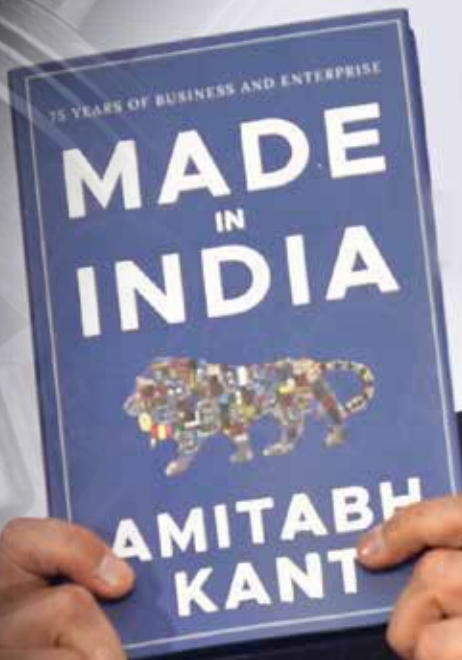


JUNE 2023. ₹50

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1975

**DESTINATION INDIA**

# CONVERSATIONS



PERPERSPECTIVES FROM THE BOOK LAUNCH

## 'MADE IN INDIA'

**TOBACCO  
ENDGAME : WILL  
INDIA ACHIEVE IT?**

**HOSPITALITY  
INDUSTRY SET FOR  
HIGH GROWTH**

**IN SEARCH  
OF THE SNOW  
LEOPARD**

# ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



Eric Garcetti is the new US Ambassador to India, seen here presenting his credentials to the Indian President. A former Mayor of Los Angeles City, he was the youngest ever to get elected, and then get re-elected with the largest vote share ever in the city's history. 1971 born, educationist and diplomat, Garcetti studied Hindi at Columbia University; he is a Rhodes scholar, and has been busy familiarising himself with things and values Indian, including a lunch with film star Shah Rukh Khan.



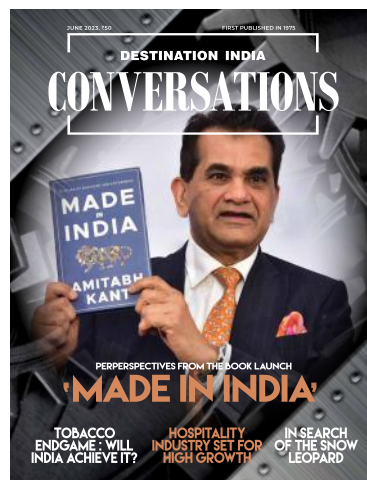
Representing the government and the people of India, seen here are Jagdeep Dhankar, Vice President of India, and his wife Sudesh Dhankar, felicitating King Charles III, during his coronation ceremony in London. Britain witnessed a happy once in a lifetime event, with milling crowds from across the globe, to be a part of the celebrations.



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### On the Cover

'Made in India' is becoming a dream coming true! A book launch by India's G20 Sherpa, Amitabh Kant, saw some great inputs from people who matter!

Our cover story this month is centred around the launch of 'Made in India', a book authored by Amitabh Kant, India's G 20 Sherpa. The book has set new records in publishing for Rupa, unconfirmed reports suggest there is a fourth edition going already. It is always the 'man and the moment' and Kant's book has come around at just the right time when manufacturing has become an important component for our economy going forward. We need industry back as modern day temples of progress. Kant has stressed on the need to enable industry to perform, it is them who will charge our economic growth in double digits.

We have wound up the IPL of this season and India looks forward to the WTC final in London early next month. Will the T20 daredevils rise to playing competitive five day cricket? Let us wait and watch!

The rise and rise of the Indian spending power is best exhibited in our ability to absorb the rising costs of enjoying our holidays! India's hotel industry is flying high, recording never seen before rates, occupancies, and profits. Which means we can expect more hotels in newer cities, even better standards and experience!

Nothing like the magic of our animal life, and what better than the lesser spotted snow leopard. The Bedi brothers have been in the forefront of Indian photography for the last four decades. Here, we capture some high moments of their new film which was screened recently in the capital.

**Navin Berry**  
Editor

# LEADERSHIP ACROSS PARTIES MUST 'WALK THE TALK', CREATE A NEW ERA OF DIGNITY IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE, A MORE MEANINGFUL DEMOCRACY

A new parliament is a great opportunity to make new rules of business. The time is right, as we seem to be losing our plot for dignified debates and discussions in public domain.



*"Confident that the new Parliament will strengthen the spirit of unity and pride in the nation." – President Droupadi Murmu*

*"This new Parliament will give new energy and new strength to the world's largest democracy.....A prosperous, strong and developed India, an India that walks more strongly on the path of policy, justice, truth, dignity and duty." – PM Narendra Modi*

*"Parliament is the most authentic constitutional forum reflecting the mandate of the people. Its decisive role in law making and shaping the destiny of Bharat is inviolable and it is the basic mantra, nectar and essence of democracy." – Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar*

*"When we enter the new Parliament, we should do so with a new resolve. While we take forward the established good traditions, we should also set new benchmarks of parliamentary discipline, decorum and dignity, so that India can act as an ideal in front of democratic platforms located elsewhere globally." – Om Birla, Speaker Lok Sabha.*

*"Let us embrace this symbol (sengol) from the past to affirm the values of our present." – Congress MP Shashi Tharoor.*

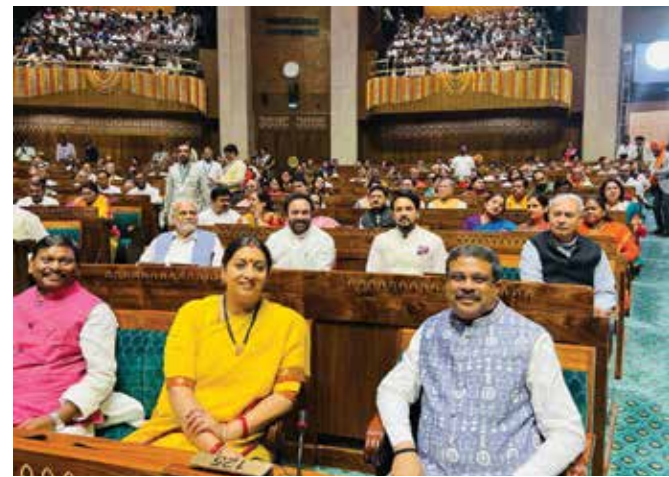


by NAVIN BERRY

**N**ow, the moot point is, where do we go from here? This much said, most laudable, who can disagree, we are all on the same page. What next, as all this is critical to fulfilling the dreams of every voter, every five years, that the Parliament to which they elect their representatives, will stand by them, deliberate, and deliver. While the government in power, both at the centre and in the states, where different political parties are in power, keep making their contributions, amidst challenges and opportunities, both national and global, our parliament and assemblies have exactly not delivered, marred as they have been by disruptions, unruly behaviour, reduced productivity from reduced sittings. So much so, some of the critical bills have been passed amidst disruptions, simply by show of hands, and not debated at all.

So, all said and done, apart from the politics of the new Parliament building, whether we needed it or not, whether the President should have inaugurated it, whether the Sengol is a befitting symbol, these are at the end of the day, are less important issues. **The bigger issue is how we will make the new Parliament a platform for new standards of public discourse, dignity in dialogue and use of language, belief in debate, upholding the true traditions of democracy. Walking the Talk, is the fundamental issue. Or, will we continue to witness boycotts, unruly scenes, protests and disruptions.**

There must be a cut-off point, which



marks a return to healthy politics. Every political party must agree that thus far, but no more! We need new rules that apply uniformly to all parties, must be respected in toto, with no exceptions. We need a cease-fire of sorts, with end of hostilities next. Many of the parties are ruling in one state, while in opposition in the other. They win or lose equally.

What is important is how we proceed on our road ahead? There are some issues that need to be flagged.

**Trading between parties once results begin to show up, making switching parties water tight** before we have the next Parliament in session, just a year away. Ensuring that no individual can change horses immediately after being elected. Can a member be barred for at least a year from elections. Or, even better for half the tenure of the assembly or parliament. Simply barred, no excuses. No horse trading, no jumping off the bandwagon on which you got elected. And, if you do, you stand automatically to lose your vote and all your entitlements. A simple rule can be that once you fight on one party, you cannot switch to another party during the current term of the assembly!

**How do we allow protest in Parliament and in assemblies?** The rules of the game must change. There cannot be any disruption beyond a decent and dignified dissent. Nothing beyond. Which means rules that ensure no loss of time in proceedings.

**Rushing to the well, use of marshals, all these require new rules.** To be applied from a specific date, at both the centre and in the states.

**Public language used in discourse, the gaali-galoch!** Please, if we have a history and civilisation to cherish, what about the imprint we are leaving behind for our posterity? There should be no infringements, people who say an ugly word must be chastised by their own party, with no exceptions. Would a national level ombudsman help?

It is for the more knowledgeable to discuss these. We so often talk of India of young people; surely our leaders need to provide a better example for the youth!

Ideally, those with a close understanding of the constitution can sit together, draft a meaningful next course correction to ensure those who get elected on one party ticket have to stay with that party only. And that no disturbance can take place which wastes time and obstruct proceedings.

*Meanwhile, let us also bring into perspective what this new building has achieved. A state-of-the-art building, executed within 30 months from the day of its foundation day ceremony, a colossus of 64,500 sqm built up, some of it during the covid disruption, with thematic walks and over 5000 artefacts representative of the cultural diversity of our country, built with materials from across India. It is state of the art, with electronic displays for every member, enabling them to choose their language, their guide map through the building. This is no mean achievement. Credit must be given to Urban Development Ministry for their overall guidance and team at work – the architects, the construction*



*team Tata Services. That there was inadequate or no public debate, given the present nature of our national discourse, if we had started a debate on design and selection of material, etc, it is more likely we might have still been in debate mode, with nothing to show. The completed building, from all accounts, has not taken any short cuts, is a perfect structure in design and embellishments. Politics apart, none of this should be overlooked.*

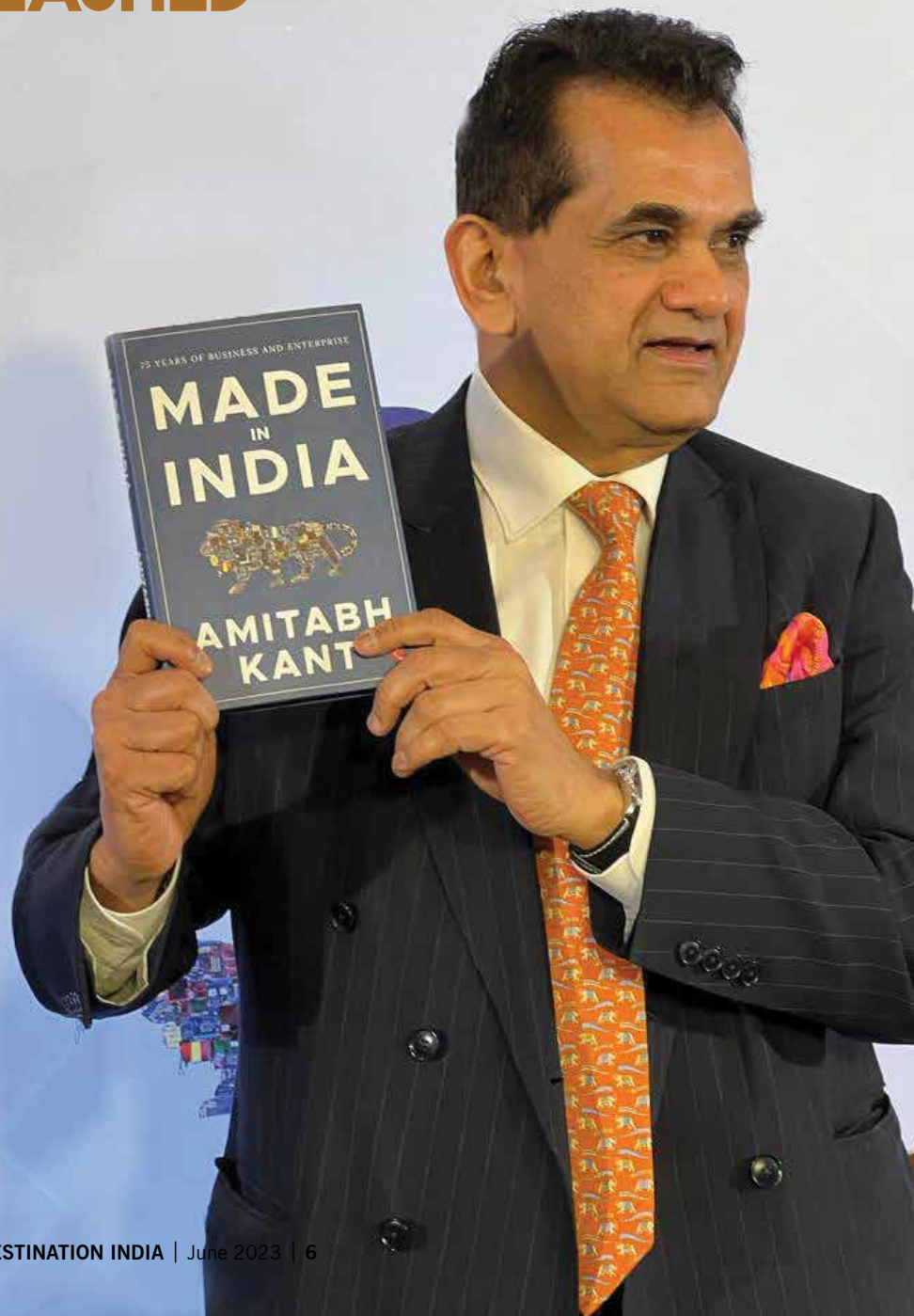
*Consider this: statues at the six entry exit points, do not have numbers as did the earlier parliament house. We have dwars, or gates, in the new Parliament building. These have been inspired by Indian ancient sculptures. While the two elephants made of stone at Gaj Dwar, which the Prime Minister used to enter the building for inauguration, has been inspired by statues at Madhukeshwara temple at Banavasi in Karnataka, going back to 9th century CE, the Ashwa Dwar has got two statues of horses inspired by the sculptures at Sun Temple in Odisha of 13th century. The statues at three other dwars - Shardula, Hamsa and Makara - are inspired by sculptures from Gujri Mahal at Gwalior, Vijay Vithala temple at Hampi and Hoysaleswara temple in Karnataka. The Garuda dwar wears the statues of mount (vahana) of Vishnu, inspired by 18 th century CE Nayaka period Sculpture of Tamil Nadu. ❖*

# SIZE AND SCALE ARE CRITICAL TO BECOMING COMPETITIVE; ENERGY OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR MUST BE UNLEASHED

The author, Amitabh Kant, has seen it all during the last decade, from heading the DIPP to Niti Ayog and now as PM's Sherpa to the G20 summit. He argues that 'Made in India' is essentially about manufacturing for which we need companies with global size and scale. Kant started as collector Calicut, was then secretary Kerala Tourism, joint secretary in the Ministry of Tourism at the Centre; instrumental in promoting God's Own Country and Incredible India, subsequently launching the Make In India campaign in Germany. Large scale manufacturing will help grow the MSME sector as well. The book was released in Delhi and Mumbai; both cities featured high celebrity events, witnessing the presence of industrialists, intelligensia, creative minds. Both cities featured a panel discussion on Trends in the Marketplace, providing food for thought towards a result-oriented future. we bring you excerpts from his presentations in both cities:

## *From the Delhi launch:*

“**L**ook at the history of 75 years from the point we got colonized. India was at about 24% of global GDP. By the time the British left us, we had just about 5% of global GDP. We moved from British Raj to License Raj, and we saw a huge stranglehold through licensing, industrial dispute act, labour laws, many other things. Now, the Indian private sector enterprise has grown and flourished despite all controls. And, I have been a long-term believer that if India has to grow at high rates of 8 to 9% per annum, year



after year, three decades or more, India has to become a 5 trillion or 10 trillion economy. The private sector must be the wealth creator. No country in the world has grown on the back of public sector; the private sector, which must create wealth, and the government must be a facilitator, a catalyst, and has to work on education, health, and nutrition, and actually, bring in the right policy framework.

This book is about how the private sector must flourish in India and how the government must retreat in the vast range areas. It also brings in my experiences from 2014 when I was secretary, DIPT, on how we brought the Ease in Business.

The Prime Minister in his very first interactions had said we should just scrap all these rules, regulations, and procedures. And we jumped up 79 positions in the World Bank 'ease of doing business' ranking. We started making states compete with each other. And therefore, in a large country like ours, competition really moved, made things move forward. When we started startup India, there were just about 456 startups in India. Today there were 90,000 startups. There were 110 unicorns, and they have attracted a vast amount of capital, over about 340 billion worth of capital in India. And startups have done a huge amount of disruption, not nearly for India, but for the world.

And now we see this production linked incentive scheme really unleashing itself into manufacturing in a vast range of areas.

So, my belief is that India needs to fire on all cylinders, not nearly services, but also manufacturing, also agricultural productivity, also urbanization for it to grow on a large scale over a long period of time. At the time we had the strangle world of government, we saw many Asian countries growing during the period 1960 to 1990, Korea growing at about 9.6% consecutively. For three decades, Taiwan grew at the same period. Japan had grown in post-World War II period with those rates. And in recent times China has grown. But the period in which the time span within which they grew, while they were growing, they were also manufacturing and carbonizing the world. When India needs to grow at high rates of growth, there are many other challenges of integrating yourself with global supply chain and the challenges that the world has become far more inward-looking post covid, the challenges that India needs to be the first country in the world to industrialize without carbonizing.

And the challenge really is to become major, not nearly major manufacturers, but to penetrate global markets today. And only without becoming global, uh, globally competitive, and without becoming productively efficient, it will not be possible to do that. So, the book brings out all these lessons of different countries. It brings out all the challenges before India, and it really brings out how we need to technologically leap frog in many sunrise areas of growth. And once that happens, that unleashing of private sector, which is happening now. India will not only go on to become the third largest economy in the world, but also raise the per capita income of Indians very rapidly forward and become a highly developed nation. And therefore, many of the lessons of different countries are spelled out here and what India needs to do, learning from our own lessons and many of these things."

### *From the Mumbai launch:*

**"**If you look back at the years when India has really grown and India has grown at 8-9%, for four to five years, but it has not grown for, you know, decades like other countries have done. But every time we have done that, it is because our exports have grown. So, exports are the key to growth, really, and that really means that you need companies that will penetrate global markets. You need size and scale of manufacturing. And that is why we brought in the PLI scheme. The production linked incentive scheme was very simple. Many people mistake it for subsidy.

If you do not achieve your targets, you don't get it. But in five years'



time, it gives you this opportunity to become global in size and scale. And once you have companies with that global size and scale, you will have two manufacturers, two three, like Maruti came in and all these MSMEs came in the automobile sector because of Maruti. It is an automatic backward forward linkage, and therefore you need large companies for MSMEs to grow. I think for large companies to happen in India, we also need to scrap many of the labour laws, which were made long time back. We need to decriminalize a lot, which the prime minister is pushing for.

So, a lot of that work is in action mode right now. And I think in the next two to three years, you will see India becoming more and more, more and more efficient in many of these areas to enable large size and scale. Look at a sector where India has the potential. I think to my mind, green hydrogen is the area where India has the potential. Today, the cost of producing green hydrogen is \$4.50 per kilogram. India is the only country which is climatically blessed. It has top class entrepreneurship. It is possible for us to bring the cost down to \$1 per kilogram, but it will not happen if we do not have the scale. And you can be the biggest producer and exporter to the world, but it will not happen without size and scale. So, size and scale are really the key to success." ❖



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Amitabh Kant is presently India's Sherpa to G20 group, during a year when India holds its presidency. Kant is

formerly a secretary in the Government of India, former CEO of Niti Ayog, and creator of globally acclaimed campaigns like 'Incredible India' for the Ministry of Tourism.

# STRONG INDIAN BUSINESS IS BASED ON STRONG MANUFACTURING, AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY



**EAM Jaishankar at the launch of Amitabh Kant's book, 'Made in India', says we should stop looking at a China 'fix'; important to find our own solutions, and equally important to 'think in India'. Presented here are extracts of his presentation.**

“Indian growth cannot be built on Chinese efficiency. That ultimately if we are really to sustain and take the economy to a different level, we have to create the kind of domestic vendor chain that a serious manufacturing economy will do. I know it is not something which will happen overnight.”

**T**here is this legacy question which he really asks, what if the Bombay plan had worked out? And he of course, I think with good reason, asserts that it would have put the country on a very different trajectory. But the fact is that the politics of the day won out. And politics of the day will always win out, in when it comes to a big national decision, like that.

But, later on there is a little bit of an India China comparison. And the fact is that when we speak about, you know, the road not travelled, the trajectory not taken, the today, the gap that we have in comprehensive national power between China and India, which is such a big concern for us in the foreign policy field, I think, that is something worth thinking about because what often is debated as a foreign policy proposition is actually an economic outcome, I would say, a business outcome, in many ways. And I would also say, frankly, bluntly, that those who are most responsible for it are also apparently most in denial. So, having got that off my chest, let me come to the second proposition, which he raises. And this is the post 1991 paradox.

The post 1991 paradox, I thought Amitabh





“What often is debated as a foreign policy proposition is actually an economic outcome, I would say, a business outcome, in many ways. And I would also say, frankly, bluntly, that those who are most responsible for it are also apparently most in denial.”



has summed up very neatly in the proposition of the duality, of how we progressed, where you had wide ranging reforms, to quote him, in some areas. And you had the vestiges of the past, also continuing in many areas. And therefore, he says, we moved forward at two speeds. And I think that's something, I mean, we all knew intuitively; he has, in a sense, verbalised that. But I know, you know, it is to me still today, the challenge that the country faces; which is, you know, instead of, shall I say, being complacent about the reforms which were done, perhaps we should have given and still keep giving more thought to the reforms which are not done, and which remain to be done, and how do we, how do we, in a sense go beyond this, two speed, situation and come to something which is, far more inclusive, far more unified, and far more impactful, in terms of the outcome it produces.

There is also a third point of the pre 2014 era, which I think is worth flagging, particularly, when I see all of you know, who all are in the room. And this is the, the compulsions, or I would say the attractions and the impact of outward investments, outward investments by Indian enterprises. As someone today, who travels in what are considered relatively distant parts of the world and sees how strongly Indian business is establishing its footprint, and you start seeing the outlines of where we would be at the end of the decade or perhaps into the next decade. And this outward experience, I believe, will serve us very well when it comes to offering services, taking manufacturing abroad or insourcing resources. And I think all those are really prospects that the Indian economy will have to address, sooner rather than later.

So let me then fast forward to the post 2014 era.

Now I would say there are some themes by which Amitabh has sought to capture all the transformation that we have. One, of course

“There are some themes by which Amitabh has sought to capture all the transformation that we have. One, of course is the formalising of the economy, and he particularly, and rightly so, highlights the GST as the landmark reform, in that regard.”

is the formalising of the economy, and he particularly, and rightly so, highlights the GST as the landmark reform, in that regard. The second is something in which he has had a particular contribution to make, and that is, improving our ease of doing business. And again, here as a perspective of someone in the diplomatic world, I would say it was probably the biggest burden that we carried in diplomacy, that there won't be an ambassador, Indian ambassador in the world who wouldn't have had at some point to explain, in the country where he was, why we were such a difficult country to do business in!

“In a way, in the last decade, what has come out most in the open is the concern about where our data resides, where our data is processed, where it is harvested, where is the artificial intelligence created? And the focus today is on trust and transparency in the digital domain.”

And that change, today has really raised our global stature, in the last decade. I will certainly put, the improved ease of doing business, as one of them.

The third one is the digital delivery which I think has improved governance. It has in many ways made growth truly inclusive. And I would say in a way, and I quote here a phrase, which Prime Minister often uses. We are a country have actually democratized technology, that we have made technology, both practically and aspirational, available to everybody.

And finally, the fourth theme, which he writes about, is the grassroots change.

In the aspirational sense my own district from where I am an MP, in Gujarat, mine is an aspirational district. And I have seen even in the space of the last four years, how much of a change there has been, as a result of that kind of focus. So, when I look at the post 2014 era, I think for me, this formalisation, the ease of doing business, the digitalization, and the grassroots delivery, I think these have really been the game changers. And as a political scientist, I would say, if you ask me today, what is the change in the politics of the country? I think we are today moving to a politics of delivery.

So, there are other aspects and thoughts that I would like to pick up from the book. One is the impact of the pandemic and what that means for all of us. I think there is no question that after the pandemic, we have entered an era where the focus is on de-risking the global economy. And that de-risking takes place in many forms, when it comes to manufacturing and supply chains, it is very much, I think the focus has shifted to building a more reliable and resilient supply chains. And that for us, is today the great opportunity when it comes to manufacturing. The second is in the digital domain.

In a way, in the last decade, what has come



out most in the open is the concern about where our data resides, where our data is processed, where it is harvested, where is the artificial intelligence created? And the focus today is on trust and transparency in the digital domain, I think this is overwhelming. The third thought for your consideration is actually the global polarization which makes diplomacy far more complex. But the global polarisation is also a window of opportunity for many nations. And I would suggest certainly for India; both economical and technological, because if this is about trust-centric digital activity, and a more resilient supply chain, I think these can really open up many new possibilities for India.

And finally, with regard to the pandemic and the prospects ahead. It appears that our destiny is to grow, but grow in a much more volatile world, but also in a much more decarbonized environment. So, India's growth in that sense is going to be fundamentally different from anybody else who preceded it, not because it is necessarily one out of our choice. I think that is the environment, the global environment in which we find ourselves today. So, which really means in many ways, we have to think through and perhaps devise a growth strategy for which there's really no precedent. So how do we take advantage of it? I think we take advantage of it, one, clearly once again by, getting the focus back on manufacturing because there is no major country in the world, which, which has sustained or enhanced its global position without some commensurate buildup of manufacturing.

I have always believed that this focus on services was actually an elegant excuse for being incompetent in manufacturing. I think the bottom line is that this country will never be a great country if it is not a great manufacturer. I think that's something which we need to understand.

The second, and I say this with a lot of business people in the room,



I think we need to stop looking for a China fix. That Indian growth cannot be built on Chinese efficiency. That ultimately if we are really to sustain and take the economy to a different level, we have to create the kind of domestic vendor chain that a serious manufacturing economy will do. I know it is not something which will happen overnight. But I can tell you as someone in the government today, someone in the economic affairs cabinet committee, we take it as a priority that how do we build deep manufacturing, the deep manufacturing supply chains, which will be needed to do that.

I think the PLI scheme in that sense is that effort really to energise the economy, to motivate the economy, to get businesses to believe that it is possible to manufacture in this country.

The third point I would make is Make in India is not just about making, it is also about thinking. You have to think, it has to be 'Think in India' and think in a way, as I said, we are in a very unique circumstance, and I fully accept there are experiences and analogies, that we can take best practices from the rest of the world. But at the end of the day, I think we will have to think through our growth strategy for ourselves. We will have to think through solutions in difficulties for ourselves. And if you look at the last decade, every time we have been actually confronted with a major challenge, I would say, the fact is that we have really reflected on it in our own particular ethos and circumstances; these have actually been hugely helpful.

I would cite the Covid experience. I mean, at the time of COVID, other than the health advice we got from the rest of the world, we also got a lot of advice internally on how to economically handle the crisis. Honestly, I would say I am so glad we did not listen to much of it. We came up with your own solutions. I would say in a way it is even applies to our relationship with the world; in the name of opening

“Honestly, I would say I am so glad we did not listen to much of it (world advices on handling COVID crisis). We came up with our own solutions. I would say in a way it is even applies to our relationship with the world; in the name of opening the economy and globalizing, we should not end up de-industrializing our own country.”

the economy and globalizing, we should not end up de-industrializing our own country. We should not allow a level playing field in this country for others who subsidize their production. That is not level playing field but an economic suicide. Every country must support its manufacturers, must support its businesses. We must not let outside businesses enjoy advantages in our country at the expense of our own. In that sense, we must and have moved to strategic economics, have a clear sense, who are our partners, where are our opportunities, where should we focus on technology tie ups?

I actually see it as a strategic statement which has been implemented and conceptualized on the ground, by people like Amitabh.

And finally, what is our attitude towards business. You know, it is something which is rarely openly spoken about in this country. But the fact is, I mean, sometimes we have heard the term, you know, wealth creators. I think it does them gross injustice. Business people to me are capability creators. They are employment creators. They are people who actually reduce our national vulnerabilities. So, to me, actually, strong business is not only about the economy, it is to me a critical segment of national security. ❖



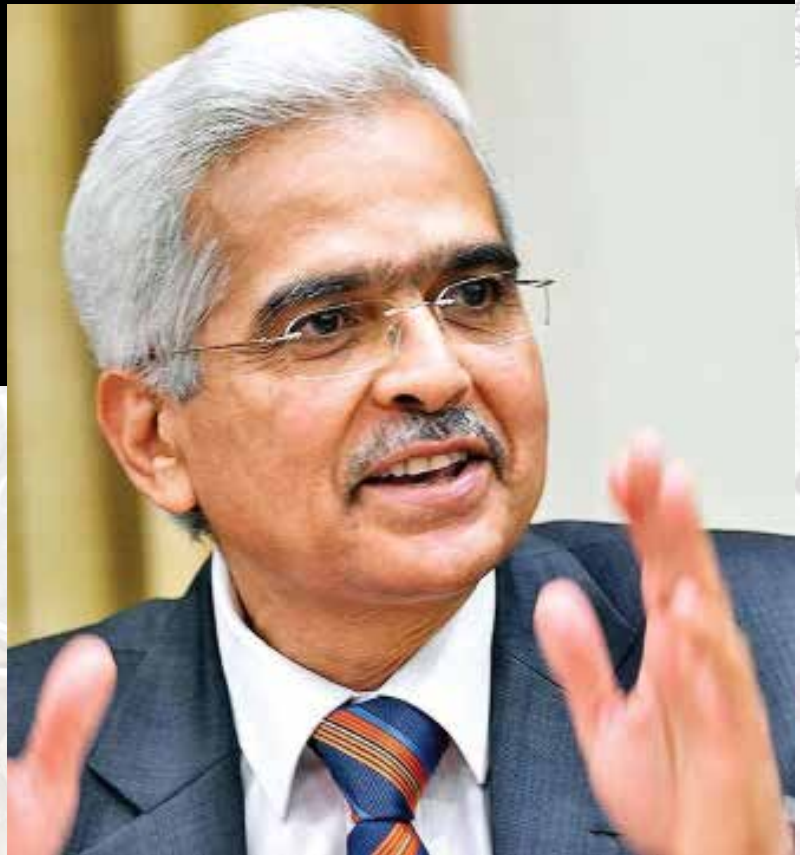
#### ABOUT

Jaishankar is a career diplomat, the first ever to also become India's

Foreign Minister. 1955 born, he is a Rajya Sabha member from Gujarat, educated from St Stephen's College, Delhi and a JNU scholar.

# INDIAN RUPEE HAS DONE WELL, IT IS TIME NOW FOR MADE IN INDIA SAYS SHAKTIKANTA DAS

The RBI Governor, in his address, at the book launch in Mumbai, recalled his long association with the author, Amitabh Kant, how they were in college together, and in the central government around the time when numerous new initiatives were being worked upon. The highlights of his presentation:

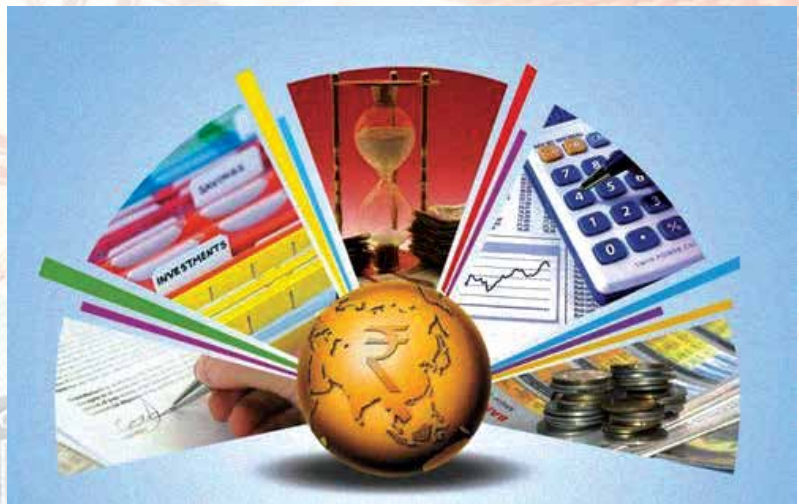


I would like to highlight four things. First, I think the book represents Amitabh's personal journey from 'Make in India' to 'Made in India'. The campaign of Making in India was launched, I think sometime in 2014 end or 2015. He was, again, secretary, Industrial Promotion and Policy.

So that was 'Make in India', which was aspirational. It was an aspiration. It was something to be done. And today he is releasing a book called 'Made in India'. That means that the aspiration is now gaining traction. That aspiration is now becoming a reality. So, I think it is reflective of his personal journey from an aspiration to something which is really happening today. And at a larger level, I think from Make in India to Made in India also represents the country's transition over the last several decades, or perhaps more than a century, because he talks about de-industrialization, which happened in the pre-independence era. During the colonial rule, how de-industrialization happened. He mentions about India's GDP being 24-25% of the world GDP and how it shrank. He has also talked of the de-industrialization or the drain of wealth, from India as a part of the colonial administration's strategic moves, not only in

“I would say with good amount of confidence that the monetary policy is on the right track. And, our job in the Reserve Bank is to provide a financial ecosystem, which will facilitate the aspirations of every citizen of this country, that India should grow fast, Indians should do well, the country should do well.”

“Almost all the high frequency indicators are revealing that our analysis in the Reserve Bank shows that urban demand continues to be strong. Rural demand has started picking up and will get further support from an excellent rabi crop.”



India, but also in Africa, and wherever else colonial rule existed.

So, in a sense, at a larger level, I think the book also represents a transition from colonial India, the starting up of private initiative even during the colonial India. And over the last 75 years after India became independent, how the process of industrialization has taken off.

The second aspect is what impressed me most, is that he has really captured India's growth story, the manufacturing sector, the service sector, the new business models, the startups, the payment ecosystem, and you name it. I think he has really captured, especially, India's growth story in the last seven and a half decades.

The third thing, which comes out very clearly in the book, what he has described as the reigniting of reforms post 2014, where he was actively participating, and I also happened to be there. And, it was from very close quarters that he has described how the whole process of transformation, how the whole process of economic reforms and the changes that we have had, leading us to a situation where we have a direct benefit transfer facility; when other countries during the covid period, were grappling with the problem of sending cheques or how to transfer money to the people affected by Covid, here in India on Sunday, at the Reserve Bank - we worked with the government and the Reserve Bank - we worked together, and on a Sunday at the click of one button, money was transferred to 30 crore families. So, the book also represents post 2014, how the reforms have taken place. And he has written it out of his personal experience. And that is something which comes across quite impressively throughout the book.

And the fourth aspect, which he has highlighted, is the role of the private sector. Now it is the private sector, which really

must drive growth, which must drive investment and which must lead the way forward. Government must provide an enabling ecosystem. Government must carry out the required reforms in various sectors of the economy. That is the role of the government to play, to act as a facilitator, and to provide an enabling environment where private sector can really play.

When we are talking of India, 'Made in India', where are we today and where do we go forward? What, what next? The country's GDP is expected to have grown by 7% last year, that is 22-23; in the current year, 23-24 we have given a projection of 6.5% from the RBI. And we are quite optimistic and fairly confident that the actual growth will be close to that.

Although international agencies like the IMF have given lower projections. But we have shared our thoughts with them, and we are fairly optimistic and confident that the growth will be close to 6.5%. You ask any entrepreneur today in various sectors, the growth momentum, the month-on-month growth. It is not just statistical that last year or year before last we had low growth. Yes, there is a statistical factor. I am not denying that there is a statistical element in that. But the momentum from month on month, also, we see good momentum.

And in fact, almost all the high frequency indicators are revealing that our analysis in the Reserve Bank shows that urban demand continues to be strong. Rural demand has started picking up and will get further support from an excellent, rabi crop. The procurement by the government has already exceeded last year's procurement. Private investment, capital investment by the government, government's capex has been really very high over the last two years. And in the current year also, the budget provision is very high. That will provide lot of support to growth. Private investment, also, there are clear indications that private investment is picking up in sectors like steel, cement, petrochemicals, and several other sectors. And for the current year, our projection of 6.5%, if it materializes, India would have contributed to world growth by about 15%. In other words, 15% of the world growth in the current financial year will come from India, which it is not a mean achievement.

So, these are the factors which give us the confidence that the India story, that the Made in India, the Make in India, all these are no more mere aspirations, but they can really materialize.

As I was leaving office a little while ago, the inflation numbers came out for the month of April, and it was very satisfying to note that the consumer price inflation last month was 5 points, that is for the month of March, data released in April. On April 12th, the consumer inflation, the headline inflation was 5.7%. And the inflation number for April, which was released today was 4.7%.



In fact, I would say with good amount of confidence that the monetary policy is on the right track. And, our job in the Reserve Bank is to provide a financial ecosystem, which will facilitate the aspirations of every citizen of this country, that India should grow fast, Indians should do well, the country should do well. So as a part of this exercise, over the last few years, we have carried out significant reforms in the regulatory architecture of the financial sector, whether it is banks, whether it is non-bank finance companies, whether it is the cooperative banking sector, all the sectors that constitute the financial sector.

We have carried out the required regulatory forms. Supervision has been tightened. And over the years, despite Covid, despite the impact of the Ukraine war, one thing which we have ensured also, and some amount of luck has also helped us, is the stability of the Indian Rupee. That is something which business, the private sector and the private investors, they need it. Unless your currency is stable, investors will not feel confident to invest, whether these be investors from India or foreign investors who are looking at India as an investment destination. In fact, the Rupee is the least volatile currency. If you compare the Indian Rupee with the currencies of our peer countries, it has been over the last one year after the Ukraine war, in the last one year, it has been the least volatile currency. This year, from 1st January, the dollar has depreciated by about one and a half percent, it varies from day to day, but roughly about one and a half percent. The rupee has appreciated by about 0.9% or 1%.

No, I am not saying appreciation is good. I am not saying appreciation is good, or depreciation is good, because that is reaching a value judgement. And, an importer will say that appreciation is good, and an exporter will say that depreciation is good. So, depending on where you stand, you look at things. But as the central bank, our effort has

“Unless your currency is stable, investors will not feel confident to invest, whether these be investors from India or foreign investors who are looking at India as an investment destination. In fact, the Rupee is the least volatile currency. If you compare the Indian Rupee with the currencies of our peer countries.”

been to ensure that the volatility in the Indian currency is contained. We have also been looking at sunrise sectors like, for example, giving boost to the FinTech sector. And, we have set down guidelines for digital lending. And we have also set up an innovation hub in Bangalore.

I think going forward, to conclude, let me say that, the Indian economy needs to continue with reforms. The reforms which have been initiated in the various sectors of the economy, not just in the financial sector, but in the other sectors, they need to be continued. We need to focus more on technology because access to technology, thanks to the fragmentation, the global fragmentation, which has taken place, thanks to the kind of geopolitics that we are witnessing today, and perhaps which may continue, even in the coming years. We need access to technology, which also necessitates that our expenditure on research and development must increase not just in the government, but also in the private sector and in the entire Indian business eco-system.

So, I personally feel that the release of a book like this at the current juncture is very timely. ❖



#### ABOUT

A former IAS officer of Tamilnadu cadre, Shakti Kanta Das is presently Governor, Reserve Bank of India. A

former Revenue Secretary at the centre, he has been a G20 Sherpa, and actively monitored the 2016 de-monetisation of the Indian Currency.

# PRIVATE SECTOR WILL NOT LET GO OF GOOD BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES: BAJAJ

“WE ARE HEADING IN THE RIGHT  
DIRECTION”

There has been this ongoing debate that it is the government that has been front loading capex. There has been a lot of talk of private sector appetite but much of it has not been realised.

**T**he Government infrastructure program and spending that has served as steroids and that has saved our economy the last few years, there is no doubt about that. You have to also keep in mind that expectation on return on capital for the government is slightly different and longer than the private individual and one must understand and respect that.

No private sector individual is going to let go a business opportunity when it is right for the picking. We still live in a very uncertain world, but we are starting to see change. We saw some notable sectors like cement, construction, housing, grow... Equipment manufacturers orders grow. The next set of sectors... on an average the capacity utilisation across sectors in the last few months has been around 74-76%... We are headed towards that direction... the pause that we have seen in interest rates is also a welcome measure.

The pragmatism that we have seen with RBI over the last three years in India, I don't see this with any other central bank in the world. So, we have a lot of positives, we just need a little bit of patience.

On how the geo-political situation is playing off! If you had to do a technology tie up, would you consider the friends' approach, we are now talking about the US treasury secretary saying let us consider friends shoring or nearer shoring – are those now weighing much more on the minds of CEOs as they make business decisions on where to do business, who to do business with, and where to put your money, who to get your tech transfer with?

This is and will again vary from business to business. I am in the financial services business and for us the biggest driver is interest rates and inflation overseas and how they impact us. Just look at the last 2 days, with the US signalling a pause at least for some time in interest rates, our stock markets are up, and that impacts all of us... what we are looking for from the government, whether it is friend shoring, near shoring or enemy shoring is consistency of policy. Businesses are not built for a day; we build businesses for decades. So, if we know that this is the road, we can choose how fast or slow to go on a road. But if the road is going to have curves in that that we cannot see then that adds to risk. And if you add risk in business, then automatically businesses get more conservative.

So, to me that is important. For us, fortunately our business today is all domestic. The resilience we have seen in our economy has surprised some of us positively over the last few years, it has meant that we have continued to grow. And the quality of growth right now in the



consumer sector, especially, is unparalleled. Lending and insurance sectors have grown very well. I keep hoping that we need to see India growing at 8, 9 or 10% and I think that is an opportunity that we are losing by not doing so. But if you look at India in 5 year snapshots, we have changed dramatically as a country towards the positive. Now we can do a lot more but I do see that change. I will also take a shot at what you mentioned earlier, when it comes to women, when I see women in our own companies, I see a big difference in the women over the age of 35 and under the age of 35 and this is a bit relating to our joint family system and its expectations, the younger lot are mostly from non-nuclear families. The husband and wife and their own kid, they have lesser pressures. There are many positives of the joint family system but for the older lot, this is the big difference. In the big families, I think this makes a big difference. ❖

## ABOUT

Sanjiv Bajaj is the younger son of iconic and late Rahul Bajaj, the former chairperson of Bajaj Auto. He is presently the CMD and CEO of Bajaj Finserv, and was till recently the president of CII.



**NOTHING  
IS EASY,  
WE MUST  
TAKE RISKS;  
NOT EVERYWHERE  
WE WILL SUCCEED,  
BUT WE WILL WIN**

**N Chandrashekharan, chairman, Tata Sons, in the panel discussion in Mumbai, shared his belief that 'Make in India' is now in execution mode, it will bring greater traction to the economy. No matter how many percentage points we grow, it could be a two-digit figure just as much.**

**I** think it is a unique opportunity for India for multiple reasons. There are three transitions, and there are moving geopolitical situations from the transitions point of view. The first is digital and AI. Second one is energy; third one is the supply chain. In all the transitions, I would say that India is probably the best place country in the world.

First on the digital, just two primary reasons. First, there is no country in the world which has demonstrated a large-scale digital intervention and digital platform for public services delivery, which is transformative at scale.

“ I think it is a unique opportunity for India for multiple reasons. The first is digital and AI. Second one is energy; third one is the supply chain. In all the transitions, I would say that India is probably the best place country in the world.”

The second thing on the digital side is it is no secret that we have the best talent available from a digital point of view for the future, on the scale and the depth that India has, again, is unparalleled. You can add all the talent that is available from next 10 countries, still, they will fall short. So, these two are big tailwinds. If you take the energy transition, India is probably the only country in the world which must achieve the energy transition, purely only accounting for growth.

And then, but whereas in India, if whatever be the doubling, tripling, whatever is the GDP number you take by 2047, the needs of growth that we have between now and 2047 or 2050 is at least three times more than what we have. And all of this will be new energy. We will, we will do wind, we will do solar, we will do 10 other technologies.

Priority should be growth, growth, growth. And when you do something for growth, you are not so much, under stress. Like when you do it for substitution.

The third thing, whether you call it, this country fix, that country fix, does not matter to my mind. The global supply chain is going to be rebuilt, and it is being rebuilt as we speak.

It is not that it is going to happen. It is beginning, it is happening. We are in the middle of that. Sometimes you do not realize when something is happening, you always connect the dots backwards. And any supply chain is an ecosystem play. So, I keep referring as India Plus, I never use any other example of saying that we are replacing somebody.





“Everybody thought it (Make in India initiative) will be a slogan. The slogan became a movement. Movement became a belief. Now we are in the execution phase. There is no question, it is going to happen. So, I really believe that we should give ourselves the chance, and we are to make bets. We have to take risks. Everything we do will not work, but it is okay.”

We are not replacing anyone. We have an opportunity to create a global alternative supply chain base, which I call India Plus, because India cannot do it alone. But just the sheer size, scale and everything else that we have, positions India to be the lead in this alternative supply chain. Somebody else cannot take the lead. It has to be India. And India is taking that lead, and the supply chain will get built for the next 10 years, 20 years, 30 years.

But I know all of this, there is one fundamental factor, which is, I have to say this, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, what has fundamentally changed is the belief and the aspiration of every Indian and every sector. You can feel it in the urban, you can feel it in the rural, you can feel it in poor people, rich people, educated, uneducated. It is there everywhere as a country. We had the audacity in the middle of the Covid when every other nation was going after Pfizer and Moderna, which normally we would have done how to find the money to get Moderna, Pfizer, or which country we can import from. Instead of all that to say that we will build our own vaccine in the middle of a crisis, there is something to be said about.

So, this whole Make in India, I mean, honestly, if you ask all of us in this room, we will recognize this Make in India started as a campaign slogan. So, everybody thought it will be a slogan. The slogan became a movement. Movement became a belief. Now we are in the execution phase. There is no question, it is going to happen. So, I really believe that we should give ourselves the chance, and we are to make bets. We have to take risks. Everything we do will not work, but it is okay.

Nothing is easy in life. All, all the business people will tell you to make a 100-crore profit. Even why 100 crore profit to become a better positive is not easy. So, who says it is easy? Okay, so we are not doing these things because something is easy. And I tell you, if you are doing



easy things, why we will succeed. Everyone else will do the same thing. So, I think we have to do things where we have a chance. What is going for us? The geopolitics is going for us. It is clear. The current geopolitics, I think they are uniquely positioned. And this will last for a few years. I do not know, it will last for three years, five years, six years, I don't know. And you cannot miss the moment. So, the geopolitics allows you to form partnerships, technology partnerships, finance partnerships, supply chain partnerships, customer supplier partnerships. ❖



#### ABOUT

Natarajan Chandrasekaran is chairperson of TATA Sons, the holding company of the Tata Group. He overlooks

over 100 companies in the salt to steel conglomerate, with a combined turnover of well over US\$100 billion!

# INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT IN THE INDIAN RUPEE

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

by VIPIN MALIK and SANKHANATH BANDYOPADHYAY

**G**iven the pressure on forex reserves and the volatility in the value of the rupee, there has been a strategic move by the Government of India (GoI) with trade settlements bilaterally with select countries in our domestic currency. This move received an impetus post the sanction of US and allies on Russia and removal of certain selected Russian banks from SWIFT operations due to its war with Ukraine.

India increased its dependence on discounted Russian oil, and India's bilateral trade with Russia between April and August 2022 surged to a record high \$18.2 billion. As a trading partner also Russia's position with India enhanced to the seventh position compared to its 25th position last year, primarily driven by rapidly rising import of oil and fertilizers in the aftermath of the Ukraine war. For instance, in 2022 so far, fuel and fertilizers- these two items constituted over 91 per cent bilateral trade between India and Russia. Russian oil is also relatively cheaper compared to countries like Venezuela. Further, Russia provided huge discounts to other countries including India during the period of sanctions imposed by US and other countries in Russia.

The RBI has allowed invoicing and payments for international trade in Indian Rupee vide A.P (DIR Series) Circular No. 10 RBI/2022-2023/90 dated 11.07.2022 on "International Trade Settlement in Indian Rupees (INR)". According to the Circular, all exports and imports under the arrangement may be denominated and invoiced in Rupee (INR) and the settlement of trade transactions under the arrangement shall take place in INR. RBI has put in place the arrangement to promote growth of global trade with emphasis on exports from India and



The approval process is that for opening of Special INR Vostro accounts, banks of partner countries may approach Authorised Dealer (AD) banks in India which may seek approval from RBI with details of the arrangement.

to support the increasing interest of global trading community in INR. The framework put in place by RBI is applicable for any partner country seeking to undertake trade with India in INR in terms of RBI's Circular dated 11.07.2022. In terms of Para 10 of the Circular, the approval process is that for opening of Special INR Vostro accounts, banks of partner countries may approach Authorised Dealer (AD) banks in India which may seek approval from RBI with details of the arrangement. The AD bank maintaining the Special

## The Framework of the RBI Circular (RBI/2022-2023/90 A.P. (DIR Series) Circular No.10) (11 July 2022)

The framework for cross border trade transactions in INR under Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) consisting of (a) Exports and Imports are to be denominated and invoiced in Rupee (INR); (b) Market determined exchange rate between the currencies of the two trading partner countries; (c) for settlement of trade transactions with any country, authorized dealer (AD) banks in India may open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts of correspondent bank/s of the partner trading country. Settlement in Vostro account for the importers will be done as importers shall make payment in INR which shall be credited into the Special Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country, against the invoices for the supply of goods or services from the overseas seller /supplier. On the other hand, exporters shall be paid the export proceeds in INR from the balances in the designated Special Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country. These measures have been justified due to the increase in interest in internationalization of Indian Rupee (INR), to promote growth of global trade with emphasis on exports from India and to support the increasing interest of global trading community in INR.

Source: RBI Circular (RBI/2022-2023/90 A.P. (DIR Series) Circular No.10) (11 July 2022)



India increased its dependence on discounted Russian oil, and India's bilateral trade with Russia between April and August 2022 surged to a record high \$18.2 billion. As a trading partner also Russia's position with India enhanced to the seventh position compared to its 25th position last year.

INR Vostro Account is required to ensure that the correspondent bank is not from a country or jurisdiction in the updated Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has introduced a provision in the Foreign Trade Policy vide Notification No. 33/2015-20 dated 16.09.2022, to allow for International Trade Settlement in INR, i.e., invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports / imports in Indian Rupees in sync with RBI's Circular dated 11.07.2022. Further changes have been introduced in the Foreign Trade Policy vide DGFT's Notification 43/2015-20 dated 09.11.2022 and Public Notice 35/2015-20 dated 09.11.2022 for grant of exports benefits and fulfilment of Export Obligation for export realisations in INR as per RBI guidelines.

An important benefit for the trade settlement in rupee is that it reduces currency risk for Indian players (businesses, traders, entrepreneurs, etc.). Also, the RBI needs to be less concerned about its composition of the foreign currency assets in the foreign exchange reserves, as a substantial share of trade can be settled via the domestic currency.

However, a caveat would be less autonomy in monetary policy manoeuvring by the Central Bank according to the requirement by the domestic economic situations, since both domestic and foreign economic agents could use rupee transactions as per the Circular. For instance, the Central Bank might face the classic Mundell-Fleming issue of "impossible trinity" that highlighted the impossibility of maintaining three things, namely an open capital account, fixed exchange rate and monetary policy autonomy at the same time.

The Government of India (GoI) has to withdraw restraints on both domestic and foreign players (who would be engaged according to the Circular in settlements of their trade transactions in rupee) both in the spot or forward market. In the absence of any special arrangements/restrictions by

the RBI to tackle any unintended consequences of this, monetary autonomy could be eroded. India is not a country like China who can manage their currency with capital controls due to their trade surplus as well as huge buffering of forex reserves to withstand any external shocks.

An Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) working paper titled as "The Benefits and Costs of Renminbi Internationalization" (ADBI Working Paper 481; Zhang, L., and K. Tao. 2014) found that in terms of the Chinese currency renminbi, one-unit rise in currency internationalisation is likely to increase the development of the financial market by 0.2 percentage points in terms of private credit and 0.7 percentage points in terms of stock market total value. This reduction in transaction costs diminishes the exchange risks of global trade and investment.

However, given the differences between the economy of China and India, and the potential risk factors, it will be better for India to adopt a gradualist approach. A RBI Staff Paper in April, 2010, titled as "Internationalisation of currency: The Case of the Indian Rupee and Chinese Renminbi" highlighted that unlike China, that normally runs a current account surplus, India generally runs trade and current account deficits.

## ANNEXURE

The following Tables (Table 1 & Table 2) sourced from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GoI show the imports of petroleum products as well as petroleum crude from Russia during April-August'2022, that compares the current years' (2nd column) value with the previous years' (3rd column) value, and it can be observed that from May-June'2022, the import from Russia of petroleum products and oil have increased substantially. The cumulative YOY growth has also shown a remarkable increase from last year.

**TABLE 1: IMPORT OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FROM RUSSIA (IN US\$ MILLION)**

| Month/Year   | Current Year: Value | Previous Year: Value | Current Year: Cumulative Value | Previous Year: Cumulative value | Cumulative YoY Growth |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| April, 2022  | 43.28               | 44.43                | 43.28                          | 44.43                           | -2.59%                |
| May, 2022    | 194.25              | 7.07                 | 237.52                         | 51.50                           | 361.24%               |
| June, 2022   | 259.87              | 0.07                 | 497.39                         | 51.57                           | 864.59%               |
| July, 2022   | 209.46              | 157.64               | 706.85                         | 209.21                          | 237.87%               |
| August, 2022 | 520.38              | 21.87                | 1,227.23                       | 231.08                          | 431.09%               |

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

**TABLE 2: IMPORT OF PETROLEUM CRUDE FROM RUSSIA (US\$ MILLION)**

| Month/Year   | Current Year: Value | Previous Year: Value | Current Year: Cumulative Value | Previous Year: Cumulative value | Cumulative YoY Growth |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| April, 2022  | 1,092.61            | 226.19               | 1,092.61                       | 226.19                          | 383.05%               |
| May, 2022    | 1,902.16            | 215.10               | 2,994.77                       | 441.29                          | 578.64%               |
| June, 2022   | 2,891.83            | 146.87               | 5,886.60                       | 588.16                          | 900.85%               |
| July, 2022   | 2,879.85            | 146.59               | 8,766.44                       | 734.75                          | 1093.11%              |
| August, 2022 | 2,645.71            | 147.20               | 11,412.15                      | 881.95                          | 1193.97%              |

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

**COMPARISON OF INFLATION RATES AMONG DIFFERENT COUNTRIES (%) [APR-JAN'23]**

| Countries   | Inflation rate in April'23 | Inflation Rate in March'23(%) | Inflation Rate In Feb'23(%) | Inflation Rate in Jan'23(%) |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| India       | 4.7%                       | 5.6%                          | 6.4%                        | 6.5%                        |
| US          | 4.9%                       | 5.0%                          | 6.0%                        | 6.4%                        |
| UK          | Yet to publish             | 10.1%                         | 10.4%                       | 10.1%                       |
| Euro Area   | 7.0%                       | 6.9%                          | 8.5%                        | 8.6%                        |
| China       | 0.1%                       | 0.7%                          | 1.0%                        | 2.1%                        |
| Switzerland | 2.6%                       | 2.9%                          | 3.4%                        | 3.3%                        |
| Japan       | Yet to publish             | 3.2%                          | 3.3%                        | 4.3%                        |
| Canada      | Yet to publish             | 4.3%                          | 5.2%                        | 5.9%                        |
| Indonesia   | 4.3%                       | 4.9%                          | 5.4%                        | 5.2%                        |
| Brazil      | Yet to publish             | 4.6%                          | 5.6%                        | 5.7%                        |
| Turkey      | 43.6%                      | 50.5%                         | 55.1%                       | 57.6%                       |
| Argentina   | Yet to publish             | 104.3%                        | 102.5%                      | 98.8%                       |
| Germany     | 7.2%                       | 7.4%                          | 8.7%                        | 8.7%                        |
| Singapore   | Yet to publish             | 5.5%                          | 6.3%                        | 6.6%                        |

Source: Official Statistics of Countries, Trading Economics.

Note: For Parity, CPI inflation is compared up to single digit only.

In recent times, India has faced a downside in its external balances, especially in merchandise trade. It causes concern that fewer countries like Netherlands, Brazil, and Singapore have shown export growth for the Indian market among the top ten destination during this month. While electronic goods export has shown positive trend thanks to the thrust in domestic manufacturing, certain major exportable like gems and jewellery, engineering goods, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and readymade garments have experienced a dip. On the import side, barring machinery and non-ferrous metals, petroleum and fertilizers have seen major growth with Russia emerging as a major source whereas the share of US, China and Australia have shown decline among the top ten major import sources for India.

Russia has acquired huge balances of Indian rupee, but Russia has not been able to use it. According to news report (Economic Times, 7 May 2023), Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Russia has huge rupee balances, but to use this amount, these rupees must be transferred in another currency, which is under discussion.

On the issue of whether India would be able to exploit benefits of rupee internationalisation, further measures would be required and the answer is uneasy since such benefits would depend on country-specific characteristics. India also needs to deepen its corporate bond market, and regulatory architecture needs to be strengthened to tackle ever-increasing financial sector sophistication. Until then, at the current level of India's financial sophistication, there is a need for a strategic, flexible policy-oriented strategy for the rupee internationalisation in a calibrated manner. ❖



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Vipin Malik, Chairman, Infomercs Ratings, served on Boards of Reserve Bank of India and Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited, Canara Bank, J&K

Bank, etc. Author of several well-received books and several articles. He appears often on television debates on economy issues.



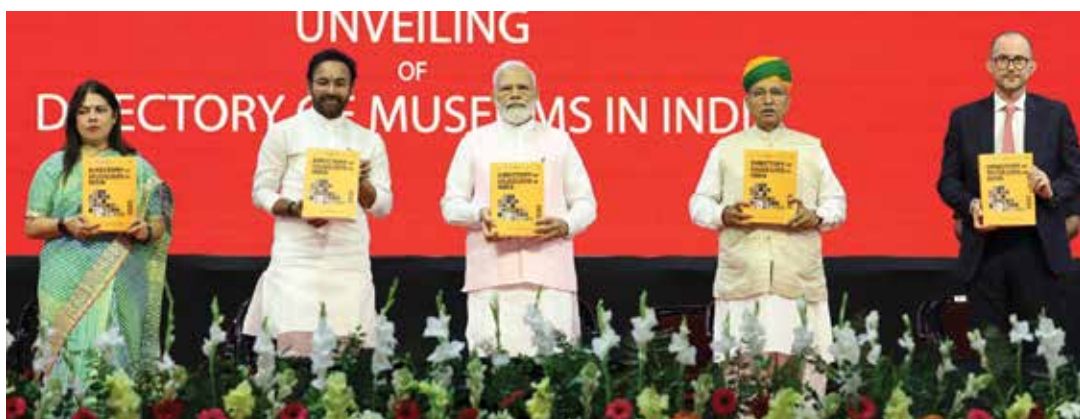
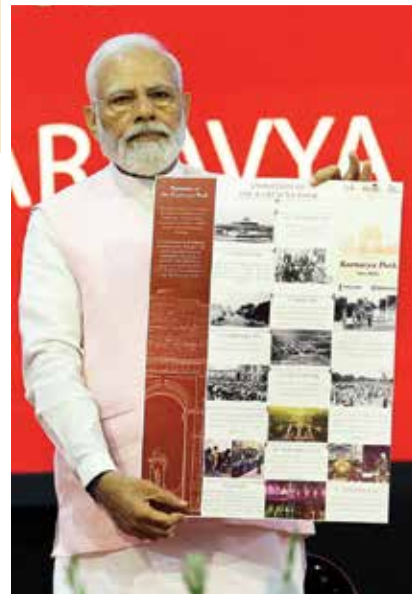
Sankhanath Bandyopadhyay, Economist, Infomercs Ratings, has worked earlier at institutions like IIFT, CBGA, JBIC, RGCIS etc. He writes regular columns in leading media newspapers among others.

# ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES

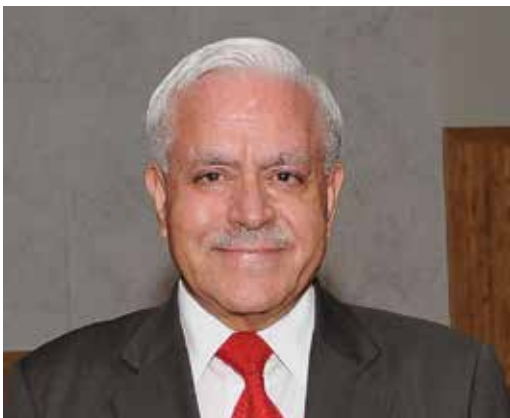


It was a time for Museums to grab the headlines, as India resurrects its cultural infrastructure, in the words of PM Modi. He said, “museums provide inspiration from the past, and also give a sense of duty towards the future” He was inaugurating the International Museums Expo in New Delhi. It saw a first virtual walk through of the proposed National Museums in North and South Blocks, as we move towards the revamp of the entire Kartavya Path zone.



# INDIA'S TIGHT ROPE GEOPOLITICAL WALK IS THIS THE NEW ORDER?

These are times when the global community is undergoing a churn. Multipolarity is the new dictum, where nations are balancing their act to ensure their individuality as a people.



by ASHOK SAJJANHAR

**T**he world has passed through immense turmoil and turbulence over the last few years. The Covid-19 pandemic which hit the world at the beginning of 2020 was the worst health crisis to have befallen the global community in more than one century, the last calamity of such magnitude having been the Spanish flu in 1919. The pandemic resulted in serious adverse consequences for all countries in the world in health, both physical and mental, economic and social spheres. Because of the intense and sustained lockdowns over extended periods, most countries suffered huge job losses and decline in their GDPs and earning capacities of their populations.

Even before the world was able to come to terms with the pandemic, it was struck by the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Although the war is taking place in a relatively small area in Central Europe, it has led to the death of several thousands, and destruction of multi-storied buildings, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure in Ukraine, and displacement of about 8 million Ukrainian women and children from their homes. They are living

as refugees in the neighbouring countries. In addition, the war has resulted in disruption of supply chains, acute global shortages of food, energy and fertilizers, steep inflation, job-losses and soaring debt in many countries. Developing countries have been the most adversely affected by these crises.

## India's Response

On account of the bold and independent policies, both domestic and foreign, pursued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, India has been successful in dealing relatively effectively with the challenges posed by these crises.

## The Pandemic

Although India's economy suffered a huge decline of 6.8% in 2020-'21 because of the protracted lockdowns, it was able to more than adequately redress this shortfall over the next two years. Because of the visionary policies of financial inclusion, digital payment infrastructure, digital identity, food grain support for more than 800 million people, and many more far-reaching decisions adopted by the government, India has been able to emerge with a GDP of \$3.5 trillion and an economy which is the fifth largest in the world. It is expected to become the 3rd largest economy after displacing Germany and Japan by the end of the decade or early next decade. On the health front, not only was India able to manufacture the Covishield vaccine in collaboration with Oxford AstraZeneca as soon as it became available around the end of 2020, but was also able to invent its own Covaxin vaccine so that the nationwide vaccination programme could take off with a bang across the country for front-line workers on 16th January, 2021. Four days after that, India launched its Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) initiative to supply millions of doses of vaccines to its neighbours and other countries, mostly developing nations, for starting the vaccination of their own vulnerable populations.

In the middle of confronting this once in a century challenge, India also had to face the incursion of about 50,000 Chinese troops with heavy weaponry on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in violation of the long-standing bilateral Agreements to maintain peace and tranquility on the border. India lost twenty of its brave soldiers in a violent clash at the Galwan valley in June, 2020, the first casualties on the LAC in 45 years. The forward deployment and standoff between the Indian and Chinese forces at the LAC recently entered its fourth year!

## The Russia-Ukraine conflict

On the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, India has adopted a balanced and principled stand. In all its pronouncements at the UN Security Council of which it was a non-permanent member till De-



ember last year and in the UN General Assembly, India has strongly espoused the principles of the UN Charter and the imperative need to safeguard the territorial integrity and sovereignty of member states. However, keeping in view its historical relations with Russia and its heavy dependence on it for meeting its defence requirements and spares, India has abstained from directly condemning Russia for its aggression (although PM Modi did tell President Putin on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Samarkand in September, 2022 that “this is not an era of war”). India has consistently and staunchly advocated the path of diplomacy, dialogue and peace.

The twin crises of the pandemic and the war have led to huge shortages and rise in prices of energy worldwide. On account of India’s acute dependence to the tune of more than 85% of its requirement of crude oil and 45% of natural gas on imports, India significantly increased its imports of oil and fertilizers at concessional rates from Russia over the last several months. This decision has been necessitated for India to provide energy at affordable prices to its population and to safeguard its energy security and national interest. India has firmly stood by its conscientious stance in spite of the enormous pressure by the West, including the US, to change its position. Because of the unwavering and well-argued stand adopted by India, the West has grudgingly accepted the merit of India’s rationale. This has helped India to sustain its time-tested partnership with Russia which is critical for it for geo-strategic as well as economic reasons. Although Russia’s dependence on and embrace of China has been getting tighter on account of the inimical ties of both these countries with the west, particularly USA, it is imperative for India to maintain robust ties with Russia to balance its contentious ties with China, to some extent if not completely.

### India-US Relations

In the midst of the above-mentioned rapid geo-political flux, India’s relations with the United States and other major powers of the West are expanding at a rapid pace. Over the last eight years, the US has emerged as India’s most significant and consequential partner. It is India’s largest trading partner with bilateral trade of US\$192 billion last year. Both countries enjoy a comprehensive, global, strategic partnership covering almost all areas of human endeavor, driven by shared democratic values, convergence of interests on a range of issues, and vibrant people-to-people contacts. They interact regularly and frequently in the more than 60 bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms covering a multitude of areas spanning education, renewable energy, cyber-security, counter-terrorism, high technology, trade, S&T, Space, health and many more. India’s active engagement with the Quad comprising of Australia, India, Japan and USA has significantly expanded the mandate of this

Grouping and transformed it into a “Force for Global Good.” The two countries instituted a 2+2 Annual Ministerial Dialogue Mechanism between the Defence and Foreign Ministers of the two countries in 2018. The fourth meeting in this format took place in 2022. Both PM Modi and President Biden have committed to significantly expand the bilateral partnership in over-arching political, security, economic, commerce, defence and strategic spheres. The two leaders have met frequently in recent months and are scheduled to meet often in the coming months including in the US, Japan, Australia and India. Both leaders have



invested considerable political capital to take the bilateral partnership to new heights.

### Relations with Japan, Australia, France

India’s relations with Japan, Australia, France and other members of the West continue to grow rapidly. The positive state of bilateral ties can be assessed from the fact that Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia visited India on bilateral tours recently. They will be coming to India again for the G20 Summit in September, 2023. PM Modi will be travelling to both Japan and Australia for the G7 and Quad Summits



India launched its Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) initiative to supply millions of doses of vaccines to its neighbours and other countries, mostly developing nations, for starting the vaccination of their own vulnerable populations.

South Summit so that the concerns of developing countries could receive full attention. It also decided to make the G20 into a mass movement in India by organizing 200 meetings in 59 cities all across the country. For the SCO, India has proposed that in addition to the Delhi Declaration, Four Documents on De-Radicalization, Millets, Lifestyle for environment (LiFE) and Digitization be adopted at the Summit in July, 2023.

### Challenges for India

The most serious challenge for India going forward will be to deal effectively with the hostility and push-back by China on myriad fronts, particularly economic and security. As mentioned above, the faceoff in the Eastern Ladakh sector shows no signs of going away. In addition, China continues its provocations by renaming several places in Arunachal Pradesh in Chinese language and rapidly developing/modernizing its infrastructure in the border areas. Its all-weather partnership with Pakistan continues unabated. In the post-pandemic and zero-Covid phase, China has become much more active globally to present a softer image after the damage suffered on account of its wolf-warrior diplomacy. Its success on the Iran-Saudi front and its confident overtures to bring peace in the Russia-Ukraine conflict are harbingers of China's growing political and diplomatic influence. This could reduce India's maneuverability in promoting its interests. On the economic front, although India is the fastest growing major economy today, the gap with China's GDP continues to grow rather than shrink. India has to offer itself as a viable alternative to China's economy if it is to make a dent in its global dominance. This doesn't seem to be possible in the foreseeable future.

The other increasingly intractable challenge for India is to simultaneously manage its relations with the US and Russia. This will require all the diplomatic finesse at its command. It has been able to do this successfully so far but the difficulty will only grow as the Russia-Ukraine conflict gets prolonged further. India needs to preserve its strategic

respectively in the very near future. On the invitation of the French President Macron, he will be attending the French National Day on 14th July in Paris as the Guest of Honor.

### Presidency of G20 and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

India assumed the Presidency of the prestigious G20 and SCO for the current year. It has taken a number of unique initiatives in both these Organizations to make their deliberations and decisions more effective and relevant. In the G20, India organized a Voice of the Global

autonomy while deepening and expanding its partnership with the US. At the same time, it will have to increasingly diversify its defence purchases and increase domestic manufacture of defence equipment to reduce its considerable dependence on Russia for defence supplies and spares. This is easier said than done. Moreover, India will have to soon find alternative, affordable sources for its energy imports from Russia which have shot up immensely over the last one year making Russia the largest source of oil imports by India today.

Effectively dealing with the all of the above challenges and more will demand sophistication from India. Thus far it has acquitted itself well. It is a moot point what the future holds.

### Conclusion

The world is undergoing a momentous transformation. Nothing like this has been witnessed since the Second World War more than 75 years ago. This geo-political churn presents immense challenges as well as huge opportunities for India. In the midst of this swirl, a New India is emerging which is Confident, Resolute and Benevolent. India has surfaced as a partner of choice for most countries of the world. Its participation and contribution is considered indispensable to seeking solutions to some of the most critical challenges like climate change, terrorism, health, achieving the SDGs etc. confronting the world.

To occupy its rightful place in the global community, India's economy needs to grow at a sustained pace of 8-10% for the next 20 years. It also needs to ensure peace and stability domestically as well as on its borders. In this context, China will continue to be India's most formidable challenge for the foreseeable future. A rapidly growing economy, internal peace, a nimble-footed policy of multi-alignment and strategic partnerships with USA, the Quad and other like-minded countries will stand it in good stead in meeting the challenges it faces and advancing its interests. ❖



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# G20 MEET IN SRINAGAR HERALDS A NEW ERA FOR TOURISM IN THE VALLEY;

## UNPRECEDENTED RUSH BRINGS MORE INVESTMENTS INTO HOSPITALITY



Why Kashmir, you might ask, as a venue for a G20 deliberation? The more obvious question is, why not?

by NAVIN BERRY

**A**s a gathering on tourism with experts from numerous countries, mostly comprising advanced destinations, and others aspiring to be recognized as contributors to global tourism, Kashmir becomes a most obvious choice! It has, so to say, the first claim to being a destination of choice. For years, it has been the most favourite among Indian destinations, then it fell through to terror attacks, fuelled by a sinister and restless neighbour, and only now is emerging, once again as the first tourism destination in our country. Post covid, the Kashmir Valley has registered a most impressive growth in domestic numbers.

Kashmir has in recent years, witnessed a most steady growth in airline connectivity, not just from Delhi but from a growing number of

Indian cities. It has seen an impressive growth in city infrastructure, seen the addition of branded hotels. Not just Srinagar and Gulmarg, new destinations like Pahalgam have attracted newer tourists – not just for leisure but also for golf, MICE, and religious tourism. Investments into tourism are significant, and given the present indications, branded supply is poised for significant growth. The last two years has seen a huge investment into the social sector, enabling the local community to dream big, grow out of the shadows of threats of terrorism.

The announcement of G20 venues, and meetings thereof, has resulted in makeover of some 50 cities across India. This augurs well for these destinations, which include destinations like Udaipur, Kumarakon, Rann of Kutch and of course, Srinagar. These were needed to propel them into world class destinations. Understandably, G20 will become the enabling steps towards this bold ambition.

So, for Kashmir, this event being the first after the abrogation of Article 370, is also a political statement for the government. It was a mandate that the ruling party had promised in their manifesto; there was no hidden agenda, and it was accomplished most directly by the central govern-

ment. That it took a decision to make the state into a UT is best left to its better judgement on how to manage the state, in terms of law and order, and larger integration with the rest of the country. That a country or two did not register for the event is not worthy of discussion; it is pointless for us, as a nation. The only moot point remains on when the centre calls for elections in the state; it has been repeatedly pointed out, as and when the situation permits, and there the matter should rest. The earlier the better, one can say, to get on with the job, for the next stage in bringing normalcy in the lives of the people. Over the recent years, it must be said, there does appear more prosperity in the valley, even as you drive through, it is there to witness.

That much for politics, back to tourism! Kashmir was showcased most effectively. The destination in all its splendour – music, arts, cuisine, handicrafts, recreation, and golf. Not just for MICE at the noteworthy SKICC Convention centre, situated right on the fabled Dal Lake; also, for film tourism and for leisure. One can only hope these are the start of yet another new era for peace and prosperity through tourism, which has been the traditional mainstay of the local economy. ❖

ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD NO-TOBACCO DAY CELEBRATIONS!



# TOBACCO ENDGAME WILL INDIA ACHIEVE IT?

by TEAM VHAI

**T**he tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats killing about 13.5 lakh people in India each year. Worldwide, tobacco use causes more than seven million deaths per year and if the pattern of smoking globally does not change, more than eight million people annually will die from diseases related to tobacco use by 2030. The economic costs of tobacco use are substantial and include significant health care costs for treating the diseases caused by tobacco use as well as the lost human capital that results from tobacco-attributable morbidity and mortality.

Different tobacco products pose varying levels of health risk to users. Tobacco use is a major risk factor for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, over 20 different types or subtypes of cancer, and many other debilitating health conditions. Tobacco smoke contains over 70 known cancer-causing chemicals. Nicotine is one of more than 4,000 chemicals found in tobacco smoke and is the primary component that acts on the brain. High levels of nicotine in smokeless tobacco are readily absorbed through the skin and mucosal lining of the mouth which is responsible for oral

cancers. Also, environmental tobacco smoke, or second-hand smoke, has been shown to cause adverse health effects in people of all ages. The impact of tobacco use is not limited to mortality rates, but also affects quality of life and attempts to cope with poor mental health impacting your everyday life. Tobacco use affects your physical functioning, social functioning, vitality, general health and mental health. Smoking can affect your breathing, causing coughing and shortness of breath, increased fatigue, loss of fertility, menstrual problems etc. It increases the risk of respiratory tract infection, including bronchitis which can significantly reduce your quality of life.

While there has been increased awareness over time of the physical effects of tobacco, the mental affects are often left out of the conversation. The mental health challenges begin with addiction. Besides, addiction being a mental illness itself, tobacco and nicotine addiction can add extra stress to your life through the struggle to maintain the addiction. The nicotine in cigarettes can cause symptoms similar to anxiety. Tobacco use is strongly associated with a variety of psychiatric disorders. Tobacco users especially smokers are more likely to have mental health conditions, such as mood disorders, anxiety disorders and psychosis.

Government of India played a prominent role in the negotiations and drafting of the WHO FCTC, which culminated into the World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) adopting the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) at its 56th Session on 21st May 2003. It is relevant to mention that at the same time the Indian Parliament unanimously passed the COTPA, 2003 Bill on 30th April 2003 (a comprehensive Tobacco Control Law) which received the assent of the President on the 18th May, 2003. Subsequently India signed the WHO FCTC on 10th September 2003 and ratified the treaty on 5th February 2004, thereby confirming its obligation to perform and carry out the stipulations contained in the treaty.



“Unlike a regulated industry, beedi is comparatively scattered because people who collect tendu leaves are a distinct set of people, who may or may not roll beedi. We also need to think that what are the alternative occupations that these tendu leaf gatherers can do, which are economically equivalent or more remunerative.”

**Rajesh Bhushan**  
Union Health Secretary

India played a key role in regulating tobacco use and its consumption by enacting the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 (COTPA) to prohibit advertisement of, and to provide for the regulation of trade and commerce in, and production, supply. Under COTPA, many States have taken effective steps for prohibition on smoking in public spaces, prohibition on all forms of direct/indirect advertisement, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products, prohibition on sale of tobacco products to minors as well as within a radius of 100 yards of educational institutions, and mandatory depiction of specified pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products. However, COTPA is best implemented when there are coordinated efforts in the direction by effectively involving various enforcement agencies and other stakeholders.

The National Tobacco Control Program (NTCP) launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India to bring about greater awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco use and tobacco control laws as well as to facilitate effective implementation of the tobacco control laws. Such efforts have resulted in greater awareness among the masses and have led to tobacco control.

For effective design and proper implementation of policies, evidence is crucial. And when it comes to tobacco consumption, ample evidence is available on its consumption patterns, health and economic harms and policy measures which may help curb its growing addiction.

The latest available Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2016-17 (GATS 2) indicated that a staggering 28.6% or roughly 26 crore Indians, above 15 years of age, were consuming tobacco in some form! Of these, 23 crores were daily users and 19 crores were in rural India. Smokeless tobacco or gutkha was the most consumed tobacco product. Consumption varied widely across the states, from 64.5% in Tripura to 9.7% in Goa. However, it was reassuring that from GATS 1 to GATS 2, prevalence of tobacco consumption in any form came down by 6% and it is hoped that results from GATS 3, which is currently underway, will continue this downward trend!

As for prevalence of tobacco consumption among youth, the latest Global Youth Tobacco Survey 2019 data indicated that 8.5% of students, in the age group 13-15 years, consumed tobacco in some form in the country, which is a marked improvement from 14.6% students who consumed tobacco in India as per GYTS 2009 data. Again, there were wide variations across the states - from as worryingly high as 58% in Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram to as calmly low as 1.1% in Himachal Pradesh.

These impersonal statistics on tobacco consumption, however, have very real and alarming implications on our public health and economy. What are these?

As per 'India: Health of the Nation's States' report, 2017 by Indian Council of Medical Research, it was estimated that the proportion of deaths due to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in India increased from 37.9% in 1990 to 61.8% in 2016, and further to 66% by 2019, as per a WHO estimate. The rising burden of NCDs is even surpassing the burden of Communicable diseases like water-borne or vector borne diseases, TB, HIV, etc. And tobacco use is a leading risk factor for NCDs attributable to nearly 13.5 lakh deaths every year, as identified by the Government of India itself.

Further, in September 2022, the Parliament Standing Committee on Health submitted the 139th Report on Cancer Care Plan



and Management in which it noted that in India, the highest number of lives lost is due to oral cancer caused by tobacco, followed by cancer of the lungs, oesophagus and stomach. The Committee also noted that in India, tobacco use in different forms accounts for nearly 50% of all cancers that are preventable.

The health burden of tobacco consumption is evident and unmistakable. But the economic burden of tobacco consumption presents an equally stark picture - it was estimated to be a whopping Rs.1.77 lakh crore in 2017, or roughly 1.04% of India's GDP. Research also indicates that tobacco pushes people into poverty and the number of people suffering impoverishment in India due to tobacco consumption could be as high as 15 million!

## Legalising CBD & Ban on Electronic Cigarettes

There has been a big move towards legalising some kinds of CBD and other substances as not just less harmful but also possibly positive in impact for health. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act) outlaws the recreational use of cannabis. The NDPS Act, does not apply to the leaves and seeds of cannabis plants. In case the CBD is extracted from the leaves of the cannabis, then technically it is not illegal. The NDPS Act also does not ban paraphernalia of cannabis smoking, such as rolling papers, pipes etc. Cultivation of cannabis for industrial purpose and horticulture is legal. CBD oil manufactured under a licence issued by the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 can be legally used. The use of cannabis as a medicine is not very prevalent in India. The bottom line here is that, more research is needed to determine the safety and efficacy of CBD oil in humans although several studies suggest that it can be helpful for managing a range of conditions.

Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act (PECA), 2019 bans production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertisement of electronic cigarettes. "Electronic cigarette" is an electronic device that heats a substance, with or without nicotine and flavours, to create an aerosol for inhalation and includes all forms of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems, Heat Not Burn Products, e-Hookah and the like devices, by whatever name called and whatever shape, size or form it may have, but does not include any product licensed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

The Government presented global evidence, ICMR White Paper, and other documents on health harm of e-cigarettes. It's alarming prevalence in children and youth due to attractive flavouring. Its failure as a cessation/harm reduction device and its dual use or use leading to



initiation of tobacco amongst others.

E-cigarettes is still available at some online and offline retail stores. The Government both at the centre and state level has taken steps such as public notice, raids, seizures, trainings etc to enforce the ban.

## Tobacco Advertising

Advertising leads to tobacco initiation and use, particularly among youth. Hence, Section 5 of India's national tobacco control law, the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, prohibits any kind of direct or indirect advertisement, brand promotion or sponsorship of tobacco products. However, tobacco companies in India have continued to market tobacco, often through surreptitious means.

Rule 2(e) of the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution Rules, 2004, defines Indirect advertisement as "the use of a name or brand of tobacco products for marketing, promoting or advertising other goods, services and events; AND the marketing of tobacco products with the aid of a brand name or trademark which is known as, or in use as, a name or brand for other goods and service; AND the use of particular colours and layout and/or presentation those are associated with particular tobacco products; and (iv) the use of tobacco products and smoking situations when advertising other goods and services.

However, tobacco companies continue advertising through "brand extension," where the tobacco company advertises their non-tobacco products and services using their logo and trademark, but with a distinct visual identity from their tobacco products and surrogate advertisements, where the advertisements of the unregulated products is virtually identical to marketing for regulated tobacco products.

Tobacco companies have also shifted marketing to digital media as traditional media has become increasingly regulated. Presently smokeless tobacco is advertised indirectly - Baba Zarda/Baba Mouthfreshner, Chaini Khaini/Chaini Chaini Mouthfreshners or through pan masala/elaichi brand name/logo such as kamlapasand and vimal which is sold conjointly with chewing tobacco small packs.

## OTT Platforms: A blessing or a curse in disguise?

Amid the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown and entertainment options restricted to one's own habitation, OTT platforms saw exponential growth in India. OTT platforms have been largely unregulated and free from censorship negatively influencing young and impressionable



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**Ranjit Singh**  
Advocate, Supreme Court  
of India

minds who happen to be the largest viewers of their content in India. OTT exposes the younger generation to a lot of harmful content, including drug and substance abuse especially tobacco. Several actors who are looked up to by the younger generation as their 'Role Models' are seen puffing a cigarette every 10 minutes in a 2-hour movie. OTT has, in fact, glamourized smoking and addiction. Review of literature consistently validates that adolescents with high exposure to tobacco occurrences in Bollywood films were 2.3 times more likely to have ever used tobacco compared with adolescents with low exposure.



“ I treat patients suffering from cancers caused by tobacco use. I observe that the Tobacco industry is launching new products especially to lure the young generation. E-cigarettes was banned in India due to its health risks and to ensure it doesn't become an epidemic among children and young adults. Government must ensure the effective compliance and enforcement of the ban. In reality, these new nicotine products are just another way for the companies to increase their profits with no concern about the impacts of lifelong nicotine addiction on the users.”

**Dr Harit Chaturvedi**  
Chairman of cancer care,  
director and chief consultant  
surgical oncology at Max  
Hospitals

To protect adolescents and young adults from such exposure to tobacco imagery, a provision exists in the Indian law. Section 5 of India's Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) essentially implies that advertising and promotion of tobacco and its products in any form in the media is banned and violations are punishable. In 2005, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare also issued regulations which require cinema theater owners and broadcaster of television programmes to display anti-tobacco static warning messages, anti-tobacco health spots and audio-visual disclaimers about the ill effects of tobacco in all films and television programmes depicting tobacco products or their use and further bans display of any form of tobacco products.

Several studies in India provide conclusive evidence that OTT platforms are disregarding India's high standards for restricting and containing tobacco depictions in the media. In fact, movies with appropriate anti-tobacco disclaimers in theaters or cable TV network are made available on OTT without anti-tobacco messages. A recent study in Delhi, published in the British Medical Journal investigated 10 popular shows on Netflix and Amazon Prime videos for the incidences of tobacco smoking and found that 70% of these shows portrayed tobacco use through their characters without any static warnings. Many series showed tobacco brands as well as close ups of tobacco products. The shows with tobacco depictions included both foreign-produced and Indian-produced series and most were rated for viewers below 18 years, thus targeting youth and children.

Tobacco imagery in on-demand services expanding rapidly in India remain outside of the current regulations and present a growing risk of exposure to children and adolescents. To remain a global leader in protecting young people from exposure to tobacco use and depiction in entertainment media, India must close the regulatory gap in OTT media and ideally extend it films rule to OTT with effective enforcement. The OTT platforms must be brought under the umbrella of existing laws governing depiction of tobacco on films and television. By introducing such a policy, India will set a benchmark for the world.

## India's Progress on Tobacco Control

Since 2010, India's political leaders have taken a series of strong actions at both the national and state level to curb the country's enormous tobacco epidemic, which claims one million lives each year. These actions include large, graphic warning labels that cover 85 percent of tobacco products. India's warnings are among the largest in the world, showing that graphic warnings depicting the deadly consequences of tobacco use work to help current users quit and prevent people from starting to use tobacco.

India became a leader in the global fight against a youth e-cigarette epidemic by taking a historic decision to ban such nicotine and tobacco products. Government of India banned production, import and sale of e-cigarettes and similar products, citing health risk to people, especially youth.

India has also increased tobacco taxes at the state level and many states have banned gutka, a popular, but deadly form of smokeless tobacco. India's newest data show that smokeless tobacco use has declined by 24 percent – a historic decrease that will save many lives in a country known as the oral cancer capital of the world. The Indian government also took an important step and announced that it will tax cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and bidis at the highest rate of 28 percent under a new Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime.

Government of India should be lauded for its significant progress of the work done against this epidemic. These progressive policies should be taken forward by the state governments by bringing out appropriate orders, notifications and legislations that are designed to protect public health and defend existing policies and laws across the country. India's progress also shows the world that even countries with

soaring numbers of tobacco users can drastically reduce the burden of tobacco use and improve public health for all.

## The Way Forward

Some possible policy measures that India can take to help stem the rising tide of tobacco menace:

■ One such measure is to impose a higher tax on tobacco products which is one of the most effective ways to reduce its consumption, while raising revenue for the Government to invest in public health. Pre-GST, there was a healthy trend of gradual and consistent increase in Excise Taxes by Central Government and erstwhile Value Added Tax (VAT) by state governments on tobacco products. When India transitioned to GST, all tobacco products, including bidi and smokeless tobacco, were put in the highest 28% tax slab. But since then, there hasn't been any substantial increase in taxes or prices of tobacco products. In fact, data indicates that tobacco products have

become more affordable as compared to inflation in prices of other essential commodities. The WHO has recommended a minimum tax of 75% of retail price of tobacco products and as many as 40 countries across the world have levied taxes at or more than 75%, including Sri Lanka (77%) and Thailand (78.6%) in our region. In comparison, the tax incidence on bidis, the most smoked product, is just 22% in India.

■ The scare of illicit products flooding the Indian market is often used to discourage higher taxes or stricter regulation of tobacco products. No reliable estimates exist on the size of

the market of illicit products in India. While some reports may provide a high estimate of 20%, some studies done in India, peg the figure to be as low as 2.7%. It must be remembered that, licit or illicit, tobacco is harmful. De-regulation of licit tobacco and unleashing its health harms on people for the purpose of killing the black market of illicit tobacco, whose size is unknown, cannot be a sane policy response. Stricter enforcement is the way to go.

■ Another imminent policy measure is strengthening India's anti-tobacco law, the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 or COTPA. In the two decades of its existence, COTPA has proved to be a milestone in India's fight against tobacco. But what got us here, won't get us there. The time is ripe to further fortify COTPA to respond to changed realities.

For instance, COTPA banned smoking in public and permitted smoking in Designated Smoking Areas. But such DSAs are poorly constructed, exposing non-smokers to second hand smoke (SHS). GATS 2 data shows that almost 30% adults reported being exposed to SHS at workplace and GYTS data shows that 21% students reported being exposed to SHS at public places. COTPA also banned tobacco advertisement but companies use innovative means like surrogate advertisements, sponsorship of sports events, social media marketing to particularly attract the youth. The legal age of tobacco consumption is 18 but this is also the age when youth are more vulnerable to peer pressure and industry tactics to experiment with tobacco consumption and become addicted.

■ Therefore, COTPA needs to be further strengthened to remove DSAs, place a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertisements and promotion, increase legal age of consumption of tobacco, among other changes. The Government of India made a move in this direction when it put a Bill in public domain in 2020 providing for these progressive changes and received widespread support. The Bill is yet to be brought to Parliament, but it is hoped that in the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament, the Bill will finally be tabled, debated, passed and we will usher in an era of a "Tobacco Free Generation". ♦



The WHO has recommended a minimum tax of 75% of retail price of tobacco products and as many as 40 countries across the world have levied taxes at or more than 75%, including Sri Lanka (77%) and Thailand (78.6%) in our region. In comparison, the tax incidence on bidis, the most smoked product, is just 22% in India.



Bhavna Mukhopadhyay



Binoy Mathew



Maansi Verma

### ABOUT TEAM VHAI

Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) is a national public health organization dedicated to making health and development a reality for people of India. It is the largest network of non-governmental health organizations in the world. Bhavna Mukhopadhyay is the Chief Executive of VHAI.

# REGIONAL IN SOUTH ASIA IS EXTENDED DOMESTIC; SKY IS THE LIMIT TO ITS GROWTH

Regional is King! Whether it is between Singapore and Malaysia, or within ASEAN. Or, within Europe which accounts for more than 70% regional traffic. It is equally true of the GCC countries with Dubai getting more than 70% of its traffic from within.



by NAVIN BERRY

*Regional is more reliable, more trustworthy. Take South Asia as a region. In lifestyle, in expectations, in travel habits, whether it is food, or drink, we are in a way a common people.*

*Regional is more last minute. People have gravitated to taking more holidays but of shorter durations. Therefore, short-haul travel is preferred. Comfort availability has improved dramatically, not just in hotels but in local transport, airports, etc. When you find low business periods, you can tap regional like you tap domestic. We understand and appreciate newspaper headlined stories talking of unrest or social disturbances.*

**T**here are some good pointers, some struggles ahead, as we think of regional tourism within the South Asian region. Important that we recognise both.

## Factors that hold Promise

■ **Natural Travel:** Much regional travel is already happening. We can call it natural travel. That which will happen between good neigh-

bours. Visiting friends and relatives, visiting for medical reasons, for work, for education. But less for leisure. This will keep growing. Indian inbound arrivals from within South Asia were as much as 29% of its total visitor count way back in 2018. How this has altered post covid, I cannot say, but my suspicion is it must be back to pre-covid, if not improved further.

This traffic is peculiar. A large part of it does not utilise the structured part of the established tourism network. No hotels, no tour operators, no tourist transport. Some of it is by road. It has by passed for the larger part, the interest levels of the tourism community in India. It is there, this Natural Travel, that we mention, and will grow. This must be equally true of many other regions. The last I knew many Singaporeans cross the border into Malaysia, only for the day, to buy cheaper goods.

■ **Connectivity:** It was never this good. With the arrival of private airlines in India, we have been able to make the growth a couple of times fold. In some cases, five to six times in the last few years. Going forward, more new city pairs would help, some help from airports (which remain congested at the major metros, and therefore smaller ones could provide new energy), tier 2 and tier 3 would be next steps. At present, on some days, the price of the ticket is very high, and a big deterrent.

■ **Awareness:** There is awareness, by and large, of the tourism product. Though in many cases, it remains restricted or is not updated. Which could help, when recognised and acted upon. Like in the case of Nepal, what the destination is today in terms of pilgrim attraction, and MICE and holidays is relatively unknown. So much has changed in Kathmandu in recent years, this new narrative needs to be told. Nepal, for instance, is yet to open adequately to well-heeled Indians. The new spruced up look at Pashupathinath is a most exhilarating experience; standard of local transport has improved manifold; cuisine offerings are international and Thamel is a new experience.





With the advent of hotel chains spreading their wings, there is greater familiarity of where to stay, increased the comfort level for all of us. In Kathmandu, you have a Vivanta, Radisson, Fairmont, Hyatt, and so on. This helps the traveller book. It has increased the sense of shared ownership among both the industry and the end consumer.

■ **Social Media:** This is a new avenue and offers unlimited opportunity for marketing and advertising. Targeted outreach, to special interest groups, at less cost than was possible in print, and a good penetration in most key markets within South Asia.

## The Problem Areas: The Constraints

■ **Traditional Markets:** We have traditionally looked at Europe and US, as key markets as these have been higher spenders and used the five-star hotels, which have been the key stakeholders in India's tourism business. But much of this is changing. These same five-star hotel groups have added mid-market properties as well. In fact, India's mid-market is growing faster than the five-star category. There are also stand-alone chains, specialising in three-star hotels, some with 60 plus properties.

■ **Domestic is Big:** During Covid and post covid, domestic was the knight in shining armour! The traffic that was bottled for two years plus, that was raring to go, found refuge in going domestic. International flights remained closed, domestic opened in phases. To begin with, as the world opened, it was overnight or week-end tourism that flowered most. It was what was dubbed significantly as *aas-paas* tourism. Close by, to destinations most preferred by road. It was also economical as a full family got bundled into a single car, as against flying which was then only opening in phases, was considered unsafe and in the first stages seen only fit for essential travel. It was a natural coming together – only domestic, more economical, shorter trips, family travel.

Within our region, this is possibly true for all our countries, with domestic growing in each of us. As in India, so in Nepal, Bangladesh and also in Sri Lanka. Domestic is being lured like never before. In the lobby of many of the deluxe hotels in Kathmandu, I find a local wedding taking place, a young couple from the interiors visiting for a week end. It is commonplace in South Asia. There are promotional packages over holidays.

In many cities, where there was little or no foreign tourism, Indian tourists have started paying rates that were unimaginable till now. In towns like Mussoorie and Rishikesh, imagine rates of ₹30,000 and more, and there are no rooms! So, for leisure, there may be a roadblock, that is increasing domestic tourism demand, to our efforts to grow regional.

Aggravating the problem is the mis-match in demand and supply. Domestic demand is outstripping hotel room supply, and will remain

## Solutions Going Forward

Given the size of India, and the geographical position, right in the centre, India has 33 states plus Union Territories. Europe has 44 countries some like Holy See with a population of 700 citizens, it is almost a fair comparison. Even though EU has a single passport, the fact is there are as many as 44 countries. And it is regional tourism for them, from one country to another.

Regional, in any case, is not foreign travel. It is not aspirational for any of us, as it would be to go to Europe or America or Japan! WOULD we be better off thinking of regional tourism in our Indian sub-continent context, as an extension of the domestic.

Industry First! Let us work regardless of governments. Let us create demand and the services will come into play naturally. We need to identify regional pockets that hold greater promise of more immediate returns, the so-called low hanging fruit. Given the geo-politics of our region, let industry show the way forward, without fear or favour.

so for the next few years.

■ **Profits Dictate Business:** Another new emerging concern is the question of sustainability and profitability, that serve as litmus tests to whatever the industry is doing. Government play has diminished or disappeared altogether. No longer is flying the flag any consideration. Air India is now in private hands. It has stakeholders, namely the TATA group, for present, but soon when it becomes profitable, one can expect it to go public and get listed. So, being profitable is extremely important for survival. Gone are the days when we could ask for free tickets for promotion. ❖



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, has been in the business of reporting on travel, tourism and

hospitality for almost 5 decades. He has published titles such as Cityscan, GoNow and India Debates; founder of India's first inbound tourism mart that became one of the biggest in Asia.

# HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY LOOKS AHEAD

## REMAINS BULLISH ON GROWTH; HEADY DAYS AHEAD, WITH HIGH RATES

Post the covid disruptions that cost the industry near death, there are signs of good growth ahead, across multiple price points, especially in tier 2 and 3 cities.

by NAVIN BERRY

It is the topic of these times. The hotel rates have caused acute concern among the less fortunate travellers. In leisure destinations, it has become commonplace to get quotes of upwards of ₹25,000 per night, that is, if you are lucky. Most weekends, there are no rooms to be had. Hotels business has not seen this kind of sudden growth, for a long time. To be fair to them, they were the first to suffer when covid struck. They were also the last to recover. What does the immediate future hold? For them, and for the traveller? We reached out to a select group of majors, checking out the business environment, where growth is expected.

The good news is that most chains are spreading themselves across price points; it is not just five-star. In fact, the mid-market is showing the greatest promise.

These chains are bullish on future growth. We check out, like where, with what brands and with what expectations, are they looking ahead? What kind of time horizon do they see where demand will be more than supply, which is what is happening at present? How do they see the rates going, as we go forward?

**Industry has bounced back, the immediate future looks good; long-term, will depend upon numerous factors**

by CHANDER BALJEE, CMD, Royal Orchid Hotels

Our chain is pursuing aggressive expansion plans to increase market share, diversify revenue, and stay competitive. However, future

Swimming pool at Novotel Mumbai



Royal Orchid Regenta Jungle Resort Kabini Springs



growth plan requires careful planning and execution due to cost, risk, and potential challenges. We currently have 24 hotels in the pipeline which are Regenta Resorts, Regenta Central and Regenta Place, aiming to open before September. Additionally, we have an ongoing international project in Sri Lanka.

Predicting the exact time horizon when demand will surpass supply in the Indian hospitality industry is challenging, as it depends on various factors such as economic growth, tourism trends, government policies, and infrastructure development. However, I can provide some insights based on the general trajectory of the industry.

- **Economic growth and rising middle class:** Expanding middle class with higher incomes leads to increased domestic travel and demand for hospitality services.
- **Tourism growth:** Steady growth in domestic and international tourism due to government initiatives and infrastructure development.
- **Business and MICE tourism:** India becoming a popular destination for business meetings, conferences, and exhibitions, driving demand for hotels and conference facilities.
- **Infrastructure development:** Government investments in airports, highways, and tourism projects improve accessibility and attract more travellers.
- **Rising aspirations and travel culture:** Growing inclination to explore new destinations and experience different cultures, supported by social media and online travel platforms.
- **Continued growth:** Expectation of long-term growth in demand for hospitality services, dependent on economic growth, tourism trends, and industry's ability to meet evolving demands.

I can provide some insights into the sustainability of the supply chain in the Indian hospitality industry. However, please note that the hospitality industry is subject to various factors, including market trends, government policies, and economic conditions, which can affect its sustainability.

- **Local sourcing:** Hotels and restaurants focus on local and sustainable products for a resilient supply chain, supporting local farmers and promoting eco-friendly practices.
- **Organic and eco-friendly products:** Growing demand for organic food, eco-friendly cleaning products, sustainable packaging, and energy-efficient equipment in the hospitality industry.
- **Waste management:** Implementation of recycling programs, composting, and reduction of single-use plastics to address waste concerns. Partnerships with waste management companies for proper disposal and recycling.
- **Energy and water conservation:** Adoption of energy-efficient technologies like LED lighting, smart thermostats, and occupancy sensors.

Water-saving initiatives including low-flow faucets, toilets, and rainwater harvesting.

- **Renewable energy adoption:** Increasing interest in renewable energy sources with the installation of solar panels on hotel rooftops to reduce reliance on traditional energy and lower carbon footprint.
- **Training and awareness:** Conducting programs and workshops to educate staff and suppliers about sustainable practices, aiming to foster a sustainable mindset in the industry.

It is important to note that the sustainability efforts in the Indian hospitality industry may vary among different establishments. While some businesses have taken significant steps towards sustainability, others may still have a long way to go. The overall sustainability of the supply chain in the Indian hospitality industry will depend on the collective efforts of businesses, government regulations, consumer preferences, and the industry's commitment to sustainable practices.

Regarding rates, currently the hospitality is getting back to its position which we had seen 3 years back. Now, the industry is in full swing so we say more gap to fill in terms of ARR. But at the same time the rates in the current market can be influenced by several factors. These factors include demand and seasonality, economic conditions, competition and market positioning, supply and demand balance, and government policies and regulations.

It is important to consider that the hospitality industry is dynamic and can be affected by various market forces. Factors such as local events, festivals, economic conditions, and industry competition can impact room rates. Additionally, the specific location, type of hotel, and target market segment can also play a role in determining room rates.

So much will depend upon individual situations, the challenges and the individual responses.



Baragarh Resort & Spa, Manali-IHCL SeleQtions



## IHCL Brands Ride the Growth Wave in Indian Hospitality

by **SUMA VENKATESH**  
Executive Vice President Real Estate & Development, IHCL

India is on a growth path and the services sector including the travel and tourism business is emerging as a major growth engine for the Indian economy. Tourism will be one of the most important pillars of the nation's growth with its multiplier effect on economic prosperity and employment generation. As per World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the sector is expected to create nearly 126 million new jobs globally within the next decade with at least 20% from the Indian sub-continent. We believe that Indian travel and tourism is at an important inflection point today.

IHCL's brand scape lends itself to scaling in a heterogenous market like India. Leveraging the brand portfolio, IHCL is present in over 125 destinations in India with over 250+ hotels. In line with our strategy, Ahvaan 2025, we are well on our way to being a 300+ hotel portfolio with a balanced mix of managed and owned / leased hotels.

A glimpse into our recent growth journey.

### ■ TAJ LEADS IN THE LUXURY SEGMENT

The iconic luxury brand and the World's Strongest Hotel Brand, Taj has crossed the 100-hotel milestone. In line with its strategy of pioneering new destinations, Taj announced two resorts in Lakshadweep. Building its presence in state capitals Taj signed two hotels in Gandhinagar and Raipur. Strengthening its footprint in metro cities of Chennai, Bengaluru and Delhi, IHCL added a Taj hotel in each city and continued focus on key international markets with the signing of a Taj hotel in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and Dhaka, Bangladesh.

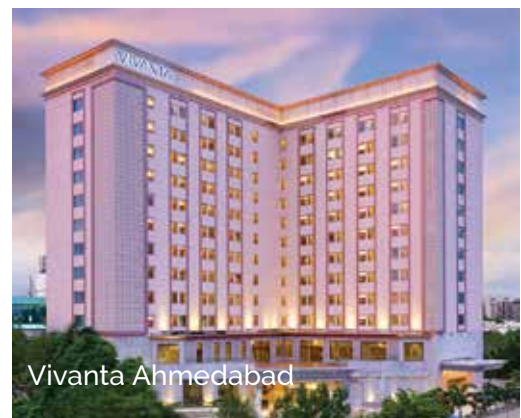
Enhancing its leisure offerings, the past year saw the opening of Sawai Man Mahal Palace and Taj Amer in Jaipur, Taj Wayanad, Kerala and added Taj City Centre New Town in Kolkata.

### ■ ACHIEVES BALANCED PORTFOLIO

IHCL, as envisioned in its Ahvaan 2025 strategy, achieves a balanced portfolio in FY 2022- 23 of owned/ leased and managed hotels. This was driven by management contracts accounting for 60% of the new signings. The balance 40% predominantly comprised of operating leases for the Ginger brand and a few select investments in Ekta Nagar and Lakshadweep.

### ■ GROWTH THROUGH CONVERSIONS

Fuelled by the power of IHCL's brandscape, the past year saw a signif-



Vivanta Ahmedabad

icant growth in the number of conversions led by IHCL SeleQtions, the brand with a distinctive and compelling character. This is in line with IHCL's strategy to proliferate its brands and hotels with a shorter time-to-market and is testament to the robust customer proposition of SeleQtions. Hotel conversions were secured in Rajkot and Mahableshwar and operating hotels were opened including Anand Kashi by the Ganges, Rishikesh, Norbu The Montanna, Dharmashala, Jaagir Manor, Dudhwa, Baragarh Resort & Spa, Manali and Yellow House Anjuna, Goa .

### ■ EXPANSION IN TIER 2 & 3 CITIES

Apart from the metro cities in India, the smaller cities with lesser share of branded rooms have witnessed tremendous growth. Tapping into the opportunity IHCL has built a strong pipeline in tier 2 and 3 cities including Vivanta in Jammu, Haridwar, Vrindavan, Indore, Jamshedpur, Rajahmundry, Katra, and Shillong among others and Ginger in Gangtok, Durgapur, Asansol, Nagpur, Ayodhya, Paradeep, Bharuch and others.

While demand will continue to grow by double digits due to the strong domestic travel segment and a rebound in inbound tourism, the supply is expected to grow by 3 to 4%. This will drive up the rates in the medium term.



Novotel Mumbai International Airport



## India Remains a Relatively Under penetrated Market

### Rates are getting commensurate to our Quality and Standards

by PUNEET DHAWAN  
*Sr Vice President of Operations - India & South Asia, Accor*

Currently we have 58 operating Hotels in India across 9 brands. Our focus is to aggressively expand in Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets in India. We are actively exploring opportunities to introduce our economy and mid-scale brands through management contracts or franchise arrangements in emerging markets.

For instance, we have received positive response and success with our Novotel properties in Guwahati and Lucknow, which has encouraged us to focus our energies in developing more properties in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. Our most recent opening is the Novotel Jodhpur adding to our footprint in the state of Rajasthan and is the 23rd Novotel in the country. Last year we signed 10 new hotels mostly across Tier 2&3 markets – 02 hotels in Chandigarh, 01 in Bhopal and 01 in Indore solidifying our presence in these upcoming hubs.

Fairmont brand is gaining momentum in India and we will see a strong presence for the brand in the future. We signed the Fairmont Udaipur, Fairmont Shimla and Fairmont Agra in the last few months. The future pipeline for our brands looks very robust.

During the height of the pandemic, the supply of hotel rooms was significantly impacted as many properties were temporarily closed or put on hold. However, as the world gradually emerged from the pandemic and travel started, there is a resurgence in demand. Travelers are eager to explore and experience new destinations once again. The current trend suggests that the supply of hotel is keeping pace with the growing demand, as evident in stronger occupancies throughout the country. Several factors like pace of recovery, evolving travel patterns, and market dynamics play a role in determining the balance between supply and demand.

In terms of branded Hotel rooms supply, India still has much room to grow with only 160,000 rooms which are less than a city like Dubai. Both the business and especially leisure destinations are under penetrated. With the growing demand trends, supply has also seen a positive growth. We have 30 hotels in the pipeline with more than 5 openings slated for this year. Post the pandemic, there is a renewed interest in building hotels across every segment- luxury, premium, mid and Eco brands. This is being driven on the base of increased average



Pullman New Delhi Aerocity

rates giving the owners confidence of a faster return on investments. Occupancy levels in India are still at around 60%-65% mark and the current rooms inventory can absorb a lot more before we reach supply outgrowing demand.

Indian hospitality sector is in very strong position to continue the rate growth, I call it more of a rate correction vis a vis the rest of the world and the level of service that we offer to our guests. Coming out to the pandemic owing to the strong domestic demand surge, improving infrastructure, entry of new industries in India and the start-up mind set in the country are some of the key factors that give us the confidence for a positive rate growth story in the next three to five years.



Pullman New Delhi Aerocity

Hilton Bengaluru  
Embassy Manyata  
Business Park

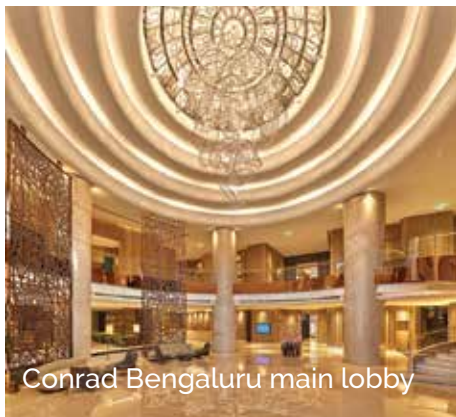


## Strong Demand Ahead, as Indian economy is on Strong Growth Curve

**Hospitality will keep Pace with this Growth**

by NAVJIT AHLUWALIA  
*Senior Vice President and Country Head-India · Hilton*

Travel is an unstoppable force. People travel because they seek the experiences they can get only when they leave home. The hospitality industry remains a good inflation hedge because we have the



Conrad Bengaluru main lobby

ability to reprice rooms every night. This gives us added tools to manage within a dynamic environment. Brands today are wanting to create reliable and friendly experiences across every stay occasion for their guests and deliver best in class returns for stakeholders. The segment today shows signs of evolving on certain key parameters like increasing demand for exclusive, im-

mersive and bespoke experiences and personalized service elements. On the back of a very positive and strong domestic demand, growth in the hospitality sector is being seen across metros and non-metros. People are preferring to travel to virgin and unexplored destinations which had led to an increased demand of rooms in non-established locations. It is a good sign to see the business confidence restored back in the growth of travel. Current rates that cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai are demanding are strong due to the uptick in MICE and business travel. ARR's are definitely higher, as a direct derivative of demand improvement. The sector has also benefitted from specific events like G-20 and we continue to see international travel to India also picking up.

We, at Hilton Hotels, are at a pivotal moment in India and our future is very much ahead of us. We have strong world-renowned brands

and will work with strong local partners to launch the right hotels, with the right brands, in the right locations. India has a strong growth potential in the medium term, particularly in the mid-scale & upscale segments and that makes us very optimistic about the year ahead. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, corporate business in India is already back to 75%, while MICE business is back to 92% and our booking pace is +43% YOY and in line with 2019.

India is among Hilton's best performing markets in Asia. India has seen Hilton deploy 5 brands across 24 hotels in the estate – and we plan to double this in coming years. Despite being one of the smallest sub-regions in APAC, India has a strong growth potential in the medium term.

India recently surpassed the UK and became the 5th largest economy, which will consist of the youngest population with ambitious aspirations. India is also poised to overtake China as the world's most populous country this year. Increasing discretionary spend within the upper and middle class has fueled demand for luxury brands over the last decade. Strengthening presence and awareness of the Conrad & Waldorf Astoria brands will also provide an opportunity for reputation and loyalty for our other brands in this market. We have major expansion plans for India from both a domestic and outbound perspective and look forward to eventually introducing more of our brands in the country.

We will be focusing on driving Hilton's reputation and enterprise awareness across all key markets in India. Solid progress is being made with openings in Bangalore and signings in Gurgaon, Nagpur and Jaipur that will help bridge the network effect. We are grounded by our resilient business model, powerful commercial engine, and portfolio of industry-leading brands.



Radisson Resort & Spa Lonavala



## 150 Hotels Going, Radisson on course with 12/15 new signings and 10-12 openings every year!

by ZUBIN SAXENA, *Managing Director & Area Senior Vice President – South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group*

When the pandemic hit, India's hotel industry saw three key metrics plunge - average daily rates, occupancy rates, and revenue generated per available room (RevPAR). This fiscal year, the industry not only improved on all three important metrics, but it also remained on a growth trajectory.



Radisson Blu Resort Dharamshala Deluxe Room with balcony

In FY24, the pan-India average hotel occupancy is expected to be at 67-69%, with Average Room Rate (ARR) at INR 6,200-6,400, as per a recent report by agency CARE. The demand outlook for the industry is positive, indicating a promising future with Indian hotels set to grow in FY24 despite uncertainties.

In terms of supply, while there was a setback due to the pandemic, a majority of projects are back in action with over 60,000 rooms expected to join this supply in the next 5 years

in big-ticket markets such as Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur. The strong growth of domestic travel will help open up new destinations in India, especially in tier-2 to 3 markets. We foresee that these markets will drive India's next supply growth phase. For instance, pilgrim locations have stepped up as important emerging destinations.

With 150 hotels in operations and pipeline across 64 locations in India, we at Radisson Hotels are looking at doubling our footprint by 2025. We have a robust pipeline for the future and will continue our growth trajectory with 12-15 hotel signings and 10-12 hotel openings every year.

With a diverse portfolio of nine brands in India, including Radisson Blu in the upper-upscale segment to vibrant and stylish hotels under Radisson RED, RHG is ready to meet the increasing domestic travel demand; we have some beautiful and brand-defining hotels across key locations like Pahalgam, Kufri, Palampur, Udaipur, Goa, Pondicherry,

Lonavala, Nashik, Karjat among others.

We have launched multiple initiatives like WOW - our guest experience program that aims to 'wow' the guests from check-in to check-out. With dedicated brand programs like Rad Family and Rad Pets, we are catering to the demands of families traveling with children and pet lovers.

Current trends such as staycations and Bleisure travel have become more experiential and becoming mainstream; thus, the idea of Radisson Individuals Retreats – an extension of Radisson Individuals. With the opening of the Rakkh resort, a member of Radisson Individual Retreats, we entered the era of experiential hospitality in the country.

We are driven by innovation when it comes to culinary experience and the Group has always been in the forefront of creativity for enhancing its Food & Beverage offerings. We have created 'Top 20' Signature dishes for our guests to experience the locale, as we use local produce and traditional cooking methods for preparing a memorable meal for them. We also opened our first outlet of "Meetha", a premium offering of curated Indian sweets in Mumbai with plans to expand it across India.

We have been consistently intensifying our sustainable business efforts to provide authentic and mindful experiences that also benefit the earth. To be a permanent solution to environmental problems while also balancing its economic impact, we have launched various initiatives such as Soap for Hope, Linen for Life, and Flush Me Not Program which are built on our long tradition of being a responsible business.

We are investing in best-in-class operational technology to enhance the day-to-day planning and productivity of our hotels. We are also integrating new 'safe travel' and contactless technologies into the design of our hotels to prioritize the safety of our guests as well as our workforce.



Hyatt Regency Dehradun



## We will continue to expand our presence while meeting the growing demand and aim to cross the 10,000 keys mark by the end of the year

by **SUNJAE SHARMA**, *Managing Director, India & Southwest Asia, Hyatt India Consultancy Pvt. Ltd.*

Hyatt recorded tremendous growth in the third and fourth quarters of 2022 primarily driven by the leisure segment which has been a significant driver of our optimistic performance in the past year. We have witnessed a surge in tourism in the country, primarily fueled by workcations, staycations, and weekend getaways. Recognizing this changing consumer preference, Hyatt anticipates that more Indians will be interested in extending their business travel plans to include bleisure trips. Moreover, our wedding business also witnessed 200% growth in the quarter as compared to Q1 of 2019.



Hyatt Regency Dharamshala



Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar

Keeping this in mind, we launched nine new properties in India last year, and we plan to continue this growth momentum and aim to launch an additional 10 hotels in 2023. We recently announced the entry of the Hyatt Centric and Hyatt Place brands in Uttarakhand, with Hyatt Centric Rajpur Road Dehradun and Hyatt Place Haridwar. Additionally, Hyatt is set to introduce the 'JdV by Hyatt' brand in India this year. This move aligns with our objective of diversifying our portfolio of hotel offerings in both existing and emerging markets. Our goal is to have over 50 Hyatt-branded properties in India by the end of 2023.

Hyatt has already experienced impressive growth in revenue per available room (RevPar), surpassing 2019 levels by 125% in the fourth quarter of last year. Moreover, in the first quarter of this year, we witnessed a remarkable growth of nearly 175% in its leisure group business and an 80% growth in its corporate group business compared to the same period in 2019. These positive trends indicate a strong demand trajectory that shows no signs of slowing down.

While domestic demand has played a significant role in driving this growth, the potential of international demand remains largely untapped. As international travel gradually resumes and reaches its full scope, it is expected to further boost demand for Hyatt's offerings.

Considering the sustainability of supply, we have been actively expanding our portfolio, and currently operate 41 hotels and eight distinct Hyatt brands across the country. With more launches in the pipeline, we will continue to expand our presence while meeting the growing demand and aim to cross the 10,000 keys mark by the end of the year. As for rates, with the demand consistently surpassing pre-pandemic levels and the potential for international demand to kick in, it is likely that rates will experience an upward trend.





The Leela Palace Jaipur



## The Leela - Focused on authentic experiences that define true Indian luxury

by ANURAAG BHATNAGAR  
CEO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

As a quintessential Indian hospitality luxury brand, we celebrate each hotel through its unique location, art, culture and cuisine with thoughtful services, celebratory rituals, and immersive experiences, all delivered with the warmth and graciousness of Indian hospitality.

The Leela is a pure play luxury brand and will always remain so. We want to be the epitome of true Indian luxury and bring to life the essence of India and the richness within with authenticity, always staying true to our brand DNA. Our expertise lies within the luxury space and this is what has helped us carve a niche for ourselves.

Our focus has been on building the brand so we can stay relevant to the evolving needs of the discerning global traveller and capture share of mind and wallet.

The understanding of luxury has always been highly contextual and evolving over time. Luxury travel has transcended material focused luxuries and comforts to include access, authentic and personalized experiences that connect with the broader community. Guests no longer long for escapes but rather seek connections with their surroundings.

In this age of hyper personalization, it has become important to curate experiences that are tailor made and resonate with the customer. We implemented programmes that help elevate the guest experience and strengthen the positioning of the brand as a leading luxury hotel brand true to its Indian heritage; driving demand through compelling and meaningful offers with inclusions and value additions built in around what matters most to our guests.

Post Covid, for the guest, experiences have become a key differentiator. At The Leela we have dialled up on experiences. For example we introduced Ceremonial rituals across our hotels. As day transitions to night, our hotels come to life with the traditional diya lighting ceremony together with a sensorial immersion into the culture of the destination, creating a unique sense of place.

When it comes to luxury hotels, the upsurge in demand post covid has shown us that travelers are willing to pay more for a differentiated and personalised experience.

At The Leela we have therefore looked at collaboration and association as a key strategy. We collaborated with The Jaipur Literature

Festival, India Art Fair and with Rajasthan Polo Club and the royal family of Jaipur to provide our guests access like no other and curated Icons of India as a platform to celebrate India's finest who are the world's best and give our guests insider access to special experiences that resonate with their passions.

With the reopening of markets the hospitality industry is back on track. We are seeing positive indicators for return of corporate travel which is picking up. ARR's are higher, and occupancy rates are good. While weddings drove the industry last year, the inbound market will play a crucial role this year.

While resorts were major growth drivers



The Leela Gandhinagar

until now, we expect future growth to come from city hotels as corporate travel begins to gather momentum. All our new hotels The Leela Palace Jaipur, The Leela Gandhinagar, The Leela Bharatiya City and The Leela Kovalam have ramped up business very well and have exceeded budgets.

While we are looking at growing in key gateway cities, marquee leisure destinations and in the wellness and wildlife space, growth in number of hotels is not our story. We are building our brand with our services, and pronounced emphasis on giving luxury an experiential nuance for our guests. ❖

# DISCOVERING MURSHIDABAD THE CROWNING GLORY OF THE BRITISH RAJ



**IN FRAME: The Darbar Hall, sporting European tiles and hand painted stained glass windows.** Bari Kothi is known for its royal five course story-telling meal in the immersive period setting of the Darbar Hall.

by TEAM BARA KOTHI

Situated on the banks of the river Bhagirathi, Murshidabad served as the capital of Bengal during the 18th century when the East India Company rose to power. It was a time of shifting fortunes and imperial ambitions, as the British sought to establish their dominance in the Indian subcontinent. Amidst this backdrop, Murshidabad emerged as a hub of wealth and influence, a center of commerce and trade, where fortunes were made and fortunes were

In the annals of history, certain places stand as a testament to the grandeur and opulence of bygone eras. One such place, hidden in the heart of West Bengal, India, is Murshidabad. Often overshadowed by other prominent cities of the British Raj, Murshidabad quietly holds the title of the Forgotten Wealth Capital, a jewel obscured by the sands of time.

lost. It was known to contribute to over 5% of the GDP of the world at one point in time. The Nawabs of Bengal, with their luxurious lifestyle and refined tastes, created a culture of opulence and refinement that reverberated throughout the region. The Sheherwali community during this time built marvels inspired by European and Mughal architecture. Palatial mansions, adorned with intricate carvings and embellishments, dotted the cityscape.

Great heritage buildings amass at Murshidabad and make it a destination much loved by the history and heritage enthusiasts. Starting from the Hazarduari Palace or the palace with the Thousand Doors, the splendid terracotta architecture of the Jain temples or abundance of anecdotes surrounding the famed Battle of Plassey and Siraj-ud-Daulah, Murshidabad has been a tapestry of history and heritage.

#### **Murshidabad Today?**

The historical significance, architectural marvels, cultural heritage, natural beauty, and culinary delights make Murshidabad a valuable and enriching tourist destination.

*Hazarduari Palace:* known for its impressive architecture and museum. It houses



**IN FRAME: Gaddi Ghar,  
the erstwhile working area of the  
babus or the Sheherwalis**

In a Sheherwali palace one would find a British room right across a Rajasthani gaddi Ghar, all housed in a building having European pillars, reflecting on the myriad cultural influences upon them.



**IN FRAME: Bari Kothi serves 300 year old authentic Sheherwali story-telling meal**

Sheherwali cuisine is a beautiful melting pot of cuisines of the west and the east of India. Bari Kothi celebrates the passion for food that has evolved through its extensive history. Alongside the royal cuisine, we also serve the humble Bengal farmer's meal to celebrate our roots



**IN FRAME: Breakfast by the Serene Ganges**

The twin cities of Azimganj and Jiaganj are separated by the mighty Bhagirathi river. A part of the restoration of Bari Kothi entailed the complete restoration of the Bari Kothi Ghat

by beautiful countryside. Consider taking a boat ride along the Bhagirathi River or exploring nearby rural villages to experience the natural beauty of the region.

*Cuisine:* The love for food, especially all things sweet, is an accurate label for any Sheherwali. Food features prominently in this community, evolving passionately through its 300-year history in Bengal. Sheherwali cuisine is the finest vegetarian spread one can find, even in modern times, and is a wonderful melange of the cuisines of the West and the East of India. Noteworthy is its unique cuisine which is

a vast collection of artifacts from the Nawabi era.

*Nizammat Imambara:* a historical Shia Muslim congregation hall. It's an architectural marvel and is particularly vibrant during religious festivals.

*Katra Masjid:* a large mosque built in the 18th century. It's known for its intricate terracotta artwork and serene atmosphere.

*Motijheel:* Enjoy a leisurely stroll around the scenic lake surrounded by gardens and palaces. It's a popular spot for locals and visitors alike.

*Murshidabad Museum:* Learn about the rich history, with the museum housing a collection of artifacts, documents, and paintings that depict the region's cultural heritage.

*Architecture:* Take a walk around the city and admire the various historical buildings, including the Nizammat Fort, Katgola Palace, and Jafarganj Cemetery. These structures showcase the architectural brilliance of the bygone era.

*Markets:* Indulge in some local shopping by visiting the bustling markets of Murshidabad. You can find handicrafts, textiles, and delicious local delicacies to take back as souvenirs.

*Countryside:* Murshidabad is surrounded



**IN FRAME: our team of local people waving our guests goodbye**

Bari Kothi aligns itself with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and works persistently to promote sustainable and responsible tourism. Every action arises from its commitment to the local community within which it operates. The experience driven nature of a getaway here is a tribute to the rural eco-system whereby tourists are in close communion with the people residing here.



**IN FRAME: The Theatre balcony or the Lounge Area of Bari Kothi**

The establishment of Bari Kothi saw a beautiful mélange of all sorts of architectural styles- Greek, European, Indian and Mughal. Restoring the palace meant restoring this beautiful mélange of cultures. Our Theatre Balcony is thus adorned with beautiful Corinthian pillars

a melting pot of various cultures.

Sunset watching is considered romantic and calm but the experience enhances when you are waterside! At Bari Kothi, either leisurely stroll along the 100 feet long Ghat while sipping a cocktail and enjoying the soft pastel skies or go for a boat ride - laying on comfortable cushions and watching the sun dip in the river. Both are utterly Instagram-able!

**The Restoration: 5 years / 1 magician / 150 villagers / 15 suites / 7 courtyards / 1000 memories**

One of the Sheherwalis, the Dudhoria family under Babu Sudip Kumar Sing Dudhoria, and his son, Babu Darshan Dudhoria took it upon themselves to restore their dilapidated 250- year-old ancestral palace known as Bari Kothi. The restoration was done by the acclaimed restoration specialist, Architect Dr.Samar Chandra From Canada for 5 years. But it was a Herculean task!

“Given the poor state of affairs in the region, the lack of skilled masons, artisans, plumbers, and engineers located near the site posed a problem. And since the family was also keen on the local ecosystem, the project took a lot more time and painstaking effort in acquiring resources. From restoring beams made of teak wood to working on vintage furniture, the restoration of Bari Kothi involved a lot of attention to detail, enough so Bari Kothi would last another century or more” - Dr. Samar Chandra

The end objective of the restoration was not to restore the building but to restore the soul of Bari Kothi. Hence, it was important to create a self-sustaining ecosystem for Bari Kothi, where Bari Kothi sustains itself for another century. This vision gave birth to the first-ever Rustic Luxury Heritage Hotel of Murshidabad.

The actual ground of the restoration was carried out by very

ordinary and unskilled labor from the local community and that became the ethos of the project. The project caught onto the nickname, Project Priceless. One of the other significant challenges in the Project was the lack of equipment which made the entire exercise very labor-intensive. But the result was that more than 50 unskilled laborers became skilled laborers and built their own houses with the money earned from the Project.

Introducing steel and cement was the most capital-intensive work in the Project. Steel was used to give support to the crumbling walls whereas cement glued the bricks together. Major structural support was built from the ground to the roof to hold onto what was remaining of the structures. In certain cases, new roofs were built and the consequent load transferred to the steel pillars inserted on the walls of the building. Very crafty and strategic planning was the recipe for success.

5 years of toil and hard work later, Bari Kothi had been reborn! ♦

**GETTING THERE**

4 hours by train or 6 hours by car to reach from Kolkatta to Bari Kothi.

# MEET INDIA'S PLOGMAN RIPUDAMAN BEVLI



by AMITA SARWAL

**A**n engineer and Socialpreneur by profession. A marathoner and a traveller. Ripudaman Bevli is famed for creating the Litter Free India and Ploggers of India movements.

"In 2016 I started India's first run-and-cleanup movement. While jogging and training early mornings, the trash and litter all around bothered me. Initially called 'My City My Responsibility' – before the term Plogging was conceived – the non-profit organisation was then renamed and transformed to the snazzier 'Ploggers

**P**logging is a combination of jogging with picking up litter (merging the Swedish verbs plocka upp (pick up) and jogga (jog) gives the new Swedish verb plogga, from which the word plogging derives). It started as an organized activity in Sweden around 2016 and spread to other countries in 2018, following increased concern about plastic pollution. As a workout, it provides variation in body movements by adding bending, squatting and stretching to the main action of running, hiking, or walking. An estimated 2,000,000 people plog daily in 100 countries and some plogging events have attracted over 3,000,000 participant.

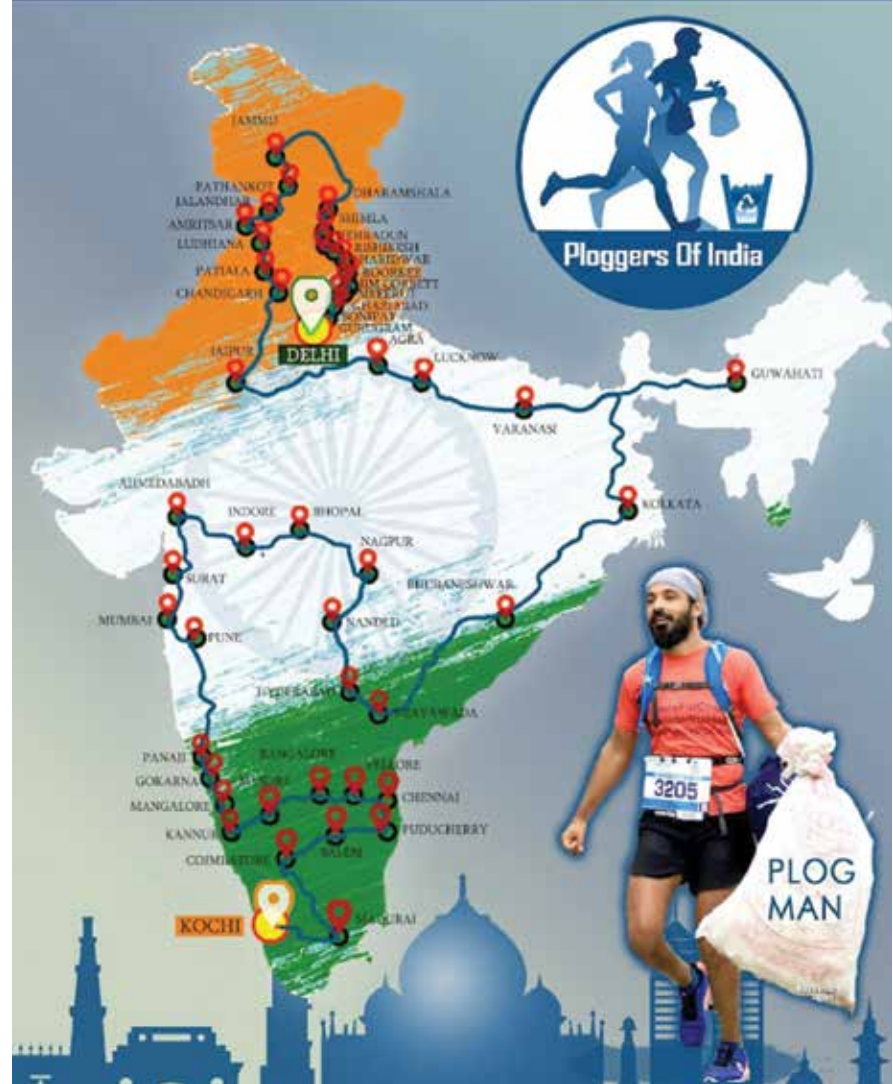
of India'. We still don't have the funds to invest in an office space. Nor do we intend to invest anytime in the near future. All the funds generated are being spent on growing the movement (mostly bootstrapped)," introduces the 35-year-old founder.

From starting alone seven years ago, Ploggers of India have almost a crore of the country's populace participating in his Litter Free India movement. The members' profile ranges from 4 years to over 80 years old and comprises people from every section of society. A success story in itself!

The Swachh Bharat movement of the Honorable Prime Minister, and the Father of Nation's words 'Everyone needs to be their own scavenger', plus several mountain and beach cleanups proved inspirational. Noting a major void in the cleanup of household waste, led to awareness and plogging drives within localities, communities, and educational institutions. The cleaning-up process has started and is proving inspirational for everyone involved. But needs to still reach out to a lot more.

'My high moment was when my nieces came home beaming when they saw my name in their GK books as the 'Plogging Ambassador of India'. They felt so proud of their chachu! From being an avid quizzer to becoming a GK fact was an amazing sensation and bought a sense of achievement, a sense of responsibility," he reminisces.

Ripudaman is a 'doer'. "I can only lead by action. Initially, it didn't bother me about people not joining me. It made me ponder over why a community is critical to make self- and collective movements like these a success. Realised, foremost, there was a societal stigma around picking up litter. To change their thinking, I led by example. By telling people ragpickers should not be called 'Kachrewalas', as we are the real 'Kachrewalas' who litter. They are 'Safaiwalas, and should be applauded. That got people thinking! Next, I was questioned by my family and friends. I responded by continuing to work – making picking trash the coolest thing to do! And had fun in the bargain being chased by dogs and



“ In 2019 we ran RElan Run to Make India Litter Free campaign. An unprecedented campaign when I ran across and cleaned 50 cities in two months covering 1000 kms on foot. Since then this campaign has had over 600 cleanups in 110+ cities and picked up over 1000 tons of litter countrywide.”

monkeys when I was on their terrain, the garbage dumps! Honestly, that's when I wished more people were doing this clean-up with me! Primarily getting them to join was a major challenge. Mine is still work-in-progress. It has 'just started'. It is a long journey to make India Litter Free. I want every Indian to dream my crazy dream – and make it a reality," he concedes.

When asked for some statistics, Ripudaman responds, "Initially we did not keep track of the collections because work on the ground is far more important to me than updating numbers on social media. In 2019 we ran RElan Run to Make India Litter Free campaign. An unprecedented campaign when I ran across and cleaned 50 cities in two months

covering 1000 kms on foot. Since then this campaign has had over 600 cleanups in 110+ cities and picked up over 1000 tons of litter countrywide. Our constantly growing chain since inception, has city and regional communities that want to join us. This is most encouraging," he reveals.

In March 2021, the 'Ride For Change' campaign was going well. In the six weeks, Ripudaman cycled from Delhi to several cities including Dehradun and Palampur. Hundreds of people on their bicycles joined alongside in these cities. Cumulatively, 26,000 kms. were cycled, eight tons of carbon emissions were saved and two tons of litter picked up. But then the covid pandemic hit hard.

"I was in isolation for a month.



Then there were losses in the family, covid took a lot! The rest of 2021 is a blur from there. I focused on personal healing and mental health. Went on yoga retreats and spent some time in Rishikesh. By October 2021, my health was much better and I was running again. But then another unexplained episode of my 'blacking out' happened in December 2021. My health got worse. For a month, I could not get off the bed. Visits to the hospitals, several checks, MRIs, etc. followed. I did recover and by March 2022, I was able to walk again and was fully recovered. Things were looking up as covid concerns had gone down," he says about the setback to his health.

July 2022 brought in the stringent plastic ban by GoI. The Ploggers team led a week long campaign RACE – Reduction Awareness Circularity Engagement with the UP Govt. Joining in were Government and Municipal corporations and more than a few lakh people participated in all major cities of UP. All sections of society including schools and colleges were engaged in plogging, cleanups and trash workouts. From the marketplaces in Lucknow, to parks in Prayagraj, to Ganga ghats in Varanasi various landscapes were touched. Ploggers acted as the bridge between people and Government. Awareness of the plastic ban and alternatives were created, including providing a platform for people to express their concerns regarding lack of alternatives, or expensive alternatives to plastic. These concerns were duly noted by Ripudaman's team on the ground and passed on to the

relevant authorities. The campaign was concluded with major conclave where Entrepreneurs, NGOs from across India participated in and discussed how to make the plastic ban work in UP.

Next, in September 2022, several beach cleanups were organised with the Tamil Nadu Government. Several NGOs and youth forums participated in these activities. Through these, several specific Chennai-based movements started and have since been actively involved in cleanups there.

A career jump for Ripudaman came along with the milestone G20 Year of 2023. "The upward turn included my being made the Ambassador of Delhi by Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). We launched our first campaign in January, giving ourselves 100 days to beat plastic. Under this, all 250 wards of Delhi have aggressively participated through several activities – cleanups for RWAs and market associations, workshops with schools and colleges, mobilisation of NGOs etc. One of the most satisfying tangible results was clearing 250 illegal garbage dumps in the city – a one dump location per ward. The first phase of this campaign was concluded on 22nd 2023 Earth Day. As part of the next phase, we plan on adding Trash Workout as part of the curriculum for a total of almost 1500 Delhi Government and MCD schools," he informs.

Reward have come along in the form of the honorary title of Plogging Ambassador of India. "Life came full circle for me upon being invited by the GoI to flag off the FIT India Plogging run on Gandhiji's 150th

Jayanti, 2nd Oct 2019. Along with the then Sports Minister (Kiren Rijju), I flagged off the run from the ramps of the Indira Gandhi Stadium, New Delhi. Close to 40 lakh people participated across 65,000 locations pan-India. Also mentionable is the induction in the Golden Book of World Records for the longest plogging run of 50 kilometers in nine hours 15 mins at Kota, Rajasthan (2020). There are a series of recent recognitions," says the first FIT India Ambassador.

The emotional side of the Plogman of India is apparent when he speaks of his mother. "She has been my inspiration. I believe what ever good there is in me, is inherited from her. True to her name Ranbir Kaur, she has fought every battle in her life with honesty and perseverance and has never given up. As a single parent, from the start, my younger sister Jasmine Kaur and I have been blessed to have found a Father and Mother in one person. And that is why I decided to add my mother's maiden family name to my surname Bevli. It feels complete now – Ripudaman Bevli."

Looking ahead, Ripudaman, as a Fit India Ambassador, plans "monthly Plogging drives across 700+ districts in India. Next, to work with authorities to create environment awareness in schools by including practical activities in the curriculum. And lastly, personally, my mission this year will be to create maximum awareness countrywide through a Plastic Upvaas – on foot a la Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Finally, my message to my 140 crore fellow Indians. Each of us must take the pledge to not litter. That will be our contribution to our country, our India, our Mother Earth," he signs off. ❖



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amita Sarwal is Delhi Correspondent at Inside Outside, Mumbai & Roving Editor, Cross Section Media, New Delhi



# ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



'Made in Heaven': not often in Indian public life do we see an Indian politician getting engaged, surely, there are exceptions, like this one, Raghav Chadha, AAP MP from Rajya Sabha. It is more common for their sons and daughters, or even grandchildren, to make the grade. And, when it comes to a star girl, like Parineeta Chopra, cousin of Priyanka Chopra, it becomes even more glitzy.



ANIMAL LIFE



Curious Pema watching a herd of Ibex

Naresh and Rajesh  
during filming



# THE BEDI BROTHERS IN SEARCH OF THE SNOW LEOPARD

Over the last four decades, Naresh and Rajesh Bedi have used their talents and energies to capture the beauty and mystery of India's wildlife through their documentaries and photographs.

Their films are entertaining, educative and always carry a strong conservation message.

They have been fortunate to witness and record rarely-seen behaviour, contributing to the scientific understanding of India's natural history. Their exceptional achievements have been rewarded with national and international recognition.

by TEAM BEDI FILMS

**A**lthough pioneers in the field of wildlife filmmaking, in their career of 5 decades, you would have never seen them blowing their own trumpet. They have always believed in speaking through their work and creating masterpieces; their numerous national and international awards are a testament to that. The extent of their skill, know-how, and unwavering grit, dedication, and passion towards their work and craft remains an inspiration to all, especially the younger lot interested in conservation, environment and animal life.

Recently they have worked upon a film on the snow leopard, which was screened to a small group of friends and admirers. Some excellent coverage of this rarely sighted animal, gripping narrative stretching over a few years of filming, highlight this elusive cat, another example of the skills of the two brothers.

The beauty, elusive nature, and rarity of snow leopards make them a subject of fascination and intrigue. Their world population is thought to be dwindling every year - but nobody knows for sure - estimates range between 4,000 and 6,500 individuals.

Snow leopards prowl the most inaccessible heights of central Asia's mountains. In India, they inhabit the Trans-Himalayan region - a high-altitude desert whose rugged topography, scant vegetation and fiercely cold winters make survival a severe challenge for both wildlife and people. Popularly known as the 'grey ghost of the mountains', the snow leopard is the most secretive and least understood of all the great cats. So thin on the ground and so elusive, they can be extremely hard to find, let alone film.



New male Namka courting with Pema

Here, is the synopsis of the film:

For many years, making a film about snow leopards in the wild was considered quite impossible. Tantalising glimpses of their secretive lives have been revealed in recent years, but no complete story that follows their intimate life.

Now in their youthful seventies, Naresh and Rajesh Bedi decided to take on the challenge.

So, the first question was funding. But what broadcaster would back two septuagenarians on a mad quest to film one of the most elusive animals in one of the most physically demanding environments? Cost was a huge

For many years, making a film about snow leopards in the wild was considered quite impossible. Tantalising glimpses of their secretive lives have been revealed in recent years, but no complete story that follows their intimate life.

deterrent but not for them. Given their passion, they were determined to 'do' it; they took the call to fund the entire enterprise themselves.

Twenty-five years ago, the Bedi Brothers presented the first rare glimpses of snow leopards to the world, filmed in Ladakh. Choosing the Spiti Valley in the state of Himachal Pradesh, not far from Ladakh, they returned to fulfil their long-cherished dream to make a more intimate study of these mysterious big cats. They set up base in the remote village of Chicham at the altitude of 4,120 metres. Over five years, with the cheerful help of several local guides, they finally succeeded where many others have failed.

Chasing Shadows (2 x 51 mins) and the one-hour version, Spirit of the Mountains (1 x 60 mins), reveal the usually unseen lives of snow leopards in vivid detail. Camera traps placed beside their favourite scent-marking rocks, monitored over several months, revealed that there were only 3 or 4 snow leopards in the vast mountain landscape within reach of Chicham. They included one elderly male, which the Brothers named Karma.

The team tracked him through the changing seasons, year after year. The dominant male of the area, he rarely crossed paths with females, solely to mate. Following Karma's coupling with a female, Lhamo, the Bedi Brothers hoped to find her den and cubs. It was challenging in the vast and complex terrain of high-altitude meadows and forbidding cliffs.

But finally, a den was found, with two small cubs (perhaps the first to be filmed in India). Brief encounters with the timid family over the following months reminded the team how difficult a task they had set themselves.

There are dramatic hunting sequences, intimate shots of snow leopards feeding at ibex and bharal carcasses, and staggeringly beautiful scenes of them in the snow-clad landscape. But by the third year, age was catching up with Karma; he looked weak and had resorted to killing yak calves.



Pema with her cub moving away to safety on slight disturbance



Bedi Brothers team on way to higher ranges.

Twenty-five years ago, the Bedi Brothers presented the first rare glimpses of snow leopards to the world, filmed in Ladakh. Choosing the Spiti Valley in the state of Himachal Pradesh, not far from Ladakh, they returned to fulfil their long-cherished dream to make a more intimate study of these mysterious big cats.



Helpless Karma during his last days

It was heart-breaking for the two film makers and their team to see the once majestic ruler of these mountains in such a sorry state. Also, a new arrival was sighted in the area – a fit, mature male with a yellowish coat. The Bedi Brothers named him Namka. He slowly began to intrude into Karma’s territory.

The life of these high-altitude predators is dangerous. To ambush and subdue a powerful wild goat, equally skilled at climbing these crumbling cliffs, is no easy task. In a rare sequence of stills, Namka misjudges his attack on an ibex perched on a cliff edge and they both fall about 100 metres onto a steep snow slope below. He was lucky to survive and even made his kill.

Six-year-old Namka claimed Karma’s territory as the mating season approached. Following her calls, he finds Pema halfway down a cliff. Both exchange warning snarls before their aggression subsides. The pair remain together for a few days and mate repeatedly. A new generation will be born to help ensure the survival of a handful of snow leopards in the little-known, awe-inspiring mountains around the Spiti Valley.

Woven through the snow leopard narrative are the adventures, frustrations and eventual success of the Bedi Brothers and their team of local trackers. Sub-zero temperatures and long periods of inactivity severely test the patience of the filmmakers. The depth of coverage of several individual snow leopards’ lives over five years makes these films unique. Also included are rare behavioural sequences of Himalayan ibex, blue sheep, red fox, golden eagle, Himalayan griffon vulture and snowcock.

The snow leopard’s survival in India can be attributed to the Buddhist beliefs of the local people, which teach that all life is sacred. The faith and traditions of the local communities have helped protect this remote wilderness. The growing success of ecotourism, centred on

the snow leopard, is helping the local people to value an animal that sometimes kills their livestock.

Over the last few years, Spiti has emerged as a centre for snow leopard tourism. But, it must be carefully monitored and regulated to avoid any disturbance to this small and vulnerable breeding population.

The local communities now recognise the benefits of ecotourism. It offers work and a much-needed boost to the local economy. The villagers have learnt to live with the snow leopards, which are now seen as an asset to be protected and celebrated. ❖



**ABOUT**

Naresh and Rajesh Bedi have been in the forefront of wildlife photography for over four decades. They have worked extensively

with international organizations such as National Geographic. They have authored several books, been part of many an initiative for conservation and protection of the environment.

# AN ASPIRATIONAL IPL COMES TO AN END CHENNAI PROVE TO BE THE SUPER KINGS!



by NAVIN BERRY and ASHWIN ZUTSHI

**T**here was so much more this year through the IPL season, an aspirational affair, that represents the young Indian at heart. From small towns, some of them barely heard before, from homes ordinary, tales emerge of how hero worship, dedication and commitment, so many young cricketers have made their mark. Earlier, before the days of IPL, the buck stopped at the Ranji Trophy. Now, IPL has opened the doors to opportunity: knock knock, who's there? Its IPL! It's a career, like no other. A cricket crazy nation, has thousands of young talents aspiring to join the IPL riot! A few big takeaways from 2023:

IPL 2023 is over and done with, a nation of 1.4 billion turned up again as avid watchers, over television, new found JIO cinema, and so many more in the stands, some of them paying extra, as reports suggest. It is the annual national euphoria festival. The final was no exception to the rule this year, with its nail-biting finish, down to the last ball. Here is a brief report.

## The Finds of the Season

If we talk about top emerging talent, Jaiswal, of course, would be the number one choice; left-handed, home-grown talent for Rajasthan, by the sheer volume of runs that he has scored this season. And the strike rate at which he has scored; expectedly, he has been picked for the Indian quad for the WTC final in London.

Another would be Rinku Singh. We have seen a lot of runs being scored by openers, but we have not seen many lower order batsmen score and Rinku Singh has done that. He has played a more significant role than Russell, upon whom KKR usually relies to finish games.

Sudarshan must be another big discovery, part of the new brigade, for his big hitting abilities. His 96 in the final will remain a most memorable part of this IPL.

There are other bowlers who found popularity, like Tushar Deshpande, who has had a breakthrough season. Coming from multiple different franchises he did not make any significant impact. And suddenly this season with CSK, under Dhoni's and Fleming's mentorship, it has been an absolute breakthrough season for him.



## Striking Facets of this Season's IPL

A big takeaway must inevitably be the maturing of Shubham Gill, for his outstanding contribution to his team, and towards his grace in making the big shots. An outstanding batsman, who must keep his cool, and not get swayed by this sudden adulation around him.

A most aggressive IPL, from a batsmanship point of view, because the kind of strike rates we saw are unbelievable. We saw the maximum number of 200 plus scores and most number of 200 plus chases. The most under 25-ball 50's! So, aggressive batting strike rates have been like the marquee of this tournament.

Many last over finishes, last ball finishes, which we saw this season. But this may not entirely new to IPL.

Consider the confidence of youth. The number of fresh young talent, young faces that we have seen in the tournament, with the confidence and skill sets that they are coming out with, has been like amazing to watch. They have been striking from the first ball, hitting sixes from ball one, and appear most confident and daring in their approach.

### The Dhoni Magic!

A most memorable part of this IPL has been the unfolding of Dhoni's magic. If you see this season, it has pretty much been about Dhoni. Besides the fact that there is speculation that it might be his last season, it has been amazing to see that any stadium you go to, it has been filled with yellow jerseys and Dhoni supporters more than the local home ground supporters. He was always the highlight of all conversations amongst commentators and experts. So, the Dhoni Magic has been the talk of this season! Great that his team won the trophy; it has been a great season for him for his leadership!

A most memorable part of this IPL has been the unfolding of Dhoni's magic. He was always the highlight of all conversations amongst commentators and experts.

### Team Performances

If we talk specifically about teams like RR falling off the ladder, while having a great start, it has been poor team strategy. This has been the case with a couple of teams, but especially with RR because they were leading upfront in the initial stages. However, in their case, the problem perhaps was that their three main players, namely Jos Butler, Sanju Samson, and Heitmeyer, they lost form simultaneously, like at the same time, after having a great start. Poor decisions like the strategy off field, the use of impact batting order. Trying to experiment too much and



being a little too funky like sending Ashwin early to bat in certain very tough situations. Giving the last over to some new player instead of the more experienced players. Some of this appears unnecessary experimentation!

Whereas in Mumbai's case, the opposite happened. They started with experimenting a lot. They could not find a settled 11 because they were missing out on a lot of great players and they were not finding their right replacements. But eventually, after the first few games, like the first five-six games, they found that balance. They found that settled 11 and a very important key to this whole puzzle, Surya Kumar Yadav found form. So that also helped.

### The Winners!

Ultimately, who takes the cake? The winner! And this year, a most consistent team, that worked through the earlier stages, did not wince once while even losing a match, under the watchful eye of its captain, all adulation must be due for CSK! The winner takes all. A most befitting send off to Captain Dhoni, assuming he will don only the mentor's cap from now onwards. But then, only time can tell. ❖

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