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DESTINATION INDIA

CONVERSATIONS

**AYODHYA REBORN
IN CONVERSATION
WITH NRIPENDRA MISRA**

**BOOK REVIEW
THE BOMB, THE BANK,
THE MULLA AND
THE POPPIES:
A TALE OF DECEPTION**

A photograph of a spotted deer running across a concrete path towards a tiger. The deer is in the foreground, running from left to right, kicking up dust. The tiger is in the background, running from right to left, also kicking up dust. The path is made of concrete slabs and is surrounded by green grass and rocks. The background shows a natural setting with trees and bushes.

**THE BIG
CAT CHASE**
**NATURE'S TUSSLE FOR
A LIVING AND A LIFE**

ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



Eminent Alumni/ Benefactors Call on the President

A group of eminent Alumni/
Benefactors called on the President
of India, Smt Droupadi Murmu at
Rashtrapati Bhavan on the sideline
of the Visitor's Conference 2023.
The President appreciated the
benefactors for their contribution to
the cause of education and society.



Attending the interaction included Rakesh Gangwal, Co-Founder of Indigo Airlines; Muktesh Pant, former CEO of Yum China; Subroto Bagchi, Co-founder of Mindtree; Prashanth Prakash, Co-Founder and Partner, Accel India; Shridhar Shukla, Co-Founder, Chairman, KPOINT Technologies; Rizwan Koita, Co-Founder and CEO of CitiusTech; Vikram Gupta, Founder and Managing Partner, IvyCap Ventures Advisors Pvt. Ltd; T.T. Jagannathan, Chairman of TTK Prestige; Nemish Shah, Co-Founder of ENAM and Board of Governor of FLAME University; Roshni Nadar, Chairperson of HCL Technologies and Trustee of Shiv Nadar University; and Ajay Piramal, Chairman of the Piramal Group.

IN THIS ISSUE

Bharat Mandapam : Venue of the G20 Summit next month, formerly Pragati Maidan, is an impressive statement for a new India.....	6
The Bomb, the Bank, the Mulla and the Poppies: A Tale of Deception.....	10
Ayodhya Reborn: In conversation with Nripendra Misra, Chairman, Ram Janmabhumi Trust	18
The Ongoing Duel with the Dragon. The India China Border Disputes Linger On!	22
Reliance Industries and Nita Ambani bring 600 Years of Indian history to The Met	27
World Bank's Ajay Banga is Upbeat on Indian Economy.....	28
'ITC Hotels' is Back to Fulfil a New Vision! After 19 years, Hotels Stand on their Own Again	32
Cynosure of All Eyes; the Indian Growth Story	34
Time for Corrective Action; It's Now or Never!	36
Havoc in the Hills: When will we Learn?	38
The 'Real' Handbook on Indian Cuisine Makes its Mark	40
BCCI: Miles to Go Before We Sleep!.....	46
Oud: India's Fragrant Gift to Humanity.....	48
The Big Cat Chase: Nature's Tussle for a Living and a Life.....	52
IPL Business Enterprise Value Hits a Record US\$ 15.4 Billion says a Houlihan Lokey IPL Valuation Study 2023	56
All Eyes upon Neeraj Chopra as he Sets Sight on the World Championship Title this Month.....	58
Discover Warsaw: The "Best European Destination 2023".....	60
'The Taj Magazine' Celebrates its Golden Jubilee Issue	62

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On the Cover

Photo by
Devendra Singh

Not often do we get a book that reads like a Bollywood potboiler, with all its scams, mafia at work, sinister designs on neighbours, all for an issue like making the bomb. An international star cast, with all the big names in recent history. Except that this narrative is not fiction, it is story telling of how our neighbour Pakistan worked upon getting its nuclear bomb, at any cost. Iqbal Chand Malhotra has done just this in his recently released book, which we were privileged to host as an event. A panel discussion that marked the release is captured in these pages. Eminent perspectives were shared, a pointer into the future as well.

A candid conversation with Nripendra Misra, formerly principal secretary to the Prime Minister and now chairman of the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust, brings out the fast-paced work being carried out on building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Floods have wreaked havoc of unimaginable proportions in different parts of the country, causing massive loss to lives and property. Especially in the hills in Himachal, where we have suggested a single big break from the past, to say enough is enough, and start doing things differently. First, do an intelligent, transparent and fair audit and start making the difference. We owe this to our people, to Mother Nature, and start giving back what we have destroyed over decades.

Our country's tiger population has shown an impressive rebound, thanks to various efforts of those concerned, a worthy effort that calls for recognition and support into the future. We record a big cat chase in the forests, where a keen eye captures nature's reality, a struggle between a life and the need for a living!

Ajay Banga, the World Bank chief, was in India on his first visit since his appointment. We bring you a collection of what he had to say in his media interactions both in Goa and in New Delhi. He shares his strong belief in the growth story of India, the challenges and suggests the direction we should take.

Navin Berry
Editor

VOICES



HINDENBERG REPORT IS A COMBINATION OF TARGETED MISINFORMATION

“The report was a combination of targeted misinformation and discredited allegations, the majority of them dating from 2004 to 2015. They were all settled by the appropriate authorities at that time. This report was a deliberate and malicious attempt aimed at damaging our reputation and generating profits through a short-term drive-down of our stock prices,”

Slammed the US based short seller Hindenburg Research report terming it “a combination of targeted misinformation and discredited allegations.” Adani told investors that in January this year, the US-based group had published a report to short the company’s stocks just as they were planning to launch the largest Follow-on Public Offering in India’s history. Adani was addressing the 31st AGM of the group.

– Gautam Adani on Hindenberg allegations



TATA GROUP TO INVEST IN GIGA FACTORY IN THE UK

Speaking to the BBC, Grant Shapps, the secretary of state for energy security and net zero, said this “certainly the biggest U.K. car investment for 40 years” and “a big vote of confidence in the British economy.” Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran in conversation with UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak at The Jaguar Land Rover Gaydon Centre, in Britain after Tata Group announced its £4 billion investment plans to establish a global battery cell gigafactory in the UK with a capacity to produce 40GW of cells annually.



I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED CINEMA TO BE THE MEDIUM OF ENTERTAINMENT

I have always believed that cinema is a medium that brings people together; that integrates human society. We come from different walks of life; we come from different parts of the world but when we sit in a darkened hall to watch a film we laugh at the same jokes, we cry at the same emotion, we sing the same songs. There are very few institutions in the world that can boast of this kind of integration. We come together on one common platform. My father, a great poet and writer of my country, during the last days of his life, he always used to sit in our home and watch a film every evening, a Hindi film, again and again every evening. Sometimes repeating the same film several times and I asked him once, what is it that you find so interesting in cinema, why do you keep seeing these films every evening? And he told me, I get to see poetic justice in three hours. You and I will not get poetic justice in a lifetime, perhaps several lifetimes. That is the power of cinema. I am very proud to be a very small part of the film industry of my country. When you honour me today, you honour the film industry of my country. You honour my country.

– On Saudia’s Highest Civilian Honour for Amitabh Bachan Conferred by King Salman Bin Abdulaziz



NIRMALA SITHARAMAN ON '4IS'

The focus of the government was on four 'Is' — infrastructure, investment, innovation and inclusiveness — to make India a developed nation by 2047. She said India had the necessary wherewithal to meet the goal set by PM Modi. Besides investor-friendly reforms undertaken by the government, she said, India had a very vibrant young population and the emphasis on skilling them to suit the requirements of the economy would yield dividends. With infrastructure comes investment, the minister said, adding emphasis on investment would promote greater participation of both the public and private sectors.....Through record capital spending outlays, the government has walked the extra mile in recent years in creating durable assets, both in the physical and digital spheres. Blended finance, on which global discussions are going on, is also something we are looking at, she said, at a CII meeting in New Delhi.



FIRST EVER VISIT OF FRENCH PRESIDENT TO SRI LANKA

"Sri Lanka and France are two nations in the Indian Ocean sharing the same goal: an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific. In Colombo, we confirmed it: strong as in our 75 years of diplomatic relations, we would open a new era to our relationship".

– *President Macron of France tweeted*



PM MODI'S OUTREACH TO THE ISLAMIC WORLD HAS BEEN EXEMPLARY

I think I used to be a critic at the beginning of the Modi administration of some of their failings but I think they have really touched all the bases reasonably well. I mean I remember the first year of Mr. Modi's prime ministership, he travelled to 27 countries and not one of them was an Islamic country and I made a bit of a fuss about that as a Congress MP and as a voice. But I am delighted to say that what he has done subsequently in outreach to the Islamic world has been exemplary, in fact it could not be better; we have outstanding relations with major Muslim countries particularly in the Gulf, UAE, Saudi Arabia and so on and that is something which I think is to the credit of India and to the government.

– *Shashi Tharoor in Conversation on a TV Debate*

BHARAT MANDAPAM

VENUE OF THE G20 SUMMIT NEXT MONTH, FORMERLY PRAGATI MAIDAN, IS AN IMPRESSIVE STATEMENT FOR A NEW INDIA.



A new convention centre of this magnitude brings a new eco-system for the MICE industry and the nation at large. It calls for a national effort to market this facility to the global community.

by NAVIN BERRY, *Editor*

Finally, the new new Pragati Maidan, oops, I meant 'Bharat Mandapam' has opened its doors, inaugurated by the Prime Minister in the presence of a packed hall that included prominent members of society. Sitting in the audience were senior cabinet ministers, industrialists, medical professionals and other leading lights – it was an important day in the life of our nation.

Pragati Maidan no longer reflected India's pragati, meaning progress. It had become outdated, outlived its meaningful presence – within the same 123 acres of land, we have now also a 7,000 seat auditorium with state of the art meeting rooms, and other facilities needed to hold world class events. That much for better utilisation of space. New exhibition halls have come up, presently seven of them. These are two floors, which also means additional floor space, and better utilisation, again. Given the art and sculpture on exhibit, given the diversity of India, all on display, it is a befitting tribute to

So, what does this new Bharat Mandapam mean for India's conference (MICE) industry. It's a tectonic change that invokes a new eco-system for the tourism industry, not just for Delhi, but also for the neighbouring cities like Jaipur and Agra, but also for the rest of India.



Speaking at the inauguration, the Prime Minister said the ‘world will witness India’s rising stature in the world at the forthcoming G20 summit’, sharing his strong conviction that India will become the third largest economy in the world in his third term in office. PM Modi referred to the data provided by Niti Ayog which said some 139 million Indians have been taken off the poverty list in the last decade.

a new India that we all aspire to.

It also meets with the government’s aspiration to drive infrastructure first, for travel and tourism. There is no doubt that its time had come, in fact already run out its course. Typically, the PM was there twice in the day. First, in the morning for inaugural ‘puja’, and later in the evening for a formal inauguration.

Pragati Maidan had in fact become an apology of sorts for the capital’s exhibition status. Often, the facilities came under attack, the halls were known to often leak, the toilets were not user friendly, restaurant and banqueting facilities were almost non-existent. Big ticket organizers did not tick any of the important boxes when looking at Delhi, with Pragati Maidan as the venue. It must be said here that numerous dispensations tried to bring about this change. It was made impossible for one reason or the other. This time around, it was the big push from the



“The launch of the International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC) complex at New Delhi’s Pragati Maidan, is an important step for India’s tourism sector. Meetings, conferences, events and exhibitions are a key driver of tourism destinations across the globe. The state of the art complex will enable hosting of large international conferences thereby increasing the tourist arrivals into the country. The hospitality industry will be a major beneficiary leading also to capacity expansion.”

Puneet Chhatwal

MD & CEO, IHCL

PMO, keen to showcase modern India at the G20 of which India holds the presidency. The inauguration is on time, with the G20 summit just a few weeks away.

So, what does this new Bharat Mandapam mean for India’s conference (MICE) industry. It’s a tectonic change that invokes a new eco-system for the tourism industry, not just for Delhi, but also for the neighbouring cities like Jaipur and Agra, but also for the rest of India. It brings an instant recall for Destination India, in her ability to hold large conferences. The main hall is divisible into three parts which would allow for smaller meetings as well. For a large facility like this, we need complementing infrastructure to match – in terms of rooms, airports, transport, etc. Happily, much of this is already in place. Typically, in any given conference there is the inaugural session which brings all delegates together, followed by business sessions of smaller numbers.

To emphasise the infrastructure aspect, the connectivity has been totally revamped with entry and exit across the already congested area in Central Delhi. New arterial roads, subways, and a parking facility for 5000 cars will remove all constraints of the past.

New Delhi, especially after the construction of Aerocity with its 5000 rooms, has



“It’s an important step forward for India’s Mice industry. Along with the soon to open Dwarka Convention Centre, New Delhi will get into the big league of MICE venue cities globally. It is an exceptionally well executed infrastructure, for us to be proud of! We have to market this well, for which Bharat Mandapam will need an active sales force that works on both national and international levels. We, as hoteliers, are an essential component of the value chain, and welcome this important infrastructure leap.”

Puneet Dhawan

Senior Vice President, India and South Asia, Accor Hotels





“Indian trade and industry has been on a constant forward stride across the years. The India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) has been hosting trade fairs, exhibitions and conferences at the Pragati Maidan in Delhi to support the promotion of trade and exports. Set up decades ago the Halls and other facilities needed a revamp to present a modern business and convention Centre to showcase 21st century India. The idea to revamp the Halls in Pragati Maidan was first broached more than two decades ago but the hard and immediate decision to completely overhaul and transform on such a grand scale and within a short time frame was made only a few years ago. Today we are ready with an impressive and modern Business & Convention Centre that can vie with the top 10 such Centres in the world. The Conference facility that can seat 7000 persons will be the venue for the G20 Leaders meeting in September this year. The logo of ITPO with its horizontal and vertical lines inspired by the inscription on a coin from the Gupta era reflects life and prosperity. Bharat Mandapam, the state-of-the-art revamped ITPO, promises to facilitate growth and prosperity for India's external trade in the years ahead.”

Rathi Vinay Jha
Former CMD, ITPO and former Secretary Tourism, GOI

more than 12,000 rooms to offer in 5-star category. In the larger ambit, including 3 and 4 star, we have some 20,000 plus rooms in Delhi and NCR. Incidentally, there is the additional facility coming up at Dwarka, with another big conference infrastructure and proposed additional 5,000 rooms of its own. This would propel New Delhi and NCR into one big global magnet for this industry.

With the fourth runway at IGIA, with the new airline structure under a privatised Air India, we can expect good airline connectivity and partnership which is necessary to attract large conventions. Domestically, we are well connected with the possibility of offering pre and post-convention tours, which are an essential component of international conventions. New highways to Jaipur and Agra will be an added bonus.

Large exhibitions are more common than large conventions. With some 100,000 sqm of exhibition space, the ability to hold large exhibitions is now possible, especially with this new package of two levels of 5,000 sqm each. This will spin off a year-round attraction for the city, especially in the off season, which should be the goal of the industry.

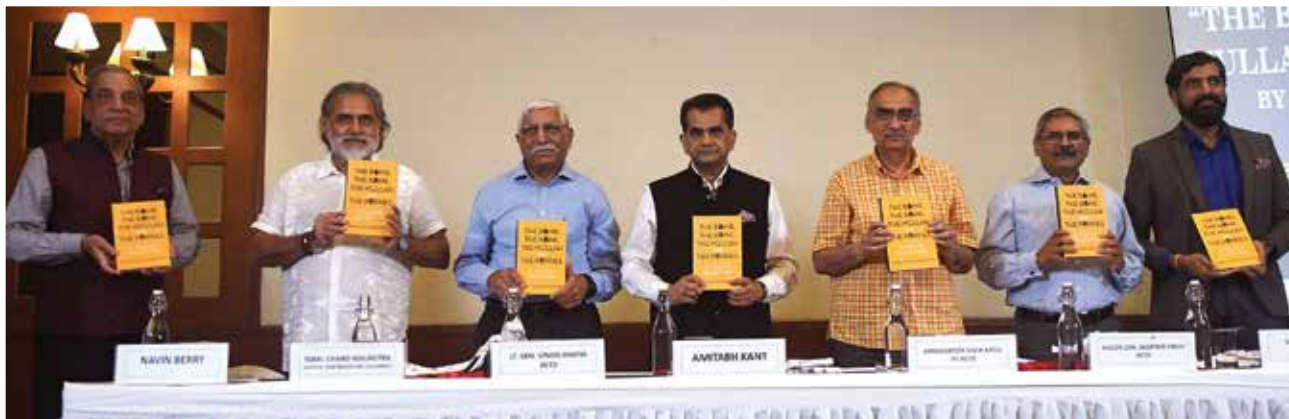
Bharat mandapam is a facility of ITPO, under the Ministry of Commerce, as owner and guardian of the new complex. It has served a most useful common cause for the MICE industry and tourism in general. But now with this new facility, we possibly need a new energy to market this facility to the world at large. We will need strong industry marketing pitch to the global planners, professionally handled at the right price points. If India is the flavour of this decade and next, it has maximum recall as a destination, and it is perhaps the best time to cash in on the India wave, as it were!

Private facilities like the newly opened JIO centre in Mumbai have professional sales force in the market place. A pro-active sales pitch is important to make the best use of this new infrastructure.

Bharat Mandapam, all the hotels in New Delhi and NCR, the tour operators and the MICE planners must engage in a concerted manner that helps the industry grow unitedly and strongly to bring gains for all. Marketing of big conferences is a complex game, with multi layers operating all times. We need a strong government backing, especially the

support of MEA, international agencies that work for India on the global stage, concerned ministries within which such large meetings are held most, namely medical, infrastructure, and others. With this new opportunity, it is important to grow the size of the cake! 📺

THE BOMB, THE BANK, THE MULLA AND THE POPPIES A TALE OF DECEPTION



Authored by Iqbal Chand Malhotra, released by Amitabh Kant, the book release event was marked by a panel discussion featuring them both along with Lt. General Vinod Bhatia (Retd), Major General Jagatbir Singh (Retd), Ambassador Vivek Katju and journalist Sandeep Unnithan. The event was organised by Destination India magazine, the discussion was anchored by Navin Berry, Editor.

Exclusive report by DESTINATION INDIA

ON THE BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK

Iqbal Chand Malhotra, Author



The book deals with the brazen and vain glorious nature of the men in charge of Pakistan from 1964 to 2004, the period during which the events in my book take place.

You will recall that from 14th of August, 1947 till 23rd of March, 1956, Pakistan was a monarchy within the British Commonwealth. And its two monarchs were George VI, and Elizabeth II. It then became a Republic on the 23rd of March, 1956. So, firstly, Pakistan is a byproduct of the policies of the British and their proxy, the politician, the famous politician from Gujarat, Mr. Jinnah, and their clash in turn, with the policies and philosophy of another famous politician from Gujarat, Mahatma Gandhi. These two politicians dominated the political discourse during those days. Some things never change.

Secondly, the Indian army was expanded greatly to fight in World War II. By 1945, the strength of the army had risen to about 2.5 million men, with about 34,500 British officers and 15,740 Indian officers. By early 1947, all three branches of the Indian Armed Forces had undergone large-scale de-mobilization of over 1.25 million service personnel. Of the over 1 million Indians who served abroad some 480,000 came from Punjab. The war had led to overt militarization of a large chunk of the population. The manifold expansion of the Indian Armed Forces provided military training and combat experience to hundreds of thousands of men on de-mobilization. They joined in droves the self-defense units and volunteer outfits of all communities that were mushrooming in postwar India. To these outfits, the former soldiers brought their professional skills in the organized application of force and the ability to



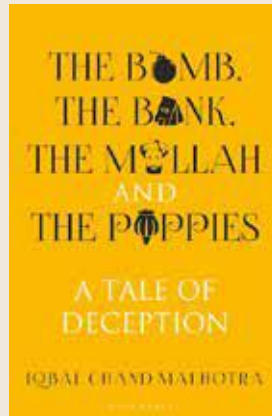
impart basic training to other recruits. Those with combat experience were not only inured to the idea of killing people, but capable of improvising in rapidly changing and violent circumstances, nor were the skills that they had picked up during the war restricted to using force.

The organizational techniques learned in the military enabled them to construct safe havens for their communities and ensure safe passage through hostile territory. Indeed, during partition, the districts in Punjab that had higher numbers of men with combat experience saw significantly higher levels of ethnic cleansing.

Thirdly, the National Unionist Party was in power in unified Punjab till March, 1947. The creed of the Unionist party emphasized “dominion status and a united Democratic federal constitution for India as a whole.” On 26th December, 1942, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan Unionist Chief Minister, or you can call him the premier of Punjab, unexpectedly, died. Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana was unanimously selected as a successor on 23rd January, 1943 about four weeks later. Tiwana suffered a blow in January, 1945 with the death of Sir Chhotu Ram, the unionist leader of the Hindu Jats in southeastern Punjab. Sir Chhotu Ram was a pillar of the Unionist Party and was greatly respected by Muslims in the province.

And in fact, Sir Chhotu Ram, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, and Khizr Hayat Tiwana were three vertices of the triangle of the Unionist Party that kept the Punjab intact till that time. However, violence engineered in the Punjab by Jinnah, the Muslim leader led to Tiwana resigning as chief minister on 2nd March, 1947. Sir Evan Jenkins, as governor of the Punjab assumed direct control of the Punjab until the day of partition 14th August, 1947. And all the violence between 2nd March and 14th August was under the ages of the British.

Tiwana remained opposed to the partition of India to the end. He felt that Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus of the Punjab all had a common culture and was against dividing India to create a religious segregation between the same people. Tiwana himself a Muslim remarked to the separatist leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah, “there are Hindu and Sikh Tiwana’s who are my relatives. I go to their weddings and their ceremonies; how can I possibly regard them as coming from another nation?”



Ishtiaq Ahmad, the author of a well-researched book, the Punjab Bloodied Partitioned and Cleansed, puts the death toll between 6-8 lakh people during those fateful days. But he also refers to Pakistan’s Census of 1951, which showed that 14 million Punjabis moved across the frontline, 8 million Muslims from East Punjab and 6 million Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab. From the time when Mohammad Ayub Khan, took over as Chief of the Pakistan army on 23rd January, 1951 from General Gracey, the ensuing contest between the ‘Mulki latt sahib and janggi latt sahib’ – latt sahib was a term for Governor or Governor General, and ‘Mulki latt sahib’ was the Governor General, or the apex of the civilian political power. And ‘janggi latt sahib’ referred to the apex of the military hierarchy in India. So, the

“The book deals with the brazen and vain glorious nature of the men in charge of Pakistan from 1964 to 2004, the period during which the events in my book take place.”

contest between the ‘Mulki latt sahib and janggi latt sahib’ weakened forever the power of the civilian authority in Pakistan. The Punjabi core of the Pakistan army wanted to dispense with niceties and take charge. However, they were restrained by the fact that until 23rd March, 1956, they were ruled by the British Crown. The action started after that date. So please do read my introduction before starting the book, because it will fill you in on the details.

WHAT SHINES THROUGH IS THE ROLE OF INDIA AS A RESPONSIBLE NUCLEAR POWER

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa



This particular book is titled *The Bomb, the Bank, the Mullah, and the Poppies*. And what an incredible title Iqbal, only you could have given such a great title. And this book takes us on a very riveting journey into the intriguing world of spies. And we are in a world where secrecy, espionage, and covert operations have always fascinated us. And this particular book brings forth a very gripping narrative.

And it delves into the clandestine operations of intelligence agencies and their influence on global affairs. Iqbal is a great master of knowing the inside stories of all intelligence agencies from across the world. And he knows more about the intelligence agencies than the intelligence agencies know themselves. So, in the midst of his latest book, you'll find a very intense narrative. I mean, there's an intense narrative, but one thing really shines through and that's India's role as a responsible nuclear power. And the civil nuclear agreement actually between India

“We've actually actively embraced nuclear energy to move away from fossil fuels, making significant strides. And now we are making very significant strides towards a greener and cleaner future.”

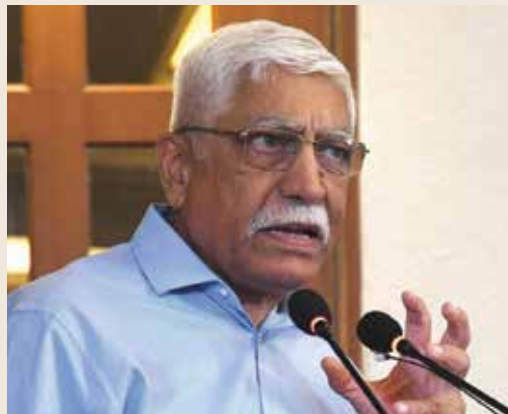
and US in 2008 really stands as a testament to the international community's recognition of India's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. It really demonstrates that in this book, I really thought that comes out, how India has been such a responsible nuclear power.

India's been a very responsible democracy. We are all argumentative Indians, but as a country, we have remained very, very responsible as a global power. We've actually actively embraced nuclear energy to move away from fossil fuels, making significant strides. And now we are making very significant strides towards a greener and cleaner future. But the book, this particular book, offers all of us a very enthralling exploration of espionage and intelligence operations. And it presents a very thought-provoking perspective on the delicate balance that exists between nations and the crucial roles actually played by the intelligence agencies. And they play a very critical role. Many of them actually go rogue in several operations, and therefore, they need in a democratic system, intelligence agencies, to my mind need to be need to be kept under a very close watch.

But they, they play a very important and critical role. And therefore, I personally feel that this is a very thought-provoking perspective.

FROM GROUND ZERO, WITH NUCLEAR TIPPED MICRO WEAPONS TO 2750, MEANING REACH THE FURTHEST END OF THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

Lt. Gen. Vinod Bhatia



The book goes into the psyche of the politico military religious dispensation of Pakistan. One thing I must say, I don't know why we call them the deep state, but it is not the deep state. It is the current dispensation. When you look at the actors, the players, the elite players, it is the

chiefs of the army. It is the political dispensation. It is the religious dispensation, the financial dispensation there.

But the fact is that there are finances involved. The end state is

very important. Why did they want the bomb? And that is the key question. Why did Pakistan want the bomb? It seeks parity with India. It's a perceived threat. It's a perception of Pakistan that India will not let Pakistan survive. We divided them in 1971. They feel we invited them. The fact is that they asked for it. It is not that we divided Pakistan, that is an outcome which had to happen in any case, because it was a non-viable nation. So, the book structures the systems and the thought process behind the endgame.

And coming down to the question, it is very interesting. We talk of the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. If I were to put a date. And why did Pakistan start the proxy war? It is because it had the bomb. Under the nuclear rhetoric, Pakistan was waging a proxy war in India, and it succeeded. And succeeded very well. They have waged the proxy war and terrorism with impunity on the basis of nuclear rhetoric, right from the 1990s. And it's not only Jammu and Kashmir. It is well outside, all over our metros. The '93 Bombay bombings, 2005 Delhi, the attack on the parliament and more. But why did we not do anything about it?

Because they had the nuclear bomb. And they thought that they could do anything under the umbrella of the nuclear bomb. And their doctrine was first use, right? And then later on, when we started our cold start, you know our cold start doctrine, after the attack on the parliament after our proactive operations, they came up with a tactical nuclear weapons. And today they have graduated to something, which is their new doctrine, which has been propagated and turned around. It is zero to 2750.

And this is the result of the 2016 Uri surgical strikes. And the 2019 Balakot strikes, because they had to grow from there after 2016, there's been no terror attack outside of J&K. And after 2019 Balakot, which is wrongly called Balakot. Balakot is a Pakistan construct. We did not touch Balakot at all.

You know, when you talk about sub-metric accuracy of our Air Force, which is an impartial Air Force, we struck at a place called Jabar Top, which is a known terrorist training camp, which is about 20 kilometers from Balakot. And Balakot is something which all of us, including the strategy community of India, has bought Balakot.

You, you would know Balakot much better. And this doesn't do with Balakot. It is a construct by the Pakistanis. We won the battle, but lost the war. That is a separate issue altogether. But what I am seeing under the nuclear rhetoric, we challenged that in 2016 with the Uri strikes, and again, 2019, the Balakot strikes and we realised that after 2016, there was no terror attack outside of J&K.

So, they have changed that to now zero to 2750. What does this imply? Zero means that they will employ nuclear tipped mines, nuclear tipped micro weapons at ground zero within both the horizontal space and vertical space. And I'm giving you some food for thought on this. And 2750 means that from their bases in Pakistan, they can reach the furthest end of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. So that is a threat. And if we do not have a counter to this possibility, I think we will see more and more terror strikes.

Because under the nuclear rhetoric, going back to the main question, I will put the date of the proxy war, if I was to put the date of the

proxy war to 13th December, 1989. Why do I say that?

On, I think the 3rd or 4th of December 1989 when we had a new government and Mufti Mohammad Sayeed became the home minister of India. And on the 7th of December his daughter, Rubaiya Sayeed, gets kidnapped. And on the 13th, December there was an exchange, and she was released. All over Srinagar, in the month of December, which is very cold, at 7:30pm in the evening the entire populace was out on the streets celebrating. So that is, the starting point of the proxy war. And we suffered the proxy war, and it led to the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from January of 1990. And this is all under the, what we saw the end, the bomb. That's why they wanted the bomb. And they got the bomb by all means. They got it. And we had to factor that in a Pakistan strategy, right?

And that strategy continued. 26/11 happened. We couldn't do anything; they had the bomb. The Parliament attack happened. In Kargil - they came in, it was a blunder by the Pakistanis, but they sent a signal to us that, look, we got the bomb. There's nothing you can do. And unfortunately, we did not cross the line of control. And we had to attack, and we suffered casualties. It took some time. Some of the,

you know, Fauji's setting out here will bear me out. If you were to give the solution of the Kargil war even in the lowest of tactical courses, you'll fail because you never hit head on. You always won't hit the shaft, right? So, if you hit the shaft, we could easily cut off the source of the brazen stance.

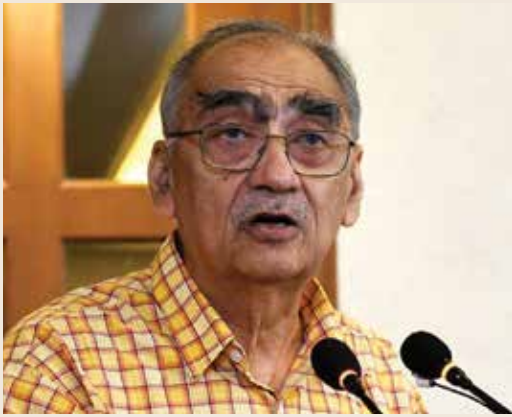
All the Pakistan army were there in Kargil, but we did not do it because of the nuclear bomb. So that is why I think this book is exceedingly important. And it is not only now. We will have to look at their revised doctrine. What else do we need to do in the light of this new development?

“Why did Pakistan want the bomb? It seeks parity with India. It's a perceived threat. It's a perception of Pakistan that India will not let Pakistan survive. We divided them in 1971. They feel we invited them. The fact is that they asked for it.”

“All the Pakistan army were there in Kargil, but we did not do it because of the nuclear bomb. So that is why I think this book is exceedingly important. And it is not only now. We will have to look at their revised doctrine.”

ESCALATION BEGINS WITH A TERRORIST ACT AND NOT OUR RESPONSE TO IT

Ambassador Vivek Katju



It is a tale of deception. As you subtitle this book correctly. It gives an account of what has transpired impacting Indian interests over the last 50 years in India's western neighborhood. And it weaves in all the important facets which relate to Pakistan turning nuclear. The way it turned nuclear, the way it managed its programme, the way it financed that programme including the bank, which helped it in moving funds, in generating funds to people involved in that process. And finally, it also focuses on the changes that took place in Afghanistan over the last four decades and more, and taken together these changes in Pakistan and in India and in Afghanistan have influenced us negatively.

There's no doubt that Pakistan succeeded in its objective of going nuclear after its 1971 defeat. And I'm particularly happy that Iqbal has focused on the meeting that Bhutto took in early 1972, soon after becoming Prime Minister, where he called in his scientists and said that Pakistan, in order to ensure its security had to go nuclear. The reason why I'm mentioning this is because the Pakistanis have all through these decades spread the canard that their decision to go nuclear was a response to India's, what is called the PNE or the peaceful nuclear explosion. So, it was a reaction to India's step taken in 1974. In actual fact, the Pakistanis had decided under Bhutto in 1972 to become nuclear.

And we have been a most responsible nuclear state, I guess the world acknowledges it. And that is why we got the NSG exemption, which I don't think they will get. But let's be straightforward here. The Pakistanis

decided that they will employ every means possible to go nuclear. If that required deception, which required setting up a network for smuggling, for doing things that involved breaking laws, if it required setting up a front bank which would assist in the transfer of funds, if it required pandering to the greed of Western companies, they would do so. Indeed, if you talk to many Pakistanis today who have held important positions, they're not in any way shy of acknowledging what they did. In fact, if anything, they take pride. They say that if national security requires that these tactics be employed, then so be it.

For those of us who have been in the business I've been involved in, during my professional career, that is in the Game of Nations. Is that a morality play, or is it the pursuit of interest by any means? But as far as the Pakistanis are concerned, they have no doubt in their mind that they'll employ every means to achieve their objective. And in this respect, they earned little respect in the world, but they achieved their objective now. The second is about the bank. And I think, Iqbal, you've done a great service by profiling the BCCI.

And you brought out the connections of the BCCI with some of America's major banks exceedingly well. And then how the bank got involved in the narcotics trade and money laundering. And eventually the game was up and it had to go, but it served its purpose. And that purpose was to enable Pakistan to get the finances moving for the smuggling network it had set up in Europe to acquire the equipment and the materials needed for its clandestine nuclear programme. I think there is material now available of the connections, which Iqbal mentions of some of the most respected figures in American history, in American politics of the late 20th century with the BCCI. And quite frankly, these figures who pretend to be very respected and respectable, are shown as having feet of clay.

That brings me to the third part of the book, which is narcotics. I've served in Afghanistan. And professionally in Delhi, I was responsible in the Ministry of External Affairs, for looking after Afghanistan for a long period after the Taliban came to power and were sent back. Americans made this big mistake. And not eliminating the Taliban leadership and the Al-Qaeda leadership that's another story. I was India's ambassador there. So many of the things that Iqbal describes in this book I saw developing in Afghanistan. How the growth and the expansion of the opium poppy took place, and how it overpowered every aspect of Afghanistan's national life. But where Iqbal makes a very significant contribution is in defining the nexus between the Pakistani army and narcotics that is seldom focused on. I believe, I may be wrong here, but I believe that it, it was there in far larger measure at one stage, but it still exists. And that needs constant focus by us and by the rest of the international community.

Because I, for one, I'm convinced that Afghanistan cannot return to peace, and our region cannot be stabilized till the narcotics problem remains in Afghanistan. It is from the 1990s, the largest producer of illicit opium in the world by far. And there is no serious endeavor on the part of the international community, unless I'm wrong, at con-

“It is a tale of deception. As you subtitle this book correctly. It gives an account of what has transpired impacting Indian interests over the last 50 years in India's western neighborhood. And it weaves in all the important facets which relate to Pakistan turning nuclear.”

trolling this. There is also this wild plant ephedra, which grows wild. It is interesting because from the little that I've read I think that needs more investigation. The regions where the ephedra grows and what is suitable for ephedra is different from the traditional regions where the opium poppy is cultivated.

This will bring about fundamental changes if ephedra related money starts flowing into Afghanistan. The areas that have hitherto been impoverished will grow further. But I think Iqbal, your focus on the Taliban, their emergence, is interesting. It still remains a very controversial subject about how the Taliban rose. What was the connection of the Pakistan army in their rise, the nature of the theology that the Taliban pursued? I think part of the problem is that on account of the turbulence and unsettled conditions in Afghanistan, there hasn't been the opportunity for genuine scholarly research taking place there. So, there are different theories about this and while that may be so one thing is certain that the Pakistanis have used the Taliban as an instrument in Afghanistan.

And whether we like it or not they were, they managed to sustain this insurgency for 20 years and eventually got the Taliban back in Kabul. That's also a fact. And I think, I for one, always believe in looking at things realistically. Because I think it serves our interests, our national interests, if we have a cold and clear analysis of the situation that we confront. But the Taliban are giving the Pakistani's a taste of their own medicine.

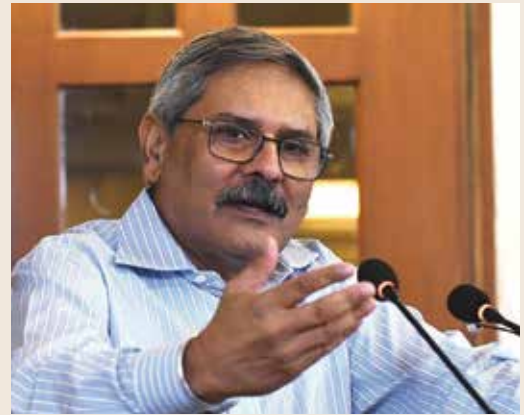
“I'm convinced that Afghanistan cannot return to peace, and our region cannot be stabilized till the narcotics problem remains in Afghanistan. It is from the 1990s, the largest producer of illicit opium in the world by far. And there is no serious endeavor on the part of the international community, unless I'm wrong, at controlling this.”

territory, or for that matter, the territory of each other's close Western allies. The Pakistanis, on the other hand, having acquired the nuclear umbrella, turned this doctrine on its head. And used it as a shield to engage us. That is why I think the Balakot strike was so important.

At that time Foreign Secretary Gokhale said that even if we see that there are plans afoot in Pakistan to strike us through terrorism or any other means, we will reserve the right to take military action. That is the doctrine of preemption. And I think that was very important because that signaled not only to Pakistan, but to the world, that the Indians won't take it anymore. And that escalation begins with a terrorist act and not our response to it.

FOR PAKISTAN, TERRORISM IS A CONTINUATION OF WAR

Major Gen. Jagatbir Singh



Iqbal has this rare knack of connecting the dots and revealing so much more. Everyone thought they knew everything, but when you start reading this book and trying to go over the multiple layers that it has, more and more comes out, and then you wonder, what were you doing for so long? Couldn't you just see it? So, you know, it's just staring you in your face. And as everybody's talked about these three things, so I'll also cover these three things.

And you know, in the Army generally, before we speak, we mention Clausewitz, particularly in the Armoured Corps.

So, Clausewitz said, you know war is a continuation of politics by other means. Now everybody's turning things on their heads. Pakistan feels terrorism is a continuation of war by other means. And that's what they've done right from the beginning.

So, this bomb, you know the book about which Iqbal has written, that title is straightforward, but as I said, there are so many layers within layers, and it comes out slowly, slowly as you keep reading. And the next important event, what has also been mentioned by my fellow panelists was soon after the war in 1971 when Pakistan suffered that defeat at the hands of the Indian army, when actually we reigned in short on the Western front. And we only went for an all-out offensive on the Eastern theatre that time, because that was the aim at that time.

And if you read General Candeth's book, he talks about this, what were the instructions given by Field Marshall, at that time, General Manekshaw, the Chief of the Army staff. But post the 1971 defeat, when Bhutto took charge at that time, his main aim was to get the bomb for Pakistan. And there's a famous

statement of his that we will even eat grass, but we'll get the bomb. And that happened in March '72. But what I want to bring out is that in July '72, we had this Shimla agreement where we literally handed everything back to Pakistan. So, did we not see this happening at that time? That they are, you know, trying to get us in a different need in a different manner. And yet we gave into whatever Bhutto had to say in Shimla couple of months later. So, this March '72 Multan meeting, and the person whose house it was held in, eventually became the chief minister of Punjab when Bhutto took over.

1979, I say, is a turning point in the history as far as we are concerned, the subcontinent is concerned, and the reverberations of which are still being felt today, because certain events took place in '79, which have had far reaching impact. And one of them was, you know, what we saw in Afghanistan, the Soviets coming into Afghanistan. Apart from that, you had the Shah being removed from Iran. And Iqbal says that after that, the westward flow of opium stopped.

But then you saw what happened in Afghanistan itself. The American Embassy was taken over by the Iranians, towards the end of '79, and they got involved with Oliver North. And other people got involved with funding the Contras, and they gave weapons to Israel, who in turn sold them to Iran at a hyped-up price in exchange for the release of the embassy hostages. And that money was paid to a fund through BCCI, which went to the Contras, to the rebels over there. So, it's extremely complicated. And that is the time in Iraq also. What Saddam came to power, and I talked about the Contras. So, who gained the most from 1979? And the first country, which gained the most from 1979 was Pakistan and Bhutto had been hung in early 1979, and Zia was in the bad books of everybody.

“1979, I say, is a turning point in the history as far as we are concerned, the subcontinent is concerned, and the reverberations of which are still being felt today, because certain events took place in '79, which have had far reaching impact. And one of them was, the Soviets coming into Afghanistan..”

“The minute the invasion of Afghanistan took place, Zia was the most feted general in the Pakistan army. They really prospered during this time.”

I mean, this all comes out in Iqbal's book. It's all fascinating. So, I mean, as far as this is concerned, and the more you read, as far as America is concerned, their interests are paramount, their personal interests are paramount, and they can make friends with anybody, use anybody for anything, whatever they want. And then you go on to the nuclear aspects and the nuclear aspects started in '72 then how AQ Khan pulled out nuclear blueprints from Holland. And this was you know, covered in German TV I think in the early eighties, yet nobody took any action against him. And people start speaking, of blacklisting certain countries, but Pakistan has had nuclear dealings with countries, all the countries who people talk about Libya, that's Gaddafi, North Korea, Iran, I mean, all these countries, their nuclear weapons have been, you know, nuclear weapon, nuclear technology has been acquired from Pakistan.

And now back to BCCI, the Chinese said, we will only route money through, you know, proper means. So, the bank that was chosen to send money to China for nuclear things was again, BCCI. Basically, Pakistan depends on two things. They want to have a nuclear weapon and they want to threaten India with a nuclear weapon that's one side. And at the same side, they want to carry on with bringing up the Kashmir issue and carrying on with terrorism. So, you have sub-conventional warfare where they don't want to raise the escalation, raise the critical mass to that level where India will react as far as using conventional forces go.

So, this is extremely important and as Mr. Kant said, India has come out as a responsible nuclear power, and I think that's something that Pakistan is fearing. So, Taliban 2.0 is far removed from what Taliban 1.0 was. Because today, Pakistan is not in control of this Taliban as it was in control of the earlier Taliban. So, they're having more problems within their borders, and the TTP is now rearing their head. And what they used to say, and what they're saying now is that as per the Doha Accords, the Taliban was not to provide safe sanctuaries to terrorists, and they're blaming the Taliban for providing safe sanctuary for terrorists, and the TTPs now attacking them. And they've been two, three attacks recently, which have come out. So, this is something which I say that the leopard cannot change its spots, and the ISI remains the ISI.

Now Ambassador Katju talked about the surgical strikes, and you know, how we went about it and about Balakot.

That was very clearly said, and well, we did it, and there is a manner in which it was done, and then the message has gone across. So, I think that's something that is there. And the last point I have to say is that today where do we stand? How are we today? So that's something that we need to see. Today, Pakistan is in disarray into a great degree because they have internal problems. The economy is in problems, their political system is in problems. The army as an institution is under attack, and they are more threatened externally by India. They see India's global stature has risen, India's capabilities have risen.

THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PAKISTAN ARMY AND THE ISI, BOTH ARE THE SAME THING

Sandeep Unnithan, Journalist



It's more like a Rosetta Stone, if I could put it that way. It actually decodes the entire period of the seventies, the eighties, and the nineties, which actually tracks this entire descent of Pakistan into becoming a narco state. And this, that, that single biggest trigger for this, I feel, is that and my

co-panelists have said this, that that one year was 1979.

And it's one of the most tectonic years in the 20th century where you had the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan, you had the Iranian revolution, you had the siege of Macca, all of these events in just that one year. And I sometimes think that if, what if the Soviets hadn't invaded Afghanistan? Because literally everything that's happened in South Asia, or the Indian subcontinent over the last four decades has been a result of that. You had the United States coming in and the Cold War. It was a battleground for the Cold War. You had Pakistan's nascent nuclear weapons programme that's taken off and so beautifully captured over here, the bomb, the Bank, and the Mullah and that nuclear programme, that's actually a result of what happened in 1971, because the Pakistan military went into deep shock.

Because it's not just about a defeat in war, it's also the vivisection of the country itself. When you lose half your country, you have the most powerful institution in Pakistan that's in a state of deep shock. And they say that, what do we do now? If this continues, Baluchistan is going break away. The Sindhi's are going to break away. Pashtunistan is going to be formed. And which is why the nuclear weapon is actually an act of desperation, that Bhutto said, if you don't have a nuclear bomb, Pakistan is going to break up further. It's going to be four or five different countries. And that's the reason they went in for that and using all the means that they did. Because let's face it states are like organisms. They want to survive. So, if you have Syria, the way it's been bombed, and there there've been attempts at regime change there, they've all manners of wars that's going on there.

And the regime has to survive somehow. And it's done that in the way that many other countries have in the past. It's turned into a narco state. Syria is today one of the largest traffickers of narcotics, and this is exactly what's happened to Pakistan over the last couple of decades. And so, the nuclear weapons, the West turned a blind eye to nuclear weapons because of the frontline role that Pakistan played in that Cold War theatre in Afghanistan from 1979, right up to 1988. And when the West turned a blind eye to this nuclear weapons programme that was playing out there, the narco terrorism that was you know also taking place, the covert war that Pakistan began using the proceeds of that war


against Afghanistan, a war against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. And that entire full weight of that was felt on India.

And that is actually the crux of what this book is all about. And I think this is one of the first books that captures all of this in one seamless narrative of over three decades. And I think a lot of us have been like those blind men feeling the sides of the elephant. So, there are these little isolated incidents that you can, you know, someone's feeling the, the, leg of the elephant and someone's holding onto the trunk of the elephant, and someone's holding onto the tusk and they see a different object altogether. But you know, it's to Iqbal's credit that he's actually brought out the elephant in the room, which is actually the Pakistan military. And this is something that we are always, I don't know what the reason for this is - we are always afraid of calling out the Pakistan military, and we always seem to have this, you know, extreme diffidence about it.

Oh, you know, it's the rogue ISI that carried out these attacks. You know, the ISI is different from the Pakistan army. This is absolute nonsense. The Pakistan ISI, is an arm of the Pakistan military, and they're as responsible as any other military organization. And in Pakistan's case, it is, it's their duty to carry out covert wars against their neighbours, to destabilize their neighbours.

“The nuclear weapon is actually an act of desperation, that Bhutto said, if you don't have a nuclear bomb, Pakistan is going to break up further.”

And the perpetrators are always these cutouts. They're either the Lashkar-e-Taiba or they're SIMI or they're Indian Mujahideen, the so-called Indian Mujahideen. But the puppeteer here is always the same. It's the Pakistan military. And somehow, we've kind of chose not to see that until recently when this was called out. And

I think as Ambassador Katju mentioned, the fact that the Balakot attacks were extremely significant. And I think it's the first time the effect of that attack that can be questioned? Did the bombs hit the building? And that can be debated, but the bombs actually may have fallen on Jabbar Top, but the impact was felt in GHQ Rawalpindi. And that messaging was very clear, and it's possibly the first time that India has kind of responded to this sword and shield strategy that the Pakistan military has employed over the last 40 years ever since they got the nuclear weapon, which is the, the shield of nuclear weapons and the sword of this war of a thousand cuts that they've been waging against us. 



Intricate *jaali* work onsite being carried out by a skilled worker at the Ram Mandir Temple

AYODHYA REBORN

HOW A DEDICATED TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS AND BELIEVERS ARE WORKING 24X7 TO COMPLETE THE FIRST PHASE OF THE RAM TEMPLE!

DI catches up with Nripendra Misra, Chairman, Ram Janmabhumi Trust, to understand the dynamics of the temple construction, the engineering marvel that will unfold in three phases starting from the end of this year.

by NAVIN BERRY

DI: *The task that is being undertaken is humongous. The size, the proportions and the time lines! If you can share with us the magnitude of the task that you have undertaken. That I think is the central point for many of us.*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: If you examine the task as qualitative, there are two phases to it. The first phase is a very long history of struggle to restore the deity to its rightful place. That leads to certain emotions, sentiments. And because the struggle itself was less political, more emotional, therefore it has got a greater significance. Now when you see that the judgement of 2019, in the month of November, suddenly an announcement is made that the deity will be installed at the rightful place, which has been the demand. And that there will be another place on which also the interest of other group would be safeguarded. At that moment, a new chapter got opened.

Peace prevailed. There were no winners, there were no losers and it had national acceptability. There was no one who was willing to oppose, no appeal was filed against the judgement. That is the first phase, when you have to imagine the ramifications of this temple. But once the temple was to be built, then it is giving another message. It gives three to four very important messages.



“If you examine the task as qualitative, there are two phases to it. The first phase is a very long history of struggle to restore the deity to its rightful place. That leads to certain emotions, sentiments.”

The first message is one of social harmony, which emanates from the life of Ram.

If you see the journey of Ram, 14 years of banishment, then you find that he was meeting various groups of people who were part of this country, but he was able to get their support in his final task to fight evil and to see that the element of evil no longer exists. So that harmony, after all, what is Mariyada.....Mariyada means all the highest values of human life. So here is a person who was passing through as a human being but was finally, while returning from banishment and going back to Ayodhya, who had turned into a God, a godlike figure. At that time, he became God. But before that point in time, he was a Raja, was a godlike figure and a most benevolent king. So, the first message is of harmony.

The second more important message is that social recognition, which is not limited to India, not only to Indian citizens. It was also to people abroad. Everywhere. That something which was a point of conflict, that has resolved into, to not just a resolution, but it has

converted into a position where it is now giving a new message. A new message is emanating from that place. So, the entire emotional background of before and after the installation, it changes the mood of the nation from one which was a fight with no hope that it will ever happen. Nobody till 2019 believed that the temple will ever be built. Everybody thought it is just talk. It is a political gimmick. It is nothing but something which is created for raking a controversy at the time of elections and that it is a vote catching device. Suddenly you find that it has become a reality. So, the mood of the nation changed and the nation felt that justice has been done by the installation of God there. After all, earlier also, there was a God there. But that God was in his tent; in a temporary accommodation.

Here is a place where what has been given to him as due. It has to be felt. It is there in the pulse of the nation. It is there in the vibration of the air of the country that a justice has been restored, fair play has been restored. A rightful place has been given to a deity of people who have faith in that and that it will no longer be now a point of conflict between various communities. So that is what I would consider as important for the site.

DI: *But, to the task now of building the temple...*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: Yes, returning, if you are thinking of it, the structure, the construction, the aspirations, the ambitions at the time of construction, when it is started, all these things were not defined. What will be the life of the construction that we undertake? What will be the big features of the construction? What will be the aesthetic sense of the construction? What will be the engineering marvel of this construction? These things were not defined. The only thing known was what is the ambition, emotion, aspiration, of the local area, of the sages and saints of the country and of the masses in general. All these three amalgamated.

DI: *So how did all these factors come about then finally?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: Well, there were various ways by which these messages were getting absorbed by those who were responsible for the construction. Of course, the team which was there and that team was involved. But let me take just a small example.

Everybody wished that this temple must be a thousand years old. So, we knew that this is the universal requirement. Now we didn't have any engineering detail. That is the fact that our temples are all over India. They have a life durability. They are seen even today with very little of maintenance. You will agree that the Indian temples last for 800 years and more.



Nripendra Misra has been a high-profile government officer for many decades. Born 8 March 1945, he is a 1967 IAS officer from the Uttar Pradesh cadre who served as Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi from 2014 to 2019. He earlier served as the chairperson of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, Telecom Secretary of India and Fertilizers Secretary of India. He was awarded the most prestigious Padma Bhushan in 2021.

Misra has an MPA in public administration from John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, a post-graduate degree in chemistry and political science and public administration from the University of Allahabad.

Misra's international exposure includes being Minister (Economic) in the Indian embassy in Washington, D.C., consultant to the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Government of Nepal.

In May 2014, newly elected prime minister, Narendra Modi, appointed him as his principal secretary, through the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) and was given the rank and status of Cabinet Minister, the Government of India.

Post his resignation as principal secretary, Mishra was appointed the chairperson of the executive council of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in January 2020.

He was elected as the chairman of the temple construction committee of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust in February 2020.

But what are the engineering skills required for doing that? That was nowhere recorded. It is the first time that you will have a temple which will have a record not only for the construction, but it will become a record for adopting a new syllabus in the engineering colleges and IITs, that how temple engineering must be followed.

DI: *But how did you study that this is a pattern which was a thousand-year-old also?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: Well, I suppose this came mostly from firstly the experts. We had five IITs who were advising us. We have Central Building Research Institute. So, they were of course told what was the basic requirement. But then there were stories which are coming from the sages. There were stories which were coming from the saints who had their own view. On one single aspect that I will share with you, how concerns mattered. Initially, we thought of constructing with piles foundation, but there was a very effective intervention I would call it from the representatives, the spiritual figures. Who said that no, we don't want

Piles foundation. We want this soil to be tested. And this soil is not strong enough. We will not mind if this soil is totally removed, dug out, and a new engineered soil is created here, which turns into a stone.

So, the foundation they wanted made of stone. So instead of soil, they wanted the foundation to be made of stone. So, we had to undertake a fresh engineering survey with another group of experts, very well-known engineers. Some of them were ex-directors of IIT. And they studied and they said that, well the pile foundation was one option, but the other foundation is that you remove the soil and not just one metre or two metres but you remove the soil till 15 metres down. Which is equivalent to a three-story building. You remove that and fill it with the soil, which we as engineers would recommend. The new soil was aggregated. This was made out of small stones, mixed and blended with a very special chemical and cement. And then layers after different layers, 47 layers were laid. One after the other, due compaction was made. And the quality that emerged became that each layer, which was formed after 28 days, had the same quality as stone. Today, if you go and take a sample from there, it will be a stone.

DI: *This would make it an Indian engineering marvel?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: Oh yes. And recommended by IIT, Madras, Surat and Central Building Research.

DI: *So, what else was the challenge? I mean one is foundation? Then when we are actually thinking of the design of the sanctum sanctorum?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: You see when we were designing that, then there were considerations of what would will be the height. So, we could sense that the feeling is that it should be minimum at least two to three storey, which should give then prominence of place to the sanctum sanctorum. And above that the Shikhar should be high enough. So that was considered. But while doing that, another challenge came and that challenge was if you make such a heavy structure and if you use the stone. No cement and no steel. Cause the steel has the life of 94 years. So, there are these red stones, Rajasthan's Bansi Paharpur, which have been joined together with copper. Copper pins have been used to join them together.

But every time the stone height was determined, the load of the stone, how in case of let us say an earthquake, what resilience it will have and how that load factor will disseminate through the plains, through the raft and then through the foundation.

DI: *So, this was determined eventually by whom?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: All these were jointly discussed. I would say that even this engineering marvel that I call it is a collective effort of everybody. The engineers and the dreamers.

DI: *What would be the height now of the full temple?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: The full temple from the ground level is 161 feet.

DI: *And that of the Ram's Murti?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: Oh, that is different story. Ram Murti is a Ram Lallan Murti. It is not Ram, it is child Ram. We had to determine that because we also wanted that on Ram Navami, the light will fall on the deity. So that has been determined that that will have a height of 51 inches. And that was determined taking into consideration the average height of devotee. Every devotee wants to see his charan and he wants to see the eyes of the god. These are the two things which he worships and takes back the blessings. So, we had to determine, and the average height taken of India was about five feet, eight inches. Which is how we calculated. But then it was modulated because of technology. The technology which was

“With only a few months to go, with a formal opening expected sometime in the new year! All kudos to the team that is working 24x7, 365 days, to fulfil a mission and a dream!”

done by the Aeronautic Astronomical Institute in Pune and the Central Building Research. They have done it in a manner that how the sun rays will come, what manner it will get diverted to the temple and then it will penetrate.

DI: *The task of putting all these elements together. Did was that assigned to some agency?*

NRIPENDRA MISRA: You see,

I am of course Chairman of the Construction Committee, but I work with my Trust. There is a full Trust which takes interest in the matter. And the task has been given to, first, the construction is tasked to Larsen & Toubro. The project monitoring is to the Tata Consulting Engineers. The stone monitoring is to the National Institute of Mechanics of Stone. So what kind of stone is coming, is monitored there by them and they certify that this is the right stone or not. Then there are 5 IITians with whom we signed contracts for advisory services. So, it is a huge effort.

NAVIN BERRY: *So, if I have a concern, that this very sentimental and emotional dream coming true for millions of people in the country. And in three years' time you'll be building the temple. There's no compromise down the line due to speed.*

NRIPENDRA MISHRA: No. None. We will have a temple the world will be proud of. We would deliver the complete temple in 2024 December. We would deliver the ground floor with the deity installed in sanctum sanctorum in December 2023. And we would deliver the entire complex in 2025. The temple in 2024, the complex of 71 acres in 2025.

So, the work goes on, in God's own speed. For a people who have their faith with them! With only a few months to go, with a formal opening expected sometime in the new year! All kudos to the team that is working 24x7, 365 days, to fulfil a mission and a dream! **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, over five decades has edited publications like CityScan, India

Debates and Travel Trends Today. He is the founder of SATTE, India's first inbound tourism mart, biggest in Asia.

THE ONGOING DUEL WITH THE DRAGON

THE INDIA CHINA BORDER DISPUTES LINGER ON!



To begin with, the territorial dispute with the Dragon was not such a hostile affair. Aksai Chin, was considered by India as an uninhabitable high-altitude wasteland, of little use. Therefore, the need to send troops to occupy the frontiers was never felt. The other disputed area was South of the McMahon Line, in Arunachal Pradesh. The McMahon Line was part of the 1914 Simla Convention signed between British India and Tibet. China however, never recognised the agreement. China was testing the waters. While India was complacent and did not feel the need to assert its claims. China maintained a friendly posture, thereby succeeding in hiding its intentions. China annexed Tibet, but New Delhi continued to be as trusting as ever. During the 1950s, China started to construct a 1,200 km road connecting Xinjiang and Western Tibet, of which 179 km ran through Aksai Chin. India did not know about its existence until 1957. China had made its move and India was caught unawares. The Indian PM stated that Aksai Chin was “part of the Ladakh region of India for centuries.” On the other hand, Zhou Enlai said that their Western border had never been delineated and that Aksai Chin was already under Chinese jurisdiction. Clearly, India had missed the bus. Then 1962 happened and so much more, and India continued to miss the bus.

by MAJ GEN JAGATBIR SINGH, VSM (Retd) and MAJ GEN VK SINGH, VSM (Retd)

China has settled all boundary disputes with Myanmar, Nepal, North Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Laos, Vietnam, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Only India and Bhutan border disputes remain to be resolved. Is this a mere coincidence? Or is there a message? Doesn't China do everything in accordance with an agenda, a long-term plan?

Let us look at some of the border clashes that took place between India and China over the last many decades to draw some lessons from them.



The Karakoram Range.



A T-90 main battle tank in eastern Ladakh.

Longju:1959. The first face-off between the two countries took place in Longju in Subansiri in Arunachal Pradesh on 25 August 1959. An Assam Rifles Post at this small village was attacked without provocation by the Chinese and the men were compelled to withdraw after suffering casualties. Soon after the Longju incident, the Indian Army took over operational control of the frontier in NEFA. **Kongka:1959.** The Ladakh Sector saw a more serious encounter a few weeks later when, on 20 October 1959. The Chinese ambushed a police patrol, killing nine and capturing another ten. The incident occurred South of the Kongka Pass, about 64-kilometres inside Indian territory. They returned the captured men but the shooting of the policemen brought a wave of anger throughout India. After the incident, the Western Sector was also handed over to the Army.

Dhola Post:1962. A border post set up by the Indian Army in June 1962, in the Namka Chu river valley. The area was to the south of the Thagla Ridge. On 20 September, the post was attacked by Chinese forces from the Thagla Ridge in the north, and sporadic fighting continued till 20 October when an all-out attack was launched by China leading to the Sino-Indian War. Facing an overwhelming force, the Indian Army evacuated the Dhola Post. The 1962 War is well documented and the Chinese attacks took place in both Arunachal Pradesh where their progress of operations threatened the plains of Assam and Ladakh, where the Battle of Rezang La has gone down in the annals of our military history for the bravery of the Company of 13 KUMAON which fought to the last man and last round.

Nathu La face-off 1967

Nathu La:1967. On 16 September 1965, during the Indo-Pak War of 1965, China issued an ultimatum to India to vacate the Nathu La Pass. However, GOC 17 Mountain Division, refused to do so. The conflict in 1967 at Nathu La began with minor altercations over small issues, such as new loudspeakers, a trench, a wire fence etc. These led to incidents of pushing, shoving, and punching between the soldiers. India felt that a fence might help stop daily arguments between soldiers. The Chinese, disagreed and several attempts were made to stop the fence. On 11 September, a tussle broke out and without any warning, the Chinese posts opened coordinated machine gun fire on Indian troops at around 0730 hours. Close to 70 casualties were reported in that first strike itself, as the Indian troops were exposed and unprepared.

The Indian Army under Major General Sagat Singh hit back with all they had and fought hand-to-hand battles around the pass. The duel continued for five days, after which the Chinese threw in the towel. The Indian Army taught the Chinese side a lesson and effectively occupied the dominating heights at Nathu La.

The Indian casualties in the action were over 200. The Chinese

The path to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 was littered with skirmishes and patrol clashes. The Longju/Kongka/Dhola incidents showed that India and China were on a collision course. The construction of a highway through Aksai Chin showed Chinese intent.

are estimated to have suffered about 300 casualties. This was the first time the myth of Chinese invincibility was broken.

Tulung La:1975. On 20 October 1975, once again Chinese forces crossed over into Indian territory, South of Tulung La, an uninhabited Pass in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese erected some stone walls on the Indian side of the pass. From these positions, the Chinese ambushed an Assam Rifles patrol, resulting in the death of four jawans. Their bodies were subsequently recovered by a patrol of 3/1 Gorkha Rifles.

Sumdorong Chu:1986. In 1986, Arunachal Pradesh was granted statehood. The Chinese government protested, as this was seen as a provocation by the Chinese. In 1986–87, a military stand-off took place between India and China in the Sumdorong Chu Valley bordering Tawang District. It was initiated by China moving troops to Wangdung, a pasture to the South of Sumdorong Chu which was Indian territory. On 14 June 1986, a patrol party of 12 ASSAM spotted a Chinese post and a few structures on the banks of the Sumdorong Chu. Indian troops occupied the ridges overlooking the Sumdorong Chu valley, including Langrola and Hathung La Ridge. The Indian Army then airlifted a Brigade from the 5 Mountain Division to Zemithang. Troop movement continued through early 1987 under a massive air-land exercise, titled Exercise Chequerboard, a high-altitude military exercise to test the military response in the North Eastern Himalayan region which served the



◀ Chinese troops with primitive weapons threatening an Indian post in Ladakh.

▶ Docklam blockade 2017.

purpose of demonstrating the might of the Indian Military to China.

The crisis was diffused after the visit of Indian External Affairs Minister Shri ND Tewari to Beijing in May 1987. The fallout from the standoff resulted in India and China restarting dialogue, which had been dormant since the 1962 war.

Depsang:2013. On 15 April 2013, approximately 50 Chinese troops intruded 19 km into India territory in the Depsang area and established a camp, at about 16,300 feet in the Raki Nala valley. The Indian Army immediately mobilised their own troops to contain the issue. The incursion included Chinese military helicopters entering Indian airspace to drop supplies to their troops. The 21-day face-off saw the two armies pitching tents and indulging in banner drills. The Indian Army showed deep resolve in handling the situation and stood their ground in spite of the adverse conditions. The fitness of the Indian troops was evident as they stood shoulder to shoulder day and night, while the Chinese could not bear the weather conditions. The tension was defused when both sides pulled back soldiers in early May.

Demchok:2014. In September 2014, India and China had another standoff, when Indian locals began constructing a canal in the border village of Demchok, Ladakh. The Chinese civilians protested with their army's support. Indian Army deployed troops and urged the Chinese not to interfere inside Indian territory. The standoff ended after about three weeks, when both sides agreed to withdraw troops. Demchok had seen face-offs between Indian and Chinese troops earlier too. The Chinese often erect tents on the Indian side of the Charding Nala in Demchok. The tents are occupied by graziers who keep moving the tents westwards.

Chumar:2014. On 16 September 2014, a 16-day stand-off took place between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh near

India has not once crossed the line or attacked. India has never had any extra territorial designs. As they say "all is fair in love and war," therefore, to ensure peace, India should do as China does.

the village of Chumar, after Indian soldiers blocked Chinese construction work inside Indian territory. The stand-off began after the PLA tried to extend the road from Chepzi towards Chumar. Soon, 1,500 Indian soldiers stood face-to-face with 750 PLA troops.

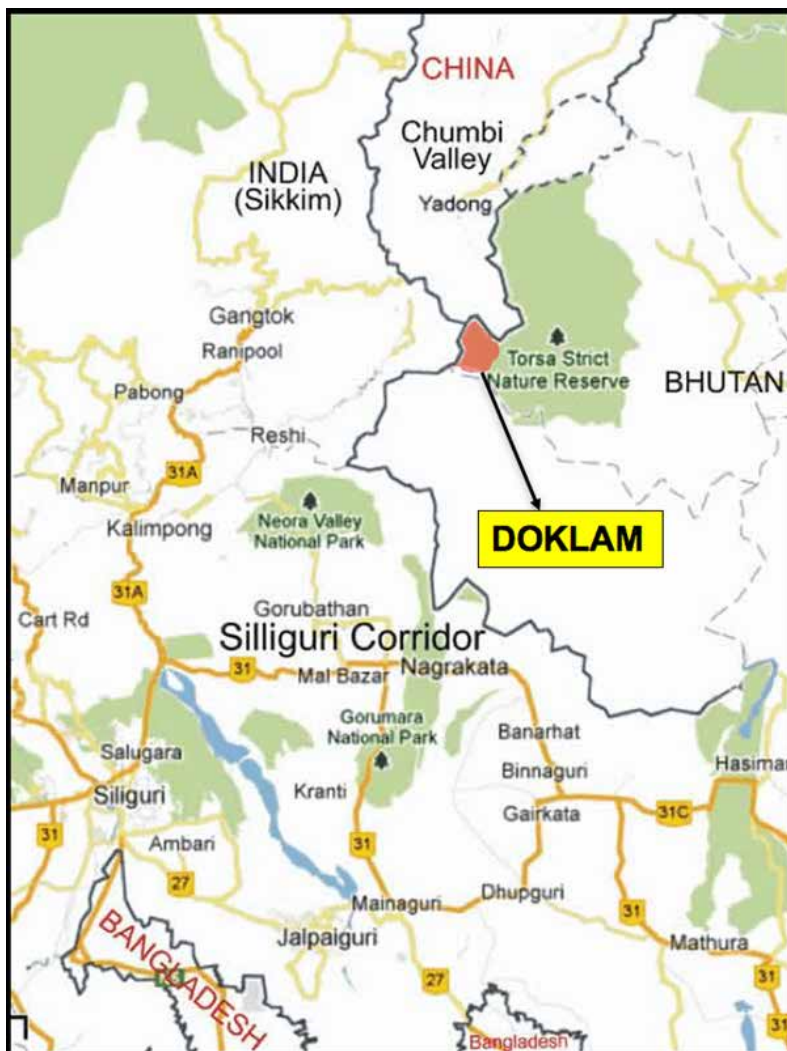
The stand-off was resolved mutually between the two militaries.

Burtse:2015. In September 2015, Chinese and Indian troops faced off in the Burtse region in the Depsang Plains after the ITBP dismantled a watchtower the Chinese were building close to the mutually agreed patrolling line. The PLA called for reinforcements, and the Indian side too responded with additional deployments. The stand-off was resolved within a week by local commanders at the ground level.

Doklam:2017. On 16 June 2017, the Chinese brought heavy road building equipment to the Doklam region in Bhutanese territory near the India-Bhutan-Tibet trijunction and began constructing a road in Bhutanese territory. The Indian soldiers blocked the Chinese from extending the road southward, the construction of which would have been strategically detrimental to India. The Indian Army warned the Chinese to go back and without waiting for a response the very next day immobilised their road construction equipment and physically blocked them. The Chinese were caught by surprise. The Chinese tried to get reinforcements but soon realised that they were outsmarted. Thereafter, the Chinese demanded that India should withdraw its troops first, but finally announced their withdrawal on 28 August, returning to their pre-16 June positions.

Doklam blockade: 2017

Galwan:2020. One of the most horrific and gruesome military encounters in modern times, fought with medieval age weapons, broke out between Indian and Chinese troops, at around 1900 hours on 15 June 2020, in the Galwan Valley in Eastern Ladakh. An Indian Army detachment of about 50 soldiers, led by Colonel Santosh Babu, Commanding Officer of 16 BIHAR, reached near Patrolling Point (PP) 14. The soldiers were unarmed, as part of the existing protocol. Their purpose was to confirm if the Chinese had indeed withdrawn from the location as per the de-escalation plan agreed upon between senior Indian Army and Chinese generals, on 6 June. However, the Indian detachment discovered that the Chinese were very much there. When the Chinese were confronted, they were adamant and refused to vacate



Galwan was much more than just a border clash. It told the adversary that India will not accept nonsense. Galwan was a display of Indian resolve. The ramifications of Galwan were felt at the strategic level, and this also changed the thinking about the Chinese threat amongst all like-minded countries.

stare-downs between patrolling troops that sometimes become violent are rarely reported in the media. However, China does assess the Indian response.

Galwan was much more than just a border clash. It told the adversary that India will not accept nonsense. Galwan was a display of Indian resolve. The ramifications of Galwan were felt at the strategic level and this also changed the thinking about the Chinese threat amongst all like-minded countries.

Therefore, now what. What to believe and what not to. Obviously, the LAC does not hold any sanctity for the Chinese. There have been so many treatise/agreements between India and China. India-China Joint Working Group on the boundary question, 1988, Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility, 1993, Agreement on Military Confidence Building Measures, 1996, Protocol for the Implementation of Military Confidence Building Measures, 2005, Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question, 2005, Memorandum of Understanding, 2006, Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, 2012, Border Defence Cooperation Agreement, 2013, to name a few. Have these agreements helped or did they serve only to push the problem under the carpet temporarily? Is China buying time through these agreements, while India is abiding by them.

All the incidents narrated above were instigated by China. India has not once crossed the line or attacked. India has never had any extra territorial designs. As they say "all is fair in love and war," therefore, to ensure peace, India should do as China does.

Reading between the lines and following China's past and present stance and activity, it is quite clear that all is not well. The Sino-Pak collusivity and China's deep interest in PoK also needs consideration. Possibly Arunachal is the rouse and Ladakh is the objective. The nibbling westwards from Depsang to Demchok continues. Through this pastoral diplomacy, our locals are losing their grazing

their positions. It appeared that the Chinese were waiting for a chance to start a physical brawl and as it turned out were totally prepared for it. Pushing and shoving led to hand-to-hand fighting that continued for several hours right in pitch dark conditions. With reinforcements arriving the clashes spread out from the PP 14 area to a narrow ridge overlooking the river. The Chinese attacked Indian soldiers with iron rods and nail-studded clubs. The ferocity of the Indians surprised the Chinese who seemingly lost their numerical superiority and were on the back foot. Some soldiers, from both sides, fell into the river below. Colonel Santosh Babu and 19 Indian soldiers lost their lives that night. There were possibly 40-45 casualties on the Chinese side, as reported by the international media.

These were the first Indian casualties since the October 1975 incident of Tulong La and the first Chinese casualties after 1967 Nathu La.

Reading Between the Lines

The path to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 was littered with skirmishes and patrol clashes. The Longju/Kongka/Dhola incidents showed that India and China were on a collision course. The construction of a highway through Aksai Chin showed Chinese intent. The recent incidents follow a distinctive pattern too. There has been infrastructural enhancement in Tibet and Aksai Chin. Earlier the Chinese only set up camps. Now they are building field fortifications, logistic installations, helipads etc. All this needs to be noted. Smaller incidents of



◀ **Hero of Galwan:** Colonel Santosh Babu, Maha Vir Chakra (posthumously), Commanding Officer 16 Bihar Regiment, was killed during a violent clash between Indian and Chinese troops at Galwan Valley in Eastern Ladakh.

grounds, as it has often been reported. China's so-called package offer of 1960, which had been alive until recently highlighted China's aim. Accept status quo in the Eastern Sector generally conforming to the McMahon Line, except Tawang, which was possibly kept as a bargaining chip. In return India concedes Aksai Chin to China in the Western Sector.

Today's India is wise to take note and be wary of the unworthy.

Conclusion

The India China War of 1962 erupted due to the different perceptions of the border. This issue has defied any solution for the past six decades primarily because China uses this as a pressure point to keep India unbalanced. Till date, every now and then China does mention the "different perceptions." China wants to occupy every high ground on

the LAC. It uses the "different perception" card to achieve that.

To sum up relations have been bhai-bhai, bye-bye and buy-buy before the deterioration that has taken place lately due to China's aggressiveness and expansionist policies.

While there is no doubt that both India and China need to rebuild trust but they cannot agree on the process. China has been challenging

War does not suddenly arrive. It charts a course that is visible to those who wish to see it. If the signs are read correctly, then war does not come. If signs are ignored, as they were prior to 1962, then an unwanted visitor enters uninvited. Today's India is wise to take note and be wary of the unworthy.

India's multilateral aspirations and wants to reduce India's capacity to manage the consequences of China's rise in the region. The war in Ukraine has added another dimension as Russia, traditionally on India's side in multilateral regional arrangements, seems neutralised by its proximity to China.

The escalating tensions and aggression of China since 2013 is therefore no coincidence. Their coercion on the border and naval build-up in the Indian Ocean, force India into a costly arms race and

therefore is pushing it closer to the US which is disliked by China. In the ongoing great power competition between China and the US, every issue becomes a zero-sum game. This makes it harder for India to solve its border conflict with China and at the same time manage China's rise and growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region in a peaceful manner.

The possibilities of the re-emergence of conflict, even in the locations where tensions have apparently eased up remain high. In a scenario where China continues its aggressive measures against India, in the military realm, coupled with the differing world views of the two, the possibility of cooperation has reduced if not disappeared. It is therefore imperative for India to contest all Chinese actions strongly and work at reducing the power differential that exists between the two countries.

War does not suddenly arrive. It charts a course that is visible to those who wish to see it. If the signs are read correctly, then war does not come. If signs are ignored, as they were prior to 1962, then an unwanted visitor enters uninvited. □

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Maj Gen VK Singh, VSM was commissioned into The Scinde Horse in Dec 1983. The officer has commanded an Independent Recce Sqn in the desert sector, and has the distinction of being the first Armoured

Corps Officer to command an Assam Rifles Battalion in Counter Insurgency Operations in Manipur and Nagaland, as well as the first General Cadre Officer to command a Strategic Forces Brigade. He then commanded 12 Infantry Division (RAPID) in Western Sector. The General is a fourth generation army officer.



Major General Jagatbir Singh was commissioned into 18 Cavalry in December 1981. During his 38 years of service in the Army he has held various command, staff and instructional appointments and served in varied

terrains in the country. He has served in a United Nations Peace Keeping Mission as a Military Observer in Iraq and Kuwait. He has been an instructor to Indian Military Academy and the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He is a prolific writer in defence & national security and adept at public speaking.

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES AND NITA AMBANI BRING 600 YEARS OF INDIAN HISTORY TO THE MET

'Tree & Serpent: Early Buddhist Art in India, 200 BCE–400 CE' opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) on July 21st.

An exclusive DI REPORT

The exhibition was made possible through support from Reliance Industries Limited and Nita Ambani, Founder and Chairperson of Reliance Foundation, an Indian philanthropic organization. A longtime, passionate supporter of the museum, Nita Ambani was named an Honorary Trustee of The Met in 2019, becoming the first Indian person on the museum's board of trustees.

Commenting on the occasion, Nita Ambani said, "I come from India, the land of the Buddha, and it is a huge honour for me to support 'Tree & Serpent' through Reliance Foundation's partnership with The Met. This historic exhibition traces the origins of early Buddhist art from 2nd century BC to 4th century AD, with over 125 objects from ancient India. With the 'Tree & Serpent,' we take immense pride in showcasing the deep-rooted connection between Buddhism and India. The teachings of Buddha are entwined with Indian ethos and continue to shape global thought. I hope people from around the world come and enjoy this one-of-a-kind experience. We remain committed to bringing the best of India to the world, and the best of the world to India."

Organized around a series of interlocking themes centered around original relics and reliquaries from ancient India, the show evokes a time when the country's religious



“We remain committed to bringing the best of India to the world, and the best of the world to India.”

Nita Ambani
Chairperson,
Reliance
Foundation

landscape was transformed by the teachings of Buddha, which in turn, found expression in a rich repository of art devoted to relaying his message. It focuses on the sublime imagery that adorned the stupas – a religious monumental structure found in ancient India. Stupas not only housed the relics of the Buddha it also honored him through symbolic representations and visual storytelling – beautiful specimens of which can be marveled at in the exhibition which culminates with the image of Buddha himself.

Reliance has supported The Met since 2016. Other notable exhibitions supported by Reliance are *Modernism on the Ganges: Raghbir Singh Photographs* (October 11, 2017–January 2, 2018) and *Phenomenal Nature: Mrinalini Mukherjee* (June 4–September 29, 2019), which marked the first comprehensive display of Mukherjee's work in the United States.

Under Mrs. Ambani's leadership, Reliance Foundation has sponsored key cultural events in India such as The Elephant Festival, and Abbaji, the annual concert of master musician Ustad Zakir Hussain, among the many efforts to recognize the cultural legends of India and ensure their relevance to a younger generation.

At the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC), Reliance Foundation has supported the arts and crafts exhibition SWADESH which has provided a global platform for showcasing traditional Indian artisans. **DI**

ABOUT THE MET

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1870 by a group of American citizens— businessmen and financiers as well as leading artists and thinkers of the day. Today, The Met displays tens of thousands of objects covering 5,000 years of art from around the world for everyone to experience and enjoy. The Museum lives in two iconic sites in New York City— The Met Fifth Avenue and The Met Cloisters.

WORLD BANK'S AJAY BANGA IS UPBEAT ON INDIAN ECONOMY SAYS 15-20 MILLION JOBS CAN BE CREATED

by NAVIN BERRY, *Editor*

Banga, 63, took over as the president of the World Bank last month, becoming the first person of colour to head either of the two global financial institutions – the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

India's economy grew 7.2% in FY23 and the World Bank expects it to grow 6.3% in FY24. Banga emphasised that India can maintain this momentum and that growth and jobs are the best way to tackle poverty. On demographic dividend, he said the number of jobs that needs to be generated is 15-20 million - some of which will come via manufacturing and technology while a large number would be in the services sector.

Banga was in India for the first visit after assuming charge of World Bank. An alumni of Delhi's prestigious St. Stephen's College, he was here to attend the G20 meetings in Goa; while in Delhi, he met finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and spoke about the G20 bloc, whose presidency India currently holds. He also discussed cooperation between the World Bank and India.

We reproduce extracts of his interaction with the media in Goa and Delhi. Important statements from a person who will have a decisive say in the global economy, in the years ahead.



“We talked about everything we did at G20 and how the meeting went. We talked about what the World Bank and India can do further as well as the G20 part of it. India is the largest market for the World Bank in terms of our portfolio here. There is a lot of interest here.”



On the world economy and where India and the World Bank can work together.

Domestic consumption provides natural cushion to the Indian economy against the global slowdown as bulk of the country's GDP depends on local demand.

India has proven more resilient and emerged from the pandemic relatively stronger than others.

India is the largest market for the World Bank in terms of our portfolio here. There is a lot of interest here

There is more risk on the downside in terms of a slowdown in the early part of next year. I think we did better than we all thought. But I still feel that there's more risk on the downside in terms of a slowdown over the early part of next year.

On Supply chains and disruptions

The opportunity currently is to cash in on the China+1 opportunity. This opportunity will not stay open for 10 years. This is a three-to-five-year opportunity when the supply chains start relocating or say not relocating but adding on in another location.

The one thing India has going for it is the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that comes from local production. Your exposure to the typical impact of global slowdowns, caused by trade slowdown, etc is cushioned by the relatively high percentage of the economy that comes from domestic consumption, which is very helpful at a time (like this).

On the aftermath of Covid

The gains made across the world to reduce poverty in the past three or four decades have faced a setback because of the Covid pandemic, climate change, fragility, wars and high debt. The best way to drive a nail in the

coffin of poverty is growth and jobs.

I am actually more optimistic today, with all the infrastructure that's going on, investment - digital and physical, skilling infrastructure.

On the future lending by the World Bank

The US has already indicated that they were going to commit to some... The first is to take our loan-to-equity ratio from 20 to 19, which does not require any additional money to come in, it is our own handle to manage it.

For every \$1 billion that comes in, the capacity to lend over a decade increases by \$5-7 billion, depending on the repayment patterns. We will need a pool of bankable projects that are ready.

The World Bank has created a private sector investment lab headed by former Bank of England governor Mark Carney and 15 CEOs to identify the barriers to growth of private sector investments.

We can do a few things to help take away a few of the risks that the private sector does not understand in the emerging markets. It could be foreign exchange, regulatory policy, political risk insurance.

On meeting with the Finance Minister

India will be shielded from risks of global slowdown. Besides, there were discussions between the finance minister and the global lending head regarding India's sectoral priorities like municipal financing, logistics, recycling of water, and renewable energy grids, for seeking assistance from the World Bank Group in leveraging private investments and how India and World Bank could cooperate to further the Group 20 agenda.

The finance minister mentioned that bridging the knowledge and technology gaps is key to future economic development and the World Bank should accelerate efforts to share the Indian development experience with the Global South, said the finance ministry in a tweet.

About India's potential growth in high-income jobs India has an

“The opportunity currently is to cash in on the China+1 opportunity. This opportunity will not stay open for 10 years. This is a three-to-five-year opportunity when the supply chains start relocating or say not relocating but adding on in another location.”



▲ Ajay Banga with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The minister mentioned that World Bank should accelerate efforts to share the Indian development experience with the Global South.

opportunity to cash in on global firms' efforts to build factories outside China, as companies seek to diversify their supply chains.

We need to understand where these jobs are. They are in technology, which is very few... then they are in manufacturing.

On being prudent with your money

We are actually fighting many crises. Let us all make sure we are using the money we already have in the best possible way. Where you are standing right now. This entire skilling idea emerged from a World Bank conversation with the Prime Minister very early in his first tenure. India is doing a lot of things which has allowed it to stay ahead.

Most countries would be very happy with a 7% growth rate in this environment.

On private sector involvement

The fact is that kind of money you cannot get from governments or multilateral banks alone or even philanthropies. You must get the private sector involved. The question is, we have created a private sector investment lab that will help us understand how to do this well. The fact remains, you will need different forms of concessional capital. You will also need different forms of multilateral bank capital and government capital and philanthropy capital to take first risk positions or to help enable the blended finance to come through. So, the real issue is if that is what you need for renewable energy, but we are actually fighting many crises. We have got climate issues, we

have got issues with fragility, conflict, pandemics, and future healthcare needs. And underlying all this, we have the issue of fighting poverty and creating jobs for people. So, I think the requirements are immense. The way I have approached this is let us all make sure we are using the money we already have in the best possible way. Once we finished that, then we should come back to the richer countries and say, what is your ambition for the future? And how much money more are you willing to put? I think the expert group just gives you a broad idea and then we can figure out where to take this.

It's a trillion dollars just for renewable energy every year in the emerging markets.

On the education sector, the loss during Covid, considering World Bank has been a constant support

You have got to remember that it is not only India that closed schools for the pandemic, the US closed schools down in a number of parts of the country. So, the developed and developing world was learning as this pandemic happened, how to deal with it. And I think there has been lot learning loss across the world. So, we have a real challenge for that generation that was going through schooling at that time. And it is not just India's problem alone, it's an issue across the world. My view is that we have just learned now we've got to fix what we've got, but we must make sure we learn for the next pandemic because otherwise we'll do this again. The next one will come. It is a question of how long before it does come. That to me is the bigger issue.

“We are actually fighting many crises. We have got climate issues, we have got issues with fragility, conflict, pandemics, and future healthcare needs. And underlying all this, we have the issue of fighting poverty and creating jobs for people. So, I think the requirements are immense.”

On increasing guarantees in other areas like hybrid capital and affordable capital.

So, the first question, what basically the process that we are following is that the evolution roadmap required us to think about all these instruments which we have now working our way through. We are



presenting them to all our shareholders, the donor countries, as well as in some cases outside philanthropies and the like. October is when the annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF are being held in Morocco. I think that is the time when you should see commitments from donor countries coming in. The US has already indicated, clearly Secretary Yellen made a very clear statement as you probably heard, that they were going to commit to some, others must commit too. So, I think you will probably see the results of that after that. The first part of the capital expansion is taking our loan to equity ratio down from 20 to 19. That does not require any additional money to come in.

It's our own to handle and we can manage. The way this works is for every billion dollars that comes in, we can increase our capacity to lend over a decade by between five and 7 billion depending on the repayment pattern. So, it has a very nice multiplier effect that I am quite keen to make use of.

But the other side of this is you have to have bankable projects. You know, you got go to countries where people are trying to set up development ideas and you have to make sure that good quality projects are ready and available. And one of the things the bank can do, in fact when you go travel in countries, including in India, it is not only our money, it is of course the stamp of good housekeeping kind of thing. But more importantly it is our knowledge. It is our convening power. It is our ability to help inform regulatory policies, to help inform these kinds of things. Where you are standing right now, this entire skilling idea emerged from a World Bank conversation with the Prime Minister very early in his first tenure and he kind of got hooked on it. That skilling changes the opportunity for young people. So, you know, there is more to it than the money. That is what I'm trying to get across. There is also the knowledge bank to be well worked through

Private investments and the kind of project being undertaken?

“The way this works is for every billion dollars that comes in, we can increase our capacity to lend over a decade by between five and 7 billion depending on the repayment pattern. So, it has a very nice multiplier effect that I am quite keen to make use of.”

So, I don't know yet. We are going to have our first meeting soon. And so, the idea is they will get together once a month and we'll discuss the kind of things we could do to help the private sector take-away some of the risks it does not understand in the emerging markets. Could be foreign exchange, could be regulatory policy, could be political risk. It will take a few months and then we will see.


On inflation how immune, how resilient will India continue to be in the midst of a global slowdown? And how can India raise its share of manufacturing GDP?

One thing I would tell you, while I did say that I expect that the global economy will have challenges over the next, you know, period of time. It has proven more resilient and frankly, everybody has been proven wrong during this period. So, I would be careful about assuming that people have suddenly learned how to forecast well. I have said that forecasts are not destiny. And I think that is really important to remember. India is doing a lot of things which has allowed it to stay ahead. You've just had a great growth year and you most countries would be very happy with the 7% growth rate in this environment. So, I am a little more optimistic about where this could go. My general sense is if there is a global slowdown, the one thing that India has going for it is the very high percentage of its GDP that comes from domestic consumption. Your exposure to the typical impact of global slowdowns caused by trade slowing down, caused by trade in goods as well as services slowing down India's exposure is cushioned by the relatively high percentage of the economy that comes from domestic consumption, which is very helpful at a time like this.

On digitization

You cannot just do digitization of lending without digitising the infrastructure.

What India has done over the last 15-20 years, it is digitising the infrastructure. I am a big fan of it. I am more optimistic today about India as a whole, economically than I have been for a long time. And that is enabling all these terrific applications to be built, which makes it easier for people to access services online. So, I am a big fan of it.

The fact is the world economy is in a difficult place. We know, it has outperformed what everybody thought, but it does not mean that it won't be more challenging. The IMF forecast, the World Bank forecasts are that the world will get a little challenging over the next year or so. But as I said, forecast is not equal to destiny. We can change destiny, and that is what you should think about. 

'ITC HOTELS' IS BACK TO FULFIL A NEW VISION!

AFTER 19 YEARS, HOTELS STAND ON THEIR OWN AGAIN

With zero debt and a few thousand crores of assets on its balance sheet, ITC Hotels is poised to look at numerous opportunities to grow its businesses. It will have the freedom to pursue new growth, while retaining its synergies with the parent company.

by NAVIN BERRY

Ever since Puri took charge, he has often been quoted on this subject of unlocking value for its shareholders, by demerging hotels into a separate company. So, this has been long expected. In fact, the contrary is true, that it took this much time to happen. Understandably, the last few years, post covid, business has been good for hospitality. It is expected to remain strong for the next few years, and therefore a good time to make the hotels stand on their own.

In recent years, again, the company has grown new brands. It has also followed the model of being asset light, meaning they will not own hotels, but build for others and run them on management contracts. ITC has an enviable track record in building responsible luxury as a mission statement and won numerous honours globally for its sustainable brand of development.

In building its own hotels, in major metro cities, ITC had engaged in substantial capex investment in green field projects. In the process, they have built an impressive portfolio of hotels in cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru and Kolkata. One of their most impressive buy-outs was ITC in Goa, then a Hyatt property for Rs. 500 crores. So, it has been tough sailing, not producing the profits that may have accrued from investing elsewhere, but an enviable assets strength across the country.

But ITC investors, it would appear, were not amused as the stock



“It (demerger) will unlock value of the hotel’s business for shareholders,” it noted “by providing them a direct stake in the new entity along with an independent market driven valuation thereof.”

Sanjiv Puri, Chairman, ITC

slid some 4% in the inter-day trading, after recording a high of Rs. 499.0, making ITC at that moment the biggest in the FCMG category, beating the market leader HUL.

The announced structure of the demerger dented market sentiment. The Street was working with a clear 1:1 demerger ratio. However, the announcement said ITC shall hold 40% in ITC Hotels, the demerged entity, with the remaining 60% holding owned by ITC’s shareholders in the proportion to their shareholding in the cigarette major.

Finer details will be announced later after it seeks a final approval of its board at its meeting on August 14. This gives time to the management

to incorporate any feedback from the Street and to the Street to digest the deal contours.

So, later we will soon have ITC Hotels back as a separate listed company. Just as it was 19 years ago, when ITC Hotels had been merged into the parent company. The wheel has come full circle. Estimates of ITC Hotels stock price, when listed, are expected between Rs.15 and 23.

ITC’s hotels business, which comprises 120 hotels reported gross revenues of Rs 2,585 crore in FY23 and EBIT of about Rs 532 crore.

The company said in a statement the demerger would help the new entity attract investors and strategic partners whose investment focus and

risk profiles are aligned more sharply with the hospitality industry.

“It will unlock value of the hotel’s business for shareholders,” it noted “by providing them a direct stake in the new entity along with an independent market driven valuation thereof”.

Chairman Sanjiv Puri said that in the proposed reorganisation, “both ITC and the new entity will continue to benefit from institutional synergies.”

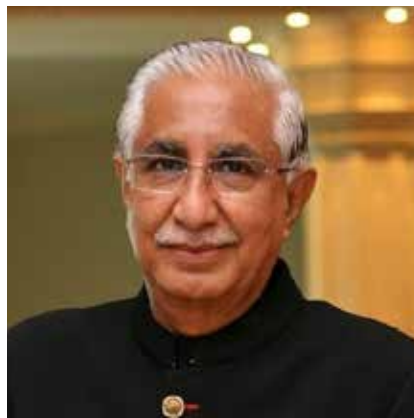
ITC said in its statement the move by the company “reinforces the sharper capital allocation strategy put in place in recent years, manifest in the pivot to ‘asset-right’ strategy in the hotels business”.

Reported gross revenues of Rs 2,585 crore in FY23 and earnings before interest and tax (ebit) of about Rs 532 crore. In comparison, market leader Indian Hotels clocked in revenues of Rs 5,810 crore and net profits of around Rs 1,000 crore. The comparison may be somewhat unfair as IHCL has a bigger market share in terms of number of rooms and properties.

The hotels business, it has been felt for a long time, has absorbed a disproportionately high amount of capital while contributing little to revenues and profits — less than 5 per cent – investors preferred a complete hive-off.

In an analyst meet, post the announcement, it was shared ITC’s segment capital employed on hotels, which is now about 20%, will go off and so will be the segment EBIT of about 3/ 4 % to ITC’s total EBIT. This

“The creation of a hospitality-focused entity will engender the next horizon of growth and value creation by harnessing the exciting opportunities in the Indian hospitality industry. In the proposed reorganization, both ITC and the new entity will continue to benefit from institutional synergies.”



Nakul Anand, Director, ITC (Hospitality)

will result in a 18 to 20% improvement in return on capital employed and over 10% on return on invested capital for ITC.

The new demerged entity will start with a healthy debt free balance sheet with assets of a few thousand crores and there will be adequate flexibility to chart its own growth. It will have the capacity to raise capital, should that be required, though this will be reduced as it pursues an asset light strategy.


ITC said the demerger would help the new entity attract “appropriate investors” and “strategic partners/collaborations” whose investment strategies and risk profiles are aligned more sharply with the hospitality industry. “In addition, it will unlock the value of the hotels business for the shareholders by providing them a direct stake in the new entity along with an independent market-driven valuation thereof,” it said.

“The proposed demerger is a testament to the company’s commit-

ment to creating sustained value for stakeholders,” said Sanjiv Puri, the chairman of ITC.

“The creation of a hospitality-focused entity will engender the next horizon of growth and value creation by harnessing the exciting opportunities in the Indian hospitality industry. In the proposed reorganization, both ITC and the new entity will continue to benefit from institutional synergies,” Puri said.

While experts have acknowledged the potential for unlocking shareholder value through a direct stake in the new entity many noted that the move might not fully meet investors’ expectations. The demerger of the hotels business resulted in investors booking profits in line with the market dictum of buying the rumour and selling the news, experts opined.

There has been speculation on why only 40%. Some suggest that the decision to hold could be to retain the controlling premium to avoid the other big shareholder, British American Tobacco (BAT) Plc from selling its share in the hotels business to any third party. BAT, it is generally understood, prefers to stay put in its core segment, which is cigarettes and was never too keen on the hotels segment. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, over five decades has edited publications like CityScan, India Debates and Travel Trends Today. He is the founder of SATTE, India’s first inbound tourism mart, biggest in Asia.



CYNOSURE OF ALL EYES; THE INDIAN GROWTH STORY

It is as good a time as any for investing in the stock markets. A wiser route is through MF, says the author, as this means leaving your options with the people in the business.

by NAVNEET MUNOT

You would have heard or read this phrase at some point in time. It means something which is the focus of everyone's attention or admiration. Over the past few years, this is exactly what India has been on the economic and political landscape. Goes without saying that few decades ago, it would have been difficult to imagine India being the 'cynosure of all eyes' on the global stage. As is the case with most things, long established pecking orders change and India has been taking firm steps in the right direction.

Speaking of change in long-established pecking order, there is one which has been garnering ample attention lately. India recently surpassed China as the most populous country in the world. While this headline may have caught the attention of people around the world, India's candidature as the next big economic superpower had already been established before this change in the demographic pecking order.

Emphasis on ease of doing business, focus on physical, virtual and

social infrastructure, improvement in quality of life is paving the path for a robust, sustainable and inclusive growth. Unlike China, where the growth model has been state-driven and environmentally unsustainable, in India, one can expect the growth to be more inclusive, driven by entrepreneurship and with the Government acting as a facilitator.

While an aging and shrinking China has many implications for the global economy, it has also brought into focus the potential challenges that could be faced by the elderly, especially in an aging country, where the working age population could be outnumbered by the elderly. Although, India's population is rela-

Unlike China, where the growth model has been state-driven and environmentally unsustainable, in India, one can expect the growth to be more inclusive, driven by entrepreneurship and with the Government acting as a facilitator.

tively young (median age of 28 years vs 38 years for China) and is expected to decline only after 2050, steps in the right direction today could avoid the possibility of a large greying population without adequate means for sustenance. As ironic as it may sound, gradual increase in life expectancy (doubled from ~35 in 1950s to ~70 now and expected to increase further) creates a different set of challenges.

India, on its part, has done a commendable job on the front of social security over the last few years. Success of JAM trinity (Jan Dhan Account, Aadhar, Mobile Number) facilitating direct benefit transfer (DBT) and other flagship schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) -Housing for All, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for universal sanitation coverage, PM Ujjwala Yojana, PM Suraksha Bima Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana etc. have been steps in the right direction. However, even beyond the efforts of the Government, a lot can be done for social security of the masses, especially those in old-age.

Rise in share of gig workers, without noteworthy social security benefits, also brings into the focus the need for financial planning.

Consequently, the onus shifts to the often-overlooked financial goal of retirement. In fact, it would be fair to say that retirement planning is by far the most critical financial goal owing to multiple factors. Firstly, for most people, retirement is a certainty. Secondly, with medical advancement and increasing life expectancy, the numbers of years one lives post-retirement has increased; however, the number of years is an unknown variable which makes retirement planning critical, yet challenging. Further, considering that retirement is a goal which is in the distant future, most people tend to put off planning for retirement till it's too late. And even those who do plan, undermine the impact of inflation (both, price and lifestyle) over a long-time frame.

It is equally noteworthy that even developed European nations like UK, France etc are facing challenges on this front of retirement planning. The challenge of inadequate retirement planning has not even spared developed economies with a long history of investing in capital markets. In India, in absence of similar retirement benefits, and with retirement age lower than most major economies, the most likely avenue for creating retirement corpus is through investments in risk assets like equities, provided the same is done with long-term investment horizon. From a long-term standpoint, equity happens to be a key asset class to generate inflation-outpacing returns. Equities, especially Equity MFs, could intuitively be the go-to investment avenue for investors to create a retirement corpus over a 15-20-year time horizon, if not more.

Recently, we have seen a notable change in mix of financial savings, with many investors diversifying their portfolio beyond conventional instruments like Fixed Deposits. Increase in Demat accounts and SIPs bear testimony to this. In spite of the recent increase, there is still a long runway ahead, considering that overall equity penetration in India is barely 5%. Direct participation in equities may not be the best way to go. A recent study by SEBI showed that 89% of individual traders in the equity F&O segment incurred losses, with an average loss of Rs 1.11 lakh during FY22. Excessive risk taking by investors dabbling in direct equity




In spite of the recent increase, there is still a long runway ahead, considering that overall equity penetration in India is barely 5%. Increase in depth of equity markets is critical for India's growth aspirations. Mutual Funds, investing in a wide array of instruments like Equities, Debt, Commodities, REITs, InvITs etc can play a key role here.

is fraught with risk. A more prudent way of investing in equities is through wide array of Mutual Funds and with a long-term horizon.

Increase in depth of equity markets is critical for India's growth aspirations. Mutual Funds, investing in a wide array of instruments like Equities, Debt, Commodities, REITs, InvITs etc can play a key role here. To meet India's ambitious infrastructure development and growth objectives, there is a huge need of risk capital, which could be met through domestic as well as foreign flows. While foreign flows into equities here are more than welcome, they tend to be volatile and expose the equity market to the risk of capital flight during tough times. Robust domestic equity flows make the equity market less susceptible to shocks from foreign capital flight.

Strong domestic equity flows

can also encourage foreign investors, as the counterbalancing stability provided by domestic flows can provide another dimension for foreign investors looking to invest here. Over the years, foreign investors have viewed India as one of the preferred investment destinations, owing to favourable macros and diverse bottom-up stock-picking opportunities at the micro level. Stability provided by domestic flows can provide the third element of interest for foreign investors.

In view of the above, it is imperative that policy environment remains conducive for encouraging investment in long-term assets like equities, through investment vehicles like Mutual Funds. All said and done, while we focus on indigenization of various aspects of our economy, we would do well to not overlook the importance of domestic risk capital in making the nation economically, and our population financially 'Aatmanirbhar'. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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TIME FOR CORRECTIVE ACTION; IT'S NOW OR NEVER!

This year's monsoon arrived on time and promise not to leave early. Across the western coast, in the hills and up in the north-east, they have brought disruption to life and property.



by NAVIN BERRY

It has rained, and rained, and rained. Like not never before, but unlike in the recent past. But what it has done is to expose many weaknesses in our system that most of knew or suspected, but there was no one to 'bell the cat'. There have been dissenting voices, but these have been ignored. Let me emphasise, it is not any one single political party that one should blame. It is not that time to say what happened in one regime, what happened in another. It has been a consistent systemic failure, our greed to grab what we can, at the lowest cost, if not for free. It is avarice of another degree, that takes into account many unholy alliances between builders, planners, politicians, and most notably the end

Let us make a clean break from the past, no mud slinging in any quarter, no blame games, no casting aspersions. So, what do we do! It is a government call, a call from the government of the day! To say, enough is enough, we must set our house in order.

users. We are all ready to cut corners, wherever we can!

Let us look back at some recent videos that grabbed the national headlines. There was one of the full house, uprooted at its basic foundation, showing there was none in fact – it just got swept away, full house intact. There were many videos where

slight overflow of the rivers showed how houses had been built blatantly on the river bed itself. We also saw how entire hillsides just collapsed, into thin air, so fragile was the depth at which they were set.

Not any of this can be explained and blamed on climate change. This is something different. Yes, there is climate change in the air. Rains and fires are being reported globally, temperatures are soaring in Europe and elsewhere, so are floods. Climate is becoming unpredictable. In fact, these have become somewhat more common sights around the world.

Yes, it is also true that nobody can plan for every extreme weather outburst. There are always limits, in every society. This downpour exceeded all limits, it was truly unprecedented.

Having said that, have we respected any limits to our greed – whether it be Nature, building norms referring to safety both for ourselves and for those around us. We have not! Indeed, we should have. Should we start doing so from now onwards?

So, while we can keep crying hoarse, it is more important to get down to some serious business, for once. Let us make a clean break from the past, no mud slinging in any quarter, no blame games, no casting aspersions. So, what do we do! It is a government call, a call from the government of the day! To say, enough is enough, we must set our house in order. It is a humungous task, not an easy one. So, what can we do, as a society?

Accept that we cannot live in fear of safety. That we have flouted norms, and we need to set right what

we have wronged. Let us make an example of say a dozen roads, some into the interiors and some on the national highways, I would say more in the interiors that disrupted life and living. Let us do an audit, conducted by crack teams, hopefully who are above influence and will deliver. What has been built with or without permissions on where no building should have come up, should be demolished. Given a month to vacate or else demolished, just like that, it is time bulldozers did something good, for a change.

There should be another safety audit of what has been built along the slopes of hills. Take the Dharampur-Garkhal road in Kasauli, the last few years have witnessed so much construction, one has no idea of what the sanctions were, with what kind of engineering, etc. These should be signalled out by an independent audit; those that have flouted dealt with severely, and made an example of. Government must act, in unison with the centre, and ensure people live safe lives.

All new constructions, or those yet incomplete, there should be a stop, or ban or both. Until this audit approves them. Decisive and swift action is the need of the hour. Where we have sliced through the slope, we must seek remedial measures, if need be, from international consultants who have faced similar situations. Best is to acknowledge we could have done better, and start doing it.

Says Avay Shukla in his article in HillPost, "it took Nature just one cataclysmic week in Himachal to reclaim the spaces which Man had been encroaching upon for decades, both in the river valleys and the mountain slopes. Our anthropogenic footprints in these areas have been overwhelming, much more than what Nature can sustain and repair. Different digits of this footprint - illegal and legal mining, building construction on steep slopes and the rivers' flood plains, hydel projects with their attendant blasting and muck dumping, road construction and widening, deforestation of thousands of trees - all these coalesced in this one week of July and triggered a reaction by the elements which should have been expected."

All the elements that have gone into our self-destruction are here! All



The capital and NCR under siege!

The problem has been severe in the capital, of another kind, where excess rain waters have entered huge parts, virtually cutting off road and life. Life had come to a standstill, in many parts of the Millenium City, and elsewhere in Greater Noida. Not again for the first time, it is the same areas that have been built recently, without sufficient thought to excessive rain water flows.

"What we need is to is simple create 200 m long and 20-30 m wide water harvesting pits in all low-lying areas. These when created will help in recharging the ground water. As well as help in dewatering the excess rain flow. Once it is done, this would be a win-win situation for everyone. We will have enough ground water to enable us to meet water supply requirements. It will avoid flooding, thereby save precious pavements from being


damaged. It will bring a substantial saving in maintenance, plus ensure there is no inconvenience to life", says Kiran K. Kapila, chairman, ICT and former co-chairman, FICCI National Committee on Infrastructure.

Kapila shared with us that he had made a presentation on this subject to the Delhi government, some eight years ago. It was appreciated but never acted upon. Very clearly, we move from one crisis to another, hoping we will not have to encounter the same one again. It is over, but it continues to haunt us, every few years. The sight of Delhi, around the Yamuna bed, became the favourite of short video makers. There were videos taking you on river cruises showing off sights and sounds of the capital, and where roads exist, they were plying in boats!

these need to be looked into.

Shukla goes on to say: "The four-lane highway between Parwanoo and Dharampur also no longer exists: after spending Rs.4000 crores and ten years on converting a two lane into a four lane we are now left with the original two-lane highway! The cause here is not a river but a mountain slope, that was widened by cutting vertically into the mountain slopes, sometimes as much as 15 to 20 metres."

"My most fervent hope and prayer is that we learn from this catastrophe and change our engineering, planning and ambitions - that we

do not build again on the river beds, that we stop this four-lane madness, that we stop the blasting, tunnelling and vertical cutting of mountain sides, that we put a moratorium on further hydel projects," he writes. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, over five decades has edited publications like CityScan, India Debates and Travel Trends Today. He is the founder of SATTE, India's first inbound tourism mart, biggest in Asia.



HAVOC IN THE HILLS: WHEN WILL WE LEARN?

Nature has started reclaiming what was always rightfully hers. Respect that and do not provoke her again.



by KIRAN K KAPILA

The nation, and indeed in many parts of the world, there has been total shock at what destruction the incessant rains have caused to life and living. Can this all be blamed on climate change, as we are so often found doing? Brushing aside our own responsibility, passing the buck to issues arising out of climate change. The single biggest problem in our hill states has been caused by uncontrolled

“What we need to do is stop all hydel projects, stop vertical cutting of slopes, build no roads on flood zone and clear the debris and create say 200 m long and 20-30 m wide water harvesting pits, in all low-lying areas.”

blasting. This disturbs the eco-system and damages what Nature has built. First thing first, this should be stopped immediately. All else will follow.

Himachal has lost more than 110 lives, dozens of vehicles, hundreds of buildings and bridges, and many kilometres of roads. But one fact is clear – the maximum destruction of lives and public and private party has occurred in the river valleys of the Beas and Ravi, and along the two four laned arteries of the NHA – Parwanoo-Solan and Mandi-Manali. It is no coincidence that these are precisely the alignments where our policy makers have caused the maximum devastation of environment.

Illegal and legal mining, building construction on steep slopes and the rivers’ flood plains, hydel projects with their attendant blasting and muck dumping, road construction and widening, deforestation of thousands of trees. All scientific and expert warnings were ignored, and life went on as usual in the interests of ‘tourism’ and ‘development’.

The four-lane highway between Parwanoo and Dharampur also no longer exists: after spending Rs. 4000 crores and ten years on converting a two lane into a four lane we are now left with the original two-lane highway! The cause here is not a river but a mountain slope, and unprofessional engineering again. The original road was widened by cutting vertically into the mountain slopes, sometimes as much as 15 to 20 metres.

This constant road construction has generated millions of tonnes of muck which has just been dumped into the rivers, raising their beds,

“The four-lane highway between Parwanoo and Dharampur also no longer exists: after spending Rs. 4000 crores and ten years on converting a two lane into a four lane we are now left with the original two-lane highway! The cause here is not a river but a mountain slope, and unprofessional engineering again.”

constricting their width and reducing their carrying capacity. Just imagine, the Kiratpur-Manali four lane alone has 21 tunnels - where do you think all that excavated muck has gone? We have been given to understand they have been dumped in landfills at an enormous cost involved shown in estimates and paid to the contractors. There is considerable scepticism on how much this has been done; could these have been merely dumped in the nearest river or just rolled down the hill-side! Some short cuts, in haste to complete the projects fast as required of them.

Hydel projects too have played their part in the destruction. They obstruct the natural flow of these rivers, allow the building up of muck and sediment, and then release them in a torrent when they open their floodgates - it is this, rather than just the waters, which cause the maximum damage, especially to buildings and bridges, on impact. These dams are touted as flood control mechanisms, but in fact the opposite is true, at least on mountain rivers. They retain vast volumes of water (which is their revenue generation inventory, after all) till the last moment; when they release these waters, the consequences downstream are catastrophic; most of the flooding and destruction in Pandoh Market and Mandi this time was caused by the opening of all five flood gates of the Pandoh Dam.

What we need to do is stop all hydel projects, stop vertical cutting of slopes, build no roads on flood



“Hydel projects too have played their part in the destruction. They obstruct the natural flow of these rivers, allow the building up of muck and sediment, and then release them in a torrent when they open their floodgates.”

zone and clear the debris and create say 200 m long and 20-30 m wide water harvesting pits, in all low-lying areas. These should also be created particularly when you are going up the hills. At the bottom of the road create the water harvesting pit. These, when created, will help in recharging the ground water, as well as help in dewatering the excessive rain flow. We need to provide these pits in all low-lying areas and I assure you, once it is done, it will be a win-win for everyone.

We will have enough ground water to enable us to meet the water supply requirements. It will also avoid flooding, thereby saving precious pavements from being damaged. It will result in substantial saving in maintenance funds, plus will ensure that there is no inconvenience to the citizens.

I am hopeful the Government will take note and thereafter implement these suggested measures to ensure we do not have such catastrophe again. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kiran Kapila is Chairman ICT, FIDIC Ambassador and former

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THE 'REAL' HANDBOOK ON INDIAN CUISINE MAKES ITS MARK

AS HOST PRIYA PAUL LAUDS THE EFFORT BEHIND ITS THOUGHT AND NARRATIVE



Sourish Bhattacharya with Aseem Chhabra and Priya Paul.

An exclusive DI REPORT

ASEEM CHABBRA: The book is such a treasure trove of information about food. It's something that you will dip into again and again, whether it is recipes on how to make certain dishes or history of some restaurants or history of India as such, with invaders and other things and foods, they brought, iconic restaurants, iconic hotels. It's just so, so fascinating. So, just give us a sense of how does a book like this get put together?

SOURISH: Colleen is here. And Pawan Agarwal is right here. He was then the FSSAI CEO. He is responsible for getting Colleen and me together. I had just read Colleen, I had not known her personally, but it was Mr. Agarwal who first connected us.

COLLEEN: This book goes back 15 years when we had a proposal to Oxford University Press for a similar book. Well, what happened is we

Bloomsbury has published this important milestone book of Indian cuisine, edited by Colleen Taylor Sen, Sourish Bhattacharya and Helen Saberi. At its launch at The Park in New Delhi, food enthusiasts got together to hear a conversation around the book, with the authors sharing their perspective. Participants included Priya Paul, chairperson, The Park Hotels; Sourish Bhattacharya, columnist and food writer; anchor for the evening, Aseem Chhabra, author and commentator and a host of contributors who could attend the event.

went through all the rigmarole, and it went all the way up. And then at the last minute, when the contract was ready, Oxford cancelled it. They cancelled their entire food series, not just this book. So when, Sourish approached me, I said, we already have kind of a proposal in place, so let us start with that.

But the difference is that 15 years ago, there weren't that many really excellent writers about Indian food that you have now. So, this time we were able to draw upon this wonderful pool of expertise, these great writers that both Sourish and I knew, and I think that's what really made the book a success.

SOURISH: We have truly a range of contributors. We have the youngest who's sitting right in front. He's now 18 years old. Wow. He wrote the Tamil section. His father is Tamil and his father is now happy to promote vegan cuisine which unfortunately we did not touch a lot on in the book. And then we have people like Priya Mani, who is a well-known writer who wrote the Rites of Passage section.



ASEEM: If you can give us some more details about the thought that went into the cities you selected, the restaurant that you wanted to touch upon.

SOURISH: What Colleen mentions in her introduction, I think makes a lot of sense. She says that this is the history, geography, and the present of Indian cuisine. You know, people like Priya Paul and her magnificent bank of Chefs, were defining modern Indian cuisine as we know it now. Actually, there is so much to write about India.

COLLEEN: We wanted to make sure we covered all the Indian states, because that's something that hadn't been done. And we wanted to do as many cities as possible. But in the sense, we were partly constrained by the availability of who could write about these things. We didn't just want any odd person write about something they didn't know. So, we really relied a lot on the expertise of the writers. Now I know there's things we left out and there are other things we could cover, but I think the book is a good mix of kind of factual information and really profiles of some interesting personalities. So, I think we tried to get a balance between really encyclopedia facts and human-interest stories. And I hope we succeeded.

ASEEM: More than succeeded. I mentioned Iranian restaurant. Did anyone here ever think about the fact that why in Bombay - all the Iranian restaurants are always at the corner of the street? It is mentioned in the book that apparently it was considered bad luck among Hindu restaurant owners and probably other religions.

SOURISH: What they call the gomukh plot of land. Even in Delhi, you know it is considered not an suspicious location to have, you know, so the Iranis did not believe in all this, so they happily took over these corners and they thrived after that. It is of course a lot more noticeable.

ASEEM: Tell me about the cities that you cover and the range of them. I mean Lucknow, Varanasi and the bigger cities. Tell me how you went about that?

SOURISH: Between Colleen and I, we did a lot thinking about that. You know, because we did, for instance, Banaras. But why do we leave something else, say Rampur. We did Hyderabad but why did we leave something in Kerala? We were bound by the number of words, so we went for the most important cities from a food perspective.

COLLEEN: Well, the interesting thing was that the one we almost neglected, the last one we did, the last entry was Calcutta. And for some reason, I don't know what happened. We asked people, and it, it just didn't happen. I thought, oh my God, you know, two people; one Bengali and one semi-Bengali. And I think that was the last entry we actually wrote for the book.

SOURISH: Why not bring in our youngest contributor here and see the writing from his perspective and the whole experience?

“The book is such a treasure trove of information about food. It's something that you will dip into again and again, whether it is recipes on how to make certain dishes or history of some restaurants or history of India as such.”

Aseem Chhabra

“I think we tried to get a balance between really encyclopedia facts and human-interest stories. And I hope we succeeded.”

Coleen Taylor Sen

“You know, people like Priya Paul and her magnificent bank of Chefs, were defining modern Indian cuisine as we know it now. Actually, there is so much to write about India.”

Sourish Bhattacharya

THE TAMIL CUISINE SECTION

SURYA KUMAR: It was really an amazing opportunity for me. I was able to connect with my Tamil heritage and culture in more nuance and different perspective.

For me, I wrote a lot about my understanding and my culture and heritage, which was through my grandmother from Chennai. She cooked us vegetarian Tamil Iyer food every single day. So, a lot of those recipes I cooked with her when I was in Chennai doing research for the book. I was there for a month cooking the recipes every single day and trying to understand how it was made. So, I have featured many of those household recipes in the book. Apart from that, I was able to learn from my aunt and her as well, the historical significance of what I was eating. A big part of our community, the Iyer community, is to be sustainable since the Vedic period. So that was a big part of our culture till day. About Tamil

Nadu I have been able to learn how many different communities there really are. And I did a lot of research about Biryani. Because there were so many different types of communities, each with different ingredients and historical experiences, perspectives and livelihoods. So, it was very interesting to see Tamil Nadu as a more of a symbiotic stage.

ALCOHOL MATTERS

PRASUN CHATTERJEE: You know, there's always this sort of criticism of historians that they do not often connect from their academic world to a wider leadership. So, this was my opportunity to write in that manner. I had an article on alcohol which was an academic essay. But this was the opportunity to make it wider, connect with everyone.

So I had earlier specialized on 17th century, and when I started looking into the early Indian past, when I started looking at the colonial Raj era, I found that a lot of writing about alcohol either went towards fact finding, or it went towards, the modern Indian debates about prohibition and other things. But no one really thought about the experiences, the stories we have across sources, across literature and how to really treat them. So, if you see my essay, my engagement was to actually look at the sources, as historians say, and what kind of questions we can ask of that. Not everything is linear, in early times in India, there was a sort of a scepticism about drinking alcohol or now it's very liberal.

It's not like that. There are ambivalences in attitudes all the time in our societies and in our cultures, in our communities. So, when we look at the sources, we find these ambivalences, you'll find ambivalences in attitudes. On the one hand, you would see Zia Uddin Berdani who is advising the Sultan of Delhi as to how to rule. And Islam really does not prescribe the drinking of alcohol. But on the other hand, he advises the Sultan that he shouldn't drink too much because that's likely to create problems in his ranks. But on the other hand, if he on the battlefield does not create those opportunities for his soldiers to have a little bit of fun, then there could be a rebellion.

SOURISH: We Bengalis have grown up, uh, listening to the chat part. And there is a great description of Ma Durga being offered alcohol by Lord Shiva, and she has that alcohol and she's in a such a state of frenzy that she would just kill every Asura that comes in a way.

ASEEM: So, there is this indication towards power violence, forcing something, through the use of alcohol. But on the other hand, there are stories which indicate towards the pleasure, the kind of atmosphere that is created, in our community while drinking alcohol. So, these



ambivalences, these ways of looking at our sources also tell us that when we encounter something from the 5th century or 13th century, we should not take it at face value. We should, we should look at what it means, why the writer says certain things in a certain context. And that is perhaps not exactly how it is today. So often we make the mistake of quoting something from an earlier time and thinking that that's exactly how it is today.

There are references to wine. You talk about Dutch and the KamaSutra courts where wine keeps reoccurring as an alcohol choice. And yet in the modern India that we know, it's only in the upper class now, that go to five-star hotels or restaurants that order. And it's the perception that Punjabis prefer whiskey. So, tell us about why wine didn't pick up really that well, as Scotch Whiskey did.

SOURISH: There is a lovely description of Thomas Rose. You know, when he met Jehangir when he came as ambassador of the East India company, he was not being given access to Jehangir. So, then he had carried with him wine from Britain and offered it to him and wooed him and got him to sign his papers for the Surat factory and that was the beginning of the British Raj.

THE BOOK AND HOSPITALITY BUSINESS

ASEEM: There was always a culture of imported wine. You're in the hospitality business, right? More Indians in your hotel ask for whiskey, right? Than wine.

PRIYA PAUL: I feel that the younger generation is a mix of white alcohol of course. Wine is a great fast going category. And because we're now



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Surya Kumar

“If you see my essay, my engagement was to actually look at the sources, as historians say, and what kind of questions we can ask of that. Not everything is linear, in early times in India, there was a sort of a scepticism about drinking alcohol or now it's very liberal.”

Prasun Chatterjee

producing so much, at different price change. Indian wines are also being consumed now and a small fraction of imported wines.

ASEEM: Being in the hospitality business... when you have students to come and join your hotel management programme in Mumbai, where do you see this book fit it?

PRIYA PAUL: We have that in Navi Mumbai. But apart from the hospitality students, I think for all professionals, there's so much to learn from this book. Professionals, foodies, people who are interested. I have just delved little bits and pieces. So, it really takes off from Dr. Chaya's book and it is updated. It's an amalgamation of beautiful writing from top people who are experts on their cultures and on the cuisine. And, of course, the historical restaurants that have been at the forefront in India.

SOURISH: I always wanted to ask you this question, but when did Flurry come into the Park Hotel bouquet?

PRIYA PAUL: Flurry's was started 1927 by Mr. & Mrs. Flurry's. And I think the rumour and gossip is that they were about to retire and wanted to leave India in the early sixties, I would say 1963. And I think the rumour is that they were walking on Park Street and so was my uncle Jit Paul, and they struck a deal on the street. Their factory was right behind what is now the Park Hotel. And The Park was under construction at that time. It has always been there.

RICE MATTERS

TANUSHREE: I contributed three chapters – West Bengal, Assam and Rice.

I will talk a bit about rice because both Assam and West Bengal will feature when we talk about rice. The rice chapter is based on about

six years of my research on rice. I am a development worker by professional. So, as I travel across India, I come across a lot of farmers, rice farmers, indirectly, indirectly.

And we're a heavily rice eating country, like 60% of the population eats rice. And I am a Bengali from Assam. West Bengal is the largest producer of rice in our country. Interestingly when we look at rice. And that's what struck me is that, you know, Southeast Asia documents its rice history so beautifully. You find so much document about rice in Southeast Asia. There's hardly anything written about rice in India, especially about the antiquity of rice. And that's how I started my food research. Otherwise, I dwell on Vedic to mediaeval Indian food. And there's so much reference embedded in this text about rice. And that's where I started looking at antiquity of rice in our Vedic text. And it's very interesting now because it's like the past three or four years when we are at a place when our archaeologists are coming to this realization that rice cultivation in India, in fact, multi cropping of rice in India is probably the first multi cropping in the world. The archaeological sites up in U.P are the first to examples of multi cropping of rice, wheat, millet, sesame,



all of them together. So, it was an interesting journey to just distil all of that. And I'll just share with you a bit of trivia which features in the book. And I find it interesting that a lot of the varieties that are mentioned in these texts pretty early on, starting from the Atharva Ved when we first find the mention of rice, I mean, growing of rice in India is from 6,000 BC. That's when rice was being grown. Cultivation of rice is from 2000 BC. We are a pretty old rice growing culture. But the first mention of rice comes in the Atharva Ved as Vrihi which is the Sanskrit word for rice. By 900 – 800BC is when rice prominently starts featuring. But how important rice is to us culturally, I think nothing says that better than the first Sutra of Mahayama Buddhism in India, called the Shali stupa sutra translated, it means a stock of paddy. That is how significant it is to us culturally and for our ritualistic and religious matters. In fact, I think most of the major classification of rice, we come to it by the time we come to the Arthashastra we find the mention of black rice, basmati and red rice and Navara which is the oldest wild rice variety, which is still being consumed. In fact for my research, I work with a very traditional healer from Tamil Nadu and they still prescribe navara for healing purposes, especially to women through their various stages in life.

DIASPORA

ASEEM: Colleen, I remember there was in NY a little hole in the wall restaurant, you know, you could barely even notice it. And there was this African American woman who was, you know, quite old even at that point of, I don't know if she's still alive or not, we used to run the place, but she used to make the best Paranthas.

You couldn't eat there. It was too dark. And one time I asked her, I said, how'd you learn this? And she pointed to a photograph of a man on the wall. Looked like a general or something like that. With a moustache. He was a Bangladeshi and she was actually married to him. And it is very interesting how food passed on.

COLLEEN: Yeah, that's very true. There was certainly a lot of Bengali settlers who, they were based actually in New Orleans, and gradually


“One of the reasons I am passionately interested in this book is, is to really look at ingredients across India, the forgotten ones, the ones you see in somewhere in the Nilgiris and you don't see anywhere else in the country.”

Priya Paul

they went north and there was another group of Bengalis who jumped ship and then were in New York. They couldn't bring their wives over. So, they married African-American and Puerto Rican women. And even when I was at Columbia University, oh my God, this was in like the late sixties. There was still a few of these little restaurants around Harlem, which was near Columbia that were run by these people. But they have all pretty much closed down now. But they were really pretty good. I mean, they were a little bit more authentic than some of the restaurants that we have.

ASEEM: The other story of the diaspora, is there was Sikhs who came from I guess Canada, many of them and sort of crossed over into, from Vancouver across into California, through Washington, Oregon State because, and California has that very agricultural land. You know, in the early 1990s and for quite a while, the laws did not allow immigrants who would arrive to bring their own wives as such. So many of them married Mexican women. So, not only did they have children who were half Sikh and half Mexican, but again, the food was mixed and emerged and evolved as such. It was really interesting.

COLLEEN: Yeah, absolutely, and really there is so many convergences between Mexican and Indian food. And in fact, here in Chicago some of the Indian restaurants actually have Mexican cooks. And I don't think it's that hard for them to do real Indian food. There's a lot of similarities though.

PRIYA PAUL: *One of the reasons I am passionately interested in this book is, is to really look at ingredients across India, the forgotten ones, the ones you see in somewhere in the Nilgiris and you don't see anywhere else in the country. How do we share that knowledge and how do we share this with everybody? And the rice stories are beautiful. And now of course we are going through the year of the millets.* 

ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



DIAL's Exclusive Lounge for Business and First-Class Travelers Now Open at Terminal-3

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), has opened "Encalm Privé," a world-class business class lounge at Delhi Airport's Terminal 3. With its elegant design, extensive amenities, and exceptional services, this niche lounge facility seeks to enhance the overall travel experience for esteemed guests. Presently, it spans 22,000 sq. ft. approximately, but once fully operational it will be 30,000 sq. ft., making it the biggest lounge facility in India.

BCCI: MILES TO GO BEFORE WE SLEEP!

The BCCI was in the news recently once again - this time for getting the lion's share of US \$ 230 mn from the annual revenue of the ICC totaling US \$ 600 mn. This amounted to 38.5% of the overall ICC kitty. The sheer volume of the money received by the BCCI, whose coffers are already overflowing, raised the hackles of many. Quite predictably, other cricket boards - mainly that of Pakistan - protested, challenging the ICC formula that decides on who gets how much.



by NEERAJ KUMAR

BCCI is easily the richest cricketing body in the world with a reported net worth of \$2.25 billion with Cricket Australia at the second position with \$79 million. It is also one of the most prosperous sporting bodies in the world. While it should surely be a matter of pride for all of us that our central governing body is as rich as it is, we also deserve to know how this huge corpus is utilized.

Sharply divergent ideas are mooted on how best to use these funds. One suggestion is: why can't the BCCI come to the rescue of other games in the country that are starved of funds. Can portions of it be channeled into other sports like badminton, volleyball, basketball or kabaddi that suffer from paucity of resources? Or should the funds be spent on cricket itself? This author's personal view is that given the overall situation a lot remains to be done to promote cricket in the country in a more systematic and concerted manner. Therefore, the

What is required is a well-thought out and well researched road map for the BCCI to spend its vast financial resources for a holistic development of the game. India should not only be the leading cricketing nation in the world but also the torchbearer in setting high standards of cricket management in all its complexities.

money, in all fairness, is best spent on cricket itself.

Let us not get lulled into believing that all is well with the game just because of the success of the IPL and the vast surplus of BCCI's financial reserves. The game requires a far more comprehensive ecosystem to ensure that it nurtures talent on a sustained basis so that we never run short of great performers at the world stage.

After all, how can we lose sight of the fact that we have not won a single ICC world championship since the 2011 ODI World Cup. Why is it that we always falter at the last stage of such tournaments, as it happened in the World Test Championship recently, and are found wanting in one department of the game or another during crunch moments? Are there some crying needs of the game that need to be met? Here are some suggestions:

Very little is done to promote grassroots level cricket. Great talents like Yashasvi Jaiswal or Rinku Singh that the IPL showcases every year, are all rags to riches wonder stories. They have come around on their own, with zero intervention from any resource. They have all played cricket barefoot in their formative years, led lives of grinding poverty, fighting every odd under the sun to make it to the top. The day has come when the BCCI may consider formulate talent spotting programs to identify such talents, have scholarships to support and nurture them right from the beginning. Also, assistance to local associations and clubs would help improve the quality of cricket at the grassroots level and help to identify and develop new talent.

Cricketing infrastructure in the country needs to be developed to match the image of the country internationally. We surely are the leading cricketing nation in the world but are our stadia, cricket academies and support systems anywhere near the best? The BCCI should never forget that every penny that reaches



Yashasvi Jaiswal

its coffers comes from the pocket of the vast number of cricket fans in the country and from overseas. The Board, therefore, needs to provide much better spectating facilities to the fans who throng the stadia in lakhs to watch the game. Cleaner toilets, better seating, availability of clean drinking water and quality food, better parking facilities, etcetera, should be on the top of the agenda of the Board. New cricket grounds and stadia in mofussil towns would reach the sport to the millions who cannot afford to visit bigger cities to play or witness the game.

The Board needs to support women's cricket in a big way. Women's Cricket Associations need financial support which would help to improve the quality of women's cricket in India and would help to improve the profile of the game among women and girls.

Corruption in cricket in India is a major problem that needs to be addressed. It mars the image of the game and its players. Shocking scams are unearthed from time to time that bring a bad name to the game. A lot needs to be done to keep this menace under check. The BCCI need to augment the resources of its Anti-Corruption & Security Unit (ACSU) in a big way, both in terms of manpower and its technical resources. Assistance of international corruption fighting entities like SPORTRADAR should be taken. Today betting, fixing and communication related thereto have all gone virtual, making countermeasures that much more difficult. The

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ACSU needs to upgrade its technical expertise to meet the challenge for which the BCCI need to fund them.

The BCCI should promote research in the field of cricket. There should be grants for research projects in universities which are cricket specific. Our country should take the lead in this direction.

Video analytics are the order of the day. If a sportsperson wants to take his game to the next level he/she has to take assistance of this technical tool. While this is already being done at the top levels, this facility has to be made available at state and junior levels also. This requires money that the BCCI can easily provide.

BCCI funds the National Cricket Academy at Bengaluru that is providing yeoman service to the sport. Such academies and training institutions are required at regional levels so that quality coaching can be given to players at the regional levels also. Financial resources with the BCCI are best spent in creating such institutions in the country.

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What is required is a well-thought out and well researched road map for the BCCI to spend its vast financial resources for a holistic development of the game. India should not only be the leading cricketing nation in the world but also the torchbearer in setting high standards of cricket management in all its complexities. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neeraj Kumar

is former Commissioner Delhi Police; Joint Director, CBI and former Head of Anti Corruption & Security Unit, BCCI. He has authored best selling books and is distinguished commentator on television.

OULD INDIA'S FRAGRANT GIFT TO HUMANITY

The scent synonymous with the Sheikhs, originated in India. We explore the saga of Oud, that protective resin that has come to be known as agarwood.



Exotic Arabian perfume oils to layer.

by KRISHNARAJ IYENGER

Dashing past in a split second, he leaves you spell bound as aromas of musk accompanied by woody, spicy overtones escape his sparkling white robe. Even several minutes past roaring away in his silver Hummer, the aromas hang in the air, creating olfactory magic in the five star atrium. You can't help but soak them in!

Apart from dune-bashing and the glass and concrete glitz, one subtly captivating experience visitors to Dubai often cherish, is that of the perfumes of the city's indigenous rich! However, that magical scent the Arabs of the Gulf have passionately obsessed over for centuries, finds its origins in the verdant wonderland of Assam. The ancient Sanskrit texts call it 'Agar', in Arabic, it's 'Oud' or simply, 'wood'. Today, oud

is a newfound fascination among fragrance aficionados globally.

Even Shakespeare couldn't resist a reference to the 'perfumes of Arabia' when in Macbeth, Lady Macbeth cries "...all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand", referring to the intense exoticism Arabia's perfumes owe, to the magic of oud!

Historic Musings

"Several millennia ago, our ancients first discovered agar or agarwood as a versatile fragrant ingredient that possessed both, the power to enchant with its unique aromas, and to heal with its inherently medicinal properties" explains veteran perfumer Mr. Mukul Gundhi.

At his 207 year-old quaint heritage perfumery Gulabsingh Johrimal 1816 in Old Delhi's bustling Dariba Kalan, a viscous, deep black oil finds place in an ornate Belgian-cut perfume jar. "The Arabs call this oil Dahn Al Oud or 'fat of the wood'" he explains. The west, he says, calls it 'liquid gold'. "While agarwood is a pivotal ingredient in Arabian perfumery, Ayurveda talks about its medicinal value. It is also mentioned in the Bruhad Samhita and the Ashtagandh"

The magical scent the Arabs of the Gulf have passionately obsessed over for centuries, finds its origins in the verdant wonderland of Assam. The ancient Sanskrit texts call it 'Agar', in Arabic, it's 'Oud' or simply, 'wood'. Today, oud is a newfound fascination among fragrance aficionados globally. Even Shakespeare couldn't resist a reference to the 'perfumes of Arabia' in Macbeth.



The unwanted non-resinous part being removed from an agarwood log.



Renowned oud distiller Tajul Islam Bakshi examining an Agarwood tree.

says Mr. Gundhi. Leathery, animalic, spicy, woody and musky, the oil's unusual scent profile is captivating as it grows on you with even just a dab on the skin.

It is believed that during the Indus Valley Civilization, the process of distilling natural fragrant materials to acquire perfume oil was first discovered. Agarwood is native to Assam and also to Cambodia, Thailand and other South East Asian regions. However, Indian oud finds mention also in the Islamic Hadith as 'Oud Al Hindi'. The Old Testament speaks about it as 'Aloes' or 'Aloeswood'. The world's oldest-known agarwood source remains India.

Labour of Love

In the endless lush green expanse of Assam, the most sought-after tree species is the *Aquilaria Agallocha*. When infection or injury strikes the tree, it secretes a protective resin which turns into agarwood.

One of the world's most respected agarwood distillers is Assam-based Mr. Tajul Islam Bakshi of Assam Aromas. Specializing in sophisticated artisanal oud, he believes that it takes herculean effort and grueling labor to give birth to this mystical scent. "Oud is today, considered the world's most exotic fragrance, not only by the Arabs but the world-over. I have clients from all faiths, nationalities and backgrounds who even wear the oil and burn the wood as incense, purely for meditation" he says. Oud, he believes, finds mention in nearly all cultures and is 'humanity's fragrant binder'.

"When the sick tree is harvested, the resinous and non-resinous parts are separated. The most resin-rich part goes through a finishing process and its chips are sold as incense which the Arabs call 'Bakhoor'. 'Curving dust' consisting of both resinous and non-resinous parts, is

“The most resin-rich part goes through a finishing process and its chips are sold as incense which the Arabs call 'Bakhoor'. 'Curving dust' consisting of both resinous and non-resinous parts, is distilled to yield the oil or Dahn Al Oud.”

Tajul Islam Bakshi

distilled to yield the oil or Dahn Al Oud. Since the chips cost more than the oil, distilling all the resinous part would be economically unfeasible." Mr. Bakshi explains.

A Global Aroma

Agarwood trees are also found in Assam's neighboring north eastern states like Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Nagaland. Many of them are said to be over a century old. Although it takes years, sometimes decades for a tree to be infected by nat-



Traditional distillation method for oud extraction.

Indian Oud as its globally known, has spread its ethereal aromas beyond India's boundaries over the years. Notwithstanding the export of agarwood falling under the regulations of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), India and the Middle East have enjoyed a longstanding trade relationship.

ural causes, the process of artificially infecting a tree through inoculation is often practiced, for quicker commercial yield.

It is believed that there are a few thousand agarwood distillers in Assam, the seat of agarwood production. Here, it is considered a sustainable cottage industry that employs nearly a lakh of people from the local population, providing them with livelihood. These are highly trained and skilled workers specializing in the various stages of the process. Although afforestation remains a debated topic, many in the industry speak about replantation.

While there are numerous agarwood plantations owned by the distillers themselves, many distillers offer services to plan-



Rare artisanal oud by master distiller Tajul Islam Bakshi.



Arabian classics by Ajmal-Mukhallat Hadaya and Dahn Al Oudh.

tation owners who complete the harvesting and pre-distillation processes before sending them for distillation.

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There was a time when, from the 70's until the late 90's, Mumbai (formerly Bombay) was the agarwood hub. White robes and bright red Shemaagh headscarves merging with Colaba's kaleidoscope of black and yellow cabs, the grey Arabian sea and the multicolored bazaars was never a surprising sight. In the economic capital's fragrance markets of Nagdevi Street and Muhammad Ali Road, Arabs from the GCC countries would flock to purchase agarwood. Today however, the hub has moved to Dubai.

Although Indian agarwood, as both, oil as well as wood, commands a lofty position on the shelves of fragrance boutiques all over Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, purchasing high-quality Indian oud and oud-based perfumes calls for a trip to the UAE for the sheer variety in perfumery innovation.

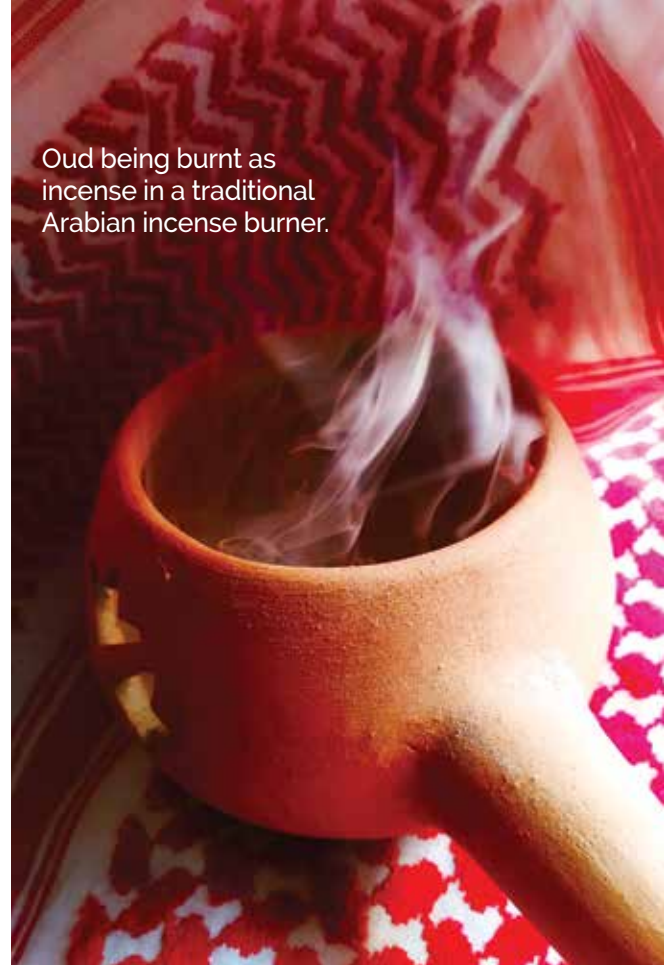
In recent times, internationally celebrated western brands like Tom Ford, Ralph Lauren, Armani and Chopard have made waves with their oud infatuation. No longer is 'oud' associated with Arab billionaires alone. "Today, every other high-end perfume coming out of the west bears oud on its label. French perfumers are making millions out of the oud tag. Their recent fascination for the rich, earthy aromas of our ancient fragrant treasure has inspired them to experiment with Dahn Al Oud and often, just an accord of it, or in other words, formulations that give the feeling of Indian oud in a perfume", Mr. Mukul Gundhi proudly smiles.

“Several millennia ago, our ancients first discovered agar or agarwood as a versatile fragrant ingredient that possessed both, the power to enchant with its unique aromas, and to heal with its inherently medicinal properties.”

Mukul Gundhi



Agarwood chips burnt over charcoal as incense.



Oud being burnt as incense in a traditional Arabian incense burner.

Painstaking Effort to Premium Luxury

For centuries, oud has been a way of life with the Gulf Arabs. Their ability to wear the heady, 'on-your-face' scent and carry it off with panache has been a subject of much awe. "We perfume everything with oud.. hair, beards, cars and clothes ! Since there is an Islamic tradition of wearing oud and even gifting it, oud has today become the Arab World's most high-end luxury product. Although Cambodian oud is gaining rapid popularity here, the most sought-after variety remains Indian oud" says senior Bahraini-Arab fragrance collector Mr. Abu Marwan.

Indeed, Indian oud is considered more expensive than gold. In India, one tola (approximately 12 ml) of premium quality high grade oil would cost anything between 15,000 to 35,000 INR. In the UAE, just 3ml of pure oud oil would cost anything between 250-850 AED (INR 5,000-19,000). The chips burnt as incense cost around a few lakh rupees a kilo. In addition to raw agarwood chips, 'muattar' incense in the form of artificially scented chips or agarwood powder are among the upper-crust oud products in the Middle East.


"In the Gulf, fragrance finds myriad expressions. Not only do Arab men and women wear Oud Al Hindi solo, they even layer it with their favorite fragrances in complex and intricate formulations. Through the art of blending Indian oud with complimenting notes like musk, amber, saffron and rose, they create hallmark 'Mukhallat' (Arabic for 'blended') fragrances. These have catapulted Middle Eastern fragrance brands to insurmountable success " explains Arab culture scholar Dr. Adel Ben Haj Yedder.

Indian oud has also played a pivotal role in oriental and now, French perfumery, adding grandeur to some of the world's most gilt-edged fragrance oils and perfumes. While in the Gulf, Dahn Al Oud and oud-based perfumes are considered a royal indulgence, western perfumers are dabbling with oud's powerful aromas to create among the world's most expensive perfumes sold today.

In the east, Gulf brands like the Saudi-based Abdul Samad Al Quraishi, Majid Iterji and Arabian Oud which boasts of a global presence, and UAE icons like Swiss Arabian and Al Haramain to name a few, have perfumed palaces with Indian oud. In the west, Tom Ford's celebrated Tobacco Oud, Armani's Eau de Nuit Oud, Chopard's Oud Malaki and Ralph Lauren's famed Polo Supreme Oud, though not apt examples of Indian oud per se, began the oud trend among the western masses in the last decade.

Oud has cast a spell even on perfume houses across Arabia's

neighbors. Turkey's legendary Eyup Sabri Tuncer 1923, that celebrates its centenary this year, has paid ode to this ancient scent with its classic Indian Oud , a play of rose, amber, musk and oud.

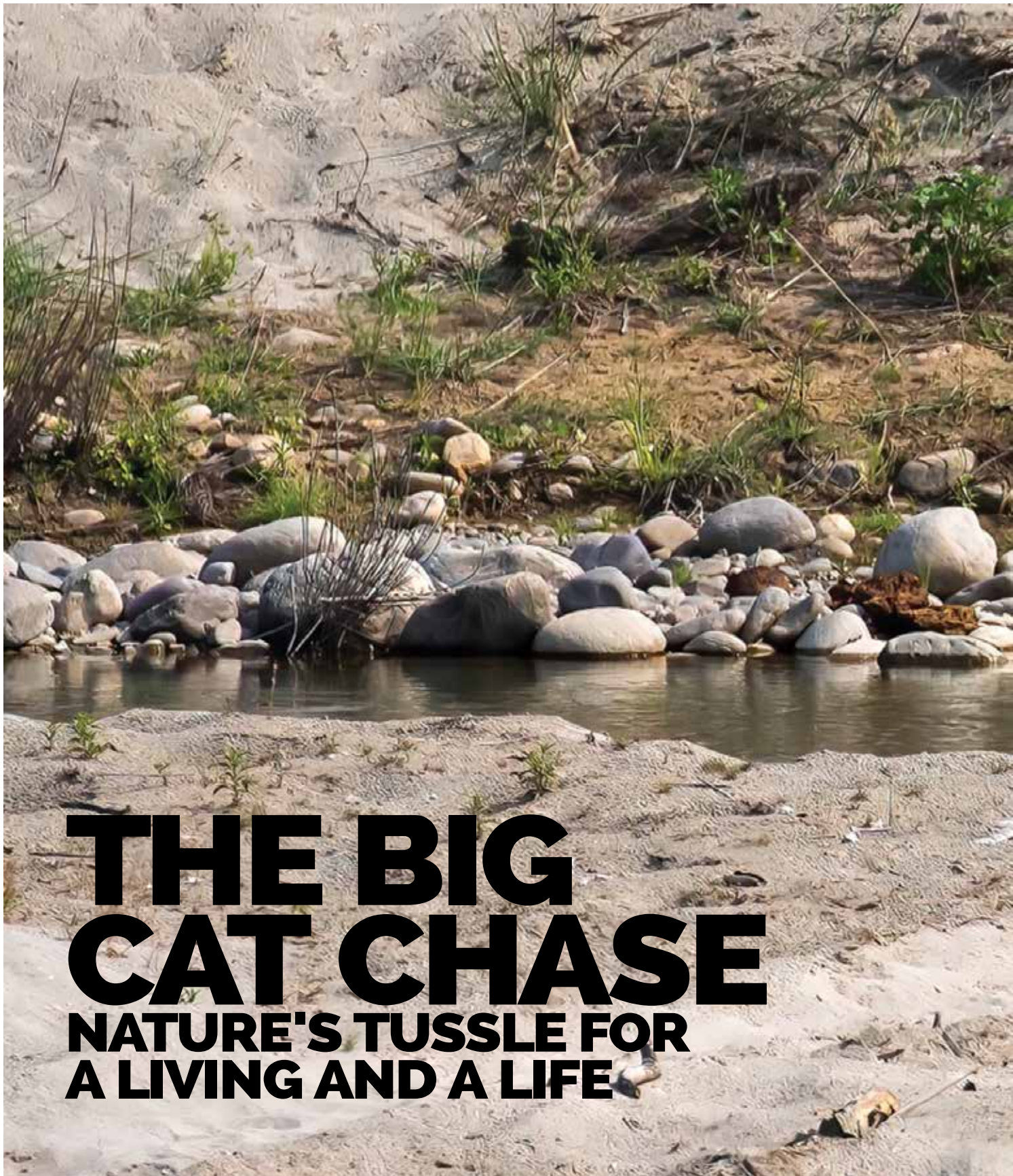
Through its poignant journey from an infected tree in Assam's hinterland to a millionaire's closet, Indian oud has surely captured hearts across cultures. Despite its unaffordability, this mysterious, towering scent has become a fashion statement and a status symbol among fragrance lovers the world over more than ever before in history. With ever whiff, we celebrate and salute the undying efforts of all the dedicated artisans who tireless strive to make the world's most exotic scent come alive! 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krishnaraj Iyengar is a passionate writer, polyglot, perfumer and musician. Along with pursuing independent writing,

he dabbles with fine fragrances and classical music. Being fluent in several Indian and international languages gives him a deeper cultural perspective to his diverse subjects.



THE BIG CAT CHASE

NATURE'S TUSSLE FOR
A LIVING AND A LIFE



29th July is celebrated every year as Global Tiger Day, to raise awareness about this magnificent but endangered big cat. The feature in this issue on The 'Big Cat' Chase.... is a tribute to the conservation efforts all over the world to protect this beautiful, very important apex predator as the survival of the entire ecosystem is dependent on him. At present there are around 3167 tigers in the wild in india. Tiger is the National Animal of india. Tigers in India constitute more than 70% of the global population of tigers in the wild. Project Tiger is a wildlife conservation project launched by the Government of India in April 1973, resulting in a steady and most successful increase in the population of tigers over the years.



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by DEVENDRA SINGH

Spread over 520 square kilometers, Corbett National Park is situated in Uttarakhand. Established in 1936 it was named Ram Ganga National Park in 1954 and thereafter renamed in the honour of Jim Corbett as Corbett National Park in 1957. The park is a paradise on earth hosting diverse flora, fauna, wildlife, butterflies, birds, and mammals. An added attraction is that it nurtures the highest population of Tigers, the most beautiful apex predator. Given the habitat and its occupants, amazing activities of Mother Nature happen every second, every minute and every day and the chance of it being repeated for a tourist is next to impossible. This is why all jungle shots are unique being life in motion.

I was lucky to capture on lens one such action-packed sequence of a great chase by a tiger.

Nature is amazing. Absolutely amazing, rather, no language is rich enough to describe it. What isn't on display here, in this experience? Prey, predator, camouflage, river, hunting

The chase began. Someone was running for his life and someone was running to kill for a living. What a game of mother nature!

technique, innocence, life, death, a very tense situation: prey unaware, predator unsure. A game of hide and seek game was being played out in front of us and the most wonderful thing was that one was there to witness it, courtesy one of the best teams of the park comprising Deepak Dhayani, guide along with driver Abdul Kayum.

It was the scorching heat of summer, the month of May when the sun beats down in all its fury and water source is scarce resulting in animals finding their way to the shrunken rivers in pursuit of shade and water. We stepped out in the afternoon for a safari. Our jeep through up mounds of dust as we approached the high banks of the river. Immediately, we spotted a tigress cooling herself in the river.

As we admired her, we sensed that her body had tensed up. A group

of deer were coming to the river, munching their way down and led by a male deer. This was ready prey for the predator.

The herd was fully ignorant about the predator who by now was in attack mode and waiting to pounce. The wind was blowing in the opposite direction i.e. from deer side towards the tiger so the herd was totally unaware of the danger lurking ahead. The herd continued its journey slowly towards the river and tiger while seeing the herd and the tigress further lowered herself in the water and took shelter behind the boulders lying on the banks of the river. There she patiently waited for over an hour for the opportune moment to strike. We waited in tension waiting for the suspense to get over and the strike to happen. Will she strike or not? When will she strike? Will the deer escape the attack? Such questions and more played on our minds while we downed down our bottles of water.

Then the moment we were all waiting for occurred! Ready to pounce on her identified prey who had reached within 10-15 feet of her, the tigress made a sudden movement

There is a clear Management lesson from nature, even if you are a King or the Queen you have to work hard to keep yourself alive.

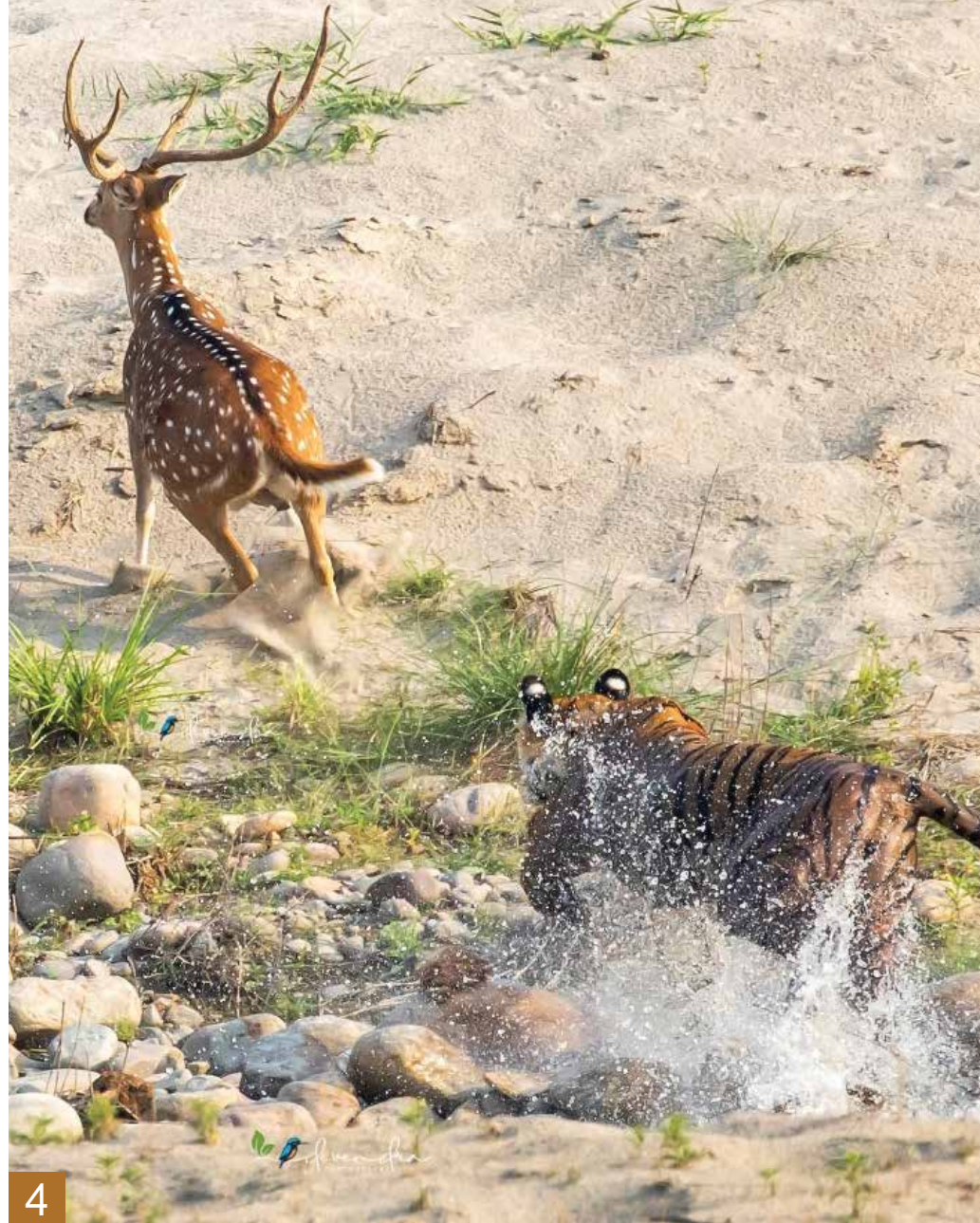
and got up. Water droplets splashed all over as she moved.

She stood up from the water and glanced at the prey..... Their eyes met and the tension in the mind and the muscles is very apparent in both the bodies. After all it is the game of life and death

Tension gripped both of them. Every part of the body was activated and the chase started. These are unique and unforgettable moments which won't get repeated.

The chase began. Someone was running for his life and someone was running to kill for a living. What a game of mother nature!

The chase continued, the drama rolled on, the hitherto silent jungle came alive with sounds, with this action packed drama. More than anything other sound, it was the



4

warning calls of the herd which were resounding in high decibel: a sound of alert and fear both.

Dust billowed from the ground with the sprinting of the male deer running for his life while water droplets sprinkled from the body of the tigress. These unforgettable moments starting unfolding in front of our eyes.

The drama continued but the long wait by both the parties i.e. us and tiger was over in a matter of a few seconds.

Suspense

.....what really happened after the chase. The male Deer survived and tigress had to try again. It normally takes around 8-10 attempts to get a prey. Obviously this attempt failed! Therefore there is a clear Management lesson from nature, even if you are a King or the Queen you have

to work hard to keep yourself alive.

These moments are happening everyday in Mother Nature. Soaking oneself in nature's lap changes you, modifies you, inspires you to become a better living being.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devendra Singh is a Photographer and

Environmentalist. He was a civil servant by profession and a nature lover by birth having grown up in lush green lands of Delhi. He now pursues photography as a full-time passion.

IPL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE VALUE HITS A RECORD US\$ 15.4 BILLION SAYS A HOULIHAN LOKEY IPL VALUATION STUDY 2023

Since its inception in 2008, the IPL has transcended the boundaries of traditional sports and established itself as a global phenomenon. Top-notch talent from around the world, unparalleled entertainment, and nail-biting competition has established the IPL has an enterprise to be reckoned with. Today, the IPL stands as a shining testament to the power of sports.



and is second only to the NFL.

In 2023, the lead broadcaster Viacom18, streamed the entire season for free on its OTT platform, JioCinema, which enabled it to set a new record for the highest concurrent viewership for a live-streamed event. Around 32 million viewers tuned in to watch the Gujarat Titans (GT) vs. CSK finale on JioCinema. In fact, the broadcaster broke the viewership record thrice this season, with 25 million viewers for the Qualifier 1 and 24 million viewers for the South Indian derby of CSK vs. Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB). It's not just JioCinema; television broadcasting partner Disney Star also saw the highest viewership numbers in the IPL's history, with a 482 million cumulative viewership

2022-US\$1.8 Billion 2023-US\$3.2 Billion	2022-US\$8.5 Billion 2023-US\$15.4 Billion
Brand Value 80% Growth	Business Enterprise Value 80% Growth

A Houlihan Lokey study in 2023 on the IPL Valuation reveals several interesting trends and facts.

The Business Enterprise Value has seen an 80% growth over last year and has now hit US\$15.4 Billion. The Study values the business of IPL using a variant of the income approach known as discounted cash flow (DCF), which is the present value of all future cash flows from the IPL as a business.

The study mentions a key reason

for the sharp increase in value to the cost of IPL media rights for 2023-2028. The media rights deal with JioCinema and Disney Star was three times the price of the 2017 five-year deal between Disney Star and the BCCI. The 2023-27 media rights for men's IPL was ₹48,390 crore, nearly 50 times higher than that of Women's IPL. When the IPL's broadcasting fee is compared with other professional leagues in the world on a per match basis, the IPL fares well above the likes of the NBA, EPL, and Bundesliga

for the first 66 matches as reported by BARC. Disney Star had more than 30 million viewers for each match, with a peak concurrency of 61 million for the second qualifier between the GT and Mumbai Indians (MI).

In this comprehensive brand valuation report, the study delves deep into the world of the IPL, uncovering the tremendous value it holds as both a business and a brand. This brand valuation report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the IPL's commercial significance, its

impact on the cricketing landscape, and its potential for future growth. The IPL's media rights have grown at a phenomenal CAGR of 18.0% from 2008 to 2023, while the growth in absolute terms between the 2017 and 2023 cycles is 196.0%.











Coming to the brand value of the IPL, the Lokey IPL Valuation Study mentions an 80% value growth from US\$1.8 billion in 2022 to US\$3.2 billion in 2023. The brand value of IPL is determined using a relief from royalty method (RFR). Under this method, royalty rate is expressed as a percentage of revenue where it is assumed that the IPL or the individual franchisees would have had to pay a royalty fee for the usage of the brand in a hypothetical scenario where they would have licensed it from a third party.

Chennai Super Kings has established itself as an iconic brand in the IPL. With a brand value of US\$212.0 million, growing year-on-year (y-o-y) at 45.2%, CSK is ranked No. 1 in both brand ranking and the business enterprise value ranking. Royal Challengers Bangalore is second in terms of brand and enterprise value ranking, with a brand value of US\$195.0 million, growing by 52.3% from 2022, surpassing Mumbai Indians. Mumbai Indians (MI), another hugely successful and popular team, is a close third on the table with a 2023 brand value of US\$190.0 million, growing by 34.8% from 2022 brand value of US\$141.0 million. The IPL franchisees have undoubtedly benefited from the renewed broadcast rights deal as well as the ever-increasing popularity of IPL globally.

The viewership heatmap of the IPL offers a fascinating insight into the preferences and trends of


A comparative study on the franchisees as a Brand

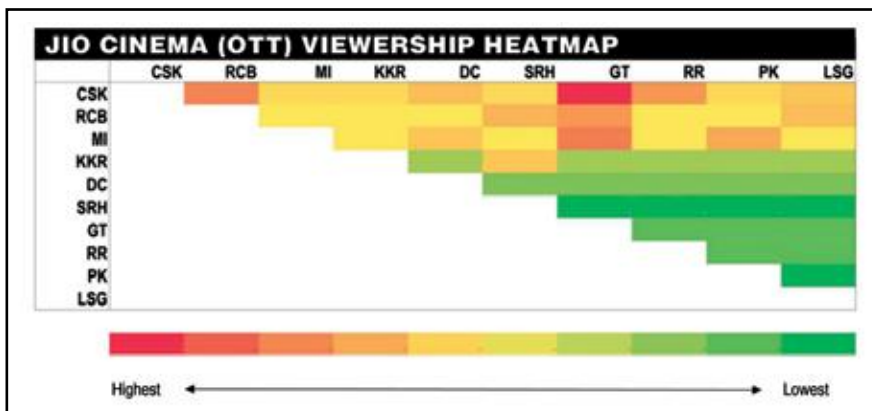
FRANCHISEES AS A BRAND

		2022 Brand Value (US\$Mn)	2023 Brand Value (US\$Mn)	Ranking based on Brand Value	Ranking based on Enterprise Value
Chennai Super Kings		146	212	1	1
Royal Challengers Bangalore		128	195	2	2
Mumbai Indians		141	190	3	3
Kolkata Knight Riders		122	181	4	4
Delhi Capitals		83	133	5	5
Sunrisers Hyderabad		81	128	6	6
Rajasthan Royals		59	120	7	7
Gujarat Titans		NA	120	8	9
Punjab Kings		63	90	9	8
Lucknow Super Giants		NA	83	10	10

*NA: Gujarat Titans and Lucknow Super Giants were newly announced teams in 2022. Hence, no brand value was determined for them in 2022.

cricket enthusiasts. Chennai Super Kings' matches have proved to have a remarkable impact on JioCinema's viewership figures, attracting a devoted fan base to the streaming platform. Additionally, the intense rivalry between the top three teams has consistently captivated audiences, resulting in a substantial surge in viewership during their encounters. The below chart shows a rise in viewership whenever CSK, RCB, and MI are playing as well as the approximate estimates of the peak viewership of respective IPL matches in the 2023 season. Note that JioCinema recorded a whopping 32.0 million concurrent viewers in the final match between CSK and GT, also shown below.

According to the SCORE report, a comprehensive IPL ad effectiveness measurement conducted by Synchronize India and Unomer, digital streaming on mobile devices and connected TVs has emerged as the preferred choice for IPL viewers, surpassing traditional linear TV. The report reveals that an impressive 73% of viewers opt to stream IPL matches on digital platforms, while only 27% rely on cable or DTH services. The SCORE report also provides insights into the viewing patterns of IPL audiences. It indicates that 52% of people enjoy the IPL experience on both TV and mobile devices, while 30% exclusively stream matches on their mobile phones. These findings emphasize the changing preferences and habits of IPL viewers, with digital streaming gaining significant momentum over traditional TV broadcasting. 



ABOUT

Houlihan Lokey, Inc., is an American multinational independent investment bank and financial services company. Founded in 1972, the company is headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

ALL EYES UPON NEERAJ CHOPRA

AS HE SETS SIGHT ON THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE THIS MONTH

The flamboyant star of Indian athletics is all set to compete later this month in the World Championships in Budapest.

by V K VERMA

Twenty five year old Neeraj Chopra, javelin thrower par excellence, is a national icon, a decorated officer of Indian Army with a PVSM and a role model for an entire generation. The precision and power behind his throws are matched only by the machine he rides, a Harley Davidson. His zeal for life and passion for adventure is so infectious that Swiss Tourism has made him their brand ambassador.

Modest and soft spoken, he lets his javelin do the talking. But when he does talk, his message resonates. Like when he did a 'bajrangi bhaijaan' after the Tokyo Olympics to silence rumors that his fellow finalist from Pakistan, Arshad Nadeem had tampered with his javelin to deny him the title.

When Neeraj was a child, his father noticed the precision and force with which he threw stones at beehives in his backyard. The skill fetched him his first locally made javelin. Soon his target practice shifted from his backyard to nearby stadiums and

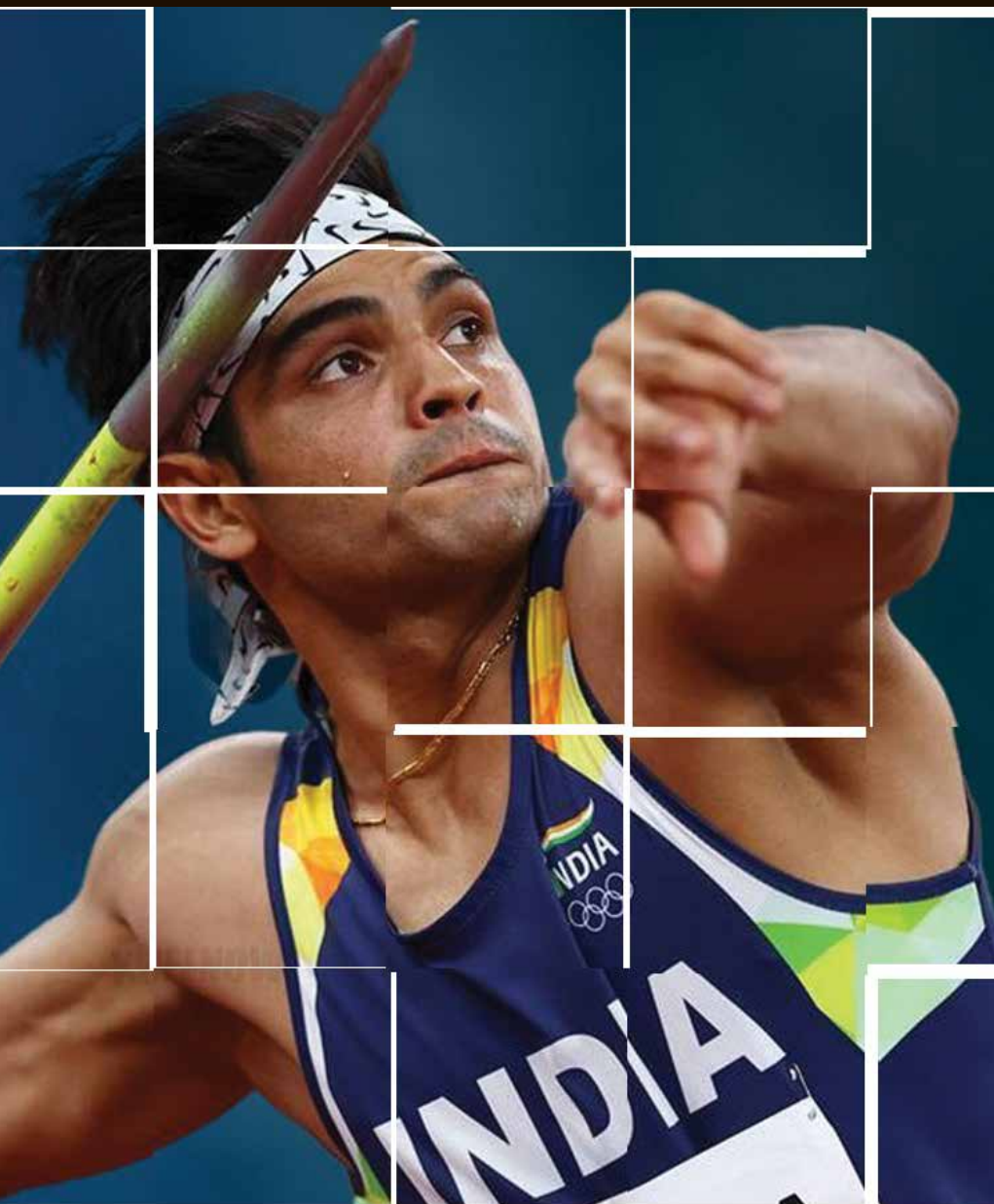
domestic competitions and subsequent selection for training in state and national camps. That was the start of his tryst that will take him around the globe and into the hearts of millions of his fans.

Like a fairy tale, in 2016, at the age of 18, he won the Under-20 World Championship in Poland with a new world record. The year 2018 heralded his 'coming of age' in great style; Gold medal in Commonwealth Games in Australia and another Gold in the Asian Games in Jakarta.

Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2021 were held amidst the gloom and doom of the pandemic. Neeraj Chopra's training had also suffered due to a nagging elbow injury that required surgical intervention and rehabilitation. With the start list showing the intimidating presence of Johannes Vetter and Julian Weber of Germany and Jakub Vadlejch and Vitezslav Vasely of Czech republic, Neeraj went into the competition as an underdog. By late evening on that fateful day, the 7th August 2021, he had emerged as a lion taking a victory lap with tricolor wrapped around his shoulder. His Javelin had soared to an



The precision and power behind his throws are matched only by the machine he rides, a Harley Davidson. His zeal for life and passion for adventure is so infectious that Swiss Tourism has made him their brand ambassador.



Neeraj has not rested on his laurels. As Budapest hosts the World Championship later this month, Neeraj has firmly set his sight on the crown of a world champion; an honor that has eluded Indian athletes so far.

Dr Bhanot is hopeful of a few other Indian athletes making it to the finals of World Championship. M. Sreeshankar and Jeswin Aldrin in Long Jump, Avinash Sable in Steeplechase, Walk and Relay teams are showing promise.

In the last week of August, as India prays for a perfect moon landing of Chandrayan, its athletics fraternity will hope for a perfect landing of Neeraj Chopra's javelin in the National Sports Stadium in Budapest. God willing, inshallah, India may have its first world champion in athletics that week. **Di**

incredible 87.58 M sending his home country into euphoric celebrations.

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After an initial training stint with German legend Uwe Hohn, Neeraj Chopra now trains in Lausanne with another renowned coach and bio-mechanics expert, Klaus Bartonietz from Germany.

Competing frequently in IAAF

events is providing him the avenue to achieve peak performance at the World Championship. His Gold medal finish in two recent diamond league events in Doha and Lausanne have raised hopes that he could throw the spear beyond 90M in Budapest.

His training and competition plan has been meticulously worked out by an expert group working under Dr Lalit Bhanot, Chairman Planning Committee of Athletic Federation of India in conjunction with the 'Olympic Podium Finish' project of the Sports Ministry.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

V K Verma is a former President, Badminton Association of India and a former Commercial Director, Air India.

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PHOTO: PHILIP KWIATKOWSKI

Copernicus Science Centre

Immerse yourself in Warsaw’s vibrant fusion of cultures, where East meets West and where history meets modern city life with shopping, dining and lots of unique experiences.

As a recipient of the “Best European Destination 2023” award, Warsaw represents Poland’s rich heritage and modernity. Get captivated by the city’s landmarks, such as the meticulously reconstructed Royal Castle, showcasing Poland’s regal heritage through opulent interiors and exquisite artworks. The Museum of Warsaw offers a vivid journey through the city’s past, with artifacts and exhibits that bring history to life.



Warsaw City Centre

PHOTO: STOLECZNE BIURO TURYSTYKI



Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street

PHOTO: WARSAW TOURIST OFFICE

Gateway to rich heritage and modernity

Shopaholics will be delighted by Warsaw's diverse and vibrant shopping scene. Nowy Świat Street, with its stylish boutiques, international brands, and charming cafes, offers a wide array of options. For an authentic shopping experience, the historic Old Town Market Square features local handicrafts, unique souvenirs, and traditional Polish products. Additionally, the Złote Tarasy shopping centre combines world-class fashion with modern design, catering to a variety of tastes.

The charm of Warsaw's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, lies in its meticulously restored buildings and picturesque cobblestone streets that transport visitors back in time. The colourful facades, historic churches, and the lively ambiance of the city's charming cafes and restaurants create an immersive experience worth exploring. Just outside the city centre is the majestic Wilanów Palace, a baroque residence surrounded by beautifully landscaped gardens, offering a serene escape from the bustling city life.

A culinary fusion of cultures

Polish cuisine, renowned for its hearty and flavourful dishes, has something to offer for all including lots of vegetarian food options. Indulge in traditional Pierogi, delectable dumplings with various fillings, or savour the famous Żurek, a sour rye soup that can be prepared in a vegetarian version. Polish cuisine also boasts a wide range of delicious salads, fresh vegetable dishes, and mouth-watering desserts.



Old Town Market Square

PHOTOS: WARSAW TOURIST OFFICE

Travelling in style, flying in comfort

Warsaw is now directly connected with LOT Polish Airlines, a member of Star Alliance, with daily nonstop flights from Delhi and Mumbai. Every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from Delhi; every Sunday and Wednesday from Mumbai. India-originating flights depart mid-morning and arrive in Warsaw during lunch time, with convenient connections to other cities in Europe and the West.

Operating modern Boeing 787 Dreamliner, the airline offers three class of service: LOT Business Class, LOT Premium Economy Class and LOT Economy Class. Passengers can opt for Indian dishes catered by well-known Taj Sats and they can also enjoy Indian movies and music in the in-flight entertainment program. **DI**

'THE TAJ MAGAZINE' CELEBRATES ITS GOLDEN JUBILEE ISSUE

The celebrated Taj magazine, printed by IHCL, owners of brands like Taj, Vivanta, Ginger and Ama has notched 50 years of publishing history. Once published quarterly, it took to online route during Covid, as a bi-annual, but is back with its commemorative issue, a coveted golden jubilee number.



(From left) Dr. Rakshanda Jalil, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Vir Sanghvi, Priyadarshini Scindia and Puneet Chhatwal

An exclusive DI REPORT

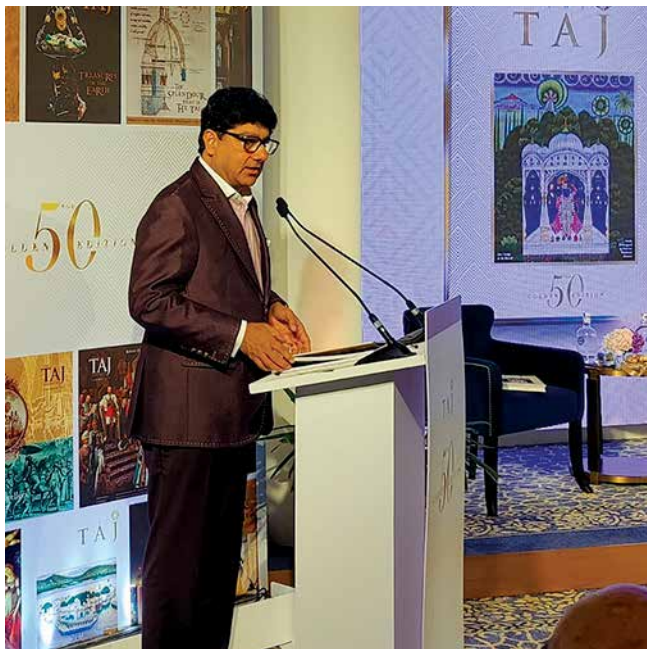
At its release function at Taj Mahal, New Delhi, an eminent panel shared their association with the group. Presiding over the panel was IHCL MD and CEO, Puneet Chhatwal. On the panel were Shabana Azmi and Javed Akhtar, along with Priyadarshini Scindia. Another panelist, Binod Choudhary, one of the leading partners of Taj Hotels, could not arrive on time on account of flight disturbances. The discussion was most eloquently anchored by Vir Sanghvi, leading journalist and author.

Speaking on the occasion, Shabana recalled one specific occasion when staying at the Taj Mahal, she had been invited to a party hosted in one of the hotel's lavish

suites. At the party she expressed great appreciation for the design and décor of that suite; on returning to her room, she was surprised to see all her bags had been cleared and nowhere to be seen. On asking what has happened, she was told she had been shifted to another similar suite in the hotel. It appears the hotel GM had overheard her!


Javed Akhtar recalled very fondly how he had looked across at the Taj Mumbai many moons ago, on New Year's Eve, and found it was charging Rs.70/- as entry fee. He decided to skip it that time, vowing to come back the following year. Which he did, as by then he had got a job that gave him Rs. 2000/- per month, which was significant for that period.

Calling it 'funky', Priyadarshini Scindia shared how her property in Gwalior, the Usha Kiran palace, run by the



Taj Hotels, had become a most popular fun hotel, with all the ingredients of a typical Taj Luxury hotel.

The present magazine editor, Dr. Rakshanda Jalil said how over the years, the magazine has had different editors, but all have kept up the challenge of quality while promoting Indian heritage. She shared how the Taj magazine worked upon thematic issues; the December issue will be dedicated to the Weavers of India.

Like its every other issue, this too is a collectors' edition, profusely illustrated on themes built around the Indian experience, interwoven with what you expect and cherish at various Taj properties, some old as gold, others new in the portfolio like the Taj Amer. The evening was a celebration to remember with eclectic cuisine and choicest drinks on the menu. 



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