

DESTINATION INDIA

CONVERSATIONS

**MANN KI
BAAT HITS A
CRACKLING
100** OF SOCIAL
DISCOURSE, BETWEEN
A SOCIAL WORKER
AND HIS PEOPLE

**HAS THE
BILLION
DOLLAR
BABY
ENHANCED ITS
REPUTATION?**

IT IS 'BHAKTI'
FOR ME,
MORE THAN
SINGING

**BUILDING THE
DIGITAL FUTURE**



ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



The Supreme Commander of Indian Armed Forces Takes to the Skies

The President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu took a historic sortie in a Sukhoi 30 MKI fighter aircraft at the Tezpur Air Force Station, in Assam.

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From the Editor

IPL2023 is now past its half way mark. Predictably, it is taking its twists and turns. There is no saying who is the ultimate winner, as a team. Though, individually, it is making its new heroes. Some of the older faces are not performing to their mark, new ones ensure a bright future as possible entrants into the India team.

Over its 16 years history, one can only thank the genius of Lalit Modi, for having invented the format that changed the game globally. In India, it has helped not just cricket but so many lives, directly and indirectly. It has brought fortunes for the organizers who have found the resources to fund other games as well. There is now a women's edition, gathering quick pace. Copy paste, and we have clones in soccer and hockey, though the boom is not the same as in cricket.

From its early days, IPL has moved forward year on year on the fast track. The management, the small innovations, the ability to keep track on what new can be done, including the birth of new stadiums and new teams; not to mention, the hunger to track new talent. It has given shape to dreams of numerous aspiring sportspersons; its impact on our lives is difficult to quantify. For all the criticism heaped upon BCCI, whether warranted or not, one must give them their due – keeping the flag of the sport and the tournament alive and kicking, going from strength to strength.

Navin Berry
Editor

MANN KI BAAT HITS A CRACKLING 100 OF SOCIAL DISCOURSE, BETWEEN A SOCIAL WORKER AND HIS PEOPLE



Read no more than this, in these episodes. It is the man, Narendra Modi, who has devised this medium as his social connect with the people across the country.

It is the *pracharak* in him that must have egged him to think of this program. Possibly, divorced from his once daily routine of mingling with the people at the very bottom of our society, as Prime Minister, he must have evolved this conversation medium. In his **Mann Ki Baat**, he could still connect, share his vision of social transformation that India needs and is undergoing.

What differentiates the **Mann Ki Baat** series is its grassroots participation. A brainchild of PM Modi, Mann ki Baat recently completed 100 episodes, much to a predictable celebration among the ruling party circles, equally among the large fan following that PM Modi has acquired over recent years. The idea of direct outreach to the masses across the country using one of the oldest and most ubiquitous mediums of information dissemination has received a most rousing response from the larger sections of our society, especially the under privileged, which is the audience for whom it was intended.

Thousands have written him letters, talking about their challenges, and sharing inspirational yet lesser-known stories that are worth sharing. PM Modi has routinely talked about local heroes and change-makers, catapulting them into the limelight. Recognizing local heroes has morphed Mann ki Baat into a participatory undertaking, which is one definite reason for its success.

The Radio is omnipresent, and now available in every car in the metro as well, not just for the villages where there is no television yet. Radio is cheap, easily available, requires no electricity and allows the conversations to circumvent the more frequently used

channels of modern-day communication. It gives the PM a sense of one to one.

Among the first episodes was that memorable co-hosting of the show, along with then President of USA, Barack Obama. The former President used this talk to strengthen his country's relations with India. 100 episodes strong, it is a tribute to the PM's commitment to the programme; it is equally a testimony to the determination of the team behind it, as it calls for much spade work in putting together every episode.

It is another matter that makes every action in India becomes a political issue, gives every action a political colour. To my mind, this is more of a social dialogue, on subjects that concern the 'real' common man, in the sense of upliftment of the individual, a concern that the PM has felt from his earlier days when he toured the hinterland as a simple *pracharak*. In this sense, it may well be his homecoming, once a month. It is therefore, no surprise, that collections of his 100 conversations have been brought out. That the 100th episode was also aired at the UN and through every Indian embassy overseas.

That there are many who do not subscribe to the concept of *pracharak* is a given. Understandably, there are people who will discard any thoughts shared above. Needless to say, these are equally valid for those who believe in the need for social transformation, by organizations committed to it. Our national discourse must remain an open dialogue! ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, has been in the business of reporting on travel, tourism and hospitality for almost 5 decades.

NO SHORT-CUTS IN A PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

LET THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE DECIDE UPON ISSUES. PARLIAMENT MUST DECIDE ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE – NOT A MINUSCULE MINORITY

by RAJIV MEHRISHI

THOUGH THE ORIGINAL petitioners may genuinely have been looking to find a way to marry a partner of the same sex, the ongoing litigation in the Supreme Court (SC) on the issue of same-sex marriage is no longer about their claimed rights or even about them. It has become another attempt by a minuscule English-speaking elite, shaped largely by Western thought, to retain the hold they have had over the country for the last 75 years.

The challenge this elite has faced over the last decade is unique. Their hold over setting and controlling the agenda has been put to the test by the “Hindi-medium types”. “HMTs” had learnt to get themselves elected decades back, but their aspiration was limited to becoming “people-like-us”, owning mansions and farmhouses and wealth in Swiss banks. Those elected now have not only not been to English-medium schools, they do not carry the baggage of not being able to quote Machiavelli or Shakespeare. On the contrary, they take pride in quoting the likes of Chanakya and Swami Vivekananda; they do not need to signal their arrival by being able to differentiate between vintage wines or Scotch whiskeys—they proudly prefer *chaach*.

In plain English, being liberal means being tolerant of others and their views. Our self-styled liberals are quite obviously not. Take Indira Jaising’s article (‘The partisan council’, IE, April 26). She argues that the SC is duty-bound to uphold the Constitution and the values espoused by it, but her arguments challenge this very Constitution and its principles. She doubts whether Parliament or state legislatures represent the will of the people because of our first-past-the-post system of elections—challenging parliamentary democracy as provided for in the Constitution. She dismisses views not in conformity with hers as being “regressive notions of marriage, rooted in religion and culture”, thus questioning the fundamental right to freedom of views and perhaps, by implication, the concept of the social contract itself. Those having views that are different from hers are accused of “polarisation”.

No sophistry is required to explain the arguments of the other side. Parliament and state legislatures together represent the will of the people to the best



extent possible, and as provided in the Constitution. Together, they have the right to amend the Constitution or enact laws for their jurisdictions. The law is an expression of society’s needs, values and thinking, depending on the levels of education, literacy, exposure, socio-economic development, etc. No law can be enacted divorced from social realities. Important changes to personal laws that have taken place in the past - the anti-Sati law, widow-remarriage law, Sharda Act, Hindu Code Bill, etc, have all had legislative approval, even if they seemed “unpopular” at the time.

Indian society at large sees marriage as a solemn union of opposite sexes, with the likelihood of procreation, limited by choice on medical issues. The elected representatives are in touch with and responsive to what the people feel. If society at large had felt strongly about same-sex marriage, no politician would dare oppose it.

The demand for recognising same-sex marriage cannot be dismissed out of hand but neither can be the view that is opposed to it. Let everyone be entitled to their views, let us respect our Constitution and let Parliament and legislatures debate and decide on the issue. To short-cut parliamentary democracy itself, ironically, in the name of upholding the Constitution, is to pave the way for an unknown and dark future. ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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THE G20 NARRATIVE IS PUSHING THE INDIA AND SOUTH PERSPECTIVE, HARD-SELLING THE INDIA STORY: AMITABH KANT



In this conversation, India's G20 Sherpa at the recent AIMA Annual Conclave in New Delhi, highlights the priorities that India has set as the agenda for the year long deliberations under her Presidency. Presented are the highlights from his address:

by AMITABH KANT

To my mind there are three critical components that are important. The first is the political leadership and the political narrative that India builds for the G20 and that is important because essentially it is a leaders' summit. Prime Minister Modi is the leader of the G20 during the course of the year and therefore the developmental perspective of India is critical.

The second is the content and the priorities that India built up. What is India's priority? How does it want to drive the global economy? How does it want to drive the world in future? The third is how well do we do the G20 presidency? How well do we execute it?

The first and foremost is the political narrative which is being conducted in a lively, vibrant democracy like India - the political narrative is that you have a leader who is driving the global G20 leadership, a leader who has very strong acceptance in a vibrant democracy. But I think more important than that is the development story that India has built up - that we are a young country which has young demographics, our average age is 29 and even as we go on to 2070 our average age will still be about 35. And that we have truly driven the digital transformation of India.

That we are a country which has ensured a digital identity for every Indian. We have ensured that we open a bank account for every Indian. That we are able to link that bank account with Aadhar, his digital identity and the mobile number and ensure that everybody has his digital identity and the mobile number and that everybody can then use the mobile to make digital payments. And we do today 11x more payments than what the United States and Europe do together and we do 4x more payments than what China does. And therefore, it is a remarkable story of digital transformation.

It is also a story that we have used open source, open API's in-

teroperable technology because if you look at the history of the open API's interoperable technology, because if you look at the history of the world in the last two and a half decades all technological development world and innovation have been driven by the big tech. If they have been driven by Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon in the West, they have been driven by Tencent and Alibaba in China.

India took a different approach from other markets where it created the public platform, on top of which we have allowed private sector to innovate and compete in the market space.

So, if you look at UPI, we have connected over 500 banks with each other but we have allowed PayTM to compete with Google Pay, Phone Pay competes with Amazon, with Apple, everyone in the market place and there are 40 different companies competing as far as payments is concerned. And that has allowed a huge amount of innovation to take place. And what it has led to is an open source, open API model with the digital identity has ensured that a company like JIO, when it launched its mobile phone, was able to do an acquisition of over 200 million people in 100 days. The cost of acquisition of a customer which is about \$25 before had shrunk down to \$1. The cost of acquisition in Europe is still about \$175 to \$180. Why I am saying this is that we have done innovation to population scale at low cost. And that is important.

“India took a different approach from other markets where it created the public platform, on top of which we have allowed private sector to innovate and compete in the market space.”

When I was a young officer in Kerala, my job, one of my jobs was to transform the lives of traditional fishermen. And we were able then to give them outboard motors, they could go much further into the sea. They could, we could give them new fiberglass graphs, we could give them new technology in terms of new fishing nets and introduce beach level auctioning. But fishermen were prone to drinking. And therefore, it was very important to open their bank account so they could save for a bad day when they will not get a catch. But opening a bank account was a nightmare. I used to chase bank managers nine months



to open a bank account. The digital identity was a problem. Today, we open a bank account in India using biometric in less than a minute. So, I have seen this journey of transformation from nine months to less than a minute in India. And therefore, my belief is that the digital transformation that India has done during the COVID period, we were able to provide money into the bank accounts of 800 million people directly into the bank account without any leakages. And what the Bank of International Settlement said that India has achieved in seven years what it would have taken

50 years to achieve. So that the transformational story of India is immense - many of us do not realize it because we are seeing it on our day-to-day basis.

The other important story is also to tell you the story of the transformation in terms of development because India has been able to provide close to about 30 million houses. Now 30 million houses really means that we have provided a house to almost every single citizen of Australia. We have provided about 110 million toilets in India which is like providing a toilet to every citizen of Germany. We provided 243 million people piped water in the last five years - 243 million piped connection means that we provided water to every single person in Brazil, that is the size of Brazil. And we built 55,000 kilometres of road, that is like one and a half times the diameter of the earth. During the COVID period, we provided 2.2 billion people vaccinations which is totally

With secretary general, AIMA, Rekha Sethi and captains of Indian industry, India's Sherpa Amitabh Kant, shared the narrative of how PM Modi was eager to give G20 deliberations more depth, a new dimension of knowledge sharing and a bigger voice for concerns of the South.

paperless and cashless. And therefore, my view is that this developmental perspective of India is to be highlighted very strongly during the G20 presidency.

The second key critical component to my mind is what are the priorities before the world and what are India's priorities? The first and foremost is that at a point of time when there is a global slowdown, it is very important to push for inclusive, resilient and sustainable growth, because without growth you will not be able to transform lives of citizens across the world. And when leaders of the world meet, it is very important for them to look at the lives of citizens and therefore how you achieve sustained growth on a long period of time to transform lives is very critical. And this is important because as I said, we are midway between the 2030 goal of sustainable development goals. Instead of progressing, we have regressed, we have fallen back, the world has fallen back from what it has said that it will transform lives of citizens through the sustainable development goals.

Now if COVID has impacted lives,

“The first and foremost is that at a point of time when there is a global slowdown, it is very important to push for inclusive, resilient and sustainable growth, because without growth you will not be able to transform lives of citizens across the world.”

inflation has impacted life, the progress made in the last 20 years, the world has lifted people above the poverty line through free trade. Instead, it has in the last three years, people have gone below the poverty line and therefore how do you accelerate the pace of growth is critical, how do you build up a new action plan for pace of growth is critical and how do you build up a new action plan for sustainable development goals which will enable you to actually accelerate sustainable development goals.



The third very critical issue is about climate action and climate finance because as we are all aware, the developed world, when they were industrialized, in the process they have carbonized the world, 88% of the total carbon space available; that is, out of 2,800 gigatons of carbon space available at 1.5 degree centigrade, some 2,400 gigatons has already been occupied by the developed world. India has occupied only 1.5% of the total carbon space available with 52 gigatons, though logically as per our population we are entitled to about 17.5% of the total carbon space available. And as we take this onward march for the next three decades of consistent rates of growth and as we urbanize, we will risk becoming a major polluter. And therefore, India's challenge is to become the first country in the world to industrialize without carbonizing. And my belief is that this is important because the future belongs to those who digitize and those who go green. And countries and companies which go green will attract value and they will attract capital in due course. And therefore, it is very important that India adopts a very clean approach and a green growth approach. We have achieved our NDC targets committed at COP 21 in Paris, nine years ahead of schedule. We do about 172 gigawatts of renewable energy and we have now launched the green hydrogen mission. India is climatically bless-

ed. India's entrepreneurship is top class. We have the possibility of becoming the lowest cost producer, and the lowest cost exporter in the world will head towards green hydrogen.

The challenges about availability of low-cost financing is our ability to get 30 years financing at low cost. There is no shortage of money in the world. The world is flushed with resources but they are not able to fund money into emerging markets, whereas the risk profile of India is different. The interest rates in the United States are one and a half percent. The interest rates in India are about 8%. The interest rates in Africa are about 15% and in sub-Saharan regions they are 22%. And therefore, African sub-Saharan countries find it difficult to attract money. The challenge is how do we get 30 years financing in dollar terms at 1% or 2%?

“ We are using this opportunity to transform every single city of India where we are taking it, in terms of the drainage, sewage, solid waste in terms of improving the quality of urban infrastructure. ”

Once emerging markets get long-term financing, they will become the champions of climate action and climate change. Without that India's Indian entrepreneurs will find it very difficult to do long-term financing. And therefore, India's fourth key priority is that there must be huge transformation in the multilateral financial institutions.

And the fifth priority is about digital transformation. But it is important to understand that in the world today, there are 4 billion people without a digital identity. There are 133 countries in the world who do not have a digital fast payment. Now India has been able to transform the lives of its citizens, become a more productively efficient economy because of digitization. And therefore, how do we take this model of India to the rest of the world is the challenge. And we will use the G20 narrative to push this digital transformation story of India to the rest of the world and see how we can use this opportunity to transform the lives of citizens in the global south. And that is what is important.

The last priority which the Prime Minister has put forth is women led development. That is important because today in India there are more women, which many of us are not aware; the new NFHS service says that there are 1,022 women to 1,000 men. Like in India and like in the rest of the world, it is not possible to go sustainably, till we are not able to put women into positions of leadership, we are not able to do more financial inclusion, we are not able to improve learning outcomes and health outcomes of women, we are not able to change the whole cycle of malnutrition by ensuring that women produce healthy children.

The India G20 is very different from what other countries do. Other countries hold G20 in one or two cities in their country. But the Prime Minister decided that he will use this opportunity to make this into a people's movement. He will convert this into a Jan Andolan and take this G20 actually to every state of India. So, we are doing 215 meetings in all the states and union territories of India. We are conducting it in 59 cities of India. We are using this opportunity to transform every single city of India where we are taking it, in terms of the drainage, sewage, solid waste in terms of improving the quality of urban infrastructure. So, when we had the Sherpa meeting in Udaipur, the Fatehgarh Lake was transformed, the roads were done up. We have just finished a meeting in Kumarakom in the backwaters of Kerala - an opposition run state. But it is a great example of cooperative federalism. They transformed the backwaters, they built up a new convention centre which will make Kumarakom a 365 days a year destination. They brought in houseboats, they really transformed the roads. So Kumarakom has become one of the top destinations and actually Aurangabad, Pune, all these cities have been transformed simply because of G20.



The other thing we are doing is to use this power to the G20 to push the brand identity of the states in terms of their culture. So everywhere we are promoting only the local state culture.

We are using this opportunity to push for millets in a big way. So, every meal has a millet component to it. We have done everything possible to bring a unique brand identity for every single state of India.

My belief is that G20 is a unique opportunity. It is an opportunity to brand, promote and market India, but more than that it is an opportunity to drive the destiny of the world through our leader. It is an opportunity to push for priorities which will be transformational for the world.

We are differentiating G20 from anything else. If you look, a football tournament is for 14 days, a cricket tournament is for about 20 days, a tennis tournament for 10 days, but here is G20 being done for an entire year and this is an opportunity to transform India and transform these 59 cities, and use this opportunity to transform the world which we will do to the best of our ability.❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

2023 will witness over 200 meetings, in some 50 cities across the country, including the summit later in September. 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.

BUILDING THE DIGITAL FUTURE

OF DIGITAL PAYMENTS, BRAND EXTENSION AND THE EXPECTED GROWTH IN FINANCIAL SERVICES **SANJIV BAJAJ** IN CONVERSATION WITH **SUNIL MUNJAL**

The two share a common pedigree! Belonging to the original two-wheeler world, those of Bajaj and Hero, these two have grown in their respective businesses around the same time. What does the future hold? How are values important in this eco-system of modern business? Let us find out in this abridged conversation between the two maestros:

SANJIV BAJAJ in conversation with **SUNIL MUNJAL**

The conversation today, was supposed to be, and I am saying, supposed to be, by the way, on digital technologies, as especially as they apply to the financial services. But if you are OK with it, I would like to make it a little bit more open, a little bit more personal. And maybe the audience will find that also more interesting than only a conversation on technology, which we hear a lot about nowadays. Let me begin by asking you a little bit, about home. You know, since our families are well known to each other, I have known your father and your brother, both, quite well. And they are both pretty strong personalities. And I am putting it mildly, by the way. And you, on the other hand, have this very quiet demeanour. I was trying to



wonder if there was an argument on the dining table at home, and I am sure there must have been every now and then how would they actually get resolved?

So, Sunil, it is good to be here. And as you said, we have more similarities than, many other people that we know, and equally strong personalities on both sides. Definitely, very smart ones on both sides. The simple answer to your question is that when somebody takes the lead to talk, someone else has to take the lead to listen and, being the younger brother, having a father as aggressive as mine, you learn very quickly that it is better to first listen, let some of the steam blow off and then present your point of view. And, I am of course, saying that part partly jokingly. But partly that was my experience, with my father, because for some of you who may have seen him on television, or otherwise at some of these events, he had a strong point of view. He made sure that his point of view got heard, got discussed. That was not for the stage. That is how

he was 24x7. That is how he was at home growing up when we were kids. That is how he was. So, in many ways, we were used to him being like that, but I always found of him that once you gave him a few minutes and then presented your point of view, he heard it very seriously. And if you could present a point of view different from his, but logically, he very often accepted it and then supported you fully as well. And we used to joke in his later years, where, I used to tell him that because we both went to Harvard Business School, I used to tell him that we have both learned the same thing, that we can argue both sides of the issue. But you do not have to argue that every time at work. I also know that, and he would start laughing. But that was him.

I am also told you were forced by your father to walk to school one day when he learned that you were using the family car. Is there a message you think? And is there a lesson for many who try and give the best to their children? What kind of learning do you think are important, especially in today's world, both material and highly facilitating?

So, we grew up, on the factory campus outside of Pune, which is where the first Bajaj factory came up, my father moved from Mumbai and set up house in the colony. Most of our senior management stayed in the city, which is about 30 kilometres away. Their children went to the schools in the city. But my father was very clear that if he was from Mumbai going to move to Pune, he wanted to be where the factory was. And we had a colony where we had probably 3/400 families, mostly middle lower middle class over there. And there was a very good convent school that had started nearby. These were Swiss missionaries. So, it was a good quality school. But the student that went there came from middle-class, low-class families, our drivers, our security staff, and those in the junior levels not only in Bajaj Auto, but the SKF, TATA Motors. My mother and father were both very clear that that is the school we must go to, because that is the India that we live in. And they knew that the school was of good education, so they would not compromise on that. So, I finished my 10th grade there, and it didn't have 11th and 12th at that time. So, I went to the Junior college in the city. We went on the school bus, and I remember we used to walk from home to the school bus and with everybody else, go to school.

One day either my sister, Rajiv or me, one of us got late. So, my mother said, OK, we had this ambassador car and she said, OK, the car will drop you. So, we said, OK, went in the car and came back. The next day must have been Rajiv with me because my sister was too scared of my parents we said "Let's do it again". So, we did it again. 2 /3 days went like this. Suddenly we were all feeling really happy. And then the next day, when we got ready, instead of my mother being outside my father was standing there and he was always a late riser, so he normally was never there. We were shocked. And he said, you will walk to school. So, so we had one staff member and the walk was a 20-minute walk. It was not far at all. And what we were all scared of was the school had very high levels of discipline by the Swiss nuns. We feared reaching the school after the bell had rung the start bell. And that is what happened. And we got punished in school. Of course, we always made sure that we woke up in time after that. But the grounding that that brought us and the people we hung around with many of my friends who are still from the school days from the time that



It has been about, say 15/ 17 million Indians in the last five years that have entered the formal financial system, just with what Bajaj Finance does. Our focus has been around the middle class, where we believe the greatest need for financial products and solutions exist.

we were three years old, we still meet once a month, at least for dinner.

My children went to a similar school. We set up a second school. Then when the number of people kids became very high, so they went to the same school as well.

Tell us, what were the learnings that you found in the early days of this transformation, and how much would you have imagined at that time would be the impact of digitalization when you were starting off.

So first I must mention Sunil from some of the things you mentioned earlier. You all have done your homework over here. I spent 10 years in Bajaj after I came back from Harvard BS from 97 to 2007. Around 2005 is when some of our large institutional investors in Bajaj Auto told us that, you know, you guys have invested in a set of financial services businesses That was all done through because that was a cash cow for the group. But over a period of time, you will have auto and financial services in one basket. And that's not necessarily what every investor wants, because you have investors with different



“ We do plan in the next couple of years to get into the microfinance segment. In the next 12 months we will enter the four-wheeler space. We will enter the rural tractor space and at some point then microfinance as well. ”

appetites and interests. And we went through the process of demerger – out went the financial services business in 2007/2008. That's when I moved from Bajaj Auto to start rebuilding financial services, which at that time was Bajaj Finance.

The one thing that I knew was that I knew nothing about financial services, so I knew I needed a good team. Second, I was fortunate that, an uncle of mine, my mother's sister's husband called Nanu Pai, who was a career city banker.

Actually, I was going to ask you about Nanu.....

So, Nanu was a mentor. He had retired from Citibank just then, spending 40 years in Citibank. And my father requested him saying that Will you help Sanjiv build these businesses? And he, uh right away agreed. And he used to be in Bombay every Tuesday morning. He used to be in office, driving from Mumbai. He used to be the first one there at 8.15. Meeting started at 8.30. We used to finish by six. He used to drive back to Bombay. He helped put in place processes, the right discipline. He had the right experience.

We would give up short term opportu-

nities if that came in the way of the kind of capabilities we wanted to build in the long term. I was very clear that coming from a business family, I had this freedom within a set of broad guidelines set by the board to go and build business as I felt appropriate to me. We are very clear that we are in the risk business, and hence we will always choose risk over growth. I think that is what has helped us put the best practises in place over the last decade, decade and a half, which has helped us through these tough periods.

No, it's actually quite fascinating from inheriting a financial services firm which was really only supporting motorcycle sales at one point in time to building this behemoth of financial services. I want to pick on a comment you made once that if you were to send a man to Mars, you would lean on expertise from the West. But if you were to have that person survive for long term on the Mars, you would look at knowledge and resources from the East. Why did you say this?

You see, when we have built our businesses, we have also looked at partnerships from around the world, especially there is so much that is happening in the startup field. There's so much innovation and ingenuity that we see there, that we keep scouting for it. And we been doing this across the world, both in the West and the East, what we find with the West. The West ends up being very transactional. If you want to go and buy a product, you want to buy a service in a very predefined clear manner. It is very simple. It is very open. It is very transparent. But if you are building something for the long term, and this is based on long term relationships, I think that tradition, those values exist more in the East. So that is why if you have a specific project that you want to go and do, which is landing on Mars, do it to the West. But if you must live there more long term, you must think more long term. We find that companies in the East culturally are more aligned now. This could also be an issue of a point in time. 50 years down the line, it could be different.

And you've been, as I was saying earlier, one of the clear leaders in the industry. The other interesting thing that has happened at the same time is this digital access across India. The availability of a digital identity of every Indian through Aadhar, the availability of digital reach through bank accounts and device smart devices or just digital devices. Do you see yourself or your business now going down to the microfinance to help the rural consumer or the urban consumer, which is focused on microfinance in any manner? Now? Is that an opportunity for you?

So currently, Sunil, we do about 30 million loans a year. We add between 2.5 and 4.5 million Indians into the formal financial system every year. This is their first loan, first time that they are entering a banking system which otherwise meant that they went to the local money lender. It was 4 /4.5 million pre covid time. Actually, we also became a little bit more risk averse. It is 2.5 million now, and it's slowly expanding. It has been about, say 15/ 17 million Indians in the last five years that have entered the formal financial system, just with what Bajaj Finance does. Our focus has been around the middle class, where we believe the greatest need for financial products and solutions exist.

So that's my question. Are you looking at a new audience for yourselves? Is that a potential new avenue for you? Or is there enough

room to continue to grow, in the middle?

In India, we believe there is enough room, but we also believe that given the size and capabilities that we have built, we are now present in just finance. We are present in over 4000 cities and towns around the country and for the first time, actually, earlier this year, the management presented its long-term strategy five-year strategy to investors because there was a lot of noise in the market about the stock and the performance of the company. And given the heightened exposure to any large company in India, we felt that rather than any information leaks out, we also finance nearly 45,000 people. We said, Let's put it out, of course not in very high level of detail.

We do plan in the next couple of years to get into the microfinance segment. We earlier this year earlier last year, expanded presence in two wheelers. We are doing all branded two wheelers now; in the next 12 months we will enter the four-wheeler space. We will enter the rural tractor space and at some point then microfinance as well. So, because the business is so attractive first, you already had some of the largest groups in the business. And with the kind of growth it is showing, it is attracting more and more attention, including groups like Reliance now throwing their hat in the ring.

What do you imagine? Will be the competitive landscape going forward in the short term to medium term future, especially because many things have become easier now because of digital technologies.

So, a few large companies or groups that have significant access to customers because of existing businesses and Reliance clearly is one of them have the advantage of a ready customer base. But building the right set of capabilities to manufacture financial products and sell them takes time. There isn't a technology system out there or a risk model that you can buy and implement. So, a lot of it is actually learning exponential learning, which will take time. But just look at Bajaj Finance - with the kind of growth we are less than 2% of the banking sector, so I think the opportunity is tremendous. Yes, probably the top 50 cities. The top 100 cities will see some intense competition in the next 24 months as some of these large players get started. But the opportunity is beyond that, and the opportunity is there to stay.



If I look at e-commerce, which is also like your services, e-commerce is another growth area right now. But a large chunk of the e-commerce business, I'm told as much as 60% is divided just between large companies like Amazon, Flipcart, et cetera. Is that a threat for you? Are they taking business away from you, or are they creating a new opportunity for you?

See, fortunately for us, we are an enabler. So, we are present in physical stores. We are present in 100 and 50,000 stores around the country. Whether you're buying a mobile phone or a television or a refrigerator or you're buying a shoe or groceries or fitness equipment, we are present online with all the large platforms, whether it's Reliance, whether it's Amazon, whether it's Flipcart, because we end up being an enabler, whether it is to give loan payments, we've rolled out our payment offerings, for example. We have 35 million digital, store cards now. So, it is an intelligent payment platform that we have put in place. You can get insurance and the intelligence that we are trying to build through our app, which is also what we link with all these other platforms, is if you are going to go and buy refrigerator or a television, can I prompt you to where the best deal is on which of my financial products? So that, you start using payments more intelligently, we will get there over a period of time as well. So, we end up complementing the real world. And to that extent, fortunately, we do not face their competition head on. ❖



ABOUT

Sanjeev Bajaj is from the Bajaj family, heading Bajaj Finserv, India's fastest growing and most diverse financial services company. He is the great grandson of JamnaLal Bajaj and the younger son of Rahul Bajaj.



Sunil Munjal is an Indian businessman and the chairman of Hero Enterprise. Founder of India's Serendipity Arts Festival, he is the chairman of the board of governors of The Doon School. He is the youngest son of Brijmohan Lall Munjal. In 2014, Munjal founded the BML Munjal University and currently serves as its chancellor.

LEGACY IS IMPORTANT,

HOW ONE CAN BE SURE OF HISTORY AND WHY HISTORY MATTERS TO THE FUTURE OF THE NATION.



“For a country like India, which has such a long history, and a lot of it is a very painful history of invasion, occupation, colonisation and so on. So, if you do not want to repeat those things, it is important to learn history.”

Does History Matter? Yes, for some very good reasons, and every nation must have a shared perspective of what has been the narrative for as long as one can look back! Those who don't write their 'own' history, will have to gobble up what 'others' write about you! Sanjeev Sanyal, presently in the PM's Economic Advisory Council, author and historian, shares his views at a recent AIMA annual convention in New Delhi.

First and foremost, as the old dictum goes, those who do not read history are condemned to repeat it. What this dictum does not mean is that history just is a repetition over and over again.

But there are patterns and in fact, as Mark Twain once scripted that while history may not repeat itself, it certainly rhymes. What he meant to say is that there are patterns in history.

And when you are talking about history, we usually mean national history or the history of a civilization or a city or something like that. So, think of it as data, long range data.

All of you, in your corporate life deal with data. You deal with annual data, you deal with quarterly data, and you try to work out certain patterns, presumably learning from these patterns to be able to improve into the future. This is important, but even in the life of a nation or a civilization, this is also true. And history really is data about the past. It is long-range data over hundreds of years or thousands of years, or whatever length of history you want to look at. And it is important to understand that, as I said, in order not to repeat the mistakes.

For a country like India, which has such a long history, and a lot of it is a very painful history of invasion, occupation, colonisation and so on. So, if you do not want to repeat those things, it is important to learn history.

Number two. It is important not only that some small group of specialists learn history, but there is a generalised understanding of at least the facts of history. You may interpret them in somewhat different ways at an individual level, a general understanding and acceptance of certain facts of history for any given people or country. Because again, the corollary to the first rule is the second. Because if only a very small group of people know the history, then the danger is that that small group will sit around and watch the rest of the people repeat history. So, it is no point in going through that, and therefore it is important that we teach this history on a wider basis to future generations. It is in some ways an accumulation of knowledge, and that, too, must be passed on.

There is a third rule to our understanding of history and which is this? And here we come to a more nuanced and complex point, which is that if you do not write your own history, and particularly when you are dealing with something as important as the future of a country or a civilization or something, a large project, then be clear that if you don't write your history, somebody else will write it for you.

The history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. So, if you, as I said, do not have the time or energy or interest for writing or history, do not think you are going to be left alone. Somebody else is going to stand up there and deconstruct you and write your narrative for you.

And this is indeed that has happened to us many times in the past. Many Indians get very excited that the British, having colonised India, took such a great interest in our history. Well, of course they did. There is no better way to colonise the people thoroughly, then to take control of the way they think of themselves. This is why, even 75 years after independence, we still talk about decolonization because in some ways we ended up seeing ourselves from a framework of thinking that somebody else set for us.

Now, having set these three points down, let me now take this into the area of leadership, whether it is in the corporate leadership or a national political leadership and so on.

Why is this important to have this discussion for you as well? Not merely as stakeholders in this country, but even in your own, when you are trying to run your own companies or industries because in the end, remember that we live in such a complex, changing, uncertain world.

We need to have a framework or a narrative framework in which we get everybody to buy into, or to be able to pull in a certain direction. That narrative building, in a sense, is leadership.

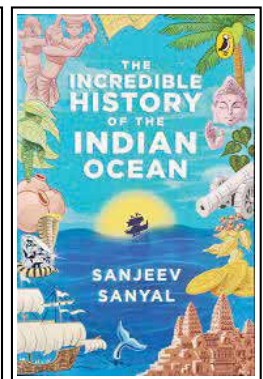
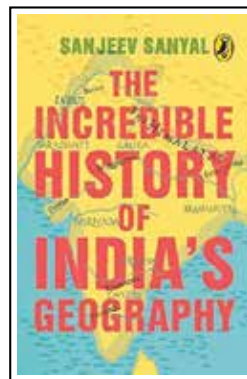
This requires you to have a shared understanding of who you are, and that in some way, and one ingredient of that is a shared understanding of your history. I am not saying you have to agree at every little point, but a general shared understanding of that history is a part of the general shared values, the general shared culture that you want to have in order to get any group of people to pull in the same direction. So, in some ways, when you are doing leadership at every level, you are in some ways creating that framework.

And so, history is a very important part of doing that. And when you are dealing with a nation or even a state or even a city, the large masses of people have to have a shared understanding of who they are Now.

Given this broader context, let us come to the conversations that we are having today and into the future. I am going to start



“ Even 75 years after independence, we still talk about decolonization because in some ways we ended up seeing ourselves from a framework of thinking that somebody else set for us. ”



with something which is not history. Then I will come back to history. You see, history is not about just the past. We are ourselves living history. One day people will look back and what we thought, what we said, why we said, and that will also become a part of history.

And therefore, we need to think about how these narratives, these frameworks of understanding, are being generated as we speak. And in this context, let me show you how and I have been a part of this conversation, show you how, as we emerge as a major global power, how a large amount of effort will get put into setting the narrative for us so that we are guided into certain directions, pathways of growth.

So, for example, you may see there are all these suddenly this plethora of think



tanks who are creating these indices - democracy index, happiness index, hunger index, et cetera, et cetera.

And in all of them, without fail, we do curiously badly. Have you noticed this?

You know, there was one of these major think tanks, global think tanks, I think it is called. It is a Sweden based think tank, it issued a few months ago an academic freedom index. And in that academic freedom index, not only are we below Pakistan, we are even below Afghanistan now, obviously, this is not even a pretence of trying to set any objective truth.

What they are trying to do is to frame us in a particular way in order to manipulate us.

And this is not something that is new today. This has been going on from the beginning of time.

What they are trying to do is that only if we behave in a particular pattern will we be accepted as a democracy.

Now, if you go and look at the Democracy index by the way. I have written several articles and working papers on this issue so you can get into the details, but it is quite interesting how it is set up. So, if you go and look at, say, the Democracy Index and look at the first four or five countries that the Democracy Index considers to be the best democracy in the world.

In that list, we are 108 out of 140. So the world's largest democracy on the democracy index comes out at 108 of 140. But who are the first five first five democracies in the world are Kingdom of Norway, Kingdom of Denmark, Kingdom of Sweden, Kingdom of Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

In other words, being a republic is bad for democracy. That is the main finding of this report. So obviously there are certain ways in which it is set up and you will be told this story in a particular way. And by the way, this is not just about this perception based in this disease about happiness index and so on.

In fact, there is one tweet which I found specifically very interesting with a world map which was quite funny, in which we saw different countries coloured according to where they rank on the happiness index. And then it was also pointed out what were their suicide rates. There is an absolute perfect co-relation. So, the joke that went around is the best way of happiness. To reach happiness at a national scale is to allow the unhappy to kill themselves off. So, this is the absurdity with which these narratives are set.

So, you know, these are very often certain advocacy groups.

These are basically non-government organisations of various kinds who will then impose on you certain norms for which in order to

grade you up or down, they will first of all charge money. But on a grander scale, they will actually use their data to manipulate you in a particular direction.

Many of you may be facing this already in your work. If you are dealing with, investments or trade in in places like Europe, we are under no illusion that this is a form of new colonisation, not very different from the way, for example, the British were writing our history. They were a small number of obviously different looking people, white people who had come and occupied a large and established country with a long history, and they needed to basically justify their rule.

So, what they said is that you guys have a long and established history, but that great civilization that you are proud of, do remember that it was given to you by other white people called the Aryans, who came and gave it, gifted it to you. So, all we are doing really is doing a software update, and therefore we have a right to rule over you. There has never been any sign in the archaeology, in the Vedic texts or other texts, or even in the genetics, of any such invasion. And yet, to this day, by the way, the Aryan invasion is hardwired in a lot of the textbooks and other conversations that we have.

So, the point I am making here is the narrative. Building it is important. It is important at the national level. It is important at the corporate level. Much of it is creating a convincing narrative, which is based on facts, is an important part of leadership. And most importantly, if you are not doing it, your enemies will do it for you. ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sanjeev Sanyal is a member of Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council.

He has worked on several editions of the

Economic Survey of the Ministry of Finance. He has authored several books, including 'Revolutionaries', that was recently released by Home Minister Amit Shah.

IT IS TIME NOW FOR DELHI TO BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL HUB OF SUBSTANCE

by NAVIN BERRY

Our airports are hubs already, making passengers conveniently transit to other destinations. This has been particularly prevalent on non-metro to metro routes, though in recent time, many new city pairs have been added, more are in the offing. Hub is where airlines give their passengers the opportunity to cross over onto another route.

When you use this facility from different points to different others, on your own network, or through alliance partners, the airline is creating a hub.

Internationally, the hub is normally within your own country, your busy city. So, Lufthansa can use Frankfurt and Munich within Germany. Given the open market within EU, Germany has other smaller hubs within Europe, either directly or with their other owned airlines like Austrian and Swiss.

Singapore and Dubai are great examples where their respective national carriers provide a crossover facility from

East to the West. Istanbul is growing in strength. One big requisite is a strong national airline around which all other developments do a piggy back. This is also when you start viewing aviation as serious business, capable of providing more jobs.

India has been well placed geographically. We could and should have had a few global hubs by now, given the size of our market. Our policy planners at that time did not understand the value proposition and allowed other hubs to grow in our region, like Colombo and Bangkok.

We are distanced well to provide links say between Australia and the UK and Europe. This was not to be, as ever since our airports grew in dimensions, our airlines petered out. Air India became a relatively weak airline. Jet and Kingfisher closed down. New entrant

Indigo preferred to operate with aircrafts that did not have the capacity to go beyond 5/6 hours of flying time.

Now the dynamics are changing. Airports are getting a further lease of life. In fact, at both New Delhi and Mumbai, a second airport is fast taking shape. Our airlines have opted for wide body aircraft that can provide genuine and real time capability to hub. Air India has ordered some 70 of them, with deliveries to start soon. Indigo is expected to announce soon

as well, presently evaluating their best bet of aircraft. We also have a government which is seized of the matter and not allowing more hubs to grow out of our own traffic in other countries.

For this to have effect, airlines need to be given single terminal access. We gather some of this is already happening. Air India already functions from Terminal 3; after its expansion project, the Delhi's IGIA will allocate IndiGo only from Terminal 1. Currently, IndiGo's flights are spread out of all three terminals which has been an issue for the airline's traffic to transit from international to domestic.

Better connectivity is required between the two terminals. Overseas, airports have a dedicated train connection, much of it underground. We can have one, too.

IGIA is steadily growing in strength. It is presently serviced by as many as 63 airlines. Between April 2022 and February 2023, the airport handled over 14.50 million transfer passengers of which around 8.56 million were domestic to domestic transfer passengers. About 2.88 million were domestic to international, 2.73 million internationals to domestic; over 3.37 lakh were international to international transfer passengers. The volumes are there already. With expected increases in traffic, we can attract more transit flight.

IGIA has all the ingredients required for making it the first truly global hub in India. Other cities can follow. ❖



India has been well placed geographically. We could and should have had a few global hubs by now, given the size of our market.

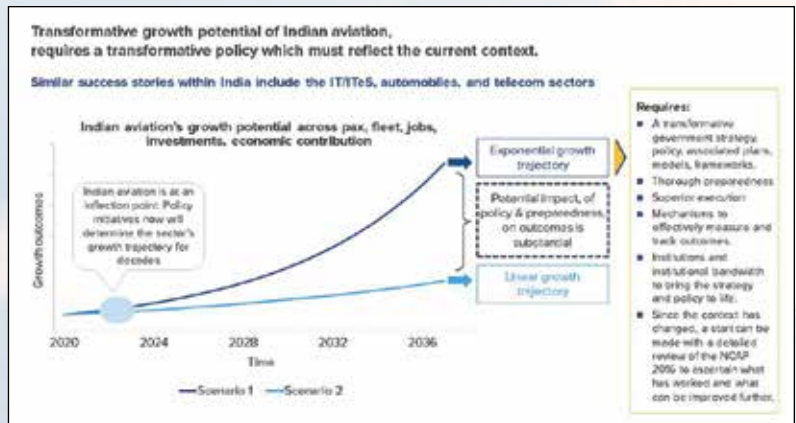
AVIATION POISED TO MAKE US\$ 1 TRILLION ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN ECONOMY BY FY 2043

INDIA HAS TO ASPIRE TO THIS TRANSFORMATIVE VISION WHICH MUST BE SHARED BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY, AS JOINT STAKEHOLDERS

In this special CAPA study, the consultancy major talks of the huge potential that India has in terms of growing its air transport. It states that all interests must come together to share a common vision and grow in harmony, keeping in mind that cake is getting bigger and bigger.

Indian aviation is at a critical inflection point. The opportunities could have positive implications for generations to come. But there are critical challenges to address if these opportunities are to be realised

- India's aviation system handled just less than 200 million airline passengers in FY2023.
- CAPA India projects that it may need to be able to handle around 1.3+ billion passengers within 20 years if an aspirational and transformational path is pursued (or around 1.0 billion passengers following more linear growth)
- Achieving such a dramatic ramp-up in scale will require a tremendous effort across the aviation eco-system.
- Each and every element of the industry will need to play their part to realise this opportunity.
- By FY2043 aviation could make a USD1 trillion annual contribution to the Indian economy, taking into account direct, indirect, induced and catalytic impacts and an aspirational and transformational vision. Otherwise around USD800 billion.
- In the aspirational scenario, India in FY2043 may be larger than the USA pre-



Setting SMART goals, measuring and monitoring policy outcomes will be critical to ensure policy effectiveness and make it aligned to changing ground realities

Policy pillar	Policy goal	Transformative policy goal (CAPA's perspective)	Metrics to monitor
Employment generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase employment (from 0.3 to 3 mtr) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create aspirational, high income jobs ■ Increase the participation of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ % share of high income vs low income jobs ■ Female participation rate
Trained technical resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have sufficient number of trained pilots (58,000), AMEs (112 mil), ATCOs (13,600) for India's needs in FY2043 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apart from India's requirements, develop a robust export pool of pilots, AMEs etc. through aspirational learning paths aligned to global standards ■ Indian talent should represent global best-in-class quality, safety, reliability standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No. of pilots placed abroad ■ No. of AMEs placed abroad
Physical infrastructure, connectivity improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have sufficient airport capacity in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build sufficient airport capacity ahead of demand, but seek existing airport assets optimally first ■ Improve connectivity index rankings ■ Sufficient inter-modal connectivity and capacity, including approach roads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Project level status ■ No. of approvals pending – state-wise, department-wise, with aging bucket review ■ Direct vs indirect, Total vs international connectivity ratios
Institutional infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop institutional bandwidth incrementally (3,500+ technical staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Re-design the entire institutional architecture to make it future ready for a new-age aviation ecosystem which includes drones, UAMs, urban air mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Competency assessment ■ Capacity development
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Currenty areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop an aviation and travel start-up ecosystem ■ Make the Indian aviation ecosystem one of the most innovative globally ■ Establish a 'MoCA Regulatory Sandbox' to encourage and instill innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No. of innovative ideas ■ No. of backstubs ■ Moves to commercial success ratio

Indicative only

COVID. In just 40 years, the Indian market would have grown from the size of Las Vegas to the size of the entire USA.

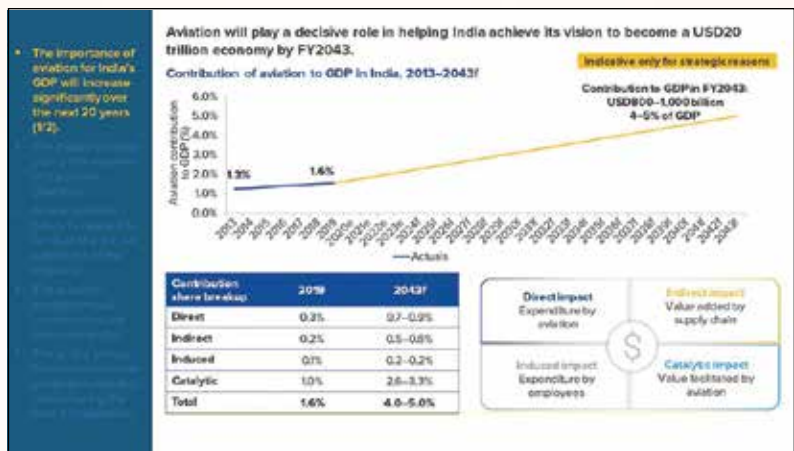
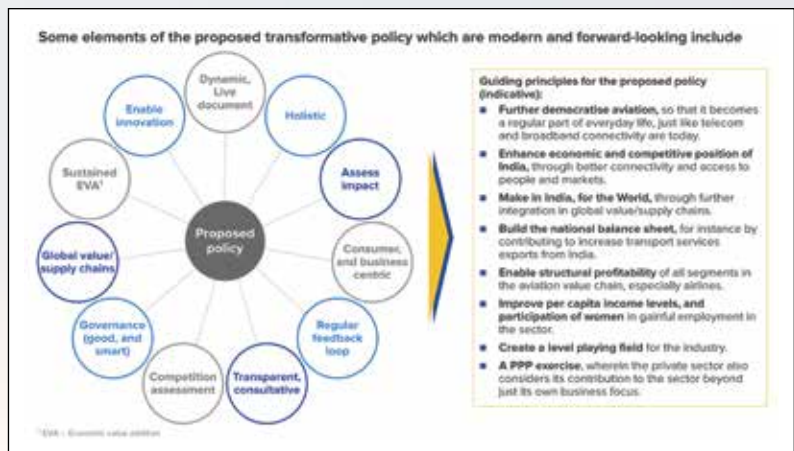
- Under a 'business as usual' scenario, India may be similar in size to China pre-COVID.
- The strategic impact that aviation could have on the economy and consumers, should inspire policy-makers, as well as industry leaders.
- MoCA has been making serious and genuine efforts to transform the sector and will need to look at a new policy framework to achieve the industry's potential.

CAPA India has extensive experience in policy and regulatory advisory. This document provides our perspective on the need to achieve the following...

- To develop a new vision for the sector
- To set aspirational goals, which may seem ambitious today, but have the potential to be reality
- To provide the necessary institutional and business framework
- To ensure that the requisite physical, manpower and digital assets are available
- To measure and track performance to ensure that outcomes are aligned with intent

Preparing for the projected growth will require a new mindset.

- **A national vision** must be developed that is shared by government and industry.
- There must be a **recognition that aviation can make an annual contribution of USD1 trillion** (direct, indirect, induced and catalytic) to the Indian economy by FY2043, if India chooses to aspire to a transformative vision.
- **Closer and more strategic cooperation** is required between central government, state government and industry. Achieving outcomes is a shared responsibility.
- Translating the vision and ambitions into outcomes will require:
 - **A comprehensive White Paper** which accurately captures the current status of the sector in terms of capacity and capabilities, and identifies the structural gaps that exist.
 - **Extensive, documented consultation** with the Indian and global industry in a professional and structured manner.
 - Development of a long-term aviation policy. This policy, which should be realistic and implementable, should



span the entire value chain. The policy must not only plan for growth, but also optimise existing assets.

- **Simultaneous preparation in terms of critical planning and execution capability.** These skills must be institutionally developed within MoCA, resulting in a world class planning team that has a deep understanding of a modern and dynamic aviation sector.
- **A performance tracking and measurement model** to ensure that the policy is implemented effectively.

Airspace design need to be restructured to provide capacity for up to 8-10x current traffic, plus continued growth in overflights, general aviation and new age aviation e.g. air taxis, UAVs and eVTOL aircraft

- Airspace capacity needs to meet **long-term requirements**
- Airspace must deliver the most **efficient flight paths** possible, for **lower costs and sustainability**
- Airspace must transition to full **performance-based navigation**
- For this to happen
 - **Corporatisation of the ANSP** arm of the Airports Authority of India should commence immediately
 - The ANSP must have a **professional and expert-led governance structure**
 - **Civil operations** must be given access to a greater share of airspace
 - Technical constraints must be removed to make the sector more sophisticated

Planning for airport capacity that will last for generations, and is developed ahead of demand, must start now. The emergence of Indian mega-carriers will require appropriate airports to be developed.

- Delhi and Mumbai will soon have second airports, but they need to start preparing for their third.

- Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata and especially Chennai, need to start thinking about second airports.

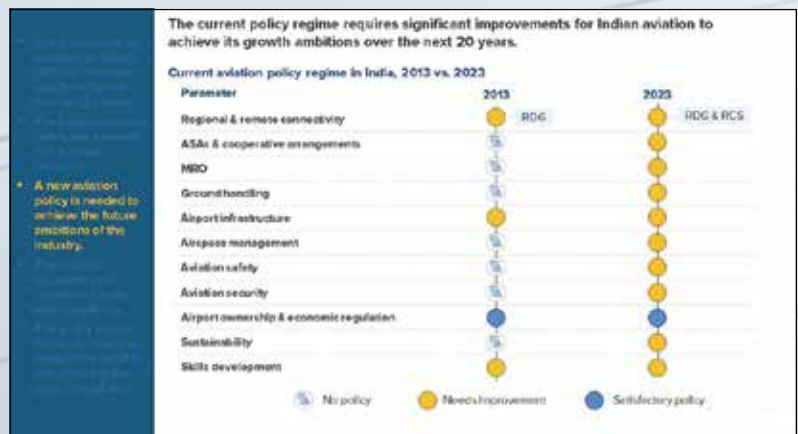
- Given the projected growth, these airports cannot be for 'just' 60-80 million passengers. Otherwise, Indian metros will be building new airports every decade.

- Instead, the next airports should be located where they can have longevity, like Istanbul or Dubai World Central, with potential capacity of up to 200 million passengers per annum.

- But this needs:

- Preparation, preparation, preparation
- A shared vision
- **CRITICAL** Land to be notified as soon as possible (this will become an increasingly scarce commodity)
- **CRITICAL** Sweating of existing airport assets
- Integration with state and regional master plans, including provisions for access infrastructure
- Clarity on whether we want existing airports to grow into mega-airports, or we want competition from second and third airports.
- Plans to be shared with Indian and global airlines so that they can take appropriate long-term fleet and network planning decisions.

Aviation policy must deliver industry viability and growth by design. The areas



highlighted below are just a sample of the areas that require attention.

Airline viability

- Carriers must be provided with a level playing field by dismantling the negative fiscal regime and providing infrastructure ahead of time. System efficiency must be maximised to enable the emergence of mega-carriers.

Bilateral policy

- India must first define an international air services strategy in line with its national interests.

- Once this has been defined, the corresponding bilateral policy can be formulated. But it must be transparent, equitable and designed to maximise growth.

- India will be such a lucrative market in the years and decades to come that aero-politics will become very complex unless there is a clearly-defined policy. This may need to take non-aviation issues into account (e.g. geo-politics, trade, energy, security, diaspora affairs etc.) when determining how to allocate entitlements between countries.

- And challenges may arise even domestically, as airlines and airports are likely to have competing objectives, and even airlines themselves will have differing views.

MRO Policy

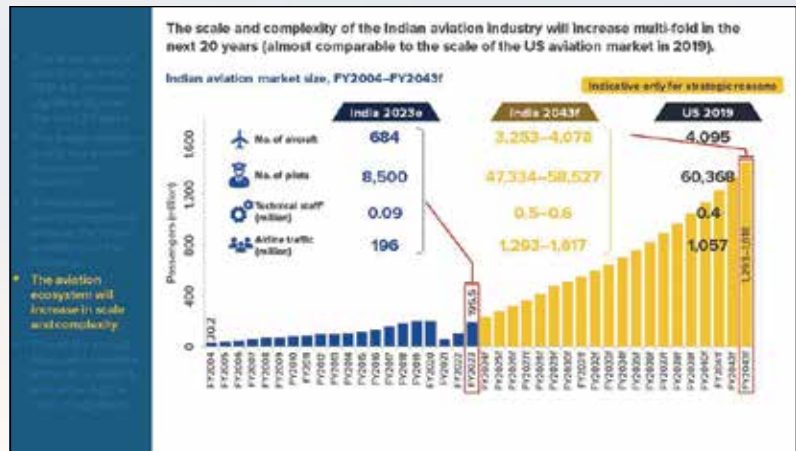
- India needs to decide whether it requires an MRO system primarily for Indian carriers, or whether it is intent on building a global centre for maintenance.

- Mega-carriers will need massive MROs. That will require a policy that delivers the requisite cost base, skills and infrastructure.

Why do we think this aspirational vision is possible? Because aviation is being taken more seriously in India than ever before. This creates an environment in which the design of a suitable long-term policy is possible.

- **Privatisation of Air India was a significant and bold reform.** Taking a haircut of INR60,000crs and possibly realising only INR8,000-10,000crs has re-set the industry and resulted in a new wave of optimism about the future.

- **Serious and determined focus by the government to convince states to reduce VAT on ATF is delivering results.** The majority of states have rationalised taxes, with Assam and West Bengal possibly



next. Larger states have been holding out, but the recent reduction in VAT in Maharashtra is a positive development.

- **The role of private airports – which already handle the majority of traffic in the country – is set to increase, with 25 non-metro airports identified for privatisation, a greenfield airport likely in Chennai, and Navi Mumbai and Noida airports on track to open in the next couple of years.**

- MoCA is engaging seriously with airlines and airport operators to facilitate the **development of genuine hubs in India.**

- India has an LCC and an FSC that have the genuine **potential to become world class, global mega-carriers.**

- MoCA is **actively consulting with the industry** to address strategic challenges.

These developments provide India with the option to consider an aspirational, transformational vision. But the scale and complexity of operations is on a scale that may be unimaginable today, and therefore has to be built by design. ❖



ABOUT CAPA INDIA

CAPA India was established more than 19 years ago with a mission to become a leader in global aviation knowledge. We have since built a worldwide portfolio of clients and

experience, and an enviable reputation for independence, insight and integrity. Today aviation businesses around the world turn to us for sound advice and research.

HOSPITALITY POISED FOR SUSTAINED GROWTH

AS INDIA SURGES ON ITS ECONOMIC GROWTH; BOTH BUSINESS AND LEISURE TO REMAIN STRONG TAILWINDS

HICSA is an annual hospitality conference now in its 16th year. It brings together the captains of India's industry across brands. The agenda for the conference not only included traditional topics related to tourism and hospitality but also new age concerns that are likely to impact its future. Therefore, HICSA 2023 was assigned a theme with three A's – Artificial Intelligence, Astute Investments and Aesthetic Interiors, topics that were discussed in breakout sessions at the conference.

Report by NABEEL AHMED

The post pandemic revival of the hospitality industry, challenges ahead and the new trends that are shaping its future formed most of the discussions at the two-day conference.

Some key takeaways

■ Hotels across India have seen an astounding surge in performance. They have witnessed 25% or higher growth in RevPar across all segments over year 2019. The last time such levels of growth were seen was before 2008. The overarching belief is that



Delegates to the HICSA conference 2023, include Raj Menon of Marriott International (third from left), and Samhi's Ashish Jakhnawala, with others.



these levels of growth are sustainable and are here to stay. The projection is that business travel will continue to remain strong while the leisure footprint may soften compared to the two pandemic years.

- The growth in per capita levels across the country is acting as a tailwind for the hospitality industry. Hotels are an aspirational commodity and with the increase in disposable income there is bound to be greater demand for travel, hotels, and aviation. This is also the driving factor behind airlines increasing their fleet size and hotel companies developing aggressive expansion plans.

- The next layer of hotel growth will be seen in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. With increased connectivity, urbanization and infrastructure development, hotels will have greater access to new, untapped markets. Leisure traffic driven by wildlife and religious destinations located in remote parts of the country will see higher traction.

- It is no surprise then to see that hotel brands have robust expansion plans in place. For example, Marriott International plans to operate 250 hotels in its portfolio in India by 2025. Hilton Worldwide plans to expand from 24 hotels to 75 hotels in India by 2026. Other hotel brands had large growth projections for India.

- Although artificial intelligence technologies have a lot of practical uses and will help enhance the pace and quality of service delivery, it cannot replace personalized, local interactions.

- While management contracts have traditionally dominated new hotel signings in India, franchising as a concept is picking up pace among major hotel brands, both domestic and international.

- A substantial num-

ber of hotel developments (approximately 25% of all new developments) in the last year have happened in the form of conversion of existing hotels from independent to branded hotels.

- Among some of the emerging trends that have been seen is the spurt in growth of bleisure travel. Hotels are witnessing higher occupancies on Thursdays and Sundays pointing to the fact that guests are extending their work stays at hotels into the weekend. Furthermore, new hotels, especially those in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities have a smaller key-count and offer local, authentic experiences.

- When looking at Google trends in the hospitality industry, one of the major findings was that social media is being used extensively by people to discover new places to travel to. Vlogs are being preferred over traditional itineraries and writeups as they offer interactive, visual cues.

Another encouraging trend being seen is that sustainability is not only about a tick on the checklist. Use of automation, technology and investments in renewable energy is being looked at as a means to reduce costs and increase a hotel's return on investment.

Breakout sessions:

- Artificial Intelligence: how AI can be leveraged by hotels under different scenarios. AI can be used to enhance guest service deliv-

HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards

One of the highlights of the event was the HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards - 2023 presented by Make My Trip, which acknowledged and celebrated the most outstanding hotel developments in South Asia in the previous year.

HICSA 2023 saw the announcement of four new landmark hotel signings including the country's first Radisson Collection in Hyderabad, the first Anantara Resort and Spa in Jaipur, the first Waldorf Astoria in Jaipur and India's fourth Fairmont in Agra.

The conference ended with an evening of revelry and a unique bar-hop experience at some of Bengaluru's finest bars.



Best Hotel in Conversion Hotel category	Devi Ratn, Jaipur – IHCL SeleQtions
Best Hotel in Budget and Mid-Market category	Fairfield by Marriott, Dehradun
Best Hotel in Upper Mid-Market category	Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park
Best Hotel in Upscale Urban Locations category	Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar
Best Hotel in Upscale Leisure Locations category	Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, Jim Corbett
Best Hotel in Boutique Hotel category	Storii by ITC Hotels Shanti Maroda, Goa
Best Hotel in Upper Upscale & Luxury category	JW Marriott Resort Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa
Critics Choice Award	Hyatt Regency Dehradun



FUTURE OUTLOOK

Following the pandemic there has been an increased desire among people to travel. People are far more inclined today to see new places and experience different cultures than they were in the past. While the hybrid work culture has its merits and efficiencies, corporate travel has picked up pace with people realizing that personal interactions are an integral part in conducting business.

The Indian economy is pegged to be one of the world's most prominent growth engines at a time when mature economies world over face the prospect of recession. A burgeoning young population, complimented by fast sustainable infrastructure growth is driving demand across industries and hotels are an obvious benefactor to this trend. As markets around the world face a saturation point, in India, due to improved connectivity, new untapped markets, in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are being explored for investment opportunities.

Some of the factors that are fueling this growth story are:

- The manufacturing sector in India is growing rapidly and is pegged to contribute 25% of the country's GDP by 2025.
- Companies like Foxconn, Apple, Samsung, ABB, Hyundai, Boeing, Lowe's and many more are either entering the country or expanding their production capacity.
- These industries act as major contributors for room nights at hotels not only in big cities but also in smaller cities where these manufacturing facilities are established.
- India already is the third largest aviation market behind the United States and China and will continue to grow further with multiple new airports in the pipeline.
- The government is investing heavily in building world class infrastructure in the form of highways and rail connectivity across the country. Highway construction in India has grown at a rate of 17% CAGR between 2015/16 to 2020/21.
- India is currently the host country for the G20 summit and that is driving significant inbound traffic to the country.

ery by collating information about guest preferences that would enable hotel employees personalise experiences. AI can also be integrated with GDS and online reservation platforms to gain further insight into the hotel's target audience and design marketing strategies in accordance with that. Furthermore, AI can help derive efficiencies in backend processes enabling the hotel team to focus more on its guests and the experiences they offer.

■ **Aesthetic interiors:** the new mantra being developed by the industry. Building design standards that hotel brands instruct architects and designers to follow can sometimes restrict their creativity in use of unique, localised design elements. Greater flexibility will allow greater use of local materials that will give rise to local architecture gaining prominence. Sustainable construction techniques and materials that are increasingly being deployed to reduce the carbon footprint of new hotel buildings.

■ **Astute Investments:** industry is slated to benefit significantly in the long term due to easy access to capital funding. The positive outlook of the Indian economy is driving investments from countries like the United States and Canada. Companies like Fairfax Financial Holdings and Brookfield Corporation have already invested in Indian hotels and are planning to expand their footprint in coming years. Since hotel investments are capital intensive and require a high gestation period, private equity players are less inclined towards investing in the industry.

The Challenges Ahead

While a lot of positive commentary was heard about the industry at large, there were some challenges and risks that were discussed. These included the following:

■ Acquisition and retention of talent has become a major challenge. The industry is suffering from high attrition levels due to long working hours and inadequate compensation levels at the grassroot level. Furthermore, there is little being done by hotels to change this trend.

■ Hotel owners continue to face regulatory challenges when it comes to setting up new hotels. These challenges may vary from one state to another but the overall ease of doing business in the country needs to improve.

■ Accessibility to funding in the form of bank loans is increasingly becoming difficult as the perception is that hotel developments do not generate returns as high as other industries.

■ The hospitality industry needs to leverage the use of technology much better. There is a lot to be learnt from the e-commerce and airline industry in terms of use of tech, and revenue management.



After a panel discussion: among others, Anil Chhada of ITC Hotels (extreme left), Chander Baljee of Royal Orchid Hotels (third from left), Rajiv Kaul formerly of Leela Hotels (4th from left), and Manav Thadani (extreme right).

Such an event creates a lot of visibility for India and showcases its destinations and hospitality offerings to the world.

- International sporting events related to cricket, hockey, football and kabaddi are finding a strong footing in India. Having developed state-of-the-art infrastructure for sporting events like the IPL, Cricket World Cup, Hockey World Cup, these are now driving growth not only for hotels but for the entire economy. The belief is that sports will have an even bigger role to play in the future.

- India is among few countries in the world that boasts of a larger-than-life wedding culture. 'Big Fat Indian Weddings' have a robust and widespread footprint and are a major contributor to demand for hotels. Because weddings happen on such a large scale, the wedding season sees most hotel markets operating at peak rate levels.

Looking at the above trends, the sense of optimism is not ours alone but is shared by hotel investors and brands across the industry. All domestic and international hotel brands have robust expansion plans as they foray into the Indian hospitality market.

- The total supply of hotel rooms in the Indian hospitality markets stands at approximately 1,54,000. This number is expected to reach approximately 2,00,000 by 2026/27.

- One strategy that allows hotel brands a brisk expansion opportunity is in the form of conversion of existing independent hotels to branded hotels. Almost all hotel brands have created the concept of a soft brand. For example, IHCL created a brand called IHCL SeleQtions, Radisson has the Radisson Individuals brand, Marriott operates the Autograph Collection and Tribute Portfolio. These sub-brands allow independent hotel owners to maintain the identity of their hotels while at the same time leverage the marketing and distribution muscle that these reputed brands have to offer.

- In the last one year, approximately 25% of all hotel expansions happened in the form of conversions and this trend is expected to continue.

- With room rates across Indian hotels having increased by close to 25% compared to 2019 levels, the important question is whether this upswing is a result only of pent-up demand or is this trend here to stay.

- appropriate for the quality experience that Indian hotels have to offer.

Our firm conviction is that Indian hotels have always offered

quality accommodation and top-notch service. In the past, Indian hotels were not rewarded adequately for the level of service it provided. We therefore believe that these elevated rates are warranted and likely to stay.

The 18th Hotel Investment Conference – South Asia (HICSA) was held in Bengaluru between 11th and 13th April 2023. The conference was attended by hotel owners, operators, developers, architects, consultants, and other hospitality professionals from a total of 15 countries with close to 600 attendees. HICSA 2023 kicked off with a golf tournament followed

by an owners-only meet on day one at the JW Marriott Resort Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa. The main conference was held over the next two days. Speakers who addressed delegates at the conference included a celebrated list of hospitality industry professionals including Anthony Capauano, President and CEO Marriott International, Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO at IHCL, Chris Nassetta, President and CEO of Hilton, Jitu Virwani, Chairman and MD, Embassy Group, and Dimitris Manikis, President and MD-EMEA, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, Megna



In the last one year, approximately 25% of all hotel expansions happened in the form of conversions and this trend is expected to continue.

Shankaranarayanan, Industry Head - Travel & Food Tech, Google, Elie Younes, Executive VP and Global Chief Development Officer, Radisson Hotel Group, just to name a few. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nabeel Ahmed works for Hotelivate, the owning company that organises HICSA annually.

ANALYSING INFLATION AND MANAGING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Central Banks across global markets have raised lending rates to curb inflation. So has India, but our challenges have been different and difficult. RBI has indeed done a good job, in checking both ends.

by **VIPINMALIK & DR. MANORANJANSHARMA**

In common parlance, inflation implies a general increase in prices and fall in the purchasing value of money. The simplest and classic definition of inflation for about a hundred years has been “too much money chasing too few goods”. The inflationary spiral stems from high oil prices, disruptions in supply chain, particularly post Ukraine war, reduced production of goods, surge in wage bills and excessive deficit financing.

Almost all central banks hiked rates since April 2022 with the cumulative hikes being US 450 bps, Hong Kong 450 bps, Canada 400 bps, UK 350 bps, and Australia 350 bps. Such successive policy rate hikes by central banks pushed the treasury bills and bond rates quite steeply and the transmission to lending rates was faster than before. While the Fed Chief maintained that inflation control occupied overriding priority, the liquidity crisis in SVB, Signature Banks and credit stress issues leading to take over of Credit Suisse disrupted the financial system globally. Fed softened its stand with an increase of 25 bps in March and domestically the RBI paused. BoE and ECB through their continued aggressive stand on rate increase could not reverse the overarching negative sentiment in the financial system.

RBI's Role

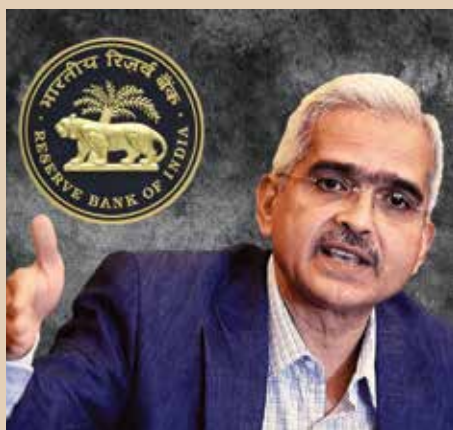
The broad objectives of mone-

tary policy in India relate to maintenance of a reasonable degree of price stability and adequate expansion of credit to foster faster growth. The Preamble to the RBI Act, 1934 defined RBI's objective “to regulate the issue of Bank notes and the keeping of reserves with a view to securing monetary stability in India and generally to operate the currency and credit system of the country to its advantage”. In line with this thought, the Urijit Patel Committee's report held: “Drawing from the review of cross-country experience, the appraisal of India's monetary policy against the test of outcomes and the recommendations made by previous committees, the Committee recommends that inflation should be the nominal anchor for the monetary policy framework. This nominal anchor should be set by the RBI as its predominant objective of monetary policy in its policy statements. ...Subject to the establishment and achievement of the nominal anchor, monetary policy conduct should be consistent with a sustainable growth trajectory and financial stability”.

The Flexible Inflation Targeting Framework (FITF) was introduced in India post the amendment of the RBI Act in 2016. In accordance with the RBI Act, the Government of India sets the inflation target every 5 years with RBI's consultation. The inflation target has been mandated by the RBI Act, amended through the Finance Act, 2016 to be 4% (+/- 2%). The inflation target can be missed when:

The average inflation exceeds the upper tolerance level of the inflation target as predetermined by the Central Government for 3 quarters in a row.

The average inflation falls short of the lower tolerance level of the target inflation



the RBI has done well. But the RBI remains constrained by several multi-layered issues that concern inflation management.

fixed by the Central Government beforehand for 3 consecutive quarters.

In the event of inflation averaging 6% or higher for three consecutive calendar quarters, the statutory provision 45ZN in the RBI Act, 1934 is invoked requiring the Governor to explain the breach to the government. This issue is compounded by inadequate monetary transmission.

Successive rate hikes began with 40 bps hike from 4% at an off-cycle meeting in May 2022, its first-rate increase in nearly four years and, therefore, "it is now necessary to evaluate cumulative effect of rate hikes". Early signs of a slowdown were visible in bank credit growth which decelerated to 15.7% y-o-y as of March 10, easing from decadal high of 17.9% in October 2022.

Since the RBI had already raised rates by 250 bps since May 2022, the dip in retail inflation from a three-month high 6.52% in January 2023 to 6.44% in February 2023; and the "downside risks from financial stability concerns"- "unprecedented uncertainties in geopolitics, economic activity, price pressures and financial markets" (e.g., banking turmoil manifested in the crash of the Silicon Valley Bank, Credit Suisse Group AG), it refrained from any such hike even though inflation continues to breach the tolerance level of 6%. This decision would provide relief to borrowers in rate sensitive sectors like real estate including residential complexes, passenger cars, commercial vehicles with the home loan and other EMIs unlikely to rise. Further, large debt companies, growth stocks, small and mid-cap space companies, and specific sectors, viz., consumer durables and real estate would not be adversely impacted by the RBI's policy move, business sentiments will improve by containing the rise in borrowing costs and thus augurs well for broad-based Indian economy. Any further hike in the benchmark repo rate would have affected India's economic growth even as domestic demand impulses remain healthy. However, the cost of wholesale borrowings in money markets could rise in money markets and corporates because of the RBI's decision to reduce surplus liquidity. Incidentally, this status-quoist decision of the RBI is in line with the decision of some other central banks in the region, including Indonesia, South Korea and Malaysia.

The sequential growth of CPI-core in March 2023 is the weakest since June 2022 because of the pass-through of declining WPI inflation in consumer goods prices. Although CPI for the full year rose from 5.5% in FY22 to 6.7% in FY23, it was much lower in the second half of FY23 at 6.1% compared to 7.2% in the first half.

Further Rate Hikes

The MPC remains focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns with the target, while supporting growth. The Governor did not explicitly say that there would be a rate

hike post the next MPC meeting. But reading between the lines, the Policy statement is strongly suggestive of the fact that there could be one more hike because the "war against inflation will continue until durable decline in inflation closer to target is seen".

The Governor said, "the MPC unanimously decided to keep rates unchanged in this meeting with readiness to act if the situation so warrants". "The MPC will not hesitate to act as needed in future meetings". While keeping the interest rate intact, the Governor stressed that core inflation remains sticky. Hence, the Repo rate could reach 6.75% with a possible final 25 bps hike in the first half of FY24. But if growth continues to be resilient and inflation continues to move south, rate hikes would not be necessary.

Inflationary Spiral

High retail inflation since December 2022, spike in food inflation hiking retail inflation and persisting high core inflation across many goods and services cause concern and consternation. While headline inflation is likely to moderate in FY24, the inflation trajectory would be a function of both domestic and global factors, viz., global dynamics, record rabi food-grains production, volatility in crude oil prices with potential high imported inflation risks, El Nino, etc. India, however, accesses cheaper oil from Russia and also benefits by Rouble-Rupee trade. "Taking into account these factors and assuming an annual average crude oil price (Indian basket) of \$85 per barrel and a normal monsoon, CPI inflation is projected at 5.2% for 2023-24, with Q1 at 5.1%, Q2 at 5.4%, Q3 at 5.4% and Q4 at 5.2%, and risks evenly balanced.

In sum, the RBI has done well. But the RBI remains constrained by several multi-layered issues that concern inflation management. These include the need to provide some degree of flexibility to inflation targets, the use of monetary policy in tandem with effective fiscal measures and the possibility of risk of too much tightening on growth. ❖



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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.



Dr. Manoranjan Sharma, Chief Economist, Infomercs Ratings, Delhi was earlier the Chief Economist, General Manager, and Chief Learning Officer, Canara Bank. With over 300 publications, his views have been repeatedly cited in The Associated Press (New York), Dow Jones (New York), International Herald-Tribune (New York), and Wall Street Journal (New York).

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

'MAKE FRUGAL LIVING FASHIONABLE', BEFORE SAVING THE EARTH, LET US SAVE OURSELVES

In this article, abridged from his presentation this year at Davos, he argues that while it is important to Save the Earth, it is more important to Save Ourselves first.

by ASHWANI KAKKAR

In a world ravaged by climate, catastrophes, wars, inflation, and recently Covid-19, most Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) and 'Social Good' actors are constantly being stretched. This stretch is in every aspect of their work: from operational impact to emergency response, as also resource mobilization, research, logistics and advocacy. Responses in all these areas need to be fast and effective, highlighting that for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and in our quest for a better world, our collective focus must be on working tirelessly towards achieving them, especially those pertaining to climate action (SDG 13), elimination of hunger, malnutrition (SDG 2) and food wastage (SDG 12), by marshalling all the resources at our command.

Were it not for technology and innovation, we may still have been at the losing end of our battle with Covid-19, whereas per WHO & Johns Hopkins data, more than 6.8 million people lost their lives, about 700 million contracted the virus and as per Devex & IMF estimates, collectively about 20 Trillion dollars (including health spends and direct support), were expended in overcoming it. Technology enabled rapid detection of the infection and the innovation of its vaccine that has contained Covid-19. Technology also enabled the evolution of working from home, digital



It was during the same three-year period of COVID-19 that over 20 million people died of Hunger and over 800 million are still suffering from it.

retail and payments, etc.

However, these cutting-edge technologies & global innovations must also work their magic in fighting similar, bigger and unfortunately much older battles, to deliver equivalent outcomes. As an example, it would be interesting to discuss SDG-2 of eliminating Hunger & malnutrition. It was during the same three-year period of COVID-19 that over 20 million people died of Hunger and over 800 million are still suffering from it, where only a miniscule fraction of a trillion dollars (one estimate at around US\$ 28 Billion per annum) were being invested in this endeavour of alleviating hunger. Even going forward, World Food Program estimate

annual spends of US\$ 40 Billion in the next few years.

Why did this happen? I would argue that this happened because Covid treated everyone equally, while hunger does not treat everyone equally.

While adequate funding and collective willingness to eliminate them are an issue, hunger and malnutrition are a complex problem and one cannot achieve zero hunger without addressing the associated factors of malnutrition.

However, multiple NGO's are trying hard and making progress, by incorporating innovative, tech-driven solutions, alongside the hundreds of thousands of their foot soldiers.

The time has come for all the Tech Giants of the world to put their shoulder to the wheel and contrib-



ute to societal causes, in fact towards ESG. Contribute intellectual resources: a few of their best minds, each for a couple of years, under a 'DonaTech' Program, to focus solely in their areas of specialization, for finding solutions to global issues like climate change, poverty, hunger, water stress, and diseases. Worldwide, for encouraging their contributions, these efforts could be made eligible for tax incentives, both for the individuals and for the corporations, for the periods where they work on these projects of global importance. As for India, the Government could also consider treating these technology contributions as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility efforts.

Small steps are already being taken and an innovative, real-life technology application in the Hunger NGO space, developed & piloted in partnerships, by Action Against Hunger is quite unique. This utilizes a simple photograph taken by the mother of an undernourished child on her smartphone, or on a smart tab by an ASHA or Anganwadi worker in the village. This photograph is geotagged, analysed for SAM (Severe Acute Malnutrition) or MAM (Moderate Acute Malnutrition) by use of AI and is then entered into a central cloud database. Real-time detection and monitoring of this database ensures immediate commencement of treatment of the child at home with supplementary foods, or at a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre. It also serves as an evidence bank for future big data analysis for trends and outbreaks. This system minimizes the need for physical measurement by a visiting worker, be it with a weighing scale and height-board, or with a physical Mid-upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) tape, a practice followed for over four decades, that has various challenges with data accuracy and required skillset. It also ensures that regular remote monitoring of that affected child can be done based on simple weekly pictures.

However, if we are to achieve the SDGs and overcome global challenges like climate change etc. multiple NGOs in diverse domains need to work with as many tech companies as possible to design and innovate technological solutions for the problems of the most vulnerable communities across the world.

On the issue of Food Wastage, it is shocking that around 1.3 billion Tons of food is wasted around the world, every year. While the estimated value of this is one Trillion dollars, this also constitutes the equivalent of the third largest Carbon footprint after the US and China. This wastage would suffice to feed the world's hungry more than twice over.

A substantial portion of this wastage is Packaged Foods beyond their shelf-life. It should be our endeavour to build a "Good for the Earth" program in cooperation and coordination with the large food MNC's, like Unilever, Nestlé, Danone etc. Under this program they would donate the last 10% of the shelf life of all their products to NGO's. These NGOs would be responsible for delivery of these donated products to the beneficiaries and consumption by them. Logistical support could also be requested from companies like Amazon, DHL, FedEx etc. under a sub-program, called for example "Amazon for Good". Parallel, governments would be requested to refund excise, VAT, etc. taxes to the producing MNC's and / or Supermarkets and Stores, as the case may be. This would result in a win, win, win situation for the hungry, the NGO's, the MNC's, Governments and for the planet.

Yet another amusing hashtag which has gained prominence is #Save the Earth. If we look at it logically, the Earth came into existence about 4.5 billion years ago and will probably be around for the next few Billion years. All our plastic waste and even our nuclear waste will resolve itself over the next 10,000 or even a million years, but we as 'Homo Sapiens' may not be around to see the day, if we continue to behave as we have been doing. It is time we learnt from the appearance and subsequent disappearance of Neanderthal man.... More than trying to save the Earth, which may have the capacity to generate new forms of life, we need to save ourselves. One of the ways in which we can all put this into action is by "Making Frugal Living Fashionable".

All of us as stakeholders are well aware of the scale and magnitude of the challenges, given their influence on day-to-day well-being. Understanding that the implications of falling short would be painful, we all must support, promote, and strengthen the collaboration between Donors, Technology Providers/ Innovators, Governments, Beneficiaries and Social Good actors for finding path breaking and game changing solutions. ❖

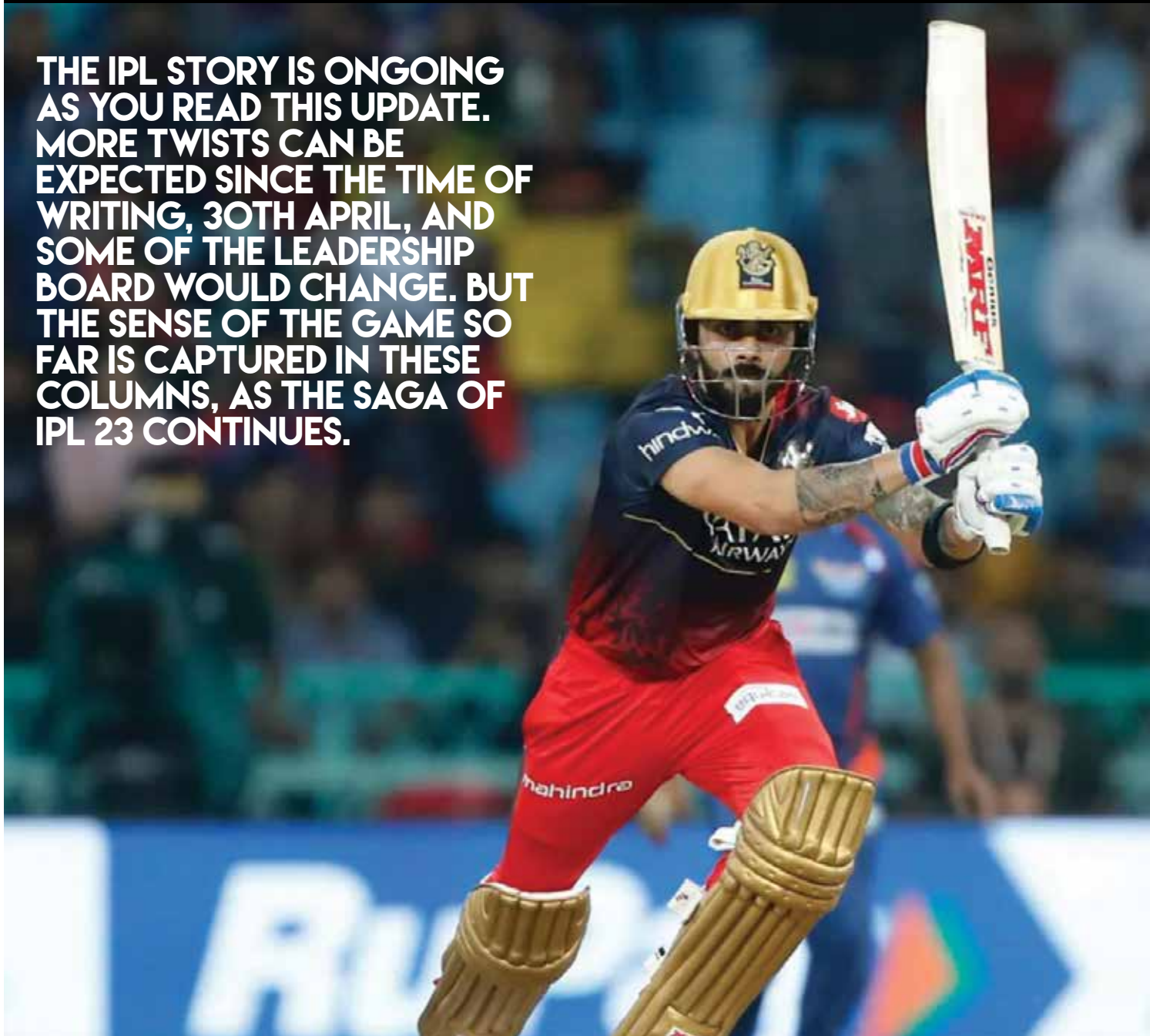


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashwani Kakkar is presently the chairman of 'Action Against Hunger', an organization based out of Paris. He is formerly a travel agent, heading Mercury Travels. He is an investor and an avid art collector.

HAS THE BILLION ENHANCED ITS

THE IPL STORY IS ONGOING AS YOU READ THIS UPDATE. MORE TWISTS CAN BE EXPECTED SINCE THE TIME OF WRITING, 30TH APRIL, AND SOME OF THE LEADERSHIP BOARD WOULD CHANGE. BUT THE SENSE OF THE GAME SO FAR IS CAPTURED IN THESE COLUMNS, AS THE SAGA OF IPL 23 CONTINUES.



IN DOLLAR BABY REPUTATION?

by SAMEER KACHRU

Half way there, the Indian Premier League is at its exhilarating best in its 16th season. Lots of shocking outcomes, the points table it witnessing a muddled middle with a log jam that'll only be separated through the NRR, but MSD is back where he belongs as CSK are yet again the table toppers despite all the injuries, unavailabilities and inexperience in the bowling department.

It just has to be Incredible Premier League that keeps evolving its avatar on a yearly basis. The 16th edition commenced with the awe inspiring inaugural ceremony in Ahmedabad followed by the rather exciting season opener match-up between the CSK & GT.

Just on the stroke of the thirteenth game, as the 16th edition of the IPL was in cruise control mode, it yet again spewed out an all-out last over entertainer when Rinku Singh blasted the five sixes in a row to stun the current IPL champs, Gujarat Titans at home. I'd like to slide by a small fact : it was a duel that saw a forgotten hat trick by Rashid Khan in the very same game as well.

Let's delve further and let's surface some key revelations this IPL. There's been much talk for years about the IPL being the tournament where talent meets opportunity. Let's dissect how the IPL has actually turned out this year by deep dredging on some key strategies, key moments and what lies ahead in the second half of the IPL.

So, is the Impact Player a real winner? Which teams have used the rule the best and the worst?

The Impact Player rule has been new, innovative and used in many ways this IPL by all the ten teams. Some strategies have been straight forward, however some of them have left many scratch their heads. Captains during the toss also seem to hold the cards to their chest till the end.

The best Impact"ful" Calls taken;

Kolkata Knight Riders have used the Impact Player in the very best way as per how the statistics stack up. We have in the past

DELHI CAPITALS' IMPACT PLAYERS IN IPL 2023



VS	IMPACT PLAYER	RUNS	WKTS	PLAYER REPLACED
LSG	AMAN KHAN	4(5)	-	KHALEEL AHMED
GT	KHALEEL AHMED	-	1/38	SARFARAZ KHAN
RR	PRITHVI SHAW	0(3)	-	KHALEEL AHMED
MI	MUKESH KUMAR	-	2/30	PRITHVI SHAW
RCB	PRITHVI SHAW	0(2)	-	MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN
KKR	PRITHVI SHAW	13(11)	-	ISHANT SHARMA

seasons seen Venkatesh Iyer contribute with bat and ball both. However, KKR has used him to nicety as a pure batsman and he has exploded almost each game with the bat scoring as ton as well this season. With the ball Suyash Sharma has been used as an impact player who has got a bag full of wickets. One has to say that KKR does have a fabulous think tank in Abhishek Nayar & Chandrakant Pandit. In particular we have seen each player crediting Nayar for their performances through out this IPL.

Along with KKR, we have seen usage of the Impact Player rule by RCB & MI to make sure their key players can afford not to take the field in order to rest their bodies to last the entire duration of the IPL. This was very well used in the case of Faf Duplessis (RCB) and Rohit Sharma (MI) as well. Worked very well for them too.

No Impact

It may not come as a surprise to anyone, but definitely worth highlighting the fact that the Delhi Capitals have the likes of Ricky Ponting, Sourav Ganguly, Shane Watson at their coaching disposal, but have taken some very erratic and whimsical calls. Its not about the dismal performances of their chosen impact players, but rather the strange strategic decisions taken. Aman Khan, Khaleel Ahmed and Sarfraz Khan have been some very erratic calls made.

With so much money paid to innumerable players, which players have been the Top Value of Money Purchases thus far?

It's said that majority of the battle is won at the auction table itself. It's not much different this year as well. There is enough

Player	Team	Bought for (INR)	Contribution (Ball + Bat)	Other Notable Contribution
Devon Conway	CSK	1 crore	322 Runs	Back up Wicket Keeper
Kyle Mayers	LSG	50 Lacs	243 Runs	Opens Bowling also
Ajinkya Rahane	CSK	50 Lacs	224 Runs	Highest Strike Rate in Power Plays this year
Sai Sudarshan	GT	20 Lacs	176 Runs	Played Match Winning Innings vs DC
Sikander Raza	PBKS	50 Lacs	100+ Runs & 2 Wickets *Limited opportunity	Man Of the Match vs LSG with bat & ball
Rinku Singh	KKR	55 Lacs	251 Runs	Hit 5 consecutive sixes vs GT
Mayank Markande	SRH	50 lacs	8 Wickets	Highest Wickets for SRH this year
Piyush Chawla	MI	50 lacs	11 Wickets	Highest Wickets for MI this year
Suyash Sharma	KKR	20 Lacs	9 Wickets	Ideal Impact Player. 2 nd Highest wicket taker for KKR
Sandeep Sharma	RR	50 Lacs	7 Wickets	Match winning Death Bowling
Mohit Sharma	GT	50 Lacs	6 Wickets	Match winning Death Bowling

proof of that at the half way stage in this 16th edition as well. Let's have a quick look at the best "value for money" picks at the Auction table.

Let's Decode Dhoni on why CSK sits at #1 half way through the tournament!

With CSK not only acing it on the auction table, it is very important to note that MSD has been at the top of his Captaincy skills on the field as well. Without Ben Stokes as a part of his armoury, he is leading the inexperienced CSK young brigade with impeccable direction. Behind the stumps he is coordinating the bowling orchestra with absolute perfection.

Let's try to decode MS Dhoni's strategy in what is likely to be his farewell season. Let's not forget he has won an IPL last time around for the CSK with what was called

KL RAHUL IN IPL 2023

PHASE	INNS	RUNS	BALLS	OUTS	AVG	SR
1 TO 6	6	95	87	1	95	109
7 TO 15	5	79	70	4	19.8	113
16 TO 20	1	20	12	1	20	167



Delhi Capitals					
Player Name	Innings	Runs	S/R	4s	6s
David Warner	7	306	120	44	1
Axar Patel	7	182	135	15	9
Manish Pandey	5	131	122	14	1
Lalit Yadav	4	48	114	5	0
Prithvi Shaw	6	47	117	8	0
Rilee Rossouw	3	44	133	5	1
Sarfaraz Khan	3	44	84	3	1
Anrich Nortje	5	34	154	6	0
Aman Khan	5	34	125	2	2
Abishek Porel	4	33	106	1	2
Mitchell Marsh	5	31	93	6	0
Rovman Powell	3	7	77	1	0
Phil Salt	2	5	125	1	0

Delhi Capitals			
Player Name	Innings	Wickets	Econ
Kuldeep Yadav	7	7	6.9
Axar Patel	6	6	7.04
Anrich Nortje	6	6	8.4
Mukesh Kumar	6	5	9.6
Ishant Sharma	2	3	5.28
Mitchell Marsh	4	3	9.0
Khaleel Ahmed	3	3	9.9
Chetan Sakariya	1	2	13.2
Lalit Yadav	2	1	6.5
Rovman Powell	1	1	9

TWO MEN ARMY! DC BATTERS IN IPL 2023

YEAR	INNS	RUNS	AVG	SR	50s
DAVID WARNER	5	228	45.6	117	3
AXAR PATEL	5	129	25.8	165	1
OTHERS	44	364	10.4	111	1





the “Dad’s Army” with majority of the players who were past their prime in the game.

MSD’s Young Brigade comes good!

This time around it’s the newbies along with an unlikely veteran who’s provided the cutting edge for CSK. What remains constant is Dhoni’s fiery strategic guidance. Every player seems to have a role and they’re responding to MSD like everyone in the past has. We all expected Devon Conway, Moeen Ali, Ravindra Jadeja & Ruturaj Gaekwad to go well on a consistent basis. It’s actually when the unexpected have come good and are the match winners. Let’s have a look at some of the names that have made a big impact;

- Ajinkya Rahane : Best Strike Rate in the Power Play (SR : 200+) and remains Not out in the first 6 over too. Batting at a fair click too. He has completely re-invented his batting intent.

- Shivam Dube : 236 runs at an average of 33. Amazing to see him deliver when it matters.

- Tushar Deshpande : 14 Wickets and Joint highest Wicket Taker so far.

- Akash Singh : Creating impact within the powerplay and is doing a Deepak Chahar sort of role for MSD.

- Matheesha Pathirana : The U19 Sri Lankan bowler hasn’t even been looked into by the SL board as yet in detail. However, MSD has had deliver the crunch death overs relentlessly against top International players. He has given a return of under 5.7 runs per over in all his spells combined. That is his role.

So, like almost every other year, why is DC clinging to the wooden spoon? What makes the DC tick in the wrong way to occupy the 10th spot?

Before the introduction of LSG and GT, the Delhi Capitals occupied the eighth spot more frequently than any other franchise. They did move from that spot, but this time to the Tenth. One wonders that with the likes of Ricky Ponting, Shane Watson and Sourav Ganguly in the think tank, how is this even possible. But, its not about inducting heavy weights that will insure a great IPL season.

Delhi is primarily batting with the one pure batsman only this entire IPL – David Warner. While Warner is scoring Heavy at a good average, his strike rate is of major concern at a poultry 117 only. He’s scoring 50’s in every alternate outing, but is playing the anchor role awaiting someone along side to launch rockets in the crowds. Unfortunately, there’s been too many failures around

UNREAL COINCIDENCE 🤪

VIRAT KOHLI & SHUBMAN GILL IN IPL 2023

8 MATCHES	8 MATCHES
8 INNINGS	8 INNINGS
1 DUCK	1 DUCK
333 RUNS	333 RUNS
234 BALLS FACED	234 BALLS FACED
142.30 STRIKE RATE	142.30 STRIKE RATE

Bowling	O	M	R	W	Econ
M. Stoinis	1.5	0	21	1	11.45
K. Mayers →	1.0	0	4	0	4.00
A. Badoni	0.1	0	0	0	0.00
Naveen-ul-Haq	4.0	0	30	3	7.50
A. Khan	2.0	0	28	0	14.00
A. Mishra (P) →	2.0	0	23	0	11.50
R. Bishnoi	4.0	0	41	2	10.25
Y. Thakur	3.5	0	37	4	9.65
K. Pandya	1.0	0	13	0	13.00

him including the likes of Mitchell Marsh, Sarfraz Khan, Yash Dhull, Manish Pandey and of course the big one : Prithvi Shaw.

The sole shining light within the DC camp is Axar Patel. Whether with the bat or the ball, Axar Patel is creating magic. In the Arun Jaitley Stadium at home, Axar is fantastic with both skills and is batting at a Strike Rate of above 150 this IPL. Bad decision making to not send Axar up the order and control the middle order is hurting DC. It's almost as though the think tank is adamant in sticking to Axar being a bowling All Rounder and slotting in at the No. 7 slot come what may. Bottom line Axar is worth his weight in gold for the DC.

Lucknow Super Giants and its curious case of KL Rahul!

A team that's been there and thereabouts within the Top 4 through-out this edition of the IPL, while its captain is fighting form in the first seven games.

Let's give you an interesting insight on KL Rahul. LSG's totals this season are reflective of KL Rahul's form. Surprisingly, when KL Rahul scores more than 20 runs LSG seems to struggle in putting a reasonable score on the board. Here are the scores thus far when KL scores more than 20 runs in any game;

127/5 (16 overs) / 159/8 / 154/7 / 128/7

Well, it's the complete opposite when KL Rahul scores 20 or less for LSG this year;

193/6 / 205/7 / 213/9 / 257/5

It's also interesting to note that at the half way mark with seven matches done, KL Rahul is the Highest run scorer for the LSG with 262 runs. What's worrisome is that these runs are coming at a strike

rate of just 113 as opposed to his LSG colleagues Kyle Mayers (SR : 150) and Nicholas Pooran (SR : 185).

From a captaincy perspective, KL Rahul been only just about average in decision making whether it comes to pressure cooker scenarios. The field sets have had a lot to be desired. The initial decision of not playing Quinton DeKock at all within the IPL 2023 has worked thus far since Kyle Mayers has come good thus far. However playing 10 bowlers in a game against Punjab Kings left raised a lot of eye brows. Stalwarts like Amit Mishra & Krunal Pandya bowled a total of three overs in the game, whereas Ravi Bishnoi bowled four overs alone. Lots of whimsical on field decisions leave us wondering if KL Rahul's conservative batting approach is rubbing on to his style of captaincy as well.

Currently, it is Kyle Mayers, Nicholas Pooran and to some extent Marcus Stoinis who are binding the team together and providing the real core. Will LSG finish in the Top 2 for an easier chance to reach the final only time will tell.

So, have the IPL billion dollar babies delivered this year? ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sam is an ex-cricketer having played for Singapore U23's and at a semi professional level in England in the 1990's.

He is a cricke-preneur working on the online & offline space in partnership with stalwarts such as Mickey Arthur.

IT IS 'BHAKTI' FOR ME, MORE THAN SINGING



I CAN SENSE A WAVE OF PEOPLE FEELING MORE RELIGIOUS!

His rendering is from the 'soul'; mesmerising with his invocation of the Gods and Goddess Siddharth Mohan started singing at the young age of 12. He can hold his audience to ransom for a few hours. Today, at 39, he believes his 'saddhna' has still a long way to go.

During your childhood, when you look back, can you recall any early indications of what you want to do? I believe you started singing when you were 11 or 12. Did you have any indications or did your parents say something which indicated that you may be heading for something which is so powerful like 'bhakti' and spiritual?

Not as such, because actually it all started in 1996. My mother did the Art of Living course. She did the basic course over there out of interest and she really liked it and like with all good experiences parents want to share them with their kids. So, she got me into that environment and because of this Art of Living experience, I got into singing.

At what age did you do the course?

I was 12 years old then. So this is a very special incident, a most important incident, which changed my life, I'll say, because Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji came to Delhi and he was in Vasant Vihar and there was a 'satsang' happening on the Art of Living platform. He just talked at the 'satsang', and then just of the blue, gave the mic to me. That's how my journey started and

soon I was singing every Sunday!

I think I've been really blessed because he just stopped the 'satsang' and gave the mic to me, and that was the first time I had held a mic. After that, everything changed.

Also, subsequent to your getting influenced by Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji, you still took to engineering, what year was that?

That was 2002. Singing was a hobby for me. It wasn't a full-time job. Never in my dreams did I ever imagine this would become my vocation. Also, I was very clear that because my father, he was a civil engineer. We lost him last year, God bless him. My brother, he too is a software engineer. I am the youngest of three siblings. My sister, she is around eight and a half years older to me, my brother, he is around seven years older to me. I am the unplanned child. I believe I am the blessed one. So, my purpose had to be different.

So, I wanted to become like my father. So, I got into mechanical engineering, I pursued that. I finished that also. During engineering days also, I used to travel for Art of Living. I used to do the 'satsang'. But then soon came a time when I found it was difficult to keep a balancing act, between my hobby and my job.

At that time were you doing standalone performances on your own, or were you continuing to be influenced directly Sri Sir Ravi Shankar?

On my own as well. People used to hear me there, and, and they started calling me for their programmes also. That is how my audiences expanded and people got to know me. But after engineering got all over and I started working in oil and gas sector as a planning engineer for about 8 months. This is in 2007, I was 23.



“ Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji came to Delhi and he was in Vasant Vihar and there was a ‘satsang’ happening on the Art of Living platform. He just talked at the ‘satsang’, and then just of the blue, gave the mic to me. That’s how my journey started and soon I was singing every Sunday! ”

So, when did the break happen?

And that time the problem started problem in the sense, my soul, my ‘atma’ was drawn towards singing. We are service class people. We did not have any background of being onn our own, it was difficult to imagine being without a salary!

Were you charging money for your performances at this time? Or, was it just still a hobby?

For private programmes, I did not ask for money; but many times, people out of their own choice did give whatever they felt was worthy. I did not think of money, so it was kind of okay with me.

I understand your family was somewhat reluctant when you wanted to quit your job?

No, in fact my father, he was supporting me in everything else. But like I said, around this time, balancing my singing and my job became tough. So, I decided, okay, no, I don’t belong inside a cubicle. I am destined for something else.

You took a conscious decision?

Yes. It was kind of a break point in my life regarding the job because meanwhile, I was preparing for GMAT also, and had plans to go to the US for further studies. It was the most logical thing to do. So, I quit my job and before quitting my job, because my mother, she is one of the senior most teachers in Art of Living. I told my mom and father, father said, okay, whatever you want to do,

you should do that. My mother was disappointed and was worried about my future. During this time, I also sought the advice of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, if I should take up full time signing. He was emphatic and said yes, definitely, go for it.

At this time, you were thinking of singing full time, or was the idea to specifically sing bhajans only?

Bhajans and Sufi also. 2007 end, I left everything and got full-time into music and full-time into Art of Living. I used to travel for Art of Living without any charges. That was ‘seva’. I did this for 3 years and this is not for money but for spiritual growth.

I was asking you, what is ‘bhakti’ for you?

At first, I became popular for the ‘bhajan’ Achutam Keshavam and I’ve been singing that from the past 25 years. And over time, as I got deeper and deeper into bhakti I realized that energy is one. That universe and that energy, that is controlling

“ I can see it everywhere. Everyone is more religiously inclined and is willing to show it also. There is a wave of devotion in India. ”

everything, which is creating balance, which is doing imbalances, which is doing everything. Everything is connected. That is one energy, that energy manifests in 'voh hi Ram hai, voh hi Krishan hai, voh hi nirakar ho gaye. That is formless. That supreme power is everywhere.

So now I am coming back to your question on what is bhakti. To feel that energy is bhakti. With bhajans, our feelings get pure and you experience this energy more deeply. Right now, we have a form and then go back to the formless and again return in a form. The only thing that is permanent is the divine presence. My life is good because of God and my Karma.

Your repertoire, the canvas of your songs, over different genres, whether it's Sufi, whether it's, uh, even gods and goddesses. Do you differentiate between one genre, another, or for you, everything is just the same. It is the manifestation of the same divine.

Yes. Everything is the same. God also came in a form and became formless. He came to tell us that you are human..... That energy which I feel in Kashi, that energy is tremendous. When I close my eyes and I think, I feel so much charged up. Imagine in our daily life, we cannot see the wifi signal, but it is there. We can't see the mobile signal. But it is there. But you still charge your cell phone. Like that, how you, you can connect with the Supreme.

So Guruji (the one at Sultanpur) has been a big influence on you. I wanted to ask, how did you come in touch with Guruji and what kind of impact he had on your life?

Way back in 2010 I was still doing 'seva'. It was a very rough time for me because everyone would question what work does this person do? 2010, I'll say it changed my life and that is when I met Guruji. Financially I was nothing and



then people do not think you have value and it was then I used to go to his Ashram.

After that because I think with my eyes closed, I could feel some energy there, and I got attracted to this energy. And back then, a handful of people were there. His following has increased after his demise. I would feel peace and calm there.

Then he passed away and now he gives darshan in dreams. He is still guru shakti. He came in a common devotee's dreams and said that his 'shoes/charan' should be given to me and kept in my house. I am the chosen one. That's how everything started changing inside me, around me. And everything started getting better.

You feel within you, that his blessings turned your career around?

I will not say career, his blessings turned me around. It is about a spiritual change, I felt now God is with me.

Your public performances, you have performed overseas also substantially. And you also sing at prayer meetings. How do you differentiate your performances?

It is the same. Same. Because I sing with my eyes closed. So, it does not matter.

Not a political question. In your span, you are much younger, have you noticed that the sense of religion has increased?

Yes, multifold. I can see it everywhere. Everyone is more religiously inclined and is willing to show it also. There is a wave of devotion in India.

Tell me a little bit about your family. Do you hear music all the time, which is spiritually inclined? Anything you want to share about; do you go for holidays?

I lead a normal family life, just as anyone else does. People have come to expect me in my kurta all the time, but when I am into any program, I dress normally. I take care of what I eat and what not to eat. I take care of my health and exercise frequently.

And holidays?

Holidays are holidays. I am a married man, and so I have to take care of my family, also have to keep my wife happy. We have a big bucket list, the places we want to visit, and she's my best friend.



And, so we love to travel whenever I get the chance. I go to malls and movies.

You mentioned fathering a child a few backs ago. How does it feel to be a father? Any special attachments?

Oh, this is very personal for me. My father passed away last May. My last words to him were that I was proud of him, that I would like to come back in my next left, with him as my father again. To which he replied that we was sure to come back to me in my present life, as my son. And, I believe he has!

So, what is your favorite destination?

We don't go to the same place twice again. So, we have been to like Australia and everywhere, Europe and Maldives. I loved Kerala. We loved Goa.

About the business side of your singing. Where do you sell, how do you sell? Which has been the best seller? My other question is that at one point somewhere you have also thanked the digital world for giving you an opportunity to reach out to a much larger audience in the digital field.

In monetary terms now it is very convenient for any artist to reach listeners. YouTube is a very big platform and I have 6 lakh followers. My first album was launched in 2003. So, from the past 20 years, there have been many albums. Now everything is digital. Now only one song is released.

Which is the most popular song in your career?

I think it's Mere Sat Guruji, Achutam Keshavam, Guruji mantra and there are many. I have been very blessed with the content, and I am able to reach out to a wider audience. I sing with my emotions. I am first a devotee and then I am a singer.

But did you train yourself as a singer?

Yes. My guru was Pandit Shankar Sharmaji in East Delhi and then Krishna Kant Ji and then finally I learnt from Vajaspati.

Which is your favourite instrument? It must be the flute, I would imagine?

The Flute, yes. It is also the oldest instrument. It is very connected to us also.

Where do you see yourself going? You are only 39.

“ We don't go to the same place twice again. So, we have been to like Australia and everywhere, Europe and Maldives. I loved Kerala. We loved Goa. ”

Next is that I want to reach out to more people and have more programmes.

But do you realize that through your soulful signing, you are able to influence a large audience?

That is the biggest gift I can get. I get the biggest satisfaction; people feel the emotions.

Tell me in your exclusive scene of Bhajan singing, I am using this expression for lack of any other word, competitors. How is the overall scene developing?

First of all, I never felt any competition. There is no competition in devotion...

You normally prefer large gatherings or you are very happy with 15/20 as well... How many people are there as your ideal?

No, I love to perform for 15, 20 because at large gatherings, many people, they, they start socializing. Because for me it is a serious affair, I prefer to have a very disciplined audience.

But at the Guruji satsangs, how many people land up?

No, no, more than that. Like thousands also come sometimes.

But you don't impose any restrictions on your audience?

I do that. We must be quiet. I do not allow any snacks or anything to be served in between, apart from what they give as prasad. And, and so, uh, uh, apart from that, nothing is allowed. That's what, one and a half hours of your devotion. It is not about money. It is not about if somebody is paying extra, they can have snacks in between. I cannot sing if people are inattentive. It has to stop. And that's the way it should be. When I was nobody also, then back then also, it was the same, these are my decisions and I want to be like this, okay, this, this... these are the rules and regulations. ❖

NEW GENERATION ROBOTICS IS LEADING A NEW LEAP OF FAITH

LIKE LAPAROSCOPY WAS INTRODUCED SOME 30 YEARS AGO!

New Generation robotic surgery is the new 'IN' thing in medicine. And, Max Saket is leading in this field, to begin with, in abdominal related surgeries, under leading surgeon Dr. Pradeep Chowbey. "It was important to bring this new equipment at the right time or we miss the bus in being the first mover. It was introduced globally in 2019, when covid struck its progress to get picked up. We started operating with it in 2021. It has been over a year now," says Chowbey in an exclusive interview.

by NAVIN BERRY

This is one more leap for you personally, and for the hospital. Robotics, of the new generation, in your field, has created a new stir in medicine. What is this machine called?

This is a next generation platform for surgical procedures.

For a layman point of view, how is robotics or robotic surgery an improvement over traditional surgery?

The biggest improvement is that traditional laparoscopy is a two-dimensional surgery. As if you are operating by looking at the mirror. Whereas robotic surgery is three dimensional, as we are sitting like this, between us, face to face. So, the depth perception is very precise.



It is like us sitting here physically vs sitting virtually. It is like going from virtual to physical. You feel you are sitting in the organ you are operating on.

But in the earlier or in the traditional laparoscopy, your intervention as surgeon and your intervention as surgeon in robotic surgery. Is that the same element?

It is much more refined, much more precise, much safer. I am the one whom is operating. But I am not standing next to the patient. There is a console. Because the robotic arms are there, with the instruments in it.

So, you need to practice the use of the robotic arm?

Yeah. It is like moving from car driving to aircraft flying, and you get a third dimension also. It is a conversion or you can say upgradation.

So, what course do you go through?

I went to Cambridge, then we went to Dubai. And then there are simulators, like flying simulators are there. Second is that in conventional laparoscopy, the surgeons' movements are restricted by the wrist because the wrist has got limited movement. And in conventional surgery we use elbow and shoulder also.

So basically, does anybody else have this in Delhi or this is Max Saket only?

Max Saket. And I want to mention, please don't get confused. This is the next generation robotic system. Not the first generation.

Which means?

What we are using is the Cambridge Medical Robotics, it is from European Cambridge. So, this is the next generation. It is similar to how now you use a smart TV. Both are TVs, but this is the next gen TV. And the wrist movements get more precise. Like stitching in three dimensional is a lot more precise.

Now you said this is mobile, which means you can take it from one OT to another OT.

Yes, so you don't waste time. It can be used in different OTs, it is not restricted physically to only one.

So, there are other surgeons also using the same?

Currently not, but there is a possibility. The gynecologist, anyone can eventually use.

So, at the moment is being used only by you?

Yes, because my workload is here. I am doing almost 80-100 robotics surgeries out of the 350 that I do in a month. We use 5 operation theatres; when you finish one surgery, the other OT is already prepped and ready.

So typically, you are working from what time to what time on an average?

From about 9.30am to 8.30pm. But I operate till about 3pm and then have appointments and follow ups and take rounds.

Does it cost more to do the robotic surgery?

About rupees 60-65000 more. About 20 to 25% more. This is due to the sterile environment required around it.

You are said to be the first person to have done the fastest first hundred Robotic surgeries. And, found place one more time in the Limca Book of records?

There are 2 reasons for this. There is a background. I have the experience with me behind me, done almost 95,000 laparoscopic surgeries in last 33 years. I do about 4000 a year. So, for me adapting has been that much easier.

You mentioned that the patient must opt for a robotic surgery?

“ I am doing almost 80-100 robotics surgeries out of the 350 that I do in a month. We use 5 operation theatres; when you finish one surgery, the other OT is already prepped and ready. ”

So, is there a reservation with patients?

No. Not among patients. Mostly, the reservations are with some insurance company which are not yet paying for robotic surgery, which I feel is a temporary phenomenon. They can't hold on for long when it comes to providing a better and safer surgery.

So if you are doing 350 earlier, the traditional laparoscopic, how many do you think you can do now?

Eventually, with an increase in efficiency using robotic technology, one can do more. It is quite likely. The tiredness is less and the average time taken is less.

When do you expect that the other departments will start using it?

I think some of the other departments have started using, but as I said, they are using the first generation. This is a special next generation robotic system, which is more friendly for quick surgeries. It is coming to every specialty and that robot might be different. Every specialty has got a different requirement. And for that there is different machine. Robotics guides you for more precision. Apart from any clinical judgement you are adding the robotic judgement.

What likely impact do you see that is forthcoming?

35 years back we moved from conventional surgery to laparoscopic surgery and now the future is in robotics surgery. From the surgeon's point of view, also, it is a great advantage because you are not working, looking in the mirror. You are almost sitting inside the abdominal cavity.



“ 35 years back we moved from conventional surgery to laparoscopic surgery and now the future is in robotics surgery. From the surgeon’s point of view, also, it is a great advantage because you are not working, looking in the mirror. You are almost sitting inside the abdominal cavity. ”

When you said this big change is going to happen from laparoscope to robotic laparoscopy, how do you see the increasing penetration of the market from robotic surgery?

See, I think this exactly, what we have gone through 35 years back when we were asked the same question, how do you see the penetration of laparoscopic surgery? It was also more expensive due to the instruments. The camera systems were expensive. So, there was a big question, but over time we realized that this question was more theoretical or political in nature.

This would then be the big new moment in transition?

You see within our own generation; we have seen how things have moved. For example, in aviation, everybody is travelling by air. So now what is happening is that now, maybe the robotic systems are expensive, but there are almost 17, 18 companies which are making it. And they are making specialized robots for each kind of surgery.

Which countries would these be?

All over the world. Japanese, Korean, US, Germany, and a few more.

You think the cost of it will come down?

Drastically. For two reasons. First, popularity and it is a better way of operating, more precise. It is also safer because there are inherent artificial intelligence and machine learning in the robotic system. So, this makes surgery even safer. It reduces human error. As the advantages dawn upon more hospitals, worldwide, there would be greater demand, and volumes will grow. Effectively, prices will come down.

For example, suppose some instrument is not under the camera vision. Any tip of any instrument. Then the system will not work. So, if there are four instruments inside, if the robotic screen does not detect four, it freezes. If some instrument is pressing on some particular organ more than it should, then that instrument will freeze. Then you have to react to it. Which will go undetected

in a non-robotic surgery.

Being the first movers, how does it feel? How has the progress been in our country?

Well, every now and then, we get people calling us to get feedback from us. From the time we got into this, I think some 40 more machines have been purchased around the country. It is an expensive machine and it must justify this expenditure for every institution.

You have done some 95,000 surgeries over your career. When do you achieve the next milestone?

I think, given that we are doing some 3,500/4000 in a year, we are hopeful we would have done 1 lakh surgeries by the end of 2024. That should be the milestone year.

How has it been for Max?

I think we are quite happy with it. ❖

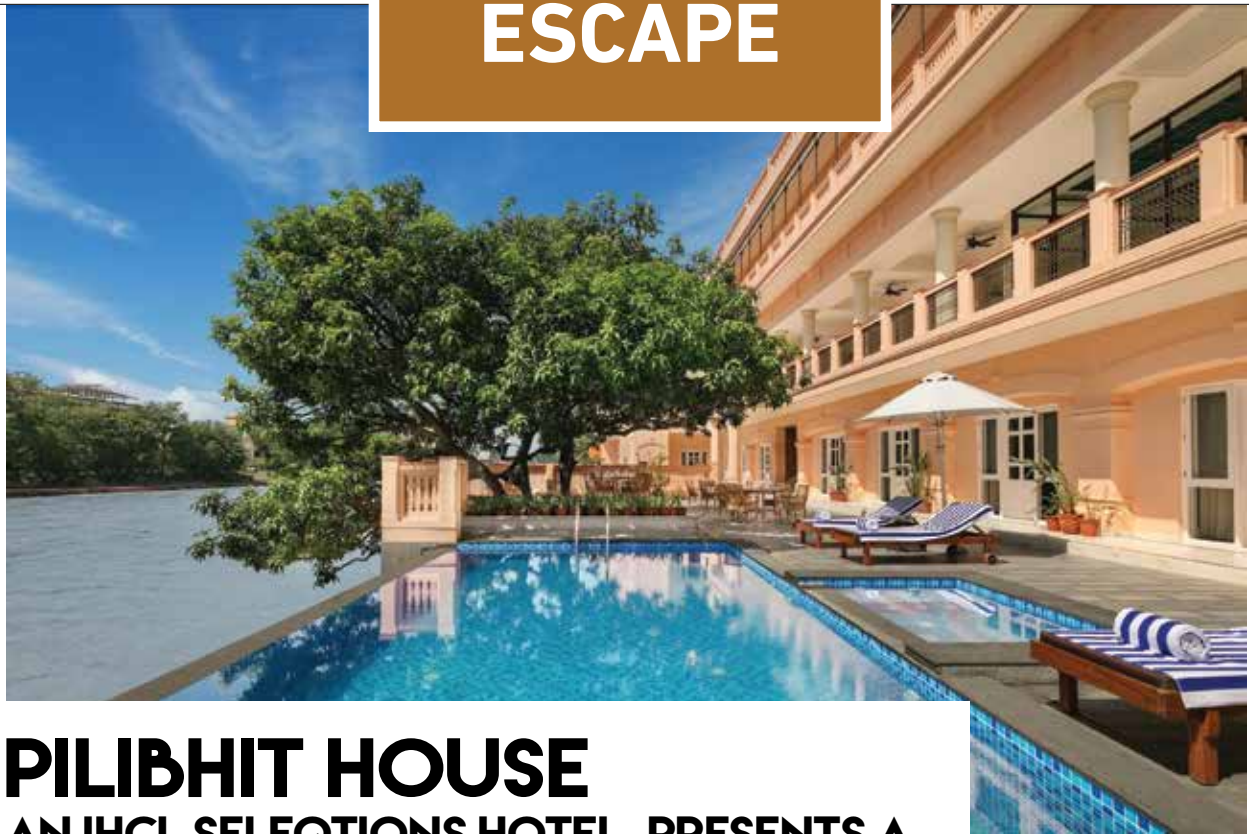


ABOUT:

Dr. Pradeep Chowbey is chairman, Max Institute of Laparoscopy, Endoscopy, Bariatric, Gastrointestinal and Allied Surgical

Specialities, Max Healthcare, New Delhi. He recently clocked another world record with 623 robotic surgeries in a year. He was recently described as the "legendary surgeon of kind cuts".

THE GREAT ESCAPE



PILIBHIT HOUSE AN IHCL SELECTIONS HOTEL, PRESENTS A MILLETS BASED HEALTHY CULINARY AFFAIR

Haridwar's luxurious address overlooking the majestic Ganges and surrounded by serenity of the Shivalik hills, Pilibhit House is an ideal summer destination to unwind and take a reflective pause.

It has curated a distinct millets menu, encompassing contemporary delicacies with an Indian heart. The dishes are made using lesser-known regional ingredients and inspired by recipes of the noble house's ancestral kitchens. These dishes will be a permanent highlight on the menu, encouraging guests to make healthier choices.

Guests can savour appetizers and small plates such as *Home-made mix millets nachos with Bhangjeera or noon dip*, *Barnyard millets upma*, and mouthwatering *Paneer ghee roast on a ragi disc*. To delight the palate further are dishes using local seasonal vegetables such as *Barnyard Millet & Basil Konjee with masala jawar crisp*, *Pahadi kaffi with bhanjeer ki chutney* and *Raagi roti*, *Ligude or Kachnaar subzi (Guriyal ki subzi)*, well-balanced *Churkani Dal* that consists of diverse types of beans, a flavorful Himalayan Red Rice Idly and more.



Patrons can also look forward to refreshing '*Buransh ki Chuski*', a local Himalayan spiced iced gola made with *burransh* (rhododendron) flowers or *Raagi*, *Flax seed & Jaggery ki Ladoo* to end their meal on a sweet note. Mocktails such as local Timur salt infused Sharbat & Shikhanji make for soothing companion.

Launched in 2019, SeleQtions – a brand of The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), is a collection of named and distinctive hotels. Celebrating the legacy of time, a sense of place or differentiated theme, these hotels enjoy a strong equity, are well-established and bring to life experiences through their location, décor, service and cuisine.

I HAVE DONE WELL, BUT NOT TOO HAPPY WITH WHAT I SEE AROUND ME: SANJAY BHATTACHARYA

He has been on the scene long enough; painted, exhibited and received numerous accolades. Today, he feels the art scene has taken a turnaround. For all the new opportunities, pure art is beginning to suffer! Excerpts from a free-wheeling interview.

by NAVIN BERRY

What is new at your end? Or, rather, anything new that you have been up to? From painting you had taken on photography, some time back.

Since last year I have been experimenting with division of space within the canvas, using shapes such as triangles, circles, rectangles, etc. Since this is new to me, I am excited about it. The forms and shapes are giving rise to new dimensions. The emergent colours are also different from my previous palette. When I draw the first shape on the canvas, the canvas itself dictates the other elements to be made, and that way I create the balance of negative and positive space. It is a play with lot of discipline, because if the balance is not struck, then all the effort is futile. People say, in oil painting there is lot of scope of repairing the work, which I personally do not believe; as once you remove a colour from the layer underneath, it loses its freshness.

How did you think of this? Some revelation or some other evolution of ideas?

The geometrical abstraction which has come to the forefront now is not an overnight story. In the year 2006, I did a series on Rembrandt and Dali. The title of the show was "Tribute to the Masters", in which I used huge black circles inspired by Dali's eyeballs. Some triangles and squares also appeared on those canvases. Later, in 2012 I did a series on Krishna. There also, these shapes appeared on the canvases. In these two series the shapes were supporting elements, and Dali, Rembrandt and Krishna, were the highlights.

“Since last year I have been experimenting with division of space within the canvas, using shapes such as triangles, circles, rectangles, etc. Since this is new to me, I'm excited about it.”





“ I painted Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma’s life-size portrait for Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1995. Again I got an opportunity to paint a life-size portrait of Mr. K.R. Narayanan for Rashtrapati Bhavan. ”

In my recent work I am focussing more on these shapes and apart from these, there is no other element in my work. There is a domination of huge triangles and sometimes some unusual forms are also appearing through the experiments. In my earlier work, bright colours were not welcome, and my weakness for brown, green and indigo was reflected. Since for years I pursued realism, my colours were very much close to nature. In this recent series I painted in black vigorously, to bring volume and weight to the compositions. Black has come to the forefront and it is taking up close to 75% of the spaces.

What made you experiment on these lines?

In fact, I started these works because I felt like bringing in a change. I was doing these works out of curiosity, and did not have exhibiting them on my mind. One day, a gallerist visited my studio and showed huge interest in them, and on that very moment she called up Visual Arts Gallery office and booked the gallery. The exhibition of this recent body of work has been fixed for this coming September.

Tell us about some recent accomplishments for your work?

Every year ABP Ananda announces an Award called “Sera Bangali” for Bengali personalities who are achievers in their respective fields. I received this award for painting. It was a nice experience going to the award ceremony in Kolkata.

Very recently, Yogish Agarwal, founder of Bleu Pharma and a businessman of repute in Romania, invited me there, and I was presented a certificate of excellence by Ambassador Vasile Sofineti. Yogish Agarwal has got 600 editions of my paintings printed, and those are adorning the walls of the houses of very important people.

People still recall your portrait of Rajiv Gandhi. Can you recount this again for us?

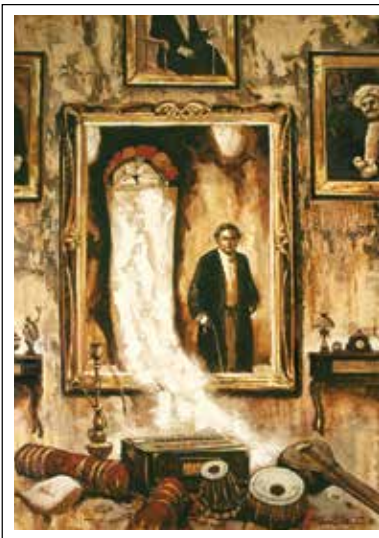
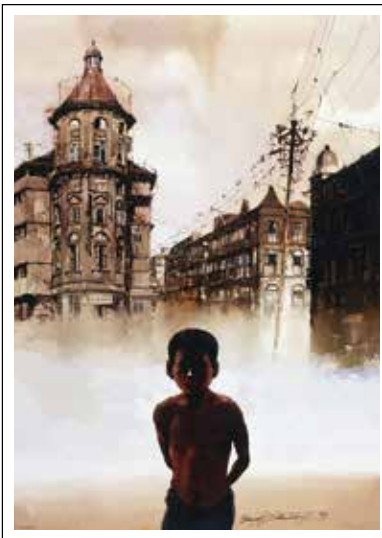
In 1994 I had painted a series on Rajiv Gandhi. Initially I did a portrait of him on my own which was taken to 10 Janpath to be shown to Sonia ji. The very next day she called me and showed many portraits of Rajiv Gandhi done by the artists from all over the world, showing an appreciation for my work. Thereafter, she requested me to do a whole series on the late prime minister. I did 15 canvases on different aspects of his life; these were later exhibited at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

You other famous personalities that you did portraits for?

I painted President Shankar Dayal Sharma’s life-size portrait for Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1995. Again, I was given the opportunity to paint a life-size portrait of President K.R. Narayanan for Rashtrapati Bhavan.

If I remember right, you did a series on Rajiv Gandhi for other collections?

Yes, I did one on him for India House, London commissioned by Sonia ji, and another for the Rajiv Gandhi Govern-



ment School, Slacq, Mauritius. Another portrait is in Shri Sonia Gandhi's collection which has been transcribed in glass mosaic and installed in Sri Perumbudur. Incidentally, I have also painted Shrimati Indira Gandhi's portraits commissioned by Shrimati Sonia Gandhi for Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (Maldives), Oxford University (London).

Other prominent locations that have your imprint? Like in some of the hotels?

There are many important places where my works are displayed including Neemrana Fort palace, ITC Hotels, The Lalit (New Delhi), Parliament House, Jawahar Bhavan, World Bank, Aakash Bhavan (Delhi), The Lalit (Mumbai), and St. John's School (Cambridge, UK).

My works can also be seen in ITC Royal Bengal (Kolkata), ITC Maurya Sheraton (New Delhi), ITC Sonar (Kolkata), the Blue Pharma Collection in London, in 10 Janpath (in the collection of Shrimati Sonia Gandhi), in Neemrana Fort Palace and at Tijara Fort.

So, is your love for photography over and done with?

No, not at all. For six years now, I have also been devoting my

“ There are many big trends are joining the river of mainstream art like tributaries. The newly opened Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre is the biggest example. ”

time to photography. Initially, I picked up the camera, not to become a photographer, but to break the monotony of my studio-based practice. Lately I have become addicted to the camera. There are things that I cannot express in my paintings, and the camera has given me the language to express that. I try my best to create a painting through the camera. I had my photography shows in Delhi, Mumbai, New York and other places in India and abroad.

How much awards matter to you, as a creative person?

I have never pursued awards in my life. Even then, throughout my journey I have enjoyed an overwhelming response from my colleagues, galleries and art connoisseurs.

Looking at the overall picture, how is 'art' happening in your personal estimation?

At one point of time the art scenario was low profile, and few painters used to survive doing art full-time. Even the very well-known painters had jobs as art-teachers in school, and a lucky few used to be professors in art colleges. There were very few institutional galleries and three to four commercial galleries. The painters suffered a lot financially. In fact, it was difficult for them to exhibit their work. But the forerunners in our field produced brilliant works and they left behind a legacy. In my time I have seen professors in college like Bikash Bhattacharjee, Ganesh Haloi and Lalu Prasad Shaw travel by trams in second class. I still remember Bikash Bhattacharjee buying a refrigerator at 40 years of age, and that was big news in our college.

In contrast today's contemporary painters are getting numerous opportu-



At the function in Romania, with Yogish Agarwal, Founder, Bleu Pharma, the host of the evening.

nities. Commercial galleries have mushroomed. Many industrialists are sponsoring art exhibitions. The media is taking a lot of initiative to project art to society. Auction houses are selling works for crores. But in spite of this favourable situation, some of the top painters have assistants at their studio, the reason being lack of time to paint, since it is used up in trying to grab the new opportunities that have opened.

What is the downside of this?

My question is – What sort of future picture are they drawing in front of the artists of the new generation? What sort of inspiration will they get out of it?

When I think about the likes of Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij, it becomes very difficult for me to believe that they would have compromised on quality to join the bandwagon. I believe the hard work and the honesty are the only adornments of a good painter.

There are many big trends that are joining the river of mainstream art like tributaries. The newly opened Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre is the biggest example. A few years back it was unbelievable that this sort of cultural centre would open up in India. Apart from that, many government museums are coming up. Along with that many private museums are coming forward to support art. Our community is thankful to these patrons and I know their intentions are the best. But I am afraid, dishonesty persists in some disguise or the other.

How would you sum up the 'art' scene? What is your take?

I would like to conclude by saying that many painters of our community have become “multi-talented.” A painter who does not know moulding, casting or any other sculptural techniques is producing sculptural works as if off the conveyor belt. Basically, they give the drawing to a person who is a technical expert, and

“Very recently, Yogish Agarwal, founder of Bleu Pharma and a businessman of repute in Romania, invited me there, and I was presented a certificate of excellence by Ambassador Vasile Sofineti.”

it is he who produces the work with his ability, and finally the painter signs on it claiming the work to be his. When there was no opportunity for the painters, they have produced a number of incredible works. And now in spite of all the opportunities, we are heading towards embracing mediocrity. ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sanjay Bhattacharya is an eminent painter and photographer. His works can be seen in important public and private collections in India and overseas.

MUSEUMS: YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW



We are lagging behind in this vital 'industry': indeed, museums showcase a legacy of a nation, and provide employment and opportunities for young and old to revisit our heritage. It is time to rethink out of the box, and adopt best practices that can be seen around globally.



by **TARUN THAKRAL**

Despite the efforts of curators and museum professionals, Indian museums still do not draw the number of visitors as they should. Is the culture of going to museums in India over and done with, or with the advent of digitization, are museums a thing of the past?

Barring a handful, most Indian museums have suffered from lack of imagination and have not been market driven. Unfortunately, despite having some very rare antiquities and objects, they have not been able to change their presentation and display over time. Archaic rules have prevented them from becoming visitor centric, having no focus on the evolving generations. They have been more inward looking and rather aloof to the changing scenarios on the museum scene elsewhere in the world. The Central and State Governments pump in crores of rupees every year to keep our museums alive, with little accountability on why these museums are not drawing visitors as they should. This has made things worse.

Presently, the focus of the Central government has been to create new museums across the country and



Photo Courtesy: Iwan Baan



allocated required budgets. That is a welcome change from the past and the focus on heritage and culture is quite evident. Some brilliant new museums have been created across the country and more are in different stages of conceptualization and construction. The future of these museums, if we do not pay attention on how we are going to manage them and sustain visitor interests, will face the same future as their predecessors.

There have been a few private players, in the recent past, who have entered the museum field and with their visitor centric approach and marketing effort, made a success. These institutions have broken the myth that museums in India are a boring experience. They operate and manage their museums like any other business entity. Their focus is how we keep a visitor stay for a longer duration so that he spends more money in the other allied services that they offer. These are India's new age museums which have been able to create a niche for themselves and have been extremely successful.

But those majority of museums which were created a few decades back and continue to be a burden on the state exchequer year on year, what can be done so that they are no longer a burden on the state? I am a firm believer in the thought that management of these museums should be handed over to professional institutions who can ensure a turnaround. The PPP model which has done wonders in other fields can certainly be thought about here too.

The museum education being imparted in the country today needs to evolve so that every student who comes out has his focus first on visitor marketing and basic hospitality besides of course his professional role. National Museum Institute which is the premier institution in this field and has played an excellent role in education needs to further lay emphasis on the above. The upcoming Museum Expo on 18th – 19th May 2023 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi being orga-

Museums in India should become fun and entertainment destinations, besides of course the education that they impart. They should be able to inspire and spark imagination for a vast audience again and again.

nized by Ministry of Culture, Government of India promises to deliberate on the various challenges facing museums and indicate the way forward.

Museums in India should become fun and entertainment destinations, besides of course the education that they impart. They should be able to inspire and spark imagination for a vast audience again and again. Globally, museums are an industry unto themselves, not just self-sustaining but also self-funding. They generate significant revenues and impart education on our past, attracting thousands of visitors on a daily basis.

It is my belief that India's time has come, for all the wealth of our rich heritage to be showcased in an intelligent and interesting presentation, in keeping with global best practices. ❖



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tarun Thakral is Founder and Managing Trustee at Heritage Transport Museum which curated and executed the entire exhibition.

DRONES ARE RESHAPING BOTH INDUSTRY AND WAR: HERE IS HOW!

Drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), have become ubiquitous, offer diverse applications and can be used to carry out a range of activities. But they equally pose grave privacy, security and strategic challenges. While the government of India has signalled its intent of piggy-riding the technology to boost last-mile service delivery, new and emerging developments continue to keep policymakers in caution mode.

by SHASHANK SHEKHAR

Wide applications:
Why drones are on the rise!

Sample this: The recent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan led to the emergence of drones as a key component of the military strategy, marking a significant technology-driven escalation. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan deployed a range of drones, including armed drones, for surveillance, reconnaissance, and precision strikes. Armenia, which had an established drone program before the conflict, used Israeli-made Harop drones to target Azerbaijani military installations. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, deployed a mix of Israeli, Turkish, and locally made drones.

Both countries extensively used them to gather real-time intelligence and locate and target enemy forces without significant casualties.

On the other hand, Amazon, a US behemoth, launched a drone delivery program known as Prime Air – that aims to deliver packages to customers' homes within half an hour of placing an order. "The MK30's increased range, expanded temperature tolerance, safety-critical features, and new capability to fly in light rain will enable customers to choose drone delivery more often," reads the Amazon website. While the program is under its 'testing' phase in the US, UK, and a few other countries, Amazon is



actively engaging with regulators and policymakers to expedite the approvals for drone operations in commercial airspace. These drones carry packages weighing up to five pounds and fly at speeds of a little over 24 kilometres per hour.

In India, while drones for delivery services are in their teething stages, companies like Zomato and Swiggy have begun testing drone-based food delivery services in select locations.

These two examples illustrate the potential of drones in transforming industry, yet they also showcase the challenges that this new technology proffers. Add to that, over the past decade, UAVs have become increasingly popular in India. The Ministry of Civil Aviation believes that "drones can be significant creators of employment and economic growth due to their reach, versatility, and ease of use, especially in India's remote and inaccessible areas." It argues that "in view of its traditional strengths in innovation, information technology, frugal engineering and huge domestic demand, India has the potential to be a global drone hub by 2030."



Perhaps, these considerations and the need to streamline its operations egged the government of India to liberalise the Drone Rules in 2021. The new legislation liberalized the drone licensing process, allowing for their registration through a digital platform and categorising them based on their weight and intended use. The rules also established 'no-fly zones' around sensitive strategic and military areas, and enforced compliance with privacy and data protection laws.

Delivering Transformational Change

Drones, indeed, have the potential to transform industries, improve disaster response, and revolutionize various fields like delivery services, inspection of infrastructure, and assistance in search and rescue operations. Drones can provide aerial views of remote locations, helping businesses and organizations save considerable time and money. The Indian defence forces and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) routinely press them into action for disaster relief operations.

Drones can significantly impact agriculture, healthcare, and logistics as they can help monitor crops and manage pest control and irrigation. They can deliver medical supplies to inaccessible regions, ensuring last-mile access to essential healthcare, and faster and more efficient logistics services. In fact, the Indian government has also launched a pilot program for the delivery of medical supplies and vaccines to remote areas using drones.

Serious Challenges are Here, too!

The use of drones also raises several concerns, privacy being one of the most significant challenges. The misuse of drones to follow celebrities and capture their images and videos without their consent is common in the USA. Such instances can lead to grave misuse of personal data.

Besides, they can risk aviation safety and can be used for illegal activities, posing threats to national security. They are now being used to smuggle weapons, drugs, and counterfeit currency across borders, as they fly low and cannot be detected by larger air defence systems. Punjab police and national security agencies



"The new Drone Rules will tremendously help start-ups and our youth working in this sector. It will open up new possibilities for innovation & business. It will

help leverage India's strengths in innovation, technology & engineering to make India a drone hub."

PM Modi tweeted after the launch of the new Drone Rules



"It is the resolve of PM Modi to make India the International Drone Hub leader by 2030. We have to lead the world in this field. Our Ministry is working along with NITI Aayog. It is imperative

for us to boost the usage of drones in different industrial -- and defence-related sectors to leverage the benefits of this technology, as highlighted by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We are actively working towards making drone services easily accessible. We are taking this forward on the basis of three wheels. First, Policy: We are implementing policies quickly. Second, the creation of incentives: We have implemented a PLI scheme, that will boost manufacturing and services. Third, generate demand: 12 Ministries have tried to create demand."

Jyotiraditya Scindia, speaking at the inaugural event of an experience studio on drones at NITI Aayog

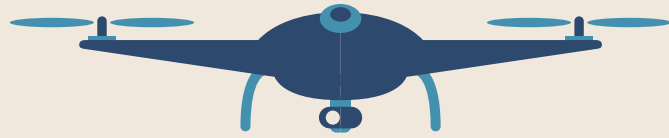


Punjab police and national security agencies have openly expressed concern about the smuggling and airdropping of narcotics, bombs and AK-47s across the Punjab border by Pakistan to ferment trouble in the border state.

have openly expressed concern about the smuggling and airdropping of narcotics, bombs and AK-47s across the Punjab border by Pakistan to ferment trouble in the border state.

Saudi Arabia's two critical oil facilities, operated by state-run Aramco, were hit in 2021 by "drone attacks claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels, damaging facilities that process the vast majority of the country's crude output and raising the risk of a disruption in world oil supplies," the New York Times reported. This incident demonstrates that drones can be used to attack critical infrastructure, such as power plants, oil refineries, and government buildings, and trigger global tensions. These drones carried explosives that were detonated remotely. This way, they caused significant damage to Saudi infrastructure, as Iran-backed Houthi rebels waged a low-cost high-yield war.

They have the potential to be used for terrorist attacks as security agencies have a difficult time detecting them. They also pose a significant threat to the security of high dignitaries, as they can be used for the reconnaissance of VIP movements. Several high-handed regimes across the globe have used them for targeted killings, raising serious concerns about extrajudicial killings. ❖



HOW DO OTHER COUNTRIES/REGIONS MANAGE DRONE USAGE AND POLICIES?

The USA

Drone policy in the United States is governed by both federal and state regulations – where the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is the primary federal regulatory agency. The FAA requires all drone operators to register their drones with the agency unless their drones weigh lesser than 250 grams. The FAA has also established several regulations for drone operations, such as prohibiting drones from flying over people, operating drones at night, and flying drones beyond the operator's line of sight.

States, too, are free to regulate drone operations within their borders, and many have enacted laws. However, they vary across states.

The European Union

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is the primary regulatory body responsible for establishing drone regulations in the EU. The EASA's regulations apply to all drones weighing more than 250 grams, and they cover a range of issues, including drone registration, pilot licensing, drone operations, and safety requirements.

Under EU regulations, drone operators must register their drones with the relevant national authority and follow a set of operational requirements. The EU regulations have also established a system for categorizing drones based on their size, weight, and capabilities. Aside from the EASA regulations, individual member states also have their drone regulations.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Drones surely have the potential to revolutionize various fields and transform industries. However, there are valid privacy, security, and safety-related concerns. The government's drone policy is a progressive legislation that encourages its adoption while regulating its use. The challenge now is to actively collaborate with the private sector to make this technology easily available and cost-effective. The commercial use of drones has significant potential, but it is crucial to address the security challenges they pose. The road ahead is full of promises but needs treading with caution. ❖

INBOUND TOURISM NEEDS AN EXTRA DOSE OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

AGENCY BODY IATO SEEKS PM'S INTERVENTION

It is an important moment in our history. We have undertaken numerous initiatives to augment our infrastructure. It is the right time to strike across international markets. The Indian tour operator will ensure our success.

by NAVIN BERRY

Inbound tour operators are the marketing arms of any government while attracting foreign tourists. Recently, the government has also taken a call to close all our tourist offices abroad effective two months back. It was a debatable issue, but that be so, we are left presently only with the marketing efforts of the Indian travel trade specialising in inbound. Hoteliers sell India only to the extent where they have their properties. But agents sell all of India, and cater to wider and diverse interest of travellers looking at India.

During covid times, much has changed for global tourism. Many agencies have shut down, some have retrenched their staff. The world is slowly coming back to business, some countries better than others. An inbound tour operator needs to reconnect with his counterpart; in many cases, with new faces. It calls for more investment; looked at another way, it calls for more support from government, a greater degree of hand holding.

IATO (Indian Association of Tour Operators), the trade body that handles the interests of the inbound tourism business, has written to the PM requesting him to support the trade at a time when the trade needs maximum help. Not just for themselves but also for the country's interests in ensuring that we remain a preferred destination for the global traveller!

Towards this, the association president, Rajiv

Mehra, has requested the PM's intervention to restore SEIS (Service Export Incentive Scheme) or introduce an alternative scheme in the new Foreign Trade Policy, as the inbound tourism sector is still suffering and needs hand holding by the government.

Besides, it seeks roll back of TCS of 20 percent to 5 percent on Overseas Tour Packages announced in the Union Budget. These steps would place the tourism industry at par with foreign tour operators and help them compete with the neighbouring countries.

Also, during the current G-20 Presidency, where promoting tourism is one of the tracks, it would be most unfortunate if tourism suffers; he has pleaded that the Government extends a helping hand urgently to the tourism sector.

Mehra has mentioned that the inbound tourism industry in India was the worst affected due to Covid-19 pandemic. Post revival of international flight operations and reinstating tourist visas, only 30-40% of inbound tourism to India has revived so far. Either, SEIS should be restored or an alternative scheme benefiting the tourism sector should be announced in the Foreign Trade Policy 2023.

“We need to compete. But it becomes very difficult

as the Government has withdrawn marketing and promotion support in foreign countries. Ended SEIS, not given any alternative benefit, GST is as high as 20-23 percent without any input tax credit, whereas neighbouring countries are charging 6-8 percent. To attract foreign tourists, we need to holistically look at all these issues. As regards the argument of revenue loss, it would be made up more than 100 times as it has a positive multiplier impact on the overall economy,” said Mehra. ❖



Rajiv Mehra, has requested the PM's intervention to restore SEIS (Service Export Incentive Scheme) or introduce an alternative scheme in the new Foreign Trade Policy.



PLANET HOLLYWOOD FORAYS INTO INDIA AND ASIA, ANNOUNCES ROHAN JETLEY TO LEAD ITS EXPANSION



In yet another proof of India's attraction among global investors in hospitality, US major Planet Hollywood is entering India with a planned series of alliances in hotels as well as in the restaurant business.

by NAVIN BERRY

With lavish destination resorts in Las Vegas, Mexico, Costa Rica, and India, US famed major Planet Hollywood is looking towards Asia and India for new luxury development opportunities.

Heading the team that will focus on opportunities throughout Asia and India, Planet Hollywood has appointed Rohan Jetley, a young hospitality executive with deep roots in India where he was the CEO of TGI Friday's India operations until 2021. He then joined Reef Technologies, where he ultimately became the CEO for the Middle East. Jetley's international experience and connections position him for success in his new role leading the international expansion plans for Planet Hollywood Hotels and Resorts worldwide.

Jetley till recently handled the TGI brand with restaurants in India. He has deeper hospitality links in the country with his father, Rajan Jetley, having earlier been the MD of ITDC and a former head of Air India.

"The market for the lifestyle hotel category is rapidly growing and has become the preferred category with global travelers today," said Jetley.

"I am looking forward to reaching out to my incredible friends and contacts in the region, and meeting new potential partners, as we demonstrate both the strength of our core brand and the many ancillary

brands that are part of our Planet Hollywood group—all of which can be added onto hotel and resort projects to enhance the overall offering of amenities."

Asked how their two existing properties, one in Goa and the other in Thane Mumbai, where they are in partnership with Joshi Group, the owners of the famed Kingfisher villa and a brewery, among other business interests, Jetley said these two locations had tested waters for the group. The response has been most encouraging and led them to take this big plunge into one of the world's most promising markets for hospitality.

Asked on how they will go about their iconic restaurants in India, Jetley said they are open to both stand alone locations as well as those located within hotel.

Earl Enterprises, the parent company of brands that include Planet Hollywood International, Inc., is a recognized leader in the hospitality, lodging, food and beverage industries. Founded by entrepreneur and restaurateur Robert Earl, the company owns and operates over 180 restaurants both in the U.S. and internationally. Under the Earl Enterprises umbrella, big name brands include Buca di Beppo, Planet Hollywood, Earl of Sandwich, Brio Italian Grille, Bravo! Italian Kitchen, Bertucci's and Chicken Guy! Some of these may be yet unfamiliar names to us in India, but they have proven success behind them in the US, which remains easily the biggest market for food globally.

Earl and his team aren't stopping here. In addition to this, through Virtual Dining Concepts (VDC) which owns Mr Beast Burger, Tik Tok Creators Kitchens, Mariah Carey's cookies and many other deliveries only brands, it holds the largest virtual brand company in the world. ❖

ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



Apple opened its company owned stores, almost overnight as it were, in Mumbai and New Delhi. Apple CEO, Tim Cook, made the most of his visit to India, taking time off to meet his team, savour local delicacies and calling upon the likes of PM Modi and Mukesh Ambani. All in a day's work for him and for the large crowds that gathered once they heard Tim Cook was calling!



ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



On his mega mission to the South, PM Modi made it a point to visit the much loved pair of Bomman and Bellie, the star couple who made India proud, with *The Elephant Whisperers* winning the Oscars as the Best Documentary. Here, he is seen caressing the majestic animals on his tour to the wildlife sanctuary.

Having 'sharbat' at a vendor in the Matia Mahal area in Chandni Chowk in Delhi, and 'golgappas' at Nathus' in Bengali Market, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi made time in between his campaign trail in Karnataka. Food has become recognised as a worthy medium to 'go local', with golgappas making news yet again.

