularly since the Cold War, this reliance has only grown, as have the number of agencies in the American Intelligence Community (IC).

Perhaps, most powerful and prominent among the 17 outfits that make up the intelligence community today has been the Central Intelligence Agency. However, many are now asking if, under Donald J. Trump's presidency, all

that would undergo a significant change in the days to come.

The question gathers salience because the US now faces a 'remarkable' situation, unprecedented in the republic's entire history. The intelligence community, if not in entirety then at least among its significant sections, now believe that Russia had interfered in November's presidential election, which by implication means that Trump was brought to power with Moscow's help.

Trump, who takes over as America's 45th President from January 20, has in turn accused the intelligence community in general and the CIA in particular of launching a vilification campaign against him. This, he said in a rare reference to history, is akin to what was done against innocent people in 'Nazi Germany'.

The very public spat between the president-elect and the CIA has led experts to wonder how the new US President, with such unconcealed disdain for his spies, is likely to function and how well the intelligence community would serve America's chief executive, a man for whom they have scant respect and are unlikely to trust while facing a major crisis.

Though Trump will have a new security and intelligence team as president, his disparaging remarks, it is feared, will have a lasting and demoralising effect on the US intelligence community that might adversely affect their work.

"No American president can succeed in foreign policy—and by extension his term as commander-in-chief—without a good relationship with the intelligence community," says Daniel Benjamin, director, John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College and former coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department.

An immediate provocation of the ongoing fight between Trump and the CIA, seems to be over the circulation of a 35-page dossier—containing compromising information on Trump the Russians have supposedly amassed—in sections of the American media, apparently written by a former MI6 operative based in Moscow, which also suggests the US president-elect is a Russian plant.

Though it was not clearly established who had commissioned the damaging dossier and how it came in the possession of the American media, particularly Buzzfeed, an internet media company that decided to run the dossier. Subsequently, it was picked up in parts by CNN for a TV debate.

Addressing a press conference early this month—his first since July 2016—Trump accused sections of the media as promoting "fake news"—he was particularly harsh on CNN—and poured scorn on the intelligence community, describing the release of derogatory information about him as "a disgrace, something that Nazi Germany would have done and did do".

The CIA, which was in the forefront among the agencies to conclude that Russia had indeed interfered in the US presidential poll, reacted sharply. Taking umbrage at Trump's scathing comparison, outgoing CIA director John Brennan said, "Tell the families of those 117 CIA

officers who are forever memorialised on our wall of honour that their loved ones who gave their lives were akin to Nazis." Brennan further added, "Tell the CIA officers who are serving in harm's way right now and their families who are worried about them that they are akin to Nazi Germany. I found that to be repugnant, and I will forever stand up for the integrity and patriotism of officers who have done much over the years...for their fellow citizens." Taking into account Trump's avowed aim to improve ties with Russia, Brennan also cautioned him about the dangers of "absolving" its many infractions in recent years, advising him to watch his "spontaneity" and to be "very, very careful" when dealing with the Putin regime.

Brennan was not the only one. Experts and observers are aghast at this flagrant deviance from the cosy coterie through which the administration and the intelligence agencies are ideally supposed to function. "Trump's disastrous start with the intelligence community could well have a profound and lasting effect on his administration," points out Benjamin.

He argues that no president can succeed without a capable and confident intelligence community. "Trump has undermined the community before even getting in office in an unprecedented way. We could face an exodus of the best people there in the near future," he predicts.

Paul R. Pillar, a former CIA analyst who now teaches at the Georgetown University's security programme, agrees and points out that the new administration enters office with the worst relationship ever between an incoming US president and the intelligence agencies. "It is not unprecedented for a new president to have a negative view of intelligence agencies, but this is the first time there has been public disparagement from a president-elect," he says.

Though what is known as the intelligence community was created during the Cold War, intelligence as a function of the American government has been there since the founding of the Republic. Through its various incarnations, it has played a key role in providing support to the US military; it has also helped shape US foreign policy.

Historical records show that George Washington, when he took command of the Continental Army in 1775 during the Revolutionary War, was not only an "avid user" of intelligence but also a "consummate practitioner" of the craft of intelligence.

He took his interest in intelligence gathering to the White House—in the first State of the Union address in 1790 he had also asked the Congress to fund intelligence operations. Subsequently, he established the Contingent Fund of Foreign Intercourse—also known as the Secret Service Fund—and got \$40,000 sanctioned for this purpose. The community expanded in size, scope and influence in subsequent years, particularly during the Cold War and now, in the fight against the scourge of global terror.

Though US spy agencies have traditionally played a key role, several American presidents, including Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton and even Barack Obama had occasional run-ins with them, often differ-



GETTY IMAGES

A provocation for the fight is a 35-page dubious dossier, with sleazy details on Trump supposedly amassed by Putin's regime, and surprisingly leaked to the media.

ing on assessments and policies. But none had ever had a running public spat with their spooks.

But Trump, a rank-outsider with no prior experience in politics or government, had faced resistance from the security and intelligence establishment right from the time he became the Republican presidential candidate. Fifty former Republican national security advisers, intelligence chiefs and trade representatives had signed a letter, saying they feared he would be the most "reckless" president America would ever have.

Intelligence agencies' allegations that the Russians had hacked into emails at the Democratic Party headquarters and

leaked them to Wikileaks, embarrassing and hurting the party and its candidate, Hillary Clinton, were made weeks before the polls. The brouhaha reached deafening levels only after Trump's astonishing upset victory.

WITH the allegations supposedly hurling a slur on the legitimacy of his victory, Trump has naturally opposed—and inimitably trashed—the CIA's conclusions and assessment of Russia's hacking. He also plans to stay away from the presidential daily briefings by the intelligence community, arguing that as a "smart" man he does not have to depend on them to run his government or decide on policies. But the gloves truly came off in a public bout after the dossier against him was made public.

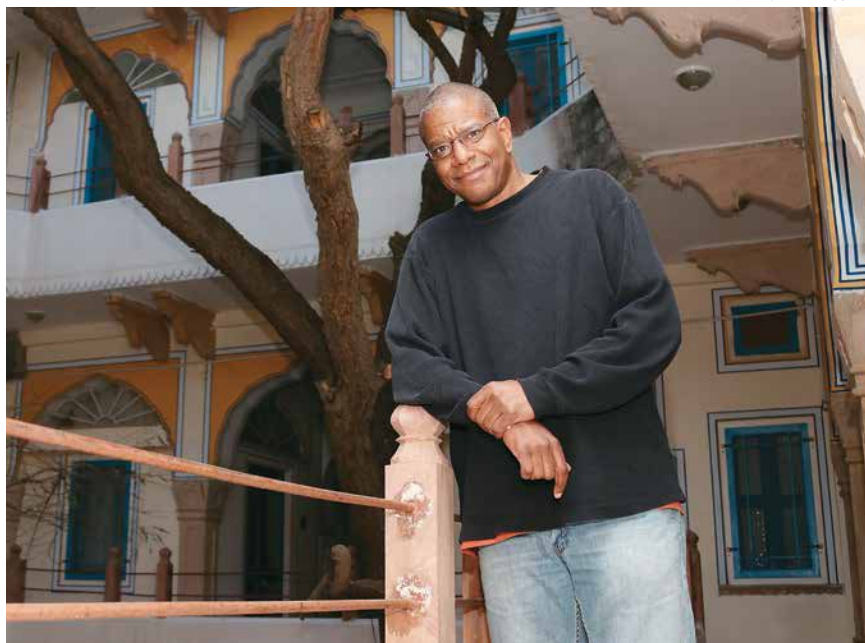
"Bad relations with the intelligence community can lead to disaster as information is vital for decision making," says Lock K. Johnson, professor of International Affairs at the University of Georgia. Though he points out that other presidents have also been suspicious of intel, none was "so disdainful".

Though he too is not sure on who leaked the dossier to the media, Johnson does not think Russian hacking decided the election outcome. "This was a massive protest vote against the establishment in Washington D.C" he says.

Pillar agrees with this, and points out that the agencies will have to accept the poll result, "and this means that whoever is president is assumed to have the right to see even the most sensitive information". He adds, "Whatever is to be the US policy towards Russia is determined by the president and not the intelligence agencies."

However, this is no guarantee that in future there would be no further leaks to the media where the 17 intelligence agencies under Trump's command would clearly make known their differences on vital areas of policy, say Russia. By not implementing his policies, they could even undermine his presidency.

So unless Donald Trump settles down in his presidency fast and makes peace with the rings of spies thrown protectively around his government, we are likely to witness an extremely turbulent period in the US administration. It could not only lead to internal strife, but also seriously jeopardise US standing in the world. ■



'It's like seeing an American apparition take this job'

*This year's Man Booker Prize winner Paul Beatty's **The Sellout** has variously been described as satire, a dystopian parable, an inscrutable tome (18 publishers rejected the manuscript). It's all that and more, but it is essentially a mirror thrust before today's America, unflinching and brutal. Beatty is in India, his first time, as part of the Jaipur Literary Festival. He spoke to Satish Padmanabhan. Excerpts from the interview.*

A new president is being sworn-in in your country, and you are here, 10,000 miles away?

It feels good actually. Being there you lose track because everything is so American-centric. I am glad I am not there in a weird way, to pretend that you are distant from the process. This is not like when Obama was elected, when I said I have to be there, but this about this other groundswell of things that have been happening for a long time. It's hard to even talk about because there is nothing there. It's like seeing an American apparition take this job. But the consequences can be very real.

In fact, *The Sellout* feels like a reaction to what has happened recently, during the presidential campaign, but surely the book has been very long in the making.

For a writer, it's always about how you touch on this timeless stuff. There is something about the human condition which is always timeless. Somehow, this book, ten years from now, will somehow still feel timeless. It's interesting, because some people think I spat the book real quick. But I am writing about things that have been going on for a long time—historical, emotional, mental—that doesn't change. The context changes, but the artistic part of it is the same.

The book has been called a satire, you have been called a comic genius, but the

'It will be interesting to see how quickly Trump pushes the media aside. Censorship is scary. The media is in a fix about which side to take, how to be subjective.'

book is actually a harrowing commentary on today's America.

That's just how I write, it's not as if I am trying to be funny. I am a cynic. Humour for me is just a device. A satire can be tied to a time and place, I am trying to avoid that trap. When I started writing the book I was reading a lot of political fiction, and non-fiction, and I was always like how there is no humour in it. I hear people talk about, even people who are involved in politics, who are activists, they talk about it with a sense of humour, but at some level when they put pen to paper it just goes.

You said you are a cynic, but when the presidential campaign was going on, did you hope that all this was political rhetoric and posturing, and once elected they system will kick in, the check and balances of the system...?

Yes, there is a trust in the system. In my younger days I used to read a lot books which talk about how everything is imaginary, it's all metaphysics—the money, the state. Now, it's almost started to play out in a weird way, you know, the smoke and mirror part of it. The decorum of the system which kept all this in place is I wouldn't say deteriorating—there is this boldness about some very scary stuff. Some people are feeling emboldened to do certain things, things that are completely self-destructive in my opinion. You know, it's Obama's job to say this is a peaceful transition, but you don't know what's going to happen.

One of the things that will be interesting to see is how forceful Trump is with the press and how quickly he pushes them aside. One of the things about the States is that left-wing media...people aren't really aware of it; it doesn't have a voice. The media thing is scary, about censorship. Even somebody like Nixon, who might have felt the same way about the press, did not voice these opinions in public. He didn't welcome the sycophantic and the sympathetic overtly. So, the media is in a fix, which side to take or not. The thing they are struggling with it is how to be subjective.

Actor Meryl Streep recently spoke out against Trump at an award ceremony. Do you think artists, actors, writers should speak their mind about the politics of the day?

Yes, if they feel the need they should. It's a beautiful thing about a democracy that they are able to say it; there is an audience for it. But it doesn't mean that I want to hear what whoever might have to say. If Mel Gibson gets on a platform, I don't want to hear what he has to say. □

BY BULA DEVI

THE drama is over and the curtain has fallen. The speculated split in the Samajwadi Party (SP) did not happen and the party retained its electoral symbol—the bicycle. ‘Neta-ji’ Mulayam Singh Yadav has put ‘Tipu’ ahead of his brothers and put his stamp of approval on son Akhilesh Yadav as the undisputed leader of the party. Staying flexible without losing the scripted plot, Mulayam allowed Akhilesh to come up on his own with the support of his legislators—in effect, patronising his son without appearing to be backing him. He did not submit individual affidavits by legislators to the Election Commission (EC) to counter his son’s claim even though he had a galaxy of eminent lawyers to argue his case. The indications were clear. He allowed son-CM-and-now-party-president Akhilesh to have a walkover.

Rajya Sabha MP and SP leader Ram Gopal Yadav has now submitted a caveat in the Supreme Court on the symbol issue, preempting Mulayam’s younger brother and trusted counsel Shivpal Yadav and others from moving court. To Akhilesh, both “wheeler-dealer” and “uncle” Amar Singh and “chacha” Shivpal are irritants.

Sources say Akhilesh seemed confident on the symbol issue. He invited some selected journalists to his official residence on January 17, a day after the EC verdict, but they were not allowed to bring in cameras or mobile phones. They were told that when Akhilesh went to meet Mulayam at night, after the EC verdict, “Netaji was happy” and “we cannot be separated”. Father and son managed to hog the limelight, eclipsing developments in the other political parties in the fray.

Amar Singh and Shivpal have been sidelined completely. Akhilesh wanted a free hand in party affairs before elections, and definitely minus Amar Singh and Shivpal. As a result, Shivpal’s name didn’t appear on Mulayam’s shortlist of candidates and, just one day before the EC verdict, Amar Singh also packed himself off to London for medical treatment. That very day, Naresh Uttam, who would replace Shivpal as state party president, apparently called on Mulayam. No one knows what they discussed, but Naresh came out of the house only after nearly two hours. When

he was asked about the visit, Naresh reportedly told some people that he had gone to seek “Netaji’s blessings”.

In the afternoon of January 16, while the commissioners in the EC in Delhi were busy drafting the pronouncement, Mulayam reached the party office in Lucknow. But he didn’t enter the office and went instead to first call on Naresh. While addressing party workers, he made Naresh sit to his left and an old man on his right. Shivpal sat behind Mulayam. He told party workers that Akhilesh neither responds to his calls nor hears his point of view and Muslims have become annoyed with the party. Mulayam’s statement is seen by many as an attempt to balance many factors—consolidate the upper-caste and Yadav votes for Akhilesh while also gaining the sympathy of Muslim voters. It is also seen as a diversionary tactics to make Akhilesh appear as a neutral leader “without the Muslim baggage”.

Interestingly, after Mulayam left the party office and before the EC verdict came, Naresh and his supporters apparently fixed Akhilesh’s nameplate as party president—golden-framed with a black background—below Mulayam’s golden-framed red-and-green nameplate. The letters on Akhilesh’s nameplate were in bigger size.

“Mulayam seems to have surrendered unconditionally,” says Bidyut Chakrabarty, who teaches political science at Delhi University. “There seems to have been some kind of father-son understanding, with Mulayam allowing Akhilesh to come up on his own.”

Many in the Akhilesh camp, however, do not agree. Mulayam didn’t want to surrender power in the party and wanted equal share for everyone in the family to maintain harmony, they claim, suggesting it was Akhilesh who didn’t want to share power with anyone except his father.

There were other dynamics in the family. Those close to Mulayam (Shivpal, Mulayam’s second wife Sadhna, son Prateek and others), sources say, felt they

could “bargain” only through him. “There is no evidence that Mulayam was trying to build Akhilesh,” says an official who has worked closely with the young CM. In fact, things did come to such a pass that only Akhilesh and Ram Gopal Yadav were together, while Mulayam and the rest of the family were ranged against them. The high-voltage family feud was reflected even in the annual party function. The more-than-a-week-long cultural extravaganza, Saifai Mahotsav, held towards the end of every year at Mulayam’s native Saifai village in Etawah district, was not held this time despite SP being in power. This is one annual event that the who’s who in the extended SP family attend, but Akhilesh seemed to be least interested in

Father, S

The SP emerges in one piece from



After the EC verdict, many in the BJP are happy that it would now be a triangular contest (BJP, SP, BSP). Had the SP split, it would have been BJP versus BSP in UP.

it. This time, such was the family feud that Akhilesh was not ready to bend.

When Akhilesh won the symbol, some observers equated it in significance with Rajnath Singh announcing Narendra Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate in Goa, in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, while sidelining all the senior leaders. "It went down well with the party workers, who were euphoric and almost felt as if Modi had already become the PM," says an observer. "There is similar winnability factor attached to Akhilesh following the EC verdict."

It is believed Akhilesh was all set with posters, banners and films documenting his achievements in development projects, women's welfare and other schemes,

as well as depicting him as a family man. The party, of course, had to put the distribution on hold until the EC verdict was announced because every campaign material sported the bicycle symbol, but it also shows Akhilesh was confident about retaining the election symbol.

But the confidence clearly does not extend to winning the election on its own. In an address to workers in party office last October, Mulayam had said that Muslims were getting disillusioned with the SP, making Akhilesh almost snatch the mike from him. Mulayam has been repeatedly showing the red flag to his CM son on this matter. According to a source, the only reason Akhilesh feels compelled to go with the Congress is the need to

consolidate the SP's Muslim votebank. "Akhilesh understands politics," says a source. "He won't be sentimental, but practical and realistic on seat-sharing with the Congress."

Indeed, Akhilesh will need some of that pragmatism, considering that the prolonged family feud in the SP had left several SP men confused, with a few even shifting their loyalty elsewhere. For instance, Mulayam's main leader in Agra district, MLA and former minister Raja Mahendra Aridaman Singh, returned to the BJP recently after four years in the SP.

The BJP, meanwhile, is faced with the disillusionment of the Jats, who have traditionally supported the party, but seem to have turned against it since the reservation agitations. After the EC verdict, many in the BJP are happy it would now be a triangular contest (BJP, SP and BSP). Had the SP split, the fight would have narrowed down to one between the BSP and the BJP, whose leaders expected Mayawati's party to gain from the situation.

on and Holy Bike

the 'family feud', with some deft manoeuvring by Mulayam

NIRALA TRIPATHI



OTHERS in the BJP, though, are rather worried about the SP-Congress alliance, even though a state leader, Shalabh Mani Tripathi, tells *Outlook*, "We will fight on the development issue and are not bothered about the alliance between SP and the Congress. Our development work at the Centre will bring us votes in the state." And yet, while the BJP campaigns with the slogan of *Abki Baar 300 Paar*, the BSP is slowly and steadily trying to consolidating its support base across India's most populous state.

"So was this a family drama or party drama?" asks Shiv Visvanathan, social scientist and political commentator, on what transpired in the SP. "A family quarrel is a clash of personalities, but a party quarrel is a struggle over ideology and plans for the future. In the SP, there seems to be a complete merging of the two, with every character, except Amar Singh, belonging to the family. The son is young and plans better, so he is deserving; the father is murky, so one doesn't want him around; and uncles, anyway, always look like Shakuni in Indian drama. That's the stereotype. I haven't heard any politician saying the state is critical not only to the electoral drama, but also to the future of Indian democracy. It is the last bridge against the BJP. But everyone is interested only in a game of musical chairs." ■

BY PRAGYA SINGH

TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

NDIA'S most populous state is headed for a fractious election in February and the run-up has been marred by casteist, communal and misogynistic slugfests. This year, incredibly, the state's minority Muslim community, which often bemoaned its dwindling heft since the 2014 national hustings, is the subject of daily outbursts, appeals and even veiled threats.

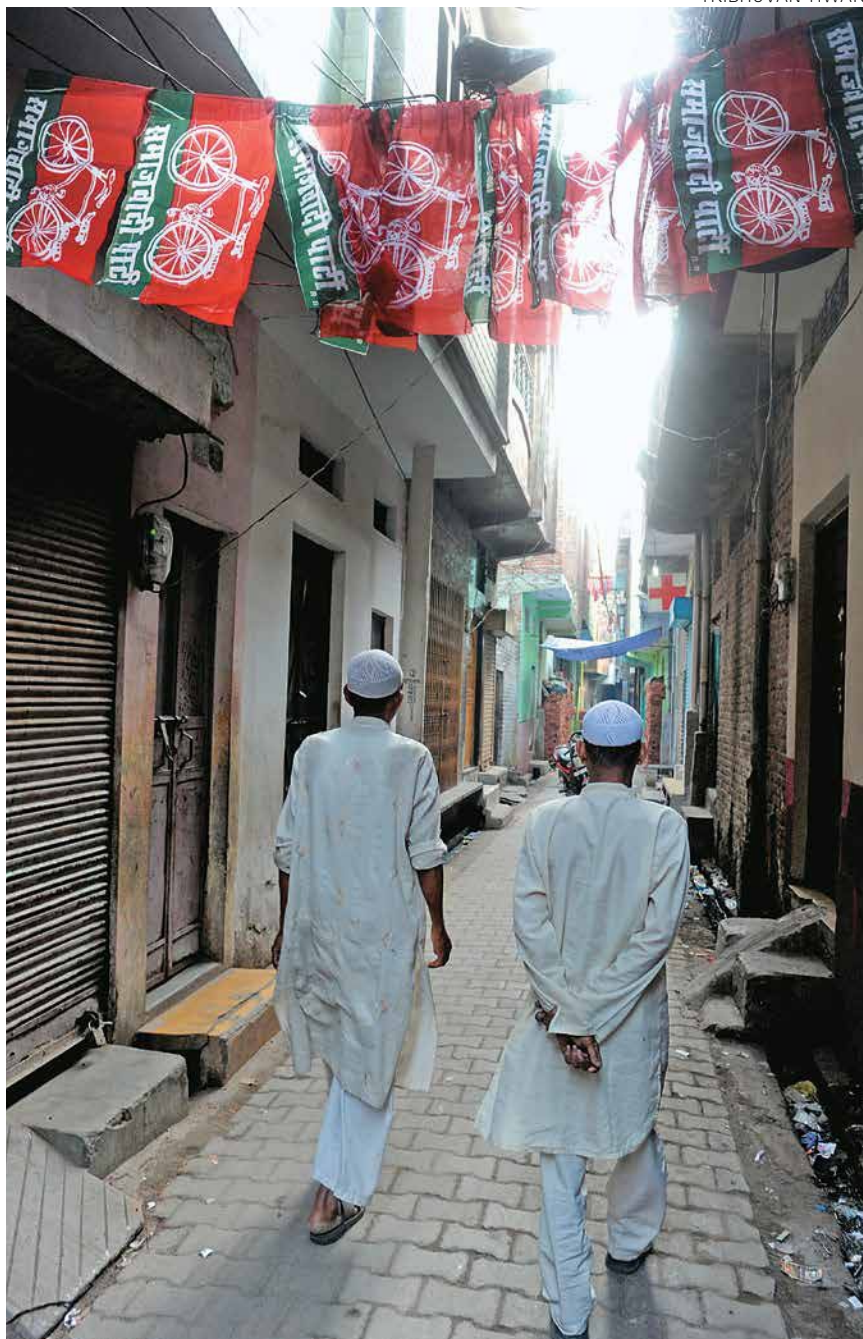
Even more incredibly, incumbent Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav has tomtomed a 'development' plank, but his Muslim voters, many believe, are largely being propelled to exercise their vote under the influence of a very different emotion: fear. "You have no idea how terrified the Muslims of UP are," says Mohammad Adeeb, a former MP from the state. "When they speak in private, in their homes, there's a real sense of doom and gloom."

The doom is partly due to the outcome of the 2014 Lok Sabha polls—more specifically, the heavy losses suffered by Akhilesh's Samajwadi Party that has adopted over the last 20-odd years a proprietorial and protective attitude towards the state's Muslims. In that election, the BJP and its leader Narendra Modi swept into power. Almost all pundits agree, the Muslims were less than enthusiastic about the communal undertone of the campaigning.

This wariness was especially pronounced in UP, where a Hindu-Muslim riot displaced more than 50,000 rural Muslims months before the election. Not just that. Thousands of the displaced still live in relief camps or away from their native place. The relief offered by the Akhilesh government in 2013 to the displaced was sketchy. For example, it provided many victims cash to rebuild their homes—but on a bizarre condition: they renounce their village forever.

In 2014, only seven leaders of the Samajwadi Party were able to retain their parliamentary seats—all members of Akhilesh's immediate family. The party hopes that the state assembly polls will reverse that bloodletting, in which the Muslims had stood steadfast by the party. Akhilesh's new image as Mr Clean is both the fulcrum of that strategy as well as the outcome of a bitter internal fight in the SP, in which he has wrested power away from his father Mulayam Singh Yadav.

The Muslims will still vote keeping in mind who they think will defeat the BJP, says UP Planning Commission member Sudhir Panwar, a professor at Lucknow



Time Again To Turn The Cycle

Protection. That's the UP Muslim's prime search word now. The vote will go to that party they think can give it.

ALLEYWAYS The path the UP Muslim voter chooses is a high-suspense matter

University. “They also see the Yadavs of the SP as capable of giving them protection,” he adds, citing reasons for the Muslim affinity for Yadavs, which extends beyond just supporting the SP’s bid for power into periods of time when they are out of power too.

The protection Muslims appear to seek while the SP is in power is usually a reference to the support they can get from the Yadav-dominated government machinery in addressing their everyday concerns. It is also a reference to the psychological advantage of aligning with a powerful social group in cases of communal conflict. Forgotten in these calculations is the high frequency of communal clashes in UP since 2013, which make it the worst state as far as this indicator goes. “I feel it is the BJP that the Muslims are helping come to power with their support to this new version of the Akhilesh rule,” says Dr Tasleem Rahmani of the Muslim Political Council of India (MPCI). “It is a dangerous trend for a community to not be able to see this reality.”

It may appear inexplicable that, once again, the Muslims of UP, who bear the brunt of communal outbreaks, are expected to stand by the SP, which has simply taken on a new avatar under Akhilesh. Doubtless because, the buzz until December was that they were actively receptive to being wooed by his political rival, Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati.

A SMER Beg of Aligarh Muslim University says political decisions are not always taken rationally. “Quite often, you are quite surprised that despite all the evidence, people make the opposite move,” notes the professor who heads the varsity’s political science department. This contradiction is clearest in the question of security, which many UP Muslims are said to be seeking. “Security,” Beg says, “is a concrete aspect of everyday life but it becomes an emotive issue in the electoral arena”. In other words, the last few years of communal clashes at an unprecedented scale notwithstanding, if the SP plays accurately on “perceptions” among the Muslims, then it can still whisk away their votes in big numbers.

This approach has a much longer history than 2014 and extends at least to the 1980s, starting with the run-up to the end-1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the subsequent riots across the country and the Mumbai bomb-blasts. The

Congress party could not claw its way back to acceptability among Muslims in the early 1990s, nor could it wrest away the upper castes from the BJP subsequently.

Seen in this light, if the SP is still assured of sizeable Muslim support, it is because the community seeks to preserve a more strategic self-interest. Even if the party loses in the elections, the Muslims may want to hang on to it, for a variety of local reasons. While all other groups may flee to join the “winning” candidate, the Muslims would rally around the SP—primarily if they believe it would hold back the BJP.

Often though, the results of this strategy turn out to be just the opposite of what the voters had set out to achieve, as pointed out by MPCI’s Rahmani. Prof Mohammad Sajjad, who teaches history at AMU, says that right before 2014 polls, a large group of educated Muslim intellectuals from Aligarh decided to jointly cast their vote for the BSP. “On paper, the BSP was well-placed to ensure the defeat of the BJP candidate. It was a rational, calculated decision we

It may appear inexplicable that UP Muslims, who bear the brunt of communal riots, will stand by the Samajwadi Party, which has just taken a new avatar under Akhilesh.

took,” he says. But on polling day, many from the previous day’s meeting switched away from the BSP to SP, which had fielded a wealthy Muslim candidate. “Overnight, there was a polarisation and the Jat candidate of the Congress got no votes. The Jats had all switched to the BJP. The SP candidate also lost. The BJP won,” Sajjad says.

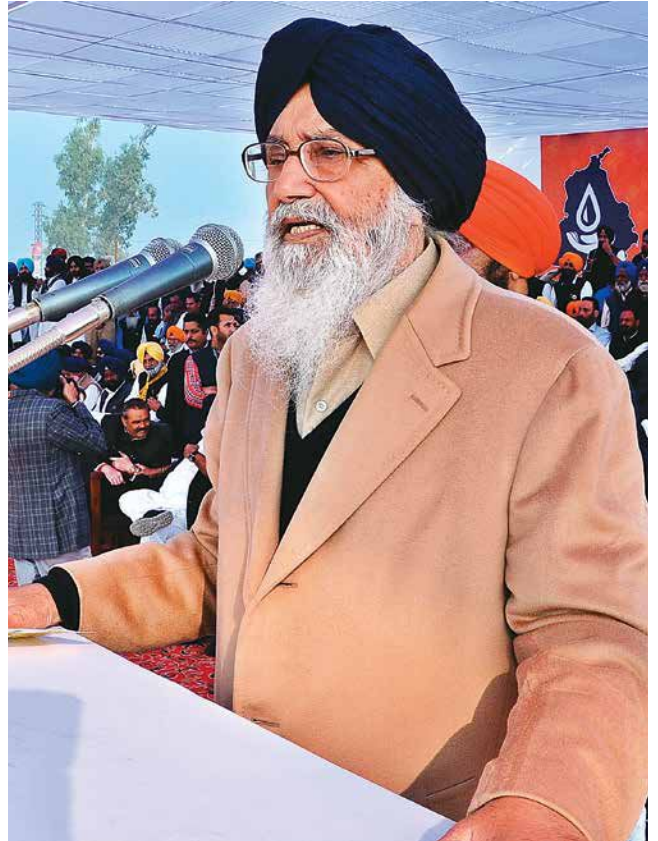
Similar scenes unfolded in Bijnor, Muzaffarnagar and elsewhere, explaining why the BSP has fielded twice its previous tally of Muslim candidates. This, though the problem of voters being more favourably inclined towards their own community’s candidates, is true among almost all party’s supporters. The Muslim voters, this time around, are adding another flavour to the UP polls. This is on account of their growing class and ‘caste’ awareness. “Elite Muslims, the Muslim bureaucracy, sections of the clergy, all are beneficiaries of the SP,” says Sajjad. “They have got plum postings, assurances against transfers, etc. They, being dominant, also manage to persuade other Muslims to back the SP.

However, the elites are loud. As for the poor or rural Muslim, we just don’t know what (s)he’s thinking.”

How far all of this holds after Mayawati’s strident wooing is another question altogether. The psyche of UP voters is embedded with the notion that Mayawati’s votes can be transferred to any political party or formation, including the BJP, the Congress or the SP. This phenomenon can go to her advantage at any time in an election. Elite Muslims dominate the SP echelons and can turn the Dalit-Muslim alliance into a Dalit-Muslim divide, but increasingly active are the pasmanda Muslim groups, who have a stronger affinity with the Dalits. “People are trying to tell non-elite Muslims very clearly and persistently now, that they should shake off the SP, go for BSP,” says Sajjad. “On law and order, she (Mayawati) is determined not to let even the BJP dictate terms. The point is, how successful will these efforts be? There’s still that fear of the BJP coming in.” The concern, in part, is dictated by a history of post-poll BSP-BJP alignments, though Mayawati has ruled it out this time.

Here, intellectuals and activists are strongly advising Mayawati that she take notice of the BJP playing an anti-pichda or most backward card. In response, they say, the elite Muslims would also try and strengthen the SP. “Security has become an old hat now, but the Muslim elite still tries to hold on to it,” Sajjad says.

Just until August 2016, the Muslims were a beleaguered lot in UP, crushed by cow vigilante groups that were wreaking havoc on its business interests, love jihad and other such campaigns. “At that time, the Una incident happened (in Gujarat) and atrocities on Muslims reduced soon after. It became clear that the Dalits could offer protection to Muslims,” says Dalit intellectual-activist Satish Prakash, who teaches at Chaudhary Charan Singh University in Meerut. But Prakash doesn’t think security and protection are sought on as wide a scale by the Muslim community. “People are not paying attention. Hindus were polarised on grounds of religion, but the Muslim is being polarised as jaatis or castes,” he notes. “Today, UP Muslims appear divided and scattered as Qureshi, Saifi, Pathan, etc. Their reason for not being with the BSP so far is that everybody wants to align with somebody ‘above’, not below them.” This is an old trope at work—the Muslims, especially elites, do not prefer to vote for the BSP, as it conveys to them a sense of a loss of identity and falling status. 



Bring on that Patiala Peg

The run-up to polls in Punjab promises a carnival of excess, with AAP, Amarinder and SAD going all the way

BY BHAVNA VIJ-AURORA

SIMMERING discontent in the Congress, an aggressive Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), ‘conspiratorial cabals’ of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and a whiff of revolt in the largely-missing BJP—the battle for Punjab has become as colourful as its famous Phulkari and as potent as the Patiala peg.

While wisecracks by Navjot Singh Sidhu and Bhagwant Mann have livened up the political landscape with their irreverent swipes against their opponents, contenders like General J.J. Singh and Sukhbir Singh Badal are scraping the wounds of

militancy and Operation Bluestar, when army tanks rolled into Amritsar’s Golden Temple with Congress at the helm. The green-and-yellow mustard fields of Punjab have certainly not witnessed this kind of a three-way election before. With polling scheduled on February 4, all the parties are preparing for the last-mile dash.

Sensing an anti-incumbency mood against the Akali government, AAP is going all guns blazing, raising the issues of rampant drug abuse and corruption in the state. Party chief Arvind Kejriwal has pulled out all the stops to expand his footprint beyond Delhi and consolidate AAP’s position in the Punjab electoral landscape, where the party won four of

OLD RIVALS (left) Captain Amarinder Singh; CM Parkash Singh Badal

the 13 Lok Sabha seats in 2014—its very first general election. AAP is targeting four lakh voters every day in an extensive door-to-door campaign, focusing on the Malwa belt, making it perhaps the most decisive factor in the elections. And yet the Badals of the ruling SAD, having latched on to the insider (Punjabi) versus the outsider (Haryanvi) narrative to corner AAP, have dubbed him “an outsider and an opportunist” flirting with pro-Khalistan elements. From the Punjabi Suba plank to the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal, the Akalis are raking up all possible issues that divide Punjabis from Haryanvis.

Invoking Punjabi pride, Akali Dal MP Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa tells *Outlook* that “Punjabis fought for a separate Punjabi Suba, so they will never tolerate an outsider, and that too a Haryanvi, as their chief minister.” Even though Kejriwal had dismissed the speculation that he will be AAP’s chief ministerial face, the Akalis are not willing to stop harping on the issue.

“The Akalis are clutching at straws,” says



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an AAP leader. “They know it is a losing battle this time and are using as many diversionary tactics as possible. At the same time, we will not make the mistake of underestimating them. Their rural votebank is still strong, especially in Doaba and Majha. They have resources and they know how to use them. And money is flowing too.”

For the Congress, the entry of Sidhu—contesting from Amritsar East constituency—may draw crowds for rallies and meetings, but it has also complicated matters for the party that had not yet declared a CM candidate. Strategist Prashant Kishor, working with Captain Amarinder Singh, had been carefully cultivating his image as the party’s de facto CM face. Campaigns like ‘Coffee with Captain’ to target the youth voters and ‘Captain Smart Connect Scheme’ to distribute smartphones among them were launched to give heft to Amarinder’s status. However, the Congress fell short of officially declaring him as the CM candidate due to the widespread opposition against him within the party.

Party sources say workers on the ground are agitated. “Punjab is the only state among those going to polls where the Congress has a fair chance of forming the government,” says a senior Congress leader, not wanting to be identified. “The problem is that nobody in the party high command really understands the nuances of Punjab. Those who know the state do not have much of a say. Even former prime minister Manmohan Singh is not being consulted. I just hope that Congress doesn’t end up losing a winning match.”

AMARINDER, though, seems undeterred and carries on in his inimitable Maharaja style. Publicly declaring that he is contesting his last election, he is giving it his all. Talking to *Outlook* after filing nomination papers, Amarinder was in a combative mood. “Jats love a good fight and I am raring to go,” he said. “This is my last election and that is why I want to end it at Patiala. And I am fighting in Lambi because I want to teach this man (Parkash Singh Badal) a lesson.”

When SAD fielded former army chief Gen J.J. Singh to take him on in his home turf Patiala, Amarinder grandly declared that a captain will defeat a general for the first time. In Lambi, where he is taking on chief minister Badal on his home turf, he claimed he was going to “cook Badal’s



goose” because he has ruined the state.

As Amarinder filed his nomination papers on January 18, the last day for filing nominations, he rued the fact that property prices had come down during Badal’s rule. “Even the worth of my palace has gone down by half,” he told reporters.

However, what has surprised political observers is that amid all this drama and hectic activity, SAD’s ally in the government, the BJP, has been keeping an uncharacteristically low profile. The only upheaval in the party was seen when it declared candidates for 23 of the 117 assembly seats it will contest in Punjab. BJP state president and Union minister Vijay Sampla threatened to quit since he was believed to be unhappy about ticket distribution. Though he later denied he wanted to resign, BJP sources say Sampla changed his tune after he was given a dressing down by party president Amit Shah for public display of dissatisfaction.

Meanwhile, the Akalis are also believed to be miffed with the BJP for its hands-off approach. Sources close to the Badals say the ruling family is extremely disappointed as the BJP is not lending a hand in campaigning. “The BJP seems to have abandoned the Akalis when they are down. A

GOING FOR BROKE AAP is going all guns blazing in its Punjab campaign

few rallies by the senior BJP leaders and maybe one or two by Prime Minister Narendra Modi can change the complexion,” an Akali leader tells *Outlook*.

As soon as the BJP started getting negative feedback about the incumbent government a year ago, it started pulling itself back. Amit Shah started openly claiming that his party was merely a “junior partner” in the Akali-led government when allegations were made about drug abuse, corruption and increasing unemployment. “This was enough of a signal for the other party workers that they need not invest too much in the state,” reveals a BJP leader.

Moreover, the RSS too has not been keen on continuing the alliance with the Akalis. “The Sangh wanted the BJP to contest all the seats on its own,” a BJP leader lets on. “Being a border state, it affected the security of the entire country—that was the Sangh’s rationale. The Sangh was also unhappy with reports of the resurgence of the Khalistan slogans and that some senior politicians were involved in drug trade.” According to him, Modi might just address “one or two” rallies in the state, but nothing has been decided so far. The prime minister, incidentally, is scheduled to address a rally in Manipur, which goes to polls on March 4.

Even though the Badals are battling anti-incumbency, an unhelpful ally and hostility from a large section of Punjabis, their rivals are not writing them off. “They are quite capable of a last-minute ambush,” claims a cautious AAP leader. □

Amit Shah started openly claiming his party was only a “junior partner” in the Punjab government when it drew flak for drug abuse, corruption and joblessness.

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ROADMAP TO PROSPERITY IN 2017

Stick to these 17 financial resolutions to
get rich and prosperous



Outlook
MONEY

NEW YEAR, NEW RESOLUTIONS

Make these New Year's resolutions—and do keep them, for a wealthy 2017, says **Taenaz Shakir**

Well, the New Year is here, bringing with it fresh opportunities and challenges. Now, some of us make New Year's resolutions, and some of us have already broken a few within the first few weeks. It's funny actually, how we decide that the revolution of the earth has anything to do with our life's course. If you are a cynic, you may find it amusing that the world celebrates the fact that the earth has made its trip around the sun. But even cynics have to admit, it is necessary for human beings to have a sense of beginning and end—a sense of time that is fleeting through our fingers like sand.

To make short-term or long-term goals, the New Year, in a sense is a reminder to make the most of your remaining time. Like a fresh chapter in a novel, anything could happen. Since you are supposed to be the writer of your own life story, maybe taking and sticking on to resolutions should help in making the story better.

Probably it is not in vogue to say this, but money does matter. Though your passions may have nothing to do with money, it can empower you to pursue those dreams.



I shall be the boss of my own money

Most often we tend to find ourselves in situations where no matter how hard we try, we end up with little or no control of how our money gets spent. By making a habit of the following, you can turn this around.



Get a fix on your finances

1

Do you often find yourself wondering where the money you loaded to the e-wallet vanished? By keeping a track of microdetails of everyday financial transactions without getting carried away, you can actually have a better grip of your personal finances. Maintain a tedious account of even your meager expenses. There are apps which help you do this. It may surprise you how much you spend on nasty habits like smoking!

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Stick to budget

2

Make a budget and stick to it. There, it's not that difficult. Even a little planning can go a long way. Before going grocery shopping, make a list of the things you need. It's actually scary how we always end up buying expensive stuff that we don't really need while completely forgetting about the essentials.

Cut discretionary expenses

3

Just think of the money you spend every time you go to a fancy restaurant. By simply cutting the frequency of such splurges, you could easily save a good amount. In the process you may in fact pick up a very nourishing hobby for life like cooking. Next time you buy that red sweater, ask yourself, "Do I really need this?"

First, pay yourself

4

Save and invest before you start spending. It is easy to get carried away with spending money and then discovering that what is left over after your expenses is what you get to save. Change the equation—save first and spend later and observe how it works well for your finances.



I shall be strong in tough times

From toppling of governments to changing of policies to crashing of markets, many things can go wrong and affect the course of your financial life. Until you play it smart and play it brave, you cannot make the most of your investments.

Get professional help

5

If you think that you do not have the time or expertise to invest in the capital market, then leave your money in the trusted hands of professional managers. There is a galaxy of mutual funds out there that will invest on your behalf—for a small fee. Choose a good fund and invest wisely.

Invest for the long term

6

Consider investing like planting a tree. You do not expect to reap the benefits from a sapling you just planted overnight, right? Follow the same with mutual funds. Invest for the long term—say 10 years. Only then can you ride out the short-term volatility that goes with this class of investments.

Don't sit on idle cash

7

The recent demonetisation drive must have taught many Indians a sour lesson—idle money is not good money. Money that's lying idle in your savings account like a beached whale, is money that's not working hard enough for you. Don't let inertia keep you from investing in programmes like SIP that automatically benefit from rupee-cost averaging: it lets you buy more of the underlying security when the market is down, and restricts your buying when the market is up.



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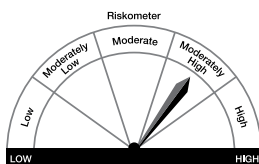


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I shall not
covet the
latest

Unlike what advertisements tell us, it is not necessary to own the latest. Especially when it can ruin your financial plans.

Don't be swayed by sales lingo

8

Much of our urge to splurge is fed by marketing hype which leads us to believe that unless you keep up scaling your gizmos and gadgets, you are lagging behind. This year, make it a resolution to not be forced into market pressure to have it all.

Be a smart consumer

9

Don't suspend your judgment when you go shopping, and be cynical of freebie deals. Also, in case of a bad shopping experience—such as a faulty product or deficient service—press the levers of consumer redress to get your complaints resolved.

Get card-sharp

10

Ever since the advent of magic (read credit) cards, it has been even more difficult to resist our shopping temptations. Even with the cost of credit built in, the EMIs create an illusion of affordability and lull you into overestimating your purchasing power. It is easy to slip into a debt trap. Learn to make the most of your credit card by making the most of the free credit period. However, discipline is key and do abstain from shopping impulses.

Get debt savvy

11

The power of credit is enormous: it helps you leverage your future earning capacity and lets you build assets and meet your financial goals much earlier in life than was possible, say, a generation ago. And not only is credit available freely today, it makes eminent financial sense to borrow in certain circumstances, such as when you want to buy your own house. But be sure to borrow right.



Banks will
not own me

To a certain extent, banks do empower you to achieve your financial goals but make sure that you do not give them too much authority over your life. Moderation is the way to go.

Know your limits

12

Borrow too much, and you could land neck-deep in debt. Learn to differentiate between the two kinds of debts—investment and consumption debt. While investment debts are taken to build assets like value-appreciating properties or an education, consumption debts are loans taken to fund expenses such as vehicles or a foreign vacation.

Know your charges

13

There is a charge on almost everything you use the banking facility for these days. Make sure you are well aware of what you pay for and what charges come into play when. You get limited free access to ATM transactions, post which you pay a fee is just one example.

I shall be smarter for my own sake



There is a way you can make your money work for you. By keeping your eyes open and being more aware citizens of this country, there is much you can benefit from. Money can prove to be your best friend at the hour of need.

Milk the tax breaks

14

More often than not, taking a loan can prove to be useful not just in creating an asset but also in saving tax. The EMI you'll pay on a home loan will be higher than the rent you now pay. Nut factor in the tax breaks, and you'll find that for much the same annual outgo—or at worst marginally more—you'll be creating a material asset that's all yours for life.

Take cover

15

A grim reality that characterises most Indians is that they are grossly underinsured. A life insurance cover ensures that in the event of your death, your financial dependants get a monetary cushion to absorb the shock of a breadwinner. When you buy life insurance, therefore, don't be distracted by the tax breaks and the returns: judge it principally for how much cover you get.

Review your financial situation

16

A lot happens through the year. You may have got that promotion and hike or the need for a second car may just come in unexpectedly. Make sure things go as per plans, for which you will need to check how your finances fare and make changes if necessary.

Start early, save more

17

When you've just begun your career and are enjoying the glee of financial independence, anything that interferes with your plans for bohemian celebration sounds like a waste of money. But save you must for your financial goals, including living the last quartile of your life on a retirement corpus you build in your earning years. The earlier you start saving, the more you will accumulate.





CELEBRITY POWER

A cursory look of the top 10 celebrities' endorsing brands will throw names of film stars and sportspersons. Each celebrity endorses a dozen or so brands across several market segments and it must be doing well, which is why they are in demand, making more money than they do from their chosen professions at times. After strict rules and norms on disallowing these endorsements to sell mutual funds, the regulator has finally given the nod to allow it. Soon Deepika Padukone may be seen endorsing an equity diversified fund, Amitabh Bachchan a retirement fund.

It is a different matter that Amitabh Bachchan also endorses government promoted insurance schemes, which are rather different from mutual funds. The level playing field will at least get people to associate mutual funds as financial instruments that are similar to other financial products like insurance, loans and digital wallets. One of the reasons why the regulator did not permit it earlier was the fear of mis-selling once celebrities start endorsing.

To ensure that Bachchan does not endorse a retirement fund from a particular AMC, the regulator has

introduced a sweetener—an AMC cannot rope in a celebrity, but the industry can. What this means is that the AMFI (Association of Mutual Funds in India), will be able to use celebrities in its campaign to create awareness about mutual funds. Yes, there is plenty to indicate that endorsement through well-known and influential celebrities is an effective way to connect with the target audience and create awareness, but will this lead to investments in mutual funds is a thing to wait and watch for.

Cynicism sets in because it took two decades for Bachchan to talk about the benefits of polio drops before India could come close to being polio free. While the curiosity about investments and mutual funds will go up, the same being translated into bringing in more investors on board will need some time before one can jump to conclusions. With efforts by AMCs in spreading awareness, the results are there to see—SIP books have been on the rise. Wonder, why the industry needs celebrities to further its cause, considering those who are investing are predominantly people who earn above a basic threshold. **m**

UPI AND MUTUAL FUNDS

Fast to catch up with changing money flow trends, two AMCs—LIC and IDFC have included UPI as an additional payment mechanism besides debit cards and net banking as modes for investors to invest in. With internet banking, one could use the National Electronics Funds Transfer (NEFT) or Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) to invest, but both have limitations compared to UPI.



Although UPI too needs internet connection, one need not have internet banking to make this payment. You will need the UPI app on your phone and a Virtual Payment Address (VPA), which is nothing but your identity when using the UPI, that is linked to your smartphone, which in turn is attached to your bank account for UPI to remit money. Once you are done with these steps and your VPA address is activated, you can start investing in mutual funds using UPI.

Visit the AMC's website using your smartphone, select the fund you wish to invest in and the preferred option—growth or dividend—after which you will be directed to a page where you need to select the mode of payment. Choose UPI, which will prompt you to share your VPA. You will have to login to your bank's app using your internet banking username and password or better still, your 4-digit mobile PIN or personal identification number. Authorise your transaction and money gets transferred instantly. **m**

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GETTY IMAGES

“**W**E hear these children and their cries of pain; we also hear the cry of the Church our Mother, who weeps not only for the pain caused to her youngest sons and daughters, but also because she recognizes the sins of some of her members: the sufferings, the experiences and the pain of minors who were abused sexually by priests. It is a sin that shames us. Persons responsible for the protection of those children destroyed their dignity. We regret this deeply and we beg forgiveness. We join in the pain of the victims and weep for this sin. The sin of what happened, the sin of failing to help, the sin of covering up and denial, the sin of the abuse of power. The Church also weeps bitterly over this sin of her sons and she asks forgiveness. Today, as we commemorate the feast of the Holy Innocents, I would like us to renew our complete commitment to ensuring that these atrocities will no longer take place in our midst. Let us find the courage needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated. In this area, let us adhere, clearly and faithfully, to “zero tolerance”.

Excerpts of the letter written by Pope Francis to Bishops all over the world, released on January 2, 2017, expressing regret and begging for forgiveness for crimes against children, asking them to show zero tolerance to such crimes.

COVER STORY

THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS

Sex crimes come with a tinge of holy terror when clergymen prey on the laity. An institutional response can't be different from a Christian one. Why then does India's Catholic Church not walk its pious talk?

He (Jesus) made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and the oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables and to those who sold doves he said, take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

- John 2:15-16, The Bible

BY MINU ITTYIPE

HARDLY 10 kilometres from Kodungallur, Kerala, where St Thomas the apostle is believed to have first set foot and brought the teachings of Jesus Christ to the Indian shores in 52 AD, lies the village of Puthenvelikkara. This is a world unto itself, a long way off from the Vatican, where the Pope wrote his remarkable Letter to Bishops on the Feast of the Holy Innocents on December 28, speaking of "the Herods of our time". A bylane that leads to the Lourde Matha Church turns off from the Puthenvelikkara police station, and runs along the Periyar



Victim: Fathima Sofiya, 17

Accused: Fr H. Arockiaraj

Crime: Rape, murder

Place: St Stanislaus Church, Walayar, Palakkad

July 23, 2013

Legal status: Trial yet to begin. Criminal Miscellaneous petition filed by Shanthi Roselin in the Kerala HC for change of the investigating agency.

SHANTHI Roselin, 42, was in a Coimbatore hospital that day, looking after a relative, when she received a phone call from Fr Arockiaraj, parish priest of Stanislaus Church in Walayar, right on the forested border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In a highly agitated voice, he told her that her 17-year-old daughter, Fathima Sofiya, was dead. "He called me 37 times in the next few hours. He kept repeating the word 'killed'...and then that she had committed suicide. I couldn't believe she was dead," says Roselin. "Some 15 of us rushed to the hospital in Walayar but she'd already been taken to the mortuary in Palakkad. By the time we reached there, it was past 5 pm and the mortuary was closed for the day. We had to go to the police station and sign the papers for the body to be released." The Walayar police closed the case as suicide within two weeks. Almost 18 months later, Roselin found a note written by Sofiya about the relationship between her and the priest. That's when she got suspicious and consulted lawyers and went back to Walayar to get the case reopened.

The family got to know Arockiaraj when he was the parish priest in St Michael's church in Coimbatore in 2006. "My daughter was in Class 6 then; he was like a family member. We continued to be in touch with him after he was transferred to Valparai and Walayar. He would come and take Sofiya for Sunday school from here to Walayar. I trusted him so much, never thought he would hurt her so brutally. That day she left college early and went to Walayar in a taxi. Within half-an-hour of meeting him, she died in the guest room." The post-mortem indicates she was raped. The ecclesiastical court had found Arockiaraj guilty of sexual misconduct and dismissed him. The police reopened the case, but there was no evidence to prove it was not suicide. Helped by a TV reporter who acted as her nephew, Roselin recorded Arockiaraj's confession that it was an 'accident', which was aired on June 15, 2015. The minutes of the ecclesiastical court, now with the police, reveal four priests and the Bishop of Coimbatore, L. Thomas Aquinas, knew about the sexual relationship between the priest and the victim and had not reported the matter to the police. On December 6, Arockiaraj was arrested and Bishop Aquinas and priests Mudalaimuthu, Kulandairaj and Melqur were charged with giving false information.

river, twisting through a thick canopy of trees. A meditative quietude cloaks the air. But it is deceptive—for, even today, anger and sadness overwhelm the laity of the Lourde Matha church. The sanctity of the church had been violently desecrated by the vile deeds of its former vicar. From January to March, 2015, Fr Edwin Figarez, 41, the then vicar of the church, had raped a 14-year-old girl several times in the presbytery in the church precincts. Despicably enough, it is reported, he had used the confessional chamber to entice the girl to his room.

When the child's parents discovered this horror, they asked the Latin Catholic Bishop of the Kottapuram diocese, Joseph Karikkassery, to defrock Figarez, and not allow him to say mass. Figarez was immediately suspended by the bishop. But to everyone's dismay, perhaps in an act of disobedience, the priest celebrated the mass on March 29, Palm Sunday. This is a holy day for Christians, which celebrates the humble entry of Jesus on a donkey into Jerusalem, a symbolic act, days before the crucifixion. That he was allowed to say the holy mass was repugnant to many in the congregation. On April 1, 2015, with the backing of a few of the church members, the mother of the victim filed a complaint at the Puthenvelikkara police station. A year and half later, on December 8, 2016, a special court in Ernakulam found Figarez guilty and sentenced him to double imprisonment under various sections of the IPC and the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act.

It was not the first conviction for a priest under the POCSO Act in Kerala. In the recent past, the number of cases against priests has been rising—an indication that the faithful, who have been suffering in silence, are no longer willing to keep quiet. In both Figarez's case as well as another one in Thrissur—that of Fr Raju Kokken—the mothers of the victims filed complaints in the respective police stations and they refused to budge in the face of isolation by the community or pressure from the church.

An hour's drive from Puthenvelikkara, which is in Ernakulam district, is St Paul's Church in Thaikkattussery, Thrissur. This is where Fr Kokken, 40, the church vicar, sexually molested a 9-year-old girl after promising her a dress for her first holy communion. On April 24, 2014, a case was registered against him. Kokken, who had fled the place, was later arrested from Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu. He was released on bail, and the case is now in the first additional and district sessions court, Thrissur.

In the gathering dusk, on the steps of the Lourde Matha Church, an anguished Gracious, 58, long-time church member, can hardly contain his tears. "I have worked hard to build this church and I have many priests as friends. But I am not willing to bow down to such atrocities. I am an ordinary believer and I know this is not Jesus's teachings. Most of us have become slaves to religion. From when we are

small, we have been taught it is the biggest sin to stand up against the church or the priests. And there is no way out of this. If your child does not go to Sunday School, he/she does not get admission to the Catholic-run colleges. The Sunday School certificate is needed even for marriage. Our lives revolve around the church.”

“Fr Figarez managed to divide this church down the middle because we are taught to believe what the priest says is the absolute truth. Many continue to blame the child and not the priest,” Gracious adds, his voice breaking. And then, with the tone of disgust rising, “They break our backs to collect money from us for their lavish lifestyles. The rot has set in because of the wealth of the churches. That needs to be stemmed first. What moral right do these priests have to stand and give us sermons?” Figarez had managed to convince many church members of his innocence and, in fact, even attempted to malign the girl’s character and that of the mother.

In the Catholic Church, the priest is seen as a representative of Christ on earth and his position is next to God. So a priest erring is unthinkable and voicing such a suspicion is often viewed as blasphemy. This theological position of the Catholic Church is slightly different from that of the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Jacobite, Orthodox, Mar Thoma, etc) and the Anglican Churches, where the priest represents the people and appeals and prays to God on their behalf. In the latter, the priest is given a salary and his private space, and can even enter into matrimony if he so chooses (the conditions for matrimony varies in each denomination). In the Catholic fold, the church completely commandeers the services of the priests and nuns.

To be sure, there are criminal cases against priests from the Eastern Orthodox churches too, but typically many more are reported in the Catholic churches where a vow of celibacy is mandatory for priesthood. A large number of priests do abide by the Christian way of life, honouring their calling in right earnest. But the priests who defile themselves by their conduct end up spreading their taint over the whole clergy by association, sully the Church in the public eye.

The Pope and the Canon

The phenomenon is evidently pervasive enough for the Pope to have touched upon the issue at some length in his December 28 letter—which was released to the public only on January 2, 2017—his words an unambiguous call for introspection, atonement and cleaning of the stables. In a way, the much-loved Pope Francis, known as one of the most frank, progressive and egalitarian-minded of the personages to have graced that august office, is going against an entrenched tendency in the Church to lean towards denial, obfuscation and institutional loyalty rather than the principles of natural justice.



ലൂക്ക് ഒഴട്ട് നോട്ടീസ്

ഈ ഹോട്ടോയിൽ കാണുന്ന ഫാ
എഡ്വിൻ ഫിഗറേസ്, ജോസഫ് പതിമൂറ്റി
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ത്തൻവേലിക്കര പോലീസ് സ്റ്റേഷൻ
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6,91 R/w 10,11 (ii) (iii) R/w 12 of Protection
of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012
പ്രകാരമുള്ള പ്രായപൂർത്തിയാകാത്ത
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ഫോൺ നം. 0484 2484022, 0484 2487098, 9497987117 (മുഖ്യ)

Accused: Fr Edwin Figarez, 41

Victim: 14-year-old girl, unnamed

Crime: Rape

Place: Lourde Matha Church Presbytery, Puthenvelikkara

April 1, 2015

Legal status: Double life imprisonment awarded by the lower court

T.M. Varghese, former circle inspector of Vadakkekara who handled the case, narrates the sequence: “The mother registered a complaint with us on April 1, 2015. One day in March, the girl went to the church near their home. When she failed to return for a long time, the mother went over and found her in the presbytery. On being questioned, the girl revealed she had been sexually exploited by the priest for several months. We investigated his background, his reputation was not good. There are allegations that he was in trouble at the previous parish too.”

Figarez’s FB account has been deleted, but his Twitter account is an active commentary on himself. At the time he was preying on a minor, he was also exhorting people to pray. Figarez, who calls himself a dhyana guru, was producing music CDs. His tweets are littered with videos of him singing, saying the mass. His tagline states: “What I am is God’s gift. What I become is my gift to God.” Says Varghese, “He had a special ability to impress people. He left for the Gulf the day the complaint was filed. He returned after he got a special leave not to be arrested for a few days and soon went about spinning the story that the victim’s mother used to write love letters to him, which he rejected and so she had retaliated with this accusation.” Sandhya Rani, special prosecutor, POCSO, says Figarez had groomed the girl before raping her and cites the Ernakulam court’s remark on how Figarez had, unconscionably, gone to the extent of attributing bad character to the victim.

Indeed, the very fact that he needed to say this is an implicit verdict on the state of affairs.

A certain duality marks the Church’s response to what is surely a crisis. Theodore Mascarenhas, secretary general of the Catholic Bishop Conference of India, for instance, talks of a slew of reform measures in a contrite, ‘zero tolerance’ vein (see *‘We are trying to fix our policy on sexual harassment’*). The CBCI sits at the crest of a multi-tiered

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ANUP K. VENU

Victim: Jeessamol Devassia, 21

Accused: Unnamed

Place: San Jos Parish Hostel, Pavaratty, Thrissur

December 5, 2005

Legal status: CBI closure report (28.1.16) calls it suicide. Binny Devassia files protest complaint asking for a thorough investigation.

THERE was an exam that day and Jeessamol, a final-year nursing student, was sent out of the hall for copying in the midwifery exam at around 9 am, says the CBI closure report. At 9.30 am, she was found hanging from a fan in her hostel room by her friend Sheeba. Her classmates cut the knot and rushed her to the hospital wing, but she was declared dead by 11.40 am. After the post-mortem, the vaginal swab and smear sent to the Regional Chemical Laboratory, Ernakulam, found semen and spermatozoa on the vaginal swab dated 12.06.2006—undetected by other labs in subsequent years. Jeessamol's mother Binny Devassia thinks her daughter did not commit suicide as too many things don't add up. "The churidar kameez she was wearing was only submitted to the police by the principal four days after her death. It was filled with blood identified as B group by the Regional Chemical Laboratory, Ernakulam; Jeessamol's blood group was O positive. Her vagina was wiped clean with solution for urinary catheterisation to clean the excreta while trying to revive her. She was dressed in someone else's clothes during the inquest. The room, which had drops of blood, was washed clean and not preserved as it was. Jeessamol's answer sheet, which is crucial evidence, has been lost. There were too many lapses...I'm fighting to keep the investigations open."

Jeessamol's local guardian and human rights activist Anthony Chittattukara got to know about the incident around 3 pm. "When I saw her body in the casualty, she looked as if she was sleeping. Her eyes were not protruded, nor was her tongue bulging out. I went with the police to her room and found it washed. The dupatta was hanging from the fan; it was supposed to have been cut off but I could see the natural end. The ligature material was never handed to the police. The post-mortem clearly says all neck structures were intact. The neck has to break in the case of hanging. We immediately filed a writ petition in the high court."

In 2013, the case was handed over to the CBI, after investigations by numerous police teams. The CBI painstakingly interviewed numerous inmates, nuns and priests at the hospital. Polygraph tests, done on three men, turned in negative results. "They tested the blood group of two priests, but made no mention of the blood group of the then hospital director. I feel they have not done a proper investigation," says Devassia.

hierarchy and has oversight over all of the Catholic Church in India. But in practice, it is often seen to give a wide berth to, if not defer to the wishes of the local diocese. Fr Joseph Palanivel Jeyapaul's curious journey (see box on page 50) is a case in point. The CBI, thus, is in some crucial ways in breach of its responsibilities. "The whole blame rests on the CBI," says a theologian. "They are responsible as the corporate body of bishops for every action of the Church where discipline has to be maintained and action has to be taken."

To a degree, the Church's instinct towards secrecy is understandable—if not entirely acceptable. Especially so in a country like India, where a fraught politics of religion defines the general atmosphere. But even while being averse to public airing of such cases, if the Church's internal handling had been oriented unambiguously towards ensuring justice, the situation may not have been so dire for victims and their kin. What is unforgivable is that the Church continues to protect these priests in spite of their criminal activities, pardoning them for their grievous sins.

This is despite a clearly stipulated internal mechanism. Where the victim is a minor, Fr Paul Thelakkat, former spokesperson of the Syro Malabar Church, lays out the internal procedure: "Every allegation has to be investigated by the local diocesan bishop. If there is any semblance of truth, the case is referred to the Vatican. The priest concerned has to be removed from office until investigations are over. Civil law concerning reporting of crimes to the appropriate authorities should always be followed. The priest is placed in a situation away from children in a discretion which the bishop has to exercise during and after any canonical proceeding."

In the Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law calls for the constitution of a tribunal and an investigation if a complaint is raised. In certain severe cases, the matter is referred to the papal authorities in Rome and then punishment is meted out. "We always maintain the law of the land should be respected and nothing should be done to defile the legal system," says an expert on the Canon Law who did not wish to be named. "Every diocese has a judicial vicar who is an expert in the Canon Law who investigates the case and there is a college of judges to decide the case. If it is a criminal case, it is reported to the police and they take charge of the case."

But believers say they are not getting any justice under the Canon Law and this body of laws seems to apply mainly to the laity, not the clergy. Instead of taking action against culprits, they are shielded by the Church. The most recent example is that of Fathima Sofiya, who was just 17 when she was murdered in 2013 (box on page 42). Here, the minutes of the ecclesiastical court proceedings, which the Bishop of the Coimbatore Diocese presided over, contain Fr Arockiaraj's confession that he had

sexual contact with the victim. Fr Arockiaraj, 36, was dismissed from the church but the matter was not reported to the police.

The faithful fear that if they speak up against the Church, they will be isolated by the Church and the community. Those who are bold enough to fight the Church are dismissed as mentally unstable or as people who have a malicious intent to damage the Church. The Church also manages to instil fear in the community that the family will come to ruin if a case is brought against the Church.

Disempowered Laity

Binny Devassia, 55, has been seeking justice since 2005 after her daughter Jeesamol was found hanging in the San Jos Parish Hospital hostel at Pavaratty, Thrissur (box on page 44). She believes her daughter did not commit suicide and there is foul play. Says Devassia, "I was told not to file a case against the priests, for my family will be completely destroyed. I was a very spiritual person, a devout Christian...but now I don't have a God or a Church. I have not done anything wrong; so why should I be afraid? I believe my daughter was murdered and I will not rest till I get justice."

Fathima's mother, Shanti Roselin, 42, from Coimbatore, is facing the ire of the Church for doing just that. She has taken on the Roman Catholic Church for the death of her daughter, allegedly at the hands of the priest. She was given a letter excommunicating her from the church on August 30, 2015. Her lawyers say she can no longer receive the holy communion.

Dismally similar was the case of Shreya Benny, 12. Shreya, a Class VII student, had gone with 70 of her Sunday schoolmates of the Kaithavana church to attend a two-day personality development camp at Accept Kripa Bhavan in Alappuzha. Early morning on October 17, she was missing from her room and was found dead in a pond 100 metres away at around 7 am. The police reported it as an accidental death while the girl was sleepwalking. The post-mortem report, which indicated death by drowning, also spoke of two bite marks on the girl's lower lips inflicted by her upper front teeth.

Says an Alappuzha resident: "There are huts all over the campus...this child was in one of them. None of the huts had any latches or locks on the doors. The way to the pond from the hut was one with many turns, not a straight one. So the sleepwalking theory is all bogus. Even the parents said she did not have somnambulism."

Inconsistencies in the statements by priests and nuns made the parents suspicious. The child's father Benny Ezharaparayil, an auto driver, and mother Suja appealed to the then CM, V.S. Achuthanandan, when police failed to make progress, and the Crime Branch took over the case. (The parents had sought a CBI probe, but the agency refused, citing lack of



Accused: Fr Raju Kokken, 40

Victim: 9-year-old girl, unnamed

Crime: Rape; photographing of genitals

Place: St Paul's Church, Thaikkattusserry, Thrissur district
April 8, 2014

Legal status: In the lower courts, Thrissur. Raju Kokken on bail.

AFTER luring the minor girl to the presbytery where he lived, it is alleged that Fr Kokken, then parish vicar, made her undress and took pictures of her genitals on his mobile. Based on the mother's complaint, the Ollur police registered a case against him under the IPC, POCSO and IT Acts. He is now on bail, and believed to be working in a home for leprosy patients in Thrissur district. Both ecclesiastical courts and civil courts have yet to decide his case. He is believed to have said he was framed.

A priest erring is unthinkable, for he is seen in the Catholic Church as Jesus Christ's representative. Casting doubts on his character is blasphemous since his position is next to God.

staff.) The Crime Branch report indicated the complicity of Fr Mathukutty, assistant director of the centre, and Sr Sneha, but they were chargesheeted only for negligence under 304 IPC.

Instead of justice, people in the locality say, what the parents faced was isolation by the church. "There were terrible rumours about the parents," says a person in Alappuzha who did not want to be named. "Ordinary people cannot withstand the onslaught of the church. They have now retreated and are not interested in pursuing the case." Activist K.V. Nair filed a counter-statement to the Crime Branch report on May 18, 2016 but the parents are no longer interested in pursuing the case. And sure enough, Benny was not interested in speaking to *Outlook*.

Anto Kokkat of the Joint Christian Council, points out that in both the Shreya and Jeesamol's cases,



Victim: Sister Abhaya, 21

Accused: Fr Thomas Kottoor, Fr Jose Poothrakkayil

Place: St Pius X Convent, Kottayam

March 27, 1992

Legal status: Trial in the CBI special court, Thiruvananthapuram

FOR 25 years, the black-and-white passport photograph of a pale and gaunt Sr Abhaya has haunted Kerala. It has been the longest probe by the CBI for any given case. In 1992, the state police registered a case of unnatural death and, after 17 days, the Crime Branch was brought in. After nine months of investigation, it concluded Sr Abhaya had committed suicide by drowning because of mental depression. All material objects found on her body and at the scene of the crime were destroyed, allegedly by the Crime Branch team; so were all the photographs. On the state government's request, the case was handed over to the CBI in March '93.

CBI DySP Verghese P. Thomas, the investigating officer, wrote in the case diary that it was homicide. Later he resigned and told the press he had faced harassment from his superior, CBI SP V. Thyagarajan, to change the cause of death to suicide. On a petition, the case was handed to the CBI's Delhi unit, which filed three closure refer reports—in 1996, 1999 and 2005—under different investigating CBI officers. All of them said they thought it was homicide, but could nothing since all evidence was destroyed. The chief judicial magistrate, Ernakulam, rejected the closure reports in all three instances and urged the CBI to continue investigating.

In 2007, a report appeared in *The New Indian Express* that the results of Sr Abhaya's vaginal smear test were tampered with in the work register of the chief chemical examiner's lab, Thiruvananthapuram. A truth serum test was conducted on two priests and a nun, but the report took its own time reaching the courts. The Action Council petitioned the CBI director that the probe team be changed. On November 18, 2008, a new police team arrested Fr Thomas Kottoor and Fr Jose Poothrakkayil, both then professors at BCM College, and Sr Sephy, resident of St Pius hostel. On June 27, 2015, a supplementary final report was filed in the CBI special court, Thiruvananthapuram. For one-and-a-half years, neither the accused nor their lawyers have been appearing in the courts. On December 9, 2016, Justice P.V. Balakrishnan said, "The petitioner is appearing, but the accused are not appearing. This is against justice."

"the parents believed their children would be safe in the church precincts, but they were betrayed."

Former priest George Pulikuthiyil agrees the Canon Law is interpreted differently for the clergy and laity. If a priest errs, he is merely sent to a retreat, made to do penance and taken back into the church. But if members of the congregation defy the clergy, they are excommunicated; even their rights to a church burial are terminated.

Human rights activist Jomon Puthenpurackal, 49, who has been seeking justice for Sr Abhaya for the past 25 years, thinks by now he has perhaps suffered more than the murdered nun. Sr Abhaya, 21, a second year pre-degree student, was found dead in a well in the St Pius X Convent in Kottayam on March 27, 1992. Puthenpurackal recalls that Kottayam was thick with rumours that priests were frequenting the St Pius X convent where Sr Abhaya too lived and she was murdered after she stumbled upon a scene in the kitchen of the hostel.

"I was 24 years old then and stayed in the YMCA hostel at Neendoor, doing social work," recalls Puthenpurackal. "I belong to the same Knanaya Catholic community, but I'd never even seen Sr Abhaya. Nor am I related to her. Three days after her funeral, a Sr Abhaya case action council was formed—prominent people like the MP and MLA of Kottayam were on board. P.C. Cherian Madakani was its president; I was made the convenor. At that time, no one dared to take on the church, but I have continued to fight even after several members of the council have passed away. I am not afraid to say the truth."

Puthenpurackal shows deep marks on his back and head. In 1994, he says, his brother tried to kill him with an axe under the influence of alcohol. "My brother had married outside the community, so he was naturally evicted from the Knanaya church. He died in 2014, and the church gave Rs 10 lakh to his widow. I find that suspicious, for she is not part of our community. If they are innocent, why should they give my sister-in-law money?"

The strangest of things to befall him, says Puthenpurackal, was in August 2008. A special team comprising two IGs and three DySPs was formed to investigate him, the petitioner, on high court orders—later stayed by the Supreme Court. "There is only one officer probing Sr Abhaya's murder at a time, while a whole team was formed to investigate me! They even tried to turn Abhaya's parents against me. Who is behind all this I would like to know."

Fr Thelakkat is indignant, though, at the suggestion of foul play by the church. "It's a tragedy created mainly by the CBI and certain very malicious individuals to settle scores with the church. It's also a case of the media creating an Orwellian truth factory. The general public and media seem to be so sure of how the nun died and who killed the nun—hence the cry for the blood of two priests!" he says.

"WE ARE TRYING TO FIX OUR POLICY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT"

Why does the Catholic church appear to protect its clergy accused of murder and rape? For instance, in the case of Sister Abhaya's murder, why does the Church go out of its way to defend, protect and rehabilitate the accused, ridiculing the due process of law? Palanivel Jeyapaul, who pleaded guilty of molestation in the US, was even reinstated and is back as a priest in India. Another priest, who is now convicted of rape in Kerala, was allowed to celebrate the mass on an auspicious day even after being accused of rape, dividing the parish down the middle. Are these attempts to put the laity down and turn them into second class citizens without any rights? Why does the church rehabilitate convicts like Fr Lazar of the Kollam diocese?

In a telephonic conversation with Anoo Bhuyan, Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, secretary general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), declined to answer questions on specific cases, but talked about the church's position on such matters. Excerpts:

What is the official position of the Catholic church in India on cases of sexual abuse by the clergy?

We are totally against any sexual offence. It is not according to Catholic teaching. We are against any form of disrespect to the dignity of women, not just harassment or rape. If we have failed in any way, we would apologise to the people we have hurt. That is the official position. This is why we are working on our own sexual harassment policy at work. CBCI is coming out with a document within a month.

In what you have just said, there is an acknowledgement of these crimes taking place. According to the Vishakha guidelines, every workplace is supposed to have a policy to deal with sexual harassment. What is the shape of CBCI's policy on this?

The policy is zero tolerance for sexual harassment. We want it to be easy to implement. We will have monitoring cells and complaint cells at diocese or institution level. We want to respond to complaints speedily too. We are interested that all employees are educated

about their role and the respect they should show to other humans. We have also started implementing POCSO at our institutions. We are moving from school to school to make the staff POCSO-compliant. Besides punishment, I feel proper education has to take place in society. We have cases within the Catholic church just as outside in the society. **The Vishakha guidelines came from the Supreme Court in 1997. Some of the biggest cases of sexual abuse in the church**



"We are against any form of disrespect to the dignity of women, not just harassment or rape. That is the official position. CBCI will come out with a document in a month."

are decades old. Isn't this response from the church late and lethargic?

I have spent the last 21 years in Rome and have just come back to India. How can I answer what action has been taken and what has not? The whole country is affected by a certain malaise. The real question is why the law takes so long to deliver justice in the country.

Is this the fault of society's "malaise"? But doesn't the church believe in being 'in the world, but not of the world'? Shouldn't we expect better standards from the church?

When I said it is a malaise in society, I

was not defending what is happening. We apologise for whatever might have happened and we would not like it to happen again. And we are trying our best to implement whatever has to be implemented in the best way it can. But you are picking a few rare cases. They remain rarest of the rare. We do not want even these to happen.

In several cases, the victims—women and children—are weak and vulnerable, while the Catholic church is powerful at many levels.

The victims have been persecuted while the priests have been safeguarded. You said the law is slow, so how fair is it to expect victims to simply go to court?

No, it is not simply about going to court. We have to clean up our mistakes too. I think the power of the church is often exaggerated. We want to use our moral power so that society can be clean. I don't think it is true that we use our power to cover up facts. You can't take a few examples and colour everybody. The church is often the most humiliated in the press.

That's because the church has a higher pedestal, so minor transgressions will be magnified. In this case, give me a counter

story. Tell me a case where the victim has been supported by the church and the accused priest has not been protected.

What we have instead are cases like that of Palanivel Jeyapaul, who pleaded guilty of molestation in the US but was reinstated as a priest in India.

How can I give you a counter case when most cases are dealt with on a confidential basis. Also, I am not the right person to speak to on cases like this as they are under the local areas.

What about the moves to canonise Father Onamkulam, who was sentenced to death by a sessions court in the murder of Mariakutty. So is there a counter story to this trend, where the church came down heavy on a priest?

I have returned to India only recently and recently taken charge. I do not have all the material available with me right now to respond to you, as I am on the road and travelling in Ranchi. We are sorry for where we have failed and we are trying to fix our policies now. 

Those Sheltering Folds

Till date, three priests have been charged with murder and two sentenced to death by lower courts in Kerala—one was set free and the other's sentence was reduced by the high court. The first was back in 1966 when the Quilon District and Sessions Court sentenced 37-year-old Fr Benedict Onamkulam of Changanacherry diocese to death in the sensational murder case of 43-year-old Mariakutty. Half a century of time-depth ensures that the case offers a unique perspective into the Church's tendency to exonerate, rally behind and rehabilitate those of its own—a classic case-study also of how other institutions are also averse to disturbing the equilibrium.

This is how the sequence of events went. A.S.R. Chari, a famous Supreme Court lawyer, was brought down to argue for the defendant. On April 7, 1967, the High Court acquitted Fr Onamkulam. The police had lined up numerous witnesses who had seen the priest near the scene of crime, but the court was inclined to find "a degree of artificiality" in their depositions. A bag of soiled clothes with patches of blood found in the priest's room too was "not a very incriminating circumstance", the judgement said.

The murder case had created a sensation in Kerala and, to cash in on it quickly, two Malayalam films, *Madatharuvu* and *Mynatharuvu Kola Case*, hit the screens in 1967. Interestingly, the then E.M.S. Namboodiripad government did not go for an appeal. Fr Onamkulam was initially not allowed to say the mass and lived a life of an outcast, but he was gradually rehabilitated into the church as a parish priest and died in 2001, recalls 83-year-old P.K. Mathew Ettumanur, schoolmate of Fr Onamkulam and member of the Kerala Catholic Church Reformation Movement (KCRM).

A concerted effort to whitewash the case, says Mathew, began in 2000. There were even moves to canonise Onamkulam. Stories started surfacing in church-run journals that he was innocent and the death sentence was the outcome of him refusing to divulge confessional secrets. The murder was furnished with a suitable back story: that Mariakutty was actually pregnant with the child of a rich estate owner called Manimelathu Paulochen, but the abortion went awry under the hands of a lady doctor in Kanjirappally; so she was killed and dumped in Mannamaruthy. The doctor's family, the newly fabricated story goes, confessed to Onamkulam many years later.

Onamkulam was bestowed with the epithet Sahanadasan (The Servant of Suffering) and, after his death, the church felt he had all the qualities of a saint and the process of canonisation was initiated. "Fr Onamkulam is in the space where people seek favours from him," a priest associated with the process told *Outlook*.

Mathew thinks the church is stretching it a bit too far and trying to fool the faithful. "I knew Fr

The Church has a mechanism to handle cases against the clergy. If it had been infallibly oriented towards justice, then the victims wouldn't have faced such dire situations.



Onamkulam from our school days. We both belong to the same parish, St Mary's Forane Church, Athirampuzha. When I heard about the murder in 1966, I was working in the sub-registrar's office in Kaduthuruthy, so I went to investigate the matter independently to save him. I travelled and met many people and was soon convinced that things were not favourable for Fr Onamkulam. However, the court acquitted him and he led a quiet life. But when they started selling artefacts based on him after his death and encouraged people to pray to him, I objected and wrote stinging articles against this in *Satyajwala*. In fact, a team of us went and tracked Manimalethu Paulochen's family in 2010."

Paulochen's son M.P. Jacob, 74, corroborates Mathew's story. "My house is less than a kilometre from the murder scene. My father never worked as a manager in a coir factory in Alappuzha, nor had he ever seen Mariakutty. He was not rich. We are not even Catholic, so the story that Onamkulam was the go-between for my father and Mariakutty does not hold. I wrote letters to Fr M.J. Kalapurackal (now deceased) who had written a book on Onamkulam titled *Agnishuddhi*, where a chapter is



RAJU PRASAD

Accused: Fr Benedict Onamkulam

Victim: Mariakutty, 43

Crime: Murder

Place: A forested area in Mannamaruthy, Ranni

June 15, 1966

Legal status: HC overturns death sentence, acquits priest

IT was on June 16, 1966, that Mariakutty was found with her neck slit from ear to ear, her upper body exposed and stab wounds on her abdomen and chest on an estate near Ranni. Mariakutty's daughter and mother identified the body through photographs on June 19. Mariakutty had left home, saying she was going to meet the father in Changanacherry. Fr Benedict Onamkulam, who was 37 then, was the manager of St Joseph's Orphanage and Press at Changanacherry. He was earlier the parish priest of the Chakrakadavu church in Alappuzha, where Mariakutty lived. She had four children and her husband was paralysed so she would visit the parish priest for charity provisions of wheat and milk powder.

The story goes that she gave birth to the fifth child soon after the priest was transferred to Changanacherry. She continued to visit him twice a month, taking her youngest son Joymon on all her visits. She had made it known to the family and outsiders that the priest was giving her money to live substantially well. According to her mother and daughter (in the court records), she did not take Joymon with her when she went to visit the priest the last time. Many eyewitnesses saw them proceeding to Mannamaruthy around 11.30 pm and many others saw him return alone in the wee hours. The death sentence by the Kollam sessions court rested on these witness identifications.

devoted to my father's misdeeds. Fr Kalapurackal apologised and gave a corrigendum in all the leading newspapers." Interestingly, there are claims on YouTube that Onamkulam was tested for paternity for Mariakutty's son Joymon and the results were negative. Joymon's wife, Mini, who lives in Alappuzha, told *Outlook* over phone no such DNA test was ever done on Joymon.

Fr Thelakkat weighs in on the side of those who think the canonisation move is a touch dubious. "The case is very old and mired in mystery and myth. I personally do not know whether he killed the lady, I cannot judge. However, I won't consider him a saint just because he happened to suffer under the police," says the former Syro Malabar spokesperson. "Those who paint him as a saint should be responsible to the holy tradition of the church lest people ridicule church's saints—and also to the public, which knows a lot of details of the case."

Be Merciful Unto Them

The cases of two other priests who had the ignominy of being charged with murder and tried in Kerala again illustrate some basic traits. One, a pattern of

exploitative relationships that clergymen enter into and seek to control—till it ends in violence. And two, their capacity to get for themselves the best possible deal under the law. Take the bare-bones story of Fr George Cherian of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox (non-Catholic). On April 23, 1984, 18-year-old Jolly Mathew was found dead in the guest room of Bethany Ashram of Kuzhimattom Kara, Kottayam. The sessions court sentenced Fr Cherian to life imprisonment; this was reduced by the Kerala High Court.

Fr Anthony Lazar of the Latin Catholic Church, Kollam diocese, offers a more fleshed-out narrative. He was accused of hiring killers to finish off Marykutty on October 13, 1986. An eight-member gang led by Sasi had barged into her home in Kundara, Kollam—in the end, she lay dead with 19 stab wounds on her body. The gang was arrested and there the matter would have ended—had Marykutty not visited social activist Dr Xavier Paul's home a month before the incident. She feared for her life, she told him, Fr Lazar was threatening to kill her.

Boris Paul, the activist's son, relates the sequence of events thus: Marykutty was enticed into a relationship by the priest when she was a nursing

There was a move to canonise a priest who was sentenced to death in a 1966 murder case. It amounts to ridiculing other saints, says an ex-spokesman for the Church.



Accused: Fr Joseph Palanivel Jeyapaul, 61

Victim: Unidentified

Crime: Rape/ Sexual Molestation

Place: Crookston, Minnesota

Legal Status: Served sentence. Now under supervision. Not allowed to work with children.

ACCORDING to the website for Jeff Anderson & Associates, attorney for the victim, their client was raped by Fr Joseph Jeyapaul for a period of one year between 2004 and 2005 when he was serving in the diocese of Crookston, Minnesota, US. In 2005, he molested another minor. When allegations surfaced about his conduct, Jeyapaul left for India. In October 2005, Bishop Balke of the Diocese of Crookston notified Fr Jeyapaul's home diocese of Ootacamund (Ooty) and referred it to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, but no action was taken in response to his letters. Instead, Fr Jeyapaul was named as secretary of the diocese education commission. Under pressure, though, the diocese later suspended him from ministerial duties. In 2007, a criminal complaint was filed against Fr Jeyapaul in the US. In 2014, he was extradited to face charges. Jeyapaul pleaded guilty to criminal conduct involving the sexual abuse of a minor girl. In 2015, he returned to India after serving his sentence.

On January 16, 2016, with the permission of Pope Francis, Bishop A. Amalraj of Ooty lifted the suspension on Fr Jeyapaul. After learning of his return to ministry, the victim filed a federal lawsuit on April 18, 2016, alleging nuisance against the Diocese of Ootacamund for returning Jeyapaul to active ministry and exposing innocent children in India to his predatory ways—and won a small victory. Barbara Dorris, outreach director of The Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), described it thus in an email to *Outlook*: "His suspension was lifted and a brave victim filed a lawsuit and won. Jeyapaul is not to be put back into work with children. He is to be supervised and church officials are to give updates. None of this would have happened without the victim finding the courage and the strength to take action. Once again, it has been left to the victims to work to protect other children." Dorris also wrote that it is almost impossible to estimate the number of priests from India who have been accused of sexual misconduct and returned to India. Often when a priest fears he may be accused, he pre-empts it by simply returning to his home country and the allegations are never made public. Children and even many adults are often afraid or otherwise unwilling to talk about the abuse and carry the secret for decades. The Bishop of Ooty was not available for comment.

student in Bishop Benziger Hospital. After her studies, Fr Lazar found employment for her near his residence and they continued their affair. Since he did not want to marry her, she wanted to settle down and start a family with a suitable partner. Fr Anthony blocked all her marriage proposals, but Marykutty went ahead and got married to another man.

Fr Lazar continued to call her and compelled her to accompany him on outstation trips. And if she did not comply, he would threaten to kill her. Says Boris Paul: "She had with her bills for the hotel where they stayed, even jewellery bills. When my father heard this, he made her give a complaint to the DGP that her life was under threat." So the police did not have to look far for the culprit; and the gang admitted Fr Lazar had hired them. He was found guilty by the Quilon sessions court and sentenced to death on July 22, 1988. Again, the sentence was reduced to life imprisonment by the high court.

Advocate A. Jayashankar says in both Onamkulam's and Lazar's cases, the church hired expensive lawyers for them. It is speculated that Figarez too paid Rs 50 lakh-1 crore to his lawyers in the rape case. Bishop Karikkassery of Kottapuram—while saying "he has strayed, but he is still my son"—told *Outlook* the church is not paying his lawyer's fees. When asked if there were complaints against Figarez from the previous parish, the Bishop said, "not of any grave nature." A member of the Lourde Matha church points out that if they had removed him earlier, this would not have been happened.

As for Puthenpurackal, he has been pleading Sr Abhaya's case without a lawyer. "I cannot afford to hire a lawyer. I have only passed my class six, but God has guided me for the past 25 years." Even after being accused of murder, Fr Kottoor and Fr Poothrukayil are being defended by the Church and hold positions of power. Kottoor is chancellor of the Kottayam diocese of Knanaya Catholic Church and Poothrukayil retired as the principal of Pius X College in Kasargod. Advocate Boris Paul from Kollam says no accused priest has been thrown out of the church in Kerala. "Though Marykutty was the victim, the Church used the people's money to hire the best lawyers to defend the accused Fr Lazar. It is morally corrupt."

Reji Njallani, state convener of KCRM, cites other curious facts. He has gathered information that in the past two decades, over 20 nuns have died of unnatural causes, but the church is not bothered to file complaints or take up the matter. As in Sr Abhaya's case, the church is not interested in finding the accused. Njallani, a cardamom farmer based in Kattapana, Idukki, joined the church-run Indian Farmers' Movement (INFAM) and was aghast at what he saw from close quarters. "The church collects money from us, but there is no transparency or accountability. That is when I joined KCRM to engi-

neer a reform within the church without leaving the church. We try and make people aware of issues.”

Njallani points out that, within the church, priests and nuns cannot raise their voice either. “Their views will be dismissed as madness and they will be treated for mental illness.” In 2016, Sr Mary Sebastian, 45, of Nasrath Bhavan, Cherpunkal, Kottayam, under the Congregation of Mother of Carmel, wanted to leave the church with compensation for 25 years of service to the church. The KCRM intervened and asked for Rs 30 lakh; the church is not willing to pay more than Rs 1 lakh. The KCRM also wrangled Rs 12 lakh compensation for Sr Anita of St Agatha Congregation when she was thrown out of her convent in Aluva for making allegations against a priest.

The number of priests and nuns leaving the church has been increasing steadily, and the Ex-Priests and Nuns Association has over 600 members in its fold. In 2009, Sr Jesme’s tell-all book *Amen: An Autobiography of a Nun* had shocked Kerala society. It was followed by Sr Mary Chandy’s *Namma Niranjavale Swasthi* (Peace to the One filled with Grace) and Fr Shibu Kalamparambil’s memoir *Oru Vaidikante Hrudayamitha* (The Heart of a Priest). *Outlook’s* cover story on these books (July 23, 2012) was met with stiff resistance from the Catholic Church. Sr Jesme then said she was denounced as mentally unstable and Mary Chandy’s claims as a former nun were dismissed as untrue. Fr Kalamparambil, 45, who left the church in 2010 after 24 years, is now married and has a child. “Celibacy is against the natural law. It has nothing to do with being a believer of Jesus. The main reason that there are so many cases now is that these poor priests and nuns have to remain celibate. They are given food and accommodation and they are just slaves of the Church where they don’t have any rights,” says Kalamparambil.

Secret Marriages?

There’s another intriguing aspect to the interface between the Catholic way and civil law. The Code of Canon Law, Book IV, Title VII, Chapter VII, allows for marriages to be conducted secretly for grave and urgent cause. The Law says explicitly that the witnesses, the spouses and the local priest must observe secrecy about the marriage conducted. Such a marriage is to be noted only in a special register kept in the secret archive of the curia. This allowance of secret marriages has been viewed suspiciously by the laymen. They point out that no layperson can get married secretly.

Says M.L. George of the Catholic Laymen’s Association, “Well, 99.9 per cent of the laymen have open marriages, which have to be registered both with the church and the government. Before a marriage is sanctioned, it goes through a long process: there has to be an engagement, the bride and the groom have to attend classes and the proposed marriage has to

be announced in church on three Sundays. The marriage is done in an open church with two witnesses. So why is there a provision for secret marriages in the Code of Canon Law? If these marriages are taking place, then it is violating the civil laws of the country. If there are children from these marriages, no one knows who they are.” George, in fact, says the entire Code of Canon Law is unconstitutional because it runs parallel to the Indian judicial system.

The Joint Christian Council has been working to eradicate exploitation by the church, promote democratisation and get the Church Act implemented. The organisation had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to enact the Church Act (The Christian Church Properties and Institutions Trust bill 2009, which is under consideration of Kerala Government) drafted by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, as a country-wide law for all sects of Christians of India. “It can stop the present lawlessness,” says Kokkat. “It will give justice to all believers, protect their civil rights. The wealth of the Church belongs to the people and the administration should be in the hands of the trust.”

Church officials, asked for a response, are naturally defensive and tend to play down the incidents. Fr Jimmy Poochakkatt, spokesperson of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church, says cases against priests are only a few and most of them have been acquitted. “All priests and nuns cannot be tarnished. In all these years, only a handful of cases has been filed.” Fr Thelakkat too says one need not “accuse the church” in every case of “unnatural death and accident” that can occur in convents or among clerics. “Celibacy and virginity are indeed practised on a large scale,” he says, and in such a situation “unfounded suspicions and even defaults” can occur. “Every accusation need not carry truth.”

He puts up a stout defence of the way of the clergy. “There may occur sin and failure in vows; that is not the end of life. In a sexually saturated and sensate world, exceptions only prove the law; celibacy and virginity are difficult, but not impossible as some seem to think,” Thelakkat says. “Sins do occur, but springs of sanctity also bloom, giving glory to the church and models to men and women in the world. Every sin is not a crime. In any case, crime is a matter for the State to deal with. The church has no power there, but it can give legally permitted assistance to anyone it thinks it should defend.”

And yet, perhaps one could wish for more than just organisational loyalty. The Church, the world over, is facing an existential crisis. Many lie desolate, some have even seen a conversion to recreational spaces like bars or restaurants. Truth and spirit, the only two principles expected of true worshippers, seem to have been abandoned. The abomination that makes the place desolate is a sign foretold by Jesus Christ. 

Within the Church, priests and nuns can’t raise their voice. Their views will be dismissed as madness; they will be treated for mental illness, says a reformist leader.

LIGHT FROM A LENS

In 2002, a spotlight fell on abuse by the clergy in Boston. Later, a film was made on it.

BY ANOO BHUYAN

“CHURCH allowed abuse by priest for years.” That simple headline on November 6, 2002, kicked off nearly 600 news reports by the *Boston Globe* newspaper, exposing the scale of sexual abuse within the Boston Archdiocese. A total of 249 priests and brothers were accused of abuse, and the investigation estimated that these men had violated over 1,000 survivors in Boston alone.

In 2002, a four-member team of journalists at the *Boston Globe* newspaper in the US, showed that clergy in the Archdiocese of Boston had been abusing children for years, and that the church had been suppressing those stories. It exposed not just the scandal but also the cover-up. Some of these cases were old ones but typically, as has been the situation for many complainants within the Catholic church, these cases had received insufficient media attention, police scrutiny, and interest from the church. They won the Pulitzer Prize in 2003 for their work.

In 2015, the movie *Spotlight* was released, after over a decade since the original investigation. It served to introduce a new audience of people to the sordid side of the church. It recreated how the Spotlight team of journalists went about investigating the story for months.

Speaking to BBC News, Mike Rende, one of the original reporters on the team, said, “We thought there would be protesters in front of the *Globe*.” But in fact, the team and the newspaper received wide support even from within the Catholic community.

One of the reasons for this is because their investigation was based on documented evidence. And it was evidence that the church and the public could not deny—their investigation released secret court and church documents which detailed the sexual abuse. It made their story hard to break, and shielded them from being smeared with bias by the church as these were the church’s own internal documents.

They further corroborated their story by tracking the movements of nearly 70 priests who were implicated in sexual scandals, in Boston alone. The team found that many of these priests were simply transferred, promoted around the country

or given leave, but were never truly punished by the church. There was never any strong message of deterrence sent to the clergy.

The film also received wide support. The Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano* said that it was not an anti-Catholic movie. It said in fact, that the movie gave “voice to the alarm and deep pain” experienced by the Catholic community. Likewise, Jesuit Father Hans Zollner, a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, told Vatican Radio that the clergy was being encouraged to watch the movie and ensure such abuse never happens again.

In India, the multiple cases of abuse have likewise been hushed up with the victims and complainants being socially persecuted and legally harassed. India still awaits its watershed moment. As the lawyer Mitchell Garabedian in the movie says, “If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one.” It is this systemic persecution of victims that is seen in the terrible cases from Kerala. “In some states, the clergy has been given a lot of importance and power. In Kerala, the victims are harassed regularly,” says A.C. Michael, national coordinator of the United Christian Forum. It is also this systemic persecution across religions that gives us victims who never find justice. “There’s a defined connection

in the West between celibacy and sexual transgression in the church but there’s celibacy and abuse in Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions too,” says John Dayal, former national president of the All India Catholic Union. After all these years, does the Catholic church in India have a mechanism in place to check sexual abuse? “There is a system. We put

together an inquiry committee and hear both the accused priest and the victim. We try to give options to them both. There is a policy paper which we have developed for this. It was updated recently. But we never stop anyone from going to the police,” says Michael. “There should be zero tolerance for this behaviour. In the Catholic church at least, since the middle of the term of Pope John Paul II, there has been an effort to sensitise the church and condemn actions of abuse. There should be no excuse,” says Dayal. Indeed victims of such abuse from all over the world would agree and hope for a spotlight to fall on their story. 



Spotlight's story is based on an expose of sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston by the Boston Globe. It covered not just the scandal but also the cover-up.



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SHIV
VISVANATHAN

SCALING THE PARSI CITADEL

Success, discipline, ambition; stacked as a community's will

SUCCESS demands the storyteller; it requires a narrative to explain achievements, its origins, its singularity. Success stories in India, like anywhere else, have a touch of the ethnic, the style of a group as it goes up in the world. The epic journey of the group expressed in individual struggles sustains the myth of the community. These stories are legion—the Marwari businessman, the Gujarati shop owner and the Tamil Brahmin scholar.

The success of the Chandrasekaran brothers is a story with a difference. Tam Brahm were legendary in their achievements in scholarship, the only issue was whether they were Iyer or Iyengar. I remember once looking at a picture of the school of physics in Calcutta. The names read like Ramanathan, Ramaswamy, Raman, Krishnan, Ganesan, Ramachandran, Chatterjee and Banerjee. These very surnames spoke out the ethnic affinity that these subjects created.

The Tam Brahm obsession for marks was legendary. Two stories illustrate it. I remember a friend in my hostel who was glumly repeating his papers. I was stunned but he told me that his father was disappointed with his results. He had only got 97 per cent and the father would only settle for “centum.” Centum was the magic goal of a maths test and the Tam Brahm ideal.

Another story I have told often with delight comes from the late philosopher Ramu Gandhi. His uncle was introducing three distant cousins. The uncle said, “This is Murthy, first-class-first.” Then turned to Ramu and said “this is Ramu, gold medalist.” There was a pause and then he added, “He is Shambhu, the silence that followed was eloquent and self-explanatory. Success defined the identity of the Tam Brahm. The success of the Tam Brahm in the struggle for exams is legendary. There is a taken for granted element here. I remember a friend topping the exams. His glee was muted as his colleagues told him he had only his genes to blame. The Tam Brahm as a scholar and an exam Olympian is by now a part of folklore. Earlier if you said Chandra, you referred to the astrophysicist.

It also reminds me of a story that the sociologist Andre Beteille once told me. A story of P.N. Dhar, the economist, who was director of the Institute of Economic Growth. Dhar used to get bombarded by V.K.R.V. Rao with complaints about a fellow scholar. He listened politely but paid little attention to it. One day

Rao asked him for a copy of one of the letters. Dhar panicked and summoned his secretary. The man quietly brought out a file neatly labelled “V.K.R.V. Rao versus Professor X” where every letter was filed. The message was clear, whether as secretaries or scientists, method was primary to the Tam Brahm way.

The success of the Chandrasekaran brothers represents a new trend. All three studied in a Tamil medium school in Namakkal. They then went to the Regional College of Engineering. Two elements of the story are already clear. One, this is not an IIT success story and two, these students are not from English medium but Tamil medium schools. The unstated is already there—focus, ambition and an ascetic approach to success. Success almost becomes a linear end to these careers. There is a tacit ruthlessness to these ambitions and a normalcy. The moral is clear. Hard work and discipline pay off. Secondly, success is not advertised through conspicuous consumption. The style is always understated. If there's an eccentricity, it will be expressed as a hobby, also followed with equal dedication.

The Chandrasekarans went beyond the standard Tam Brahm dream by extending success from science and bureaucracy to the corporate boardroom.

There is a fascinating family element here. All brothers were successful. One is N. Srinivasan at Murgappa Chettiar, the other is N. Ganpathy Subramaniam, the COO of TCS, and Natarajan as chairperson of Tata Sons completes the triptych. Each achievement resonates the other.

The response to these successes is also interesting. Hard work is taken for granted and yet one keeps working hard despite success. Secondly, all the skills of the current world are absorbed. Chandrasekaran's interest in running is an example. The Tam Brahm is a constant learner with a classical touch. He will be conservative about music to which he brings a distinctive style. You seek competence and enjoyment in new domains. Competence can only lead to more competence and there is a spiritual quality, an ethical quality to success. You have to do things right and do the right things as the Viennese Brahmin Peter Drucker said. It's a recipe not only for success but success in newer fields. One should expect newer forms of entrepreneurship from the “Chandras” of the new decade. 

(The author is a social science nomad)



GETTY IMAGES

The moral is clear: hard work pays off. Natarajan Chandrasekaran (above) was recently appointed chairperson of Tata Sons.



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Taxing Times They Are A-Changin' Now

The budget may bring about tax incentives for the public as well as the corporates

BY ARINDAM MUKHERJEE

A couple of months ago, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's faint reference lifted the spirits of the general public despite the gloom and doom scenario post-demonetisation. He said that if the government's measures on demonetisation bore fruit, there was a case for moderation of taxes in the budget. Two-and-a-half months after the historic move on demonetisation, which the government claimed to be a huge success, there is widespread expectation that the finance minister will 'reward' people with tax breaks.

The expectations are realistic given that the last tax breaks happened two years ago and the economy is also presenting the government with an opportunity to play with the taxes and reward the tax-paying citizens. After the hardships faced by the people because of demonetisation, it is also payback time for the government and it is expected that some major tweaking with personal and corporate taxes would happen in this budget that would be announced on February 1.

Tax experts across the board expect this year's budget to be defining in terms of personal and corporate taxes with prospects of reduction in both. According to sources, the government is working towards giving an array of tax incentives to the people. This is not being pushed just by increased tax collections following demonetisation but also the fact that the government needs to take some populist measures ahead of assembly elections in five states. There is also the fact that since this is the fourth budget of this government, it will have to show something that benefits the people.

To begin with, there is a strong case for a reduction in corporate tax this year. The government had already stated that it is committed to reducing corporate tax

from the present 30 per cent to 25 per cent. With two years remaining before the 2019 polls, the government has to move in the direction of reducing corporate tax this year.

"A roadmap for reduction of corporate tax from 30 per cent to 25 per cent is possible in this budget," says Girish Vanvari, head of tax, KPMG India. "The rates in the US and the UK are going down and India needs to align its corporate tax rates as well. A drastic reduction to 25 per cent in one go is not possible as there is no headroom for it. A gradual approach may be announced in this budget."

The industry has also been clamouring for a reduction in corporate taxes for some time. In its pre-budget memorandum, apex industry chamber CII said that the effective corporate tax rate was 19.8 per cent because of the slew of exemptions and wanted it to be lowered to 18 per cent after exemptions and after including surcharges. It has also urged the government to withdraw other incentives or exemptions if this proposal was accepted.

"This is a big year where the FM would realise the intent of reducing corporate tax," says Gokul Chaudhri, leader, tax, with BMR & Associates. "He has to move to a 25 per cent regime by 2018, so he has to make a beginning this year. In America, President-elect Donald Trump has said that corporate tax would be cut to 15-20 per cent. That would have an impact on India."

A lot of other measures are also expected in this sphere. Chaudhri says the Income Computation and Disclosure Standards (ICDS) and Place of Effective Management (POEM) rules for taxation, which the government had brought in earlier have both struggled and could be done away with. On the contrary, there is a possibility that the General Anti-Avoidance Rules (GAAR), India's anti-tax avoidance rules, may be brought in this year. "We expect some clarity on GAAR and on what will happen to the treaties that are already there. We ex-

pect the government to concentrate on easing things on treaties, tax compliance and on litigation in the budget," says Vanvari.

There was also a case, felt experts, for the government to improve the environment for investors to invest in India through tax rules. This would include removal of new tax provisions on indirect transfers which have dogged many companies in the past.

Not many changes are, however, expected in the indirect taxes domain, especially in excise duties and service tax as they would be subsumed in the Goods and Services Tax which will set in from July, according to the new deadline set by the government as the budget would be transitioning towards GST and rules and regulations in terms of excise and service tax would be aligned towards it.

Changes are however, expected in the customs duties. "Changes in customs duties are expected to come in the budget particularly to encourage 'Make in India' and to boost manufacture in India," says Mahesh Jaising, partner at BMR and Associates. "This may be through a lower rate of customs duty on components and a higher rate on finished products."

But for India's tax payers, there is a lot of hope that the Union Budget 2017 will bring in cheer for them in terms of lower taxes. With the upcoming GST limiting the scope for the government to do much in the indirect taxes sphere, it is in direct taxes that we may see the maximum changes.

They may not be disappointed by the finance minister as the government may be looking at increasing the basic exemption level. "Post-demonetisation there is hope and hype that there will be tinkering with the taxes," says Kuldeep Kumar, partner, personal tax with PwC. The basic exemption level can be increased from Rs. 2.5 lakh to Rs 3 lakh." This expectation comes from the fact that the last time the basic exemption limit was increased was in 2014, when it was increased by Rs

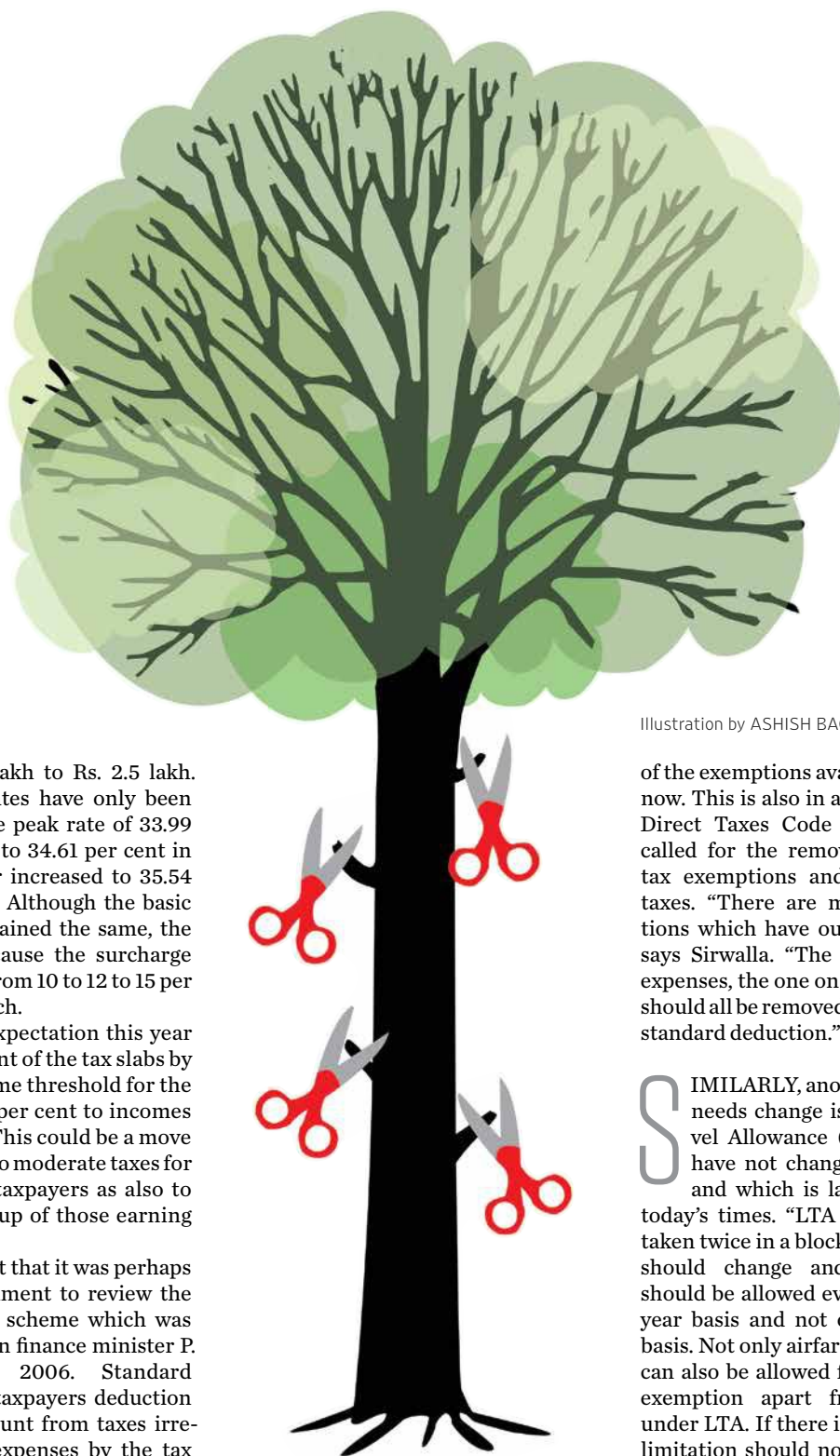


Illustration by ASHISH BAGCHI

50,000 from Rs 2 lakh to Rs. 2.5 lakh. Beyond that, tax rates have only been increasing, from the peak rate of 33.99 per cent in 2013-14 to 34.61 per cent in 2015-16 and further increased to 35.54 per cent in 2016-17. Although the basic rates and slabs remained the same, the rates increased because the surcharge kept on increasing from 10 to 12 to 15 per cent for the super rich.

There is a lot of expectation this year also for a realignment of the tax slabs by increasing the income threshold for the topmost slab of 30 per cent to incomes of over Rs 20 lakh. This could be a move by the government to moderate taxes for a large number of taxpayers as also to create a special group of those earning above Rs 20 lakh.

Experts also expect that it was perhaps time for the government to review the standard deduction scheme which was discontinued by then finance minister P. Chidambaram in 2006. Standard deduction allowed taxpayers deduction of a lump sum amount from taxes irrespective of actual expenses by the tax payer and was an intrinsic part of the Income Tax Act till 2006.

"Standard deduction may come back and the salaried taxpayer may be treated on par with the self-employed. There has been a constant demand for this," says Parizad Sirwalla, partner, tax, KPMG India,

There is also a possibility that the government will look at removing many

of the exemptions available to tax payers now. This is also in accordance with the Direct Taxes Code (DTC) which had called for the removal of most of the tax exemptions and a moderation of taxes. "There are meaningless exemptions which have outlived their utility," says Sirwalla. "The Rs 15,000 medical expenses, the one on children education, should all be removed and brought under standard deduction."

SIMILARLY, another area that badly needs change is that of Leave Travel Allowance (LTA), where rules have not changed for a long time and which is largely irrelevant in today's times. "LTA was allowed to be taken twice in a block of four years. That should change and LTA exemption should be allowed every year on a fiscal year basis and not on a calendar year basis. Not only airfare, hotels and dining can also be allowed for inclusion in the exemption apart from foreign trips under LTA. If there is globalisation, this limitation should not be there more so when more people are now travelling abroad," says Kumar.

Of course, the real scenario would be clear on February 1 when the finance minister announces the budget proposals in Parliament. There is a lot of hope that people's expectations would be fulfilled and that the budget would bring in the prime minister's promise of 'Acche Din'. 

"A roadmap for the gradual reduction of corporate tax from 30 per cent to 25 per cent is possible in the upcoming Union budget."



SHUBHASHIS GANGOPADHYAY

BLUEPRINT FOR THE NEXT GEAR

The upcoming budget must look at the economy holistically

ONE of the most interesting aspects of the demonetisation episode has been the revelation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi that only 2.4 million people have reported a taxable annual income of more than one million rupees. If we assume that there are 250 million households in India and that each household has one earning member, this would mean that less than one per cent of households report taxable incomes of more than one million per year. This has led many people to argue that there is a lot of tax evasion in India for it cannot be that more than 99 per cent of households have taxable income of less than a million every year. Along with the demonetisation, this mention of the 2.4 million figure by the prime minister and, the persistent warnings by various officials and ministers to those evading taxes, have raised expectations that the budget will come up with sufficient incentives to encourage more people to honestly pay taxes. In particular, most people are advocating for lowering of income tax rates with a simultaneous increase in the tax-base. The hope is that these twin measures will attract more of the 'more than one-million-a-year income earners' into the tax net.

First, how valid is the feeling among the salaried that the non-salaried do not pay their share of taxes? In most countries, the logarithm of income follows what is statistically described as a normal distribution (the bell curve). The advantage of the normal distribution is that if we know the average and the variation around the average (or, the variance), we can generate the entire distribution. In India, we do not have income distribution data but we have the consumption distribution from the National Sample Survey (NSS). Luckily, the logarithm of consumption, both in India and in other countries, follows a similar distribution as income. By definition, the average income is the per capita income. If we assume that the variances are the same in the two distributions (income and consumption), then about 7.5 million people should be earning more than one million a year. Roughly, then, for every three earners above a million, only one owns up. It is more likely that two out of these three taxpayers have been hit hard by demonetisation while only one of them is looking forward to income tax changes!

Two budgets ago, the government had announced a reduction in corporate taxes and a concomitant abolition of the various exemptions in corporate taxation.

This year, the government must start delivering on this promise. Investment demand, for some years now, has been low and the upcoming budget will have to do everything possible to correct this trend. The expected changes in corporate tax should help boost investment demand. This will not only bolster growth, it will also generate employment outside of agriculture. Indeed, this will help the rural economy much more than investment in agriculture. There are too many people connected to agriculture and their best bet is to find income earning opportunities outside of agriculture.

Since 1991, the budget speeches have frequently laid out the future policy map of the incumbent government. Given demonetisation, this year, more than in any previous year, people will be looking forward to a blue-print of upcoming policies for the post-demonetisation era in India. Demonetisation was a bold step, regardless of what it has achieved. Similar bold decisions are now required over labour and land.

Land policies are essential for increasing investment in infrastructure, housing, urbanisation and manufacturing. The government needs to take the initiative and start utilising the surplus land that it and its public sector undertakings are holding on to. These lands could not only be used as public spaces but also for raising government revenues to fund essential public investments.

Whenever one talks about labour, one thinks of the ease of hiring and firing. What the budget should consider, instead, is how to transform the informal labour market into a formal one. For this, the budget speech should be bold and make a commitment to get rid of the thresholds that distinguish the small, where labour laws do not apply, from the large units where labour laws do. This is the more important labour market reform than the irrelevant discussion on ease of hiring and firing.

The Indian economy has been slowing down quite independent of the demonetisation event and its aftermath. This is evident from the data on falling private sector investment that started happening much before demonetisation. And, hence, the government needs to focus squarely on generating growth and employment. Simply chasing after black money, while desirable, may not be enough. □

(The author is the research director at the India Development Foundation)

Investment demand, for some years now, has been low. The upcoming budget will have to reverse this trend.



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Yellow Blip At The Cross

GST is to roll out this July—and move Indian economy in a different gear. Not that all log

BY ZIA HAQ

In the end, the government succeeded in breaking the biggest deadlocks in negotiations for a Goods and Services Tax—India's biggest reform since the 1990s. And that, without much noise because for every problem, the finance ministry had readied a backup, middle-of-the-road solution. A July roll-out is now on track. To be sure, there's a lot of work to be wrapped up.

Businesses are struggling to get their tax maths right. A complex, backend infrastructure, part-physical, part-virtual, needs to be tested. But there could be no better start to 2017 for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who can now look to shrug off some of the dire consequences of demonetisation. The status of a GST-compliant economy alone will improve India's ease-of-doing-business rankings by a few points.

With the GST, Asia's third-largest economy will move into a different gear. Lorries piling at interstate checkpoints, a common reason behind highway jams, will vanish. Speedier and seamless movement of goods—a sign of mature economies—itself raises the GDP by a percentage point. It's not just trucks that will move faster. Supply chains fragmented across states will become tax-pliant cohesive systems because making goods in one state and selling them in another will no longer mean paying a welter of taxes at every stage, and often, paying twice for the same stuff.

Here's why the GST is a big deal. Suppose an e-commerce website sells a high-value television set to a consumer in Vizag. Suppose further that it is manufactured in a factory in Uttar Pradesh, a state that charges an extra exit tax on all goods whose value exceeds Rs 5,000. As the telly moves at least five states from UP to down south, the seller pays an exit and entry tax at every border. Such a system discourages firms from having large stocks because ploughing back the unsold goods mean additional expenses. This way, India, politically one country, acts like 29 different markets. The GST will integrate the

country into a uniform market, much like the case with the European Union.

The GST is nothing but a pact between all states to levy uniform rates of taxes and not charge for the same good twice. And dodging taxes will become difficult because there's nowhere to hide. With both ends of the supply chain mapped into a national software, there's little chance a taxpayer can go missing in between.

Equally important, there is actually a disincentive for not complying. A good reason why compliance will improve is that a firm had to earlier pay taxes for the entire value chain rather than just its own portion of value added. So a buyer of bicycle parts pays, for instance, only for the spokes supplied. The buyer of the finished bicycle pays for the whole product. In this way, the GST is a destination-based tax—charged where goods are sold—with a tax credit for the previous custodian of the product.

The GST will replace a complex patch-

work of state- and local-level taxes with a uniform tax structure for all kinds of marketplace transactions. The immediate gains will be felt by consumption-related sectors such as auto, consumer durables and FMCG.

What does the GST mean for consumers? Most economies, as a rule, see a rise in prices immediately after implementing the GST. "It will temporarily dip growth because of increase in taxes on services, which account for 60 per cent of India's GDP. And headline retail inflation by 20-70 basis point," according to analyst Sonal Varma, an economist with financial advisory firm Nomura. A basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point.

A report by the GST committee estimates a standard GST rate of 18 per cent, a low rate of 12 per cent and a high rate of 40 per cent would have no net impact on headline CPI inflation if producers adjust prices after accounting for input tax credits under the GST. But inflation could rise, since firms are unlikely to fully pass on the benefits of tax credits to consumers. That will kick in the policing function of the GST. Services typically will be expensive anyway, such as restaurant meals, salon services and travel. After about a year, the impacts should even out.

Economists have long made a strong case for a national sales tax. The first discussion paper of the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers makes clear why. It gives details of how prior to the introduction of the VAT, there was a burden of multiple taxation in the pre-existing central excise duty and the state sales tax systems. Before any item was produced, inputs that go into its making were first taxed. Then, after the commodity is out of the factory, it gets taxed again—this time it's an output tax. This caused an atrocious system of multiple taxation or "tax on tax", also referred to as a cascading-effect phenomenon. Businesses just hated this archaic taxation system.

Moreover, under the sales tax structure, there was also a system of multipoint sales taxation along the distribution chain. To this, "input tax load, burden of sales tax

LEAPS & SNARL-UPS

THE GAIN

Seamless interstate trade Uniform GST will eliminate a welter of taxes. No waiting at borders means trucks can travel six more hours a day. That's a productivity boost at less cost

Investments Firms will get credit for input taxes across goods and services. Means lower capital goods prices.

Less black A self-monitoring GST system will continually nudge the informal economy towards a more formal one



THE PAIN

Inflation Consumers pay higher prices in the immediate aftermath because of new, higher service taxes

GDP Temporarily, growth could see a dip because consumers may cut down discretionary spending

Teething troubles The GST ecosystem will initially run into a trial and error mode. Firms may not pass benefits of tax credits to consumers immediately. The first year may see interstate disputes.



sroads

jams are to end in a jiffy.

paid on purchase at each level was also added, thus aggravating the cascading effect further”.

Warm tone to talks

Negotiations between the Centre and states were hobbling ahead, until they nearly came unstuck on the crucial twin issue of “dual control” and “cross-empowerment”.

“We remain committed to GST,” said Amit Mitra, West Bengal finance minister, wrapping up the last round of talks. “The GST, in principle, is something we strongly support. But we cannot have a GST that is not sustainable and that will not work in practice.”

In the last meeting of the GST Council—a body represented by the Union and state finance ministers—states and the Centre continued to quibble over who gets administrative control over assesseees, or millions of business firms to be taxed in the new system.

According to its plan, the Centre would have control over businesses, whose annual worth is upwards of Rs 1.5 crore. It also wanted joint centre-state jurisdiction over those below that cutoff. States insisted they must have exclusive control over smaller business or those below that cutoff.

The Centre had been insisting on joint control over a proportion of smaller taxpayers, for it feared the GST might leave it with a reduced taxpayer base and therefore smaller revenues. This crucial aspect falls under the Integrated GST Bill, which is one of the legislations that need to be passed to make the GST a reality. In all, four separate laws need to be passed. Parliament will have to pass the Central GST legislation and states need to pass their versions of the same law, apart from one Integrated GST bill. Another law that must go through allows for monetary compensation to states to make up for their initial revenue losses after the GST rolls out.

A middle path seems to have broken the

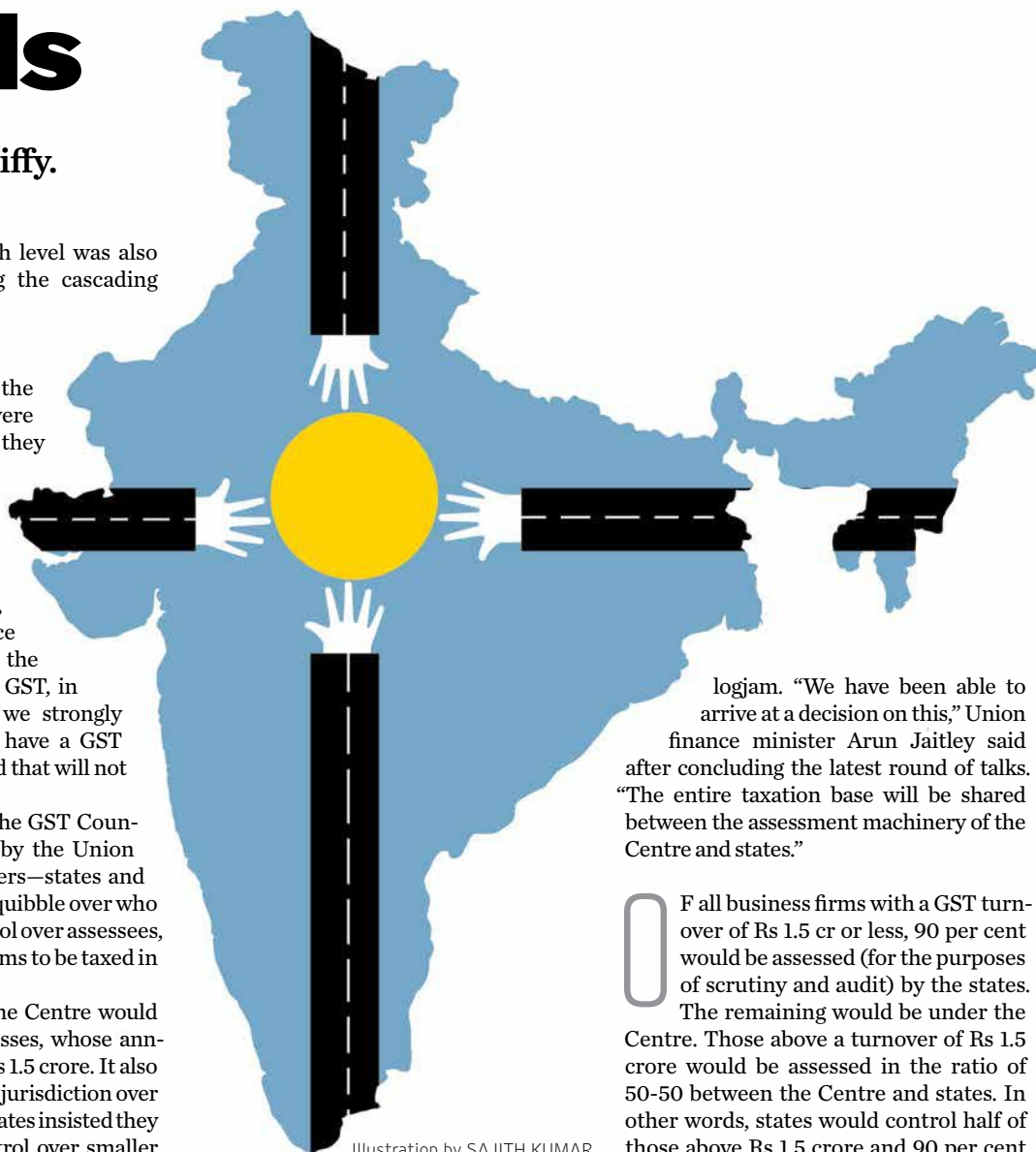


Illustration by SAJITH KUMAR

Post GST, a firm needs to pay tax for just its own portion of value added, instead of what is now for the entire value chain. There is a disincentive, thus, for not complying.

logjam. “We have been able to arrive at a decision on this,” Union finance minister Arun Jaitley said after concluding the latest round of talks. “The entire taxation base will be shared between the assessment machinery of the Centre and states.”

OF all business firms with a GST turnover of Rs 1.5 cr or less, 90 per cent would be assessed (for the purposes of scrutiny and audit) by the states. The remaining would be under the Centre. Those above a turnover of Rs 1.5 crore would be assessed in the ratio of 50-50 between the Centre and states. In other words, states would control half of those above Rs 1.5 crore and 90 per cent of those below the cutoff.

The demand of coastal states, which wanted their tax jurisdiction over sea territory up to 12 nautical miles to continue, was acceded to, paving the way for the deal to be clinched. In a country with acrimonious centre-state rivalries, the GST stands out as a rare moment of political consensus. The finance ministry, sources said, has agreed to give higher compensation if any state can give proof of revenue dip due to demonetisation. By no means perfect, the GST, however, may present enormous teething problems. But as top revenue bureaucrat Hasmukh Adhia says, no country has a flawless GST and it's better to push for “endogenous change” than to wait for the perfect GST. ■

Needed: Both Push And Pull

India needs more seaports, aerodromes and power. To top it all, work on roadways must gain required pace.

BY ZIA HAQ AND ARUSHI BEDI

IN 2015, Gammon Infrastructure looked desperately to exit from some of its roads projects. For, debts piled upon the company, whose name was commonly visible at construction sites in several Indian cities. Today, this has become a sector-wide trend. The problem of bleeding infrastructure firms and banks with bad loans to who they owe large sums is creeping towards a tipping point. All eyes are now riveted on the February 1 budget for support, though the real fixes may lie elsewhere.

Take, for instance, the Foxconn Technology Group. Spurred by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India', the firm that makes iPhone for Apple pledged to build an electronics ecosystem in Maharashtra. That's yet to take off. By its very nature, infrastructure is tied to the considerable risks of long gestation periods, high costs and budget constraints.

Last year, nearly a third of all big infrastructure projects were behind schedule. To be sure, that's reassuringly less than the 45 per cent delayed projects in the previous year, which also means cost overruns have come down by about a percentage point.

But the big cautionary tale is this: much of the push has come from public spending, which isn't sufficient with private firms sitting on precarious balance sheets.

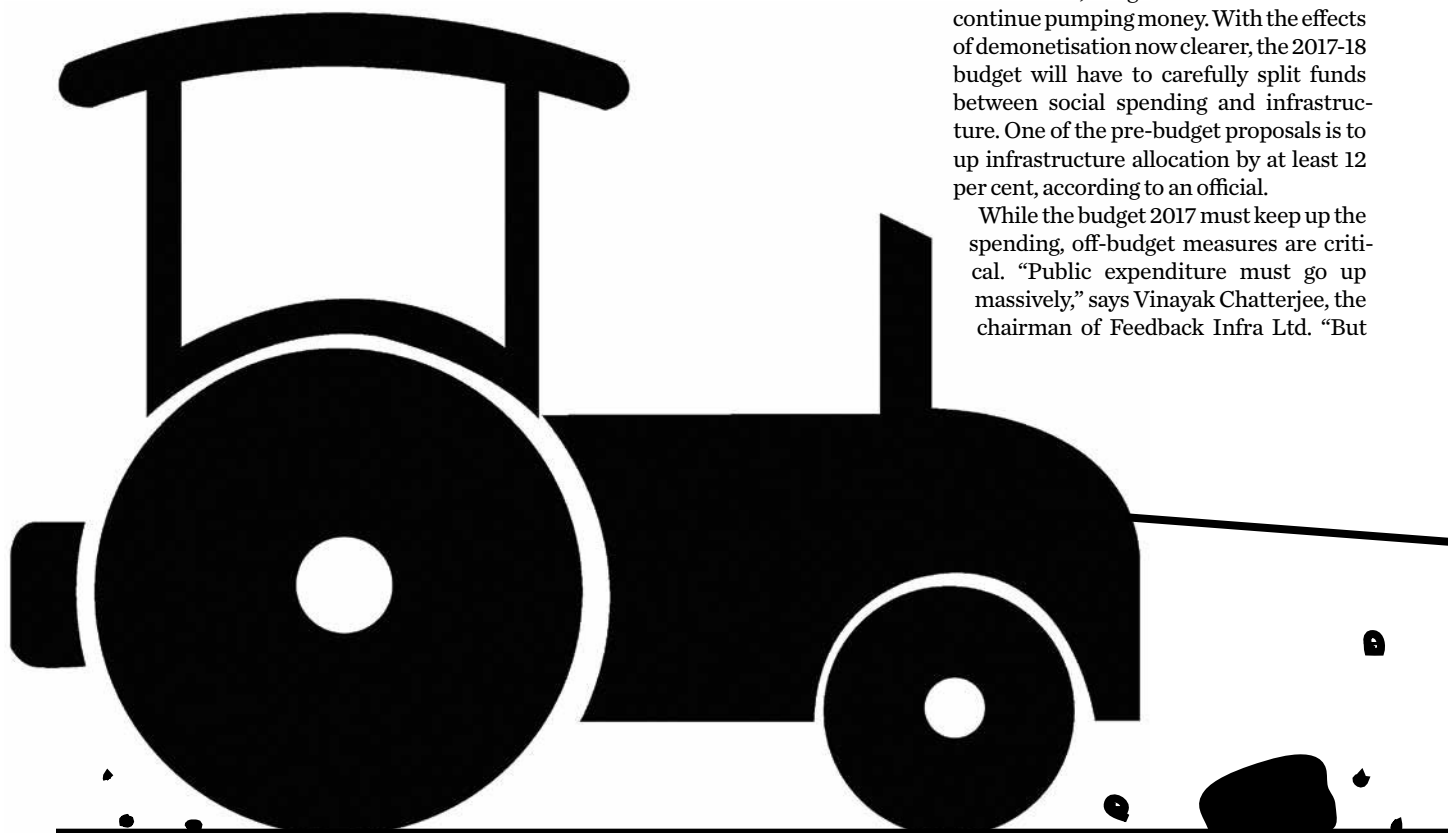
The Modi government needs to create employment for the 1.1 million new Indians who join the workforce each month. That scale of job creation means shifting people from farm to non-farm employment. This requires massive levels of infrastructure building that can support growth. Low-cost airports, paved highways, tunnels, cargo terminals, dry and seaports, warehouses, housing and manufacturing enclaves. Each is a cogwheel that makes the next one move.

When projects meet deadlines, it's not just investors who gain. If a real estate project saves a 21-month delay, it also saves 20 per cent of the costs, which can then be passed on to consumers, going by CREDAI, India's largest developer lobby.

According to a Credit Suisse report, debt levels at 10 top conglomerates have risen by 15 per cent, while profits continue to fall. Net debt in these companies has exceeded capital investment. Investment bankers label such firms over-leveraged—they are borrowing more than they are investing.

Cumulative problems of the past five years have increased mounting bad loans. To offset this, the government will have to continue pumping money. With the effects of demonetisation now clearer, the 2017-18 budget will have to carefully split funds between social spending and infrastructure. One of the pre-budget proposals is to up infrastructure allocation by at least 12 per cent, according to an official.

While the budget 2017 must keep up the spending, off-budget measures are critical. "Public expenditure must go up massively," says Vinayak Chatterjee, the chairman of Feedback Infra Ltd. "But



generally there is not much fiscal space for hugely hiking expenditure within the budgetary exercise."

One of the things the government must do is to quickly release 75 per cent of the cash against arbitration awards on major projects so that firms have working capital. That's like releasing upfront cash. Roads minister Nitin Gadkari recently said the government must find cheaper capital to sustain investments. Forget cheaper loans, Chatterjee says, finding liquidity itself is proving tough.

Budget proposals include the setting up of an overhauled National Infrastructure and Investment Fund besides asset recycling, which denotes the government's divestment of operational utilities, like power plants, to private investors.

The ability to move goods quickly and cheaply around the country is necessary for growth. The world's fastest-growing country will need to, at the minimum, double power generation, add a dozen more low-cost airports, upgrade all of its major ports with larger container terminals, develop inland water navigation and speed up highway construction. This can raise GDP by 2 percentage points and add six million jobs. For the railways to regain falling freight market share, a Dedicated Freight Corridor must be commissioned in two years.

CRISIL recently pegged India's infrastructure sector's funding needs at Rs 43 lakh crore of investments over five years ending March 31, 2020. The government can at best match 6 per cent of this. Urban population will increase to 40 per cent by 2030. The government needs to crank up its plans further in the real-estate sector.

Take for instance, the PM's housing-for-all initiative, which aims to create 20 million housing units for the poor by 2022 or 30 lakh houses every year. Only 14,511 houses could be constructed after a year of the scheme. Work is progressing on merely 144,321 units. That's less than 15 per cent.

A major drag is the inability of the government to keep track of the progress, says

Praveen Jain, president of the National Real Estate Development Council. "The government needs to keep track of developments within the scheme. We have recommended setting up a committee in this regard but action is yet to be taken," he says.

Land acquisition remains a hurdle as much as funding and its current shortage in major peri-urban areas does not allow development of affordable housing. Of the Rs 6,000 crore sanctioned for the scheme, Rs 3,570 crore has been released so far.

PRIVATE equity investments within the sector have fallen from Rs 23,253 crore in 2015 to Rs 21,019 crore last year. "Investor faith in the real estate sector is down at the moment because of demonetisation as well as a slump in the market," says Praveen.

The last budget committed Rs 2.21 lakh crore in creating new and upgrading old infrastructure. Of this, Rs 97,000 crore was for 10,000 km of roads planned during the financial year. The length of highways built went up from 18 km a day to about 21 km a day. "This is a sign of growth, but it presents a challenge also," said finance minister Arun Jaitley. "Therefore, we have speeded up the process of road construction."

The target of 40 km a day of roads, though, has not been met. "Lack of funds has compromised the procurement of resources," says S.P. Singh of IFTR. "And 40 per cent of our cargo is transported only on 2 per cent of the national highways." Singh advocates a push to integrated transport systems that include railways and water transport.

Affordable housing is largely concentrated in peripheral areas where connectivity and infrastructure challenges abound. "The Housing For All project can only succeed with a rapid transport system as well as the opening up of periphery lands where such housing societies are being constructed," says Ashutosh Limaye, head of research at JLL, a global real-estate services firm.

Analysts like Limaye expect a fresh

rebates in income tax for home buyers in the new budget. "The current rebate of Rs 1,50,000 on interest and Rs 50,000 on capital payable is expected to go up." He also suggests bringing back section 80 IB of the I-T Act which would help incentivise developers to construct more affordable housing by offering tax savings on capital gains.

Weather-exposed infrastructure such as roads tend to depreciate fast. Maintenance is critical. Lack of funds and capital investments have forced developers to buy sub-standard resources. This, according to K.K. Kapila, chairman of the consultancy Intercontinental Consultants and Technocrats Pvt Ltd, has led to delay in projects, which are also substandard and compromises road safety.

Last year, Jaitley had met sovereign foreign wealth fund managers for investments in roads, energy and ports. Separately, steps announced by his ministry included revival of unserved and underserved airports in partnership with state governments, incentives for gas production from deep-water, ultra deep-water and high-pressure-high-temperature areas and a comprehensive plan looking at a 20-year horizon to augment investment in nuclear power generation.

It's an uphill battle from now on. Economic data available after demonetisation point to a slowdown, including a 16 per cent dip in auto sales and a 41 per cent slump in home sales. Factory output showed a rise of 5 per cent in November but that's only when compared to the same month last year. Sequentially, when compared to output growth in October, industrial output shows a clear fall. Only sufficiently high government spending can crank up the economy in 2017. 

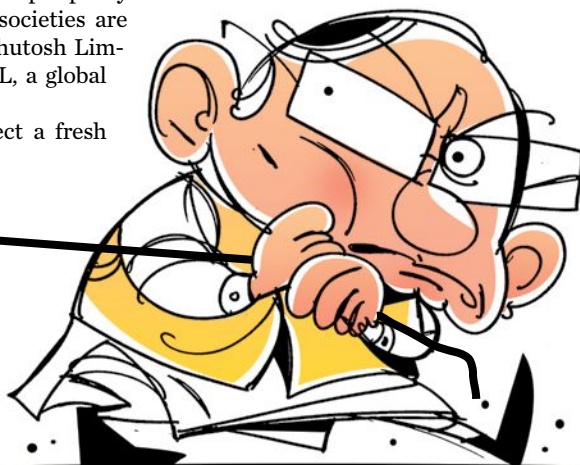


Illustration by SAJITH KUMAR

Squaring the Nation's Books in Times of Less Cash

What will Modi's penchant for the unexpected bring to cut through the haze of the demonetised 'slowdown'?

BY LOLA NAYAR

AT the end of the 50-day wind-up of the demonetisation exercise, Prime Minister Narendra Modi doled out many "sops", particularly for farmers and small enterprises, to mitigate some of the cash crunch pains.

It was also an exercise to improve voter sentiment in five states going to polls in February, before the constraints of the election code kicked in.

Up ahead, the NDA government faces a major challenge when presenting its fourth budget on February 1, which will indicate the policy direction for its remaining tenure in the run-up to the 2019 general elections. The challenge is not just to boost investor sentiment, but also to revive demand growth that has been severely hit, making many national and global bodies such as the IMF to scale down India's growth projection to below 7 per cent.

"My government is strongly committed to continue the reform of the Indian economy," Modi told potential investors at the biannual Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit last week. Among the over 25,000 MoUs signed during the three-day gala, it was mostly small and medium enterprises that committed to invest.

It is not just in Gujarat that investment sentiment has seen a dip. Data compiled by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt Ltd (CMIE) suggests that

demonetisation has hit the pace of new investment proposals during the quarter ended December 2016 with only 404 new investment proposals. In over a decade, this is the lowest number of new projects announced in a quarter. Post-demonetisation, CMIE forecast that growth trajectory could "shift down to about 6 per cent per annum for the next five years", which contradicts many other projections that the negative impact may wear off in one or two quarters after the money supply improves.

"It normally takes six to eight months for liquidity to get normalised and even longer for confidence to be restored," explains Mahesh Vyas, managing director of CMIE. "In six months, consumers would have found equilibrium at a lower level, so coming back to old levels of consumption will take time, leading to delay in investments, which, in turn, will hurt employment growth as well as demand growth. Clearly, any hope of growth returning to higher levels in the near future runs on thin arguments. We are being more cautious and realistic, and not pessimistic."

Signs of slowdown preceded demonetisation. The CSO had revised the advance growth estimate from 7.6 to 7.1 per cent this year without taking its impact into account.

Moreover, with the government having failed to scotch rumours of the new Rs 2,000 bank notes being demonetised, there is lingering fear among consumers. Adding to the woes are the weekly limits to withdrawals by individuals still at Rs 24,000. So the liquidity needed for higher levels of consumption demand are just not there yet. Investors, on their part, would obviously wait for demand to be restored, supply chains to be repaired, the spectre of raids to go away and banks to return to normalcy before they display any enthusiasm for creating new capacities.

While the government seems gung-ho about the switch to the digital mode of transaction, everyday experience of consumers tells a different story, with most traders unwilling to accept anything but cash. From 98 per cent cash transactions to a less-cash economy is going to take almost a behavioural and attitudinal change, feels Rajat Kathuria, chief executive of think-tank ICRIER (Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations). "Enforcement of digital transactions will have to become part of the system. It will take longer to gain traction and become entrenched," he says. "Meanwhile, investment is not happening as there is uncertainty in the economic environment, which is never good. Demonetisation, for example, was



never anticipated. One of its impacts is that it has made people a little more risk-averse.”

Kathuria is nonetheless optimistic that investment will return as India is still the most promising of markets. Despite the lowering of growth expectations, India, along with China, is expected to record relatively higher growth among the developing countries. While it is still early to predict the impact of demonetisation, how soon the cash would come back into the system and by when digital transactions would have gained adequate acceptance, Kathuria is concerned about the disruption in the labour market, “as it will take a lot more time to be resolved than getting the monetary system back in place”.

D.K. Srivastava, chief policy advisor at Ernst and Young India, points out that the economy had started showing signs of slowdown due to investment contraction even prior to demonetisation. In turn, the inventories were getting accumulated. As a result, the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) had revised the advance estimate of GDP growth from 7.6 per cent last year to 7.1 per cent this year, without taking into account the impact of demonetisation. “Impact of demonetisation led to consumption contraction, superimposed on investment contraction,” says Srivastava, who was formerly

director of Madras School of Economics. “The IMF has revised India’s growth outlook to 6.6 per cent, which is a fall of one per cent compared to its earlier forecast and around 1.4 to 1.5 per cent below the potential of 8 per cent growth.”

Vineet Rai, founder of the Aavishkaar-Intellectap Group and a member of the Business and Sustainable Development Commission launched in Davos in January 2016, is more upbeat. “Most people I have met, both in senior leadership positions at the commission and outside here at Davos, believe that the India story is intact and, if anything, the move to demonetise signals the current government’s intent to rise above political considerations and act,”

says Rai. “The impact of demonetisation over the next two quarters would be a drain. Whether it was necessary, given that we are already on the path to delivering GST, is a debatable position and most people believe we could have waited. Having said that, the general belief is that India would be back to growth and high growth over the next three quarters.” Describing demonetisation as “shock therapy”, Rai says it would depress spending as “it removes black money, which was equivalent to the purchasing power capacity that got wiped out”.

THE upcoming budget is seen as the first major opportunity for the Modi government to lift the economy back to the potential for 8 per cent growth.

For that, both fiscal and monetary stimuli are necessary, Srivastava points out, with fiscal preceding the monetary as even a fall in interest rates is not expected to revive demand until inventories are brought down. There are several means by which fiscal stimulus can be provided. “I think the economy can be boosted by fiscal means to an extent of 2.5 per cent of the GDP and all of that should be spent on infrastructure. Once this gets going over two or three months, monetary stimulus can then be thought of by reducing the interest rate,” says Srivastava.

Elaborating on the room for fiscal stimulus, Srivastava says that despite the much lower expectations now, there will be some fiscal windfall gain from the extinguishing of the demonetised currency and some additional one-time tax revenue gain because of the income-tax amnesty schemes, while the surge in bank deposits should result in some additional tax revenue. The government can also relax the FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget



GETTY IMAGES

Management) norm, which is targeted to be 3 per cent next year, and let it grow an additional 0.5 per cent of the GDP. Thirdly, the state governments can also be brought on board and allowed relaxation of 0.5 per cent of the GDP. There is also the possibility of letting public sector enterprises and departmental enterprises such as the railways and posts to take up their investment plans this year, particularly as the prices of investment goods are currently low.

“We cannot depend on any global support to Indian growth. It will have to come from within,” says Kathuria. “If the preconditions are in place, such as getting the GST off the ground (it will take at least two years to completely fall into place), improving and easing the cost of doing business, which we have started doing to woo more investments, digitisation of transactions and transparency in funding of political parties, and making our tax regime more tax-payer friendly, then we would well be on our way to 8 per cent or even higher growth rate.”

AFTER five to six quarters of negative to zero growth, India's exports have started looking up, with the pickup in demand from the US and Europe. The challenge before the government is to attract FDI and other investments as the incentives being offered have had little uplifting impact. Most worrying is that both domestic savings and investment rates have fallen over the past few years, which are fundamental weaknesses in the system.

At the macro level, experts point out, both the industry and investors want policy certainty even as they clamour for

incentives. The industry has also been demanding greater public sector investment in infrastructure, while urging the government to address market failures. There is also the government promise to reduce the corporate income-tax rate in four years to a nominal 25 per cent and simultaneously reduce some of the deductions and exemptions so that it is not a revenue-losing proposition.

“If the government focuses on investment and tries to leave a little more disposable income in the hands of consumers, then it will give a big boost to growth in 2017,” says Ranen Banerjee, leader (public finance and economics) at PricewaterhouseCoopers, who believes one of the biggest impediments to the Make-In-India programme “are the constant issues around taxation. International companies and investors want certainty on taxes to be paid, so coming out with regular clarifications unnerves investors.”

The fundamentals to boost growth are on our side—the demography is just right and there is lot of scope for building infrastructure and creating jobs. Moreover, there is greater clarity today about the rural-urban link, which is becoming stronger and stronger. “Today rural econ-

TRUST INC. Modi greets Mukesh Ambani at Vibrant Gujarat, 2017

omy is not just agriculture, which constitutes just 45 per cent of it,” states Rajesh Shukla, managing director of think-tank People Research on India's Consumer Economy. “With rural areas becoming dynamic for growth, it has become a focus of interest to everyone, including industries, which are trying to push sales of consumer durables and two-wheelers.”

The biggest challenge in rural areas is the poor implementation and administration of socio-economic development schemes by both the states and the Centre. This is forcing the government to pay greater attention to rural demands, whether for votes or for demand growth.

The 2017 budget could well be the last budget for the Modi government to announce major policy decisions with the larger national interest in mind. The next budget will be closer to the 2019 polls, when there will be certain obvious constraints in taking any bold policy actions and even lesser scope to roll out any grand scheme. The expected boost in government revenues due to the impending GST rollout in July and the expansion of the tax base in the wake of demonetisation with more people moving into the tax net, at least in the service sector, should provide more resources to enhance public investments. It could also make room for giving some tax breaks to those at the lower end of the income bracket. Given Modi's penchant for devising new ways to engage with the public, one can surely look forward to some move to recover the lost sentiments. ■

This budget could well be the last big opportunity for Modi to announce major policy decisions in the national interest for roll out before the 2019 election.


**MUKESH
BUTANI**

A PSALM AFTER A STORM

A budget for the new 'normal' in India's economic landscape

THE Union budget exercise takes centre stage on the political scene for the first quarter of each calendar. This year it is generating more interest, both in India and overseas, in the backdrop of the impact of demonetisation on the economy, the Centre-state logjam over the GST regime, impending elections in five states, surge in international crude oil prices and falling commodity demand. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will be balancing multifarious expectations with the current budgetary exercise. With the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) coming into effect for state elections, the Government's move to advance the budget proposals by one month has already generated an intense debate.

The upcoming Union budget is the Modi Government's fourth, and the industry cries for economic and tax reforms are louder than ever. In terms of priority sectors which are likely to feature high on the FM's agenda, 'agriculture', 'infrastructure', 'railways' and 'manufacturing' emerge as the front runners; the netizen vote on the Finance Ministry's Twitter handle resonates with this list. Insofar as the budgetary allocations are concerned, it is likely that the FM may loosen the fiscal deficit target for 2017-18 to 3.5 per cent of GDP (as against three per cent of GDP), to accommodate enhanced spending on priority sectors.

From a tax reform standpoint, this budget could prove to be a game changer on multiple fronts. In terms of direct tax reforms, the budget may lower the tax rate for corporates, a move which the India Inc. has patiently awaited since the FM's announcement in 2015 for a phased rate reduction coupled with withdrawal of tax exemptions. In 2016, the FM fulfilled a part of this promise by setting out the sunset dates for a host of tax incentives. The other part on tax rate reduction seems to be in the offing now, particularly to boost industry sentiments post demonetisation. The common man is expecting relief to soothe the demonetisation impact; whether this is addressed through a rejig of exemption threshold, slab rates, tax rebates on interest and loans, etc. or uses the long handle of fostering job creation by extending a helping hand to corporates, remains to be seen. India Inc. may get a breather from the tax accounting standards, which result in advance recognition of the income and a greater administrative burden for the taxpayers. The Industry wish-list for deferral of General Anti

Avoidance Rules (GAAR) may not cut ice, given its last two-year deferral in the 2015 budget; though the Place of Effective Management (POEM)-centred residency rule may be shelved with the anti-avoidance-based Controlled Foreign Corporation (CFC) provision. It is likely that the FM will act on the implementation of select recommendations of the Easwar Committee and of the Tax Administration Reform Commission, to address 'ease of doing business'. Notably, the government has implemented a host of measures on the tax dispute resolution front since assuming power and the trend is likely to continue this time. This has further become critical from the standpoint of discretion which the revenue authorities may seek to assume in the context of GAAR and demonetisation-related provisions, thus, necessitating the government to implement credible counter measures in anticipation.

In its recent report on global economies, the World Bank has pared India's growth forecast for the financial year 2016-17 to seven per cent from 7.6 per cent estimated earlier; similarly, the IMF in its World Economic Outlook update, trimmed India's growth rate in the current fiscal to 6.6 per cent. Given these developments ahead of the budget announcements, the FM will certainly seek to cement India's position as the 'preferred investment destination' by articulating India's intent for convergence towards emerging global consensus on tax policies. On the international tax front, the FM is likely to reiterate India's commitment to the OECD's BEPS programme, Multilateral Instrument (MLI) being the key piece, which India is likely to sign in 2017-18. It is expected that following the release of the MLI text by the OECD in December last year, the FM could lay down broad contours of India's approach.

The GST-related announcements are likely to hog the limelight in the FM's budget speech. He may not push through changes in the indirect rate structure, as India is on the verge of implementing GST. He may seek to modify the existing service tax rate, to align it with the proposed rate for services under the GST.

It does seem that the Union Budget 2017 may set the tone for the new 'normal' in India's economic landscape—be it corporate tax rates, India's stand on MLI, implementation of the GST or the change of the current accounting year to a calendar year. □

(Mukesh Butani is managing partner, BMR Legal. With inputs from Vishwendra Singh, associate director.)

In terms of direct tax reforms, the budget may lower the tax rate for corporates, a move patiently awaited by the government.

THIS CANVAS
IS LARGER
THAN ONE'S
IMAGINATION.
THE
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MUZIRIS
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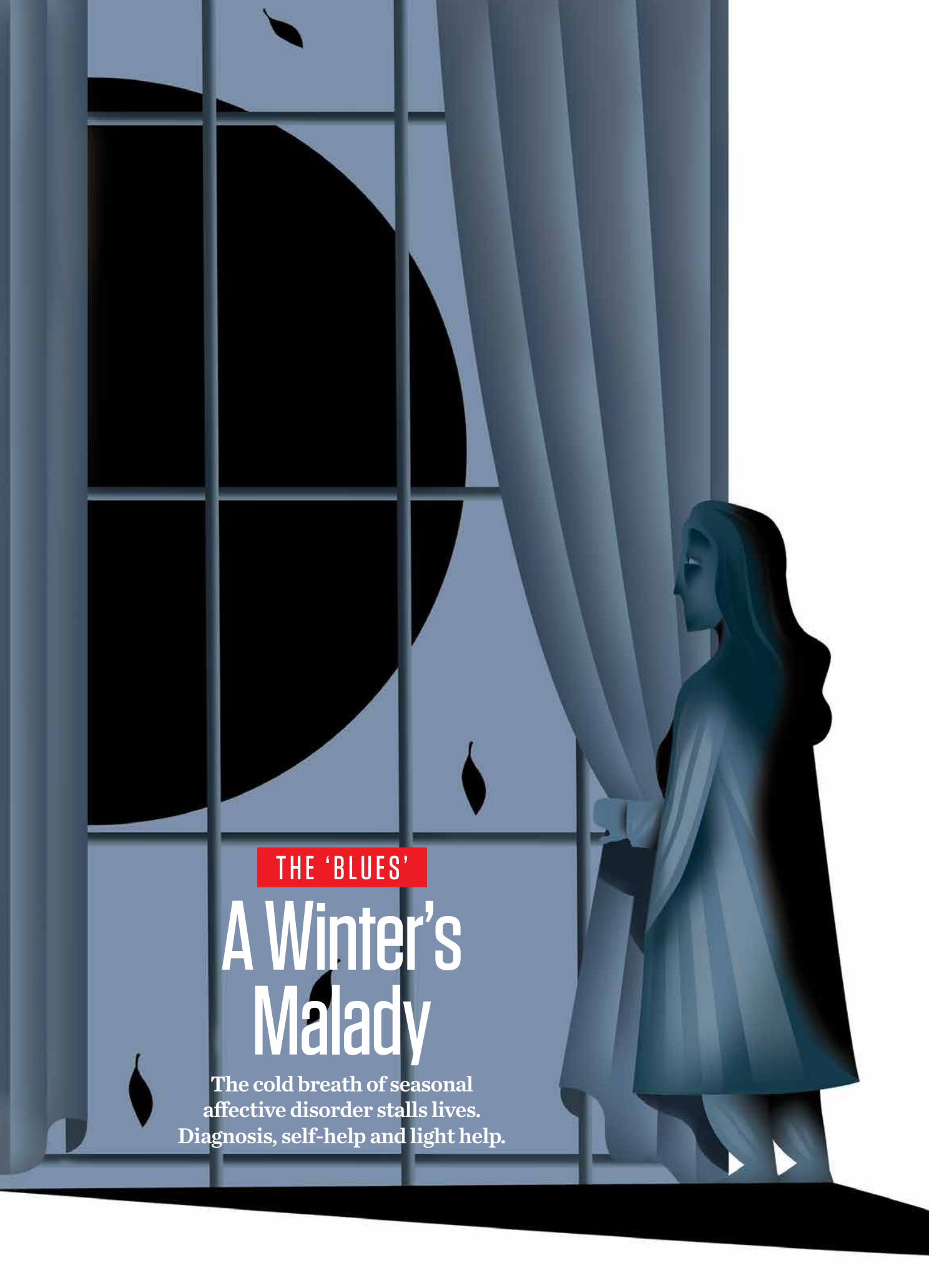
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An illustration of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark coat, standing by a large window at night. She is looking out the window, which is framed by vertical bars. Outside the window, a large, dark, circular shape is visible against a dark blue sky. Several small, dark, teardrop-shaped leaves are falling from the top of the frame. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

THE 'BLUES'

A Winter's Malady

The cold breath of seasonal
affective disorder stalls lives.
Diagnosis, self-help and light help.

BY DOLA MITRA

“I am generally a happy-go-lucky type of person,” Dipti Mukherjee insists. But, according to the 30-year-old Calcutta homemaker, “for about three months a year I suddenly turn into a different person—depressed and withdrawn, apparently for no reason at all. I sulk and even shun gatherings. When there are parties in our house, I often lock myself in my room and refuse to come out and meet the guests.” After her arranged marriage to a Bengal-based businessman two years ago, her husband and in-laws concluded that she had a multiple personality disorder which was kept hidden from them. “I was so insulted by their allegations that I was on the verge of asking for a divorce, when my husband suggested I consult a psychiatrist. That’s when I was diagnosed as suffering from ‘seasonal affective disorder’ or SAD,” a psychological disorder which shows symptoms during certain months of the year, remaining dormant at other times.

“SAD is an extremely serious but underdiagnosed condition with symptoms which are often dismissed as ‘mood swings’ or even ‘personality disorders,’” says psychiatrist Debashish Ray. “But it is a psychological disease which is triggered by external and environmental causes, most generally the onset of the cold, winter months or other intemperate or inclement weather conditions,” he specifies. Dr Ray further explains that according to statistics, more women are afflicted with the condition (the reason is yet unknown), which is characterised by a host of symptoms, the most common being lethargy, increased sleep and appetite and a lack of interest towards daily activities like domestic chores, physical exercise or even mental work. “The patient may experience a deep feeling of rejection and alienation from society,” explains Dr Ray. In extreme cases, this deep sense of loneliness can, according to experts, be accompanied by suicidal thoughts.

Take Gloria D’souza. The 50-year-old claims to have lived her entire life battling thoughts of ‘self-harm’ until finally last year, a colleague referred her to a psychiatrist. “Come winter, when the rest of my family would be delighted at the thought of the approaching Christmas festive season, I would be dreading meeting relatives,” says the receptionist of a private firm. “Each year, from November to January, I buried myself in reading the Bible for en-

lightening thoughts and that is what kept me going. But the depression was never completely gone until summer, when miraculously I would start to feel better again.”

The first time that a diagnosis of this condition—earlier commonly termed the ‘winter blues’—received a formal name was in 1984, when Dr Norman Rosenthal and his colleagues at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland, US, used the term (Seasonal Affective Disorder) in a research paper.

Since then, SAD has not only become widely accepted as a psychological disease that merits the whole gamut of medical attention, from diagnosis to treatment,

FAQ about SAD

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

A depression which afflicts suffers in particular times of the year, usually winter

What are the symptoms?

Severe lethargy; increased need for sleep; increased craving for food; sudden drop in energy levels; constant feelings of irritability; sense of rejection, alienation, loneliness; heaviness of the lower legs and arms

What are the causes?

Mostly unknown, though it has been linked to lack of adequate sunlight; lower levels of melanin production and lower levels of serotonin; family history and heredity are factors

Treatment:

Prevention includes healthy diet, yoga, meditation, exercise; treatment is specifically psychiatric and involves various types of phototherapy

When should you be worried?

If you regularly experience significant shifts in moods, behaviour and personality during particular periods of the year it could be cause for concern

psychologists, doctors and other medical professionals also warn against ignoring symptoms, as it’s potentially dangerous both in the long and short terms. “Other than thoughts of self-harm, the most important reason to seek treatment, the disease, also known as ‘winter depression’, can make a person dysfunctional,” says Dr Ray.

D’souza recalls that she became so averse to work that she quit several jobs during winter months, when her symptoms peaked. “It was crazy. I didn’t feel like getting out of bed. While in college, my parents thought I was just lazy and forced me to get up. But when I started

working I was on my own. Dragging myself out of the blankets was a big chore. I saved money throughout the year so that I could go into hibernation in the winter,” she jokes, saying that she changed her job at least a dozen times in thirty years.

According to Sanjay Garg, senior consultant psychiatrist, Fortis Hospitals, Calcutta, “Though the exact causes of SAD remain unknown, the lack of sunlight during winter has a role to play.” He observes that changes in melatonin absorption by the body influences sleep patterns, triggering mood changes. “Serotonin levels too decrease due to less sunlight and may produce these symptoms,” he adds. “Changes in the circadian rhythm (the 24-hour physiological cycle) may also be a contributory factor.” A prior family history of the disorder is also associated with its onset.

What of treatment? Dr Garg emphasises the need for taking preventive measures by those who have observed significant changes in behavioural patterns in themselves or others. “The golden principle always is prevention is better than cure. If you have noticed this happening regularly, be prepared. Keep your house bright and airy. Open windows and blinds. Take regular walks in the sun. Try and have your lunch in the open—or at least sitting by the window of your home or office. Exercise regularly. Do yoga. Meditate. Observe a balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables. If these things do not help or if your condition affects your day-to-day functioning, then you may need to see a professional. Phototherapy with special light boxes, psychotherapy or sometimes medication does provide relief,” he suggests.

Dr Ray too believes that the importance of treatment cannot be overemphasised. He points out that patients tend to ignore symptoms and not seek treatment because there is a kind of age-old, tacitly-agreed social stigma attached to anything loosely considered a ‘mental illness’. But those who have been treated for SAD—Dr Ray puts the figure of patients with winter depression to as high as 30 per cent of his daily visitors during November, December and January—have discovered that they could live a much fuller life during the cold season with just a simple treatment of light—natural as well as artificial.

Dipti Mukherjee and Gloria D’souza have both benefited from light treatment and claim that not only are their winters more satisfactory since then, but that their lives in general also seem to have been lit up from within. 



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Picking Up An Ankle With A

Smash-hit *Dangal* plays fast and loose with facts about the ‘villain’ of the uplifting piece

BY KAISER MOHAMMAD ALI

It wasn't superheroes or mythologies, romances or crime thrillers, comedies or musicals but a biopic on a sports personality that's given Bollywood its highest revenue earner in over 100 years. And it took all 'Mr Perfectionist' Aamir Khan had to offer as producer and actor for the film's fiendishly successfully run across the

country in its fourth week. *Dangal*, a biopic of legendary wrestling coach Mahavir Singh Phogat, had on last count already crossed Rs 350 crores and looks set to cross the Rs 400-crore mark—a new box-office benchmark.

Former wrestler and Dronacharya Award-winning coach Mahavir Phogat gets pride of place not only in the film but outside reel life too. He will always be remembered for shaping India's first-ever woman

wrestling gold medal winner at the Commonwealth Games—his daughter Geeta. She won gold in the 55 kg category in the Delhi Games in 2010, etching her name in the record books. Aamir Khan's Mahavir brilliantly brings out the coach's obsessive, single-minded goal: to guide his daughters—he has four—to gold at the Games. Indeed, critics and fans have applauded the film in rare unison. However, to add a bit of drama—an essential ingredient of a sports

Photograph: PRABHJOT SINGH GILL



Mat Finish

—women's wrestling coach P.R. Sondhi

biopic—Aamir rubbed the official coach of the then Indian women's team at the Delhi Commonwealth Games, Piara Ram Sondhi, the wrong way.

In the film, Mahavir doesn't agree with the national coach, named P.R. Kadam, over Geeta's training at the national camp, held at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, before the Games. Mahavir also disagrees with national coach's strategy for her at her matches in the competition.

All this—particularly the depiction of Sondhi's character as the arch villain in this fairy-tale—has caused a controversy. Sondhi, 69, says the pain this has caused him would always remain, stressing that certain elements of *Dangal's* storyline “didn't exist at all” in real life. Quite strangely, Sondhi himself hasn't seen the film yet, and has based his reaction on what others have told him about his character, as portrayed in it. “The character of the coach in the film is

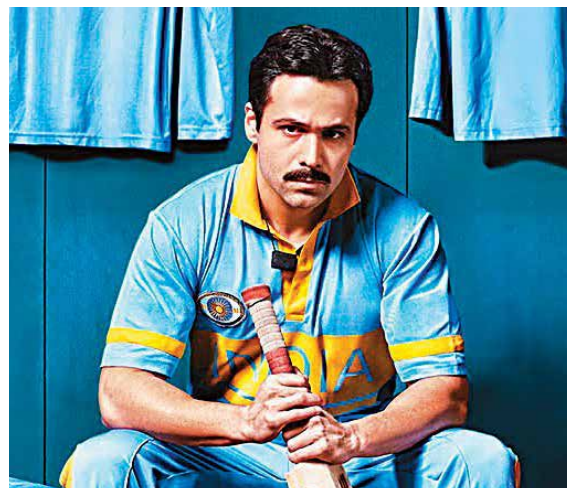
Piara Ram Sondhi with pupils at his wrestling academy in Phagwara, Punjab

shown in a negative way. *Is baat ka mujhe puri umar dukh rahega* (this will pain me for the rest of my life). *Aur baki coaches ko bhi dukh hai* (other coaches are also disappointed). People who know me and have seen the film in England, Canada or America are also disappointed about how my character is portrayed,” Sondhi tells *Outlook*. “Aamir Khan told me that since it was a biopic, ‘we've put some mirch-masala’ in the film,” Sondhi says about his conversation with the actor-producer. “It's okay that he has made the film on the father of Geeta. I also encourage women empowerment, which is the theme of the film and which is apparently well portrayed.”

GEETA agrees that certain incidents shown in the film didn't take place. She even defends Sondhi, agreeing that his character has been negatively magnified. “The national coach's role has been a bit exaggerated; he was not so bad either. Incidents shown, like how my father was locked in a room (during her final match at the Games), did not happen in reality,” says Geeta. But isn't it true that her father Mahavir couldn't watch her final bout at the Games? Who could have stopped him? “The security people posted at the NIS had stopped him,” she says. The movie shows that Mahavir could not watch Geeta's final match against Emily Bensted of Australia at the Games after a person, apparently acting on a plan devised by the angry national head coach, locks him in a room so that he couldn't pass instructions to Geeta from the stands. Mahavir is shown shouting instructions for Geeta in her earlier bouts at the Games.

“The government of India conducted the Commonwealth Games. They had deputed enough security that monitored the events and the athletes. Also, the print and electronic media were there. Would this (locking Mahavir in a room) have been possible? And they are now saying it is only a biopic. Aamir told me he had to give importance to the person who had achieved such a great feat,” says Sondhi.

Mahavir was so keen on monitoring the intense training of his daughters Geeta (55kg category) and Babita (51kg) that he, along with the rest of his family, relocated from Balali village in Haryana to Patiala in Punjab for about six months, the duration of the camp. Although he wasn't allowed inside the NIS, he managed to



impart extra coaching before the morning sessions at the camp started. Sondhi was the camp in-charge. In the film, his character is shown complaining to NIS authorities about Mahavir's additional coaching to Geeta and Babita.

Sondhi says that he didn't even know that Mahavir was living close to NIS, Patiala during the camp. "The training at the camp was imparted in the mornings and in the evenings. If Mahavir trained them, he might have done that before or after these two sessions, but I am not aware of that. I later learnt that someone who teaches in the NIS diploma section stopped him from training his daughters. Also, there's a government rule that anyone from outside can't enter the NIS and train athletes," says Sondhi. "It is a fact that my father was not allowed to meet us during our training camp. The security guards (at the NIS, Patiala) had stopped him from going inside the campus where our training and bouts used to take place. Their (administrators') viewpoint was also correct, when they said that if every athlete's parents started coming inside there was no need for coaches," says Geeta. "My father was not satisfied with the training at the preparatory camp and he wanted his daughters to train harder. This part has been depicted correctly in the film."

In the film, Mahavir is shown to disagree with Kadam, the Sondhi character, over the strategy that Geeta should adopt against her opponents. Sondhi, however, says Mahavir never interfered with his coaching.

After he came to know about how his character was cast in a negative light in the film, Sondhi had a talk with Aamir over the phone. "Two things I told Aamir. He has shown in the film that when Mahavir in-

terfered in training the chief India team coach did not take it in the right spirit. This is wrong; Mahavir never interfered. And the girls who trained under me were never indisciplined. They used to do whatever I told them to do, I told this to Aamir," the veteran coach emphasises.

SONDHI, who now runs a wrestling academy in Phagwara in Punjab, says that old age prevents him from doing anything else except lodging his protest orally. "I am at that stage of life where I have to remain calm. And the negative portrayal not only affects me, it affects all coaches (who were then attached with the women's team). I'm serving wrestling as a coach and he (Aamir) has done it by making this film," he says even-handedly.

Earlier, when the film was being shot, Sondhi met Aamir through Kripa Shankar, a former wrestler and his disciple, who trained the female actors who played the roles of the wrestlers in *Dangal*. But the retired coach claims that despite knowing what the film was about and his proximity with its subject, he didn't ask Aamir if his character was also part of the biopic. "Kripa Shankar had told Aamir that I was coach of the women wrestlers at that time. But it never occurred to me that I should

Left, Aamir Khan as Mahavir faces off with national coach Kadam in *Dangal*; top, Emraan Hashmi in *Azhar*

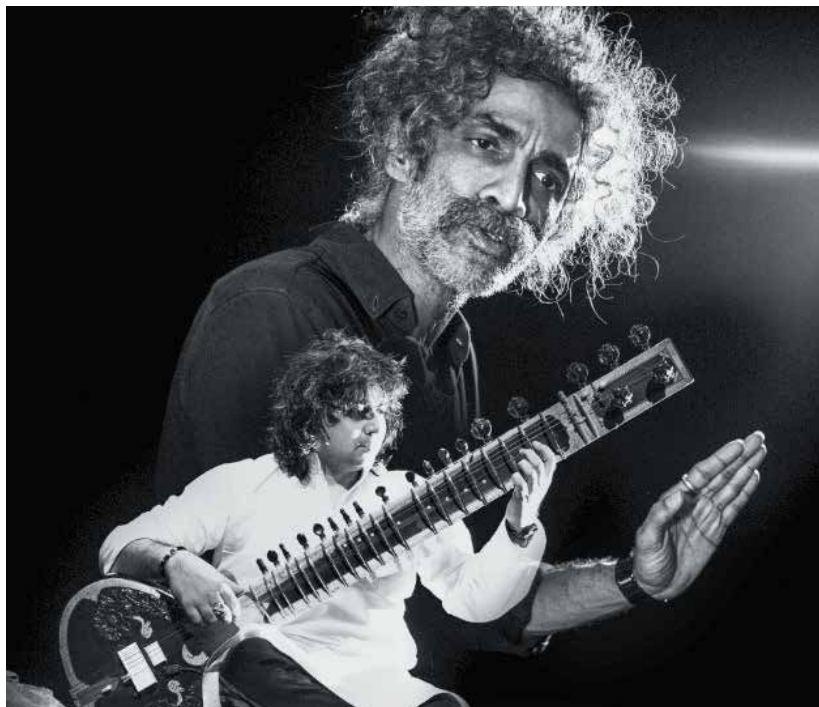
ask him about my character," he says now.

Geeta Phogat says she appreciated the film very much. "I liked the film a lot. All the characters—whether it is Aamir Khan ji or the character of my mother or the younger Geeta—are good. Aamir Khan ji has played my father's role very well. He was fit to play the role. I am very satisfied with the characters depicted and the overall film," she says. Mahavir's unrelenting training regimen for her daughters continues, says Geeta. "He was stricter than what is shown in the film. He still is very strict, particularly with my younger sisters," she says.

Dangal was released in December, close on the heels of former India cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni's *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*, and *Azhar*, the life story of former India captain Mohammed Azharuddin. A common thread that runs through all three biopics is that certain plot twists were added to make them more entertaining—often they are in the form of conflicts that magnify the drama, or accentuate the obstacles facing the protagonist. *Azhar* ends when he dramatically returns the money and mobile phone to the person who had given it to him to underperform, which had led to his life ban by the BCCI. In another shot towards the end, his first and second wife enters the courtroom together, thus signalling a happy ending to the film. Real life, wreathed in bewildering shades of grey, rarely unfolds according to the smooth requirements of a well-written script. Even fairy tales have to be touched up for greater effect. ■

Dangal was released close on the heels of MS Dhoni: The Untold Story and Azhar. In all, plot twists were added to real-life events to make them more entertaining.

On An Electric Cool Memory Ride



THE show generates curiosity for bringing two maverick artistes together. That apart, if being absent and yet somehow simultaneously present, and playfully meddling with the consciousness of the audience was a parameter of how enjoyable a performance is, then *Patni* is right up there.

Makrand Deshpande's latest 'prayog' (experiment) is a solo act accompanied/interjected with live music by Niladri Kumar. It is written, directed, performed by Deshpande, who plays Parag Godbole, who wants us to meet his wife, Neelam, except that she "happens to be dead".

The multi-lingual play starts with Deshpande miming a climb of the stairs to his apartment, then coming down and climbing up the pipes, and a lovely, frothy introduction to his bank manager's job, followed by a conversation with his neighbour, whose son has settled in the US and yes, a very husband-like chat with Neelam. He introduces her, her eccentricities and her habits: "*Kuch adatein aisi hoti hai, rooh se dhari hoti hai*," he says about his habits and her soul....

While all this goes on, Niladri Kumar, who prefers the prefix of 'bandit' over 'pandit', watches till his moment comes. And then in perfect sync with Deshpande, plays his Zitar (electric

sitar), capturing different moods depending on the point where the monologue has paused.

Deshpande says though the structure is in place, every show and every rehearsal is different. The one hour seven minute-long show can be extended by 10 minutes or so because it is about the "state of mind". "Because I was presenting a state of mind to the audience, I needed someone to heighten that emotion. Niladri Kumar has that tremendous strength," he says.

So the audience and the neighbour, who we never see, is taken on a memory ride—of love, loss and longing, under the pretext that Neelam's soul has to leave the house and he wants to bid her a proper farewell. Deshpande's skill lies in making the whole thing so natural that one not just believes in her presence but thoroughly enjoys the banter between a loving husband and wife, whose replies we never hear. Even better is his skill in perhaps knowing when to punctuate it with music, recordings and pauses.

And Niladri Kumar is the perfect partner. "I don't know what I am going to play," he chuckles in the interval between two shows. "You liked it? It works? Great. I don't plan any ragas etc because every show is different," he says.

With generous sprinkling of humour (even some digs on demonetisation) and Niladri's lovely music, the experiment is over before one gets time to pick on plateauing/slowing moments, if any. The show, as Deshpande knows, has triggered curiosity of theatre lovers as well as music enthusiasts, and the attendance of stalwarts of both disciplines—from Zakir Hussain to Manoj Bajpayee—was an indication of that.

However, amidst all the good acting, effective stage design and enjoyable music, one must not forget Neelam. Conspicuous by her absence, she comes across as an utterly lovable human being, created entirely through Deshpande's writing. Schizophrenic or hallucinating seem harsh words, though perfectly valid, for the idea and its execution. Mirage is more like it, retaining a certain poetry, however melancholy it may be.

When asked about his continued involvement with the subject of human relationships—*Maa in Transit*, *Meri Maa ke Hath*, *Shakespearecha Mhatara* and now *Patni*, Deshpande says, "The more you live, the more sensitive you become towards the inevitable truth. You start seeing mortality more delicately. That is perhaps what I am trying to do—to find the sweetness in the final truth and to find the strength to face it." □

PRACHI PINGLAY-PLUMBER

Conspicuous by her absence, Neelam comes across as utterly lovable, a melancholic mirage created by Deshpande.

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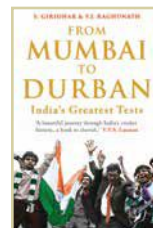
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From Silly Point To Long On

A patchwork run through India's Test history has great anecdotal charm, but is repetitive

BY SURESH MENON

WEST Indies, the first team to play in India after Independence, had to wait till the fourth Test in Chennai in January 1949 to record their first win. India came within six runs of squaring the series in Mumbai, but they finished with 355 for eight, thanks partly to rival skipper John Goddard's time-wasting tactics (at one stage, the wicket-keeper ran to the boundary to fetch the ball). And partly to the decision by the Indian umpires to call off the game with two minutes (at least one over) remaining. In fact, umpire Joshi not only got the time wrong, he even miscounted, allowing only five balls in what turned out to be the last over.

This landmark Test match is the starting point of the book; it was an early indicator that India would go for targets in the fourth innings with vigour. So much so, say the authors, that "it became a common joke to say that India ought to play their second innings first".

It wasn't so long ago that cricket meant only radio commentary and newspaper reports. Television and the internet have brought Test matches into our drawing rooms and the palm of our hands, and this story of Indian cricket told through 28 Test matches is as much a tribute to the players as to the mediums that carry the matches to us.

Fans of an earlier generation saw the game through the eyes of men like Pearson Surita, Anant Setalvad, Dicky Rutnagar, V.M. Chakrapani, their voices heralded by All India Radio's signature tune.

This, the authors, colleagues at the Azim Premji University, tell us, was

composed by the Czech refugee Walter Kaufman in Raga Shivaranjani. It is the kind of detail that you look forward to reading in the description of the Tests. But perhaps that number does not lend itself to the gradual unfolding of a Test match, complete with breaks for tea. Giridhar and Raghunath, who bring an obvious passion into everything they write (their earlier, *Mid-Wicket Tales*, was both quirky and fun) are clearly lovers of Test cricket. But the format of



This story of Indian cricket, told through 28 landmark Tests, like the tied Test of 1986, is as much a tribute to players as to the mediums that carried them to us.

the essays is more limited overs, short and sweet. Perhaps it is a technique to attract the T20-loving millennials to Test match cricket.

This is an Indian quilt of a book, a patchwork history lovingly stitched together with threads from cricket writers, commentators, players, Wisden and Cricinfo. The flip side of such self-conscious objectivity, however, is the repetitive nature of the essays, where statistics sometimes dominate. The authors do speak to some of the

actors in the many dramas described but insights are often of the "bowling-in-the-right-areas" variety. Perhaps, they needed to have brought themselves into these essays more; after all, the stats are available online. When they appear in the stories, the anecdotes charm and the book becomes as much about "India watching (as) about India being watched", as Gideon Haigh observes in the foreword.

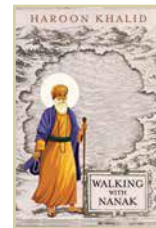
Yet, in the context of an effort like this, which involves much collecting and collating, these are minor cribs. The audience is clearly the youngster who is IPL-obsessed and whose history doesn't go beyond Mahendra Singh Dhoni (I know of at least one cricketer who, when introduced to Sunil Gavaskar, said, "Oh yes, you are the commentator"). The matches are well chosen, 13 of them at home, and there can be no complaints about the industrious manner in which they are put together.

The story is divided into four parts, 1947 to 1969 (Hope Takes Root), 1970 to 1980 (A Heady Feeling), 1981 to 2000 (Everyone's Game) and 2001 to 2010 (The Rise to the Top).

All of India's cricketing greats find their place here, from Lala Amarnath to Anil Kumble, from Vinoo Mankad to Virender Sehwag. The suggestions to keep Test cricket alive are both heartfelt and practical. "Our memories of watching Test matches from the 1950s are of the gaiety of a festival that pervaded Indian grounds," say the authors. "Yet for some years now, expectations of a victory every time India take the field have assumed jingoistic proportions."

Their book, where fighting draws are shown to be as exciting as India's victories, is an antidote to such monorail thinking. 

(Suresh Menon is Editor, Wisden India Almanack and Contributing Editor, The Hindu)



Tranquebar Press | 292 pages | Price not stated

The State's Hand In The Graffiti

A book follows the footsteps of Guru Nanak in Pakistan and boldly speaks some bitter truths

BY RAHUL SINGH

WALKING with *Nanak* is one of the most unusual books that I have ever read. And its author, Haroon Khalid, is clearly a courageous man. I say unusual, because it deals largely with the life of the first Sikh Guru, Nanak, in what is now Pakistan, while describing the gurdwaras and shrines—many of them in a sadly dilapidated condition with Islamic graffiti all over them—that were built in his honour. Courageous, because Haroon Khalid, a young Pakistani who resides in Islamabad, is not afraid to deplore his country's establishment for its neglect of Nanak's legacy.

Khalid is also bold in his frequent and pointed criticism of the potentially disastrous direction that Islam is taking in Pakistan: "Various studies have been carried out on the biased nature of the Pakistani education system and the religious puritanism that it promotes through its curriculum. The entire school curriculum has been designed in such a way as to instil in the minds of young students the separateness of Hindus from Muslims, and hence justify the creation of Pakistan.... Nationalism is premised on hatred towards Hindus.... All traces of the Hindu past are omitted from the curriculum. Students from such schools emerge more radicalised and susceptible to Islamic militancy than from your neighbourhood madrasas." Brave and honest words, indeed!

Walking With Nanak is a charming blend of painstaking historical research, some myth and a little fiction—a blend which works beautifully well. The author traces Nanak's footsteps (he travelled far and wide for 24 years) in present-day Pakistan. Nanak was accompanied by his loyal follower, the Muslim Bhai Mardana. They both lived through Babur's invasion of

India. Nanak was followed by nine 'Gurus', the last one, Guru Govind Singh, being the best known. In fact, most people know of only Nanak and Govind. Aurangzeb died around the time of Guru Govind Singh, Aurangzeb's death marking the start of the decline of the Mughal empire. Hence, the formation of Sikhism coincided with the rise and fall of the Mughals.

Till the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, relations between the Sikhs and the Mughals were fairly amiable. However, Arjan decided to support Khusro, the eldest son of Jahangir, who had rebelled against his father. In 1660,

Arjan) decided to militarise the Sikh community", writes the author. "It was argued that it was unSikh-like to bear oppression and be unafraid to die in the process, if need be. The foundations of the contemporary face of Sikhism had been laid."

That is well and concisely put. But it is on Nanak and his teachings that the author mainly focusses on: "Nanak himself had been born into a Hindu household and was then educated in a Muslim milieu; however, he was neither a practising Muslim nor a Hindu. His entire life was a struggle to dilute the differences between these two religious communities. Everywhere he travelled, he offended both Hindus and Muslims by stating that there was no Hindu or Muslim.... If one was a Muslim, then one should be a good Muslim, and if one is a Hindu, then one should be a good Hindu.... Nanak believed in the universality of all religious traditions. He believed that any religion followed in its essence will lead one towards the Truth, a journey that Nanak traversed throughout his life".

Alas, Nanak's bid to bridge the divide between Muslims and Hindus failed. The author also makes a pertinent observation when he criticises modern-day Sikhism, with its numerous rituals and its institutionalisation: "Nanak vehemently spoke against organised religion, and yet today, the religion that is attributed to him is one of the most prominent organised religions in the world. He abhorred the concept of associating miracles with religious personalities, but today his biography is nothing but a story of his miracles."

Or take Nanak's view on worship: "His message was that work, no matter what it is, should be treated as a sacred activity and hence an act of worship." In other words, work was worship and worship was not work. In my view, and I daresay also in the view of the author, Nanak was way ahead of his time. The man that he resembled most actually came some four centuries later—Mahatma Gandhi. 

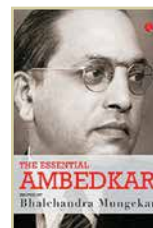


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This is a charming blend of painstaking research, some myth and a little fiction. Khalid also justly criticises modern Sikhism with its many rituals.

Jahangir had Guru Arjan killed, making him the first martyr of Sikhism. It was a fateful turning point in the community. A long conflict between the Mughal authorities and the Sikhs followed (Guru Tegh Bahadur and all the sons of Guru Govind Singh were killed by Mughal rulers).

Circumstances changed Sikhism radically, with the peace-loving Guru Nanak at one pole, and the militant warrior-like Guru Govind Singh at the other. The dichotomy remains to this day. "Guru Hargobind (who succeeded the martyred Guru



Rupa | 456 pages | Rs 395

Join The March For The Riddles

The vast trove of Ambedkar's writings is culled for a greater understanding of this intellectual titan

BY RAJA SEKHAR VUNDRU

In 1991, an oncologist, an economist and a police officer compiled excerpts of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's thoughts on various subjects as *The Essential Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*. This was one of the compilations on writings and speeches of Ambedkar that flooded his birth centenary year in 1991. Another 25 years later, economist-parliamentarian Bhalchandra Mungekar attempts to crystallise in 437 pages the vast repository of Ambedkar's thoughts. These are selective pickings from Maharashtra government's seventeen volumes of compilations of Ambedkar's speeches and writings and Marathi biographies of Ambedkar.

After the mahaparinirvan of Ambedkar in 1956 there was a deadlock on the permission to bring out his unpublished writings, which were in the custody of the Court Receiver of the Maharashtra government. Dalit Panther J.V. Pawar reminisces in his memoirs, *Ambedkarite Movement After Ambedkar* (2016), that in the late 1970s Ambedkar's wife Savita Ambedkar and son Yashwant Ambedkar agreed to publish his works sealed in trunks. The Maharashtra government's initiative to celebrate Ambedkar's works came only after consistent demands for publishing by the Ambedkarite movement and Dalit Panthers. In 1976, Maharashtra set up an advisory committee with Vasant Moon as officer on special duty to compile and publish all writings and speeches of Ambedkar. The first compilation arrived in 1979; by 2006, 21 volumes were published.

The unpublished writings of Ambedkar comprised incisive dissection of Hinduism and Indian social structure and were eventually published in three volumes in 1987 and 1989. *Riddles in Hinduism*, at the time of its publication, faced opposition from upper caste groups in Mumbai, who held a rally against it. Ambedkarites gave

a befitting show of strength with a massive million-strong march in support of its publication. On February 8, 1987, *Ridalscha Morcha*, or the March for Riddles in Mumbai by Dalits resulted in its publication in October 1987.

Ambedkar was one of the most prolific writers of his times. Apart from publishing his academic research on economics and finance in the 1920s, he consistently published his speeches. His most famous speech (undelivered), the classic *Annihilation of Caste*, was published by him in 1936. For a person in public and political life, leading one of the greatest struggles in the world—the emancipation of untouchables oppressed



GETTY IMAGES

Ambedkar's unpublished writings comprised incisive dissection of Hinduism and Indian society. *Riddles in Hinduism* faced opposition from upper caste groups opposed to its publication.

for thousands of years—Ambedkar made time for writing. The 1940s were his most productive years. He wrote and published works of social anthropology—*Who were Shudras* (1947) and *Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* (1948); political works—*Pakistan or Partition* (1940), *Mr Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables* (1943) and *What Congress and Gandhi*

Have Done to the Untouchables (1945).

Ambedkar invariably published his political speeches and memoranda as booklets. *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah* (1943), *Federation versus Freedom* (1939), *Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve it* (1945), and *States and Minorities* (memorandum, 1947). During the successful piloting of the Constitution and working as India's first Law minister, there was lull in his writings (1947-1951) as he was busy trying to break India's oppressive social structure from inside the government.

Ambedkar's next phase of writings till his death was on religion and his shift to Buddhism. These were all published posthumously, including his last book, *Buddha and his Dhamma* (1957).

The greatest compilation of Ambedkar's thoughts were by Vasant Moon, who sifted through proceedings from the Round Table conferences (1930-33), his debates and speeches in the Bombay legislature (1927-39), as member of the Viceroy's executive council (1942-46), in the Constituent Assembly (1947-50), in the Hindu Code Bill (1947-51) and as Union Law minister and member of opposition in Parliament (1947-1956). Manifestos and proceedings of Ambedkar's political parties, Independent Labour Party and Scheduled Caste Federation, were also compiled.

Mungekar's compilation under review is a meticulous work that attempts to pick the core of Ambedkar's ideas on caste, Hindu social system, women, human rights, political safeguards, conversion, economic development, parliamentary democracy, Constitution and the Buddha. *The Problem of Poverty in India*, picked from Ambedkar's 1952 election manifesto, is a rare gem. This carefully worked out compilation is a welcome addition to understand Ambedkar, whose mind and ideas are the core to the understanding of India, its society and polity. It is an essential read. 

(The author is an IAS officer)

NEWS & UPDATES

SPOTLIGHT

THIS
&
THAT

Honda NAVi – What The Fun

Funtastic to the core - Fun to see, FUN to Ride & FUN to Create!!

Launched at the Auto Expo 2016, NAVi emerged as the latest mantra for the Indian youth. In the Two Wheeler category where the scope of differentiation is limited, NAVi's innovative design makes it stand out and break away from the 'syndrome-of-sameness'.

Disrupting the monotony by bringing FUN to 100-110cc category, the NAVi is 100% developed by Honda R&D India from concept development to commercial production. NAVi celebrates the rebel in you – It doesn't believe in rules. You really can't typecast it. Its' neither a scooter nor a motorcycle. NAVi is a completely new segment. Taking forward Honda's fun DNA, NAVi promises a world of unlimited possibilities. NAVi's design opens up a significant opportunity of customisation to suit one's preferences and personality.

NAVi's language of FUN has won fans not only in India but also offshore. Receiving an overwhelming response, NAVi crossed 50,000 sales landmark in just 6 months of its launch. The Fun Patakha is changing the way youngsters are riding. Youth are not just buying the NAVi, they are customizing it & making it an extension of their own personality with over various customization options, young India is painting their NAVi red, green, orange, black and even the blingy Chrome.

So what are you waiting for, Go ride the FUN Patakha- NAVi and get ready to have fun like never before. Get ready to hear the loving Oohhs !! and Aahhs!! on the roads.



Param Dairy products provide quality, purity and good health



Mr Rajeev Kumar

Chairman & Managing Director, Param Dairy Limited

Param Dairy Limited provides customer satisfaction through excellent quality of their products. They foster the health of their customers with purity of their dairy products. Param Dairy Ltd was established in 2000 and since then it has been growing steadily in the market.

It has got a wide range of products from skimmed milk, desi ghee, paneer, curd, dairy whitener etc. Mr. Rajeev Kumar, CMD of Param Dairy Ltd, says we do not compromise on the purity and quality of our products and focus on the health of our consumers. There is no scope for any adulteration. Their products are not only sold in our country but also exported worldwide to different countries. Their plant which is situated in Khurja, U.P. is fully automatic and gets around 10 lakh litres of milk every day which is further sub-processed in the plant into Poly Pack Milk, Desi Ghee, Milk Powder, Paneer and various other dairy products. His core team consists of experienced Marketing, PR and R&D professionals who are doing a good job for the company. During the hiring process the employees education, experience, confidence along with personality and skill is considered.

Mr. Rajeev is not only a successful businessman but also engages in social service.

REVA University announces sponsored seats for kin of Indian Army

Honours Shekhar Gupta, Ignace Tirkey with Lifetime Achievement Awards



Major General VPS Bhakuni V S M receiving the Letter of Association from Dr. P. Shyama Raju, Chancellor REVA University

On the occasion of their Founder's Day, Bangalore based REVA University announced a new initiative, allocating sponsored seats to the kin of Indian Armed Forces personnel. Karnataka and Kerala Sub Area and the REVA University have approved the modalities for admissions based on the above. The initiative aims to acknowledge the noble endeavours and services rendered by the Indian Army, and is a way of tangibly giving back to the respected institution. The approved modalities detail the offering – three fully sponsored seats will be allocated annually to kin of the Indian Army who apply.

This could be in any discipline and for the length of the chosen program.

This year the Guests of Honour were Mr. Shekhar Gupta, Founder & Editor-in-Chief of The Print; Padma Bhushan awardee and Mr. Ignace Tirkey, former captain of the Indian Hockey team and Padma Shree awardee with the "REVA University Lifetime Achievement Award 2017" for their exemplary and stellar contributions to their respective fields.

The recipient of this prestigious award in 2016 was Shri. Kiran Kumar, Chairman, ISRO, in recognition of his initiatives that touched and changed not only the scientist community but also millions of common men and women.

Carnatic singer T.M. Krishna talks about his music video *Poromboke* (a pejorative Tamil word, also meaning 'common land resources'), on Chennai's environment issues, that has gone viral on social media

'First Carnatic song to trend on YouTube'



R.A. CHANDROO

How did the smash-hit *Chennai Poromboke Paadal* happen?

It's a coming together of two internal and mutual conversations. Environmental activist Nityanand Jayaraman, the brain behind the idea to a large extent, had taken me on an early morning trip to the north of Chennai and I saw the fly ash ponds and it was shocking. The other discourse that I have been having internally is the whole idea of de-classing the arts.

"Unshackling it from man-made ghettos...."

Absolutely. I realised that one way to approach it is—why not sing about multiple themes? In Carnatic music, about 99 per cent of the time, we sing about Rama and Krishna. It's also dialect that classifies people. Suddenly, it struck me that I could even sing on Rama, but in a dialect that is not an upper caste one.

Can Thiagaraja kirthanams co-exist with *poromboke*, as you put it recently?

It sounds like a blasphemous statement, but it's in fact as equitable as you can think of, right? When Nityanand came up with this *Poromboke* song and sent it to me I said, you know what, we can make a Carnatic song. This

is not just a Carnatic thing, it's a big step for the so-called upper-class classical because even Hindustani musicians will not render a bandish in...shall we say Dharavi lingo. But why can't it happen?

You're saying it's not a one-off thing?

I don't think so. When we started tuning it, it just came easily, there was no struggle. Aesthetically, it blended without any problem. It opens a huge door of possibilities for everybody, not just me.

A new kind 'isai' (music)?

In a way, I also think that it's important that art forms are grounded in the contexts that they live in and the challenge the contexts that they live in. If art is not going to disturb you and challenge the status quo, it is not art.

Going by the song, was Ennore Creek a personal issue for you?

Honestly, I've had very little understanding of that part of Chennai. Thanks to that one trip, I saw the whole area and the devastation. And, the word *poromboke* is something even I've used as abuse. In English, 'commons' sounds so fancy, something that's valuable, but 'poromboke' is not. So, it was also about retrieving that word.

And, of it being, in that sense, each one's responsibility?

I think the song challenges so many notions in one go. Some by design, some by default. But I think it's fascinating that we were able to create a cultural push that includes environment and art and our own judgment of spaces, their value and ownership...so many things.

Have the 2015 floods changed things?

I think yes, the floods have shaken up the people here, probably even all over the country. But also, the fact that our memory is so short is shocking.

Was the public response to the petition overwhelming?

Looks like it, I don't know the numbers. I can stick my neck out and say this is the first Carnatic song that's ever trended on YouTube. That is something quite phenomenal and means the environmental issue was important for people.

10. Any reactions from the purists?

Actually, among all experiments and questions and arguments I've raised, this one has received the least amount of criticism. That's quite amazing. 

AJAY SUKUMARAN



'I have been thinking about de-classing the arts. Why not sing about multiple themes, in a dialect that is not upper caste?'

Read the full text of the interview
www.outlookindia.com



NEWS & REVIEWS



For his notable achievements and contribution to the engineering profession, Mr. Atul Sobti, CMD, BHEL, was honoured as one of the country's eminent engineering personalities by The Institution of Engineers (India). He was felicitated with a plaque and citation at the 31st Indian Engineering Congress, held at Kolkata.

NBCC Signs MoU with Indian Navy

In presence of Dr. Anoop K Mittal, CMD, NBCC(India) Ltd. and Rear Admiral Kishan K Pandey, Indian Navy, a Tripartite MoU has been signed between NBCC (India) Ltd., Indian Navy and NBCC Services Ltd. (NSL) - a Wholly Owned Subsidiary of NBCC (India) Ltd., on 13.1.2017, for construction of Sahara Widows Hostel at Vasant Kunj, New Delhi for Indian Navy under CSR initiative of NBCC. The MOU was signed by Shri Sanjay Nirmal, Commodore Indian Navy, Shri R Wanchoo, CGM(CSR), NBCC(India) Ltd. and Ms. A Sabeena, Chief Executive



will be shared by NBCC (India) Ltd. and Indian Navy equally. This would be a basement plus stilt plus four storeyed building meant for the Rehabilitation of war widows of Indian Navy and will have 36 nos. Dwelling Units of Studio Apartment Type. The project is a first of its kind in North India for the welfare of Widows of Indian Navy and is scheduled to be completed by December, 2017.

Officer, NBCC Services Ltd. on behalf of their respective Companies. The cost of the project, to be implemented by NSL, is approx. Rs. 13.50 crores and



SAIL Chairman visits Chasnala Mines

Chairman SAIL Mr. PK Singh was on a visit to the Chasnala Mines under SAIL's Collieries Division recently. Mr. Singh visited the Chasnala Deep Mines and its washeries division. During the visit, he interacted with the employees and encouraged them for better utilization of resources. He also visited the Tasra project site of the SAIL Colliery division. Mr. Singh was accompanied by SAIL's Director (Technical) Mr. Raman, Director (Raw Materials) Mr. K Maity and other senior officials of the Collieries Division.



REC Extends Rs 14.2 Crore CSR Support to IIM Trichy

REC Limited, a Navratna CPSE, has extended a financial assistance of Rs. 14.2 crore under its CSR initiatives to Indian Institute of Management, Tiruchirappalli for installation of 2 MW solar panels (SPV) at various locations of IIM Trichy campus in Tamil Nadu. The main objective of the project is to reduce grid energy consumption for achieving a cleaner community and to protect the environment by reducing carbon dioxide emission.

The Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was executed between REC and IIM Trichy on 16th Jan, 2017 in New Delhi. Shri C.P. Bhatia, General Manager (CSR), REC and Dr. Prafulla Agnihotri, Director, IIM Trichy signed the MoA in the presence of Dr. P.V. Ramesh, CMD, REC and other senior officials of REC and IIM Trichy.

SANJIV SINGH, DIRECTOR (REFINERIES), INDIANOIL, FLAGS-OFF 'SAKSHAM-2017' Urges IOCIans to use innovative practices to reduce energy footprints

Mr. Sanjiv Singh (second from left), Director (Refineries), IndianOil, releasing a poster to mark 'Sanrakshan Kshamata Mahotsav' (SAKSHAM-2017) at Refineries HQs.

Seen (R-L) are: Mr. D Roy, ED (Finance); Mr. Kaushik Bora, ED (Process/Project); Mr. Rajesh Ahuja, ED (Maint. & Inspection) and Mr. Brij Behari, GM (Technical) of Indian Oil.

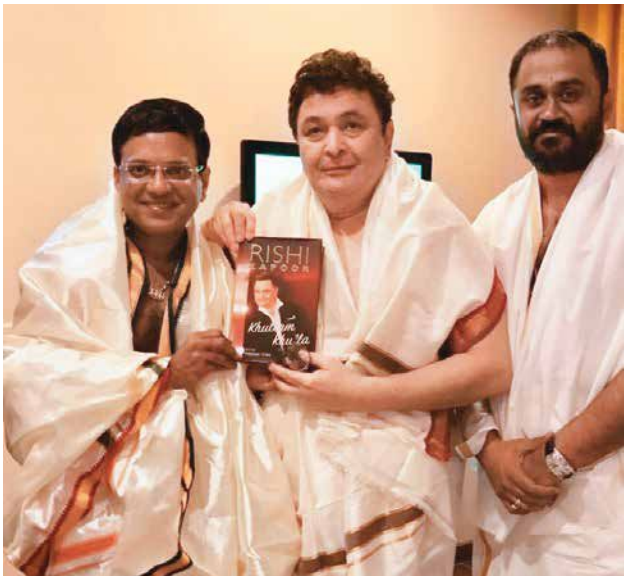


“I got married so many times in my life—onscreen! “I don’t want a whi my life. And ready.” – AMANDA SEYFRIED on her upcoming marriage



On The Trail Of The Gown

A wannabe beauty queen is an idol too. For, to represent India at Miss Universe, Bangalore’s Roshmitha Harimurthy had hurdles to leap over. At her alma mater, Mount Carmel, Rosh aims a selfie, as students and teachers creep in closer.



Marking A Copy To Tirupathi

It’s all old hat to the omniscient Lord Tirupathi, but He would certainly appreciate Rishi Kapoor’s present of the first copy of *Khullam Khulla: Uncensored*. Stardom, a brush with Dawood, a mercenary fling with a film award...the autobiography might reveal a new man to friends Subba Rao and Jairam.



Time Stops By For Her

How can anyone still have the confidence to stun in clothes the whole world has consigned to a dowdy bag labelled The ’80s? But Rekha, ageless, edgy, be-turbaned doesn’t have time for fickle fashion judgments. At a recent calendar launch in Mumbai, did anyone have time for the monthly beauties?

THIS TOO HAPPENED

Sahara Ray sure loves her skinny-dipping. Daughter of legendary surfer Tony Ray, and rumoured ex of Justin Bieber posted videos and photos, showing off her toned body, although the favourite seems to be the one of her in front of

GETTY IMAGES

te dress!...I've never been excited by anything more in to Thomas Sadoski.



PTI

Put On Your Colours

Folk and fire dances, camel safaris and rides, fireworks and fun, earthy, rural games (tug of war, wrestling, camel milking, earthen pot race) enlivened the streets of Bikaner. But for these tourists at the Camel Festival, the draw was the perfectly waxed, miraculously coiled beard and the silver staff of this artist.



Well-Aimed Maya

One day, this shot might serve to make archery a popular sport, but Shama Sikander is just enacting her role in the erotic web-series, *Maaya*. A copper-toned tale of desire and bloodshed, Maya's beau, Veer Aryan, had better be a greater marksman!

Bringing It To You

Is Bollywood finally ceding its oomph to television? TV's Karishma Sharma (*Pavitra Rishhta*) breaks the monopoly of Katrina and Alia, working hard with lensman Amit Khanna to make a success of a minimalist attitude.



AMIT KHANNA

er, the 23-year-old took to the waters again, six months after she was seen skinny-dipping with then boyfriend Bieber. The model the waterfall where she has covered herself with sunflower emojis. May she dip with ever-increasing frequency!

Once Upon A Boom Town

NO politically aware person who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s can forget the Vietnam war. A lot of it happened in the southern part of the country where the Viet Cong, backed by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), battled the Americans and the South Vietnamese regime.

The long war is now distant memory yet the tourist economy infrastructure of the country is dotted with reminders in the form of museums such as the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and its counterpart in Hanoi, and tourist 'destinations' like the tunnels of Cu Chi, near HCM City, where the Viet Cong created a 250-km complex of tunnels to conduct their war.

Da Nang is another loud echo from the wartime. The biggest US airbase in its time is a boom town today with an active night-life. Nearby is the Imperial City of Hue that saw the bloodiest battle of the war during the Tet Offensive of 1968. The Viet Cong and PAVN lost the battle, but they eventually won the war. The imperial citadel where the Viet Cong and the PAVN made their last stand was napalmed and bombed, with most of its ancient buildings destroyed. Now it proudly flies the Vietnamese flag and tourists throng some of the restored buildings of the Nguyen empire.

All Shaped Up

VIETNAM is one of Southeast Asia's fastest growing economies. Despite a major economic drought last year, rising FDI and electronic exports are powering its growth. Tourism is another important factor. Vietnam has become the go-to destination—it got more than 10 million tourists last year earning \$17 billion for the country. There are many things to see in the country, but its spectacular beaches are the major attraction. Halong Bay, with its striking rock formations, and the beaches of Muine or Nha Trang stand out. The Phu Quoc Island is Vietnam's Andaman—now a high-end resort, it used to house a colonial prison.

There are other charms like Hoi An, an old port city near Da Nang, with well preserved old houses and meeting halls which once facilitated Chinese traders. Both Hue, with its imperial palaces and tombs, and Hoi An are UNESCO heritage sites.

Then there's the bustling Saigon, with great eating places offering cuisine from all over the world. Beer, Saigon or the 333, is excellent, and there are a number of inventive micro-breweries where your beer gulp can come in after-tastes of coconut, coffee and many more flavours. Vietnamese coffee is particularly favoured by tourists, who are



MANOJ JOSHI

The author is a journalist and a fellow at the Observer Research Foundation

mainly from China, South Korea, Japan, the US and a sprinkling of Indians. Vietnam offers great value for money with a variety of cheap and clean accommodation with super service, a safe environment for women and superb eating places and cafes.

This Golden Bird

THE great pre-industrial civilisation of Cambodia has had a tragic modern history. I did not have the heart to visit the museums which record the self-inflicted genocide that killed 2.5 million Cambodians, an astonishing 25 per cent of the population during the mid 1970s. To my surprise, despite this

terrible recent history, the people of Cambodia remain gentle, helpful and ever-smiling.

For those Hindu Indians, whose celebration of their temples and 'grand' ancient culture borders on hubris, Angkor Wat is an answer of sorts. It's bigger than anything ever built in India! The city around the heritage site, the extent of which is yet to be fully determined, used to be the largest Hindu city of the ancient world.

You soon realise that Angkor Wat is just one temple, albeit the largest. It takes one a minimum of three days to see the entire complex. It would be ideal though, if you give yourself five days to explore the magnificent ruins. With time on your hands, you may also be able to manage a journey to Bantey Srei, which has a small, almost boutique temple, but the best preserved of the lot.

Dragon Breath

CHINA looms large over both Vietnam and Cambodia. Today, it is the biggest source of FDI and provider of foreign aid for Cambodia. The country has virtually become a Chinese dependency which can be trusted to do Beijing's bidding in world bodies, especially the ASEAN.

Vietnam has a history of resisting China, though the latter played a major role in aiding the former's struggle against France and the US. Today, the US, which was responsible for killing millions of Vietnamese, is closer to Vietnam than China, an indicator to how national interest trumps historical memory.

Rebirth

AS you travel through these two beautiful Southeast Asian countries, you slowly realise one aspect of societies: their ability to rebound to vibrancy despite their dark pasts, this is especially true of Cambodia. It almost makes you forget the turmoil the people had to go through just a few decades back, until you stumble upon another museum or war memorial.



SAJITH KUMAR

प्रिय भारत, हम तैयार हैं आपको वैश्विक बाज़ारों तक ले जाने के लिए!



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