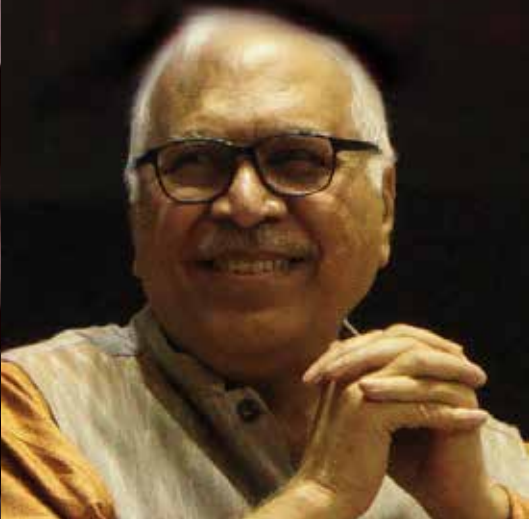


DESTINATION INDIA CONVERSATIONS

DR Y S QURAISHI

Electoral System in Indian
Political Space



MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

Rajiv Gandhi:
The PM and the Man



INDIA GLOBAL

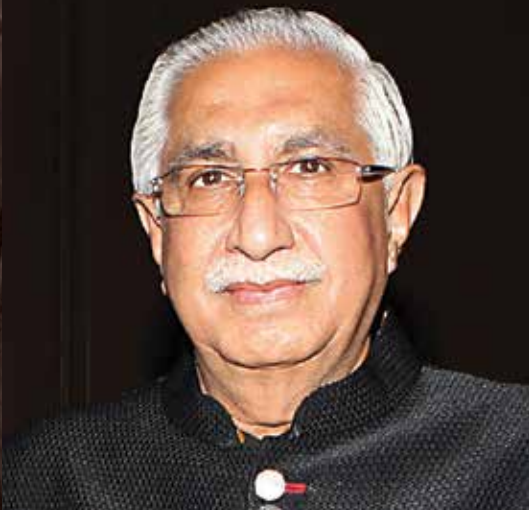
Sudden Impact:
IMEEC and
India's Interests!
The Nijjar
killing, the Gaza
War and China's
Designs

CONVERSATIONS

'Bad' Girl
Indrani
Mukerjee says
with a Grit and
Straight face you
can Expect her to
Show!

NAKUL ANAND

ITC's Journey in
Responsible Tourism!



ARJUN MATHUR

Typecast, No!
Activist, Yes!



The Punjab
Tango in Canada
A Conversation
with Ujjal
Dosanjh

SPORTS

Asian Games'
Successes!
Signs of a New
Eco-system!

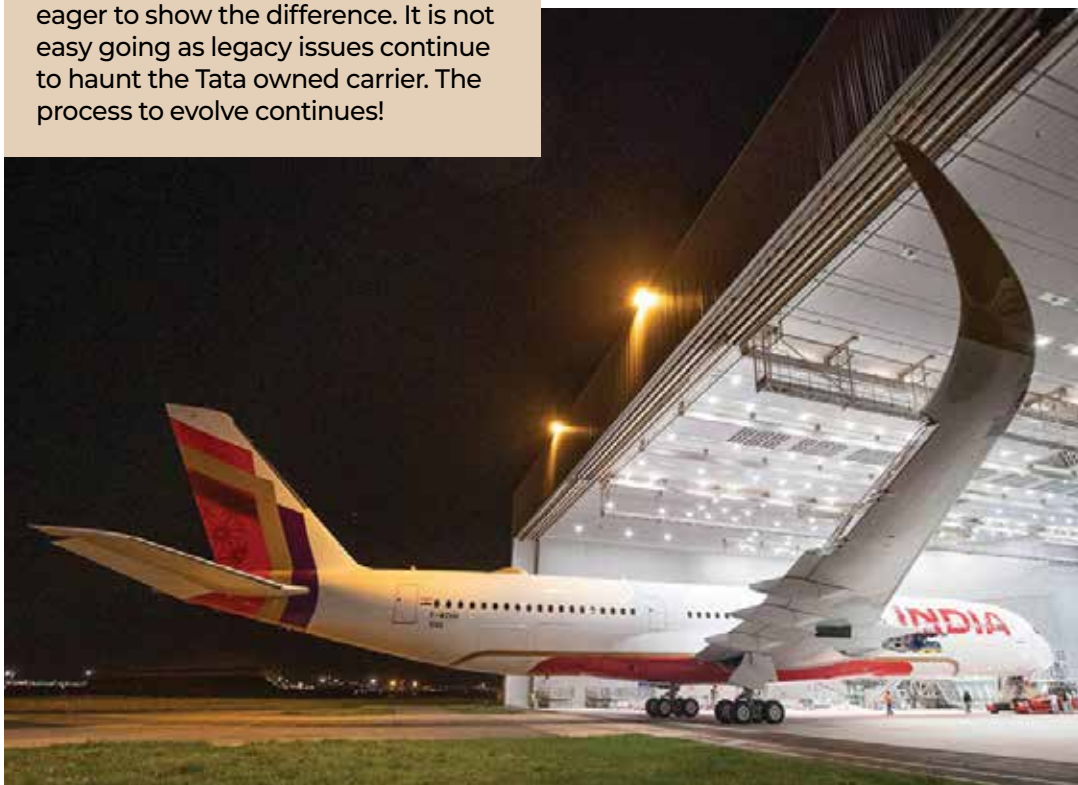
CELEBRATION

Leela Hotels
Keeps Alive the
Spirit of Polo

AIR INDIA GOES FOR A FRESH LIVERY!



A new logo, a new image unfolds for the erstwhile public sector airline, eager to show the difference. It is not easy going as legacy issues continue to haunt the Tata owned carrier. The process to evolve continues!

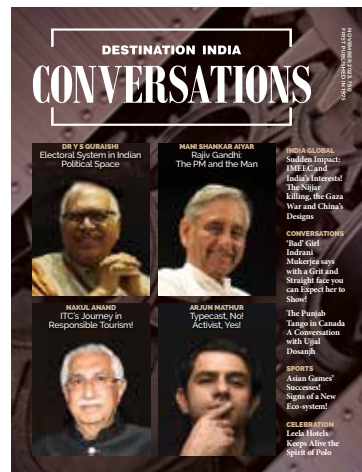


IN THIS ISSUE

Voices.....	4
Sudden Impact: IMEEC and India's Interests! The Nijjar killing, the Gaza War and China's Designs.....	6
Simplifying the War Games. What Next in the Israel-Hamas Story?	10
Journey of Indian Democracy as Witnessed through its Electoral System; Experiments in Indian Political Space.....	12
Global Headwinds: Our Response and Its Ramifications.....	18
Bihar Caste Census: A Political Masterstroke?	22
Mani Talk on Rajiv Gandhi. The Prime Minister and the Man he can Recall from his Memoirs.....	26
The Punjab Tango in Canada. A Conversation with Ujjal Dosanjh	30
'Bad' Girl Indrani Mukerjea says with a Grit and Straight face you can Expect her to Show!.....	34
Kasauli Remembers the Passions, Concerns and Values of Khushwant Singh	38
ASIAN GAMES' Successes! Signs of a New Eco-system!	40
What's ITC's Journey in Responsible Tourism Means for Indian Hospitality!.....	44
The Kerala Model in Tourism: How Does Tourism Benefit the State's Economy?.....	50
Exploring a New Concept of a 'Distributed Hotel' model Jewish homes in Kochi Street set to open.....	54
Hospitality is a Serious Business at InterGlobe Hotels.....	56
Typecast, No! Activist, Yes! There's much more to Arjun Mathur, waiting for us to discover!.....	60
Delhi's Skat Club Brings Three Authors on One Stage	66
Leela Hotels Keeps Alive the Spirit of Polo.....	68
Indian Accent Now at JIO Centre!.....	70

Destination India is a monthly magazine edited and printed by Navin Berry on behalf of Cross Section Media Pvt. Ltd, 401, Surya Kiran Building, New Delhi-110001. It is printed at Advantage Offset, Naraina, New Delhi-110028. Registered with RNI under reference 28908/1976.

All enquiries can be addressed to connect@diconversations.com



'Conversations' take firmer roots in this issue! The big topic within our country is the elections on hand, in the five states. The EC as an institution and electoral reforms remain a concern. Former CEC, S Y Quraishi, released his book that provided an opportunity for a panel discussion. That conversation is a central piece in this issue.

Khushwant Singh remains both the doyen as well as the prized journalist of all times. In his memory, the Literary Festival in Kasauli brings alive the writer's zest for life, his sense of irreverence and his humour. His son, Rahul Singh, also a noted journalist, brings a rare assembly of authors and literary contributions onto a single celebration. We bring three of such 'conversations', each a treasure in their own segments.

The Israel-Hamas war has brought a new series of issues and concerns back into the forefront, globally. First and foremost must be the futility of war, the unending games that upend all human efforts to improve lives and value life, bringing untold misery and loss of dignity to human existence. Somewhere, did it have an 'eye' on India? Never mind that, the fact is that some of our recent successes globally have got sidelined, in the interests of bigger and more immediate concerns; so, the war games continue, much to global outcry.

A 'Greener Earth' remains a priority for us, a growing issue around us. It becomes imperative that every industry breaks out to contribute how best it can! In hospitality, the 'green leader' has been ITC, where Nakul Anand has spearheaded these efforts for the last few decades. We bring a brief peek into these efforts, how ITC can infuse this credo into the larger hospitality industry.

Entertainment is big, in every country, even more so in ours. That entertainment can help social causes, remove stigmas, help challenged people or who are different, is of vital importance. Especially in India, where films can override diverse languages and societies. LGBTQ is an issue that confronts us majorly. 'Made in Heaven' with Arjun Mathur has been one big endeavour in this direction. Meet Arjun in this issue and follow his career and his young aspirations.

Navin Berry
Editor

VOICES



INDIA NEEDS A NEW WORK CULTURE

"India needs to increase its productivity. India's work productivity is one of the lowest in the world. Unless we improve our work productivity, unless we reduce corruption in the government at some level, because we have been reading, I don't know the truth of it, unless we reduce the delays in our bureaucracy in taking this decision, we will not be able to compete with those countries that have made tremendous progress. So therefore, my request is that our youngsters must say 'this is my country. I want to work 70 hours a week. This is exactly what the Germans and Japanese did after the Second World War.'"

- Narayana Murthy in a podcast hosted by Mohandas Pai



THE ROLE OF SPORTS IS MUCH LARGER

"If we have to host an Olympics, no one will disagree with what I have said. We want a strong performance from our athletes. Forty (gold) medals in 2036 is a fair ask for what we're doing! We should aim for that. No question about it. It really boils down to how we as a nation are going to embrace sport. Can we embrace sport as a catalyst to build our society into a healthier and more inclusive one? Can we use sport to educate our young kids? Then of course hosting the Olympics is an interesting thing to do. It can act as a catalyst for so much development. What I would not like to see is us embracing sport from just one prism: winning medals. The role of sport is much larger."

- Abhinav Bindra, Olympic champion in an interview with Indian Express



FOR IMPROVING TIES WITH INDIA, PAKISTAN NEEDS THE GENERALS' NOD

"If, as is rumoured, Pakistan's current military leadership itself wants respite from endless conflict to focus on the economy, Sharif might be able to try and re-engage with India. But while focusing on the economy and implementing his vision of "liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation" might be feasible, building a new relationship with India might be more difficult. Sharif recognised as much by talking in his homecoming speech about both "ending conflict with neighbours" and "seeking an honourable solution to the Kashmir dispute". Still, Sharif has tried before and will probably try again to improve ties with India, this time with the generals' acquiescence. But before that he must win another election."

- Husain Haqqani, former Ambassador of Pakistan to the US

KEEPING THE SPIRIT OF G20 ALIVE!



A tree planting ceremony, organized at Nehru Park in Chanakyapuri, New Delhi commemorated a green, sustainable and environment friendly G20 presidency. Attended by envoys and representatives of G20 members, invited countries and international organizations, who planted a sapling each of national significance from their respective countries or a local Indian sapling. External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar, Union Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas and Housing & Urban Affairs Hardeep Puri, Lt Governor of Delhi V K Saxena and India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant participated. The theme also spotlights the message of Mission LiFE, which nudges individuals towards sustainable lifestyles and responsible consumption to preserve the environment. EAM Dr Jaishankar said that India's G20 Presidency will be remembered as "G20 for the future" for its strong focus on environment, sustainability, and Global South and that the G20 trees will serve as a reminder for the same.

SUDDEN IMPACT: IMEEC AND INDIA'S INTERESTS!

The Nijjar killing, the Gaza War and China's Designs



by IQBAL CHAND MALHOTRA

In my article **The '5 Eyes and More! The Plot Thickens as Multiple Motives Emerge'** which was posted on 2 October 2023 on diconversations.com I had argued that the killing of pro-Khalistan activist Harjit Singh Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia on 18 June 2023 was a most likely False Flag operation jointly conducted by China's MSS and Pakistan's ISI. The objective of this op was to derail G20 and with it the proposed G20 India-Mid East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) championed by US President Joe Biden as the alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The collateral motive was to destroy India's ties with the West.

While this False Flag operation failed in derailing G20, it pretty much succeeded in denting India's ties with the West assisted in no small measure by misguided and naive anchors and "journalists" from the mainstream print and television media in this country.

On 9 October, exactly a week after my article mentioned above was uploaded on the net, a Chinese born and now US based independent blogger called Jennifer Zeng announced in her video blog that according to a Canadian based Chinese writer and U Tuber named Lao Deng, the MSS or Chinese intelligence orchestrated the hit on Nijjar. The

An entire narrative is emerging that shows a determined effort to derail the gains from G20, the important going forward of the IMEEC corridor, as an effective alternative to the Chinese BRI plans. The new alignments in the Middle East, the new found acceptance of Israel as an ally of key Arab countries – all these have been put into cold storage, for the time being. Hamas attacks are now near forgotten, the plight of the Gaza residents has come into focus, igniting Muslim passions globally.

go-ahead for the operation was supposedly given to MSS field agents in Seattle, USA under instructions from Mr. Chen Yixin, China's Minister of State Security (MSS). However, no motive was disclosed.

Meanwhile, around the same time information was being circulated on the internet that two deep cover ISI agents based in Surrey namely Tariq Kiyani and Rahat Rao were the local handlers of the Nijjar execution. Such reports indicate that both individuals were interrogated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Clearly, where there is smoke, there must be fire.

Was the objective to derail the potential of the IMEEC?

However, this False Flag operation failed in derailing G20 due to the pragmatic and conciliatory leadership of US President Joe Biden. He succeeded in shepherding the leaders of India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, and the European Commission to collectively announce their consensus in creating the IMEEC. The corridor would have



an Indian starting point from either Mumbai or the Adani Port in Mundhra. Goods would be shipped from either of these two destinations to Jebel Ali or Al Fujairah ports in the UAE. Jebel Ali is one of the world's largest and most efficient ports and trans-shipment hubs. It is also the base of a famous Emirati logistics company called DP World, which operates container terminals on India's west coast at the ports of Mundra, Mumbai and Kochi. Almost 25% of India's container traffic is carried by DP World.

From Jebel Ali and Fujairah, the IMEEC land route would see containers moving by rail from Fujairah to Israel's Haifa port on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean coast. The Adani group has purchased a container terminal here at Haifa for \$1.2 billion.

End to end from Al Fujairah to Haifa the distance by rail is 2547 kms. Out of this, 2067 kms of railway is already operational. A 250km stretch from the Saudi-UAE border to Haradh is under construction and the remaining 1,392km long railway line from Haradh to Al Haditha border post with Jordan is already in place. What remains to be laid is about only 230kms of track from Al Haditha to Beit Shean on the

Jordan-Israel border. The final 70km stretch from Beit Shean to Haifa is already in place. Coincidentally, it traverses along a small part of the 1,300km long narrow-gauge Hejaz Railway line built by the Turks in the early part of the 20th-century to link Damascus with Madinah.

From Haifa, the containers would then be loaded back onto ships that would take them to either Kavala or Volos in

Greece, Gioia Tauro in southern Italy or Marseilles in France to get on the European rail networks for their final destinations in Germany or beyond. And the same would happen on the reverse journey from Europe to India via West Asia.

IMEEC and the Abraham Accords: Both important Indo-US interests

Just days before the commencement of the G20 summit in New Delhi on 8 September, Prime Minister Modi visited Greece on 25 August. According to an English language Greek news portal called 'Greek City Times' during talks between Modi and Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis, the former expressed India's interest in acquiring Greek ports. This interest was in acquiring one or more of the ports of Kavala or Volos or Alexandroupolis. While Piraeus would have been the best Greek port for this purpose, it could not be considered because it is 60% owned by a famous Chinese company called COSCO. Clearly the Adani Group was/is integral to the success of IMEEC, since IMEEC can only be a reality with both Haifa and either one of the three Greek ports as trans-shipment hubs.

What added fuel to the fire of China's ire against this emerging IMEEC was Italy's formal withdrawal from the BRI almost simultaneously with its endorsement of IMEEC. Furthermore, the next meeting of all the IMEEC signatories was scheduled for November this year. The genesis of this ambitious plan of creating the IMEEC unquestionably lies in the Abraham Accords. This was one of the few foreign policy achievements of the Trump administration that has bipartisan consensus in the US and was adopted by the Biden administration.

The Abraham Accords not only established the basis for ties between Israel and

False Flag operation (Nijjar killing in Canada) most likely jointly conducted by China's MSS and Pakistan's ISI. The objective of this op was to derail G20 and with it the proposed G20 India-Mid East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC).



UAE but also gave birth to the I2U2 grouping that brought India into the fold along with Israel, the US and UAE. Statements issued after the first I2U2 foreign ministers' meeting in October 2021 and the virtual summit in July 2022, clearly included joint investments in transport as one of the group's priority areas. The meeting of the NSAs of India, the US, UAE, and Saudi Arabia in Riyadh in May 2023 realistically shaped this hitherto nebulous concept.

While Israel was not represented in Riyadh, her Prime Minister, Netanyahu has been an early and enthusiastic supporter of the proposal. In fact, Israeli energy minister

spired Russian media has been quick to contrast Xi and Putin's multi-polar vision of the world epitomised by BRI with the Biden midwifed IMEEC. Both Beijing and Moscow are working to immediately energise the two-state (Israel-Palestine) formula as a fundamental solution to the long crisis presently manifested in Gaza.

Much to Lose for other Countries such as China, Turkey, and Iran?

For China, while the BRI is overtly focussed on trade, IMEEC, by its very definition, goes beyond the somewhat narrow scope of trade in physical products. It builds on dialogues within the Quad, NATO and AUKUS during the past few years about the imperative of cyber security and



The next meeting of all the IMEEC signatories was scheduled for November this year. One can argue that China, Iran, and Türkiye had to act fast to destroy IMEEC before November 2023. Could there be a better way than to instigate and underwrite the Hamas action against Israel that started on 7 October 2023? Türkiye, President Erdogan himself took the lead in opposing IMEEC.

Yisrael Katz claims to have persuaded Netanyahu to push for its inclusion in the I2U2 framework and was confident that it could not only foster peace but also turn Haifa into a regional transport hub.

However, watching on the sidelines of these developments were China, Türkiye, and Iran. They collectively stood to lose greatly by IMEEC.

On 17 October as the crisis in Gaza accelerated, Xi Jinping was master of ceremonies in Beijing to celebrate ten years of its Belt and Road initiative. The galaxy of guests invited ranged from Vladimir Putin and Hungary's Viktor Orban to the Taliban. The Putin in-

the need to build secure and trusted communication and logistics networks. Also, the emergence of IMEEC would devalue China's equity in the Greek port of Piraeus.

For Türkiye, President Erdogan himself took the lead in opposing IMEEC. "We say there is no corridor without Türkiye," he has said. "We are an important production and trade centre. The most convenient route for traffic from East to West must go through Türkiye." The sea route for IMEEC between Haifa and Kavala or Volos or Alexandroupolis passes through disputed waters. The Greek and Turkish navies frequently clash in these waters as they are yet to demarcate the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and maritime boundaries. Erdogan feels that India had raised similar concerns about the (BRI), which passes through foreign occupied land in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which Türkiye and Greece signed after a four-year war, did not specify maritime boundaries and the status of islands in the Aegean Sea. If Greece maps its maritime borders from the islands it occupies, then 71.5 per cent of the Aegean Sea would be under Greek sovereignty and only 8.7 per cent under Türkiye.

For Iran, IMEEC will perhaps spell the end of the proposed 7,200-km International North-South Transport Corridor between India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe. That corridor relied on the Iranian port of Chabahar.

The dynamics of global intrigue

Therefore, one can argue that China, Iran, and Türkiye had to act fast to destroy IMEEC before November 2023. Could there be a better way than to instigate and underwrite the Hamas action against Israel that started on 7 October 2023? Even though Iran is Shia and not an Arab state, her Hamas proxy is Sunni. Notwithstanding all his bold and culturally western actions, Prince Salman of Saudi Arabia cannot ignore the re-



The Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza blast (that Hamas falsely blaming Israeli airstrikes) prompted the cancellation of the critical next leg of Biden's visit to Amman, Jordan where he had been due to meet Jordan's King Abdullah II, the Egyptian president, and the leader of the Palestinian Authority.

taliatory killings of Sunni Palestinians in Gaza. The Israeli blockade of Gaza has resulted in driving a wedge between Saudi Arabia and Israel and Saudi Arabia and the US. Further, it is beginning to unite all the diverse factions of global Islam.

The route taken by IMMEC from Al Fujairah to Haifa traverses through an area in Israel that Iran and Islamists call *waqf* (endowment) land, temporarily lost to *kafirs* (infidels) and requiring reconquest. Following the US withdrawal from the Middle East, Iran has spent several years surrounding Israel with client Islamist paramilitary groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. The aim is to decimate and eradicate Israel so that Iran dominates the Middle East. In this regard, Iran encouraged Hamas to make powerful regional friends like Qatar and Turkey. However, weapons know-how, tactical skills and hardware that made 7 October possible are only provided by Iran.

Hamas has staked the lives of civilian Palestinians to engage in this heinous act of terror on innocent civilian Israelis. Perhaps Netanyahu's persecution of the Gaza strip to render it an unviable enclave within the ambit of the Palestinian state has contributed to the emerging apocalyptic outcome. Hamas had nothing to lose. It was being pushed to the wall. Israel however has its work cut out as Hamas is not merely an organisation but a movement. How Israel will succeed in obliterating this movement remains to be seen. If Israel fails in snuffing out Hamas, it will lose its aura of invincibility in the Middle-east prompting others to take a chance against it. The Former Prime Minister of Palestine and the head of the Hamas Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh, has called on the global Islamic Ummah to stage anti-Israel protests. These have started in a swathe from Beirut to Melbourne. All Democracies with significant Muslim minority populations can expect such demonstrations to ignite their cities in the days to come. Why did Sunak and Scholz visit Tel-Aviv to be shortly followed by Macron?

On 17 October an explosion at the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza created an uproar with Hamas falsely blaming Israeli airstrikes. Israel however displayed evidence that the deadly blast in the parking lot of the facility was caused by a misfired rocket launched by Palestinian terrorists. The blast coincidentally occurred on the eve of President Biden's trip to Israel the next day on 18 October. Biden came to reinforce Israel's fight against Hamas and to offer aid to Palestinians suffering under an Israeli retaliation. However, circumstances pushed Biden to inextricably link himself to Israel in any fight to come.

The hospital blast prompted the cancellation of the critical next leg of Biden's visit to Amman, Jordan where he had been due to meet Jordan's King Abdullah II, the Egyptian president, and the leader of the Palestinian Authority. Rather than host a presidential summit, Amman on Wednesday was rocked by a second night of huge protests that crystallized anger in Arab nations over the Israeli pounding of Gaza. Demonstrations also erupted in Tunisia, Iraq, Iran, in the occupied West Bank and Lebanon.

Further, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak landed in Israel at on Thursday 19 October 2023 for meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog. Will Sunak be the 21st century's Neville Chamberlain?

The situation in Gaza also appeared to inextricably harden the attitudes of key regional powers like Turkish President Erdogan.

The Arab allies of the US appear to have moved back many steps from their embrace with the US.

Meanwhile, the Chinese and their guests and allies celebrating the 10th anniversary of BRI are probably laughing behind the high walls of Zhongnanhai and toasting their first significant victory, against the Quad and its fellow travellers. **DI**

EDITOR'S NOTE

But this is where we stand at present, with much more action to roll! How it pans out remains of huge interest, given the non-stop coverage of the Israel-Hamas confrontation on our national television. Given this possible scenario, India's best interests are to ensure the IMEEC remains on track, recent alignments which India has achieved do not get derailed from their original intentions. That we remain adequately committed to our multipolar diplomacy, keep our defences up, our feet and ears to the ground.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iqbal Chand Malhotra is chairman and producer, AIM Television Pvt. Ltd. He has produced over 500 hours of television programming which have been telecast

worldwide. He is a member of the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

SIMPLIFYING THE WAR GAMES. WHAT NEXT IN THE ISRAEL-HAMAS STORY?

Too much is at stake for all concerned. This could become a yet another protracted war.



by NAVIN BERRY

On 21st October, we broke the story that the Hamas attack in Israel had as one of its targets, the prestigious IMEEC project floated at the recently held G20 Summit in New Delhi. That the G20 outcome was impacting those not desirous of India's success! The Nijjar killing in Canada, too, had its origin in the same principle. Disrupt unity in this emerging alignment, as it could put the nail in the coffin of the BRI initiative which had found its own detractors. It had flawed economies in the region, made small nations bankrupt with unviable projects. Both these perspectives had been put forward by our columnist Iqbal Chand Malhotra, at a time when the media was focusing elsewhere; the focus was on the fallout of Prime Minister Trudeau's mis-guided missiles, not on why he was a prisoner to his domestic compulsions.

Canada and India have been close friends with shared ties, marred by the 'K' factor, which unfortunately has continued to give a different colour to our present-day relationship. This continues. Reports are coming out of Canada that the so-called friends of Khalistan are now planning referendums in key cities on whether the Sikhs in Canada want an independent nation. They can, but best they should settle down in any other country, except within India! There is zero traction for the idea, today, in any part of India, Punjab included. These efforts must be stopped, it remains the responsibility of any friendly country. Between India and Canada, there is much at stake.

Friends of recent alignments, like the Quad and I2U2 and IMEEC, and those wish-

ing the continuing success of the G20/G21 movement must get Canada to understand. Trudeau's government must act, like what his political rival from the opposition has promised, when voted to power.

The subsequent Hamas attack and the war that rages in the Gaza region was a well-conceived action, a single act that had multiple targets. As the story has unfolded, it is clear nothing in politics and diplomacy is ever simple.

How will this go, is anybody's guess. No saying how long will it continue, there are silent players and behind the scenes players, and some obvious ones. Till these cards open, it would be anybody's guess. Even the chief protagonists have been left guessing.

For India, what does this mean? The IMEEC project is presently put on the back burner, for sure. And so is the success of the recent G20 summit. What about the war between Russia and Ukraine? That too has lost its relevance for the time being. More pressing issues have surfaced, out of nowhere.

India condemns terror in all its manifestation, most of all state guided. It is also saying we will be guided by keeping all our hands on deck. It also says that 'war is not an option' in current times. It also calls and expects nations to respect the territorial integrity of fellow countries.

It is also not a time for chest thumping of any kind. It is best to do our job diligently and stay united. We are not that invincible, we have our vulnerable touch points, we must remain guarded at all times, on all fronts. We must

continue our tight rope walk.

The Palestine Cause has been our close concern for decades. We have moved closer to Israel in recent years, given our pronounced multipolar diplomacy. It may not always appear that we are neutral, but that is the price of tight rope walking. Keeping our balance is vital in volatile times like these.

What next? Voices are appearing for a solution along the lines of a two-nation state!

What inspired Hamas to launch this sudden offensive? Was the counter attack justified, did Israel have the right to retaliate? And, what will it take for the self-prestige of Israel to be satiated? We have a most volatile situation on hand. Our prayers are for a quick fix, that meets all aspirations.



But this would take some time; meanwhile, destruction reigns, civilian casualties mount, almost deafening human sensibility. Images of women and children falling to bombs and mortar, reports of hospitals turning into military camps, shortage of food and crippling life conditions. These warrant immediate cessation, with a shared understanding on the next steps forward. Untold misery on lives in the Gaza region and around are beyond human dignity and comprehension. No wonder, protests are mounting globally.

Going back into history can be everything, tracing the origins of this hostile environment for decades. It can also mean very little, for today's generation, and for peace tomorrow. Palestinians have been long time friends of India, always enjoyed our unstinted support and understanding. Israel and India share strategic interests, we also have a long history of togetherness with the Jewish community.

What inspired Hamas to launch this sudden offensive? What was behind the timing? How much of the counter attack is justified? Yes, there was an unprincipled Hamas attack, to begin with. What will it take Israel to say we have had enough of a revenge? With US forces doubling down in the region, both men and guns, ships and aircrafts, we have a most volatile situation on hand. The world waits, with bated breath. **DI**



IMEEC Could not have been the Target! The Hamas Attack Had a Long Planning Process Behind it.

A Perspective by Maj Gen. V.K. Singh (retd)

Ido not give too much credibility to the presumption that the Hamas attack was timed to target the IMEEC project. While there could be some truth to the Canada connection, but the timing of the Hamas attack could also be just a coincidence. There may be several reasons to arrive at such a conclusion.

Are we attaching too much credence to the G-20 success? No doubt, it was well conducted and received, but I think what was more successful was the media hype.

Has the West shed its colonial mindset, their continued deep-rooted suspicion and I daresay dislike for India and Indians? Does China even consider India as a competitor? Why should such a massive effort be made to derail the yet on paper IMEEC? A more suitable timing for derailment would have been when India had sunk in major investments.

Next is the very nature of the Palestine-Israel problem. This problem is not something that can get solved. It has always been simmering ever since the inception of the state of Israel and will continue to simmer. There have been frequent eruptions which do not necessarily get precipitated by world events like G-20, 9/11 and so on. They just happen because of the deep-rooted hatred and dislike, to the extent that they just cannot tolerate each other's existence.

Thirdly, consider the very selection of the alignment of the IMEEC. Why did we choose to make the corridor through an area which has been the centre of conflict ever since 1948. Should we have not known what to expect either today or tomorrow?

It is my firm opinion that the 7th October attack was not something that happened on the spur of the moment. It happened on Sabbath Day and on the date of several Jewish holidays. The scale of the attack shows the kind of military planning and preparation that must have gone into, prior to the attack. Possibly for years. Even the very thought that such an attack could have been carried out to derail the IMEEC is beyond belief, because its planning would have commenced well before IMEEC was conceived. **DI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maj Gen VK Singh, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into The Scinde Horse in Dec 1983. The General is a fourth generation army officer.

JOURNEY OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

as Witnessed through its Electoral System;
Experiments in Indian Political Space

A panel discussion marking the release of a book by **Dr S Y Quraishi**, former Chief Election Commissioner, brought a distinguished panel to deliberate and converse on what steps are needed to making the system more transparent and reliable. Elections are the current flavour of our times, with five states in full election mode, and 2024 soon to follow with its General Elections. We bring excerpts featuring **Fali Nariman**, distinguished lawyer; **Shashi Tharoor**, Congress MP; **Neerja Choudhary**, leading journalist and author; **Shekhar Gupta**, also a leading journalist; and the author himself. Moderating the discussion was **Nidhi Razdan**, former NDTV anchor. The views expressed below are those of the panelists, the publication does not necessarily endorse them.



NIDHI RAZDAN: This book isn't just about the election commissioner of India. It's not just about elections in India. It's very much about the soul of India and I think that it has come at a very opportune time. We are at a crossroads. We are the mother of democracy on one hand and on the other our institutions including the election commission, are increasingly being scrutinized for what is believed to be their partisan stand on issues.

FALI NARIMAN: Well, I really think that the Election Commission in our constitution is like a three-legged stool with one leg much longer than the other two so that it's a bit out of focus and it would've been much better if we had a three-legged stool with all three commissioners, election commissioners along with the Chief Election Commissioner having equal status and having equal protection as judges of the Supreme Court, as the Controller and Auditor General. I don't know why this was a lapse on the part of the people who



framed the Constitution, but they expected that Parliament would pass some legislation about it and although Parliament did pass one or two rules and laws, unfortunately it didn't do too well and I was a little disappointed with earlier decisions of the Supreme Court of India, particularly with regard to Mr Sheshan, because I had great admiration for him.

But there's one important thing which you must know, and that is that there is an article in the same chapter which deals with election commissioners and that is an Article 329A which is no longer in the Constitution, so you can't read what is missing there because that was a very, very dangerous provision that was specially enacted once Mrs. Gandhi lost her election in the Allahabad High Court, instead of going directly to the Supreme Court, what very intelligent lawyers did and those who advised her, that we should have an amendment so that ultimately the decision of who is to be elected and who not, would be taken not by the Supreme Court, but it would be taken by the executive who would draft the law.

And you must read this 329A. It's one of the most monstrous amendments that were ever carried out and fortunately it was the first time that the Supreme Court applied the doctrine of basic structure and shut it down and the rest of it was deleted by the Janta government. So actually, this is one of the very highlights of this election laws that we have in our country and despite everything that's been said, there is a feeling all over amongst the citizenry that much requires to be done to make the Election Commission have a backbone and at least be far more independent than it appears to be.

NIDHI RAZDAN: In your book Dr. Quraishi, you've dealt with this issue of the Election Commission, the questions about its neutrality in some detail. How do you look at the way today the Election Commission's credibility is being viewed, having been at the helm of that organization yourself?

DR. QURAIISHI: Actually there are four or five articles in the book on neutrality and let me tell you, every time I have been a self-appointed spokesman of the Election Commission. Let me tell you Ashok Lavasa is here; even when he was in office, he would not have that much credibility as I had as a retired chief election commissioner because his job is to defend EVM. It's not my job to defend EVM, but if I say EVM is dependable, people listen. They trust because I have no interest anymore. So, when I found that the Election Commission was not doing things right, it was a painful decision for me to write something. I tried to use all the command over the English language, which I have, which is very little, to somehow convey it in such a language that it doesn't sound like a criticism of them.

My typical answer was that every time I hear a criticism of the Election Commission, it hurts me. But the point was that there was criticism which they earned and it was all up to them. But I've been a



“Every time I hear a criticism of the Election Commission, it hurts me. But I've been a defender because this is an institution I am proud of. This is an institution which has done India proud. There are aberrations here and there.”

“Actually there are four or five articles in the book on neutrality and let me tell you, every time I have been a self-appointed spokesman of the Election Commission. when I found that the Election Commission was not doing things right, it was a painful decision for me to write something.”



Falli Nariman

“It would've been much better if we had a three-legged stool with all three commissioners, election commissioners along with the Chief Election Commissioner having equal status and having equal protection as judges of the Supreme Court, as the Controller and Auditor General.”

“The whole world today is getting more and more autocratic. And it's time that we take note of this trend and see what we can do to reverse it. And one of the most important parts of it is the chapter on elections in the Constitution, what sort of laws we need.”

defender because this is an institution I am proud of. This is an institution which has done India proud. There are aberrations here and there, so let us hope that they're incumbent based with the new incumbent we can have a new expectation.

NIDHI RAZDAN: Shahi Tharoor, can you weigh in on this? Is it unfortunate that there seems to be also quite a bit of a trust deficit at the moment, at least between opposition parties and an institution like the election commission.

SHASHI THAROOR: But it's come to that because of these developments that you're

looking at a situation where they have specifically been lapses to put it politely on the part of the Election Commission that has given rise to these concerns. When you read in the newspapers that the three election commissions are summoned to a meeting with the principal secretary to the prime minister and they actually go without saying, sorry, it's not your business to summon us. When you read that in the 2017 Gujarat elections, which had historically always been announced at the same time as two other state elections, that suddenly those two are announced first and nothing is announced for Gujarat.

When you hear about the Lavasa controversy where one election commissioner essentially seeks to dissent and then ends up being sort of packed off to Manila.

It's very striking that previous governments actually valued the independence of the election commission. It was always headed by a retired bureaucrat, but governments went out of their way to find bureaucrats with a reputation for integrity for no nonsense and corruptibility for people who would not lightly take matters lying down.

NIDHI RAZDAN: But there were election commissioners that one could say were friendly towards the Congress dispensation? Though I don't want to take names.

SHASHI THAROOR: But I can take names of ones who weren't even though they were appointed by the Congress, so let's not go into names. Perhaps they were one or two like that. And that by the way was also something which came up in earlier deliberations about the appointment procedure. But why not have an appointment panel? Right now, as you know, there's a Supreme Court judgement suggesting a panel that would include the Chief Justice of India, until Parliament rules otherwise. And parliament of course means unfortunately in our present system, the executive. Essentially, once the executive is formed and has a rubber stamp majority in parliament, you are surrendering to the executive the right to create the kind of mechanism admissions. And as you know, the preferred formula of the present government is that the third member far from being an independent justice of the Supreme Court is going to be a cabinet minister named obviously by the Prime Minister.

So, these are questions that that are troubling because in fact, in many ways the independence and neutrality of the election Commission was always one of our great talking points when it came to speaking about India's elections.

It was no accident that we have been summoned by numerous countries to come and observe their elections, to guide them, to give them advice. It's only because we have developed over these years and it wasn't just Congress rule, in all fairness, there were a few other governments in between. We've developed a reputation for having an election commission of true neutrality and independence, which has also acquired a lot of expertise in running elections in a country with



the kind of challenges we have with many other developing countries and some new democracies found valuable.

NIDHI RAZDAN: Let me just get Neerja Chowdhary and Shekhar Gupta at this point. Both of you have covered elections in India for decades now. So, you've seen how things have changed the kind of chaos our elections used to be. It's a flawed, but it's a great system of electronic voting machines. I for one, I don't buy into the conspiracy theories about EVM's, but Neerja Chowdhary, in that context then, how important does the perceived independence and the neutrality of the election commission become in the India that we live in today that to ensure that in this chaotic democracy of ours, a level playing field is being provided to all?

NEERJA CHOWDHARY: Look over the years we've seen this, and this is before T.N. Seshan. T.N. Seshan was also very close to the Congress. He was part of the Rajiv Gandhi regime, but once he sat in that chair, he was a bulldog. He had the prime ministers, the politicians running in circles. They had to do what he said had to be done for the conduct of free and fair election. And the CCs who followed no matter what their political alignments, they stuck to that. My experience is the stronger the Prime Minister, the weaker the institutions in our country. It is paradox, the weaker the government, if it's an alliance government, the stronger the institutions, the more the checks and balances that come into play. And because for 25 years we had coalition governments, I think it made it easier for the election commission also to function more autonomously.

But the simple answer to your question is there just simply has to be a political will to do the reforms that are necessary. I don't expect it to happen unless you have a prime minister, strong prime minister in the saddle who says, okay, I don't mind if I don't come back to power the next time round. But these things I will do.

NIDHI RAZDAN: Shekhar Gupta, just to take off on what Neerja Chowdhary just said in terms of let's move on to sort of the election electoral reforms that there are so many of them. I mean we could be here all night, but what would you say the election commissioner of India over these decades has really got, right? And what does it need to get right? Is it election funding primarily? You think that we are still in a hole.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: The Election Commission got the mechanics of holding an election right. Mechanics, if anything, have gotten better I would say with every election. It's not just that counting is so quick and results come quickly, but you get much fewer complaints. People get privacy in the booth. I've just had for an audience, a bunch of bankers who said, why can't voting be online in Bangalore? They want everything to be online, so why can't voting be online? So, it's very difficult to explain to them that online means somebody's voting from their homes. Somebody will walk into the home with two 'lathies'



“But why not have an appointment panel? Right now, as you know, there's a Supreme Court judgement suggesting a panel that would include the Chief Justice of India, until Parliament rules otherwise. And parliament of course means unfortunately in our present system, the executive.”

“We've developed a reputation for having an election commission of true neutrality and independence, which has also acquired a lot of expertise in running elections in a country with the kind of challenges we have with many other developing countries.”



and say, I'm watching who you are voting for. So, it's very important for a voter to go to a booth, get that privacy and get a sense of security. So over time, election after election, that has improved. Those are things that are good and I would say by and large are fair. There are two problems. One is a problem that election committee doesn't have to address. That's a problem that the Supreme Court has to address.

One is a problem that the Supreme Court has to address, but that can, a call on anonymous electoral bonds. Before last elections, they said it's too close to the elections right now. They will say it's too close to the elec-



Neerja Chowdhary

“There just simply has to be a political will to do the reforms that are necessary. I don't expect it to happen unless you have a prime minister, strong prime minister in the saddle who says, okay, I don't mind if I don't come back to power the next time round. But these things I will do.”



Nidhi Razdan

“We are at a crossroads. We are the mother of democracy on one hand and on the other our institutions including the election commission, are increasingly being scrutinized for what is believed to be their partisan stand on issues.”

tions. Five years from now they'll again say it's too close to the elections. So, when anonymous electoral bonds were brought in, Arun Jaitley said it's the first step, at least there will be no cash needed now, but what does the first step mean? This is a completely unfair system because the government knows who has paid how much money to whom, because the State Bank of India is the Government of India. The Government is the majority shareholder, but no other knows. That one single thing has upset the balance in the electoral process.

So, there are challenges. It's a work in progress. But as far as the electoral process is concerned, this electoral funding now, it's not a question of cash being passed under the table. Now it's given legally in such a way that one side knows, only one side knows who's paying whom.

NIDHI RAZDAN: And the voters don't know. We don't know how parties are being funded.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: And that's easily fixed.

NIDHI RAZDAN: Absolutely. And that's why I spoke right at the beginning about the two institutions in particular who seem to have weakened today, which is the judiciary. As Shekhar rightly said, the Supreme Court will now hear the electoral bonds matter from the 31st of October, not in time I guess for the next round of assembly elections. I want to quickly touch on so many things, simultaneous elections. So, if I sort of be the devil's advocate here, the logic is it's going to be cheaper. We are going to get out of this continuous cycle of elections. You don't need a model code of conduct every time, the business of governance can go on. It's just a more efficient way to do it. And we started when we were independent, we had simultaneous elections till the early sixties. So why can't we do it now?

SHASHI THAROOR: Well, because the mirror is already cracked and in fact it's not just cracked in '67 when the SVD governments were formed and then it failed and fell at different times. So elections were necessitated later, but now we've got the mirrors have completely shattered that you really can't piece it together again because pretty much every six months there's an election somewhere.

But frankly that's not anybody else's fault but the prime minister's and the ruling party's. They have chosen the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, to be the principal campaigners in every stage election, every municipal election in a big city. They don't have to, that's not their job. The prime Minister's job is to run the country, not to win elections for his party. Others can do that. The honest truth is that this is a way of trying to press gag the system into a uniformity that is completely illusory. We are a diverse country. We are a country with a number of different traditions, cultures, political cultures as well. And frankly every state has its own story. Even if somehow artificially by shortening some terms and expanding some terms, all of which will be arguably unconstitutional, you manage to have one set of elections altogether once, which would be a small nightmare anyway, given the number



of seats at stake and the number of EVMs required and number of personnel required, all of that, you have it once. What's to prevent one of these governments falling again six months, nine months from now, if your only solution is keep President's rule until the next election cycle is due, that's undemocratic. That would surely be violating of the basic principles of the Constitution. So, I don't see that this is a feasible reform, let alone whether it's desirable or not. Because as I say, I mean once the mirror has cracked, you cannot possibly be set together again and get an accurate reflection.

NIDHI RAZDAN: Mr. Nariman, if I could get your comment on this idea of simultaneous polls. Do you see it as an attempt in a sense to homogenize everything one nation, one election, one leader, dare I say maybe no elections?

FALI NARIMAN: One president. The whole point is that because it's a moving towards a presidential system of government, I have convinced that it is at some point of time and therefore we have to be extraordinarily careful if we are saying we are democratic and we hold elections and so on. And what Shashi Tharoor rightly points out the election bonds syndrome is a very, very dangerous syndrome because it's only the big money bags who can then with whom the ruling party, whichever it is, whether it's Congress or it's the BJP, they align itself to, and that's the greatest danger in our country because you see the whole world today is getting more and more autocratic. And it's time that we take note of this trend and see what we can do to reverse it. And one of the most important parts of it is the chapter on elections in the Constitution, what sort of laws we need.

SHASHI THAROOR: If I may just add given, and we've already talked about some of this, given the hollowing out of our democratic institutions and practices, we haven't even mentioned how parliament has been reduced to rubber stamp. Given all of that, elections are actually the only vehicle for popular accountability, for holding governments accountable for their performance and therefore to reduce their number and frequency itself is undemocratic because the more elections you have, the more opportunity you have to register your views about the government in a concurrent way. In some ways Fali Saab, a presidential system would be more honest. At least you'll have an independent legislature. Right now, we have the worst of both worlds. We have a parliamentary system being run presidentially and the parliament is completely toothless.

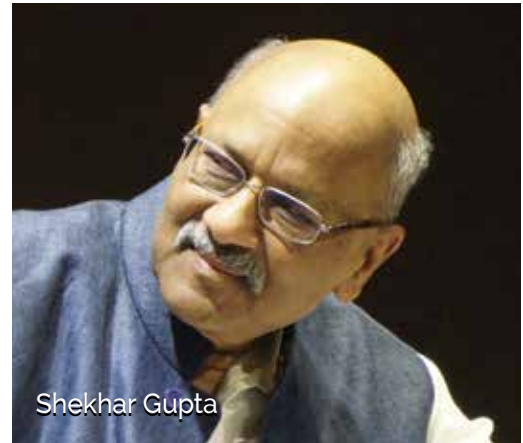
FALI NARIMAN: In a presidential system, we won't be able to have a meeting like this.

SHASHI THAROOR: Well, that's a different argument we need to have because I do believe that the logic of the presidential system is complete separation of powers. The executive would not be formed by the legislation, therefore couldn't control it. But that's a different conversation.

NIDHI RAZDAN: You're talking about the US system. Dr. Quraishi, your views of simultaneous polls not being feasible.

DR. QURAISHI: Actually, the government report, there was a preliminary committee which says that it should be simultaneous, but one basic flaw in the whole argument. Initially Prime Minister said that all three tiers should be simultaneous, but gradually 3 million Panchayat elected person they forgot about. That left us with 4,120 MLAs & 543 MPs. So, it is a dilution of the proposal. Then the parliamentary committee and the Niti Aayog committee come out with a proposal, alright, if not once in five years, let's do two in five years with that kind of dilution, what moral authority is left in the proposal and then what we hear, look from the beginning, for the first 10 years, there used to be simultaneous election.

Yes, that's part of history. But what happened in the 11th year because states started falling, we started having separate election. Then finally, among various arguments, there are pros and cons of this. As one MP said, ask the people what do they want? They love elections because that is the only power they have. And the money, if they said it'll save money. Now the 60,000 crores which was spent



“It's very important for a voter to go to a booth, get that privacy and get a sense of security. So over time, election after election, that has improved. Those are things that are good and I would say by and large are fair. There are two problems. One is a problem that election committee doesn't have to address. That's a problem that the Supreme Court has to address.”

by the politicians, it was recycled. It went to the poor people, the labourer, the painter, the auto drivers. So actually, it is doing good to the economy. And I had a very interesting slogan by a girl in a youth parliament in Pune. *Jab jab chunav aata hai, garib ke peth mein pulao aata hai* (whenever elections are held, the poor are fed well).

Otherwise, how many times we have seen the MP or MLA disappear for five years. So therefore, because of repeated election, they have to go back again and again. And finally, they should know now there are only two or three the stakeholders who will be affected by frequency. Suppose the election is happening in, does it affect you or me? We won't even know that the election is happening, only the political party who's contesting and the election commission because we have to be there, everywhere. And the media. Media should be happy because this gives you work. **DI**

ABOUT

S Y Quraishi is a former Chief Election Commissioner, a former Haryana cadre officer; a prolific author and political commentator.

GLOBAL HEADWINDS: OUR RESPONSE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS



by DR. MANORANJAN SHARMA

A day after the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war (i.e., October 7, 2023), Gaza based Hamas, an Islamist group, launched 7,000 rockets on Israeli targets heightening global geo-political tensions. These are times of great challenge and turbulence. We already had the Russia-Ukraine war for close to two years. Now we also have a global flashpoint in Israel and Palestine. There are lurking fears that things could take a turn for the worse in China and Taiwan. So, all this needs to be placed in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is widely considered to be one of the most severe economic and medical emergencies in the last hundred years. The nearest comparisons are the Spanish flu of 1919 and in terms of the hit to income, output and employment; it was also seen as the most severe debilitating crisis, much more than the Global Depression, the Global Financial Crisis of October

Bond yields will harden, cost of credit may go up for companies, crude price will rise if it spills over to the Middle East. There can be a sustained reduction in oil supply. Surging crude oil could impact domestic inflation and interest rates could remain persistently high for a prolonged period. The disconcerting mix of war risk, spurt in US bond yield to record highs and volatile crude support the safe-haven dollar. Technically, the greenback is still in an uptrend and the upcoming correction could be the normal retracement. Gold may become a safe haven.

2008 and even the Great Depression of 1929. No wonder, then, the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2023 characterised the present situation as 'polycrisis' to stress that "present and future risks can also interact with each other to form a 'polycrisis' - a cluster of related global risks with compounding effects, such that the overall impact exceeds the sum of each part".

India recovered well post the pandemic and multilateral institutions like IMF, RBI, World Bank, ADB and OECD are agree that India is on a steady growth path of 6 to 6.5%. But one size does not fit all. What worsened matters was that in several countries, particularly in advanced economies like the US and the UK, inflation was very close to double digits, 9%, 10% also, in case of US and UK which was a 40- or even a 50-year high. Things were coming slightly on track but there are also fears of stagflation with the inflationary spiral and slackness in GDP growth.

The surprise Israel-Palestine war has wide-ranging ramifications and repercussions across geographies, economies and sectors. There is volatility in the bond and equity

market albeit temporarily. Bond yields will harden, cost of credit may go up for companies, crude price will rise if it spills over to the Middle East. There can be a sustained reduction in oil supply. Surging crude oil could impact domestic inflation and interest rates could remain persistently high for a prolonged period. The disconcerting mix of war risk, spurt in US bond yield to record highs and volatile crude support the safe-haven dollar. Technically, the greenback is still in an uptrend and the upcoming correction could be the normal retracement. Gold may become a safe haven.

Swap traders are divided on the chances of another Federal Reserve rate hike by December, pricing in roughly 50% likelihood after the non-farm payrolls report showed employers quickened the pace of hiring.

The Federal Reserve warned of escalating geopolitical risks to global financial system with Middle East conflict and war in Ukraine threatening 'spillovers' to markets amid heightened risks of higher inflation and slower growth. The Fed said "the global financial system could be affected by a pullback from risk-taking, declines in asset prices, and losses for exposed businesses and investors, including those in the US".

At the global level, recently, the IMF has placed in public domain a very comprehensive report on this issue which demonstrates that a 10 point basis hike by the US Fed which will reduce commodity prices by 0.5% to 2.5% with a lag of 18 to 24 days and there are larger effects for highly storable and industrial goods. Accordingly, there could be some kind of a divergent stance between central banks of different countries depending on their peculiar circumstances and distinctive conditions.

Global spillovers

There could be a further flashpoint in the Middle East and the Israel-Palestinian war may well spill over to Iran. With some unconfirmed reports indicating that China could also have some part to play in it, the US bringing two of its warships in close proximity to the hotspot and China also parking its warship in the troubled waters, the situation is evolving and it is difficult to foresee how things will pan out. If the war is localised, then we do not see things going beyond manageable proportions. But if Iran is also affected and there is some kind of a major flashpoint with China, then things could spiral and go out of hand. In this kind of a doomsday scenario, all bets would be off.

Iran is contextually significant because of the crude

The surprise Israel-Palestine war has wide-ranging ramifications and repercussions across geographies, economies and sectors. There is volatility in the bond and equity market albeit temporarily. Bond yields will harden, cost of credit may go up for companies, crude price will rise if it spills over to the Middle East.



The disconcerting mix of war risk, spurt in US bond yield to record highs and volatile crude support the safe-haven dollar. Technically, the greenback is still in an uptrend and the upcoming correction could be the normal retracement. Gold may become a safe haven.

oil output of almost 3 million barrels per day (mb/d), i.e., about 3% of the global production but more importantly, 20% of the total crude oil production passes through the Persian Gulf.

Indian scenario

In the case of India, this war would have multiple macroeconomic impacts and also have several implications for the financial and banking sector. Bond yields will go up -- as interest rates would rise further, oil prices would go further up. This would impact the Indian capital market, the banking sector and the triple deficits - trade deficit, current account deficit and also to a limited extent, fiscal deficit.

FIIIs are continuously selling due to higher bond yields and high crude oil prices could add more issues. India and the rest of the world are now tackling the bigger, higher threat of inflation. In this grim overall setting, the breaking out of another war, besides the on-going Russia-Ukraine war and the lingering impact of the pandemic makes the transition growth pathway uneasy and the ascent to growth difficult and uneven. This leads to the fears of the central banks around the world launching a fresh cycle of rate hikes to control inflation and the RBI will have to carefully straddle the growth-inflation trade-off. But in the case of India, we did not see RBI cutting rates prior to April 2024 next year. Now, this could delay things a little more.

All this depends on the severity of the Israeli counterattack and the duration- does it end swiftly with a crippling blow to Hamas or it drags into a long protracted war, e.g., Russia



-Ukraine war? My sense is for a swift, bloody war and Hamas getting a debilitating blow. But this is an evolving situation and would further heighten geo-political tensions, which were already exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine war and the posturing or worse in the Taiwan region.

Sectoral impact-a granular examination

While surging oil prices have a cascading macro-economic impact across sectors and could trigger a risk-off in the market, oil-based sectors like automobiles, transportation, aviation, paints, tyres, cement and chemicals could take the greatest hit. So far, the market doesn't seem to be unduly disrupted by the war-related risk because the supply-demand oil dynamics continue to be unfettered.

Some of Indian stocks with an Israeli connection include Adani Ports, which owns Haifa Port in Israel; Sun Pharmaceutical, which owns a majority stake in Israel's Taro Pharmaceutical; Dr. Reddy's and Lupin because of a potential impact on sector bellwether Tel Aviv-based Teva Pharmaceutical; NMDC and jewellers Kalyan Jewellers and Titan. Further, oil marketing companies could be adversely impacted and there are apprehensions that the war could impact India's plan of building an India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor as reflected in the falling prices of railway stocks like IRCON, Jupiter Wagons, and RVNL in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. The bearish Indian stock market is also attributable to the gradual downsizing of the Canadian Pension Fund, redemption pressure on FII's for profit taking, high P/E ratio and overheated segments of the market, the US Fed and unassertive role of the LIC. But it is instructive to see how stocks perform after major events. Clearly, extensive pessimism is unwarranted.

Volatility in oil

In case of crude oil prices, exacerbating two-pronged pressure stemmed from first Russia and now the Middle East. For natural gas, Europe reduced its dependence on Russia and then turned to the Middle East. This crushing war threw a spanner in the works and seems to have inordinately delayed things by disrupting critical supply chains. This has certainly rudely shocked investors across the world, including in India because oil is the basic catalytic agent. Oil prices in the last few days have dropped from \$96 a barrel to \$93 a barrel. At present, it is trading in a very narrow band of \$87 to \$89. But oil prices could breach the psychological barrier of \$ 100 a barrel.

Strategic options and choices

A no-holds barred war is now on with Israel strongly pushing back to secure its borders with Gaza, ending the incursion of Hamas fighters into

While surging oil prices have a cascading macro-economic impact across sectors and could trigger a risk-off in the market, oil-based sectors could take the greatest hit.

its territory, destroying the group's capabilities, and rescuing more than 200 Israeli hostages being held in Gaza. But whether it remains a localised conflict or the Iranian government also jumps in the fray going well beyond the pre-war direct and indirect support of the Iranian government remains to be seen. There could be some kind of a further flashpoint, it could spill over to Iran and China could also have some part to play in it. The US has also brought its warship very close to the hotspot as indeed has China. So the situation is evolving and it is difficult to foresee. But if the war is localised, then we do not see things going beyond manageable proportions. If Iran is also affected and there is some kind of a major flashpoint with China, then there could be a free fall.

Even if this kind of worst-case scenario does not materialise, there are distinct fears of a multi-front war in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon, especially as Iran is supporting Hamas, Hizbullah and a smaller group, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). While gazing into the crystal ball and predicting the likely shape of things to come is fraught with uncertainties, there are not many chances of this conflagration degenerating into a wider regional war. While Israel would eventually (our estimate is within 90 days) succeed in its military and territorial objectives, all parties to the war would be devastated. The post-war situation would also be characterized by continued insecurity and instability in daily life and the business environment in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon would be scarred for long.

Where do we go from here? Concerns about Iran, broader geopolitical developments, shared economic interests and the perceived need to be on the right side of the US because of its financial might and clout will ensure on-going co-operation between Israel and some Arab nations. But given the trust deficit on both sides, the thaw in relations between Israel and Arab states will take some time and some doing. □



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Manoranjan Sharma is Chief Economist, Infomerics, India. With a brilliant academic record, he has over 250 publications and

six books. His views have been cited in the Associated Press, New York; Dow Jones, New York; International Herald Tribune, New York; Wall Street Journal, New York.

THE PRESIDENT HONOURS THE BIG ACHIEVEMENTS IN INDIAN FILM INDUSTRY



A grand celebration of Indian cinema and its outstanding achievements! At the 69th annual National Film Awards in New Delhi, India's President honoured among others-actors Alia Bhatt and Kriti Sannon; Allu Arjun, who created history in being the first Telugu actor to win the Best Actor award; leading yesteryear star Waheeda Rehman who got the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Lifetime Achievement Award! Present on the occasion was Anurag Thakur, Union minister for information and Broadcasting.



Bihar Caste Census: A Political Masterstroke?

The recently released caste survey in Bihar has created political ripples. The move has the potential to shape India's political discourse and alignment going forward. However, how much will it benefit the INDIA alliance electorally remains to be seen.



by SHASHANK SHEKHAR

The old-timers, students, and enthusiasts of politics would remember the political rumbles unleashed by the tussle between Mandal and Kamandal in the late 1980s. The then prime minister VP Singh decided to implement the findings of the Mandal Commission during his short yet highly-tumultuous stint, which recommended reserving 27% of government jobs for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Many saw this move as an affirmative action for historically marginalized communities, which was on the lines of the reservation system for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, granted by the constitution since India's independence. However, it also led to the emergence of LK Advani as the mascot of Hindutva politics, who undertook the famous Rath Yatra to promote the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. The idea was to unite the Hindus under one umbrella and pose a counter-narrative to the budding caste politics.

While Advani was successful in catapulting the Bharatiya Janata

“This caste survey will be beneficial for all and enable the government to work for the development of various sections of society, including those who are deprived. This will help us to know which areas require development. Let the data come and I'm sure that the other States will also follow it.”

Nitish Kumar

Chief Minister, Bihar

Party (BJP) onto the national scene, helping the party bag its highest-ever numbers in the 1991 general elections, it also altered the nation's political landscape, leading to the rise of regional satraps like Kanshi Ram, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Yadav, and Nitish Kumar. This transformative moment in Indian politics was marked by a struggle for social justice, caste-based reservations, and a reconfiguration of power dynamics, galvanizing OBC communities, which now command a lion's share of India's political power. It also unleashed the rise of the coalition politics, which remained a force to reckon with until the 2014 general elections, where BJP, led by PM Modi, became the first party since 1984, to storm to power and get a simple majority on its own.

Some thirty-four-odd years later, a recent caste census undertaken by the government of Bihar has the makings of yet another seismic shift in Indian politics. Bihar, like many other states in India, conducted a caste census in 2021. The undertaking sought a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic landscape in one of India's most populous states. Aimed at collecting detailed data about the caste-based demographics and socio-econo-



Mandal Commission: A Background

The Mandal Commission, officially known as the Second Backward Classes Commission, was constituted in 1979 by the Indian government, led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai, and chaired by B.P. Mandal.

The commission's primary mandate was to identify socially and educationally backward classes among the population and recommend measures for their upliftment.

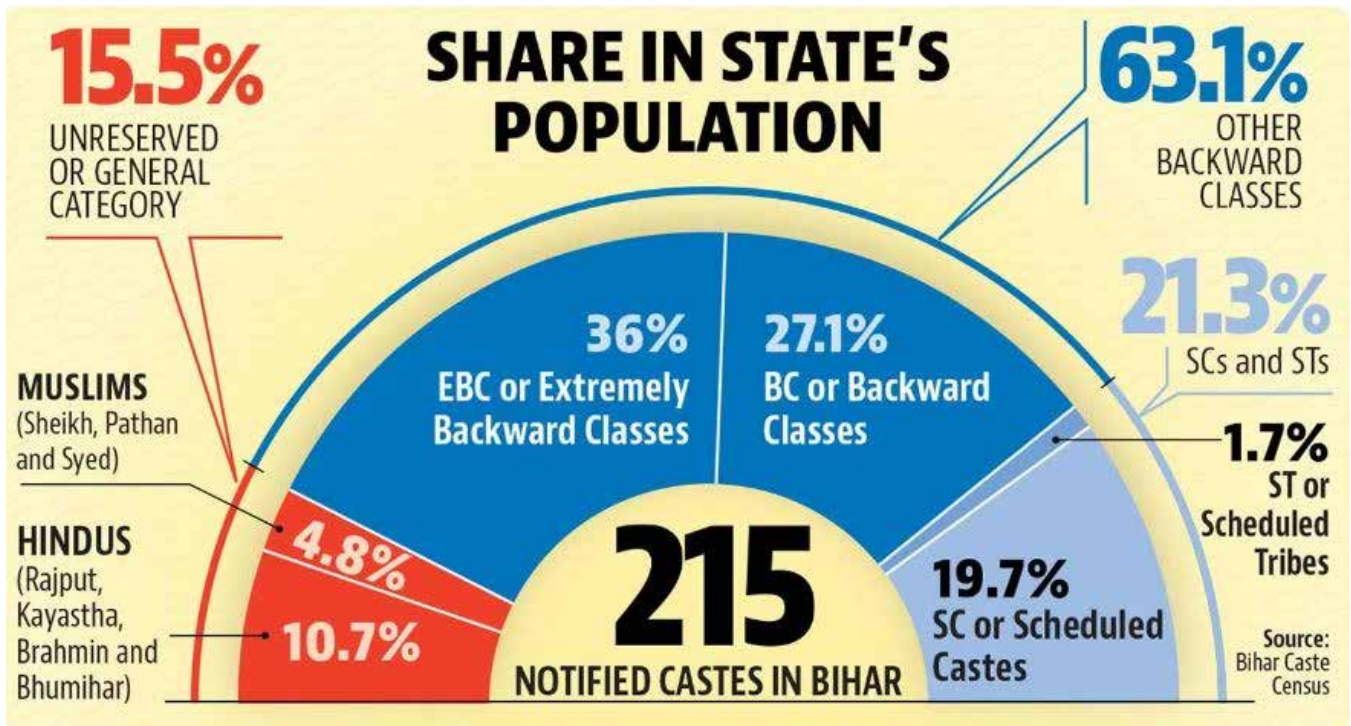
The Mandal Commission recommendations unleashed a political firestorm in India. On one side, there were vociferous proponents of the reservation policy who argued that it was essential to rectify historical injustices and uplift the marginalized sections of society. On the flip side, others vehemently opposed it calling it "reverse discrimination" and an attack on meritocracy.

The Mandal Commission report of the late 1980s was a watershed moment, leading to significant changes in the country's political landscape. It brought the issues of social justice, affirmative action, and caste-based reservations to the forefront, reshaping the dynamics of power and representation. The legacy of the Mandal Commission continues to influence and shape Indian politics and society.



“What would the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh be thinking? Former Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh used to say that the minorities have the first right on the resources of the country and that too the Muslims, but now the Congress is saying that the population will decide who will have the first right. Does Congress now want to reduce the rights of the minorities?”

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister



“The caste census of Bihar has revealed that OBC SC ST are 84% there. Out of 90 secretaries of the Central Government, only 3 are OBC, who handle only 5% of India’s budget! Therefore, it is important to know the caste statistics of India. The greater the population, the greater the rights – this is our pledge.”

Rahul Gandhi

Member of Parliament, Wayanad

“Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar play caste-based politics. Backward class plays a vital role but Nitish Kumar has not done anything for the backward class... Bihar CM has done nothing for the development of the state.”

Samrat Choudhary

President, BJP, Bihar

“Today, on Gandhi Jayanti, we all bear witness to this historic moment. Despite numerous schemes and legal obstacles by the BJP, Bihar’s government has released the caste-based survey data. These numbers will provide an equitable representation of various groups for comprehensive planning and development, ensuring justice to the marginalized, neglected, and impoverished sections.”

Lalu Prasad Yadav

RJD Supremo and Former Member of Parliament



economic conditions of the state’s population, the census sought to offer insights into the distribution of various caste groups, their economic status, access to education, healthcare, and other key socio-economic indicators. The census was conducted as part of the larger Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) initiative launched by the Government of India, eyeing a comprehensive database to create policies around social justice, reservation, and welfare programs.

The Key Objectives of the Caste Census

- **Unravelling the state’s caste dynamics:** The government of Bihar sought an updated picture of the distribution of various caste and sub-caste groups, which it suggested was crucial for identifying marginalized communities and addressing their specific needs.
- **Socio-economic profiling:** Beyond caste, the census collected data on the economic and social conditions of households. This data could help formulate targeted welfare schemes and addressing disparities in access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.
- **Policy formulation:** The data gathered from this census is expected to play a critical role in shaping policies related to reservations and affirmative action programs. It can help ensure that these policies benefit the most marginalized sections of the population.

Key Findings

Total Population	13.07 crores
Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs)	36.01 %
Other Backward Classes (OBCs)	27.12 %
Scheduled Castes	19.65 %
Scheduled Tribes	1.68%
Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs and Jains	< 1 %



The data collected in the recent caste census is expected to have far-reaching implications for Bihar, helping design policies and programs that could address deeply-entrenched socio-economic disparities, improve access to education and healthcare, and uplift marginalized communities. Additionally, it can paint a better picture of the distribution of resources and opportunities, ensuring that they reach they most needy.

Why the Political Storm?

Like previous caste censuses in India, the 2021 exercise has not been without its share of challenges and controversies. BJP and other parties opposing the census suggest that the exercise is setting a dangerous precedent and trying to divide the country on caste lines. Reading between the lines, the exercise threatens to derail the BJP's attempts to consolidate Hindu voters just before the all-important 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The INDIA alliance, meanwhile, views this as a masterstroke that can derail PM Modi's juggernaut.

PM Modi's sharp reactions and frontal attacks on the INDIA alliance and the idea of the caste survey indicate that the BJP remains wary of the development, especially as it gears to fight polls in five crucial states, in the run-up to the 2024 general elections. The census has already been challenged in the Supreme Court and the apex court has refused the petitioners' request to stop the state government from going public with the data findings. The INDIA alliance has been buoyed by the findings, and senior Congress leaders like Digvijay Singh, former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, have gone public to say that they would implement a similar survey if voted to power. Even BJP's allies like Anupriya Patel of Apna Dal have echoed similar sentiments.


Nitish Kumar's bold gambit has put the ball in BJP's court. Mandal 2.0 will have far-reaching consequences, or will it? Only time will tell.

The data collected in the recent caste census is expected to have far-reaching implications for Bihar, helping design policies and programs that could address deeply-entrenched socio-economic disparities, improve access to education and healthcare, and uplift marginalized communities. Additionally, it can paint a better picture of the distribution of resources and opportunities, ensuring that they reach they most needy.

Rahul Gandhi's idea of political representation based on population can open a new Pandora's Box for political parties vying for 120 seats in the Hindi heartland (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh cumulatively send 120 members of parliament), which holds the key to BJP's chances of securing a third straight mandate since coming to power in 2014.

The census catapults Nitish Kumar as a champion of backward castes and a front-runner in the race to become the face of the INDIA alliance, should the multi-party alliance be able to grab a sufficient number of seats. Much remains in the realm of ambiguity, judicial examination, and the outcome of the soon-to-be-held state elections in Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh. If BJP is able to hold onto power in Madhya Pradesh, dislodge Gehlot in Rajasthan, Bhagel in Chhattisgarh, and emerge as a key player in Telangana, it would have enough firepower to shape the narrative. On the contrary, dismal performances in key state elections will only embolden non-BJP state governments to fiddle with the idea of a state caste census, creating a counter-narrative to BJP's Hindu consolidation.

Politics aside, some of the other key issues around such an exercise are the lack of accuracy of self-reported caste data, potential disputes over categorization, and worries about the misuse of information for political purposes. Those against the idea of caste-based reservations also argue that focusing singularly on caste may not suffice in addressing diversity-related challenges like gender, religion, or regional disparities, and may not lead to adequately inclusive and comprehensive policies.

Nitish Kumar's bold gambit has put the ball in BJP's court. Mandal 2.0 will have far-reaching consequences, or will it? Only time will tell. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shashank Shekhar is a freelance journalist, keeps track of political and social issues.

MANI TALK ON RAJIV GANDHI

The Prime Minister and the Man he can Recall from his Memoirs

In conversation with **Rahul Singh** and **Malavika Sangghvi**, two notable journalists, at the Khushwant Singh Lit Fest in Kasauli, author and politician **Mani Shankar Aiyar** recalls his association with the late prime minister, as he has portrayed him in his recent book released earlier in the capital.



RAHUL SINGH: Mani writes about his school days in his book, by the way, a most readable book. Even the bits, which I was not all that familiar with, I found most readable. But the part which I personally liked most of all was how you got close to Rajiv Gandhi, and you made it very clear that you did not really know him at all before that. People think that this part of the Doon School coterie that was ruling India at one time, but there was nobody really from Doon School.

MALAVIKA: No, there was Arun Singh.

MANI: But he only lasted a year.

MALAVIKA: Anyway, what we're going to talk about is, of course everybody knows that Mani has written about Rajiv Gandhi. He has spoken about him. But I wanted to take the conversation to something deeper. I wanted to engage Mani and Rahul in something about what he thinks is a man of great character. What is a man of great principle? Let him define those things for us. And then let's start a debate on what between the audience and us and Mani, what are those values that really make a man

memorable and somebody we can say he's got great character. Was Rajiv Gandhi a man like that?

MANI: In my view, yes. I didn't know him at all. What little I knew of him, I didn't really appreciate. I didn't think we should have a dynasty. I was astonished that an airline pilot was being made Prime Minister of India. He didn't have a good academic record. In fact, he had the distinction of having failed at both Cambridge as well as the Imperial College. And so, when I learned that he'd become the Prime Minister of India, I was shocked less at him then at the country, and then came the Sikh riots, or rather I'd call it the Sikh pogrom. And I found myself very, very disturbed by what was happening. I was also very deeply concerned for myself because my wife being a Sikh and me not being a Sikh, I just wondered which side was going to get us. But I later learned that he had gone out when he discovered that his Home Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao and his Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, had both completely fallen on their faces as far as stopping the pogrom was concerned. He went in his own car to the worst affected areas at 2:30 am in the morning and on return and ensured that the Indian army came in from Meerut. It could not have come in from Delhi because the Delhi cantonment strength, as told to me by Maj Gen Grewal is always kept low.

MALAVIKA: But Mani, Rajiv Gandhi also made that statement, which seemed like an apology for the pogrom. He said, when a tall tree falls, the earth is bound to shake. And that was used many times against him and his government.

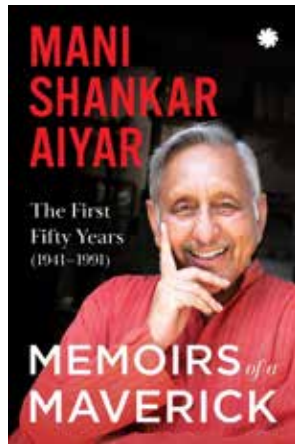
MANI: Yes, it was. But that was, I think a highly motivated attack on him for it is generally believed even by people like Jairam Ramesh, who belong to my circle that Rajeev said that on the first day, and that as soon as the riots broke out, he said, when a big tree falls, the earth will shake a little. And Vajpayee in his typical style said, no, no, it's wrong. It's when the earth shakes a little that the tree falls. But this, it has to be remembered that it was only after his personal actions as a completely new and raw Prime Minister had brought matters to a complete dead stop by the 3rd of November. That 16 days later when for 16 days there had not been a single killing, at least in Delhi, then it was that it turned out to be his mother's birthday. And at that birthday celebration on the 19th of November is when in a speech where just before this sentence comes, he's appealing for peace and a refusal to take revenge that he says that the only way that one can view what happened, he doesn't condone it, he doesn't justify it, is to recognize that it is a fact of nature that when the tree falls, the earth shakes. This has been misused again and again for the last 40 years. So, I thought I had better explain the entire background. I've given extracts in my book from all the speeches that he made between the 1st and the 5th of November, whereby which time things had come to a standstill.

But I also criticize him. I also fault him for four major errors. I think the book says six, but I'm not going to go into the other two because it'll be too long. The first error he made was that he did not apologize personally. It took a Sikh Prime Minister more than, or nearly 20 years later as Prime Minister to apologize for the events of 1984. Second, he did not dismiss his cousin, who was the Commissioner of Police. He removed him later, but that by then it was too long, too late. Third, he didn't announce a commission of inquiry.

And the Ranganath Misra Commission of Inquiry was established six months after these events in April 1986, by which time it had no political impact. I think the last thing I would say is that he never said, he did not at that time say anything that could have brought comfort.

MALAVIKA: And why do you think he didn't?

MANI: Well, what did he do then? He then showed that in his view, it was not words that mattered, but action that mattered. So as soon as he'd won the election in December of 1985, in January of 1986, he immediately released Sant Harchand Singh Longowal. While I was then taken into the PMO and put in charge of organizing his trips and travels, and Harinder Baweja had used the manager tours and travels to describe my designation. And so I was with Rajiv when he went to Hussainiwala in Punjab, and there was not a word of retribution towards the Sikhs who had killed his mother. Instead, there was a long hand of friendship extended, and I didn't know then. But we all learned later that the reason he'd appointed Arjun Singh as the Governor of Punjab was to get a conversation going between Longowal and all his companions and the Government of India through the governor in order to create the ground through which eventually, and by eventually, I only mean July of that year, he talked to



“I didn't know him at all. What little I knew of him, I didn't really appreciate. I didn't think we should have a dynasty. I was astonished that an airline pilot was being made Prime Minister of India.”



Longowal directly and the Rajiv-Longowal Accord was signed and elections were declared in Punjab. So his actions spoke very loudly, more loudly, I think, than his words. I wish he had combined his words with his action, but at least in evaluating his words or lack of them, I think his actions should be considered.

RAHUL: But Mani don't you think the Congress was behind those riots?

MANI: No.

RAHUL: No?

MANI: No.

RAHUL: Well...

MANI: I think because I think there may have been individual Congressmen involved, one of them.

RAHUL: Arun Nehru?

MALAVIKA: No, no.

MANI: No, Arun Nehru's role has been mentioned. I have mentioned that in my book. But I've said that I have no evidence of this at all.

RAHUL: Now there Mani, I disagree with you. I think the Congress was behind those. And that is why whenever people talk about the Gujarat riots, they counter saying, well, what about the Sikh riots?

MANI: Well, now that you've said that, I would like you personally to give me the evidence that you have regarding the involvement of the Congress as a party. As individuals there have been cases going against Jagdish Tytler for the last 40 years and have not come to a conclusion. There was the Ranganath Misra Commission, there was then another committee, I forgotten what his name was.

RAHUL: Ved Marwah also had something, had a committee.

MANI: The point is that it is not enough to make a statement. As a policeman Ved Marwah knew very well that he would have to establish this, and forums were established by Rajiv Gandhi and by subsequent Congress government where whatever evidence there was could have been led. And if they weren't, well, it's not the fault of the Congress. It is the fault of those who had information but didn't come forth.

“There were three major problems that he (Rajiv Gandhi) had inherited. The Punjab problem, the Assam problem, and the Mizoram problem, these were the three big insurgencies. And his solution to each one of them was extraordinarily patriotic.”

MALAVIKA: Okay. But one thing, the session is not about Rajiv. It is about Mani's value, why he admired the man and whether he has seen those qualities in other people during his rich career of diplomacy, politics and writing journalism. What were the qualities you admired? Now you've stated that he was a man of action. Perhaps he couldn't communicate as well as he should have. He was a man of empathy, would you say?

MANI: I would say that he was a man of enormous compassion. He lacked ambition because he didn't need to have ambition to get to the position that he did. As a quality he assumed, he assumed wrongly I think that others in the company of politicians would also lack that killer instinct to just promote their own interests.

MALAVIKA: So, was he naïve?

MANI: No, because when it came to the problems that he had inherited, and there were three major problems that he had inherited. The Punjab problem, the Assam problem, and the Mizoram problem, these were the three big insurgencies. And his solution to each one of them was extraordinarily patriotic in the sense that he sacrificed his party's interest to get those who were against India and against the government of India to come onto their side.

The first example of that was the deal he did with Longowal. The essence of which was that an election would be held in Punjab, which every Congressman knew the Congress would lose. And as predicted, the Akali Dal won and Barnala became the Chief Minister. That there were complications subsequently about other aspects of the deal. I don't think I should take up too much time explaining them, but I have explained them in great length in a book that is about to come out, which is about Rajiv Gandhi. This book is about me.

The second major problem he had was Assam and Assam in the sensitive Northeast was a problem that had not been handled by his predecessor, his own mother. He instructed his Home Secretary to tell the boys that they should put down whatever they want on



a piece of paper, and that he would then accept what they said subject to ratification by the electorate. And as a result of that electorate, the existing Congress government of Hiteswar Saikia lost.

And Mizoram which is something that very few people in the rest of India seem to care about, had had a 20-year insurgency caused by bamboo flowering. It started in 1966, and Rajiv came into this in 1986. For 20 years, successive governments of India had failed to come to an accommodation with Laldenga, despite the fact that 15 years before Rajiv became the prime Minister, no, sorry, 13 years before he became Prime Minister, East Pakistan had become Bangladesh.

So, the kind of assistance that Laldenga was getting from East Pakistan seized with the creation of Bangladesh, yet the insurgency continued. So, what did he do? He told Laldenga who was leading the insurgency that you become the Chief Minister without an election. And my Chief Minister, whom you've been trying to assassinate for 30 years will become your Deputy. And after that government is formed, you fight an election and then if you win, you'll become an elected Chief Minister. And sure enough, in the election, Laldenga won. There was later on another election and the Congress came back to power. Since then, for the last 30 years, there has been complete peace in Mizoram which is an integral part of our country. It's setting an example to Delhi by taking in the refugees that are being driven out by the Junta from Myanmar, they have shown the country a lead. And this has been done by changing from a Congress to an MNF that is the Mizo National Front government every 10 years. It's an absolutely remarkable example of putting yourself in your enemy's feet and then trying to find a solution that would be accepted by all.

MALAVIKA: So much wealth of admiration, absolute loyalty, really adulation for this gentleman.

MANI: No, there's no absolute loyalty. And there's no absolute adulation.

MALAVIKA: No, but he's not there anymore. Was the loss deeper personally or for the country?

MANI: It was all for the country because in each of the three cases I mentioned, the consequence was that the Congress party, which had fought a bitter political battle in Punjab against the Akali Dal, found itself being sidelined by its own Congress President Rajiv Gandhi in Assam, there was actually a congress government that had been elected under in Gandhi's dispensation. It was led by a man called Hiteswar Saikia, who was asked to, was forced to fight an election that was not due, and inevitably he lost the election and then he was sent as governor of Mizoram. And there he had a major role to play in affecting the accord between Rajiv Gandhi and Laldenga that led to peace of a kind that the rest of India has not experienced in the last 40 years.

MALAVIKA: Why don't you tell the audience about what you've written about in the book about how he said to you between the Shah Bano decision and the Babri Masjid decision, he has lost all his support base, which shows how larger than the situation he was, he was willing to

risk his own personal equity for the better good, for the greater good. **MANI:** No, I think the Shah Bano story needs to start with a remark that Rajiv made to me when he was more or less changing things after the 1985 decision. He said to me, even Sonia does not agree with me. And now Neerja Chowdhury has said that D P Tripathi had reported to her that he'd witnessed an argument between husband and wife. And since Rajiv had the highest respect for his wife's opinion, his opposition began at home. Outside there was the general view taken even by his Director of Minority Affairs that now that the Supreme Court has spoken, why do you want to involve yourself? But he had listened to the debate that took place in Parliament for all of seven months, from May 1985 to December 1985, where every Muslim speaker had said that this judgement violates Muslim personal law, and he had to find a balance between the two. They were objecting. They thought the Supreme Court in 1985 had upheld a woman's rights against the patriarchy of her religion. And the Muslim personnel concerned were of the view that you have promised us our personal law in the Constitution. And other minorities joined in that and said that you cannot completely throw away personal law and say that all this is dependent on the Supreme Court.

After he passed the Muslim Women Protection on Divorce Rights Act, Daniel Latifi, who is a very famous lawyer of my generation or of the generation which I admired, he filed a case in the Supreme Court, a special writ petition in which he challenged the legal, constitutional and moral validity of what Rajiv Gandhi had done. The Supreme Court took its time coming to a conclusion, but in 2001, 19th September, the Supreme Court announced that in fact he had codified Muslim personal law into our civil law because the role of the waqf board in looking after destitute women was referred to the Magistrate and it became part of our country's civil law with the result that all marriages, which break down in the Muslim community in the last 20 years have all been decided under the act that Rajiv Gandhi passed. And we've had nine non-Congress governments in this period, none of which has repealed the act, and yet this is not talked about at all. The fact of the matter is that if you respect the 1985 Supreme Court judgement, you have to equally respect the 2001 Supreme Court judgement.

MALAVIKA: Okay. So this brings me to the question, as I said, he's gone and it's been a terrible loss for many people, including yourself and the nation as you have argued in the book. Now, why for instance, do you think the present Congress is following any of his principles, any of his examples in leadership? And if not, what is the gap between that?

MANI: I think Parakala Prabhakar answered that question this morning, and I completely agree with him that there is no political party in India, including of course, the Congress which would be ready to take on the BJP and the forces of Hindutva on fundamental questions of principle. They're not ready to do that.

And Rajiv himself, as I've said in this book, he fell from his great principles when he agreed to the suggestion made by R K Dhawan and others that he should conduct the shalanyas in the middle of the election and the people punished him for it. He was brought down from over 400 seats to under 200 seats. His election in 1984 was the single biggest election victory ever recorded by a putative prime minister. The defeat that he suffered in 1989 as a result of playing both sides of the case, gave him the biggest defeat that any incumbent government has ever received in the history of parliamentary India.

So, I am not saying that he was a God whom I am adulating or admiring he was a human being who was trying to cope with the situation. When he was on his own then the moral Rajiv Gandhi prevailed; when he was not on his own, when he was being pressurized then sometimes then sometimes he toppled over. But then in the year after he got defeated, he spent time with Siddhartha Shankar Ray. Siddhartha Shankar Ray gave him an answer that a case could be filed in the Supreme Court under Article 143, and he proposed that to Chandra Shekhar. And because Chandra Shekhar didn't accept that, it became one of the reasons



“I am not saying that he was a God whom I am adulating, or admiring, he was a human being who was trying to cope with the situation. When he was on his own, then the moral Rajiv Gandhi prevailed; when he was not on his own, when he was being pressurized, then sometimes then sometimes he toppled over.”

why he brought down the Chandra Shekhar government. But much of the rest of the time, imagine being an airlines pilot who inherits problems that dates back to Morarji Desai, to Indira Gandhi, and in some cases even to Lal Bahadur Shastri, and then he solves three of them within a period of a little over a year.

And those solutions have held Punjab today. And this conference itself shows that because all of us have come through, Punjab is a peaceful state. Yes, it has differences among themselves and with Delhi and even with the Congress party. But considering the situation that he inherited, the long-term solution, he found equally, you can go to Assam anytime, and although it's under the BJP government, you can easily wander around the whole of the state.

MALAVIKA: And the irony is that people say that had he lived, he would have been a much, much better Prime Minister than even the first term.

MANI: I don't accept this as a compliment. Because I think where he prevailed, he was being himself where he failed, he was being a politician. And if your suggestion is that he'd become more of a politician, then no. He could have reverted to himself, but then he would've been the same Prime Minister who caused so much problems for himself. So therefore, I think we need to evaluate him as a person. **Di**

THE PUNJAB TANGO IN CANADA

A Conversation with Ujjal Dosanjh

Tracing the roots of the problem, and sharing some mistakes by one and all, where the issue has snowballed into, and highlighting the present times, hear Canadian Lawyer and Politician and former Health Minister, former MP and 33rd Premier of British Columbia interviewed by **Kim Lalli**, senior partner at Wedlake Bell, law firm in UK. At the Khushwant Singh Lit Fest in Kasauli.



You went from a dusty Indian village that we're all sort of familiar with to lead the government of the third largest province in Canada. Now that's incredible because even now, if I look at the UK, yes, we have Rishi Sunak, but certainly if you look 23 years ago, we would not have had many politicians of Indian origin. And I assume the same went for Canada. In terms of politicians, were there many at that time?

Well, there was one MLA that was elected in 1988, I believe, or 1986. He was the first brown MLA to be elected in the country. And he was the first provincial cabinet minister too in '91, I got elected in '91 to the provincial legislature. I failed in '79, in '83. And then I didn't run for the next two elections because I was fighting the Khalistani's from 1984 onwards and too tired to run in elections and make a living at the same time. And then I finally ran in '91 and against my own wishes, because I was making good money as a lawyer and politicians don't make any

money in that country.

I used to pay more in taxes as a lawyer than I made as an MLA when I got elected in '91. And one of my sons still is angry at that because he thinks we would've been richer had I just stayed as a lawyer.

A lot of the things that you had to fight against was your own community. You weren't always backed by them when it came to elections. You had issues with the Pro-Khalistani's. You were attacked by a fellow Sikh leaving you with 84 stitches and near dead. How did you overcome those? Were you ploughed on doing the right thing and they came around?

Well, I think maybe it needs a bit of an explanation, otherwise people will think, why are you talking about that. After the Golden Temple operation Blue Star, you have to understand that Khalistan in Canada existed before 1984. Many of the people who aren't Punjabis, particularly people abroad, don't understand that Khalistan existed in terms of an issue from the moment Jagjit Singh Chohan issued a declaration in the United States of America paying hundreds of thousands of dollars and declaring the state of Khalistan independence. And from then on, you had the ISI and that time the CIA funding these organizations long before June of 1984. I was one of the only few lawyers in town, and they were my clients in civil matters. Many of them. They were running around with Khalistani currency, titles of President of Khalistan or Prime Minister of Khalistan, those kinds of things.

So, when 1984 happened, there was a fertile ground for this hatred to set in, and we all were shocked. I, in fact, had come to India in December of 1983. The Council General in Vancouver knew that I was coming and

bumped into me at one place and said, look, because in Canada, there was a lot of hatred in the Punjabi newspapers. In Punjabi radios in December of 1983 and before. So this Council General, I still remember his name is BK Mitra, just took me aside and said, sir, you should go and see Mrs. Gandhi. And I said, why would she see me? I'm just a lawyer. I am nobody. He said, no, you should go see Mrs. Gandhi. And impress upon her the fact that we need a solution to Punjabi issues because it's having an impact in our lives abroad, not only in Punjab.

So, he set up a meeting for me. My wife and I travelled in December of '85, and we were here December, January. And then during that time, I met accidentally, I had a long argument with Bindrawale for about an hour on top of the Langar building. I met with Mr. Longawal for about two hours, had a deep discussion with him about what was going on. I wanted to do that because if I was going to meet Mrs. Gandhi, I wanted to know what was happening on the ground. And then I met Mrs. Gandhi, my wife was with me, and the first 5 or 10 minutes we talked about our fathers and grandfathers being in jails and being freedom fighters. And then we got onto the job of what was happening in Punjab. And my understanding at that time, look, one of the things I should say, I don't have a dog in the race in terms of Indian politics.

I don't support A, B, C, or D. I love India. It's my motherland. And that's why I come back. But I have no political connections or concerns in terms of interest myself. So, when we were having that discussion, she says to me, she says, I've had many meetings. She confirmed much of what Sant Longawal had told me about the meetings, but she said that I'm trying to negotiate a settlement, but I'm worried that every time you have a settlement with the Akalis, there's usually another group that springs up and says, we don't accept that. So there has to be a sense of finality at some point to these issues. And as a lawyer and as an activist, I could empathize with that. Those were the kind of last words she said to me before we left.

And then June '84 happens, and there was a large demonstration, 25,000 people demonstrated in the city of Vancouver against



Operation Blue Star. We said nothing. We were quiet because everybody was hurt. We didn't understand what was going on, thousands of miles away. So, we thought let them let out some gas and pressure. Then in August of '84, I used to be invited to all these cocktail parties at the Indian Consulate's home in the mornings flag ceremony, in the evening cocktail reception. I never usually went because I was a busy lawyer raising three kids, doing other things. But that morning at the flag ceremony, some of the Khalistani extremists jumped the fence and had a running battle with the RCMP, burnt the flat, burnt the tricolour and had a skirmish. And you had RCMP helicopter overhead and the RCMP wrestling these guys down.

The Golden Temple is very sacred to many of us. But to me, and I wrote that at that time, to me, the tricolour was as sacred. Although I'm a Canadian citizen, but my 'nana' spent eight years in British jails fighting for the independence of the country. His 'chacha' came from Canada as part of the other party to fight for the independence of India and was hanged by the British.

So, I come from a very different background, a very secular background, and I was concerned. I was concerned on several counts. One, it had taken us a long time in Canada to get equality. Right to vote had been taken away from us in 1907. We got it back in 1947. We couldn't practice professions until 1953, like lawyers, doctors, and engineers. And we had achieved a certain modicum of equality during those years. And I was worried that with all the violence and the threats that were happening in Vancouver and in other parts of Canada that we were actually hurting our own image as a community in Canada.

I had run twice and lost two elections by then. I was an activist, I was well known. So, I thought, I talked to my wife, talked to my children. Actually, they were very young. I felt that somebody

“I was fighting the Khalistani's from 1984 onwards and too tired to run in elections and make a living at the same time. And then I finally ran in '91 and against my own wishes, because I was making good money as a lawyer and politicians don't make any money in that country.”

needed to say something. Everybody was in a state of fear. Silence had gripped the entire community except the Khalistanis. Except the extremists. They were ruling the roost essentially. So, I decided that I would speak up, and I took me a week or so to figure out, I called a press conference. It was widely reported in the national media, and I basically made a couple of points.

One that it is important for us as Indo-Canadian and as Sikhs, to make sure that we do no violence in Canada and promote no violence against India. That if we do so, we are in danger of losing our own respect and equality in this country. Number two, that people have a right to ask for Khalistan. I have no issue with that. That's a freedom. Even the Supreme Court of India says, Canada says you have the freedom of expression to demand anything you want, but I said, violence is not acceptable. If you want be violent and you want to really demand Khalistan, we disagree with you. The third thing I said was that if you really want Khalistan, please go back to India and fight there for Khalistan.

And so I received a barrage of threats, and from then on to about '89, '90, I was one of the two or three people in the entire country, perhaps in the entire western world at that time, who was speaking against these people and they targeted me and eventually and got me with an iron bar, getting out of my law office. I always say if it had been the 90s or the current situation, I probably would've been long dead because there are lots of guns available now. In those days, there weren't that many guns available to people. So that's sort of the essence of the struggle that I went through.

But do you think it's difficult for Western governments with the focus on freedom of speech? I understand with violence, but non-violent demonstrations, I think the Indian government gets upset sometimes that we are having these, but there is freedom of speech, so they can't have one rule for one set of people and one for another.

Well, two things. I think you have to sort of distinguish the two things. Freedom of expression, yes; violence and extremism, no. Number three, Western governments have been somewhat hypocritical. And I've said that publicly. I mean, you see what's happening with Hamas vis-a-vis Israel and the Western governments, including our own Trudeau, has been very forthright in condemning the glorification of violence on the Canadian streets by Hamas supporters. He's very clear. He condemned it immediately, *but he has never condemned the violence and the glorification of violence by the Khalistani extremists both on the streets, outside the temples and inside the temples.*



So, I've said this to Canadian politicians, many of the Canadian politicians have no backbone. I'm sorry to say I've said that publicly. And that's not to say anything personal against anybody. They know what extremists do on the streets and inside the temples and in what they preach is wrong, but they can't bring themselves to say, okay, folks, we understand it's your right to ask for Khalistan.

But, we, as a democracy, as the government of Canada, as the leaders of Canada, do not support the dismemberment of a friendly democracy. No matter how faulty that democracy may be. It is still a democracy. It is still a democratic country. But no Canadian politicians has had the gut courage.

So, I know Indian politicians are rather touchy. I'm an Indian through and through; Indian culture is very jingoistic because 'wah-wah', we've done that strike and this strike and we've done this, and we don't sort of think calmly about these issues and what the implications, long-term implications are, such issues. And so, all these things get lost. But the things the Indian government needs to say to Canada is first, if you have the evidence against people like Nijjar or anybody else, present it in a formal request for extradition, several people pursuant to the extradition treaty have been already returned to India to face prosecutions. They should formally present the cases to the Canadian government. Number two, not be so touchy if the Canadian government says it is their right to ask for Khalistan, we can't do anything. They can't do anything.

“We, as a democracy, as the government of Canada, as the leaders of Canada, do not support the dismemberment of a friendly democracy. No matter how faulty that democracy may be. It is still a democracy. It is still a democratic country. But no Canadian politicians has had the gut courage.”

But they should say to Trudeau and to the US and to Britain that you should condemn the dismemberment of a friendly country. Why aren't you doing that? You consider us friendly. Please condemn the movement that is trying to dismember your friendly country.

Can you tell me, is the next generation feeling as strongly about these things or is it a certain, the first generation who went over to Canada, to the UK, are the youngsters as excited by it all?

I wish I was a social scientist, although I did some sociology courses in my BA, but that's a very difficult question. First of all, if you ask, all Canadian Sikhs, the Khalistanis should stand up and be counted. I did that with them in 1984-95, they used to say, vast majority of the Sikhs want Khalistan. So I said to them, show me. I said, take 'guru-granth sahib' out of a temple. Hold a rally in a public place and say only Khalistanis should attend. They fell for it. They held a rally in Vancouver on the first anniversary of June 84. It was June 85. No more than 200 people showed up, and then they thought that they had done something wrong. The following year they went to another area, it is a big complex. They think they had 250 people. So, if you ask people to stand up for Khalistani, they would not, because most people aren't Khalistanis. If I'm a Khalistani, I have two friends. I take them to the demonstration. People cover their faces when they're demonstrating. So, 95% or more of the Sikhs in Canada and across the world are not Khalistanis. So, when you stop issuing visas to us, sitting abroad, you are actually creating problems for your friends that love your country.

From the audience

You said that the Canadian government condemns people who try to divide India out there?

No, it doesn't condemn. They don't condemn. No, that's what I've asked them to do. I said you should as a friendly country, say freedom of expression, yes, but we don't support what you're trying to do. You're trying to dismember a friendly country. They haven't done that. And there's no law that stops them from even talking about dismembering a friendly country. That's freedom of speech. Violence and hate are prosecutable, but not freedom of speech.

AUDIENCE: Now I don't know how far it is correct. Day before yesterday, Pannu says, now we will invade and put an attack similar to Hamas. So at least this is illegal. Canadian government should book him.

If he had said that on Canadian soil, police should investigate that and book him for hate speech. If he's done that on the American soil, because he is an American, I think Canadian police should have perhaps reasonable grounds to investigate him for the statement that he made that all Hindus should be expelled from Canada. Now that is hate speech. And that is prosecutable.

AUDIENCE: I was not born in 1984. This time, for the first time in my life, in the international press, the Sikh issues, this Khalistan movement have been discussed for all good or bad reasons. So what you think that if there is a political problem back in India or in Punjab, you met Mrs. Gandhi as well. If the things would have been come to any sort of finality, this type of diplomatic embarrassment or at distasteful would have been avoided.



“Indian culture is very jingoistic because 'wah-wah', we've done that strike and this strike and we've done this, and we don't sort of think calmly about these issues and what the implications, long-term implications are, such issues. And so, all these things get lost. But the things the Indian government needs to say to Canada is first, if you have the evidence against people like Nijjar or anybody else, present it in a formal request for extradition.”

But if you are talking about the current spat, there are no angels in this spat. I think Prime Minister Trudeau had other options to deal with this issue. He could have dealt with it by allowing the press to talk about it and say, we are aware of it, we're dealing with or get the foreign minister to say something rather than elevating it to the level of a somber statement in Parliament. And he may have had some political compulsions. But in your country here, there are political compulsions. So, you have your own problems in this country. Canada has its own problems.

AUDIENCE: So, the only question I have left is that with the situation that's happening right now, personally, I may be wrong, but I feel like it's very political there as well. He wants his vote, he wants his bank, everything. But my question is, do you think that the Prime Minister making a statement like that in Canada has the potential of backfiring in India for the people in India?

Well, it's already backfired and he shouldn't have done it that way. Many political leaders and thought leaders in Canada say that he perhaps has damaged himself as an interlocutor vis-a-vis India. It should have been raised. Look, if India has done it, gone across international borders and killed somebody that is legally by international

law, wrong, but it doesn't make it right just because the US does it or somebody else does it. But there were other options in the way they dealt with it, they could have dealt with it better. **Di**

“I will never be the good girl that society expects me to. And that’s a warning to anybody who wants to be my friend”

‘BAD’ GIRL INDRANI MUKERJEA

says with a Grit and Straight face you can Expect her to Show!



It’s a tough one to swallow! After all the sinister references in full public gaze, the accusations and the counter charges, the now quietened down case of Sheena Bohra murder mystery, was brought to light again. And for what reason? The prime accused, and acquitted, has written a book, published by none other than Harper Collins, came on stage to be questioned again, happy to say she has had enough of her quiet life, has a softness for older men, and will dare being herself, all over again. In an open and most engaging conversation with eminent Mumbai based journalist **Bachi Karkaria, **Indrani Mukerjea** faces the jury this time, of the audience at the **Khushwant Singh Literary Festival in Kasauli. We produce only excerpts of the full conversation.****

So if you had to live your life all over again, what would you change?

If I had to live my life all over again, I would live as Indrani. I live life as it comes. I think Mukerjea or Bora is just a surname. It doesn’t really matter.

So, what has really been the biggest learning?

I think what I’ve really learned is that the human spirit is resilient to all external circumstances. And we all have the inner strength to fight and to rise again and again no matter what your struggles are. And the circumstances that I have gone through are not very easy as not very easy perhaps is an understatement for a regular person.

So of all the stories one has heard around this case, what maybe has upset you most or hurt you most or what you found the most laughable?

So I think the most hurtful moment was when I was accused of filicide. I think that was very, very difficult for me because I was dealing with two things. One is the loss of a child and loss of my firstborn child irrespective of the paternity. I’m her mother and she’s my firstborn child.

Everyone decided that I was that horrible monster accused my own child without really even my charge sheet coming in or without any evidence in court. But nobody really realized that there was a grieving mother inside. I was dealing most importantly with the loss of child.

The other thing that hurt me a lot was my own family abandoning me because when I went into prison. So that was very painful because I couldn’t really figure out that how could a man who lived with me, all the family who I take my life to, who lived with me for 17 years actually believe something like that. Or even if for a moment it was true that what would I have done if he had been arrested in my case.

So, the laughable, this was when somewhere I read that I come from the northeast! So, I do black magic and so I must have done black magic on Peter and everyone else and that is how I rose so high and I became a



person of high net worth and it's very laughable because I wish I could do black magic. I wouldn't have spent six years in prison.

But why do you think all your family was willing to believe the worst of you?

I don't know about everyone because only everyone who had to say a lot of things about me. I don't know most of these 'everyone'. My parents were not alive. Actually my mother had a heart attack the day I was arrested and passed away in 15 days and my father passed away immediately after. And in fact, I have because I'm the only child, so I have to step out of prison. I had to take court permission and do their last rites.

What did come to me as a surprise was that Sheena was the child of the rape by your father and that was the second time that he had raped you, first at 14 and then at 16. So do you think that this rape was apart from all that happened afterwards, was that really the defining factor in your life because would it change your life pretty much after that, from that protected angel background to make your own life? So was that really the defining factor?

Actually I have always I think had an inherent strength within me, which is why I think I survived from a very young age, I have learned to be on my own. And when I'm saying on my own, doesn't necessarily mean not being around with people. But I have learned to deal with circumstances even when nobody supported me. I've had the courage to, I was a very, very good student. So, I did not let anything come in the way of my education, for example. And I continued to study, I topped the university, I continued with my career. So that was something I realized very early on in life and which is what actually ultimately stayed with me.

So what do you think about yourself? I mean, would you say that yes, you are pretty harsh about relationships?

You know I do not conform. I never have and I will not conform to

“I think the most hurtful moment was when I was accused of filicide. I think that was very, very difficult for me because I was dealing with two things. One is the loss of a child and loss of my firstborn child irrespective of the paternity. I'm her mother and she's my firstborn child.”

“I have always I think had an inherent strength within me. I have learned to be on my own. And when I'm saying on my own, doesn't necessarily mean not being around with people. But I have learned to deal with circumstances even when nobody supported me.”

the good girl syndrome. That's the first thing. The second thing is I do not believe that if I cannot be happy in a relationship, if I'm not happy in my relationship with a person, I cannot then make the other person happy. Do I put my happiness before the happiness of the other person? If, that is the question you are asking me, it depends who the other person is. If it is you are talking about my three children, I would put their happiness before mine. If you are talking about a man in my life, I'm going put my happiness before the man's happiness.

Okay, tell me now, what was the point where the whole lot has been said about how you tried to pass off these two children as your siblings and going by your book, that your parents thought that it was too much for society to take. And your parents then decided that those two children would be brought up as theirs, but if for the sake of society they didn't want to be exposed to that, then how do they explain to that same society how these two young kids came into their life?

I have had Sheena when I was 16 years old. I was still a minor and I, irrespective of what people have to judge or think at 16 I was not in a position to take care of kids. And that is the realities that I would've ended up probably instead of finishing my education, I would've ended up becoming a hooker. So I wouldn't have been where I am. But most importantly, the day I was financially independent came the day I believe that I could take care of myself at the very same time I brought my kids back to me because I would not have done justice to them.

Now your question is that when my parents decided that they were going to adopt the children and raise them as their own, it happens in a lot of cases. That is not the painful part of it. The painful part of it for me, I can only talk about my feelings. Because

the agreement was that when I finished my education and I could take them back, I would bring them back to me.

But when I went back, two things had happened, which was a very heartbreaking moment for me that my children did not recognize me. That was the most heartbreaking moment for me because they were obviously, one was a little baby, the other was a toddler. And also, I had to go to my grandparents, my parents and my mother had not brought the kids to meet me till the last minute. And I had already given up. I was 17 years old. I didn't know about all the legal ramifications and I didn't realize that I had given up my rights to



“I think people have to accept me for all that I have gone through and people who decide that they want to be my friends and true friends, not fair-weather friends. I will never be the good girl that society expects me to. And that's a warning to anybody who wants to be my friend.”

“I wanted my kids back, I wanted them back in my house. I wanted to live with them. That is why I got Sheena back to Bombay. I wanted to make up on that lost time. And that is something nobody ever really understood or realized.”

my children at that point, I didn't realize it. And so, after I left, I did not connect back for another 10 years. It was my parents reached out to me when they became old and they needed me and they needed the support and they couldn't obviously maintain their lifestyle the way they should, but I didn't grudge them for it.

In the meanwhile, you had reconciled yourself to the fact that these kids, I mean, okay, they're my siblings, but they're not my children.

I was not even in touch with them. So, for me, honestly, I did not perhaps emote the way I should have as a mother when I met them after, because I think Sheena was almost 15. And also for them, also for Sheena, because it was like she grew up with my mother as her mother, but we bonded very, very well over a period of time and all these unnecessary talks that were around obviously in the media. Oh my God, she was heartbroken that I did not accept her as a daughter. That's all rubbish because that is not true.

Could you describe for us, that time which must have been very traumatic when your kids were told by your parents or who ultimately, that they were actually your children. And I think that was a bit of a surprise to me.

That came was a bit of a surprise to me as well as to them actually. Because it was when my parents had reached out to me for financial help obviously. And that was the time, they had to break the news to them.

Did they discuss it with you that now we are going to tell them the truth?

They did. It was a very kind of awkward situation really because very few people, apart from my ex-husbands, and actually both my husbands are ex-husbands now.

So apart from Sanjeev and his mother as well as Peter, very few people and very, very few people, close people, not too many people knew about Sheena and Mikhail at all really. But when they reached out, and this was a conversation that I had with Peter, which is what I had written in my book, and that time Peter was the CEO of Star and he said, oh my God, this is going to destroy my reputation.

So, in hindsight, I feel I should not have put the man before my kids and that was the mistake I made. So see the easiest thing for me to do would've been to send a cheque every month to my parents and that would have ended it all. But I wanted my kids back, I wanted them back in my house. I wanted to live with them. That is why I got Sheena back to Bombay. I wanted to make up on that lost time. And that is something nobody ever really understood or realized.

So now this book seems to be almost as much about damning Peter as exonerating yourself. And you have definitely murdered Peter's reputation, personal and professional, even if you haven't murdered your daughter. But the point is, Peter was this iconic figure. He was a media star and the way you made him out to be, as if he was a wimp in his personal life, in the way that he handled his ex-wife and couldn't extricate himself from her. From the fact that you made all the wise decisions and Peter was making the wrong decisions or he wasn't making any decisions because he was either travelling or doing whatever. How do you swallow that?

Let me, since you have several questions in this, let me address each of your questions one by one. When I had written this, I had written this book in prison. So, when you talk about pen to paper, yes, no, no, no, I did not say that. I have written this. And it was, when you talk about writing, actually this is, I've written it with a pen. Pen to paper. So that is how I wrote the book. And I think someday I hope to sell that manuscript, handwritten manuscript for a fortune. I'm a businesswoman at the end of the day. So anyway, coming back to this. So that is how it got printed so quickly because the book was ready. Yeah, Peter, Peter, I'm talking about Peter.



When I actually wrote this book, a lot of people, when I came out, including very, very close friends, had said that, listen, you must write this as a fiction based and say it's a fiction based on your life. And the reason I chose not to do that, and instead I said that no, I am going to write it as a memoir and I'm going to take the name of names of every single person and publish it only with a reputed publisher. There are two reasons behind it. One is somebody like Harper Collins, and particularly when you write a book without putting pseudo names, they do not put in anything in the book until and unless it is validated, you would know this because you're a journalist and a very reputed one. It took six months, my book was ready. It took six months of legal validation of every single word that I said.

He cannot dispute it. He cannot, he cannot, cannot. But the opinions are thoughts and opinions are different, facts that I had. See, the day I got arrested, there were two things, two very interesting things that happened, that the next few days Peter just spent just interviewing, which all the journalists saying, what a monkey I made out of him. That is what, those were his words. Hello, you are supposed to be this cool, the CEO of Star. And if a woman came and made a monkey out of you, then I am clearly smarter than you. Okay.

My earlier question before I come to ask the end of your book was why should we believe you? But I explained about that whole thing about the exhuming and the body. So please read the book to find that out. But my last question is why has Sheena not reached out, if you think she's alive? See, I do not know or think of anything. That's the first thing. Okay. I have been informed that people have cited her, but I haven't seen her myself. But I believe only in the hardcore evidence that has come on record in court. And I'll cite only three evidence. I know for me, talking about skulls and bones has become the new normal again, because I know it's not very easy for people.

But I've done this for the last six years. In fact ended up studying a lot of law books and case study for this. So, the DNA expert has come and admitted in court that he forged the DNA report. Okay, he got suspended. So anyway, so that obviously is very telling. Why would somebody until and unless somebody's really hell bent on framing me for reasons best known to them, why would anyone want to fudge a DNA report? The second thing is also as per the post mortem report, they had said that the skull of that skeleton, which was found, was cut open. My reason to believe is because Rahul Mukerjea has come and admitted in court that there are messages, and he admitted those messages in between him and Sheena five months after she allegedly disappeared and we allegedly strangled her.

“I had written this book in prison. I've written it with a pen. Pen to paper. And I think someday I hope to sell that manuscript, handwritten manuscript for a fortune. I'm a businesswoman at the end of the day. So that is how it got printed so quickly because the book was ready.”

Why has Sheena not reached out?

That I cannot say. That is only an answer that Sheena can give me. She's under duress. It is definitely all the evidence exonerates me. But I still need to find Sheena. I still need to find what has really happened. And this has got nothing to do with the court and, you asked me another question, why should we believe you? Right? You asked me, I'll answer, I'll answer. No, I don't want anyone to believe me or not believe me because it doesn't really affect my life whether people believe me or not. Because people decided I was guilty till everything, all the evidence came and caught and everyone realized that the agency didn't just have an egg on their face. They had an omelette on their face. Okay? So that was big, but that really doesn't make a difference to me anymore.

But the court, ultimately, it's the court. The case is the court. And the rest of it is, I think people have to accept me for all that I have gone through and people who decide that they want to be my friends and true friends, not fair-weather friends. I will never be the good girl that society expects me to. And that's a warning to anybody who wants to be my friend. **DI**



KASAULI REMEMBERS THE PASSIONS, CONCERNS AND VALUES OF KHUSHWANT SINGH

The 12th edition of the Khushwant Singh Literature Festival was a top seller event, with some 300 attendees, a host of celebrity speakers, some honest conversations. The Kasauli Club played a memorable venue with unforgettable memories. We bring you an overall perspective in this brief chat with Rahul Singh, son of Khushwant Singh, the prime mover of the festival.

How was the event this year? Compared to past editions? I thought it was most memorable in every way! This was the 12th Khushwant Singh Litfest (KSLF) and in many ways the most memorable. The opening morning session was a full house, a rarity. The speaker was Dr Prabhakar, who happens to be the husband of the Union Finance Minister. The last session, too, a play with Juhi Babbar playing the main role was also packed, another rarity. Also, for the first time General Ian Cardouzo, got a standing ovation for his moving tribute to the Indian army.

How did the sponsors go this time? It was elaborate and must have been expensive?

Sadly, we were very short of funds and perhaps did not make enough effort to get the necessary funds. Even now, we would welcome some generous contributors to give

the Khushwant Singh Foundation, which is a non-profit and tax-exempt status. Even the Himachal government gave us nothing and we have helped put Kasauli on the tourism and literary forefront.

It's not easy to do such events anymore, simple as they may appear! How is your experience?

Very difficult and sometimes humiliating to raise and ask for funds. I wish a large corporate house, after doing its due diligence, would give us enough to form a corpus, the interest of which would pay for KSLF.

How do you see the event capturing the spirit of Kasauli and of your father, especially this edition, with your choice of speakers and their subjects?

A major purpose of the KSLF is to reflect the passions, concerns and values of Khushwant Singh. Also, bring the beauty and history of Kasauli, a military cantonment in the Himachal Himalayas alive to the audience. Kasauli is a very fragile ecological region, as was seen with the recent catastrophic landslides and floods in Himachal and Uttarakhand. You meddle with nature at your cost. We always have a session on ecology or on climate change and global warming. Since Kasauli is in a cantonment, the KSLF is dedicated to the Indian soldier and sessions on the military always take place. My father's other concerns were the

education of the girl child, closer Indo-Pak ties, and of course, promoting literature and a love of books. He also was a great humourist, so we try to also have a session on humour. Not easy!

What next?

We plan to have a Litfest in London, which would be the fifth there (two were online because of the pandemic). London was where my father went to university and got his law degree from Kings College. He was also a great admirer of British values and its democracy. A KSLF in London also enables us to get Pakistani writers to interact with Indian and other writers, thereby improving ties between the two countries, which my father was very keen on. **Di**

“A major purpose of the KSLF is to reflect the passions, concerns and values of Khushwant Singh. We always have a session on ecology or on climate change and global warming. The KSLF is dedicated to the Indian soldier and sessions on the military always take place.”



A session featuring film actor Raj Babbar, his daughter and son in law, was an instant hit, with the audience loving every bit of this frank exchange.

“We plan to have a Litfest in London, which would be the fifth there. A KSLF in London also enables us to get Pakistani writers to interact with Indian and other writers, thereby improving ties between the two countries.”



Rahul Singh, Indrani and Niloufer Bilimoria



Major Gen Ian Cardozo and Lt. Gen Kamal Davar

ASIAN GAMES' SUCCESSES! SIGNS OF A NEW ECO-SYSTEM!



Neeraj Chopra kept his date with destiny defending the Javelin title

A new and developing eco-system that is more scientific, supportive and encouraging has shown positive results, bringing India an unprecedented medals haul of medals never before earned by us. It's a promising start, that with better support from the private sector, and with clear leadership from the government can result in ensuring India trains its talent to bring greater laurels.

by V K VERMA

Pierre de Coubertin, regarded as father of the modern Olympic Games, described the three Latin words (meaning faster, higher, stronger) as "representing a program of moral beauty".

These words, cherished by athletes all over the world, resonated over and over again in Hangzhou Asian Games as Indian athletes scaled new heights, breached old frontiers and created a watershed moment in India's journey in the Continental Games since their inception in 1952.

As the dusk descended on Hangzhou city on 8 October, the myth of invincibility of China, Japan and Korea was blown away as India's medal tally settled at 107 including 28 Gold and 38 Silver - its best-ever campaign in Asian Games. The only other mega event where India won over a hundred medals was the Delhi Commonwealth Games 2010 where its tally was 101 medals, including 38 Gold - its best-ever in those Games.

If not early signs of a revolution, Hangzhou Asian Games were certainly an unmissable inflection point for Indian sport.

While most medals in Hangzhou came from India's traditional basket of events, many others came from unexpected triumphs and surreal finishes over formidable rivals.



Koreans have held an iron fist over the sport of archery for decades; monopolizing all 10 Gold medal events. Indian archers led by Jyothi Surekha and the young 21-years old Ojas Deotale did the incredible by winning 5 gold medals, downgrading the mighty Koreans to the second spot. This will hurt the Koreans hard and set up India as an archery powerhouse.

Squash, once a Pakistani fortress, guarded by the Khan royalty of Jahangir and Jansher, was overtaken by Saurabh Ghosal and Abhay Singh in a nail biting final reminiscent of the drill at Wagah border!!

At the Benjiang indoor stadium, India's national anthem was played for the first time ever since the sport of badminton was introduced in Asian Games in 1978. The Doubles pair of Satwik and Chirag, known as Fire and Ice, claimed the Gold, ambushing the fancied Chinese and the Koreans. According to Gopichand, the National Coach, the Asian

Koreans have held an iron fist over the sport of archery for decades; monopolizing all 10 Gold medal events. Indian archers led by Jyothi Surekha and the young 21-years old Ojas Deotale did the incredible by winning 5 gold medals; downgrading the mighty Koreans to the second spot.



PT Usha has arguably been India's most distinguished athlete till date. Her sterling performance in 1986 Seoul Asian Games winning 4 Gold and one silver medal remains the stuff of folklore. She was fated to lead this distinguished contingent from Hangzhou in her new role as the President of Indian Olympic Association.

I had an occasion to interview her after her return from Hangzhou. Excerpts of the interview:

How do you plan to take forward the momentum created by the Asian Games?

These are very positive tidings. We will need to expand the base of the pyramid and create many more sports hotels in every state so that talented athletes get support from early stages.

What was different this time that fetched such good results?

Athletes are getting much better training and competition exposure than what was available in my time. There is sports science support, foreign coaches and many more incentives. In fact, with such incentives, there should be not one but three Neeraj Chopras!

What role do you see for private sector going forward?

Like Reliance Foundation, JSW, NTPC, many more corporate houses should come forward in providing jobs and in creating centres of training. This could even be included in the charter of corporate responsibility.

Games Gold is tougher than an Olympic gold. The Fire and Ice duo now have their task cut out for that elusive Olympic Gold in Paris next year.

The Indian Men's Hockey team did an encore to an era gone by and reclaimed the Gold medal.

In Shooting, India's bullet train was unstoppable till it reached its destination tallying 22 medals, its highest ever. Taming the dragon, Indians hit the bull's eye in 7 events. Sift Kaur Samra's gold in 50 M rifle and Palak Gulia's gold in 10 M pistol, beating their Chinese rivals, will justifiably ignite dreams of an Olympic medal in Paris next year.

The crowning glory however came from the Track and Field events as Indian athletes swept 29 medals including 8 Gold and 9 Silver. While Neeraj Chopra kept his date with

destiny defending the Javelin title, it was Kishore Jena who won hearts matching Neeraj for each throw; finally bowing out with a silver. The eighty thousand strong crowd roared as Sable and Parul Chowdhary stole the show with their incredible running in Steeple chase and 5000 M events earning a Gold and Silver each.

As Toor and Annu Rani dominated the Field by winning Gold in Discus throw and Javelin, Men's 4-400 Relay team created a new Games record while winning the Gold; the previous medal in the event was won in Jakarta in 1962!!

Soon, the medals won in Hangzhou will become part of drab statistics. Not many will remember how these champions had toiled against heavy odds in the quest for glory. Not many will know that they came from the lower tiers of India's middle class that resides in villages and small towns with scant training facilities. Recounting their tryst is necessary for preparing a blueprint for future if this momentum is to be accelerated.

Twins, Nithya and Vithya Ramraj, blazed to glory in 100 M Hurdles and 400 M hurdles/ Relay and brought home a silver medal each. Their father once pulled an auto-rickshaw in the lanes of Coimbatore to support the family.

Ram Babu, another medal winner, worked under MGRENA to earn a living when he lost his job of a waiter in a restaurant during covid. He bought his first pair of running shoes from the wages earned as a labourer.

Parul Choudhary, winner of a Gold and a silver medal and Annu Rani winner of Javelin Gold lived in hamlets in remote villages in the district of Meerut. Parul almost gave up training in the face of social ostracism not uncommon in that region and was escorted to her training centre by a defiant mother. Annu Rani practiced throwing sugar cane stalks in early days of her training for javelin.

Then there was Roshbina Devi, winner of India's first Wushu silver medal who hailed from Kwaksiphai, an obscure village in strife torn Manipur which was falling apart when she was in the ring for her final bout.

While these stories are inspirational, they also reveal the enormous headroom for medals if the system of search and support can put its act together at the Panchayat level.

Athletes achieve high levels of performance when a conducive ecosystem is created for their training and competition during the build up to such mega events. The National Sports Federations and the Sports Authority of India (SAI), an arm of the central government, have a shared responsibility for meeting this goal. Were things done

Athletes achieve high levels of performance when a conducive ecosystem is created for their training and competition during the build up to such mega events.





Dr Lalit Bhanot, who helmed Asian Games planning and monitored training of over a hundred athletes on his dashboard, had this to say: “Over the past three years,

AFI contracted several specialist foreign coaches and implemented a scientifically customized competition plan using modern training methods. This was done in harmony with Indian coaches who had trained the athletes in early stages. This was a crucial factor in the significant upswing in athletics performance”.

He added “the main plank on which this success was achieved, was the annual inter-district meets conducted by Athletic Federation in which over ten thousand athletes get a chance to participate and be recognized for higher levels of training”.

Success in shooting, which produced the second highest medal tally, was no fluke either. Dr Pierre Beauchamp, high performance director engaged by the Rifle Association, set up at Karni Singh Shooting Range in Delhi, what was described by shooters as the ‘War Room.’ Mapping of pulse rate, heart beats and breathing patterns, neuro signals were simulated as experienced in final stages of shoot outs. Raunak Pandit, National Coach says ‘it worked wonders’.

Apart from the Sports Authority of India which implemented its Target Olympic Podium (TOP) program, several corporate entities i.e., Reliance Foundation, JSW, NTPC etc. earned wholesome praise from National Federations in providing cutting edge support.

National pride and personal glory have undoubtedly driven our sportsperson to achieve unprecedented success. However, deep down, these champions cherish the hope that the State will reward them with more than just accolades. Parul Chowdhary’s innocent remark, after winning the Gold in 5000M “at least now she hopes to be appointed a Dy SP by the UP Government” was as candid as it can get. The State must live up to its duty in fulfilling these aspirations.

In the after-glow of the Asian Games success, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in the IOC Session held in Mumbai, formally communicated India’s aspiration to host the Olympic Games in 2036. Hosting the Olympics is as much about creating world class infrastructure as preparing its athletes for podium finish. The Prime Minister has given a clarion call to the corporate houses for a deeper involvement and thrown down the gauntlet to a generation which is about to enter their teens and will be in the right age group to compete for Olympic glory on home soil.

Pierre de Coubertin’s words about the Olympic Games being a program of moral beauty will be as relevant then as these are now.



The doubles pair of Satwik and Chirag, known as Fire and Ice, claimed the Gold, ambushing the fancied Chinese and the Koreans. According to Gopichand, the National Coach, the Asian Games Gold is tougher than an Olympic gold. The Fire and Ice duo now have their task cut out for that elusive Olympic Gold in Paris next year.

differently by these agencies in the run up to the Hangzhou Asian Games?

Yes, indeed. Instead of bickering over who was the boss, the SAI and National Sports Federations (NSFs) worked in sync to ensure that there was no digression from the assigned goal.

While NSFs organized robust domestic circuits and national camps with state-of-the-art facilities, the SAI ensured that there was no resource crunch for engaging foreign coaches, psychologists, Bio-mechanics pros and sending deserving athletes for training abroad in Olympic training centres.

The new poster girl Parul Chowdhary and the poster boy Avinash Sable, winners in Steeple Chase and 5000 M, trained at high altitude training centre at Colorado Springs in USA under the renowned Symmond Scott. They were flown directly to Hangzhou just days before their events. Neeraj Chopra trained at the Olympic training centre in Lausanne, Switzerland under Dr Klaus Bartonietz for months before reaching Hangzhou.



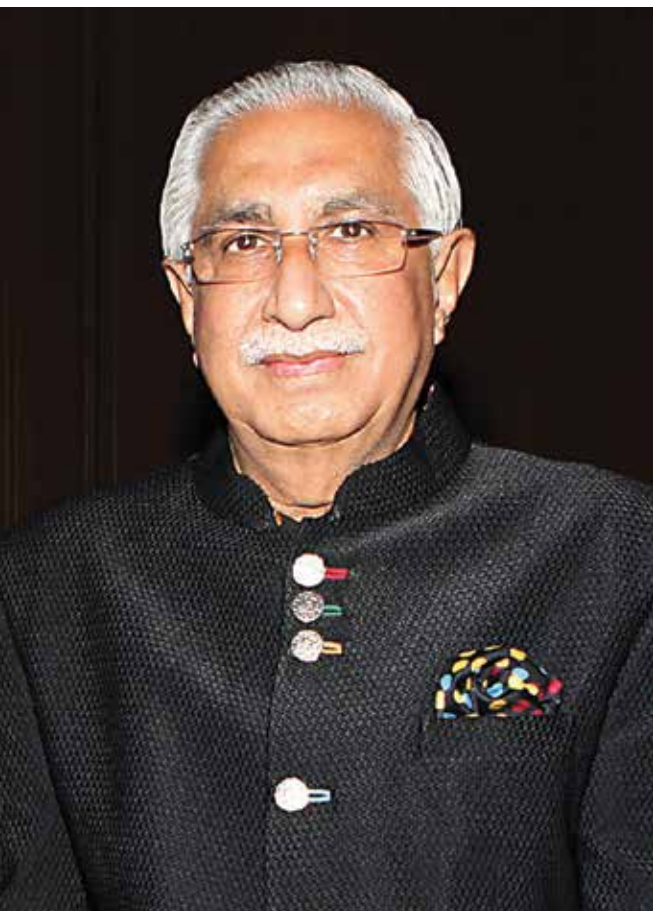
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Director, Air India.

What's ITC's Journey in Responsible Tourism Means for Indian Hospitality!

Responsible Luxury has been the codename for all things at ITC Hotels! Going Green has been their mantra for many years now, long before we heard all this talk of climate change. What has this journey been like, and at what cost? How will this translate into Responsible Tourism for the country at large, for all its stakeholders. We met with **Nakul Anand, Director Hotels, ITC on how much the industry has moved towards green tourism.**



by NAVIN BERRY

It was one thing to achieve targets for all your owned properties. How do you take this message to hotels you run as different kinds of joint ventures?

Speaking with the owners, we have a master plan to convert all hotels at some time into some form of a sustainable feature and classification. What exactly would that be, we are working on various blueprints, et cetera, but very clearly we would continue with our progression and take it further to managed properties, take it further to the other franchised properties like WelcomHeritage; even if it be a franchised property, but absolutely committed to the cause of sustainability.

How do you see this journey? You seem to have started well before others were aware of it?

Maybe, we were years ahead of our time. I was acknowledged Green Hotelier of the World in 1994 or 1995 by the International Hotel Association in Amsterdam. Now I am talking of that so many years back.

Post that, sometime between 2005 or 2008, we began responsible luxury. That was only one hotel because I was then the GM. Then I subsequently took over as VP operations and then we started. When I took over as CEO, we converted that green outlook into luxury and subsequently into responsible luxury.

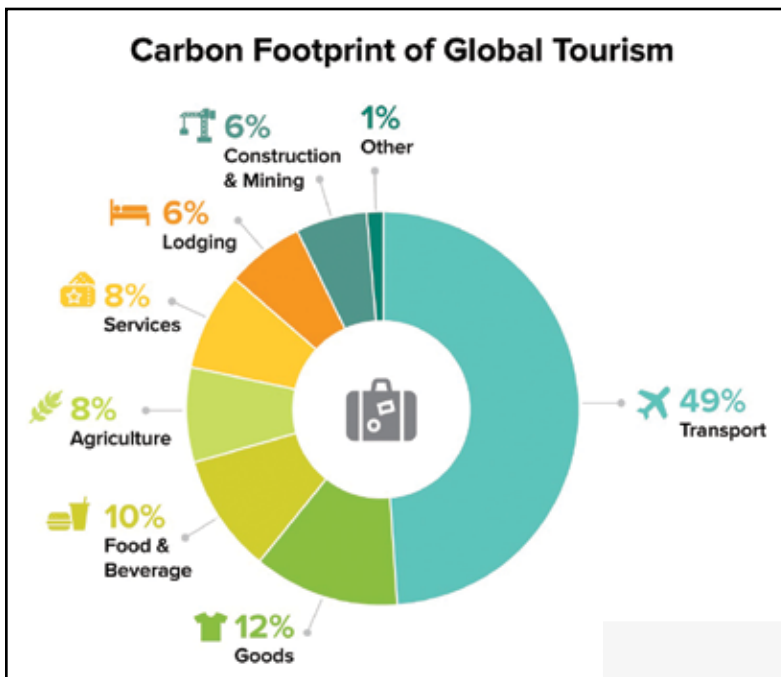
But this process of getting your managed hotels or franchised hotels onboard, is that going to be an easy ride?

It's not! I think that luckily for us, we have had great success with the hotels that have already converted in terms of acceptance. What was the problem earlier, and when I give you my document to see that people always believed that luxury and responsibility could not go together or luxury and sustainability couldn't go together. If you were a green hotel, you were sacrificing comforts of the customer. You would throttle the water pressure for him. The AC of his room would be off. He would have to suffer for 20 minutes. Switch it on, and wait for his room to cool. You will not change your bedsheet every day. You would throw your

“Then came the opportunity when we had a choice. We were getting into the luxury collection and ITC's DNA was green. Now what would I choose? Do I choose green or do I choose luxury? I said, we will choose the path less travelled. The only option for us was a combination of both, together. Thus, was born responsible luxury.”



Gourmet couch, Sustainable packaging



“Let me also tell you nowhere else, but in our Vedic scriptures, that we talk of sustainability. So, in even following sustainability practices, you are following exactly what is Indian. Indian food, Ayurvedic forms of therapy, the whole science of food such as eat by season.”

the cost of operations was less. So, there was only one way to do business that was green for us. Fortunately, it pays for itself over the years. We were setting an example for others to follow. We were also being responsible because we felt it was necessary that we should be!

Over how long a period?

Depends from hotel to hotel, place to place, et cetera. You can't generalise it, but certainly the operational costs of renewable energy are much cheaper. Recycling water, there are capital costs much higher and operational costs, much less. Over the years, it pays for itself.

For a smaller hotel, like a hundred room hotel owned by an individual?

The same rules would apply. The formula is the same.

Have you moved into the larger ambit of educating the industry as a whole?

Yes, yes. Even suppliers, even vendors. Let me tell you, it's a very scary future. We all know what's happening with global warming. Where we are, we already set our goals with 2030 commitments, et cetera. So, there's a big fear. Now. Every company has sworn, a Unilever, a Proctor and Gamble, and ITC, and Tata has sworn that they will have X carbon footprint by 2030. By 2050 we will be carbon

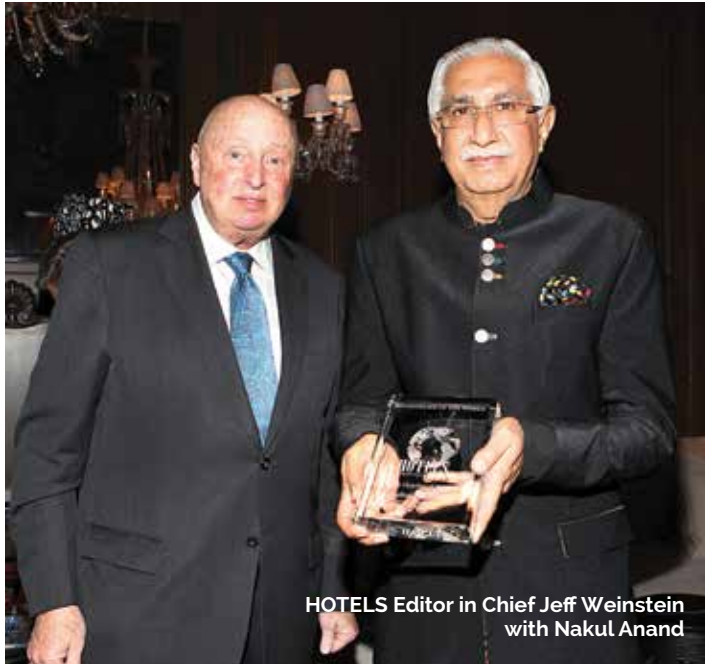
towel and say, I will not change my towel. That's not luxury.

Then came the opportunity when we had a choice. We were converting from the Sheraton brand to the Luxury Collection. We were getting into the luxury collection and ITC's DNA was green. Now what would I choose? Do I choose green or do I choose luxury? I said, we will choose the path less travelled. The only option for us was a combination of both, together. Thus, was born responsible luxury.

Now somewhere around at this point, ITC Gardenia was being built, so we converted ITC Gardenia into a platinum. We built it as platinum rated building, one amongst the first platinum rated hotels in the world, to prove to ourselves that it was possible. It also won the award for the most luxurious hotel of that year. Giving us the confidence the two could coexist. The moral of the story being that you come and indulge, leave the backend to us, use as much electricity as you like, but it comes from renewable sources. Right? So, while you are sleeping, while you are enjoying and while you're indulging, we are taking care of the backend. At the end of it, you will leave with a positive footprint or the lowest carbon footprint that you could have in any hotel.

But isn't there a cost to it?

There's a cost to it, but cost was never a motive. Let me explain to you. It wasn't an option. A non-green building would have cost less, but the cost of operations was X. A green building was going to cost more, but



HOTELS Editor in Chief Jeff Weinstein with Nakul Anand

ITC Hotels: Trailblazer in Sustainability

- World's Largest Hotel Chain with 23 LEED Platinum Certified Properties
- World's First 12 LEED Zero- Carbon Certified Hotels
- World's First 02 LEED Zero- Water Certified Hotels
- Surpassed 2030 sectoral emission targets set as per COP 21

Emissions (Kgo02e)

ITC Hotels (Current Level)	Target - COP 21 (2030)
57 Per Room Night	65 Per Room Night
80 Per Sqm	129 Per Sqm

- Over 57% of electricity consumption is through renewable sources. Renewable Energy generated annually is enough to light up a Highway from North to South of India for a year.
- Reduced 50% freshwater consumption over the last few years. Entire wastewater is treated/recycled - Equivalent to irrigating 100 thousand trees, sequestering 95 thousand tonnes of CO2 approximately.
- "Our Diet is Cooking the Planet". The emissions from food supply are growing at a rate of 1.8% annually. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C will be impossible, without significant changes made to how the world eats. As food production accounts for roughly a quarter of the World's total GHG Emissions.
- Over 50% of Food & Beverages at ITC Hotels are sourced locally
- LOCAVORE WelcomSthalika: every region across India has its own take on the Thali or Sthalika. WelcomSthalika is a tribute to the local cuisine where each hotel is located, presenting a composite assortment in a balanced combination of lentils, local millets, seasonal fresh produce & meats.

neutral to something. We have all made commitments. If I have to do this, I have to do this in every aspect of my business. Am I right?

Travel being one aspect. Therefore, when Mr. Berry, for example, who works for Unilever, travels, he will have to justify travelling to the hotel which has the lowest footprint because that will add to the total carbon footprint of the company. Won't I then be a preferred hotel over the other hotel even at a preferred cost?

No, but when you said you were ahead of your time, were you not too much ahead? I mean did you gain anything over this time, being the first runner?

I didn't gain, but that was my philosophy. Today I can gain. That's the difference.

But were your operational costs less? Over this period in time?

Yes. Operational costs were less, but capital cost for more.

So, like with ITC Gardenia, which you mentioned as an example, now it's 10 years since you opened Gardenia.

Nearly 15 or 18.

Okay, so in that time, have you progressed in recovering some of the cost it took?

Every year it would have. Because simple thing like power, your power costs are going up. We get power at commercial tariff, not at industrial tariff, which is the second most expensive part of the running of our hotels. Right? But now you are buying it from renewable sources. You're getting it from your own windmills. You're getting it at one quarter of the cost. Just look at that as a difference.

How does one educate the industry at large; the hotel industry at large?

What gets measured, gets managed. I have data at large to prove.

But is there any agency which is spreading the word?

Yes. There is something called an SHA, which is a sustainable hospitality alliance where the leaders of all the companies like Hilton et cetera, sit on that board. I am part of that sustainable hospitality alliance.

This is based in UK and we have a CEO. We are the ones who are creating standards. What is the standard measure or benchmark? How can I compare hotel A to B? How can I share best practices, et cetera. It's an industry wide effort.

Have customers come to recognize this now?

Customers are demanding it because their company is demanding it. Your company



Lobby at ITC Gardenia, Bengaluru

will tell you to give them a carbon footprint at the end of a year. Why Mr. Berry, did you cross so much? They will penalize you. So, you will firstly stay in the hotel with the smallest carbon footprint and secondly, you will take longer stays, but lesser number of trips; instead of four trips of three days, you may take two trips of six days. And save on your consumption of fuel. Aviation is a big part of your fuel costs. You are already seeing it. Then you're going to combine business with leisure again because you want to save the fuel, et cetera, and you know can work from anywhere. Trends are already showing that 90% of business travelers say they're ready to book a bleisure. They are ready to give some time for leisure, et cetera. Marriott's data is already showing that business travel is getting longer.

It was earlier an average of three days; it's getting four days or five days proving exactly the point that I'm trying to say. You are now the custodian of your company's carbon footprint. You have a commitment to bring it down. You've committed 2030 & 2050, right?

Ok, so that is for the corporate traveller. What about people like me whose company is not dictating me anything? So, am I getting more alive to it?

It is up to us. But let me tell you, not so much the baby boomers where you and I come from, but the millennials and the Gen Z, very much savvy and very much conscious.

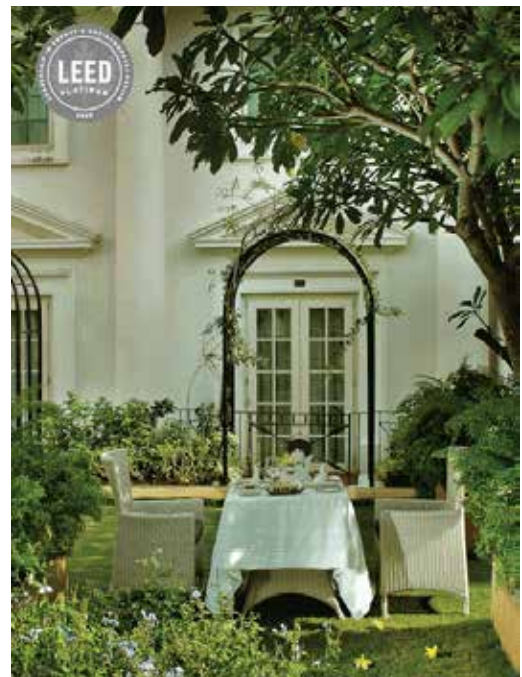
And you're passing the word to your own customer there?

Absolutely, and to our associates. Our associates, our employees are taught in it. 10,000 employees.

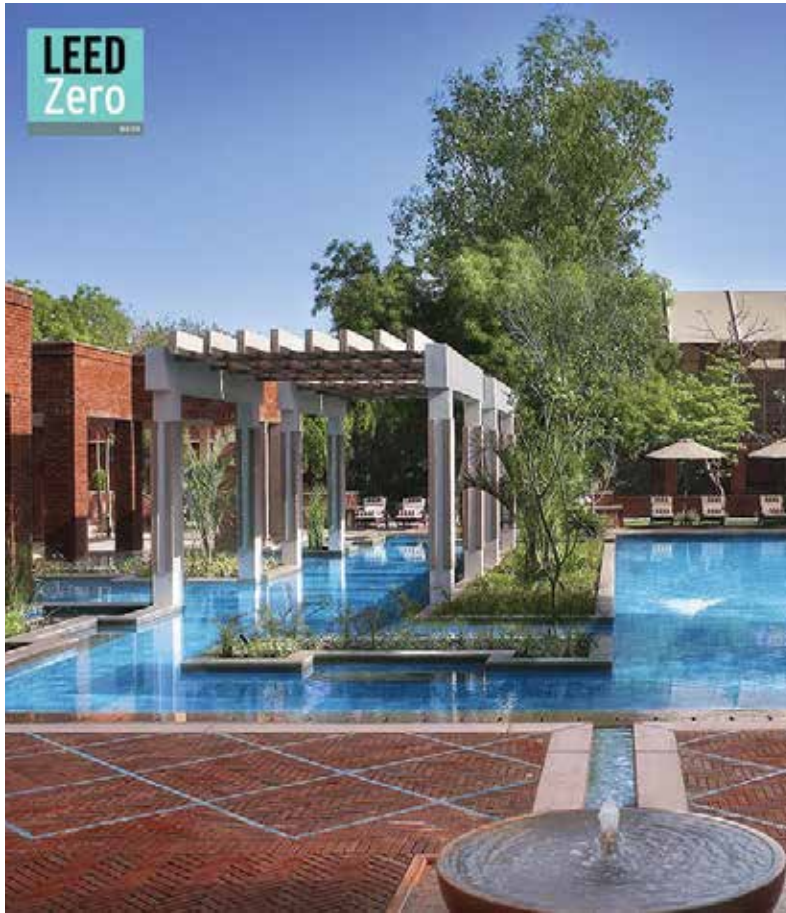
Are you sensing a greater sense even amongst the industry or no?

Absolutely. Let me give you a typical example of safety. 30 years back or 20 years back, even in the hotel industry, even in a five-star hotel, if I walked 30 years back, having two wires from a vacuum cleaner going into a power point, it didn't affect us. Today, it will hurt my eye and yours. It has to be a plug.

That is how things have changed. That is the cause of safety. I'm just giving, this is a very simple example to say this is how our bodies have got attuned. It looks like a cockroach to us, which may be accepted 15 years back. If it was in our room today, you leave the room; we check out of the hotel if there was a cockroach.



“We converted ITC Gardenia into a platinum. We built it as platinum rated building, one amongst the first platinum rated hotels in the world, to prove to ourselves that it was possible. It also won the award for the most luxurious hotel of that year. Giving us the confidence the two could coexist.”



You used this example back about the towel not being changed every day. Do you feel the customer is wanting to use the same towel longer?

The customer doesn't want to be bound by your laws. He wants to do what he wants. He may want to come back after three hours. That towel may still be wet. He wants the feel of a fresh towel. Luxury is a fresh white linen sheet at night. Not the one I slept in yesterday. I want a change from what I do every day at home.

So, are you changing the sheet every day now?

Of course, we are.

And you change the towel every day?

Of course, we do. In some hotels we give an option to the customer, but in our case it doesn't matter.

What next for ITC, if you can go to another subject altogether?

We believe every hotel is working towards getting what is called carbon neutral, which should happen soon. This is not a problem. The problem is in the states. One of the big things in getting carbon neutral is getting access to renewable energy.

In many states, hotels are fighting battles because the hotel is the single largest revenue source that the state electricity board has. We are huge guzzlers and we pay commercial tariff, not industrial tariff. Nobody else pays commercial tariff. In many states, they have become adept at finding ways to not to give alternate energy to us. So, wherever I am not getting carbon neutral, I'm fighting the system. System is overtly shouting for all green. But down the line, everybody has targets to meet.

Just one other subject towards greening in a way, organic foods, ITC itself has gone into millet making. How much of that Indianness are you ready to absorb and put through across your hotels? I mean,

◀ Water is a precious resource and recycling is a responsibility we must uphold to ensure a sustainable future for our planet. ITC Mughal, Agra & ITC Sonar, Kolkata have become the first two hotels in the world to be LEED Zero Water Certified. The certification verifies net zero goals and signals market leadership in the built environment. The hotels have been ensuring that their water requirements are offset by the use of sustainable practices such as recycling water and rainwater harvesting.

for one, I miss your paan shop. I miss your mithai shop.

I think we do and I think the world is coming around. People are now looking for experiences. Even when they travel on business, they're looking for an Indian experience. Therefore, our biggest strength is nobody gives you India like we do as we had said 45 years back. Our properties are built and rooted in the soil. Nobody can take that.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

We have an identity wherever we have been.

Even our last hotel in Ahmedabad is called ITC Narmada. Our uniforms have always been Indian. Our cuisine has always been ethnically Indian, what we are famous for. There are a few things like this that are left like the Mithai shop, a few touches we certainly can bring back, but that is the way to grow and our differentiator is Indianness.

Let me also tell you nowhere else, but in our Vedic scriptures, that we talk of sustainability. The Vedic scriptures go back to 4,000 whatever years, talk of sustainability. So, in even following sustainability practices, you are following exactly what is Indian. Indian food, Ayurvedic forms of therapy, the whole science of food such as eat by season. Eat local is all sustainable. All that the world is talking today. We have done it from our childhood.

I noticed and I was very, what shall I say, impressed by the elevator - you have this new logo where you talk about going experiential and immersive and local experiences.

So, I go and stay in my Storii hotel in Dharamsala. I want to experience something local. They have tied up with the local villagers. They take me for a walk, one and a half kilometre. I go and meet this couple. We have cleaned up the kitchen. He will source local ingredients and cook food, which I will have with him. That's a local immersive experience where we feel as part of the local society.



One Bite Wonder, mindful sustainable eating

“Our biggest challenge was convincing the government that tourism is an engine of economic activity and not an elitist activity. Today tourism has changed to an industry for which governments roll out the red carpet. Mr. Modi calls tourism on a mission mode.”



Entrance at Storii Moira

Somewhere it has to move towards responsible tourism for us all. And we are hearing all this while that hotel constructions at large in states like Himachal Pradesh, rampant violation of local laws. What can the hotel industry do?

We are a good means of communication. We are a good media for communication and I think we need to continuously communicate what is happening. Let me share with you something that’s happened. For years, our challenge, and I’ve been heading industry associations like HAI and WTTC and now FAITH. Our biggest challenge was convincing the government that tourism is an engine of economic activity and not an elitist activity. Because it was considered to be an elitist activity. Nobody wanted to touch it. Today tourism has changed to an industry for which governments roll out the red carpet. Mr. Modi calls tourism on a mission mode.

We’ve got 50 things happening in the country. So, people have begun to realize that tourism is totally a different thing. I think similarly it is important to educate people on the importance of tourism, the negative side and the positive side of it. I was there at the G20 in Goa where the GOA declaration was signed, the finest document that I have read, and I’m proud to be in Indian, that India could do it. How tourism can be the path to sustainable development goals of the world.

Who put it together?

The G20 task force for tourism, but it’s under India’s presidency and it’s called the Goa Declaration.

But the declaration that has come out is absolutely brilliant one that was unanimously accepted by all countries. Now that is moving towards responsible tourism and that covers the entire gamut of the tourism canvas. Create more spaces for tourism. Don’t put everybody in one city, create 20 more cities, create incentives for people to go there, what to do. Rural tourism. It covers the entire gamut of it.

But coming to our question of the example that we are setting in our own states, how hotels are rampantly, violating local norms, et cetera. I just feel that associations like HAI, FHRAI, WTTC, FAITH - somewhere we need to do more, some kind of education because we are getting a very, very bad name for the industry.

No, I think that we’ve had problem in one or two states. I think the situation is very much better than what it was before. I think some of the events, the last 60-90 days have come as bitter truth without naming in which state what has happened. But I think barring that, things are so much better. I think that these few places are also looking at correcting. It is much on the positive side, not withstanding these few recent aberrations. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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

THE KERALA MODEL IN TOURISM

How Does Tourism Benefit the State's Economy?



Kerala's tourism has been essentially a rural tourism story! Not city based but experiential built by individuals! It is a celebration of the state's culture and traditions! How has this played out? Over the years and where does this stand today? Today, there are modern day drivers like mice, weddings, sports, special events, how much of this has caught on with the state's tourism drivers? Has there been any noticeable negative effect of tourism in the state? Every destination has to keep reinventing it to remain relevant! Is this happening in Kerala? Has the PPP model in tourism Kerala kind of waned off. Is the private sector more complacent and the government is more on its own? These and more are some of the questions we had for **Jose Dominic, senior member of the Dominic family, who run the most impressive and successful hotels in the state, under the brand of CGH Earth.**

Interviewed by **NAVIN BERRY**

Where is the real genesis for the present tourism industry in your state?

Though a late starter in Tourism Kerala emerged as a front performing state in particular as a thought leader. To attract investment most states laid the red carpet. Kerala on the other hand played the hand it is used to by showing the Red Flag. Thus, scaring away FDI.

What in essence is the Kerala model in tourism?

Also, it must be acknowledged that highest priority given to investment that contributed to the state achieving the highest HDI rank in the subcontinent. Thus, also creating a destination for the modern evolved traveller. Sensing the opportunity local entrepreneurs did what they could which was small and in a manner they knew which was local. To their genius making indigenous and small World Class. This in essence is the Kerala model. Democratised entrepreneurship. Made the destination unique relying on its own cultural features. Conceived in Kerala Designed for Kerala. Offering the local to the foreign and national tourist.

How did you go about this invention, at least in terms of choosing the model, and your potential tourists, especially from overseas?

With its own unique Geopolitical circumstances in the first instance created the platform for a traveller using a word coined by a tour-





ism researcher Dr Peter Aderhold professor in Denmark later after retirement founded the Aderhold Institute of Tourism Research. He described two types of travellers and coined words for them. One the Sun Sand Surf Traveller (SSS) and the other Alert Independent Traveller (AIT).

Who are these? And, where did you fit into their requirements?

SSS: they seek 27degree Celsius water, white sand, the best hotel, best room with a view. all in that line. Nothing else mattered. Certain of what they want. Must have it regardless. They will buy a seat and go where the seat goes.

AIT: for whom it was a voyage of discovery. Travel is an adventure. An exploration into new Worlds. Also, it mattered to him the life of local communities - their life, human rights, democracy. Impact of his travel on them.

And, between the two, as these were at variance with each other?

Clearly two markedly different types. Aderhold research also found that 90 percent of the market was SSS while only 10 percent was AIT. But also found was that SSS was sunset while AIT was sunrise. Destinations like India were more attractive to AIT and more capable of satisfying the AIT.

It followed naturally therefore that despite AIT being in minority, it fitted better into the aspirations and capabilities of destinations like India, Kerala and enterprises like CGH Earth.

Unlike the SSS who bought a seat and went wherever the seat went, the AIT wanted to be in fully in command. The internet and later the social media were the tools that belies him.

So, this was a new model, unlike what was being pursued in other successful destinations in India, like in the North, for instance?

Kerala's strength is in its evolved feature. It reflects the strength of modern India and not dependent on ancient stories long gone of turbaned maharajas in palaces. Kerala now stands poised in leadership position in what is referred to as Responsible Tourism, drawing its strength from the local in concept, practice and ownership.

“Kerala's strength is in its evolved feature. It reflects the strength of modern India. Kerala now stands poised in leadership position in what is referred to as Responsible Tourism, drawing its strength from the local in concept, practice and ownership.”

And going into the future? Where does this model go forward?

Travel is very personal. Travel to rejuvenate body, mind and spirit. Lifting the bar. This is the Kerala model. And therefore, poised in an extraordinary advantaged position. MICE, special events, weddings et al will flow from that.

And, for the state as a whole? Where does tourism fit into the economy?

Tourism has been identified as a change maker in the state through surging entrepreneurship. Harnessing the local. Creating jobs and livelihoods in the town as well as in the far away villages. A model of tourism that is futuristic. Putting the interest of planet and local communities on equal parity with the visitor. In short, able to attract the evolved traveller who finds luxury where the consumer interest does not overwhelm the interest of the environment and people.

Kerala Travel Mart has made significant contributions to the state's marketing effort.



Bangaram Island Resort

“As a local entrepreneur in the private sector, I came to be the President of KTM. The first mart in year 2000 brought buyers from around the world and the nation on a scale never before seen. For an entrant into the tourism sector, it obviated the need to go to ITB or WTM and the huge costs that those required.”

So, this would be experiential that is new age luxury?

The model of tourism that has emerged in Kerala is the result of its originating source. Local entrepreneurs; who could create world class experiences from what is both small and local.

This model which put interests of the environment and community on equal parity with that of the consumer and enterprise has helped to take away or very much minimise the negative impacts very often tourism brings in its wake.

How has the industry been supported by the state government? Is there a PPP in works?

The PPP model in Kerala, yes! The government has actively supported the local entrepreneur by promoting the destination. It is this partnership that could lead to taking the pioneering step of branding the destination, as 'Gods own Country'. This has served exceedingly well both on the supply side and the demand side.

And, the industry too has come forward? In what manner and means?

This is most marked in marketing of the destination, with the creation of the Kerala Travel Mart which emerged as India's most significant travel marketing event; a direct result of the PPP in action. KTM started in year 2000 when Amitabh Kant was Tourism Secretary of Kerala and Dr Venu, the present chief secretary of the state, was its director.

What was your role, and how did it work?

As a local entrepreneur in the private sector, I came to be the President of KTM. The first mart in year 2000 brought buyers from around the world and the nation on a scale never before seen. For an entrant into the tourism sector, it obviated the need to go to ITB or WTM and the huge costs that those required.

What has been the downside for tourism in the state? Surely, there would be some snags you have experienced on the way?

Through successive governments, whatever the colour of the flag, they have kept the Kerala model on course. Though, some barriers linger. One for example is the excise regulations.

It was under the chief minister ship of Sri AK Antony that brought a ban on Arrack. Today, though the current government is enjoying an unprecedented run in Kerala for a second term they are unable to get out of the clutches of the Antony diktat.

Instead of Arrack or IMIL (Indian made Indian liquor) made in Kerala, creating local jobs and benefit local farmers, now allowed is IMFL (Indian made foreign liquor) mostly manufactured in other states. It is nothing but industrial alcohol with added colour and essence and called whiskey and brandy. Though it is not the business of government to be in business least of all the business of alcohol retail. Yet government has made it their monopoly business to retail alcohol and on top of it make a loss in the process.

Do these impact events and your capability to hold MICE and weddings?

Yes, indeed, very much so! The state's excise regulations stand as a major hurdle in tourism promotion. 1st of month are dry days, high exorbitant charges for serving alcohol on special events particularly wedding events - all these make the state a difficult destination for MICE and destination weddings. On top of this, wedding planners complain about the additional hurdle faced on account of a practise called Attimari, that gives local hoodlums the right to unload, enabling them to demand high charges, making Kerala the most expensive location to have an event.

And what of the future for this model?

The Kerala model in tourism gave a unique advantage to Kerala. The realisation of the value of this model has not the same following as before. The state's success will come from this differentiated model. To keep the leadership model, it is important for everybody to value and know your own strengths. Harness those strengths. This is the story for every successful brand.

What could be Kerala tourism 2.0? Is that needed?


Destinations must reinvent to remain relevant! You can't keep flogging the same thing in eternity. The Kerala model emerged as an innovative disruption to the existing tourism models. It was small local entrepreneur



“It was under the chief minister ship of Sri AK Antony that brought a ban on Arrack. Today, though the current government is enjoying an unprecedented run in Kerala for a second term they are unable to get out of the clutches of the Antony diktat. Though it is not the business of government to be in business least of all the business of alcohol retail. Yet government has made it their monopoly business to retail alcohol and on top of it make a loss in the process.”

led state supported model. Which easily identified itself with environment sustainability, local community inclusion and offering local. Kerala's progress from Bimaru status as far as tourism is concerned to progressive is thanks to the model. It is acknowledged that Kerala has leadership position in Responsible Tourism. This is giving the Kerala destination a preferred destination status especially among the Alert Independent Traveller whose numbers are swelling even among domestic travellers. Though such a destination brand image for Kerala is not waning it will make good sense for Kerala to position the destination more strongly in this space.

Your last word on the subject?

Do what you say. Say what you do. 

EXPLORING A NEW CONCEPT OF A 'DISTRIBUTED HOTEL' MODEL

Jewish homes in Kochi Street set to open



Ezekiel House on Synagogue Lane

“The restoration of the two-ancient 400-year-old Jewish houses was taken up sometime back. The AB Salem House will have 4 guest rooms and the Ezekiel House 6 guest rooms. The Ezekiel House will also have a Cafe serving Jewish cuisine. I hope to complete the work and open the two houses in December 2023.”

The passion to innovate, think out of the box is never ending. Here is another proof of the pudding, lies in the eating, with **Jose Dominic**, a guiding figure for decades in the success story of CGH Earth, as it unfolded in Kerala, is back at it again. This time, exploring the concept of a distributed hotel model. In his own words, this is what you can expect by end of this year.

“I have acquired two houses on Synagogue Lane. It happened this way. Kenny Salem, whom I knew long ago, called me one day and told me that they were preparing old Jewish dishes and would I come and taste them. These were being cooked by their help who had been taught by his parents and grandparents. Would I would like to come and taste them? Of course, I said, who would give up such an opportunity. And, I was there at Kenny’s House.

After I had a taste of the old Kochini Jewish Fish, Kenny confided that they had used this ploy to lure me to their house. He told me that he and his sister Linda had migrated to Israel and from there to Canada. When they were in Israel, they would visit at least once or twice a year. But after they had moved to Canada, only once in a few years and hence had decided to sell their house. He had made a list of a few people whom they thought would make ideal buyers for their house and I was number one on that list. Hence, they had got me over. They said if I do not purchase it, they would then go to the next name on the list. I ended up buying the house.

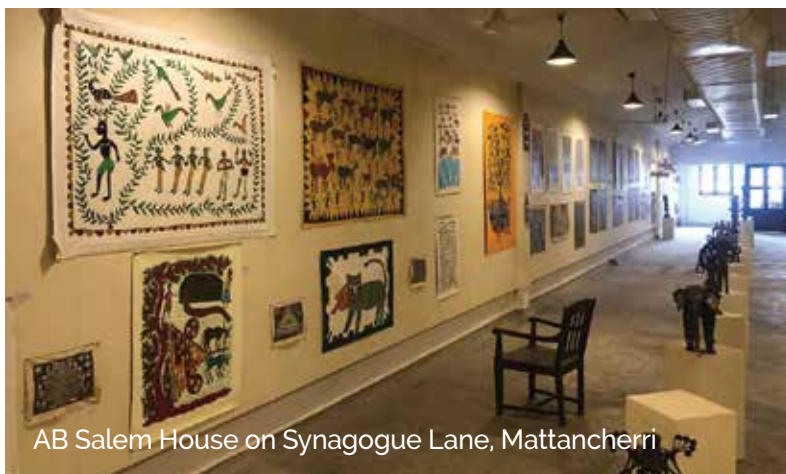
The house is known as Salem House; its famous occupant was AB Salem who was also known as the Gandhian Jew. A road in Jew town was named after him. After purchasing the house with the help of my daughter Mridula who is an interior architect graduate from CEPT Ahmedabad, I went



AB Salem House on Synagogue Lane, Mattancherry



Synagogue Lane at Jewtown ,
Mattancherry, The Jewish quarter
of Kochi



AB Salem House on Synagogue Lane, Mattancherry



A vintage photo
of Synagogue Lane,
Jewtown, Cochin

1930

about restoring the house to what it would have been during the time AB Salem, their grandfather, resided there.

The house is to be made into a tourist residence.

While I was undertaking the restoration work, the owner of another house 50 m down the lane, offered to sell his house, too. This house had been named as Leela Manzil by current owners from the Jewish owners. I ended up buying that house, too. Researching its history, I discovered that it was once owned by the Jewish Ezekiel family. It's owner Rahabi Ezekiel was a prominent trader during the Dutch times who traded with China on Dutch ships. He was the one who had donated the Hand Painted Chinese made ceramic floor tiles the Synagogue is famous for. This happened in 1758 when the Synagogue was undergoing renovation. These houses were ancient around 400 years old. The Synagogue Lane was the lane the Jews referred to, as the one on which Paradesi Jews lived. The Synagogue is known as the Paradesi Synagogue.

The restoration of the two-ancient 400-year-old Jewish houses was taken up sometime back. When the Pandemic struck, the work was suspended. Now I am completing the work. The AB Salem House will have 4 guest rooms and the Ezekiel House 6 guest rooms. The Ezekiel House will also have a Cafe serving Jewish cuisine. I hope to complete the work and open the two houses in December 2023.

I am experimenting with a different concept referred to as 'Distributed Hotel'. This is in contrast to the 'Fortress model', which hotels usually are. Enter through one gate and all the facilities and rooms are within the four walls. In the 'distributed hotel' model, the hotel is spread on the street. Four rooms in one house, further down more rooms in another house. Another house is a café, another a gallery, and so on. The street functions as the corridor of the hotel. Now for the exciting part. Others too, set up rooms and cafes. The more the better. In other words, the hotel is distributed along the street, and having different owners, too. On the same lane, other houses have been converted into guest houses. One has already opened. Two more are



Paradesi Synagogue tower

in the pipeline, likely to open in 2024. In all, I can see a distributed hotel on Synagogue Lane aggregating about 25 guest rooms, differently priced, differently owned, each having its unique concepts spread over 5 houses. In addition, there would be a cafe and galleries. The street therefore gains identity as a great place to stay.

As told to **NAVIN BERRY**

Being Responsible in what is Built, Forward Looking and Sustainable!

HOSPITALITY IS A SERIOUS BUSINESS AT INTERGLOBE HOTELS



InterGlobe Hotels was launched in 2004 as a joint venture between InterGlobe Enterprises and Accor Asia Pacific to develop the 'ibis' brand as a quality mid-market product, sensing a significant void in this space. In the first five years, they successfully opened seven hotels across seven different cities, and since then, the pace has only accelerated. The two partners share mutual trust and a vision to transform the hospitality sector through an efficient development and operation model.



by **J B SINGH**, *President and CEO, InterGlobe Hotels*

INTRODUCTION

■ The expertise of the two organisations, renowned for their unmatched reputation, created the right platform to meet the evolving needs & aspirations of the Indian consumer.

■ The joint venture now has a very well-diversified portfolio of **30 hotels**, spread across different SPVs, including **28 operational** (23 ibis & ibis styles hotels, 4 Novotels, 1 Pullman) and **2 under-construction hotels** (1 ibis and 1 Novotel) under the JV. These cumulatively offer

over 6,000 rooms across 14 cities in the country, making InterGlobe Hotels one of the key leaders in the this segment of the hospitality industry.

■ Presently, our network spans 14 cities, encompassing both business and leisure destinations. These include New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Gurugram, Pune, Nashik, Jaipur, Goa, Hyderabad, Kochi, Coimbatore, and Thane.

VISION AND STRATEGY

● Our purpose is to offer world-class experiences to our guests by creating innovative, efficient, and top-quality hotels through a culture of continuous learning, collaboration, and ownership. We believe in challenging conventional norms, and this approach has helped us establish a unique brand that is recognized for its creativity and fresh perspectives.

● Throughout our 19-year history (the JV started in 2004), we have



Library at ibis Thane



New-Gen Room with art from emerging artists at ibis Thane

achieved numerous firsts. We followed a strategy that was different from conventional wisdom and focused on greenfield projects. Through our brand 'ibis', we have stayed true to our original philosophy of providing high-quality experience at great value for money, aimed at the young, discerning Indian traveller.

- We, like the rest of the InterGlobe group, has a strong commitment to compliance. It's in our DNA. The implemented procedures guarantee meticulous adherence to compliance standards, as we consistently maintain a zero-tolerance approach towards any compliance delays.

- Our product is designed to cater to a diverse audience, including families, seniors, couples, solo travellers and the younger demographics on the go.

DESIGN

We have transformed India's mid-market hotel segment by anticipating and effectively adapting to the industry's explosive growth and transformation. When the first hotel, - ibis Gurgaon, was launched in 2008, it challenged the status quo, and other players turned around and took notice. Our effective use of space, cookie-cutter design of rooms, pod bathrooms, and well-designed public spaces were game changers for the industry and have positioned the group as a frontrunner in hotel design and development.

- Our new-gen hotels are designed functionally and aesthetically to provide all essential facilities to offer an exceptional, first-rate experience to our guests. We partner with the best international interior and architectural design firms to deliver modern designs in chic and lively public areas of our hotels, combining western aesthetics with Indian elements. Design is conceptualised keeping the modern traveller in mind, with spaces that are more fluid and offer a warm look and feel.

- Our fittings, fixtures, furniture, acoustics, etc. are constantly improved to keep up with trends and stay relevant. For instance, we have added curated libraries to our latest designs and started promoting emerging Indian artists by investing in and displaying their art at our new hotels. This appeals to millennials and Gen Z alike, as well as business and leisure travellers. Through the art initiative, we aim to promote and support artistic talent and raise awareness of India's thriving art scene among hotel guests and patrons.

- Additionally, across all our properties, we offer modern, vibrant, and spacious back-of-house (BOH) spaces to create a welcoming environment and provide a range of amenities tailored to meet the needs of young hotel staff, thereby fostering higher levels of engagement.

CONTINUOUS INNOVATION

- Our approach revolves around ensuring that our business is future-ready, with a continual emphasis on innovation and the implementation of cutting-edge technology. One of our key core values is Future



Employee engagement program at our corporate office

Mindedness; our innovative methodologies have led to new industry standards in 'cost-to-build' and 'time-to-build' in our product segment. Our efforts here are complemented by strong execution and operational excellence to provide best-in-class service experiences.

- Regular product reviews are conducted to ensure that our offerings are fresh, modern, and aligned with market demands.

- Innovation requires transparency, and hence information flow and open communication are crucial. Through various forums and cross-functional committees, the focus is on resolving key business issues, which fosters ownership and commitment. We also have committees and groups dedicated to innovation and new ideas. During challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these committees developed various innovative ideas to generate ancillary revenues. Consequently, when the hospitality industry experienced a resurgence after the challenges of COVID-19, our hotels exhibited significantly faster growth and recovery compared to the overall market.

CULTURE

- Our culture places strong emphasis on agility, encouraging employees to adapt quickly to change. It fosters an environment where employees are inspired to take ownership of

their projects and initiatives, and the leadership team supports this by providing them with the autonomy to drive their tasks and take pride in their work.

■ Transparency and involvement are ensured via regular interactions with the leadership team via town hall meetings, open forums, and one-on-one sessions. Innovation seminars and brainstorming sessions are often organised to promote creativity.

■ Employees are encouraged to contribute their ideas and suggestions during regular strategy discussions, which look at long-term objectives and market trends. We support employees in learning new skills, foster a culture of learning, and advance both physical and mental wellness through a variety of training programs, workshops, and online courses.

■ InterGlobe Hotels is dedicated to undertaking endeavours that benefit all by promoting gender equality at the workplace, supporting the local community through upliftment programmes and solidarity projects, and striving for the highest level of employee engagement.

SUSTAINABILITY IN CONSTRUCTION & OPERATIONS

■ The concept of sustainability is ingrained in our culture. We acknowledge the evolving demands of our customers and are dedicated to implementing sustainable development practices in both the construction and day-to-day operations of our hotels.

Under Development Hotels in Mumbai and Bengaluru



IGBC Gold certification received for ibis Hebbal Bengaluru and ibis Thane

■ Sustainability begins at the site selection and project planning stage and continues until the hotel opening stage and even beyond in our daily operations. One important factor we consider when choosing a location is the site's proximity to public transport. Additionally, all design layouts are planned with stringent compliance practices for building norms to ensure development control and avoid any negative impact on the physical infrastructure.

■ We also look at site preservation measures, aiming to preserve 10% of the current topography and vegetation and retain 50% of the site contour. We additionally examine methods for mitigating soil erosion, such as employing barricades and sprinklers to control dust and constructing an on-site sedimentation tank to manage sediment.

■ Building design is closely coordinated with architects, MEP and green building consultants to incorporate sustainable design features. This includes conducting energy simulations, sun-path analysis, BIM review, and lighting analysis. The goal is to create a complete passive building envelope design, including the selection of facade materials and glazing, resulting in an annual energy savings of more than 2%. By implementing these strategies, we help decrease the carbon footprint of our buildings.

■ In one of our upcoming hotels, we are using technology for energy reduction in the ventilation and air-conditioning systems. To enhance air quality, we are retrofitting the ventilation systems in our properties with high capability air filters and our buildings are specifically designed to include elements that result in an annual energy cost reduction of more than 8%-10%.

■ We have also been conferred with the IGBC award under the category of 'Pioneer in large scale adoption of green buildings in the hospitality sector in India' and our hotel in Navi Mumbai is India's first IGBC gold-rated hotel to be retrofit to IGBC requirements.

Some of the initiatives implemented in our portfolio include:

During Construction

- IGBC certified Gold rated hotel constructions.
- Dry walls used (low carbon footprints)
- Promoting Sustainable building - Natural lights in Meeting Rooms & Restaurant
- Usage of Solar Energy for day-to-day operations and lighting of periphery

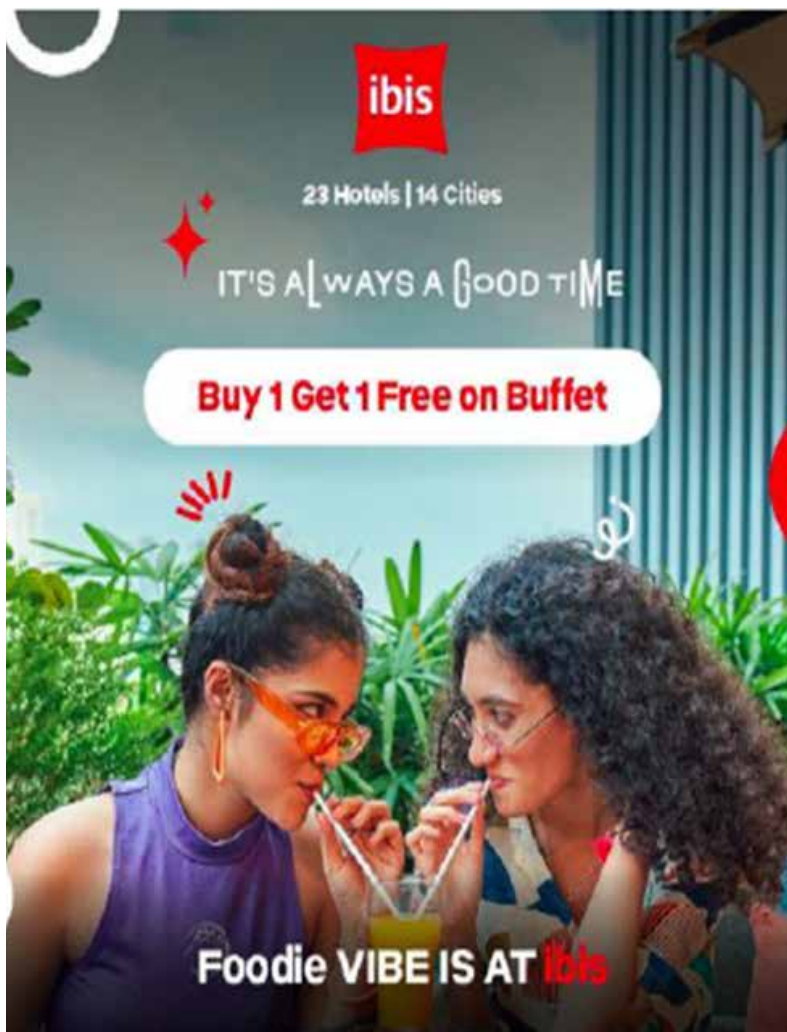
OPERATIONS

■ Elimination of single use plastic from guest interface area.

■ Implementation of water bottling plant across portfolio for drinking water.

■ Energy efficient equipment implemented across networks (variable frequency drive), electric kitchens that minimize carbon emissions.

■ Implementation of EV charging stations at our hotels (50% of our portfolio to be covered by end of 2023).



▲ EV Charging Stations at ibis Hyderabad and Novotel Chennai

◀ 'Vibe is at ibis' campaign

deployed, connecting critical departments and guest interfaces to simplify operations. This system enables centralised monitoring and review of progress, ensuring a consistent allocation of staff members, even during periods of high occupancy.

- We are transforming/revamping the whole revenue management system with a comprehensive single platform with a dynamic pricing solution for room rates, additional sales channels, credit management, and price listing across different OTAs.

- Efficient use of energy and resources via new technological tools for energy monitoring.
- Healthy & Sustainable food Charter - Consume local and seasonal products.
- Food Waste management.

MANAGING OUR ASSETS

- We opened our first hotel back in 2008 and the properties need continuous upgrades and maintenance. Hence an asset management system was developed to manage our growing assets and volumes. This involves close collaboration with our joint venture partners and operators to ensure alignment towards the common goal of fostering a thriving business.
- Efficiently planning renovations using a robust displacement analysis is a crucial task undertaken regularly. This enables us to renovate a building within a ninety-day timeframe, demonstrating the strength and efficiency of our processes.
- Consistent with our forward-thinking approach, we consistently maintain a business plan that is regularly amended and updated to accurately assess where we stand as an organization in terms of value creation. Our planning methodology remains adaptable and open to frequent evaluations and helps us to swiftly adjust our tactics in response to changing circumstances.
- We have successfully tested and are now implementing a new Energy Control Building Management System which would help our team identify operational energy conservation methods based on data analytics.
- An interactive property management system has been successfully

SALES & MARKETING

- While we have many distribution channels, our efforts have always been to maximize direct bookings and try to connect with our guests and end users. We aim to leverage our loyalty base and explore technology, focused public segment campaigns to grow this segment.
- We prioritise integrating cutting-edge technologies in various operations, including cloud-based property management, e-audits, revenue management, and centralised finance and procurement. We can use data more intelligently and detect consumer behaviour changes with these new technologies. Enabling the business to better adapt its marketing strategies to customers, an essential aspect post-COVID-19.
- Our most recent brand campaign "Vibe is at ibis" was launched at the beginning of the year, and the second phase of that is currently underway. The guest response has been very positive. Through our target campaigns, we have the opportunity to offer the best rates, F&B options, and promote our health and safety measures, which are some of the key priorities for travellers today. **Di**



TYPECAST, NO! ACTIVIST, YES!

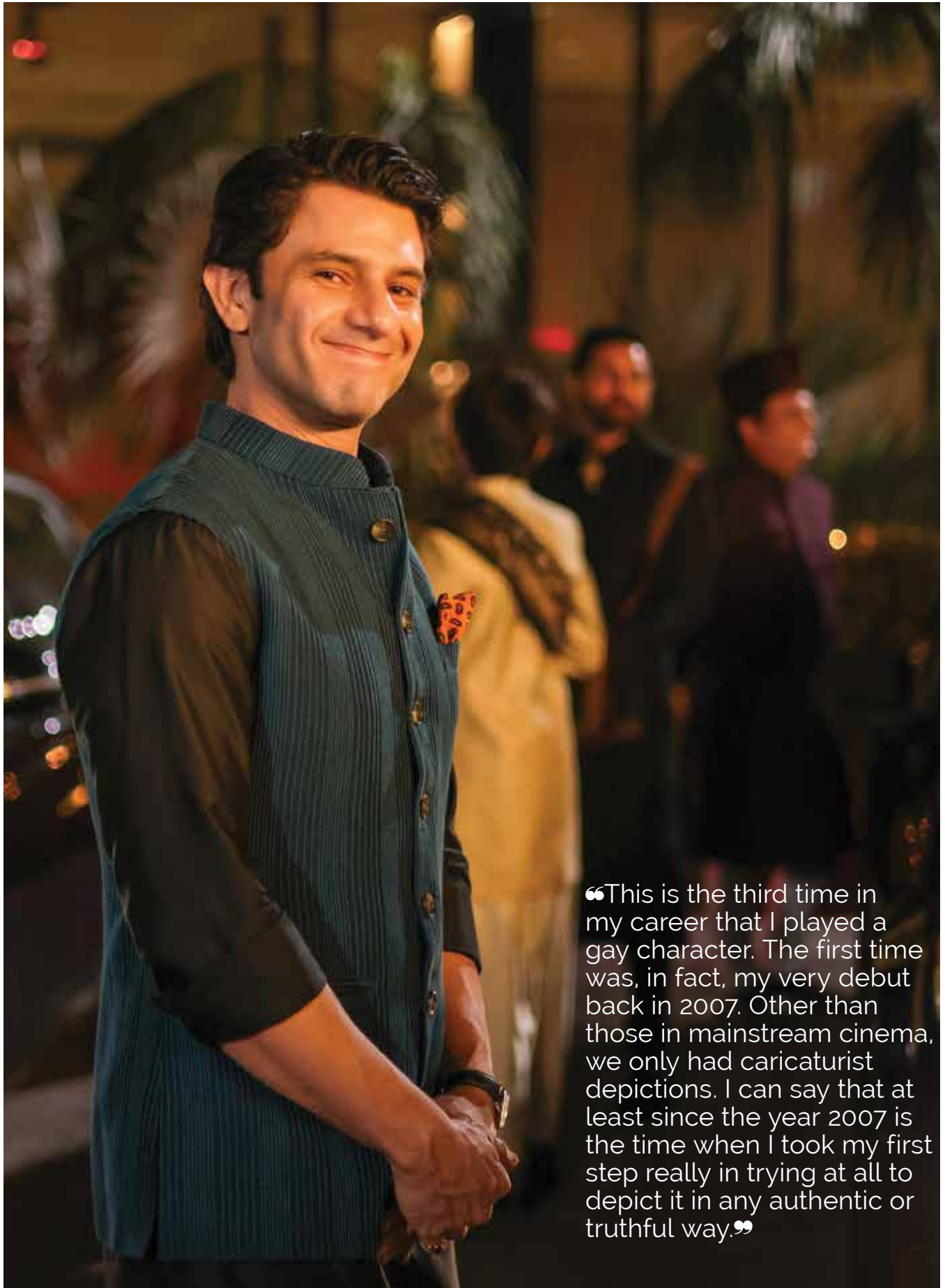
*There's much more to **Arjun Mathur**, waiting for us to discover!*

As a young Delhi boy, he decided to go into films, has done 35 projects till date, has arrived on the OTT platform as a star, with his recently released 'Made in Heaven', holds all promise to strike into the big league with his down to earth thinking. In a free-wheeling conversation, Arjun shares his beliefs, his ideas on going forward, most of all, as a human being.

Interviewed by NAVIN BERRY

You are a leading star on OTT platforms and a great champion for LGBTQ causes in both your series. How has the response been to LGBTQ as a subject, in your understanding through your films and also generally on OTT?

This is the third time in my career that I played a gay character. The first time was in fact my very debut back in 2007. And back then there were no references whatever. There was no representation of the community that had been done accurately before that, other than in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, just the odd film here and there, which was considered extremely arthouse at the time. Other than those in mainstream cinema, we only had caricaturist depictions. I can say that at least since the year 2007 is the time when I took my first step really in trying at all to depict it in any authentic or truthful way. But then I was very lucky then, because again,



“This is the third time in my career that I played a gay character. The first time was, in fact, my very debut back in 2007. Other than those in mainstream cinema, we only had caricaturist depictions. I can say that at least since the year 2007 is the time when I took my first step really in trying at all to depict it in any authentic or truthful way.”

that was a short film that was directed by Mira Nair. I was acting opposite Irrfan Khan. It was not a mainstream per se depiction.

The second time was for a film called 'I Am' with Onir who is a great champion of LGBTQ himself. And in that film, this was now in 2010 or something. And even then, I mean, it's certainly not anything that most actors were ready to do at the time.

Understood! And then the narrative going further?

By the time *Made in Heaven* came around in 2017 to be on the same page with you; the first time when I found out that this is a gay character, it's not that I had reservations about it, but I just felt that I had done it already twice in my career, and I didn't want to be repetitive as an artist.

Therefore, how did you then agree to doing it?

So, I shared that thought with the creators in my first meeting with them, and they just told me to take the script home and read them, and by the time I finished reading them, I realized that this was just something so new and different, and really it was like a voice that hadn't been heard before in our cinema scape.

So, I decided, there and then, that I am going to do it again for a third time. I realized myself that I had to personally first drop those lines in my own head of whether this is a gay part or a straight part - at the end of it, it's a human character with human emotion.

That's so beautifully said. Yes, yes, yes.

So, I first myself had to do that as an artist, as an actor, for there to be any effect of it on the audience to start with. I also feel that the world itself right now where we are, we'll get to later, but I think that over the last 10 odd years, the world has really evolved fast towards being inclusive and opening up towards rights for minorities and some minorities, not all.

You just mentioned that which is something very, very inclusive, something very human and emotional when you said that you have to remove the lines in your mind; straight or gay or what, but it is a human being. You see yourself somewhere arriving at a situation where you become a kind of an activist yourself for more inclusive life around us?

I think I have always been, aside from just LGBTQ rights, I have always considered myself a bit of an activist, to be honest, be-

cause I just find there are many, many things in the world that are just not right, and films is one of the strongest mediums we have, to form public opinion and change perceptions. I've always believed in not just preaching at the end of it, first and foremost, we are entertainers, but if through our work we are able to actually affect some change, some positive change, then absolutely, I am an activist.

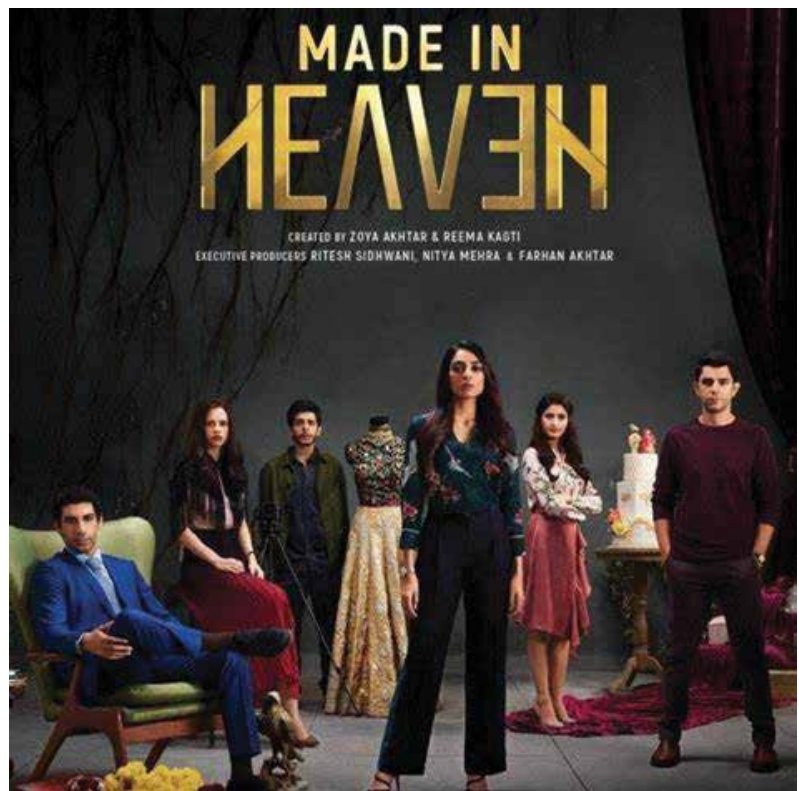
No, but tell me now, if you go back to 2007 and you go to your current *Made in Heaven* Season 2, how much revolution do you think has happened in terms of acceptability of let's say, common causes?

I'll say a lot. Honestly, you're right. I actually started realizing this only after *Made in Heaven* Season 1 released, because to be honest, I did not know how it would be received. I did not expect it to be received the way that it did across races and genders and countries and religions, and it was just universally accepted. I expected a little bit of negative commentary also, because all said and done, there are fringes and groups in the world that don't take well to these ideas. But that was simply not the case. I think that the victory of *Made in Heaven* is exactly that. It so beautifully puts its point across through its human stories that everybody across the board would feel it.

Would you say that what you have managed to portray gay or straight, it's basically you and me? It's very much normal, common human beings. It's all about us.

Yes, very much. I would, in fact, that was the very brief given to me by my directors also. We don't have to spell it out for any audience, that this is what this character is. They wanted me to play him as me, and that's what I did. There are gay men who are absolutely alpha male, masculine

“So, I first myself had to do that as an artist, as an actor, for there to be any effect of it on the audience to start with. I also feel that the world itself right now where we are, we'll get to later, but I think that over the last 10 odd years, the world has really evolved fast towards being inclusive and opening up towards rights for minorities and some minorities, not all.”



as hell, but they just like to sleep with men. So that's really the only thing that is.

Very interestingly though, this was not my expected emphasis in this interview. When you say you've been kind of an activist in so many ways, are there some other causes that also I can expect you to pick up? There are so many ills that we have. I mean, non-recognition of gays and straights is one issue, where we don't recognize the individuality of the person, but there are other social stigmas and issues. The girl child, for instance.

Absolutely.

Would you look at being an activist for other causes in society?

I've had gay friends my entire life. I'll first just talk about this cause. I've had gay friends my entire life, and if we all say that, yeah, yeah, you have my support and this that, but *Made in Heaven* for me was a way to really just put my money where my mouth is with regard to that. So that's why I did that. But personally, if you ask me, the gravest danger to our world is of course, I think the destruction of our natural habitat at the pace that is taking place. It's really what's a primary concern for us all. If you were to ask me what is the one cause in your life, I really think to save this place we live in and to save all its wildlife and all its creatures really would really be my top priority. But that being said, yeah, there are, I mean, when the CA protests were happening, I was right there in the thick of it in Mumbai. There's just anything, I mean, I'm there. At least I'm there to lend my voice to every ill that I see in the world.

When there were those NRC protests back in, I think 2019. I would say that there are many causes that I think strongly about, but also I have to say that being some kind of a public figure, I learned over time, I have to be somewhat cautious as well; I used to be a lot more fearless about the causes that I believed in.

You have to be a little circumspect now?

I do a little bit because I feel that public people run the risk of being exploited. They're exploited by the media for clickbait. And often times don't care much about whose lives they're destroying or whose lives they're affecting, or who really bears the consequence of what they end up saying. So, I find that as a measure of protecting not just myself, but

“I have always considered myself a bit of an activist, to be honest, because I just find there are many, many things in the world that are just not right, and films is one of the strongest mediums we have, to form public opinion and change perceptions. I've always believed in not just preaching at the end of it, first and foremost, we are entertainers, but if through our work we are able to actually affect some change, some positive change, then absolutely, I am an activist.”

like at one point in time, art house cinema was a very niche thing. There is a limited audience for it, just like that. I consider even commercial cinema to be its own niche, because that is just what it is. What we are catering to, or at least what I tend to cater to, is honestly a world audience.

I mean, you are in some way, can I say indulging in your passion or

also the people I love and care about. I've learned over time that it is also important that I temper my activism.

*But very interestingly, you touched upon two very interesting points. One is that you talked about putting your money where your heart is. But I want to say these ventures of yours - *Made in Heaven 1* and *Made in Heaven 2* - these have been commercial successes for you, reasonable commercial successes, or is it the big screen that is going to bring you that commercial success.*

See, with streaming platforms, it is not the box office. That is why it exists, because if it was the box office, then there is no way that actors like me, Jim Sarbh or that very extremely talented cast that you were seeing in most of the streaming shows today, these actors would not even be cast in these shows if they were based on box office and on commercials. Just



in your art at the moment, but if you want to be a commercial success, you'll have to hit the big screen. Am I putting it right or no?

I suppose it is true to some degree, but then that comes with its own trappings also. If you're really talking about you've got to be a star for the big screen, then the stars are really stuck in their own trappings of their image and what they can do, what they can't do, the risks they can take in that degree, I am much freer actor, who is free to take risks. That is also the way I like it, because I don't want to get stuck to an image of Arjun Mathur.

So, one question which I had for you is in your current LGBTQ roles, is there a fear that you could become typecast? And would you also not want soon somewhere an opportunity where you could play a non-LGBTQ character? It could be an environment activist, it could be just a normal guy with a family.

I mean, no, first of all, typecasting is not my problem.

Not your problem?

Yeah. Typecasting is, honestly, it is absolute lack of imagination and any foresight or vision on the part of creators who, once they see an actor do something, they are unable

to visualize him do anything else. And just because the actor has done that one thing well, then people just want to see him do the same thing again. Honestly speaking, as long as I don't typecast myself, I'll never get typecasted. Also, my LGBTQ characters are like 3 out of 35 projects that I've done.

But would you say Arjun, that as far as the OTT canvas is concerned, forget the big screen, you have already arrived with a star status as befits the OTT canvas.

Yes, I should think so.

And what's your first responses? Because, very obviously as, forget the fact that I may be known to you personally, but I do get very positive vibes on your roles, and one feels very happy and encouraged to see the kind of responses you are getting as a star on OTT platform. So where do you go from here in terms of OTT – I have seen

you in some very good ad films.

Well, the thing is, there are no decisions. I don't make these kinds of decisions. I don't decide, okay, now I want to do a film, or now I want to do a series. When something comes to me, I look at it for the story. And very often, honestly speaking, in today's climate, there are many people who are making things without actually knowing where it's eventually going to be seen, whether it's going to be seen in the theatre or on a streaming platform, or are we going to make this as a series or as a movie. So, all these lines are blurring quite a bit. There are many films that were made for theatrical release

“Typecasting is, honestly, it is absolute lack of imagination and any foresight or vision on the part of creators who, once they see an actor do something, they are unable to visualize him do anything else. And just because the actor has done that one thing well, then people just want to see him do the same thing again. Honestly speaking, as long as I don't typecast myself, I'll never get typecasted. Also, my LGBTQ characters are like 3 out of 35 projects that I've done.”

but have been forced to release on OTT. So, there is no saying, and in this era, how do we make these plans? The thing is to always and always only connect with the story and the character, and that's the only thing I can do, decide if I like this, if I want to be a part of telling the story, if I like what my character is doing, if I feel I can do justice.

So, what are the projects that you're currently working on?

I finished a feature film called 'Lord Curzon Ki Haveli', which is, it's like a dark comedy thriller; four actors in one room over one night, that kind of psychological thrill. And then I am starting a new series next month that I'll announce soon. It is a limited series that is based on the Asaram Bapu case. So, it's based on a book called God of Sin.

Now coming back to the main course, your ideal role model, whom you consider a role model. For all the talent that you have, if you ask me whom would I like to become, if I was going to start acting, my hero might be some one like an Anupam Kher who can be so devilish and who can just not bother about what you think of him? Who would be yours? Naseeruddin Shah for certain is one. Irrfan Khan, hundred percent.





Daniel Day-Lewis, simple. There is just no greater talent to me than Daniel Day-Lewis and the greatest thing about him is that he doesn't give a 'damn'. He does not dare. Simply, he is what he is. He does what he does. He only gets talked about when he wants to be talked about. He only gets talked about because of his work and nothing else. And more than anything, I think he realizes that this is all healing and it is all just unhealthy attachment actually, to be so blindly fixated on your needs to be seen and to make all this money.

Somewhere then, would it be fair to say that you are not chasing money, you are chasing your satisfaction?

I'm chasing having a body of work that I can look back and be proud of.

Wonderful. Tell me, in all this journey of yours so far there would be some inspirations for you personally, privately. Would you like to share some of that? But who has been your biggest influence?

I think I have to say that my mother continues to be my greatest strength.

What is it that you remember about her that you can recall, which makes you say she's your greatest strength? And in what manner does Reynoo still appear in your life?

Oh, she appears at the toughest of times. She appears at the best of

“I think the destruction of our natural habitat at the pace that is taking place. It's really what's a primary concern for us all. If you were to ask me what is the one cause in your life, I really think to save this place we live in and to save all its wildlife and all its creatures really would really be my top priority.”

times. I can feel her protecting me when things are bad. I can feel her smiling at me when things are good. She would've really loved to see where I am and what I am doing. And she was a real film buff in the family.

Sorry, just refresh my mind. At what age did you lose her?

I was 14.

Because I can remember her smile was the most infectious.

Yeah, I agree.


What role has your father played in your upbringing?

My father, that has been honestly the greatest support. The thing is that we as a family went through quite a tragedy and it left everybody with their own gaping holes. In the following years as a teenager, dad and my relationship was quite volatile, and those were also very formative years for me. So, I think that father-son relationships can anyway be quite complex and complicated because not as much as shared easily between each other. In terms of just sharing feelings. So, I think things can get complicated. I think I spent some time in my life being quite angry and resentful, but I think that has also been my journey of growth and of forgiveness towards all of us.

That's so touching what you are saying, because he literally dotes on you and is very, very proud of all that you are doing. I can only say as a father myself, we are just all the time doting on our children. So, we just love to see their growth and their success!

And that's what, it's only when you yourself get a little older and gain the maturity to be able to see your father as a human before he's your father. I think that has been my journey. But having said that, coming back to your question, from the day that I told him that this is what I want to do, and I dropped it on him like a hot potato. That I don't want to go to college. That I want to go to Bombay. That's not an easy thing for a father to accept. He has just been supportive from day one.

I always tell him that he is my role model in being an ideal father. My last question, what are you looking forward to in your next phase?

It's hard for me to be specific. I got myself an Emmy nomination a couple of years ago. That was a huge thing for me. Right now, I have just turned 42 years old. I am myself going through a time of transition, and there is change taking place in my life. I am now in a different bracket of 'actor' than I was when I started acting, when I was just 25-26 years old. So, I will simply go with the flow! 

DELHI'S SKAL CLUB BRINGS THREE AUTHORS ON ONE STAGE

Promoting tourism and friendship, uniting all sectors in the industry, Skal is an international association with over 12,000 members worldwide. The Delhi Chapter was recently honoured for being the largest globally. Recently, it did another kind of uniting, bringing three authors from tourism and hospitality to share the stage. Anchoring the session was **Aabha Bakaya**, former news anchor and now an enterprising business person. The venue was the fairly tale lawns around the swimming pool at Hotel Radisson, Mahipalpur. We bring select episodes and thoughts from the three authors.



Holding the SKAL flag with the office bearers of its Delhi chapter.

ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY THEN AND NOW, THE BIG CHANGE

Navin Berry, author, *A Journey in Tourism*

Hotels themselves have undergone a total sea change. I mean they've taken quite a few turns and turns and they have gone reinventing themselves. So, there was a sense of from where I'm going to come, there was a sense of an industry, a very closed bonhomie you could say. You would not have thought of them as competitors. I have seen all the big guns among hoteliers and tour operators sitting together, enjoying an evening. They were all competitors and there was not even a thought of competition.

At a typical travel agents convention, there would be some 350 to 400 delegates. It was like your annual coming together to meet, with families very often. There was a sense of belonging, which doesn't exist anymore.

And I have recalled how there was one association, which broke into two, and then into three, four and it goes on. So, there are so many of them, all doing their own thing and they are also kind of incestuous in themselves. They are not growing at all. Domestic tourism should have an audience of 5,000 ten years ago; today, it should have 15,000. We are not visualizing on that landscape and I think the more we are growing as an industry, the more our associations are going inwards.

Who will Own up for Tourism?

I see that nobody is there for ownership of 'tourism', that I talk about in my book. I have asked who are the stakeholders? And I kind of put my neck out, to say that I think hotels are mostly facilitators, they are mostly not the stakeholders. The stakeholders are the tourism product, they are the real stakeholders. These are product owners, there are probably 10,000 of them in the country. Nobody is bringing them together. So, I have actually used this expression, it's the tail wagging the dog because there's nobody who is taking ownership of the dog itself. So, what is tourism? Who is going to handle tourism? The tourism stakeholders are the museums, the whole gamut of experiences, both private and in government, whatever India has to offer, which is colossal, but there is nobody there to take charge of them.

And I think it is getting worse because I think there is only one person in the country, whether we like him or not, it's all subjective and individual. There is only one proponent for tourism in the country and that is Prime Minister Modi. There is nobody else talking about it. Suffice it for me to point out, when there was covid, all my hotelier friends were talking about tourism. Now business is booming, nobody's talking about tourism, they're all working unto themselves, all are happy. So, tourism is doing all hunky dory because their job is not to drive tourism, their job is to drive their own hotels, their own businesses. So, the hotels are being driven well. But who is driving tourism? The ministry of tourism, I have written in the book, does not have ownership of beyond their own four walls. So how do you go beyond, they can't tell what will happen to ASI because that's with the ministry of culture. And, then there is the subject of roads, airports, everything is being controlled by other departments. And I have advocated there should be a tourism mission which should take care of India's tourism.

I have advocated there should be somebody in the PMO who should drive tourism directly under the Prime Minister's direct stewardship. Certainly, then, things will change.

WHEN MRS INDIRA GANDHI WANTED TO HOST 70 HEADS OF STATE

K B Kachru, author, *'Humility and Agility – The Life of a Hotelier'*

When Mrs. Gandhi was to host a banquet for 70 head of States and she called my boss and told him that she wanted to discuss the menu with the boss and the team. So, we trooped in, alongside myself and our executive chef, a Frenchman, Roger Moncourt. We arrived five minutes earlier and we were straight away rushed in and she said, what kind of menu we want to do. We meekly suggested it was around Christmas time, in December and we must have roast turkey on the menu. She said, why can't we have biryani? I said, ma'am, we can do biryani, if that is what you prefer. And while we were discussing that, she suddenly said, why can't we have both?

I didn't know how to react. I said the two won't go, and offered my reasons for that as well. And, she really gave me hell. She told my boss, this is the youth of India, they're not ready for any change. My boss held my hand, suggested just listen to her. So, obviously, I did, had to save my job.

Everybody appreciated that. They appreciated because it was hosted by the host country's prime minister or whatever it was. Everybody appreciated it. Then, after the banquet was over, I went to see her off. She came back, held my hand and told me, I told you this would be a hit.

I mean there were encounters, some controversies, I'm sure many of you know about the white paint over Hotel Ashok! India Today carried out a lead story on Hotel Ashok being painted white.

And there was a whole lot of controversy all over India. They said mad people, people who are running the hotel, they painted the stone white. Do you think one would have done that? But the real fact was the stone was never painted. There was a gap between two slabs of stone which was painted like pink. So that was changed into white. And the reason for that was we had spent, in those days, over a hundred crores refurbishing the hotel and it was her (Indira Gandhi) marketing mind. She said, you have done a lot of work internally and do people know what you have done?

Do it, create the controversy. People will know what you have done inside - we soon opened seven food and beverage outlets. Five of them opened the same day and some of you would have experienced those which were a



The three authors with the anchor, let the dialogues begin!

hit. And you had an average waiting time of three hours to have a seat in that hotel during those days.

INDUSTRY MUST CELEBRATE ITS BIG ACHIEVERS

Rattan Keswani, author, *'Check In, Never Check Out'*

I don't think the hotel industry celebrates enough the people who work with us. And I would really exhort all of you that all the people who work with you, please celebrate them more. You all become MDs and heads of divisions, et cetera. You have these certifications such as the best employee and more, but we don't celebrate them enough. Our industry, both travel and hotels, and when you put it together, is almost a representation of all the good and the bad and the confusion in our country. The societal confusion, the tribal confusion, the caste confusion. Our team members come from very different backgrounds and the older the organization or the hotel or the travel agency or whatever, you will understand what I am talking about.

But imagine all of them. We succeed when our business succeeds, but all of them come from different diverse backgrounds, thought and egos. But when they are on stage with our customer, there are hundreds of thousands of moments of truth and wow moments that they go through and handle for us. They are like multiple orchestras playing at the same time. And it still doesn't sound dissonant. But we don't celebrate them enough. We don't recognize them enough. But therefore, the fun goes out in their life and it becomes a chore and just a job.

The second part is people don't want to work in our business. It has been talked about so many times because we don't market ourselves well enough, they don't want to work with us. We get blamed for long hours. Every business is long hours. We don't market them in our business. We don't recognize the diversity of people.

There are societal hangups that we've got. I think we need to shed them. So, both as customers and internal customers, think of the community of the LGBTQs, that can be a powerful segment of employment that you never thought of, always kept away from. Both as a customer all over the world, that community is a better community, a more productive community, a more rewarding community. They pay better business rates and they work better for us. We leave aside a whole segment of people that we could have, which would make our industry both travel and hospitality a lot more creative and rewarding than we can think of.

The third part is that I did a lot of work with differently-abled people, which is why my book royalties are dedicated to work with that community. You will produce self-esteem. You will have a different set of people who create wonders and Lemon Tree Hotels is a prime example of what can be done. It opens up a whole segment.

Kids of this age group need us to think differently and they can create wonders for us. But if we don't, we will only live in the past and we will never be part of their future. **DI**

LEELA HOTELS KEEPS ALIVE THE SPIRIT OF POLO

It is the polo season again, and for the second year, Leela Hotels sponsored the prestigious Leela Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Polo Cup, 2023.

His Highness Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur led The Leela Polo team




An exclusive DI REPORT

It was a star-studded weekend of #PoloInThePinkCity with The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts celebrating its second year of sponsorship of the royal sport in India with The Leela Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Polo Cup 2023, in a unique collaboration with Rajasthan Polo Club.

Against the backdrop of the Pink City's rich heritage, the sport of kings, polo, came alive at Rajasthan Polo Club where the heart-pounding matches took place, with an ambience nothing short of regal. The young Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur led The Leela Polo Team.

The tournament commenced with a grand Lawazma, a royal procession. The occasion was graced by Manushi Chhillar, an Icon of India by The Leela, who rolled the ball as the ritual for the final match to begin.

Guests which included an eclectic mix of royalty, glitterati and well-known faces from the world of Polo enjoyed the match from The Leela marquee, followed by the trophy presentation ceremony and champagne afternoon tea hosted by Anuraag Bhatnagar, CEO, Leela Hotels and Abhishek Sharma, General Manager, The Leela Palace Jaipur. Signature Leela hospitality was showcased further with Aujasya by The Leela menu as afternoon tea.

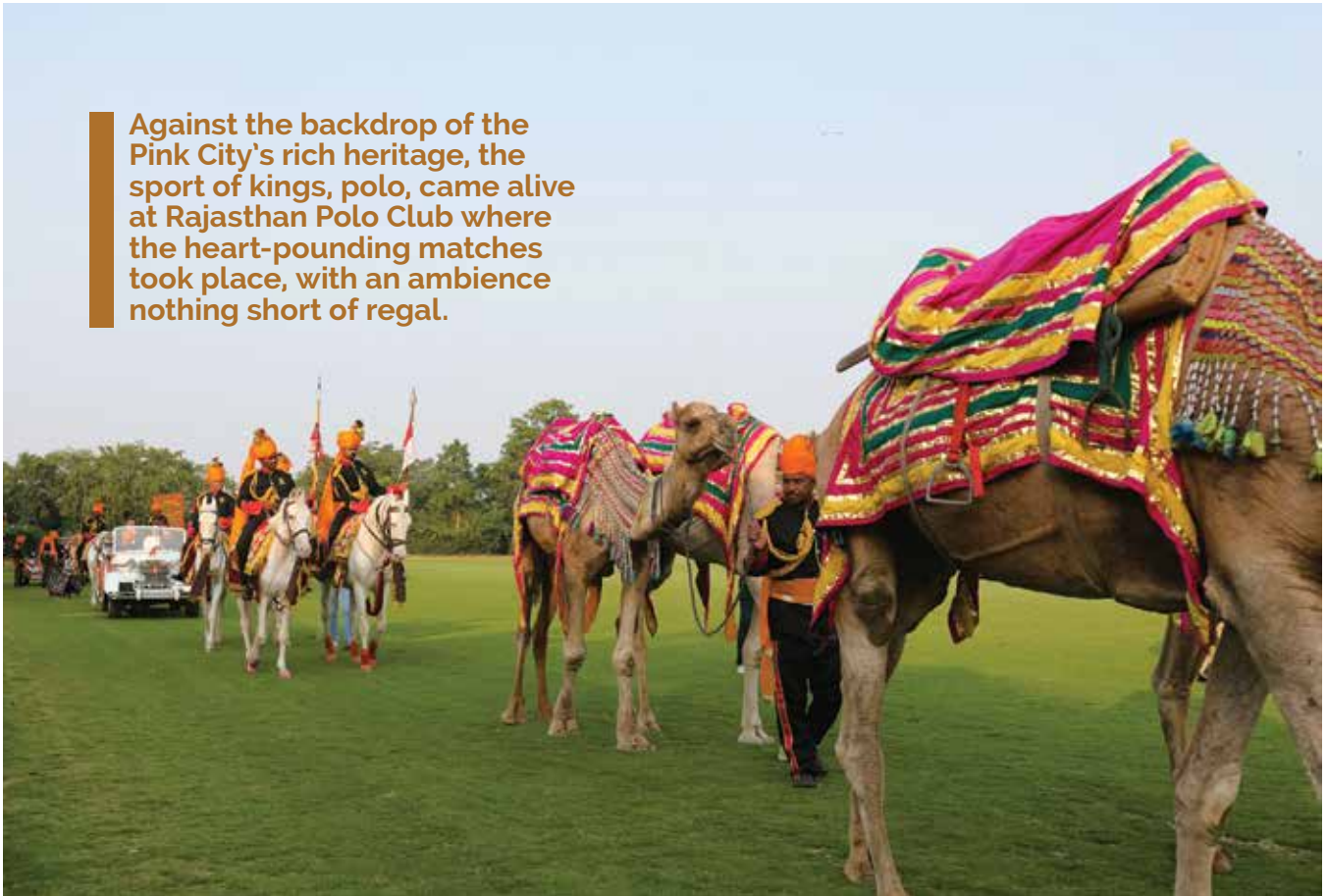
In the land of Maharajas, where legacy meets modernity and sport meets luxury, #PoloInThePinkCity was a true celebration of history, inheritance, and all things regal. 

The tournament commenced with a grand Lawazma, a royal procession. The occasion was graced by Manushi Chhillar, an Icon of India by The Leela, who rolled the ball as the ritual for the final match to begin. Signature Leela hospitality was showcased further with Aujasya by The Leela menu as afternoon tea.



Trophy Presentation

Against the backdrop of the Pink City's rich heritage, the sport of kings, polo, came alive at Rajasthan Polo Club where the heart-pounding matches took place, with an ambience nothing short of regal.



Hi-tea set up by The Leela Palace Jaipur



INDIAN ACCENT NOW AT JIO CENTRE!

What's Unique? What is Quintessentially Manish Mehrotra? What is different at JIO Centre from what you experience at the other venues? Master Chef Manish answers in a brief exclusive.



“It’s all my Team and me, because while the menus and dishes are curated by me, it’s all of my team, especially Chef Rijul and Chef Shantanu, who help me execute my ideas at the restaurant on a day-to-day basis.”

PHOTO: ROHIT CHAWLA

Night view of the main dining area

PHOTO: ROHIT CHAWLA



Baked Paneer Pinwheel, Coriander Pesto, Baby Cucumber Achaar, Chutneys



Saag tart, tossed vegetables, roast almond, makhni

PHOTO: ROHIT CHAWLA



The Bar at Indian Accent Mumbai

An exclusive **DI REPORT**

At the new Indian Accent at Jio World Center, we are serving a tasting menu, as well as an A La Carte menu. The A La Carte menu in Mumbai has been compiled to capture the essence of Indian Accent over the last 14 years. All the best sellers over 14 years have been compiled on this menu, along with some new dishes which are especially created for Mumbai, including the burrata chaat, the Chandrakala dessert, the salmon dish. All these things were created especially for the Mumbai menu.

The tasting menu, however, is a specialty and we really emphasize on the tasting menu, because it is the one thing which gives the diner the complete experience of Indian Accent. The tasting menu in Mumbai is totally different from New Delhi. It's a completely new menu, which is curated especially for the Mumbai restaurant. Every dish, approximately 17 dishes, on these tasting menus are new including the Hundred-layer paneer, tamatar chaaman, nadru, Braised pork kofta, punjabi lobia, bacon chilli glaze, Pulled lamb dumpling, aab gosht, rice puffs, etc.

It's all my Team and me, because while the menus and dishes are curated by me, it's all of my team, especially Chef Rijul and Chef Shantanu, who help me execute my ideas at the restaurant on a day-to-day basis.

Chef Rijul is the one who is heading the Mumbai outpost and he will be taking care of the day-to-day at Indian Accent Mumbai. **DI**



Discover Pure Relaxation Nestled in Nature's Lap



Not to Miss!
Kasauli's First Microbrewery

Garkhal Kanda Road, Vill-Kawali, Kasauli -173209

☎ 80915-31071 | 80915-31072

 www.kasaulihillsresort.com    /kasaulihillsresort