

DESTINATION INDIA

CONVERSATIONS

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Ayodhya Reborn

A Good time to Usher Ram Rajya



India Global
**INDIA-MALDIVES
TIES IN CHOPPY
WATERS**



Travel & Tourism
**INDIA IS SET TO BE
THE MOST EXCITING
AVIATION MARKET**



City Scan
**NURTURING
THE TRADITIONS
OF AZAMGARH**

PRESIDENT MACRON IS THE CHIEF GUEST ON REPUBLIC DAY, AS FRANCE AND INDIA TAKE COLLABORATION FORWARD



Sometimes defaults work to advantage. As President Biden pulled out, India quickly moved ahead to invite President Macron as the chief guest. France has strategic connections with us, defence and commerce; the French love our culture especially around Rajasthan. No surprise then, it was in Jaipur that he and PM Modi deliberated on taking our ties to the next level.

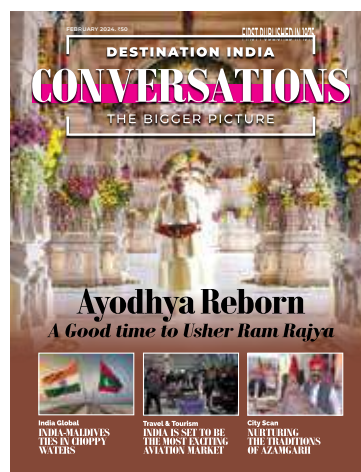


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The last month was a big one for India. With the consecration of the Ram idol, the temple has been inaugurated and Destination Ayodhya has kept its tryst with India going forward. On the anvil, is almost a green field development of the city, much like the Vatican for the Christians. But like the Vatican, people go there from all faiths, it is a communion of another kind for everybody. Tourists can be seen flocking to get a glimpse of the Pope as he blesses all from the hallowed balcony. Much of this will come alive, in the best of Hindu traditions, around a fast-developing infrastructure of connectivity, accommodation and cultural activities. In terms of tourism, this promises a new era of spiritual tourism, as India offers the most pious pilgrimages for all faiths.

Maldives came into contention with a change in its government; the new dispensation assuming a somewhat hostile approach to many things Indian, including showing disrespect to the Prime Minister, most unexpected in diplomacy. A new awareness has dawned upon us as people and as a country; that we need to become more pro-active in diplomacy and defence. Not surprising, the interim Budget of 2024 has announced projects to improve infrastructure in the islands, including Lakshadweep. Not surprising again, a debate has stirred up on the pristine quality of the corals and life in Lakshadweep. There will be development, there is no going back on this one. The corals have their value, but there is a limit. On account of climate change, their life span is said to be limited to some 50 years from now. That too is a reality.

For India, on the cusp of change on numerous fronts, our immediate neighbourhood is an area of continued challenges. We have a shared culture, an enviable shared heritage. Whether it is the *salwar* or the *saree*, both reign supreme. Our love of Bollywood is a shared entertainment. Our love of cricket is a common passion. We eat and drink much the same, with small variations. Islam, Buddha and Hinduism is equally a shared belief. We need to dwell on how similar we are, and celebrate this shared culture together. The leadership in the South Asian region must focus on these, to bring peace and prosperity.

Navin Berry
Editor

VOICES



A-I TO INDUCT 68 NEW AIRCRAFT IN 2024: CEO

Air India will induct and operationalise a total of 68 new aircraft this year. These includes a fleet of A350, A320 and B737 jets, the airline's chief executive officer & managing director, Campbell Wilson recently. The carrier will receive a fleet of five widebody A350 aircraft by June this year, and it will also receive 17 A320 and 46 B737 jets through the rest of 2024.

The airline started the commercial operations of its first A350 aircraft on January 22, with a flight from Mumbai to Chennai. Meanwhile, the Tata Group-owned airline will begin the process of upgrading 40 B787 and B777 aircraft in its fleet by July this year which would include completely replacing seats and entertainment systems on these planes. Similarly, it will commence the upgradation of interiors across 41 of its A320 narrow-body aircraft.

"Though we still have a long way to go to upgrade the legacy fleet, improve our consistency, close remaining gaps and strengthen fragile processes, the future is now more visible, more tangible and, I hope, more inspiring. Despite - and no doubt somewhat because of - the good progress we've made in two short years since privatisation, expectations are high, so we need to keep rising to meet them," Wilson said in a message to the Air India's employees on the occasion of the second anniversary of the airline's return to the Tata Group.

Air India is looking at building a larger pool of pilots who can operate in low visibility conditions, better roster planning and schedule buffers as well as more preemptive flight cancellations to deal with such situations, Wilson said.

- *The Business Standard*



OUR ONLY AIM HERE IS TO PROCLAIM ANEW OUR ATTACHMENT TO THE FAITH, CONVICTIONS AND VALUES

For some critics, January 22 marks the arrival of Hindu supremacy. This flawed view existed even at the time of our Independence. Consecrating the temple at Somnath on May 11, 1951, Rajendra Prasad, then President of India, clarified that the restoration shouldn't be seen only as an attempt at rectifying history. "Our only aim here is to proclaim anew our attachment to the faith, convictions and values on which our religion has rested since immemorial ages," he explained, a sentiment that aptly reflects today's situation. He also reminded the nation that the great truth that Sanatan Dharma proclaims is that every individual should have full independence and opportunities for rising to the highest glory of life.

Whether it was Rajendra babu then or Narendra Modi now, the emphasis was on using the sacred symbol of the restored historic temple to infuse "new life into the Temple of Prosperity of our people". Building a prosperous Bharat requires humongous effort and tremendous unity. A\$5 trillion economy may make Bharat the third largest in the world, yet not the most prosperous. To become truly *viksit* requires a much bigger economic clout, which the Prime Minister wants the nation to achieve by its centenary.

- *Ram Madhav in The Indian Express*





JAPAN'S STOCK MARKET MAKES A FURIOUS COME BACK

There's a shift underway in Asia that's reverberating through global financial markets. Japan's stock market, overlooked by investors for decades, is making a furious comeback. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index is edging closer to the record it set on Dec 29, 1989, which effectively marked the peak of Japan's economic ascendancy before a collapse that led to decades of low growth. China, long an impossible-to-ignore market, has been spiraling downward. Stocks in China recently touched lows not seen since a rout in 2015, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index was the worst-performing major market in the world last year. This year was set to be a tumultuous one for global markets, with unpredictable swings as economic fortunes diverge and voters in more than 50 countries go to the polls. But there's one unforeseen reversal already underway: a change in perception among investors about China and Japan. Foreign investors pumped \$2.6 billion into the Japanese stock market last week, adding to \$6.5 billion the week before, according to data from Japan Exchange Group. That is a stark shift from the roughly \$3.6 billion that was yanked out in December. All that money has sent Tokyo's Nikkei 225 surging about 8% this month. The market is up over 30% over the past 12 months.

A combination of factors has contributed to Japan's recent success.

- *The Times of India*

CHANDIGARH MAYORAL POLLS RAISE TROUBLING QUESTIONS

In normal circumstances, the elections to the post of mayor for Chandigarh would not have elicited attention beyond the urban confines of the common capital of Punjab and Haryana. At best, the winning party and its followers would have celebrated it online. But instead, given that the procedure of counting and announcing results has raised dust, instead



of being conducted in a way as to be above reproach, it has become a national issue.

It is seldom surprising if any political party or leader tries to cavil about an election procedure after a defeat, and so it is with the INDIA alliance candidate backed by the Opposition parties, the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, which were locked in a direct fight against the BJP. But the storm raised with videos being circulated, claims and counter-claims, allegations and counter-allegations, the entire process is now under doubt, and that is seldom a good outcome for democracy, especially one with a much larger nationwide general election looming ahead.

- *The Asian Age, editorial*



TO SAY THAT THE REPUBLIC IS DEAD, AND SO IS ITS LIBERALISM, IS DEFEATISM IN ANGER

To say that the Republic is dead, and so is its liberalism, is defeatism in anger. It sounds like that furious parent in a 1970s movie telling their wayward child: *Tum mere liye mar chuke ho* (you are dead as far as I am concerned). Democratic politics is always a battle of ideas, ideologies. Constitutional republics do not die, political leaders, parties, ideas do. Where did the libertarian idea of the Swatantra Party vaporise, for example? In the 1967 election, its tally of 44 was second highest after Indira Gandhi's Congress, ahead of the Jana Sangh's 35. The next level of defeatism manifests in the fears that Mr Modi now has the power to abrogate this Constitution, write a new one, change India into a presidential system and declare himself President for life, this will be the last election and so on. However, he will do no such thing. He draws all his power he needs from the same Constitution, Parliament and elections. Why would he change the "system" if it works so brilliantly for him. It is within the same system, Constitution and politics that his rivals will need to find the political, intellectual and moral wherewithal to defeat him. And rectify the direction of the Republic if they do not like the course on which Mr Modi has now set it.

- *Shekhar Gupta in the Indian Express*



VFS GLOBAL CEMENTS ITS PREFERRED EMPLOYER STATUS

VFS Global, the world's largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions, secured a rating of 4.01 on a scale of 5 for 2023 on Glassdoor, a leading platform for employee feedback and company reviews. This significant achievement reflects VFS Global's commitment to excellence in every aspect of its people management and human capital development. With an employee value proposition of developing a 'fellowship of winners', is an outcome of the company's continuous investment in training and development and in building an organisation where people come first, and in creating meaningful work opportunities and building successful careers, in a diverse and inclusive workplace.

The six parameters on which Glassdoor assesses companies is based on Excelling in Culture & Values, Work/Life Balance, Senior Management, Compensation & Benefits, Career Opportunities, and Diversity & Inclusion. VFS Global has elevated its standing on all of them. According to Nirbhik Goel, Chief Human Resources Officer, VFS Global, "I am thrilled to acknowledge the high Glassdoor rating VFS Global has received, a reflection of our commitment to an inclusive and empowering workplace culture. Central to our success is our vibrant workforce, comprising over 131 nationalities, which not only enriches our work environment but is also a cornerstone of our global success. This rating is particularly meaningful as it stems directly from our employees, offering a genuine and voluntary endorsement of our practices."

INDIGO AWARDED FOR THE YOUNGEST AIRCRAFT FLEET IN THE WORLD

IndiGo has been recognized by global aviation intelligence platform ch-aviation for having the World's Youngest Aircraft Fleet in 2024. IndiGo has received this award for the second

consecutive year in the 100+ aircraft fleet category. With an average age of 3.94 years. Currently, IndiGo has a fleet of more than 300 modern, fuel-efficient aircraft from the Airbus 320 and ATR-72 family. IndiGo is among the 10 largest carriers in the world by daily departures, and recently became the first Indian airline to achieve 100 million passengers in a calendar year (CY2023) and also, the first in the country to clock 2000 daily departures.

Pieter Elbers, CEO, IndiGo said, "We are thrilled to be felicitated as the World's Youngest Aircraft Fleet 2024 by ch-aviation. IndiGo's mantra has been to maintain a young fleet of aircraft to ensure reliable and efficient operations while maintaining high levels of fuel efficiency. We strive to integrate sustainable initiatives into our operations, ensuring that we are not only meeting the needs of our customers but also contributing to a better future. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint and mitigating the effects of our operations with our young and efficient fleet."

Thomas Jaeger, CEO, ch-aviation, said of the Award: "ch-aviation established the Youngest Aircraft Fleet Award to recognize airlines worldwide who understand the value and necessity of investing in their fleet, introducing new-generation aircraft that considerably reduce CO2 emissions in the aviation industry and improve fuel economy. IndiGo has been taking giant leaps forward in all these areas, thereby, setting a benchmark for the aviation industry. We honour IndiGo with this award that celebrates the incredible effort."

CARAVELA BEACH RESORT, GOA: SETTING TRENDS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY



This is the new and current narrative in the hospitality industry in India. Responsible hoteliering is the new buzzword, above all, to your stakeholders. The CARAVELA BEACH RESORT in VARCA, GOA in a letter to its shareholders has declared a 1:1 bonus share offering and a 100% dividend on the back of consistent revenue growth; recorded a milestone of the highest ever revenue of INR 3,304 lakhs in Q3FY24, the highest revenue in any quarter in its operating history, registering a growth of 11% (YoY); Q3FY24 Profit Before Tax (PBT) stood at INR 1,270 lakhs, clocking a growth of 8% (YoY).

The total Income, EBITDA, Profit Before Tax and Profit After Tax in Q3 have been the best amongst any quarter in the entire operating history of the Company. Significant performance indicators of the quarter ended December 2023 include: recorded an average occupancy of 82.4% in October, 82.3% in November and 91.3% in December 2023; versus an occupancy of 78.1% in October 2022, 82.5% in November 2022 and 90.2% in December 2022; the Average Revenue Per Occupied Room per night after subtracting taxes was INR 18,012 in October, INR 20,606 in November and INR 26,146 in December; versus INR 17,298 in October 2022, INR 19,547 in November 2022 and INR 21,493 in December 2022; on Christmas Eve, the Caravela Beach Resort Goa achieved an Average Net Revenue Per Occupied Room per night after subtracting taxes of INR 33,514, at an occupancy of 88.7%.

The 'Caravela Beach Resort Goa' is an independent, 201-key, 5-Star Deluxe golf resort on the Arabian Sea, designed by the world-famous architects WATG (who designed both the 'Atlantis' resorts. Located on a 23-acre estate with a 275-meter-long beach front on the powdery white sands of Varca Beach, South Goa.

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Ayodhya Reborn!

A GOOD TIME TO USHER RAM RAJYA

An awesome ceremony, a rare consecration, an event unlike any other. Evoking the spirit of Lord Ram can be the best deterrent to voices of division and despair, a time to give and take and live in peace and progress. Some thoughts on India going forward at a pivotal moment in time in our nation's history.

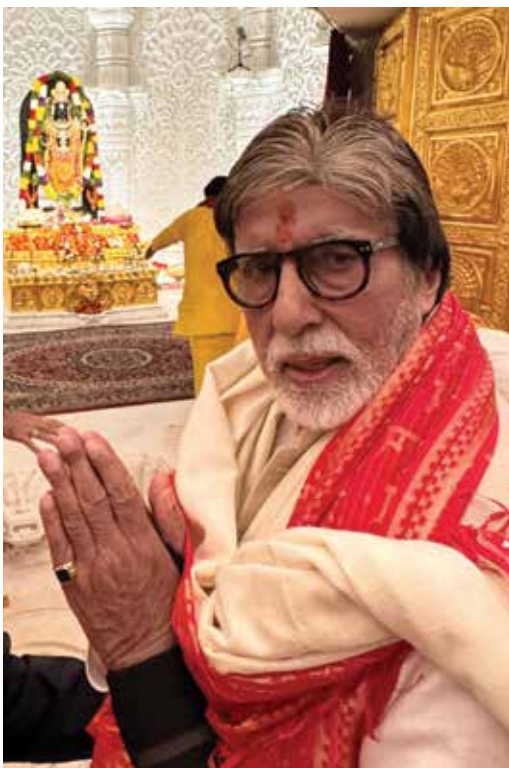
by NAVIN BERRY

Last month is etched in stone, literally. All those concerned, a triple engine development, which would include the centre, the state and the trust put all hands-on deck, leaving no stone unturned, beautifully chiselled in all the mastery that Indian artisans are famous for, globally. From the temples of yore, to this modern-day marvel. With this, the Ayodhya temple issue finally resolved itself, in the inauguration of the Ram temple! Resolved, or entered the next phase, only time can tell. It took a while, starting from the Rath Yatra of LK Advani and the demolition of the masjid. It is now all history, as another chapter unfolded on 22nd January last month. There was no looking back, after the Supreme Court judgment; just within three years, the temple rose again, to herald a new birth for the

The PM is no ordinary taskmaster, he demands and commands. Delivery both within time and quality is the only deliverance. And, indeed, it works.









Some few thousands in attendance, with the who's who in the country, name him or her, and you met them, just soaking in the ceremony like commoners, rubbing shoulders as either the devout or celebs, or both.

Hindu deity. Meanwhile, the Gyanvapi Mosque issue has come up, we may witness some more developments in this same direction.

In its entirety, from start to finish, in one sweep, if there can be one, what would one say? Was this a political narrative unfolding, or a religious one? Or, was it perhaps both, a tryst with religion, made possible by the sheer strength and dominance of political will! There is a bit of both, religion and politics. There would be both opinions, some giving more points to one than the other. For the present, it has played out well, for the ruling dispensation, regardless of the absence of all the opposition combined. Helplessly, they kept themselves out, not knowing what else they could do. But religion is here to stay, it appears, as a central piece in the political narrative – its manifestations would be diverse. Going forward, more and more actions will be given a political hue, 2024 being an election year. As has been pointed out, some more than 50 countries are slated to have their elections later this year, USA and UK included. A new global dispensation can be expected by the end of 2024, given the many shades of opinion around the world.

As the Indian story unfolds, you can well ask who has been leading whom, and who is being followed? Is it what the masses want and which the BJP is giving them, or is it what the BJP wants and is leading the people to believe this is what they want? Who is following whom? And for what? But then, you can also ask, does it matter? Somewhere the two meet and submerge into each other and then it does not matter? Is there a psyche that believes Indians (read Hindus) have been betrayed in their own country? That the repeated invasions, especially by the Muslims (the British did not destroy our temples) that destroyed our identity? That this is the beginning of our return to our identity, a re-affirmation that we are on our way to standing tall once again, on our own two feet? This version is closely going hand in hand with India becoming the fifth largest economy globally; we were reported as having crossed the Hong Kong market index climbing to global 4th position.



Is it the emergence of Bharat? Those, who have remained marginalised?

Is there a corresponding narrative that says we need to rediscover our Indian identity, and that time has come for the 'majority' to take a call on how India should go forward? Is it that so far, some 2% of the well-bred Indians (read Oxford and Cambridge type) were deciding how the other 98% should live. Was it the Eton type, Lutyen's Delhi pedigree, that believed they were the privileged few; tell the rest how to conduct themselves and respond appropriately as they should. Modi rose from the humblest of origins, rose to the very top, a symbol for the average man on the street to look up to, and emulate. He is not a favourite with this 2%; but should this matter to him? He remains visibly scornful of them, believes India's story does not rest on them; on the contrary, he believes this 2% derailed the Indian success story till the last decade! Whatever be the answer, it does not rest with the 2%.

I keep looking at cricket as a metaphor, raising similar questions. It was originally the cosy Bombay club, it was five-day cricket, all dressed in whites, red ball play, all was hunky dory. Then came newer formats, the onslaught of Delhi as an example and then Haryana and Punjab



There is a bit of both, religion and politics. There would be both opinions, some giving more points to one than the other. For the present, it has played out well, for the ruling dispensation, regardless of the absence of all the opposition combined.

and others, with the likes of Kapil Dev who was at that time learning how to speak the language! With his patented *Palmolive ka jawab nahin!* Today, new wave onslaughts from tier 3 and 4, not even 2, have swept the scene, enterprising players who like Narendra Modi have been dreamers who made it big! Is this truly the foundations of the new aspirational India, who want to break free and make India, say Bharat, their future. Witness the rise of the likes of Siraj, Shami and Jaiswal! Incredible folk tales that defy city driven logic.

Ram Temple: A new beginning for Religious Tourism

So, what does the Ram Temple come to signify? A new awakening, or is this all hyperbole, and that dust will settle down on this once sleepy town, and commerce around spiritual tourism will take over. That indeed, would happen, that a new era of religious tourism is set to grow. Traditionally, religious tourism has been overlooked by the organized tourism sector. That it has been relatively looked down upon as meant for low income and middle class. Though in recent years, the last two decades or so, mid-market brands from ITC and Taj have entered the sector in places like Shirdi, Katra and Tirupati. But Ayodhya has a different story to tell. The Taj Group has already signed for three of their brands, the Leela has signed for a seven-star property with the Lodha Developers. This narrative of religious towns is destined to change; you will witness more connectivity, more ease in travel and a range of accommodation including the more luxe. This change promises more financial returns from this segment of travel. A concerted seamless ease in travel should be expected in the immediate years ahead.

Political Power Play: It is Inevitable

But back to the political narrative, the aberrations are already there and here to stay, regardless of which party is on power. Unrelenting power play is in vogue, witness the no holds barred campaigns in the US for their side of the elections. There, hell has seldom seen this fury unleashed; then why a lesser mature democracy less ours should not wander and waver? Now in Ayodhya, as 2024 unfolds the BJP can well say a promise has been delivered. And therefore, Modi ki Guarantee could well work. Even if the average person does not have the 15 lakhs in his bank account and not much has come out of the Swiss banks? But it is always a score card, of hits and misses, and Ayodhya and the Ram temple is a big Hit and not miss, a hit that matters, at least over the next few months!

How far will this relate to votes? Nobody can tell, if there are many positives on one side, there are also angry voices that either do not endorse the temple or the manner in which it was consecrated! Everybody is entitled to their viewpoint, and best expressed or manifested in their choice on the ballot box.

In recent years, the last two decades or so, mid-market brands from ITC and Taj have entered the sector in places like Shirdi, Katra, and Tirupati. But Ayodhya has a different story to tell. The Taj Group has already signed for three of their brands, the Leela has signed for a seven-star property with the Lodha Developers.









The Grand Ceremony, A Landmark Event

The 22nd January event needs to be mentioned in its detail. Eye witness accounts suggest it was a flawless ceremony for guests. Some few thousands in attendance, with the who's who in the country, name him or her, and you met them, just soaking in the ceremony like commoners, rubbing shoulders as either the devout or celebs, or both. Not a glitch, the event witnessed the easiest comfort among the guests. Security was unobtrusive, the movement immaculate and impeccable.


The temple itself is elaborate in every detail. It brings together the craftsmanship for which the Indian artist is world renowned. No compromise, no short cuts. The mandir was perhaps many years in the making, as across the country, the believers have been busy in the faith that one day this will happen, its time will come, and it did. The etchings in stone are masterly, the structure has been built to last a thousand years. There is no steel in the fabrication, it is a testimony to building today, as how temples were built in yesteryears. In all circumstances, full marks are deserved for one and all, from the head of the team at work, to the craftsman, who toiled day and night. The PM is no ordinary taskmaster, he demands and commands. Delivery both within time and quality is the only deliverance. And, indeed, it works.

Ayodhya: Dawn of a New City

For the big day, not just the temple, but the entire town has taken a new look. Ayodhya has a new railway station, a new airport, revamped streets and restrooms, new facades donning what was once dilapidated narrow lanes filled with a few hawkers on the look out for scant tourists. All this has changed. Land prices have sky rocketed, with no respite to be seen. It will grow into a huge big city, perhaps rivalling the might of cities like Varanasi and Mathura. Uttar Pradesh is well set to become the centre for Hindu pilgrimage, with new tourist itineraries around its cities set to provide a new momentum for the state's economy. Some 20,000 crores of investments have already been committed. Ayodhya is the city to be in, watch and see it grow. Being almost a greenfield development, it has the land, the resources and the political will to grow into a magical fairyland for the world to experience.



The Spirit of Ram Rajya, the Epitome in Humility

What about the most important message from Lord Ram? His persona breathes humility, self-denial, benevolence, sacrifice. Above all, just as vulnerable to public opinion as the common man. His message to our countrymen must indeed be this message, to inculcate this same spirit in each one of us. To be benevolent and caring towards whom we serve, those who have given us the task to lead them. Arrogance and vengeance are alien to Ram; he was the Lord himself, the royal, the king in waiting, but never a sign of any of that in his daily task. No defiance, no hatred, he breathed love and care. That is Ram Rajya, in spirit and letter. A good time to take our vows afresh, as a people. 



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THE PILGRIMS PROGRESS AYODHYA: THE INDIAN VATICAN



Lalit Panwar was one of the special invitees at the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. He recounts his impressions of the impact this development will have on Indian domestic tourism, and indeed globally, for both religious and cultural traffic.

by LALIT K PANWAR

Ayodhya-puri

As per Vedic literature, there are seven puris (holy towns) and Ayodhya is at number one, other six are Mathura (2nd) and Haridwar (Maya) (3rd); the 4th is Kashi, the fifth is Kanchi, sixth is Avantika (Ujjain) and the seventh is Dwarka. With the praan prathistha (consecration) of Ram Lalla, at Ram Janmabhumi Ayodhya, a new chapter has begun not only in Indian tourism but on the global canvas of religious /cultural tourism.

I am reminded of the celebrated novel Pilgrims' Progress by John Bunyan (1678 AD). This novel reveals timeless truths about salvation, right living and the importance of staying on the path of faith. If we substitute the main character of this novel, Christian with Hindu, then this novel can be another piece of Hindu allegory.

I was one of the invitees for this ceremony and spent two days in Ayodhya (22nd and 23rd of the month).

The Herculean task (Bhagirath prayatan)

I had the good luck to be an eye witness of the mega ceremony (Praan Prathistha). We are all aware of the chequered and the hyper sensitive turbulent history of the Ram Janmabhoomi saga. With the consecration and the massive response of the common people,

As per Ayodhya Master Plan (2031), projects worth Rs 85,000 crores are in the pipeline which includes over 50 hotel projects by leading hotel companies like Taj, Oberoi, Marriott, Leela.





this new abode of the god, Ayodhya is poised to become the Indian Vatican for both pilgrims and general domestic tourists alike.

If we look at the number of pilgrims to the leading global cities as pilgrim centres, the numbers are as follows: Vatican 90 lakhs and Mecca 2 crores. Compare these with Indian pilgrim centres which attract the following numbers: The Golden Temple 3.5 crores; Tirupati 2.5 crores; Vaishna Devi 80 lakhs; and then compare these with regular tourist attractions and cities like the Taj Mahal (70 lakhs) and Agra city (30 lakhs).

As per the foreign stock markets, research firm like Jeffries, Ayodhya may surpass Vatican and Mecca in the coming years. At present 1 lakh tourists / pilgrims are visiting Ayodhya per day; this number may go up to 3 lakhs per day and given that even if a single tourist spends Rs 2,500 per day, this would contribute a whopping Rs. 25,000 crores to the local economy.

Plethora of promising projects

Under the guidance of the Ministry of Tourism, U P Tourism organized a global tourism summit for Ayodhya which resulted in the signing of 102 MOUs for tourism projects worth Rs 18,000 crores, as per the statement of Gaurav Dayal, divisional commissioner, Ayodhya.

Hon Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has mentioned details of a longer term Ayodhya plan in the Maan ki Baat episode on 25th January and announced both the Ramayana circuit and also establishing of a National Institute of Theology, Divinity and Religious Studies on the pattern of Harvard, Oxford and Yale Universities. This national institute would have the following schools – School of Vedic/Hindu studies; School of Indigenous religions – Buddha, Jain and Sikhism; School of External Religions like Islam, Christianity, Bahai, etc; School of Study of Comparative Languages like Pali, Prakrit, Urdu, and others.

As per Ayodhya Master Plan (2031), projects worth Rs 85,000 crores are in the pipeline which includes over 50 hotel projects by leading hotel companies like Taj, Oberoi, Marriott, Leela. A 1200-acre new township costing Rs. 2180 crores is being developed, in addition to a seven star pure vegetarian hotel by the House Of Abhinandan Lodha and over Rs 140 crores resort by O-Rama Hotels and Resorts. A Disney style theme



“As per the foreign stock markets, research firm like Jeffries, Ayodhya may surpass Vatican and Mecca in the coming years. At present 1 lakh tourists / pilgrims are visiting Ayodhya per day; this number may go up to 3 lakhs per day and given that even if a single tourist spends Rs 2,500 per day, this would contribute a whopping Rs. 25,000 crores to the local economy.”


park on Ramayana theme and super speciality hospitals by leading groups are being planned.

A Divine Destiny and Destination

Bhawan Shri Ram's destiny was witnessed in 'Treta' period but with the divine blessings of Shri Ram, now Ayodhya's destiny is being transformed from a small town of pilgrimage to a mega travel destination for Hindu pilgrims from all over the world.

Apart from Hindu pilgrims, Ayodhya is an important pilgrim centre for Jains, because five of the 24 tirthankaras were from here and for Buddhists as well, because Lord Buddha spent six years of his life in Ayodhya. Saketa was the Buddhist name for Ayodhya.

Indian tourism now has a mega tourism destination and circuit which would be equally appealing

to domestic tourism and pilgrims of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lalit K Panwar is a former IAS officer, who has held multiple assignments in the tourism sector. He has been chairman, Rajasthan Tourism; CMD, ITDC and secretary tourism, Government of India. Presently, he is the chancellor, Vivekananda Global University, Jaipur.

“Why Bharat Matters”

INDIA IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE. WHAT WE DO, MATTERS TO THE WORLD!



A trailblazing diplomat now turned into an astute statesman and politician with his effortless wit, humour and charisma. He has also become a youth icon for every young minded Indian at home and abroad, with him at the helm of Indian's foreign policy. We can all be rest assured that Bharat will continue to scale new heights. Here, we catch the Union Minister for External Affairs, Dr. S Jaishankar, in conversation with BJP MP, Tejasvi Surya, on the occasion of the Minister's book release, “Why Bharat Matters”.

T **TEJASVI SURYA:** I have with me a very interesting book that Dr. S Jaishankar has authored, which is also very interestingly titled Why Bharat Matters.

This book is of interest to any young person who is interested in world affairs. There is economics in this, geopolitics, and also, interestingly, Ramayana in this, because most of the episodes of current geopolitics, the developments in the world theatre, that you describe, there's an allegorical reference that you make to episodes from the Ramayana. I have a twofold question, rather because your previous book was titled The India Way, and the new book is Why Bharat Matters. So, why did you make the new book Bharat? What is the significance of the change in the connotation? And second, what is the significance of the allegorical references to Ramayana and geopolitics in this book?

DR. S JAISHANKAR: You know, I think one of the reasons why I shifted from the 'India

Way' to 'Why Bharat Matters' is actually what has happened to all of us in the last five years. In the last five years, we have become much more self-confident, much more self-aware, much more impactful on the world. We have done other things, which have caught the attention of the world, like the landing of the Chandrayan at a particularly difficult part of the world.

And, you know my first book had a chapter on the Mahabharat, which a lot of people liked. Nobody needs to teach you this. You, you grow up with it. When you have something like an epic, a great epic, each one of us sees some value in it. For me, as someone dealing with diplomacy, I looked or I reimagined it, through the lens of world affairs, through diplomacy, through statecraft.

And in the case of Hanuman, he was cursed to be forgetful. And as he actually does more and more, he discovers his strength. And that, I think, is what is happening with us today. We are discovering ourselves. And because we are discovering ourselves, that is why I use the word Bharat.

TEJASVI SURYA: The other chapter in the book that I personally thought of as very important for a lay audience, is this chapter that you title, foreign policy and you. Could you expound more on how a common Indian man must invest himself and see foreign policy?

DR. S JAISHANKAR: There are today roughly 34 million Indians and people of Indian origin who live across the world, roughly half are



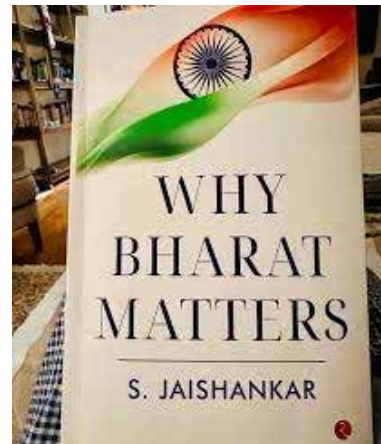
our nationals, and roughly half are not. A very large part of them are blue collar workers. By the way, a very large part of them are students. Is it not the basic duty of a state, of a country, of a government to look after its citizens? There must be you know, in fairness for efficiency for scale, there must be a system by which people in distress outside, people in need outside, can turn to the government. This is today the expectation of the average person. It could even be any one of you tomorrow as a tourist. How do we stand by our people? A large part of what we do, when we speak of an aspirational world, it is important for us to respond to the daily requirements, the legitimate expectations of our citizens.

TEJASVI SURYA: So, I think the sense of security that you spoke of is something that the common Indian is experiencing every day. And I think that sense of a renewed security in your government is something that has been a hallmark of what you call in your book, the Modi Era diplomacy. So, can you explain for us a few characteristics of what is this Modi Era diplomacy, and how is the Modi era diplomacy different from what was practiced in the pre-Modi era?

DR. S JAISHANKAR: Partly, I think a new way of thinking. Say, for example, to take our neighbourhood and make them partners, not competitors; neighbours who benefit from what you are doing. Our neighbours today associate India with education, with health, with aid.

We are today spreading our wings. We are making a difference to the world. And the world actually wants a country, a power like us today to balance out what are the established powers. And most important at the big league, we are today holding our own. There isn't a debate in the world in which today we are not putting out our idea. That is the difference.

TEJASVI SURYA: And, and I think this renewed voice that India has found at a global stage is also reflecting in the way that we are dealing with our immediate neighbourhood, which also includes China. And



“I think one of the reasons why I shifted from the 'India Way' to 'Why Bharat Matters' is actually what has happened to all of us in the last five years. In the last five years, we have become much more self-confident, much more self-aware, much more impactful on the world.”

“There's an elaborate chapter in the book titled 'dealing with China'. So, my understanding is that, a visible shift that has taken place post 2014, the way we are dealing with China, is that we are dealing with a more realistic perspective than any romantic ideas or idealistic ideas about how it should be.”





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DR. S JAISHANKAR: Two comments. One, in politics it’s natural that everybody will try to do, how do the competitors, in terms of the strength of what they say. So, I think people should always test words against record, against actions. I’ve used two examples. One who prepared, who actually prepared on the border? Now, on the border you know, there



was a very dominant school of thought till 2014, saying, if you leave your borders facing China, unprepared and undeveloped, that’s the best defense you can have.

Now, when you actually get into crunch time, what happens? You have to send your troops up there. Now, if you had decided that you’re not going to develop the border, or even if you’re going to develop it, very frankly, your heart was not in it.

Look at the cold facts today, the border development budget per year has gone up roughly from about 3,500 crores a year to almost 15,000 crores per year. If you look at the speed of road building, the tunneling, the bridging, we are actually looking at two x, three x, four x improvements.

If today we have been able to send and maintain troops out there, which we have done in those large numbers since 2020, it was only possible because actually on the ground, you made a difference. Now,



“The battle of narratives is something we should expect, because in different ways, we are defying the entrenched narrative. It’s happening in different domains. It happens in politics, it happens even in business. When they rate a country, you know, how judgments are made are often very, very subjective.”

that's on the border.

I would say, look at something much more basic. You know, all of us today are troubled by the fact that there's a big trade deficit with China. You know, why are we being flooded with these Chinese goods? The best way of not being flooded with Chinese goods is to produce Indian goods. So, to produce Indian goods, what should you do? You should first push for Make in India. Now, if the stand is, oh, Make in India is not possible. If you say, look, let's assume, let's all make it easier to do business. But if our policy is making it harder to do business, and environmental clearances were actually practiced as a tool to, to actually slow down industrialization in this country,

So, I would say, you know, where, where this whole China debate is concerned there are, there is a real school, there is a much more romantic fatalist, sometimes I would say even complicit school. I think there's been this constant debate, and it's not a new debate.



At the end of the day, I would say it is very important, especially if you have the responsibility for the security of your country to be very hardheaded about it, to be very practical.

TEJASVI SURYA: You also make very insightful observations about the present and the future. And one of that is regarding the narrative battles that we need to fight in today's digital media age. And also, the challenge that comes in a conflict zone, or a war theatre where multinational companies with budgets which are, which are even higher than GDPs of certain countries also come into play. So, these two threats that you have amongst the many that you have highlighted are something that I think we should spend some time discussing. So where do you see in the coming years in more digitized, more globalized space, the influence of these MNC, these tech giants? How are they going to play a role in everyday lives of people, especially in times of conflict and to the narrative battles? We see the New York Times commenting about India, you see some other agency coming out with a survey and giving India a much lower ranking in the democracy index than Pakistan.

DR. S JAISHANKAR: In fact, on the press freedom, I think they gave us a lower ranking than Afghanistan. But look, I think, the battle of narratives is something we should expect, because in different ways, we are defying the entrenched narrative. It's happening in different domains. It happens in politics, it happens even in business. When they rate a country, you know, you will find out that the basis of how judgments are made are often very, very subjective. So, what we have seen, and this is something that has been steadily building up over the last 10 years, I expect it to reach a crescendo in the first six months of this year.

And as elections come closer. If it looks like it's going in a way which the narrative drivers don't like, they will actually start to attack the process. Now, we have seen that before. They will attack the Supreme Court, they'll attack the Election Commission, they will attack the EVMs. I mean, we've got to figure this out, and we have to fight




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back. So, I don't think we need to keep taking it. I think we need to call them out.

The narrative context on the technology issue. I think it's far more complex because you have the market-based economies today, you have these big giants.

TEJASVI SURYA: There's one interesting line that you write in the book, which caught my excitement. The whole country, of course, is waiting for the 22nd of January for the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. And so, in the book, you write that this excitement is not something that just the Bhartiya's are sharing, but this is also a matter of excitement deep in South Korea, in Southeast Asia. So, if you could expound on how the construction of the Ram Mandir is being seen from outside of India.

DR. S JAISHANKAR: You know I think it's important especially for young people who travel, and those of you who travel abroad, to go to those places where our cultural imprint historically has been very, very strong, then you will realise that what is happening in India is not something which is of interest or limited to us; that other societies are following a lot of this. In fact, once you start moving eastwards, you can see actually a very, very strong cultural influence. I would say on 22nd of January that a lot of people across the world will be looking at what's happening in our country. 

RAHUL YATRA 2.0: BHARAT JODO, AS THE INDIA ALLIANCE FALLS APART



An ironic statement of unity when the alliance itself is falling apart. If the idea was to come together and put up a joint opposition to the ruling dispensation, this is looking like a pipe dream at present. Was this alliance too idealistic, too presumptuous, and even premature? With such disparate people and programmes between them, a more practical programme would have been simple seat sharing wherever the lead players are eating into each other's votes. Just that, plain and simple.

by NAVIN BERRY

Starting from Manipur on January 14th, we saw the Rahul Yatra 2.0 make an East to West push for an India, free from division. Ironically, as the yatra broke up for rest, in those two days while Rahul was in Delhi, the carpet was moved from under the INDIA Alliance feet. Right under their nose, as the alliance leaders helplessly saw the playing out of the 9th incarnation of Nitesh Kumar as the chief minister of Bihar. The alliance lost yet another of its pillars, after Mamta had declared she would go it alone in Bengal, a double whammy for a faltering gathering of disparate partners. If the prover-






bial cat has nine lives, does Nitesh have more, as he continues to invest in partnerships that ensure his relevance, read the assurance that he remains the CM, unless it is the PMs job, to which he believes he was born to be!

Does the yatra have the same traction as the first one did? One is not sure, as media appears less excited about it, though they may have their own reasons to overlook it. If it is another grass root connect, that the Congress hopes to achieve, photo coverage of the yatra appears to be doing well. Eventually, how many votes will it garner, will remain anybody's guess.

But a good time, as any other, to check how grounded the Congress is, and how practical it is going into the 2024 election battle? Has it done an honest assessment of how many seats it can actually procure on its own, in arrangement with other 'willing' parties, given the complexity within alliances and an increasingly effective BJP going strong every passing day. It is not that time in the history of our nation when our people will get swayed with long gestation plans and policies. Instead of a manifesto, the common man wants an alternate action plan on how another party will improve his daily life? Credibility is at stake, promises alone will not deliver. This is while the BJP has launched a campaign that says just that, *yeh Modi sarkar ki guarantee hai!* They have the pulse of the people with them.

The yatra in itself will not yield much result, with the elections so close at hand. Or, will it, bringing a more recent recall among the voters? These images from the yatra sure have a zing to them, the young campaigner on the streets across the nation, connecting at the grass roots. 

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INDIA'S STORY IS BEGINNING

*It's the right time to
Invest Now: Prasoon
Mukherjee*

An Incredible Success Story wrapped up in an unusual inherent sense of humility. So understated, he might be the young man next door. Except that his group has already invested over Rs. 10,000 crores, with a promise of another Rs. 12,000 in the next 6 years. Soft spoken, focused upon making the difference, Prasoon is that Delhi boy who has gone global. Read his views on the Indian story going forward!

In conversation with NAVIN BERRY

T*o start with, it might be useful to understand your current portfolio, your interests globally and within India. So, just give us a snapshot.*

We are headquartered in Singapore. Singapore is very convenient because it is in between Indonesia and India, where our largest stakes are. And currently our businesses are into a few verticals, but our main business is in real estate, but in a different form. We have so far finished almost 20 million square foot of real estate development in Eastern India. This includes business parks, residentials, high rise, bungalows. But now we have moved on from residential to the business of logistic parks. And we are also in the business of data centres. This is in India.

In the logistics part, the advantage is that it not only good for business, it also creates huge employment. In 100 hundred acres or so, 3 million square ft of logistic farm, in a poor country or a semi-developed country like India, you create 15,000 jobs. So, it is a huge job creator.

But you are creating these logistic parks for whom?

For us. We only build the warehouses. And then we put them on rent. So, in some of our parks, there is Honda, there is Flipkart, so they are the ones who rent the place. And we have partnered with ASR of China. Now, we are now in partnership with Capital Land, which is the biggest real estate investment company in Asia Pacific, owned by the Singapore government. Logistics parks is that one thing we have started only recently. We have also got into the business of data centres. Today, everything is about data and the demand for data centres is huge. We have started developing a data centre in New Town, Calcutta, where we are developing a 27-megawatt data centre. But we are also looking at the opportunity of data centres in Uttar Pradesh, in Assam and the more states.

Then, what is in Gujarat? You have interests there, as well?

In Gujarat, we have land in Dholera, in the Special Investment Region, where we are building a special economic zone. We have signed an MOU to build renewable energy. We are creating a park to generate 500 megawatt of solar power with an investment of around Rs. 2300 crores.

If we look at the overall investments in India so far, what would they total?

It will be around 10,000 crores already invested. I think now, including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, we have committed to invest another 12,000 crores over the next 6 years. So, the scale of investment will more than double in much shorter time span.

And, your Indonesia operations? That is your mainstay?

In Indonesia, we are mainly in partnership on a very large coal concession.

So, if you see a company like the Tatas, TCS is the holy cow which enriches every other enterprise, which may be producing yet or not producing. In your system, is it the coal mines?

No, no. I think in our system it is the crude oil trading company. That is where we make most of our money.



Dholera project

“In Gujarat, we have land in Dholera, in the Special Investment Region, where we are building a special economic zone. We have signed an MOU to build renewable energy. We are creating a park to generate 500 megawatt of solar power.”



What is the kind of cash generation you see happening?

That is where we get our equity from, to invest. Because the rest is all long-term investment. If you really look today at a group like ITC, 67% is non-cigarette, 33% is. So, we want to come to a stage when we will be 10% crude and 90% non-crude.

When do you anticipate that to happen?

I think in 10 years' time. That is what our goal is and we are working very well towards that.

I get a feeling that your primary area of interest is land oriented?

In infrastructure and now into new technology. Land is a very controversial topic in India, but you cannot build a project in air. You want to build a logistic park? You need, 1,250 acres to build 500 megawatts of power. If you want to build a data centre, you need four acres of land in a good place where there is good grid connectivity. So, I think, land is a basic ingredient, which you need to have. I think this whole mindset of India that land is a dark chapter in any business is actually, completely ill founded.

What is your basic modus operandi? You are buying land or doing joint ventures with the states?

We buy only government land because we are Singapore based and we don't want any controversy on any land. And the states are supporting.

Which other state would you look at, going forward?

Currently I'm very bullish about all the four states we are in. And I come from Bengal and I just spoke at the Bengal conference and I said it is in the last 12 years, we have built 20 million square foot of business in West Bengal. I also think the Uttar Pradesh government is very encouraging. Gujarat has been always very promising to us. We have just entered Assam and it's also very promising. In the future, we might look at Telangana.

Are you going to do your own projects like say DLF has projects going under its own name, which they develop and then sell. Are you under working upon anything like that?

We have done one project where we have done everything in our name

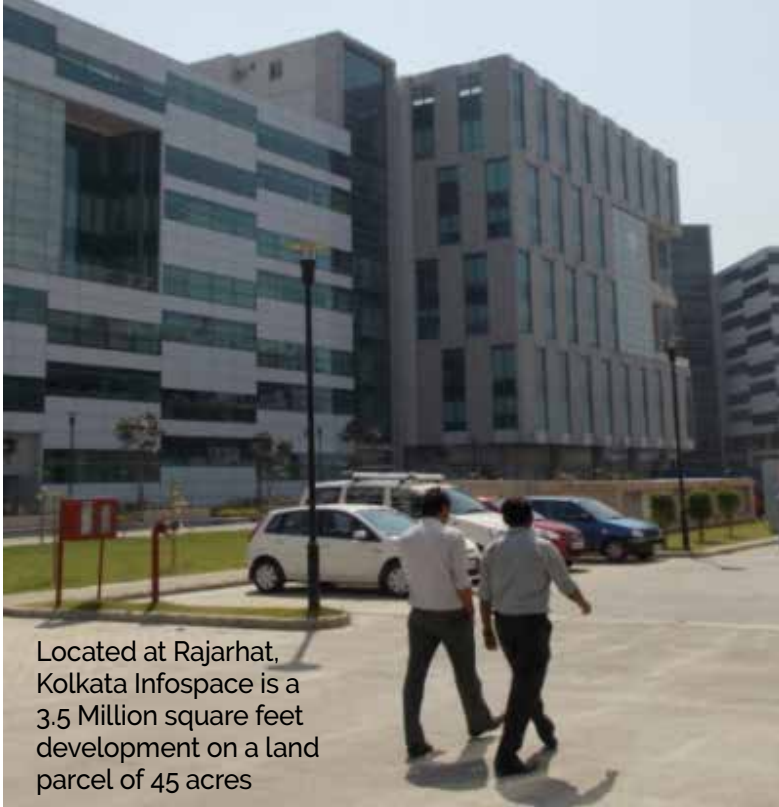
but I think some of the projects we also partner, for example, with Shapoorji Pallonji or Unitech at some point. We do not shy of being a partner with anybody; ultimately you need to create the fastest value. You might take over, say a hundred acres of land, and take some five years to develop on your own; with a partner, we deliver it in three years. Those many jobs created, economy is doing better, in shorter time. We are not shy of sharing our profit. We remain open to good partnerships. With Salim, we are now partners in the business of coal in Indonesia for 30 years.

What is your sense of India at this moment in time?

I think in India, the growth is steep. Every state needs investment. Everywhere, the government has done a lot about building infrastructure. Focus on connectivity is huge. So, airports are coming everywhere, port connectivity is increasing. India's story is the global conversation.

What would you like to see more?

I definitely think that there should be a better tax structure in this country. Investors feel that to get any dividend out of the company, you pay out almost 50-55%, and then you pay income tax. People like me, who are non-resident Indians, who have business here to manage, also getting funds from overseas. The reason that you are an NRI is not that you want to save taxes, but you also, like, I am based in Singapore. I have till now had two very large partners from Singapore. I had Capital Land, I had ESR, they're all Singapore based companies.



Located at Rajarhat, Kolkata Infospace is a 3.5 Million square feet development on a land parcel of 45 acres

They are huge funds, huge companies. So that helps facilitates our business in India. But this 120 days' limit of being here, it restricts your activity. You are always ready to run out of the country, finishing or not finishing half of your work. I do not know the reason why government changed it to 120 days, but I think that that needs to be re-looked at.

I think it was a bureaucratic mistake. I think that need to be looked at again, tax structures need to be better.

As an overseas investor, do you see India emerging to be a growth engine globally?

I think there's no other growth engine today besides India. United States has very old infrastructure, it is a country plagued with many kinds of problems. In the real sense, Indian GDP is already, we are already number three. Our prime minister is talking about being number three.

Does our democracy hinder our growth? Especially, when we see China where there is none?

No, I think the democracy actually helps growth. Because at the end of the day, if you are in China, you might not have scope to address something that isn't fair. In India, you can. Look at this retrospective tax, which the government put forth and the Supreme Court overruled it. All these four pillars of our democracy really work very good for business. Today, we are a zero-debt real estate company, one of the rarest in India. I don't think there are many companies like this in India. Democracy is definitely not a hindrance. It's actually a step to progress.

What about labour laws?

It's a poor country. You cannot have cheap labour and not pro-labour policy. Why don't you go and manufacture your car in Japan? There is no hard and fast rule about retrenchment. You can go and manufacture something in United States, you can just give 15 days' salary and ask somebody will go. That does not happen. They have unions. You cannot have cheap labour and no hard labour laws. It cannot be. So, a businessman wants to get benefit on all fronts? This is not being fair.

Secondly, I support any government. People are very critical about rolling out money free. I completely support it because these freebies,

the money which goes to the poor people or the people who need it, actually drives the economy. One of the main engines of our growth is also because the governments have realized that they need to take care of these people by giving them support.

There's one other issue. Capex. Last five years, particularly, the economy has been driven largely by government capital. Private sector investment has been relatively not coming through to the tune at least that we would like. There are some big-ticket announcements, but on the ground, the investment is not happening. Would you agree?

I think India also had gone through a very rough patch, when number of loans defaulted. Now big corporations have not yet come out of that shock. The corporates who are going to build capex, who need capital, so such people are loan shy.

Is there any reluctance or reticence on the part of industrialists to invest more because they feel in some way or manner there is some instability, or a sense of insecurity in investing more? Why are they shy of investing?

They are shy because they want to be very sure that they will be able to pay back the loan. That's the only thing. The capex from private sector is going to take some time to come back.

Tell me in your DNA, you are a hotelier, right? What about the hospitality business?

We have got TGI Fridays and we are trying to expand that. I took over the franchise for Southeast Asia which includes India, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia.

Any other arm in hospitality, like hotels?

We are thinking of doing budget hotels. In the land parcels, which we have, we are looking at doing hotels as such. And I think, building hotels in the next three years is going to be a reality for us. We might start with a Ginger brand!

Any land parcels in Delhi NCR?

No. We will probably start with West Bengal and then with Assam, and then with Gujarat. Perhaps NCR region, yes, but not right now.

Any learning curve that you may wish to share?

The learning curve is as businessmen, we are dreamers and know we are very aggressive




“It (TGI Friday) is an iconic brand and we really want to grow it. I don't think it is about growing one outlet and then another, but a bigger play. So, we will probably need to take a stake at the parent company level so that the parent company can invest in manpower, resource and everything and grow the brand bigger. But I am very, very confident of this brand here in India.”

Was it not as much a connivance between the industrialists and the banks, an unholy nexus, that the present government exposed?
I don't agree to that. I don't think so.

No, you don't.

No, I don't agree. I think businessman and as usual, I being an entrepreneur, we are dreamers. We think that we can create wonders. I don't think there was any intention that percentage of companies who have gone bankrupt or who defaulted in their loan, a genuine loan default in my opinion, they really wanted to build institutions. They wanted to expand. And I think the expansion mission, they defaulted in the loan payment, because there was a mismatch between the loan and the interest payment and the cashflow. In most cases, I think the assets were very good.

Your last word on TGI?

It is an iconic brand and we really want to grow it. I don't think it is about growing one outlet and then another, but a bigger play. So, we will probably need to take a stake at the parent company level so that the parent company can invest in manpower, resource and everything and grow the brand bigger. But I am very, very confident of this brand here in India. 

in all our businesses. But I think that the hard patch which one had, with loans in the books, with delayed projects, it gives you a sense that you need to balance, you need to only chew as much as you can digest.

Those easy days of the bank giving you money to pay your interest is all gone. So, the real business has started in last five-six years in India, where the banks say, if you cannot pay the 10% interest, we take over your company.

What do you think is the single biggest factors can help Indian economy and India progress?

Consistency of policy. There's no point, I come and invest in your country and then tomorrow you change the law and I start paying 60% tax. If you invite me today in telecom and say, I'm going to give you tax rebate, then the tax rate must stay.

Tell me how much of our policy making is done in your impression in consultation with the real stakeholders of that domain?

I don't think so much. That is the problem.

If these laws have to become sustaining, they must have the blessing or the support or the approval, whatever you want to say, of the industry stakeholders.

Yes, but I don't think that happens. But I think the government is quite open now about foreign investment. It takes its time. Again, otherwise, if everything is given at the wish, by the government with the industry there will be a disbalance.

But better balance is possible? Government wants investments, right? They want them to stay put. They want to contribute to the economy and to the lives of the people.

Yeah. But I think how much is, how much is also, because when I was growing up, I still remember George Fernandez's speech once, and he said, everywhere there was ration and all this. And he said, this is after 50 years of our independence. But today, if you really see, we do not have much licenses anywhere.

Regarding loans and the NPAs, just one question. A lot of it was manipulated, not genuine fall of companies?

I think it was genuine, in most cases.

ABOUT

Prasoon Mukherjee is a first generation entrepreneur at Universal Success Enterprises which he founded in 1995. Widely sought for his views on global commerce, he has business interests in Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines and India, among others. The group is headquartered in Singapore; originally from Delhi, his latest acquisition is the India franchise of the prestigious TGI Fridays, the upmarket fine dining chain.

EXAMINING THE STOCK MARKET CONNUDRUM



by DR. MANORAJAN SHARMA

India has been the fastest-growing major economy for the third successive year. Despite global headwinds, including geo-political realignment, India's economy would continue its strong and resilient growth of 6.7% in FY 2024 and 6.2% in FY 2025. The first Advance Estimates of National Income 2023-24 placed macro-economic growth at 7.3% in FY 24 vis-a-vis 7.2% last year. However, the nominal GDP growth is estimated at 8.9% as against 16.1% in FY 23. These figures could change following improved data coverage, actual tax collection and expenditure on subsidies, etc.

A renewed capex cycle, a well-capitalised banking system, robust credit growth, an upturn in the housing sector, rising domestic consumption, robust investment, growing services exports and "digitalization-driven productivity gains" are force multipliers. India would consolidate its global heft by important transformative drivers both on the demand and the supply sides.

Despite external headwinds, both the Nifty 50 and BSE Sensex recorded hefty gains, making 2023 their second-best year since 2017. While Nifty surged by 20% in 2023, this was no flash in the pan, no "happenstance, ... coincidence" (as Ian Fleming said through his immortal character James Bond in his novel Goldfinger).

For, if the Nifty decadal returns are placed in a proper historical and comparative perspective, Nifty returns oscillated from a massive 31.4% in 2014 to a low of 3% in 2016 (with negative 4.1% returns in 2015) during the twelve-year period 2012 to 2023.

The Nifty recovered from 16,828 points in March to reach over

21,800 (28% rise), while the Sensex surged 11,000 points (18% throughout 2023), thereby breaching the 72,000 level reflecting the broader market's strength. Further, the Nifty Smallcap 100 surging by an impressive 54%, and the Nifty Midcap 100 jumping over 44%.

Indian equity markets invested ₹15,100 crore a month via MF SIPs in 2023 on an average, while 26.8 million new demat accounts till November showed large direct retail participation. Foreign investors first withdrew during the year but came back strongly to infuse the highest-ever ₹1.75 lakh crore, exceeding 2020's ₹1.73 lakh crore.

This Nifty rise of 20% in 2023 needs to be seen against the backdrop of 28.2% rise in Japan (Nikkei), 22.3% in Brazil (IBOV), 20.3% in Germany (DAX), 18.7% in Korea (Kospi), 16.8% in France (CAC), 13.8% in USA (Dow) and 3.8% in UK (FTSE). There was, however, 0.3% contraction in Singapore (STI), 3.7% in

China (Shcomp) and 13.8% in Hong Kong (HSI). No wonder, then, India's market cap-to-GDP ratio zoomed from 23% in December 2001 to 112% in March 2023. India's stock market did well this year, with indices hitting record highs. Despite the S&P BSE Sensex ending 168.66 points lower at 71,315.09 on December 18, 2023, India's stock market has been on a roll.

This paradigm shift induced Goldman Sachs' report of Sept. 19, 2023 to justifiably maintain that India's aggregate stock market value is set to rise from \$3.5 trillion currently to over \$5 trillion by 2024. India thus became the fifth largest in the world by market capitalization, surpassing the U.K. and the Middle East. This stemmed from three

basic trends and tendencies underpinning strong macro momentum: Indian start-ups have raised \$10 billion through IPOs so far this year-exceeding the sum raised in the last three years and more importantly, the pipeline

Nifty50 Returns of the last 12 years (Only 1 negative year!)

● 2012	+27.7%
● 2013	+6.8%
● 2014	+31.4%
● 2015	-4.1%
● 2016	+27.7%
● 2017	+27.7%
● 2018	+27.7%
● 2019	+27.7%
● 2020	+27.7%
● 2021	+27.7%
● 2022	+27.7%
● 2023	+27.7%

for future public listings remains robust over the next two years. Hence, there is a distinct possibility that 150 private firms could potentially list on the stock market over the next 36 months, adding a whopping \$400 billion of market value over the next 2-3 years. This tectonic shift, this rekindling of “animal spirits” could herald a new era for the entire ecosystem. Zomato could be quickly followed by Paytm, Ola, and Flipkart leading to a sustained bull run. Thus India’s stock market has been on a roll. But the best is yet to be both because of global cues and domestic macroeconomic drivers!

Globally, India’s economy is the fastest growing among major economies on the back of growing demand, moderate inflation and stable interest rate regime. This makes India an out-performer and with steady growth of 6% over the medium-term, equities are likely to march northwards. On top of over 20% corporate earnings this year, corporate earnings are likely to rise further over the next six months. Other strands of this debate include India’s manufacturing PMI rising to 56 in November 2023 (the 29th successive month of rise in factory activity) from October’s 8-month low of 55.5 and net FPI inflows of US\$ 24.9 billion (up to Dec. 6, 2023) as against net outflows in the preceding two years. FPI Flows would be influenced by peaking U.S. dollar, the high-octane May 2024 elections and India’s greater heft in global markets. Hence, investors should stay invested despite occasional dips and troughs. As John F. Kennedy stressed way back in October 1963, “a rising tide lifts all boats”. While the big picture is unmistakably clear, a granular examination reveals a capital market divide with small-caps and mid-caps outperforming large-caps. It needs no clairvoyance to perceive irrational exuberance, bubble and unsustainably frothy valuations of mid-caps and small-caps (while Nifty gained 20% in 2023, Nifty midcap surged ahead at 39% small caps zoomed by 48%) as also, inter-alia, reflected in a significantly higher price-to-book ratio than the long-term average in the Indian capital market. Consequently, a correction, particularly in the small-cap and mid-cap space cannot be ruled out. Given this scenario of a skew in the bourses and the possibility of a decrease in India’s over-allocation in investors’ emerging market portfolios, large-caps inspire greater confidence since they possess competitive advantage, sustainable growth potential and are reasonably valued vis-à-vis mid/small-caps.

Perils of investing in Futures & Options (F&O)-Dangers Galore

Creating huge money swiftly has always lured investors to the stock markets. But a headlong dive into the F&O quicksand without fully understanding the stock market operations and information regarding companies, securities and prices can be quite catastrophic. This assumes greater significance because the SEBI’s study revealed that 89% of individual traders (i.e., 9 out of 10 individual traders) in equity F&O segment incurred losses, with an average loss of ₹1.1 lakh during FY22, whereas, 90% of the active traders (indulged in trading frequently) incurred average losses of ₹1.25 lakh during the same period. This is quite scary. It is manifestly clear that there is a free fall here like in the case of an aircraft crash when you fall from 35,000 feet. And the F&O segment sends the investors straight to the ventilator- no nursing, no treatment, no OPD, no hospitalisation or even no ICU! Tauba, tauba!

Given the significant risks and dangers inherent in these investment instruments, Ms. Madhabi Puri Buch, SEBI’s Chairman stressed the significance of a strategic and cautious approach to investment. As she pithily said, “if you invest for the long term, you will rarely go wrong”. With such terrifying educative series, most persons shouldn’t touch F&O with a barge pole unless of course they are overpowered by an all pervading sense of greed. Greed and fear constitute the eternal



SEBI’s study revealed that 89% of individual traders in equity F&O segment incurred losses, with an average loss of ₹1.1 lakh during FY22, whereas, 90 per cent of the active traders incurred average losses of ₹1.25 lakh during the same period. This is quite scary.

flaws here- something like the “original sin” of eating the Apple by Adam and Eve.

Pathway to the Future

The Sensex correction on January 23, 2024 was not entirely unexpected. In line with our prescient forecasts, the Sensex fell over 1000 points to end at 70,371; NIFTY fell by 1.5% to close

below 21,250. A deeper fall of 3% was seen in mid and small cap indices. The capital market dip triggers were disappointing HDFC results, downgrading of RIL, stricter SEBI norms on beneficial owners with effect from February 1, net selling by FIIs, profit booking across sectors and fragile 22,000 NIFTY basis. The market capitalisation of all BSE-listed stocks fell to ₹366.3 lakh crore. Despite such steep dip, the long run Indian growth story in general and the capital market in particular continues to be robust and positive. There could, however, be occasional hiccups. William Shakespeare wrote in his play A Midsummer Night’s Dream, “the course of true love never did run smooth”. Similarly, the capital market never progresses in a linear and progressive unidirectional manner. **D**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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MUMBAI START-UP CHALLENGE

Conversations on What's Trending



The inaugural StartUp Mumbai Challenge, with the theme, Forever Planet”, was held at the iconic Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) as part of the Mumbai Festival 2024. With the bell-ringing ceremony at BSE marking the pinnacle of the event proved to be a resounding success, amplifying Mumbai’s stature as an innovation hub.

lives, contributing to a greener and more prosperous tomorrow. In the face of climate change, our collective innovation is the key to ease of living and a better tomorrow.”

While setting the stage for the Start-Up Mumbai Challenge, **Anand Mahindra**, Chairperson of the Mumbai Festival Advisory Committee, said, “Connecting with startups is a legacy from my grandfather, who began in Calcutta with minimal resources but astutely moved to where the streams of opportunity flowed as he recognized the growth potential. Today, as we explore startups, I am thrilled by those not just driven by profit, but by a noble vision to enhance our world. Mumbai, the city where dreams come true, and now the fourth-largest capital market in the world, is the ideal stage for acknowledging and supporting these transformative endeavours.”

The panel discussion *Breaking Barriers, Building Sustainability: Thinking Beyond ROI*, moderated by **Ayesha Faridi**, National Editor ET Now, featured the eminent mentors, **Ronnie Screwvala**, Chairperson and Co-Founder, up-Grad; **Vikas Agnihotri**, Director, InMobi and GlobalBees; **Kaustubh Dhavse**, Joint Secretary and OSD to the Deputy Chief Minister, Govt of Maharashtra; **Harsh Jain**, CEO & Co-founder, Dream11 and Dream Sports; and **Venkat Raju**, Global CEO, Turbostart.

In the panel discussion, the focus shifted from startup challenges to a broader exploration of India’s evolving entrepreneurship landscape. Emphasizing the need to redefine the startup concept, the speakers highlighted understanding consumers, building strong teams, and a clear problem-solving focus.

Shedding light on the government’s startup initiatives, **Kaustubh Dhavse**, Joint Secretary and OSD to the Deputy Chief Minister, Govern-

With inputs from MAHARASHTRA TOURISM

Powered by Turbostart, the challenge focused on concepts prioritizing eco-friendly living and environmental preservation. This transformative initiative signifies a bold step toward nurturing early-stage startups, specifically concentrating on sectors crucial for the city’s evolution - sustainability, entertainment, media, sports, and lifestyle enhancement.

Ten startups and entrepreneurs showcased their groundbreaking ideas, contributing to the festival’s mission of advancing Mumbai’s identity as a global centre for innovation, during the grand finale of the StartUp Mumbai Challenge.

While assuring the Government’s partnership with ideas that are sustainable, **Devendra Fadnavis**, Deputy Chief Minister, Maharashtra, “In celebrating the vibrant culture and innovative spirit of Maharashtra, we recognize that sustainability is not just a concept but a collective responsibility. The innovation showcased at today’s StartUp Challenge, we recognize that startups are the catalysts for positive change. Maharashtra is now hailed as the startup capital of India and not just startup capital, it is also the unicorn capital of India. Today’s startups are not just shaping ideas; they are transforming



ment of Maharashtra, said, "As the Government of Maharashtra, our primary objective is to act as a catalyst and facilitator by implementing effective policies and principles that nurture the entrepreneurial spirit. Through the Maharashtra State Innovation Society, we have introduced a Rs 100 crore startup fund, recognising the significance of supporting startups lacking essential access. While our fund aims to benefit every deserving startup, its predominant focus lies in reaching out to startups in tier two and tier three cities, providing them with the necessary impetus and mentorship."

Ronnie Screwvala, Chairperson and Co-Founder, upGrad, while speaking about his entrepreneurial journey, said, "Mumbai, a city of dreams, marked the beginning of my path as a first-generation entrepreneur. In today's Startup challenge, the focal point transcends mere ROI and investment; it involves spearheading transformative changes in society. For startups, comprehending your consumer in this price-sensitive market and addressing their needs takes precedence. Contrary to the notion that funding should top your list of priorities, it deserves the fifth spot for those seeking a successful venture."

Harsh Jain, CEO & Co-founder, Dream11 and Dream Sports, conveyed, "Within the realm of any startup, one encounters novel challenges daily, spanning from recruiting talent and pitching ideas to growing and ensuring profitability. These facets collectively embody the essence of the struggle for an entrepreneur. Despite these challenges, facing each obstacle head-on and striving for superior outcomes becomes paramount. In the trajectory of our startup, we too grappled with numerous challenges. After navigating through 3 to 4 years of pivoting, we eventually discovered our path, and since then, our trajectory has been one of continuous scaling. As an entrepreneur, a profound passion

Ten startups and entrepreneurs showcased their groundbreaking ideas, contributing to the festival's mission of advancing Mumbai's identity as a global centre for innovation.

“As the startup capital and unicorn hub of India, Maharashtra is at the forefront of fostering new business ecosystems. By transitioning to distributed solar power in agriculture, we not only empower our farmers but also cultivate a new ecosystem of opportunities.”

Devendra Fadnavis

“Today, as we explore startups, I am thrilled by those not just driven by profit, but by a noble vision to enhance our world. In a world where our gaze shifts not only to market indices but also to the skies each morning, this exploration holds significance.”

Anand Mahindra

for your work is indispensable.”

Vikas Agnihotri, Director, InMobi and GlobalBees said, “In the realm of startups, the present scenario is more favourable than in the past; the current ecosystem is significantly improved. We now witness early-stage founders with immense talent contributing to the landscape. Furthermore, a noteworthy trend is the increased willingness of seasoned founders to invest time in supporting and mentoring emerging startups and entrepreneurs, facilitating valuable guidance and networking opportunities.”

Venkat Raju, Global CEO, Turbostart, said, “Over the past decade, I have observed the dynamic phases of growth and saturation within startups. What holds significance is not just the quantity but the quality of startups — entrepreneurs and their ideas, particularly the emphasis on originality, steering away from replicated concepts borrowed from the West or China. The key is aligning with the unique needs of India. Notably, there's a rising trend of startups dedicated to supporting sustainability in the ecosystem. The progress within the entire startup sector in India has been truly remarkable.”

On the occasion of the StartUp Mumbai Challenge, these illustrious mentors and key dignitaries ceremoniously rang the bell at the Bombay Stock Exchange, symbolizing the triumph of the StartUp movement in Mumbai. **Di**

IRAN AND PAKISTAN: ANOTHER FLASH POINT



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

Introduction

In an unexpected development, on 16 January 2024, Iran launched missiles into Pakistan's, Baluchistan, aimed at Jaish al-Adl strongholds, Turbat & Panjgur. Jaish al-Adl, is a Sunni militant group operating in Sistan-Baluchistan. It is designated as a terrorist group.

Earlier on 03 January 2024, Iran suffered its worst domestic attack when two bombs killed 84 people at a ceremony in Kerman, being conducted in memory of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, General Qasem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the US. In retaliation on 15 January Iran fired ballistic missiles at Kurdish-controlled Northern Iraq and Syria. Iran said it was targeting Islamic State and Israel's Mossad, both of whom, it said, had been involved in the Kerman bombings.

Pakistan was also quick to respond with "precise" military strikes with not only missiles but also fighter jets in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province. Iranian media reports, quoting state officials, said three women, four children, and two men killed in the attacks were "non-Iranians," implying they could have been Pakistani nationals. Meanwhile Pakistan claimed that the attacks were launched to target the Baloch insurgent groups.

Though both countries agreed to de-escalate tensions after tit-for-tat military strikes on each other's territory, the episode reveals a lack of trust between the neighbours that will continue to plague relations even after the missiles and accusations have subsided.

Jaish al-Adl

Pakistan and Iran have a delicate relationship specially along their 900 km long border. Jaish al-Adl was established in 2012 in the border regions of Pakistan and Iran. It mainly comprises of members of the

There are a host of possible reasons regarding the strikes. One such theory is that the Jaish al-Adl has been nurtured by the US and Israel. The US is targeting Iran because of Iran's support for Palestine and using proxies like Jaish al-Adl.

Sunni militant Jundallah group, which was weakened after Iran executed its leader, Abdolmalek Rigi, in 2011. It is widely believed that Mullah Omar Irani was one of its key founders. In its previous iteration as Jundallah, the group had pledged allegiance to ISIS.

The group came into the spotlight after a roadside bomb in Saravan killed thirteen Revolutionary Guards in October 2013. In response, for the first time, Iran fired a missile at Kulahu, the compound run by Mullah Omar Irani in Kech. Mullah Omar however, survived.

The cycle of violence has continued with the Jaish al-Adl, claiming responsibility for several attacks in recent years on Iranian Security Forces in Sistan-Baluchistan. Iran has, threatened military operations if Pakistan did not act against the group. There have been counter-complaints from Pakistan regarding Iranian security personnel crossing over into Pakistan.

Possible Reasons that Led to The Strike

There are a host of possible reasons regarding the strikes. One such theory is that the Jaish al-Adl has been nurtured by the US and Israel. On 19 January a former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Shamshad Ahmad Khan said in an interview with Mehr News Agency that the Jaish al-Adl, under the auspices of the United States, had carried out several operations in Iran. The US is targeting Iran because of Iran's support for Palestine and using proxies like Jaish al-Adl.

Iran was pushed by internal pressure to retaliate as it needed to do something to boost the morale of its proxies in the Middle East. Moreover, attacking two countries simultaneously and not facing any retaliation may have emboldened Iran to attack Pakistan. Hence

Iran chose to attack Pakistan to score a point, to reduce cross border activity on its eastern border and thereafter concentrate on the main battle.

The Iranian missile strike could also have been prompted by the attacks on Rask in December by Jaish al-Adl, in which eleven Iranian security personnel were killed.

Of course, there is also a view that both countries had stage managed the attacks and had warned each other in advance.

A Crisis Building up in the Region

Pakistan strongly condemned the unprovoked violation of its airspace by Iran, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying that the strike inside Pakistani territory killed two children and injured three girls.

As per reports a missile hit a Mosque, partially damaging it, and injuring some people. In its statement, the 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs' said "the violation of Pakistan's sovereignty is completely unacceptable and can have serious consequences".

However, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, speaking in Davos, insisted that no Pakistani citizens had been targeted, "We only targeted Iranian terrorists on the soil of Pakistan." He added that he had spoken to his Pakistani counterpart and assured him that we do respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan.

Nonetheless, Islamabad recalled its Ambassador to Iran and said that the Iranian Ambassador would not be allowed back into the country for the time being.

However, on 20 January, Pakistan's government decided to end the tension with Iran and fully restore diplomatic ties with Tehran. The decision was taken by Pakistan's Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar. Also, in a telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani said, "It's crucial to actively pursue the axis of security and military cooperation that has been agreed upon and emphasized by both countries in the past."

Talking Peace but Raining Missiles

Even as their leaders talk of peace, confrontations between terrorists and Security Forces are common along the Pakistan-Iran border, which often result in the loss of both Pakistani and Iranian personnel.

This latest strike coincided with a meeting between Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Anwaar ul Haq Kakar, the caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and also at a time when both navies were carrying out joint drills in the Gulf.

In July 2023 Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir's visited Iran. He met the Iranian President and Foreign Minister, as well as Tehran's



Iran was pushed by internal pressure to retaliate as it needed to do something to boost the morale of its proxies in the Middle East. Moreover, attacking two countries simultaneously and not facing any retaliation may have emboldened Iran to attack Pakistan.

military hierarchy. Border Security was a dominant theme during the visit.

As per an ISPR statement then, both sides "vowed to eradicate the menace of terrorism" along the common border by sharing intelligence and enhancing cooperation. This was the second high-level exchange between the leaderships of both countries, as Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Ebrahim Raisi had met in May 2023, to inaugurate the Mand-Pishin 'border sustenance market'.

However, the world changed after the 07 October attack by the Hamas in Israel. Iran's proxies in the form of the three H's, Hamas, Hezboullah and Houthi's became hyper active thereafter.

On 15 December Jaish al-Adl attacked a Police Station in Rask, a town close to the border with Pakistan and killed eleven policemen. Soon after the attack, Iranian officials blamed weak Pakistani border control measures and claimed that militants had crossed from Pakistan to carry out the assault.

And now the latest 16 January attack and its retaliation.



IMAGE: ASSOCIATED PRESS/ALAMY

◀ Tensions flare: Pakistanis chant slogans at a demonstration to condemn Iranian strikes on their country's territory.

Pakistan's Dilemma

This strike was not the first time that Iranian forces had hit inside Pakistan. In 2017, the Pakistani Air Force had shot down an Iranian drone. In 2021, Iran rescued two Iranian soldiers who were being held hostage by Jaish al-Adl inside Pakistani territory. But these attacks have brought to light the fact that Iran is emboldened after the recent activities of their proxies in Israel, Lebanon, and Yemen. It is also emboldened by the fact that Pakistan has a caretaker government and the country is in turmoil.

As per reports the missiles were launched from Sirkan area of Iran. Retaliation by Pakistan required deliberation, given its own internal situation as also the risk of being drawn into a conflict with Iran.

However, in what is seen as a face-saving measure Pakistan undertook highly coordinated precision military strikes that killed several terrorists in an Operation codenamed 'Marg Bar Sarmachar'.

To quote Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistani Ambassador to the US "If Pakistan hits back, it risks getting drawn into Middle East conflicts it has avoided so far, if it does not retaliate, it will appear weak yet again, and that will have consequences for the prestige of its Armed Forces."

Undoubtedly Pakistan was surprised by the Iranian attack. If Pakistan had let it pass, they may have emboldened Afghanistan, where the Taliban have been protecting the anti-Pakistan Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). On the other hand, adopting an adversarial posture toward Iran complicates the balance of Pakistan's already complex relations with its neighbours. **Thus, by escalating against Iran, Pakistan is inviting a three-front dilemma involving Afghanistan, India, and Iran.**

The Effect in the Region

China which has close relations with both countries has urged Pakistan and Iran to show restraint. After all Baluchistan is a region crucial to its Belt and Road Initiative, and it can ill afford tensions in this province.

Russia's also called on Iran and Pakistan to show maximum restraint and its Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova in a statement said; "It is regrettable that this is happening between friendly SCO countries, with which we are developing partnership relations. Further aggravation of the situation plays into the hands of those who are not interested in peace, stability, and security in the region."

Although both Western and regional countries do not want the war in Gaza to escalate, Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis are patiently and methodically consolidating an alliance of forces across a regional battlefield and these include the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Shia militias in Iraq and Syria. The Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea demonstrate a threat to global trade and energy supplies.

The West sees Tehran as the mastermind behind this network, and

there is no doubt that the axis reflects Iran's strategic outlook. Its Revolutionary Guards have also provided these proxies with lethal military capabilities and support.

There is a difference between the missile attacks in Pakistan and the Houthi attacks in Yemen, as possibly Iran wants to lower the tempo of conflict with Pakistan as regards terrorism, whereas in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, Iran wants to raise the tempo in an effort, among other goals, to drive the United States out of the Middle East and establish Iran's regional dominance.

Yet targeting three neighbours Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan, that too simultaneously, in a way shows the kind of relations that Iran has in the region. Though the current attack on Iraq was confined to the Kurds' area, supposedly a building of a local, allegedly fronting for Israel's Mossad. Can Iran's decision to strike be guided by internal pressure forcing it to flex its military muscle to deter further targeted killings and strikes in the region.

In an official statement Iran's Foreign Ministry emphasised 'that Iran differentiates between Pakistan's friendly and brotherly government and armed terrorists. It always adheres to its policy of good neighbourliness and does not allow its enemies and terrorist allies to strain these relations.'

He separately said that the ' missile attack on a building in Erbil, Iraq's Kurdistan region, was justified by legitimate defence and compliant with international law.

But from another perspective, the Iranian action also highlight Iran's ability to project power beyond its borders, as also reflects the kind of military depth the country thinks it possesses, which not everyone is willing to concede.

Implications For India

India said that Iran's missile attack on Pakistan "is a matter between Iran and Pakistan. Insofar as India is concerned, we have an uncompromising position of zero tolerance towards terrorism.

Pakistan has an active Army comprising of approximately 7,00,000 soldiers. If other fronts are peaceful, Pakistan can concentrate all troops on its Eastern front, bordering India. India on the other hand has a 1.2 million strong army. However, the Indian Army has to look after several fronts. On a simple calculus it can deploy anything between 4,00,000-5,00,000



IMAGE: ARASH KHAMOUSHI/THE NEW YORK TIMES

◀ "Prepare your coffins," a banner warns Iran's adversaries in Tehran, 16 Jan 2024

troops on the west, which is roughly the same number or lesser than the opposite side. However, the moment Pakistan commits troops elsewhere, the balance immediately shifts in favour of India. **Pakistan getting entwined in military duties to its West will change its focus altogether. It will naturally force Pakistan to commit its reserves in that direction and hence 11 and 12 Corps which are in Peshawar and Quetta respectively will get tied down. Militarily, this is a clear win-win for India.**

There is also the aspect about the Chinese radars and Air Defence protection of Pakistan which did not get activated and failed to detect the Iranian drones and missiles deep within Pakistan. The weakness was first evident when Osama Bin Laden was targeted in Abbottabad,

thereafter when the Balakot strikes took place, as also in March 2022 when the Brahmos missile fired accidentally landed at Mian Channu, and now when Iran has struck deep within Pakistan. This has raised questions on Pakistan's capability to protect its airspace.

The retaliatory strikes by Pakistan can also be

viewed as a form of signalling to India that any strikes within Pakistan territory will be responded to. It is likely that Pakistan would have had the tacit support of China while carrying out these attacks and is a means for the Pakistani Armed Forces to regain their importance.

One of the fallouts though a remote possibility could be that the US feels that Pakistan is now a bulwark against Iran and starts funding it militarily. The concern naturally is that military aid to fight terrorism and Iran will be diverted to strengthen Pakistani Armed Forces against India.

The fact remains that of all the current hot spots in the world, the Middle East if allowed to flare up, has the potential to adversely affect a very major chunk of India's imports and exports specially in the vital energy sector.

To any analyst the writing seems very clear Pakistan is now committed on three of its land borders namely India which it views as its primary threat, Afghanistan where the Taliban regime has allowed its ground to be used for attacks by militants and Iran where matters have escalated.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Iran's hitting of its nuclear-armed Eastern neighbour is a dramatic escalation. While countries reserve the right to retaliate against terrorist groups and proxies supported by hostile states, but Pakistan's nuclear deterrence was clearly not a factor when

Iran decided to strike across the border. *Or could this mean that Iran has its own bomb?*

For Pakistan its troubles on its western borders are only increasing. It already faces security issues with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State Khorasan (ISKP) and its deteriorating relationship with the Afghan Taliban. Now a new front has opened with the Iranians.

The activities of militant groups on both sides of the border are one of the biggest irritants in the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Iran and both countries need to address this issue in a mature fashion to ensure the situation does not worsen further. While matters are unlikely to calm down soon, this is also something both countries would not like to escalate.

Is this the beginning or the end. I would place my bets on the former. ☒

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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

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



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

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

INDIA-MALDIVES TIES IN CHOPPY WATERS



by ASHOK SAJJANHAR

Background

It is not unusual for India's smaller neighbors to suffer from a small-country syndrome. There are several reasons for this. In the context of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), India is the only country in the grouping that shares land or maritime boundaries with each of the other member countries while none of the other countries shares such a border with any other member except India (except Pakistan and Afghanistan which share a land border with each other). According to Kautilya's Mandala Theory, the immediate neighbor state is most likely to be an adversary (real or potential) and a state next to the immediate neighbor is likely to be a friend. This sentiment becomes more pronounced when the differential between the neighbor-

Relations between India and Maldives hit a rocky patch when the new President Mohamed Muizzu was elected in September, 2023. It was expected that bilateral relations under Muizzu would not be as warm and cordial as under the previous President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. The foreign policy of Solih ever since he assumed power in 2018 was anchored in the theme of "India First."

As against this, Muizzu fought the 2023 Presidential election on the slogan of "India Out." According to a Report by the European Election Observation Commission, parties supporting Muizzu "deployed anti-India sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation around this theme during the 2023 presidential elections."

The rapid and precipitous decline in bilateral ties has come as a huge surprise to all observers and analysts of the evolving scenario. If there is one individual who can be held responsible for this unfortunate turn of events, it is none other than the new President Mohamed Muizzu. He has conducted Maldives' relations with India with immaturity, lack of sophistication, short-sightedness and impetuosity.

ing countries in territorial area, population, size of economy etc. is widely different. India accounts for more than 70 percent of the total area, population, GDP of the SAARC member States. As such, India's small neighbors have an apprehension that their independence and sovereignty could be under threat although India's policies have always tried to reassure them that India has nothing but their security, well-being and prosperity at heart.

In the instant case of Maldives, this is unmistakably demonstrated by India's prompt assistance during the 1988 coup attempt. The immediate withdrawal by India of its troops when they were no longer required, totally



India's rapid and comprehensive assistance and support during the outbreak of measles and Covid-19 in 2020 established beyond doubt the advantages of India's proximity and capacity to come to Maldives' rescue in distress as compared to any other distant country. All these incidents further reinforced India's credentials of being the "first responder" in times of distress to Maldives and other neighboring countries.



The anti-India small-country syndrome at times is used by the neighboring countries in their domestic politics for their narrow and short-sighted personal interests. This is what has been done by Muizzu and his party in the recent elections.

debunked any fears of Indian dominance or territorial aspirations. India was also the first to assist Maldives during the 2004 Tsunami and the water crisis in Malé in Dec 2014. India's rapid and comprehensive assistance and support during the outbreak of measles and Covid-19 in 2020 established beyond doubt the advantages of India's proximity and capacity to come to Maldives' rescue in distress as compared to any other distant country. All these incidents further reinforced India's credentials of being the "first responder" in times of distress to Maldives and other neighboring countries.

The anti-India small-country syndrome at times is used by the neighboring countries in their domestic politics for their narrow and short-sighted personal interests. This is what has been done by Muizzu and his party in the recent elections. It would have been thought that countries engage in shrill political rhetoric during the election process but quickly steer themselves to a more centrist position once the respon-

sibilities of governance devolve upon them. Exactly the opposite seems to have occurred in the case of Muizzu who appears to have become even more belligerent and hostile than he was during the elections.

India's neighbors are also prone to using the China card to get more benefits and support in trade terms, investments, infrastructure development from both India and China. This demands that they ensure warm and cordial relations with both the countries. This is what was pursued by Muizzu's predecessor Solih who ruled from 2018 to 2023. Muizzu appears to have moved totally to the China camp by unnecessarily downgrading Maldives' ties with India. This is nothing short of shooting itself in the foot as the track record of China in helping developing countries to achieve their developmental aspirations is highly suspect. Most countries recipient of Chinese funding for investment projects have sunk into unsustainable debt from which they find themselves difficult to extricate. On the contrary, India's support to developing countries is according to their needs and has not led any country into an unsustainable debt burden for them.

India-Maldives Relations

Relations between the two countries are deep-rooted and multi-faceted. The last few years particularly during the Solih regime have witnessed many new initiatives to strengthen and expand bilateral ties in diverse areas. Some of these include capacity building/training requirements of the Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), meeting around 70% of their defence training needs; Joint Exercises, Maritime Domain Awareness, gifting of hardware, infrastructure development etc.; establishment of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital and the National College for Police and Law Enforcement; creation of infrastructure in education, health and community development sectors; restoration of Hukuru Miskiiy (Friday

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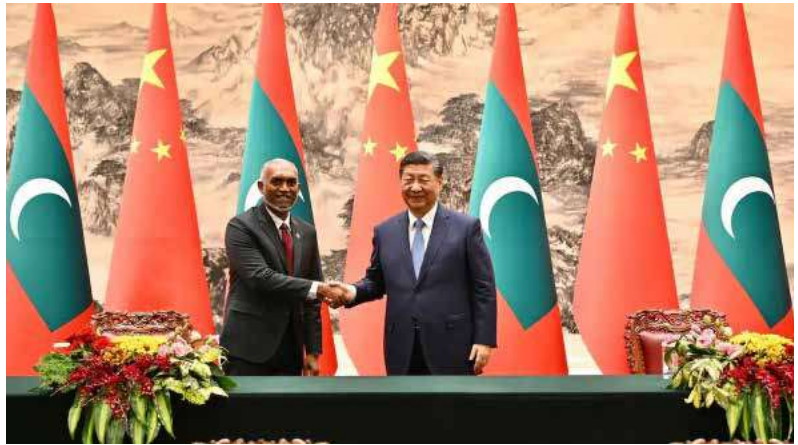
Mosque) in Malé; Water and Sanitation in 34 Islands; Addu Development Project (Roads and Land Reclamation); Expansion of Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company Limited (MIFCO) facilities in Felivaru and Gemanafushi; state of the art Cancer Hospital; Gulhifalhu Port project; Hulhumalé Cricket Stadium; Airport Redevelopment Projects in Hanimaadhoo and Gan; Greater Male Connectivity Project, and many more. By embarking on his reckless and ill-considered venture, Muizzu has heavily damaged the interests of Maldives and its citizens.

Recent Developments

Going against the past practice of coming to India as the first foreign country to visit after assuming charge, Muizzu chose Turkiye as his first foreign destination. This is indicative of the larger role that Turkiye can be expected to play in the defence and domestic affairs of Maldives. Over the years, Maldives has been transforming into an increasingly Islamic radicalized society. It had the dubious distinction of being the largest per capita supplier of foreign militants and terrorists to the cadres of the Islamic State fighting in Syria and other neighboring countries. Turkiye in its bid to emerge as the leader of the Muslim Ummah has been dabbling in South Asian affairs particularly by strengthening its ties with Pakistan and reaching out to others like Bangladesh. Its increased presence in Maldives will be a matter of concern for India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Lakshadweep on 2nd January, 2024 extolled the charm of the islands and encouraged more Indian to visit and enjoy their serene beauty. Totally unprovoked, 3 junior Maldivian ministers came out with vituperative, racist and abusive tirades against India, Indians and PM Modi himself. After a barrage of criticism on social media by Indian common people and celebrities against these remarks and threat to stop visiting Maldives as tourists, (India contributed the largest viz. 12% of total Maldivian incoming tourists in 2022), the Maldivian government "suspended" (not dismissed) the three deputy ministers.

At the time when the mayhem about the Ministers' remarks was in progress, Muizzu was on a 5-day long visit to China. He chose



China to be his second port of call (after a short official visit to Dubai for the COP28 during which he also met PM Modi) during which he 'elevated' bilateral relations with China to 'strategic cooperation,' signed 20 agreements, joined China's Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Strategic Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI), revived the Belt and Road Initiative and Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from the Yameen era, both of which his successor Solih had abandoned.

On his return, he needlessly and brashly declared that Maldives might be a small country but it did not give the right to any country to "bully" it. He added that "though we have small islands in this ocean, we have a vast exclusive economic zone of 9,00,000 square kilometers. Maldives is one of the countries with the biggest share of this ocean. This ocean does not belong to a specific country. This ocean belongs to all countries situated in it."

In addition, Maldives gave permission to the docking of Chinese research/spy vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03 in Malé. Maldives' explanation that the vessel visit was only to replenish stocks sounds hollow. Similarly, Muizzu's decision to extend its public health insurance coverage to hospitals in Dubai and Thailand, beyond those in India and Sri Lanka, is calculated to significantly decrease its connect with India. Coming on the heels of the non-extension of the joint hydrographic agreement with India which expires in June, 2024 and ultimatum to India to withdraw

In the instant case of Maldives, this is unmistakably demonstrated by India's prompt assistance during the 1988 coup attempt. The immediate withdrawal by India of its troops when they were no longer required, totally debunked any fears of Indian dominance or territorial aspirations.





its “77 troops” (which are basically stationed in Maldives for humanitarian assistance and medical evacuation purposes) by 15th March, signifies a pro-active push to replace India with China, Türkiye and other countries in meeting the strategic and daily requirements of the Maldivian government and people.

Muizzu’s anticipated yet fast-tracked replacement of India with China as the preferred partner; requesting China to send more tourists in a bid to supplant India’s significant presence in this sector; his simultaneous new partnership with distant Türkiye in civil and military trade; also importing essential staples like rice and flour from Türkiye, so as ‘not to rely on one country’ have created a new strategic conundrum and evoked considerable concern in India.

The Way Forward

Significant segments of the Maldivian population are in support of strong and close relations with India. Strong statements criticizing comments by the three junior ministers against India and PM Modi were made by many common people as well as respected members of the political elite of Maldives like Ibrahim Solih and Mohamed Nasheed, both former Presidents of the country; Abdulla Shahid, former President of the UN General Assembly and Maldivian foreign minister, and several more. In the recent elections for the Mayor of Male, the position occupied by Muizzu before being elected President, the India-leaning party scored a decisive victory over the candidate put up by Muizzu’s party. The Parliament, elections to which are scheduled for 17th March, 2024 is currently controlled by the party which advocates strong and warm relations with India.

India needs to reach out and pro-actively cultivate its ties with the people of Maldives who are favorably disposed towards India. This would of course need to be done without in any way interfering in the internal affairs of the country.

India extends large quantities of developmental support and aid to Maldives. India will need to draw some clear red lines concerning its core strategic and security interests which must be respected by the Maldives if it wishes to continue to receive India’s support. There are other areas also where India can exercise its influence over Maldives. Comments from Maldives suggest that while it is keen to continue to receive largesse from India, it is not agreeable to respect India’s sensitivities. Maldives would have to be told firmly that this would not be

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acceptable. All this would need to be communicated to Maldives behind closed doors and not through the media. The above carrot and stick approach would need to be conducted in a sophisticated and nuanced manner. Keeping in view the geo-strategic importance of Maldives, India should not respond in a knee-jerk fashion but adopt a measured, sober and well thought through approach. This is what India has done so far. It needs to continue the same policy with equal finesse.

Conclusion

Challenge posed by Muizzu’s government is stiff but not one that an experienced and mature diplomacy of India will not be able to handle.

China continues to expand and deepen its ties with India’s neighbors in an effort to create a “string of pearls” around it to contain it. India has through its Neighborhood First, Act East and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in The Region) has been assiduously reaching out to its land and maritime neighbors. These initiatives have yielded positive and encouraging results.

PM Modi’s first visit to Nepal in August, 2014 was the first visit by an Indian PM to Nepal in 17 years. Over the last 9 years, PM Modi has travelled five times to Nepal, twice for multilateral engagements and thrice on bilateral visits. Similarly, the India-Nepal Joint Commission held in September, 2014 was the first meeting of this body in 23 years.

PM Modi’s visit to Sri Lanka in March, 2015 was the first bilateral visit by an Indian PM to that country in 32 years. Over the last 9 years, PM Modi has travelled thrice to Sri Lanka, all visits being bilateral in nature.

India has adopted the same approach and continues to give increasing priority to its neighboring countries. It needs to further step up its game and use all the assets at its command of development cooperation, soft power, culture, language, cuisine, music etc. to significantly deepen and upgrade its ties with its neighboring countries. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Analyses; President, Institute of Global Studies; Distinguished Fellow, Ananta Aspen Centre, and former Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan, Sweden and Latvia.

TIME TO ACCELERATE OUR SOFT POWER!

*Bollywood, Sports and Tourism can be the Silver Lining
in our relations with our neighbours.*

In our immediate neighbourhood, the China card has been persistent and remains as challenging as ever! There is no visible reason that we can expect this to scale down, in fact, only expect them to escalate. It is the big power game, that we have seen in history and around geographies; the chemistry is the same too, tends to get physical without provocation. Within the Indian Ocean, across the Himalayas, the narrative is the same. We have more of a shared history and sense of community with our neighbours than any other country can lay claim to. Our soft power around films, sports and tourism must remain open, promoted for greater goodwill and people to people connect, which will matter most.



by NAVIN BERRY

Our South Asian neighbours are best targets to begin with, as India remains the big thorn in the Chinese grand plans and encircling India has been one of the priorities. The string of pearls has been around as strategy that we in India have tended to either overlook or dismiss. Smaller countries cannot offend one or the other, though the new dispensation in Maldives is proving an exception.

In the larger context, we could have continued with proxy wars in the region, but with the open hostility on our northern border, where China came out as an aggressor once again in 2020, with its continued build up on their side of the border, which is in fact in Tibet, there has been no looking back. A counter narrative has become the highlight within the region.

Ambassador Vivek Katju, in an editorial in The Indian Express, has outlined some of the issues and recent developments between our two countries.

He has stressed that red lines in neighbourhood on Maldives' ties with China, India must send out a clear message. "These problems with neighbouring countries are not new but they have been exacerbated because of China's persistent assertiveness in the region.

He writes that "the neighbours are clearly finding it impossible to overlook Chinese overtures even while emphasising their links with India. The neighbourhood situation

Calls for boycott of Maldives were unwarranted and out of place. Inspired as they were by a sense of outrage and expression of nationalism. But tourism has no connection with closure of borders, in fact it must always remain a power to connect people and peace and prosperity.

does not present a comforting picture for India, including in the security sector. India needs a cogent and enduring framework of engagement with its neighbours which harmonises its interests and those of its neighbours”.

President Muizzu on his return from his China trip has said, “We may be a small country, but that does not give you a licence to bully us”. It does not require any great imagination to comprehend who “you” refers to in this context, says Katju. So emboldened has he become, assured of whatever assistance and cooperation that he has been given.

The message is clear from Ambassador Katju’s observations. That India respects Maldives sovereignty (and that of other countries just as much) and its (their) choices. That we need to together tread the future as “reliable development partners”. However, what India will not be able to accept is for a neighbour like Maldives to become a base from where its security comes under threat. It is natural for a country like India to draw such a red line not only in the context of Maldives but also in respect of other neighbours.

China’s assertiveness within the region has been strong across countries. In Pakistan, in Nepal and Bangladesh, and more recently in Bhutan as well. Efforts with varying successes have been ongoing, the pressure has been relentless. To encircle India through her neighbours has been a major foreign policy initiative of the Chinese.

Ambassador Katju writes

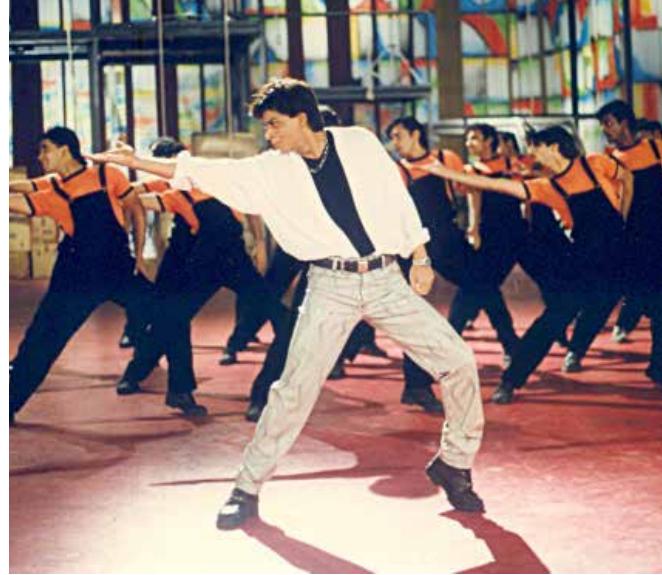
“For over three decades, India’s other neighbours have witnessed this country being unable to take decisive action to successfully combat Pakistani terrorism. That did not send a message of Indian strength. Again, during these decades, the Indian economy grew substantially but China outstripped India by a factor of six. That too sent out a message to the neighbourhood. These have to be countered.

Modi’s Balakot action of 2019 displayed a determination to use coercive elements of national power to counter terror. A red line was drawn. What is needed is that, quietly and subtly, a series of Indian security red lines have to be enunciated for the region while emphasising the Modi doctrine of “sabka saath, sabka vikas” and of non-interference in the neighbours’ internal affairs. And if the red lines are breached, forceful action will necessarily have to be undertaken.”

President Muizzu has gone to great lengths in keeping his election promises pertaining to the stationing of some 80 personnel from India.

But to his credit it must be mentioned he sacked his three deputy ministers for stepping out of turn with their disparaging remarks on India and our prime minister! Calls for boycott of Maldives were unwarranted and out of place. Inspired as they were by a sense of outrage and expression of nationalism. But tourism has no connection with closure of borders, in fact it must always remain a power to connect people and peace and prosperity. Politically drawing a firm red line that here the buck stops, no treading beyond as it hurts our security, is one thing. Stopping tourism flows in both directions must remain an open channel of people to people connect.

A carefully drawn narrative is the crying need of the hour, one that spells equal status of brotherhood, with promotion of soft power that India enjoys immensely in the region. Unlike any other country. Like sports, tourism and Bollywood. Encouraging industry to promote film festivals, sports events and intensively promoting two-way tourism, encouraging




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Indians to lead as tourists into the neighbourhood and making it easier for their nationals to visit us. Promoting religious tourism to destinations in India like to the Buddha circuit and to pilgrimages such as Hazrat Nizamuddin and Ajmer Dargah. Incentives available to domestic tourists can extend to regional destinations just as much.

Bollywood is a huge magnet for the region. Purely for entertainment, you should witness the craze for Hindi songs even when the language is scarcely understood by so many in Sri Lanka and in the Maldives. It might be mentioned here that a very large percentage of the workforce in the Maldives’ resorts is from India. Whatever one can say, culturally and ethnically, we have more in common with our South Asian neighbours and

they with us, in what we eat, drink and wear. Our celebrations are similar, so are our moods. We are more sentiment, wear our likes and dislikes on our sleeve, and react impulsively, not often on design. There is a way forward to forge this common and shared identity.

This may be equally true of much of Pakistan, as well. Should we engage on a more direct people to people contact? This is a larger issue that only our political bosses can deliberate upon. But a shared history is just as much with them and with Bangladesh and Nepal. The corridors for our soft power must remain open, ideally, and best with a 24/7 and a 360° engagement. 

MALDIVES AND ITS CENTRALITY TO THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IOR)

Maldives' geography explains its strategic importance. The 960 km long submarine ridge below provides only two SLOCs for all sea traffic from the Gulf of Aden and Straits of Hormuz in the West to Malacca Straits in the East, and that too within the maritime borders of Maldives, which makes it a Toll Gate for these passages. Its central location between other island territories of Seychelles, Mauritius, Diego Garcia, Lakshadweep, and Sri Lanka further enhances its strategic value.

by MAJ GENL. VIVEK KRISHAN SINGH (RETD)

Till about a decade ago, India enjoyed an unchallenged sway in this region, as there was no clash of interest. However, expanding Chinese commercial and strategic interests changed the security dynamics. China acquired a Logistic Base in Djibouti. In Myanmar, China took control over Kyaukpyu port, a commercial maritime port that can be doubled as a military facility and set up a naval intelligence unit at Coco Islands. Hambantota (Sri Lanka) and Feydhoo Finolhu (Maldives) were acquired as commercial bases on long lease. Gwadar (Pakistan) was pocketed as part of BRI. Additional facilities on the African eastern seaboard started appearing as China was in the process of acquiring and/or constructing numerous dual use port facilities. With growing Chinese ambitions, aggressiveness, capabilities and reach, India was seriously challenged in the IOR.

China had virtually completed its String of Pearls theory.

This did not happen overnight. The writing was on the wall. China was building a blue water Navy and enhancing its capability to maintain its permanent presence in the IOR. For India, Maldives has been an unfortunate case of missing the boat.

The Chinese investment in the Maldives is a subject of concern. First to be leased was



Feydhoo Finolhu, a tiny islet just 0.5 square miles, strategically located just 3 nautical miles from the Maldivian capital and the international airport. The next was **Kunaavashi**, an atoll 35 nautical miles from Malé. China's largest, and most visible, infrastructure projects in the Maldives have been on the capital island of **Malé** and adjacent **Hulhumalé**. The two most important projects have been the expansion of the International Airport and the construction of the **Sinamale bridge connecting it to Hulhumalé**. Beijing Urban Construction Group signed a deal to expand the **Velana International Airport** in 2014, displacing India's GMR which previously held the contract. There are several others which are on the anvil including the **Makunudhoo Observatory**.

However, much as we may wish away these developments as mere commercial ventures, their intent is visible to even those who cannot see. For India, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the countries located in the region including the Maldives are of strategic importance and part of its sphere of influence. A military base in the Maldives would tilt the geopolitical balance towards China. The geographical location of Feydhoo Islands poses a direct threat to Indian security and freedom of movement in the Indian Ocean. If established, the Chinese military base would be 900 km away from Minicoy and 1000 km from the Indian mainland. Such a military facility could be developed to dock warships and nuclear submarines amongst other maritime usages. As of now, it is believed, that Beijing has taken over 17 islands in Maldives

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Male-Hulhumale Link Road



as commercial projects. In case China does decide to convert one/them into a military base(s), Maldives can do nothing to stop it.

Male-Hulhumale Link Road

The Indian Ocean has the potential to become the new theatre of conflict between India and China. Already engaged in the Ladakh, Arunachal and Sikkim, Maldives could be the next location for a standoff between them.

What can India do, under these circumstances? There is an immediate need for long term strategic thinking, starting as well from immediate as well as short term. India needs to catch the boat and develop strategic naval facilities not only in Andamans but also in Maldives, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Mauritius. But the **Defence outlay has been steadily reducing** and stands at a low percentage of GDP. With the maritime front poised to gain more importance in the future, it is imperative that the government considers an increase in defence allocations and reprioritizes inter sea importance of defence projects with an aim

We should use the QUAD to ensure that the Chinese navy remains embroiled in the Pacific while we develop the requisite capability. Japan on the other hand can help us with finances and Australia juxtaposes its maritime capability to pose a threat to China.

to strengthen the capabilities at sea. The Indian Naval fleet of ships and submarines needs to cross the 200 mark earliest. Given that the number of ships being commissioned is less than those decommissioned, it seems unlikely that we would be able to meet that target, unless off course a major course correction is made. The capability gaps are slowly increasing in other spheres too.

In the interim, we should

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It was as early as 1968 that the UK/US combine felt the need of naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Thus, Diego Garcia came into being as a joint US/UK military base. The atoll is located 1,796 km south-southwest of Kanyakumari and 739 km south of Addu Atoll (the southernmost atoll of Maldives). *We could have learnt something there!!*

Serious investments are needed into our maritime security, new alignments that have been secured with like minded partners need to be forged as strategic deterrents, countries in the neighbourhood must be advised not to act against our security, which cannot be overlooked. It does not help any of the nations to become centres of big power rivalry, best is to retain the region for peace and prosperity. □

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maj Gen VK Singh, VSM was commissioned into The Scinde Horse in Dec 1983. The officer has commanded an Independent Recce Sqn in the desert sector, and has the distinction of being the first Armoured Corps Officer to command an Assam Rifles Battalion in Counter Insurgency Operations in Manipur and Nagaland, as well as the first General Cadre Officer to command a Strategic Forces Brigade. He then commanded 12 Infantry Division (RAPID) in Western Sector. The General is a fourth generation army officer.



Lakshadweep Calling

PM Plays the Brand Ambassador

With inputs from **RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SOCIETY OF INDIA**

It has been a relatively less talked about destination, discovered some decades back, ironically also made popular at that time by the then prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Unfortunately, his visit too sparked controversies, but of another kind, with reference to sustainability laws, with media decrying his idea of a holiday. But then, this time too, there have been outcries but of another kind! Imagine how a prime minister on holiday with friends became a subject of derision; as a country we have moved to a much more open society with a PM espousing his citizens to take holidays and discover their country.

This time, released photographs promote the pristine quality of this eco-friendly destination. PM Modi is visibly relaxed and enjoying a quiet and reflective discovery. His visit has coincided with the inauguration or granting of numerous schemes that would improve both the quality of life of the average inhabitant and also improve the visitor experience to the islands.

That these islands are in the deep south, neighbouring the ever-popular Maldives, is also a call for strengthening our defense capabilities in the Indian Ocean. This is a destination of unparalleled raw beauty, nature at its most charming best. But then national security comes first, with

It might even be the right time to determine the carrying capacity of the islands, and ensuring that we adhere to the limited numbers that Lakshadweep can handle.

no compromises. Media reports suggest the government intends to build an airbase on the Minicoy Island, for both defence and tourism.

Given this new spotlight, it might even be the right time to determine the carrying capacity of the islands, and ensuring that we adhere to the limited numbers that Lakshadweep can handle. A plan for development transparently shared by the local administration. There is no getting away from development and develop we must. How responsible can this approach be, is the question? We bring a few alternate opinions on this issue, a subject of a recent debate set up by the Responsible Tourism Society of India.

– EDITOR



HH Jodhpur: Gaj Singh

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit has undoubtedly placed these eco-friendly islands in the spotlight, drawing global attention to the island's untouched beauty. The appeal of these pristine islands is undeniable, but this newfound attention comes with an inherent risk of overdevelopment and rampant tourism. The islands find themselves in the crossroads of economic growth, fueled by tourism influx, and the risk of harmful consequences. We must therefore understand the delicate balance between economic growth and environment protection. Unchecked tourism can be a wolf in sheep's clothing. Devouring the very beauty of the serenity of these islands that attracts visitors in the first place.

The Himalayan Hill stations should be a warning to us. We have already witnessed adverse effects of unregulated growth, and now the threat extends to the pristine islands of Lakshadweep. We stand at a juncture where we must navigate challenges posed by the rising demands of tourists and tourism, ensuring that the island's unique ecosystems remain unharmed, and the lives of those residing there are enhanced and not unduly disrupted. The local population is very important in all tourism projects. I'm not expert on marine tourism, but at the same time, there are basic methods and ways and means about how we should address tourism.

The Lakshadweep islands with their coral reefs, vibrant marine life demand our conscious attention. Lakshadweep tourism demands mindful growth, respect for the geology, ecology, and culture. We must respect these parameters and develop tourism responsibly and in hand with the locals, flourishing tourism that benefits all. We must educate the local communities and steer the ship by involving them in crucial decision-making processes. This way we can harness their



Agatti island

valuable knowledge of the area's culture, environment and resources for crafting policies that preserve the unique identity of the destination. That does empower local communities to be custodians of their own land, not passive on local, that tourism benefits them without eroding their way of life and lifestyle. The Lakshadweep tourism development must become an international model.

And that should be its USP. The island should not be moulded to fit external expectations. They chasing other popular destinations or chasing inappropriate trends in tourism and organic growth; guided by local voices and respecting natural limits is the only path to a thriving future for both the islands and their communities.

Sheel Bannerjee *Former secretary tourism, Government of India (IAS retired)*



The geopolitics of the Indian Ocean is a compulsion which we cannot ignore. And now how that is to be balanced with these other concerns is going to be the issue. So now we'll have to eventually take it all up with the government, really decide what happens in Lakshadweep as a part of the entire change.

I think we have already known the impact of over-tourism in our hill stations, not only the hill stations but also very important tourism destinations like the Taj. If I recall right, some time ago there were very disturbing reports that the footfalls to the Taj were actually coming down because of the unregulated tourism visits that were being allowed.

My hope is that this trend has been reversed. I understand that some measures like regulating the number of visitors to the Taj have been implemented. Perhaps that is resulting in positive results. Similarly, the impact of over tourism on an ecologically fragile region, like the Lakshadweep cannot be underplayed. Now, I have been talking about the carrying capacity of tourism destinations and how one should regulate it for quite some time now. But that can be not only at the peril of the tourism destination itself. Now, if Lakshadweep is allowed to go ahead and invite tourists without any restriction, without any understanding

of the issues, I think that will be a disaster that we can all avoid.

So, the idea here is to prep up India's capacity in the ocean, to ensure self-defense, against all possible situations that can arise. So, keeping that in mind, there are certain compulsions which have to be taken note of for India to respond. I think, in a place like Lakshadweep, it is critical, especially with the developments of what has happened in Maldives recently and what is happening now. So, the choices before the Indian government would be limited, and they have to respond. So, while we should not be seen as a society, while emphasizing a very real threat to the ecological wellbeing of these very fragile areas of Lakshadweep, we should also keep this kind of threat in mind while giving our responses. So, I think while we should say over-tourism should not be considered, it should not be allowed. At the same time, it should be done in a manner which will keep India's interests safe in the region.

Samit Sawhney

Barefoot Pioneer, Andaman Islands



I bring in 20 years of experience in Andamans. So, these 20 years are, you know, the jumpstart that Andamans tourism got actually over Lakshadweep. So, in a lot of ways, it's like seeing the same train track happening all over again in slow motion because we've, you know, 20 years ago when Andamans

just started to open up, we had all the same concerns. All the same buzzwords were thrown around. It is there in every tourism action plan. And the vision documents policy, if you read them, they are all perfect. You know they all say high value, low volume. Even now, if you read the state plans for Lakshadweep, the optics is correct. The language is correct. The problem is what happens in implementation.

And we've, you know, we've seen a situation in, and, and luckily Andamans has a lot more landmarks. It is a lot bigger, it has more opportunities to get things wrong, than Lakshadweep ever will, because Lakshadweep is tiny in comparison, and there is really no scope for mistakes. And really having made a mess of the two main tourist islands in Andamans, that should actually be a bit of warning. When you open up tourism with a few buzzwords and no actual practice on ground. The disconnect between policy and implementation is actually where that fight happens.

But what's already happening, two properties have gone out on tender. They have gone to The Taj. A third one I've just shared on the group, Minicoy has been re-tendered. It's very clear what you have to build. The winning bidder has to cough up 150 rooms, 40 of them in the lagoon and on the reef. These things are part of the tender. You can't back out of it. So, the question then is, you know, where can you come in and where can you make any form of difference.

There is usually such a huge disconnect between what is being planned and what actually needs to happen? So, you know, the only people you can work with are the ones who are meant to implement the projects that have already been tendered out. And secondly, you know, work with the administrations and locally as well; it's not just policy level, but also making sure that there's some kind of monitoring body,



which is what Andamans has missed.

So even though Andamans has this high value, low volume, and it is still there on the ground, they've always taken the tack that, you know, if an Indian with a budget of 500 rupees a day wants to visit Andamans, who are we to stop him? And then they ended up creating a bunch of infrastructure for that. So, this in Andamans, specifically the LTC tourism was, and, you know, chasing after that and making sure they had facilities, that started the mass market move. And a similar thing could well happen in Lakshadweep. You know, when you have every Indian wanting to get across there and take, you know, their selfies, et cetera, and you end up with administration creating the infrastructure for that. So where is the mechanism to stop something like that from happening?

Specifically using the word pressure group because people like us you know, a Barefoot brand or a CGH or an Oberoi or an ITC would be all much more amenable to working with the groups like R-T-S-O-I, because they don't want the flip side of it, which is to get a name for not putting environmental concerns upfront. So, I think, we need a two-pronged approach. One is to say, okay, fine certain tenders have gone out. How do we work with the people who have to implement them and make them as green as possible? And that is probably the most practical thing we can do. And secondly, I would say not just take it up at the policy level, but also drill down to the UT level and make sure, you know, what are the checks and balances once you get in this policy document?

How do you make sure that the Andamans experience doesn't happen again, which is where the policy remains on paper, and the people who have to execute it anyway have got these wide-ranging powers where they can just ignore the overarching aim of that policy. The only two things that will be developed in the future is fisheries and tourism. We are seeing the effects of over fishery in Lakshadweep on our reefs. Again, most of



Minicoy island

it is going out for export. I am actually shocked that only 80% is going out in Lakshadweep. I thought the number would already be in the high nineties, but I am very sure it's going to be in the high nineties, very, very soon.

They are taking resources out and tourism at least is a way to put it in, you know there's a way to also make sure that given that you are going for such high-end luxury tourism, even an extra \$50, a \$100 a night, can take all the garbage out, for example, can also do a lot of good on the island. And, you know, there is a sustainable lifestyle. There, there is a local lifestyle over there. It's been sustainable for them thus far, but there's not everything happening that is right? And there's a lot that could still be improved in the way they're living their lives and the way they dispose of their waste. And, and maybe when these resorts come in and if they are given additional responsibilities to make sure that those islands also are properly disposing waste, et cetera and they're part of that solution, then you could end up with a net non-negative kind of impact.

And when, when I am talking about us working with the resorts to come at two levels. One is during the build phase, when you're making sure that, okay, if you have to build these in the lagoon, where you are actually locating them, what is happening in the build phase, that you are minimising the risks of damage in the lagoon itself. It is too late to say they, they shouldn't be there. It is going to come there whether you like it or not.

And the second part is ongoing in the operational phase, and how do you make sure that they are making a positive impact on the island as a whole?

Jose Dominic *CGH Group, Kochi*



Walking on that coral beach in the lagoon with, I thought the PM was sending a big signal of endorsement of that model of eco-friendly growth in Lakshadweep, and then with the rush on social media as never before in the history has happened, after that in India the islands have become the destination, become known.

Now, in 1988 when we went first, there was a strong policy in place, a strong direction in place. And so it was, first of all, there was carrying capacity drawn up of about 100 people as tourists on the island at any time. And then, how much power can be generated that is supplied by the government, how much water can be extracted and to reduce power consumption and to, and to avoid dredging of the lagoons from movement of heavy draught vessels and so on and so forth. And so, a model emerged where the advertised features of the resort called Bangaram Island Resort when it opened in 18 December, 1988, was the absence of telephone, television, newspaper, air conditioning, hot water room service, 24/7 restaurant, swimming pool, all absent and what was present was the pristine nature to enjoy. And that was a model positioned for a specific market.

Their response was extraordinary. People came, not despite, but because of that model.

Now, the other islands which are being developed have got 200, 300 rooms capacity. And what was, what was sacrosanct at that time was that all buildings, that any structures created should be invisible and everything built behind the tree line.

The question came up, should we not follow the Maldives example? And it was unanimous, both the government, the authority and the entrepreneurs said, we should not spoil the island by dotting the lagoon with water villas. I equate that water villa on the lagoon to building, and which will of course fetch a fancy price of a thousand dollars a night. But I equate that with building in the Taj Mahal monument in the gardens, if you allowed people to build tourist cottages, they too will do. Come on, come on, a thousand dollars a night. Will you do that? It is extremely shocking and surprising that the regulators, the government, the administration has now invited tenders; it appears to me an administrative order suddenly just jumped to that as well as, as well as to build something in the lagoons.

The very reason for people to come there was the miracle of nature, which is a lagoon and the corals. And that is dotted with, with water villas, unimaginable that this could happen. And this, and I was just looking at asking others in, in the developed areas in the Pacific, there is a strong ban against such constructions. But, of course, what has happened is they have got thousand and one islands, and then tendered out to big brands from around the globe who came there and they were given 20 years, it was slash and burn. Do what you want? Make what you can, then move on. They have other islands they can develop. We don't have that luxury.

But I think what is at stake, are rare, very

rare and precious. India does not need Lakshadweep to make India a developed country or to reach a trillion-dollar economy. On the other hand, India's stand should be to preserve and protect the pristine quality of the islands as well as to build capacity of the local islanders. The resort was run practically, although we happened to be from the mainland, but it was 95% by the Islanders; it was their idea, their ideology, so local and so environmentally conscious and so socially beneficial. These criteria are, are timeless and, and, and they need to be. We cannot say that, that it (new hotels) has now been tendered and now let them happen.

Rakesh Mathur

Founding Member & Honorary President, Responsible Tourism Society Of India



I would like to begin by making some propositions for consideration by that section of the Tourism and Administrative Fraternity, which is actively promoting the setting up of Sea Bungalows in Andaman Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands. Some have even gone to the extent of saying that "this will help us in achieving our tar-

get of being a 5 trillion economy " by 2025 Really??? So let us then do the following:

- Erect Tourism Bungalows inside designated Wildlife Forests. We will be able to generate at least Rs. One lakh per night every night except when the Forests are closed.
- Erect a few Bungalows in the inner lawns of Taj Mahal. Another similar money spinner. Or even Humayus tomb for that matter!!
- Do away with the 300 meter law in coastal sea fronts. Super hotels with come up on the beach fetching premium revenues

We could could go on and on and go about ruining our natural habitat and our heritage for the sake of seemingly fuelling economic growth.

First and foremost the sea is the property of commons and cannot be encroached upon.

The Corals are live and are akin to Forest life. Any intrusion will slowly destroy them. Any marine biology scientist will tell you this. Several studies have been done in this regard

Damage has already been done in Andaman Nicobar. We need to stop and reverse that.

We strongly believe that any development in these prestine environments should be behind and below the tree line! We can create similar unique experiences.

Maldives can't be compared to us. They have no options. They depend on this for their survival. We don't.

Even Australia with the Great Barrier Reef hasn't ventured into this.

We also understand there is a report that should the current rate of global warming continue, all these islands shall be under water by 2050. 26 years left. So what is the feasibility?

So let us not run after short term profits but focus on conserving our natural heritage.

RTSOI will endeavour to ensure that our message reaches the highest decision makers to present a balanced view.

Rohan Arthur

Marine Biologist based in Lakshadweep



We are going to have to mitigate the effects of climate change, both in terms of its insidious effects, as well as when it comes to its catastrophic effects that occasionally might happen, like storms, like the decline of fresh water, like disease. All of these things are going to be important. We will all need, also need, and this is something that needs to be said. We also might need to think about strategies of migration of moving when that, when the eventuality occurs, we might need to have to. And a, a coherent climate strategy needs to incorporate that. We need to support existing resilience. And I, you know, I I was really enthused by what was said about supporting local institutions and celebrating local ways of life, because that's exactly what we need. We need to strengthen the local institutions that exist already.

We need to celebrate the local ways of life, which are actually fairly climate resilient. And we need to shift the needle on climate change because we need a paradigm shift. We need global pressures on climate policy to shift as well. How can tourism support this transformation? Can we influence thinking on climate adaptation? Can we promote a culturally relevant low-level tourism that supports local institutions? And can we embrace climate sensitive approaches to tourism? **DI**

ABOUT

Formed in 2008, at the behest of the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, the founding members of Responsible Tourism Society of India comprised of widely experienced, eco-sensitive professionals from the Tourism industry, state government departments of tourism and forests, wildlife conservation, NGOs and also Members of Parliament.



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NOTABLE SPEAKERS

Abhishek Logani, Chief Business Officer – Hotels, MakeMyTrip
Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Executive Officer, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts
Arshdeep Sethi MRICS, President - Real Estate, RMZ Corp
Binu Mathews, Chief Executive Officer, IDS Next
Carlton Ervin, Global Development Officer International, Marriott International
Clint Nagata, Founder and Creative Partner, BLINK Design Group
Cyril Jacob, Founder & MD, Ascentis
Deepika Rao, Executive VP, New Businesses, Hotel Openings & Corporate Communications, IHCL
Dillip Rajakarier, Group CEO, Minor International
John Gerondelis AIA, IIDA, LEED AP, Principal, Smallwood
Mark Hoplamazian, President & CEO, Hyatt Hotels Corporation

Omar Romero, Chief Development Officer, Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas
Peter Joehnk, Founding Partner, JOI Design
Pieter Elbers, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo Airlines
Raghu Sapra, Head Hospitality, Embassy REIT
Samir MC, Managing Director, Fortune Hotels
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Suma Venkatesh, Executive VP, Real Estate and Development, IHCL
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INDIA IS SET TO BE THE MOST EXCITING AVIATION MARKET

2000 Aircraft by the End of FY2025, Up from around 1620 Today



Highlights

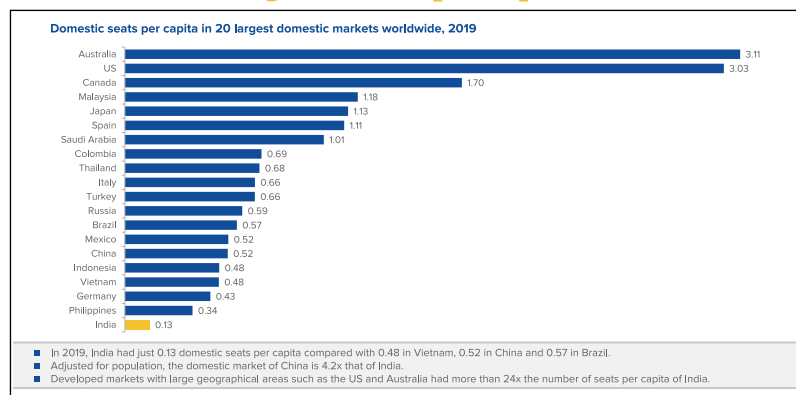
- Indian airlines currently have an order book for close to 1620 aircraft (after yesterday's Akasa Air order, but excluding Go First and SpiceJet). This is expected to rise to closer to 2000 aircraft by Mar-2025.
- This increase will be achieved as a result of Air India converting some of its 370 options to firm orders every few months, supplemented by possible further orders by other Indian carriers.
- In 2023, Indian airlines ordered more aircraft than those from any other country. And the total order book for Western aircraft is second only to the United States.
- Developments over the last year have tracked closely in line with our expectations, with 1124 aircraft ordered in FY2024 to date, including Akasa Air's order for 150 x 737 MAX aircraft announced yesterday.
- India is set to be the most exciting aviation market of the 21st century, with long-term rapid growth for both domestic and international traffic. However, in order to support this once-in-a-generation growth, and the eventual induction of this expanding order book, Indian aviation will need further structural and institutional reforms.

A CAPA ADVISORY EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

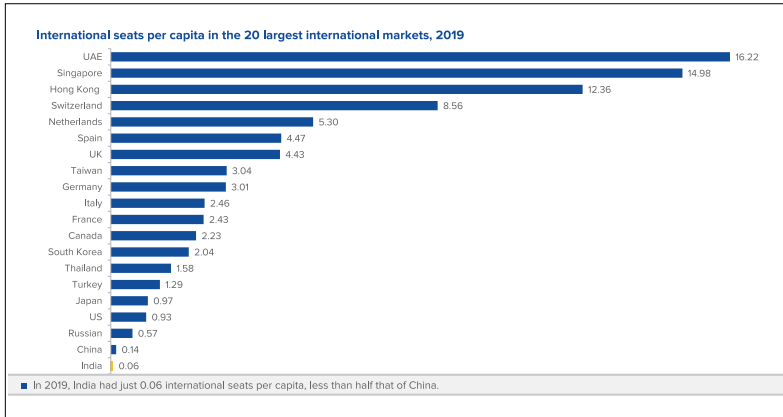
The current Indian order book is more than 2.5x the size of the number of aircraft in service. This is by far the highest ratio in the world, reflecting the optimism about future growth.

Airline	Aircraft in Fleet (Dec-2023)	Aircraft on Order
IndiGo	350	956
AIR INDIA Group	242	458
Akasa Air	20	204
SpiceJet	55	144
Go First	54	72
Total	721	1834
Total (excl. SpiceJet and Go First given uncertainty)	612	1618

Airlines have the confidence to place larger orders because the penetration of air travel in India is by far the lowest among the world's 20 largest domestic markets, reflecting massive upside potential.



Similarly, in terms of international seats per capita, India is well below other large aviation markets. The long-term fundamentals for continued growth remain very strong. We have only just scratched the surface.



The centre of gravity of global aviation is moving eastwards. Asia, the Middle East and Africa are expected to drive 67% of worldwide fleet expansion over the next 20 years.



India has a unique opportunity, positioned at the epicentre of this global aviation growth. In addition to its massive home market, among the five leading aviation markets in the world India has arguably the most favourable location to act as a hub on the fastest growing intercontinental corridors.



India is in a unique position, in terms of scale, growth and geography. It will need to decide what kind of aviation market it seeks to be and chart a path towards achieving that. Other major markets may not have a similar combination of positive attributes to be comparable benchmarks to follow.

- India has a unique opportunity, being the world's fastest growing market, and positioned as it is at the epicentre of global aviation growth. [see next two slides]
- In addition to its massive home market, India has arguably the most favourable location among the five largest aviation markets in the world (the others being the US, China, UK and Japan), to act as a hub on the fastest growing intercontinental corridors:
 - The geographic location of the US as an end-of-the-line market means that it has limited opportunities to serve as an international hub.
 - India may reach the size of China within 12-15 years. But China has an aviation industry that has a high degree of central government control and planning, which is not the case in India.
 - Both China and Japan have location that limits their hub potential to trans-Pacific routes.
 - The UK has the ability to handle traffic to/from North America and Europe, which is certainly large in volume. But these will also be the slowest growing markets going forward.
 - Australia, as has been shown, is the most similar to India in terms of market concentration. But by the end of this decade, India's market will be almost 5x the size of Australia, making parallels between them less relevant. And Australia too is an end-of-the-line market.
- India is therefore uniquely positioned, being the third largest, fastest growing and one of the most favourably located markets to be able to handle a massive home market and hub traffic. India will need to decide what kind of market it needs to be, and a robust institutional framework then needs to be developed with this in mind.

India's economy and demographics are experiencing underlying structural changes that will have a positive and material impact on economic growth, and by consequence on air travel.

Home to top 10 fastest growing cities

- The World Economic Forum projects that all of the top 10 fastest-growing cities in the world during 2019–2035 will be in India.

- India's dominance indicates the broader theme of the tipping of global economic activity from the West to the East.

Uptrend in share of global trade & merchandise exports

- India's of merchandise exports increased from 0.6% in the early 1990s to 2.4% in 2022.

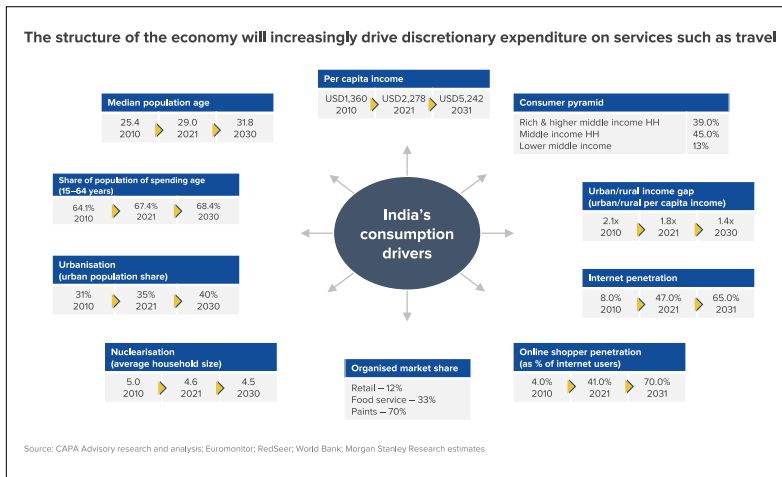
Urbanisation trends

- The UN projects 68.0% of the world's population would live in urban areas by 2050, up from the current 55.0%. This implies an addition of 2.5 billion people to the urban count.
- In 35 years (1980–2015), the urban population in India increased by 268.0 million. The urban population is projected to increase by 448.0 million during 2015–2050.

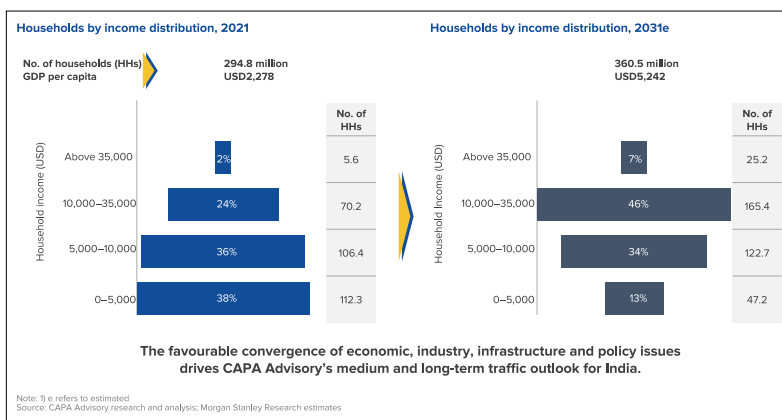
The Fourth Industrial Revolution

- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has the potential to transform economies such as India by tackling some large-scale systemic challenges.
- The 4IR provides an opportunity to transition from a low value-added services economy to a strong, R&D-driven products and innovation ecosystem.
- India is well-poised to lead the 4IR, given the presence of a young population that is technologically sound, a large educated labour market and a better IT ecosystem. Also, it is well poised to leverage opportunities created by the growth of 4IR technologies.

The structure of the economy will increasingly drive discretionary expenditure on services such as travel



India's middle- and upper-income categories are growing the fastest. The number of households earning more than USD35,000 per annum is projected to grow at a 10-year CAGR of 16.2% through to 2031.



Managing the massive, once-in-a-generation growth that is expected, will not be possible without a complete re-think of India's physical, institutional & skills infrastructure. We have a window of around 5 years to address these issues, and need to start immediately, failing which risks will otherwise increase.

Key areas that will require reform and attention

Aviation regulation

- The DGCA should be recast along the lines of the CAA UK. An independent and professionally-managed safety regulator is essential.

Security regulation

- The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security needs to be re-cast as an independent, technology-driven security regulator, modelled on the Transportation Security Administration.

Airport regulation

- Given the changing aviation landscape, including for example, the emergence of dual airport systems and their implication for competition, a new AERA Act is required.

Air navigation services

- Air navigation services should be corporatised to be able to invest in sufficient capacity, efficiency and safety to meet long-term requirements. This has been pending for many years.

Skills & training

- Our aviation skills and training infrastructure needs to be overhauled across the board, including flight training organisations, simulator centres, maintenance training academies, air traffic controller training, cabin crew academies and the delivery of regulatory and security training.

Consumer and competition issues

- Competition and consumer issues need to be given appropriate consideration and protection, irrespective of whether or not there is market concentration.

Airport infrastructure

- A long-term plan needs to be developed for airport capacity, with a planning horizon that extends beyond the next 5-7 years for a generation or more.

Fiscal regime

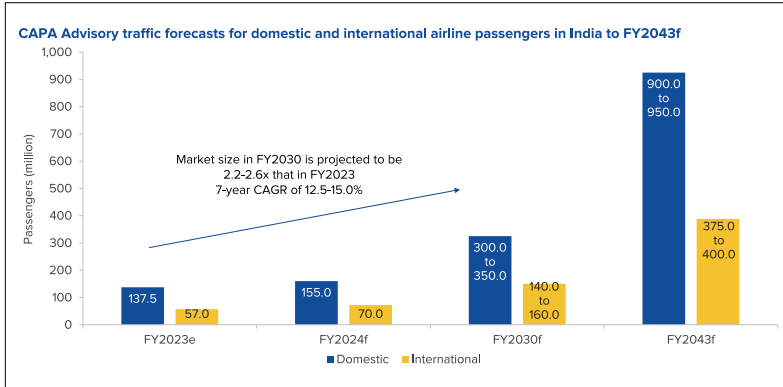
- And arguably most importantly, the negative fiscal regime must be addressed. Indirect taxation currently accounts for close to 20% of airline revenue and must be fundamentally re-aligned to support viable operations.

Bilateral policy

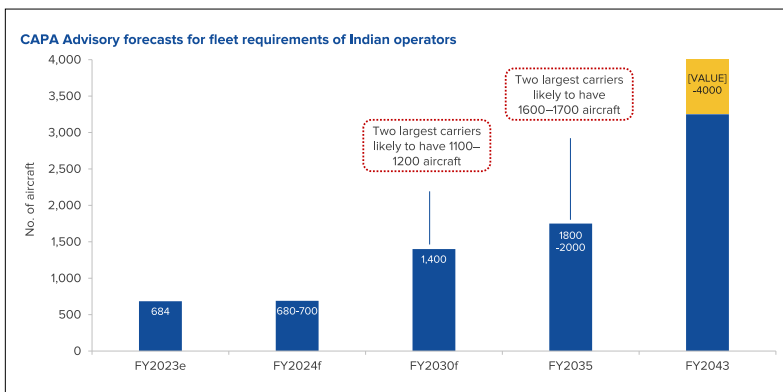
- India will require a clearly-defined international air services strategy and bilateral

policy that balances the interests of Indian carriers with India's overall connectivity requirements.

India is forecast to see domestic traffic rise to 300-350 million passengers, and international traffic to 140-160 million passengers by FY2030, and may further almost triple by FY2043, by which time it will be larger than the US market today.



Indian scheduled airlines are likely to operate a fleet of 1,400 aircraft by FY2030. By FY2043 the fleet size is expected to approach 4,000 aircraft, comparable to China today. (Indicative only for strategic reasons)



But in the short-term, the industry will need to handle a couple of critical challenges for the next 1-2 years. In addition to serious ongoing supply chain issues, airlines now have to deal with the impact of the revised Flight Duty Time Limitations.

- Supply chain issues are serious and will remain a concern for the foreseeable future. There are currently 160 aircraft on the ground, which could increase to around 200 by the end of Mar-2024, representing almost 25% of the aircraft on the register. There is continuing uncertainty since nobody can determine the timeframe by which these issues will be resolved, nor rule out the possibility of further issues emerging.
- The recent revisions to the Flight Duty Time Limitations may result in airlines having to increase their pilot numbers by closer to 20% in order to be able to remain compliant with operating the current schedule, let alone future growth. And this is happening at a time when there is a structural global shortage of pilots. Indian carriers will be competing with expanding airlines in the Gulf and Asia in particular, for a constrained pool of pilots.
 - Compliance with the new regulations within the timeframe provided will be a challenge. This could result in increased flight

cancellations and a further deterioration in on-time performance, and may have an impact on network planning.

- FDTL issues will have critical operational and financial implications from Summer 2024, especially given the growth that is expected.

Indian aviation is experiencing structural tailwinds – for the first time since the industry was deregulated in the 1990s - which the industry must take advantage of.

- Almost 30 years after deregulation, and 20 years since the second phase of liberalisation, for the very first time we have a **strong and well-capitalised airline system**, with the balance sheets required to support the growth potential of the market, and the determination to be world class operators.
- Indian aviation has, possibly for the first time, **airport capacity either in place or under development that exceeds projected demand for the next 5-7 years**. Metro airports are expected to have a structural capacity of around 500-550 million passengers. And even Adani Airports' six non-metro airports will also see significant expansion of capacity ahead of demand, with eventual masterplan capacity of close to 200 million passengers.
- Dual airport systems** in Delhi and Mumbai will be game-changing for the industry and the economy.
- Recent **air navigation initiatives** such as the expansion of airspace available for flexible use, and the halving of lateral separation for aircraft are positive developments
- However, the **pace of growth will be at a once-in-a-generation level**. This will require radical changes not seen before in India, to arrive at a new order in terms of physical, institutional and skills infrastructure.
- The Ministry of Civil Aviation clearly recognises this. It has been **proactive in delivering many positive initiatives already and is aware that deeper institutional changes are required.**



ABOUT CAPA INDIA

CAPA India was established more than 19 years ago with a mission to become a leader in global aviation knowledge. We have since built a worldwide portfolio of clients and experience, and an enviable reputation for independence, insight and integrity. Today aviation businesses around the world turn to us for sound advice and research.

The Recent Mayhem at IGIA: A Call for Course Correction!



by NAVIN BERRY

Why just the fog? A breakdown can happen suddenly, anywhere, not just in India but at any airport globally. Emergencies are of this nature only. It was that time of the year when Delhi, the capital city, is besieged with fog. It is an every-year occurrence, nothing unusual. While reports and analysis suggest a complete breakdown of services alongside uncalled for misery on the hapless fliers, as an aftermath, the government is said to be considering new guidelines. The Minister has called for setting up a war room, a need of the hour at all airports.

Like airlines must have intimate information on incoming flights, share actual position with regard to expected departure times, etc. Also, inordinate delays cannot be carried on endlessly; flights that are more than three hours delayed must get cancelled. These are some most welcome steps, but there is another and perhaps a deeper malaise that these events point out towards - inherent weaknesses in the system, absence of basic Operational Procedures when they are most needed, even more critical in times of distress. An airline may be prepared, an airport may be prepared, but the system is not! No wonder, the minister called for a War Room at the airport, nothing less. Perhaps an outlier call, but well put in such a situation. If only it was anticipated better, none of this would have happened.

This was not any unexpected catastrophe, like it was the regular fog over Delhi that besets

the IGIA ecosystem every year. That SOPs did not exist or failed in such a regular, annual occurrence points to another deeper malaise - inexperience and total lack of coordination between different agencies.

And that begs another critical question? Are we growing faster than our capability? Are we adequately prepared for this much anticipated and heralded aviation boom? It is all very good to be the fastest growing aviation market in the world but what about corresponding ability to handle this boom? On top of this is the arrogance and conceit that goes with this expected growth; are these

companies beyond reproach, they can do no wrong and are the new Demi gods? Have they too attained the status, much like our cricketing stars?

There are other problems, too. I have seen Air India from up close over many decades. Many of my senior friends would be called for airport duty,

There is another and perhaps a deeper malaise that these events point out towards - inherent weaknesses in the system, absence of basic Operational Procedures when they are most needed, even more critical in times of distress. An airline may be prepared, an airport may be prepared, but the system is not!



in such situations in advance, on regular call duty, to lead, supervise and give confidence. Such seniors have now left, availed of VRS and other schemes, or simply superannuated. You have a new team, less experienced overall. Other airlines, have no such supporting experience either. It is usually a young team, relatively inexperienced.

Before I wander more, here is a recap of what happened on a particular flight on that fateful day: 14th January, 2024!

Terminal 3. Flight AI 885

Original scheduled departure 10.30 am

Changed departure timing after being advised on SMS 13.50 ...

Flyer arrives at airport, checked in ...not informed that flight is further delayed ...

Boarding card shows 17.50 boarding...17.55 departure.

Display at the airport shows 13.50.

On reaching the gate, told flight is further delayed ...awaiting arrival of Pune flight at 6.10 ...

Fresh scheduled departure is now 18.50.

Crew arrives at 6pm at Gate 27 where the flight is supposed to leave.

But the crew leaves for gate 41..... this is where the incoming aircraft has been parked.

Here, there is No commercial staff.

Pilot arrives around 7.30 but the crew is waiting elsewhere.

It is the Passengers who run and call the Crew.

Commercial staff arrive only much later and boarding starts past 8 pm.

All are boarded now, thankfully, but now the captain announces the flight needs fuelling (was this an after-thought).

Final take off around 9pm or so with arrival in Goa at 11.15.

(Mind you, once checked in, there is no option to opt out; you can neither leave the airport. The passenger is captive to the airline, the airport and the security. In between you were offered a snack at an outlet where the queue had a few hundred lined up)

My information is that a similar situation existed at terminal 2, where IndiGo flights are exclusive. The delay was some 6 hours for similar flights to Goa. Presumably, this delay applied across the system, with similar such harassment. That points out to a very scary experience to say the least. All because of fog, of which so much is routine, you only have to scan newspapers of previous years around the same time.

The government must do an honest audit of situation, experience and response and coordinate the entire ecosystem, create transparent guidelines that prescribe rules and responsibilities on every stakeholder. For instance, that real time flight details must be prominently displayed at every gate. If that information is available, then why not display it at the boarding gate as well, or else it remains blank, or only shows the flight number of the next flight from that gate. This would eliminate any human error or lack of communication.

Secondly, it is not about CEOs meeting and sharing their flight plans. That is at the top end. It is more important that ground level coordination

The government must do an honest audit of situation, experience and response and help the entire ecosystem, create transparent guidelines that prescribe rules and responsibilities on every stakeholder. For instance, that real time flight details must be prominently displayed at every gate.

becomes a regular feature at every airport around the country.

My last point! All over the airport, it is displayed prominently that passengers must respect staff on duty and behave, or they can be prosecuted. Nowhere does any announcement say that staff on duty is doing their best but what if fliers find the staff rude, we have recourse to go to, like a helpline. And, much too often, they do behave most rudely and discouragingly! And this includes the immigration staff, just as much.

All this mayhem can lead to some good and important measures on the ground. It would then all be for a good cause, if only effective measures can be undertaken by all concerned. And more importantly, it is not during fog alone, but in every conceivable emergency, not just at IGIA but at any airport in the country.

This incident and all that occurred around it, is possibly already forgotten. Important that it should not be, and it is critical that we build around it, not in criticism but in confidence building for our entire air transport system. **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.

BRIDGING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

in Asia's Sustainable Architecture Landscape



by MARK PETROVIC

In Asia, the urgency for sustainable architecture is a response to today's environmental challenges and societal needs. The continent is at a pivotal crossroads, where every construction and design decision can significantly impact our ecological footprint and livability of urban spaces. As architects and planners, we possess not only the tools but also the vision to guide our world towards a sustainable, equitable and resilient future.

At Archetype Group, we are passionate about leading this transformation. Through innovative design and a deep commitment to environmental stewardship, we are doing what is necessary to create spaces that serve functional purposes while also positively contributing to the communities and ecosystems they inhabit.

By comprehending the significance of green architecture and

recognizing the challenges and rewards, we are positioned to forge a sustainable legacy for Asia that will endure for generations to come.

The Urgency for Sustainable Architecture in Asia

Asia's rapid urbanization and economic expansion brings an urgent need for sustainable architecture. This diverse region faces unique environmental and societal challenges, from construction activity in ecologically fragile hilly and mountainous areas, densely populated cities to rural communities, each requiring tailored sustainable solutions.

In urban areas, the focus is on designing buildings that reduce pollution, conserve energy, and mitigate the urban heat island effect. In hilly and mountainous regions construction, the focus is on designing structures that align with the fragile precariously balanced and intertwined ecosystem including the carrying capacity of such regions. Meanwhile, rural and developing areas need accessible and culturally sensitive sustainable designs.

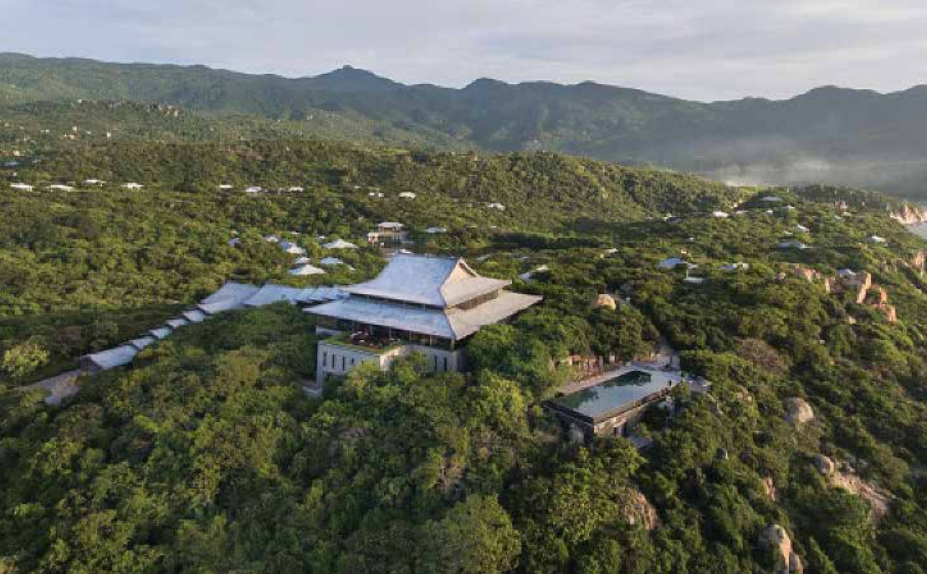
Climate change, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels add another layer of urgency. Buildings need to be resilient, minimizing environmental impact through careful consideration of energy use, materials and waste management.

Sustainable architecture in Asia also addresses social equity, providing safe, healthy, and affordable living spaces for all. This approach extends beyond environmental benefits, encompassing community wellbeing and social inclusion.

With growing consumer and investor awareness, there is a rising preference for green buildings due to their environmental and long-term economic benefits thereby accelerating sustainable construction practices.

Advancing Green Innovations in Building

Green buildings in Asia are designed and constructed to minimize the impact on the environment throughout their lifecycle, from



“As the Director of Architecture at Archetype Group, I have had the privilege of shaping skylines and communities across Asia, a region marked by its vibrant diversity and dynamic growth. However, with rapid development comes a responsibility that we at Archetype take very seriously the pursuit of sustainability within the built environment. Striking a balance between our ambitious projects and the delicate ecosystem presents both a challenge and a rewarding opportunity.”

material sourcing and construction to operation and eventual demolition. To achieve this, a holistic approach is adopted, encompassing a series of strategies tailored to address the region’s specific environmental concerns.

A key strategy is energy efficiency, which can be achieved through passive design elements. These include maximizing natural light and ventilation, incorporating high-performance insulation, and installing efficient appliances and systems. These measures reduce energy consumption while also improving the overall comfort and livability of buildings.

Adapting to the tropical climate prevalent in many parts of Asia is another important aspect. This involves using passive design strategies like shading, natural ventilation, and green roofs, which can reduce reliance on air conditioning and thereby minimize overall energy usage.

The varying availability of water across Asia means that effective water management is essential. This is addressed through innovative approaches like rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling and the use of drought-resistant landscaping. Water is an increasingly precious resource in many regions in Asia and such practices ensure water conservation.

Material sustainability is also at the forefront of green building practices. This can be done with the use of recycled or sustainably sourced materials, minimizing waste during construction, and designing structures for eventual deconstruction and reuse, which not only reduce the carbon footprints of buildings but also promote a circular economy in the construction sector.

Indoor environmental quality is another area of emphasis, especially given the high amount of air pollution in Asian urban areas. Now, many green buildings in Asia use low-VOC (volatile organic compound) materials that ensure proper ventilation and air quality, along with providing access to natural light and views, creating healthy and comfortable places for occupants.

The Challenges and Future of Green Architecture in Asia

The transition to green architecture in Asia comes with numerous challenges, pivotal among them being the higher initial costs associated with sustainable building practices. These costs, often due to the use of advanced materials and technologies, can be a major barrier to adoption, especially in emerging economies where budget constraints are a primary concern.

Moreover, there is a widespread lack of awareness and understanding about the long-term benefits of sustainable architecture. This knowledge gap exists not just among the public but also within segments of the construction industry, where traditional methods are deeply entrenched.

Despite these challenges, there are bright prospects for green architecture in Asia. For example, there is a growing recognition of the long-term economic and environmental benefits of sustainable buildings, including lower operational costs, enhanced resistance



◀ Song Saa is a perfect example of a resorts blending with its surrounding environment literally and functionally to create a harmonious relationship with the blue sea – Architectural Design by Archetype

to climate change, and improved occupant health and productivity. This awareness is gradually shifting the mindset of stakeholders, from investors and developers to end-users, causing them to consider sustainability as a key factor in design and construction.

The region is also experiencing an evolution in policy and regulatory frameworks. Governments across Asia are now implementing stricter building codes and regulations that promote green building practices. These policies play a vital role in setting industry standards and encouraging the adoption of sustainable methods.

Furthermore, technological advancements play a significant role in shaping the future of sustainable architecture. Innovations in materials, construction methods, and energy systems are making green architecture

more feasible and cost effective. The integration of digital programs like building information modeling (BIM) is also improving the efficiency and precision of sustainable construction projects.

Another aspect shaping the future is the increasing collaboration among architects, engineers, environmentalists, and policymakers.

ers. This collaborative effort is essential for developing solutions that address the multifaceted challenges of sustainable architecture.

While the path to widespread adoption of green architecture in Asia is fraught with challenges, the trajectory is promising. The region is poised to become a global leader in sustainable building practices, driven by a combination of policy support, technological innovation, and a growing awareness of the economic and environmental benefits of green architecture. As we look ahead, sustainable architecture will be a defining feature of Asia's urban landscape, contributing to a more resilient, healthy, and ecofriendly future for its people.

Archetype Group Leading the Way in Green Design Solutions


At Archetype Group, we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of green design solutions, especially in the real estate and hospitality sectors. Our approach is rooted in a deep understanding of sustainable architecture, driven by a team of highly skilled professionals. These experts, who have extensive experience in leading green building certifications like LEED and EDGE, bring a wealth of knowledge to every project, ensuring that our designs not only meet but also exceed sustainability benchmarks.

Our vision at Archetype is to create architecturally sound environ-

mentally sustainable spaces. We believe that every structure we create should contribute positively to its surroundings, setting a new standard in sustainable development.

This commitment is evident in our portfolio of projects, which showcases a range of innovative, sustainable, and carbon-neutral solutions. We understand the delicate balance required to design buildings that are both aesthetically pleasing and environmentally conscious. It's a balance we strive to achieve by integrating cutting-edge sustainable practices with the unique cultural and environmental needs of each project location.

We invite you to explore our sustainable solutions and learn more about our expertise in carbon-neutral projects by visiting the Sustainability & Carbon Neutrality section of our website. Here, you'll find examples of how we're transforming the architectural landscape, one building at a time.

As we look to the future, our focus remains steadfast on pushing the boundaries of green architecture, ensuring that our work today lays the foundation for a better, more sustainable tomorrow. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Petrovic is a distinguished leader in the field of architecture and currently the Director of Architecture at Archetype Group. Throughout his career, he has spearheaded a variety of projects around the world, ranging from high-end residential buildings to award-winning mixed-use developments. As the creative leader at Archetype Group, he ensures design consistency and excellence in all projects, from conceptualization to execution. Beyond his primary role, Mark is country representative for the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) and has served as a French Foreign Trade Advisor (CCE) for eight years. Mark's passion for creating environmentally responsible structures fuels his ambition to make impactful contributions to a greener, more sustainable future.




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KARMA LAKELANDS

An Eco-Conscious Oasis built with care and eye on detail



Spacious properties coexisting with vibrant biodiversity constitutes the hallmark of Karma Lakelands. The prestigious green estate is coming up with a new residential project synthesizing luxury and responsible living. Conscious living and the environment are intimately interconnected. Being mindful of one's choices and their impact on the environment is a fundamental aspect of conscious living, fostering a holistic approach to personal well-being and ecological sustainability. Real estate and ecological responsibility can and must coexist, through thoughtful practices, and even profitably thrive.

NAVIN BERRY *in conversation with*
ASHWANI KHURANA, *founder and CEO*

So, how has been the journey?
As a project, Karma is a green oasis amidst the urban cacophony of the bustling Gurugram. By preserving green spaces and minimizing disruption to natural habitats, integrating green solutions, practising sustainable activities and maintaining biodiversity in landscaping have significantly contributed to this sustainable development.

And the hospitality district, if I can call it, consists of.....
A sprawling golf resort, which is the centre piece, luxury residential offerings, fine-dining restaurants and the AK's bar.

What are the gains from this approach? This eco-friendly materials and your sensitivity to nature?

Implementing green building practices not only significantly reduces the environmental impact of construction and operations, but also creates healthy and ecologically vibrant spaces. At Karma, the prime focus has been on using energy-efficient materials, incorporating renewable energy sources, and designing buildings with optimal insulation and natural lighting, thereby significantly reducing the carbon footprint of buildings. This includes the use of smart and energy-efficient lighting, and appliances, recycling & waste management, implementing water-efficient technologies and landscaping practices that can conserve water resources.

Since its establishment, the resort has prioritized conscious living initiatives as a central aspect of its mission. Transitioning into a zero-waste property and actively engaging in eco-friendly endeavours such as soil rejuvenation, tree planting, rewilding efforts, bee farming,

“At Karma, the prime focus has been on using energy-efficient materials, incorporating renewable energy sources, and designing buildings with optimal insulation and natural lighting, thereby significantly reducing the carbon footprint of buildings. Since its establishment, the resort has prioritized conscious living initiatives as a central aspect of its mission.”



and the bio-composting of both plant and animal waste, Karma showcases an outstanding dedication to purposeful and sustainable living.

And what have you achieved at the project as of today?

Beautifully carved spacious properties coexisting with vibrant biodiversity is what has become the hallmark of Karma Lakelands. Residential projects here consist of luxurious villas and chalets for accommodation, which are designed with a focus on sustainability and eco-friendly practices, as well as five exquisite restaurants, bar and recreational outdoor spaces along with the Klub Karma which has been a winner in this space of events and weddings in the region.

The resort provides well-appointed rooms for guests, each designed to offer comfort and a unique experience. Sustainable practices have been incorporated into the design and operation of these accommodations. Our restaurants and bar focus on using locally sourced,

organic ingredients and follow sustainable dining practices. The nine-hole golf course is designed to harmonize with the natural surroundings, and sustainable golf course management practices are in place to minimize environmental impact.

And your villas, give us a sense of the variety between them?

The villas are typically designed with a focus on providing a high-end, eco-friendly living experience amidst natural surroundings. Villas often come with private outdoor spaces such as gardens, balconies, and terraces, allowing residents to enjoy the natural surroundings. Given their location, these offer scenic views of the golf course, lakes, and green landscapes.

Each villa has its unique style, identity and ambience, which is in harmony with Karma’s emphasis on sustainable living.

Wildflower Villa at Karma, known for its old-world charm, comes with a rich blend of classic exterior and modern interior giving it a unique touch and flavour. Pranavam Villa provides a breathtaking view of the golf course interspersed with lush green private gardens and a waterbody adding to the charm of staying in this majestic place and getting closer to nature.

Kingfisher Villa offers incredible warmth and exuberance. The interplay of myriad colours and patterns gives it a uniquely stylish



“By embodying ecological consciousness in its practices, Karma Lakelands has not only reduced operational costs but has also generated additional revenues by delivering superior products, services, and experiences to its customers.”

and authentic texture, the aura of which is further enhanced by the splendid lake-side view which makes it a perfect place for spending precious time with the family.

Karma's Orchard Villa adorns an enchanting Spanish feel and an orchard in the backyard.

The biggest villa at Karma is the Presidential Villa, which boasts of an attached infinity pool, a deck area by the lake, expansive lawns, a beautiful orchard, a lounge area and a games corner.

Two more villas are there redefining luxury, combining minimalistic looks with vibrant interiors - Albatross Villa and the spectacular Rock Garden Villa.

There is this new luxury project that you have signed with a leading developer?

Along with Sobha Realty, a renowned international luxury developer, is coming up with a project of high-rise apartments. It will have three, four, and five-bedroom residences ranging from 2800 sq. ft. - 4200 sq. ft. In addition, the high-end project will offer a plethora of world-class amenities ranging from an outdoor fitness area, grand plaza, sports arena, camping ground, play park, leisure pool, and premium clubhouse with standout features like temperature-controlled pool, racquet sports and also co-working spaces.

Combining luxury with eco-responsible living, the project will ensure that Karma's legacy of nature first continues further.

The project will be a heritage of exquisite detailing with tasteful architectural designs. It will be the newest and most prestigious luxury estate nestled in around 235 acres of golf course and landscaped greens, and there will be impeccable attention to detail from conceptualization to delivery. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be a part of eco-responsible, conscious living with low carbon footprint, targeting zero waste, pollution-free indoor air quality and carbon neutral community,

amidst two lakh plus trees and plants.

The project will make ample use of rain-water harvesting, and solar energy, as well as promote the usage of new eco-conservation initiatives like plastic-free waterless urinal solutions and 'making your fresh air'.

Businesses flush a million litres of fresh potable water down the drain each year. The conventional urinals use water to remove the leftover part of urine from the urinal bowl but water doesn't eliminate or prevent the bad odour. The main cause of odour and smell is ammonia (NH3) which forms when water and uric acid get mixed up. The water-free urinal technology digests the urine organic crystals rapidly, as it contains ten times more biological bacteria, resulting in fresh and hygienic washrooms as well as saving huge amounts of water.

So, how would you sum up your experience in developing a symbiotic relationship with nature?

Since inception, we have prioritized conscious living initiatives, placing them at the core of its mission. Embarking on the journey to become a zero-waste property and engaging in initiatives such as dispensing with plastic use, waste segregation, in-house treatment of wastewater, bio-composting, tree-rescuing etc, Karma exhibits an exceptional commitment to intentional and sustainable living.

By embodying ecological consciousness in its practices, Karma Lakelands has not only reduced operational costs but has also generated additional revenues by delivering superior products, services, and experiences to its customers. The resort serves as a testament to the idea that prioritizing sustainability can lead to a harmonious coexistence of ecological responsibility and economic viability. **DI**

ABOUT

Ashwani Khurana is the Founder/owner of the Karma Lakeland project in Manesar, Haryana.

Exhibiting India: Pashmina & Zanskar, An Unseen Ladakh

A tour curated by DR NAVINA Jafa from 19th -30th June, 2024

Journey into the World of the Golden Wool – Pashmina – Changthang Plateau

Embark on a journey through a less-trodden path that unveils the vibrant ecosystem of the Pashmina World of Changpa Nomad pastoralists. Travellers will immerse themselves in wool harvesting, partake in the nomads' rich tapestry of songs, music, rituals, and other artistic expressions, and gain insights into their challenges. Nestled within the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary, amidst wild asses and snow leopards, the spiritual essence of the Dragon Tibetan Buddhists, known as Drukpa Kargyu, comes to life. The journey is a profound reflection of the connection between the pashmina ecosystem and the broader landscape, including Tso Moriri Lake, enriched with tales of flying dragons and meditative rituals meticulously documented by the curator.

The Enchanting Valley of Zanskar

Venture into Zanskar, a hidden gem within the Tethys Himalaya, offering an unparalleled and memorable exploration. With extensive research into the region's artistic heritage, the curator invites local communities to share their legacy of folklore and ancestral skills. Experience the artistic heritage of Zanskar's monasteries, brought to life through folktales and performances that echo the region's significant symbols and motifs. This part of the journey celebrates Zanskar's rich cultural fabric, woven seamlessly into the experience.

Logistics: Comfortable, clean, and humble



ABOUT

Navina Jafa is a renowned curator and scholar on Cultural Heritage & Tourism, and a most accomplished classical dancer. She

is a prolific writer and regular contributor to art discussions.



Enchanting Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Leh – Acclimatize and enjoy the first night in this charming town, preparing for the adventure ahead.

Day 2: Set out on a picturesque drive to Hanle in the remote Changthang region of Ladakh. Discover the tranquillity of local monasteries connected with the Dragon Tibetan School and immerse yourself in their serene spiritual ambience.

Day 3: A day with the Pashmina Nomads is aimed to be an extraordinary experience to observe the pashmina harvest, engage in the artistry of weaving, delight in the harmonious songs of nomadic women, enjoy the traditional craft of cheese-making and vibrant music of the nomads.

Day 4: Embark on a journey to the stunning Tso Moriri Lake. After soaking in the beauty, return through the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary back to Leh.

Day 5 & 6: Explore the historic and natural wonders around Leh.

Days 7-9: Exploring Zanskar– Spend three enthralling nights there. The journey includes an insightful session on the Women Amchi or Tibetan Doctors Programme, revered local Buddhist Monasteries, with interpretations informed by thorough research from the Buddhist University in Sarnath (Varanasi): folktale Storytelling encounters, journey into Zanskar's carpets and Kilim, and traditional performances.

Day 10: Kargil

Day 11: Return to Leh via the Alchi Monastery, a spiritual and artistic haven.

Day 12: Departure for home.

homestays in the entire trip to a highly remote part of the world, travelling around 1400 kilometres in 12 days.

For details, contact: navinajafaheritagetours@gmail.com

NURTURING THE TRADITIONS OF AZAMGARH

A Festival that Brings its Treasures to the capital

ITRHD, the Indian Trust for Rural Heritage and Development, organized a two-day festival that brought both recognition and livelihoods to the artisans and performers from Azamgarh.



Azamgarh, a district in Uttar Pradesh is just about 100 kms from Varanasi, Azamgarh is one of the poorest districts in the state, and yet has one of the richest cultural heritages in the country.

The village of Nizamabad specialises in the crafting of a unique black pottery, often embellished with silver. These potters are said to have migrated from Kutch in the time of Aurangzeb and have been the recipient of many national awards. The nearby village of Mubarakpur, home to thousands of weavers of silk Banarasi saris with gold and silver *zari* work finds mention in the travels of Ibn Batuta, almost 400 years back. The third village, Hariharpur, possesses a classical music tradition where every Brahmin family can boast of one or more vocal and/or instrumental musicians. This tradition has also existed for at least 400 years, depending solely on the training and guidance provided by the elders.

This village is unique in more ways than one. The musicians from Hariharpur, a 200-year old village which has also produced eminent singers like Pandit Chhanulal Mishra and Rajan Sajan Mishra amongst others, is a unique discovery. They are known for their own of *Purabi Gayaki* style of the Banaras Gharana.

One of the main challenges in keeping these traditions alive, since many in the younger generations look for other profitable pastures, is to do everything to improve their livelihoods and improve working conditions.

The Azamgarh Project, over the years, has continued to place their resources to nurture rural traditions and put in place systems by which the community can benefit commercially and improve their skills. Today, their crafts are being sold both in domestic and international markets.

As a part of their role as a catalyst in reviving this rural heritage and traditions one of the major activities in the Trust calendar has been to organise the Annual Crafts Fair

by SUJIT SANYAL

Azamgarh, a district in Uttar Pradesh is just about 100 kms from Varanasi, Azamgarh is one of the poorest districts in the state, and yet has one of the richest cultural heritages in the country.

Here, artisans take pride in their traditional crafts, while musicians do their best to keep their traditions alive. Three clusters — Nizamabad, Mubarakpur, and Hariharpur — all located within easy reach of Azamgarh town, form the Azamgarh Project by the Indian Trust for Rural Heritage and Development.

One of the earliest projects adopted by ITRHD, for a comprehensive development of these three extraordinary villages, each with a strong and living heritage, and each suffering from poverty, lack of basic amenities, and infrastructure, and the danger of losing precious traditions, this has been an ongoing project.



It is hoped that this festival, along with others becomes an annual feature in the Delhi NCR calendar. The enthusiasm amongst the people was certainly encouraging, as were the numbers.



in Delhi to promote the works of the weavers and potters and the keep alive the legacy of the Hariharpur music artistry.

While it has been an annual feature, till Covid restrictions caused a major interruption— and this year, the **Azamgarh Barmer Crafts and Music Festival** was staged once again in association with Alliance Francaise, New Delhi. The three-day festival was held between 19-22 January, 2024.

This time, the carpet weavers from Barmer were also included at the festival. The weavers from Barmer even wove on site, becoming a photo-op subject, complete with the weavers sporting the regulation Rajasthani “mooch.” The Desert Craft covered intricate embroidery, *Ajrakh* prints, appliqué work, weaving, and the crafting of camel hair dhurries, among other desert-inspired crafts.

Ladies were seen at the various sari and dress material stalls, taking time to make up their minds on which colours to buy and how many to buy at that. Understandably, the choice was difficult. The colours,

the exquisite *zari* work and the material made the choices difficult, till the buyers decided to buy in numbers to be on the safe side. With the *shaadi* season on, gifting authentic sarees purchased from the “source” was naturally adding to the story.

The potters had placed their material on display and you could see people buying coffee mugs to even gift items. The encouraging element was that the buyers did not bargain beyond a point as they all realised that the artisans needed to be encouraged to keep the tradition alive. After all, India lives in her villages!

The two evenings when the musician from Hariharpur performed was an experience to talk about. The *Tal Badya*, comprising of five tabla players — the youngest being 17 — accompanied by their 70+ year-old dadaji playing the harmonium, was something to write home about. As were the *thumris*, the *chaitis*, the *horis* and other forms of light classical music. The presence of Pandit Sajan Mishra, who too hails from the same village on the second night, added to the performance value and the auditorium went full to capacity.

It is hoped that this festival, along with others becomes an annual feature in the Delhi NCR calendar. The enthusiasm amongst the people was certainly encouraging, as were the numbers. **DI**

ABOUT ITRHD

Conserving and nurturing rural heritage is a foundation for sustainable economic growth as it ensures livelihood to rural residents in their traditional habitat, and increases the pride and self-confidence of the entire community.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO CHASE YOUR DREAMS!

Rohan Bopanna gets the Australian Open Doubles Crown, and also a Padma Shri



Rohan Bopanna came through as an Indian, winning one of the Grand Slam titles after a long hiatus. And, he has done this at a very ripe age of 43 years. Full marks to an incredible journey, that was somewhat faltering a few years ago when he ran into a rough patch, not winning any title for a long enough time to make him wonder if he should continue. These are moments of self-doubt, depression, and indecision. A nation fondly recalls how this was not to be. He decided to carry on some more, and indeed, he did well for himself and for India, to do so. This time, won the Australian Open doubles title, after having won some 24 ATP titles before in his career.

Earlier on, his high points among others, have been reaching the US Open Final in 2010; winning the French Open mixed doubles title in 2017; winning the Gold in men's doubles and Silver in mixed doubles at the Commonwealth Games in 2010 in Delhi.

In a social media chat, Bopanna dismissed concerns around age, saying when you change limitations to opportunities, everything happens.

Said Billie Jean King, a tennis champ with 39 Grand Slam titles, said it is never too late to chase your dreams.

From a happy and proud 1.4 billion Indians, heartiest congratulations, Rohan!

Among his many other achievements is the setting up of the Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy. An academy with an international standard curriculum enabling high performance and grassroot development of the sport. It has brought about a refreshing new dimension to tennis coaching in India. Focused on enabling holistic development of athletes, it was established in March 2016, offering access to a progressive tennis coaching program. With professional coaches overseeing the program and special inputs from globally qualified fitness trainers, RBTA introduces a balanced curriculum – with equal emphasis on fitness and sports skills for young children looking to play tennis.

And by sheer stroke of good luck, came the announcement of a Padma Shri to Bopanna, a fitting honour on a very special occasion. **DI**

Earlier on, his high points among others, have been reaching the US Open Final in 2010; winning the French Open mixed doubles title in 2017; winning the Gold in men's doubles and Silver in mixed doubles at the Commonwealth Games in 2010 in Delhi.



Arijoy Makes his Statement; Putting Ink on paper to Express his Modernity and Spirituality



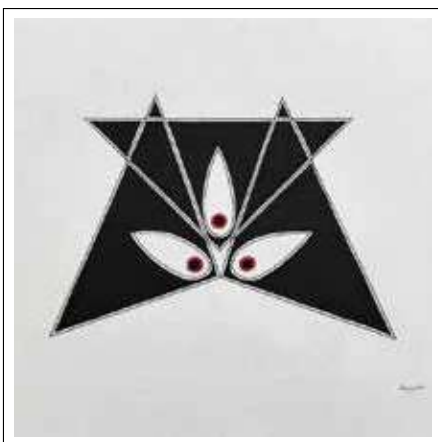
DI converses with Arijoy Bhattacharya on the occasion of the launch of his latest series -AghoraTech. An enchanting and captivating series inspired by blending both tantric spirituality and German Bauhaus, is an attractive collection of 23 pieces using ink on paper. The son of well-known artist Sanjay Bhattacharya, Arijoy, showcased his most recent works at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai.

by PRIYAANKA BERRY IDNANI

What was your inspiration behind the series?

The inspiration in terms of form. I was basically trying to create a blend of Indian elements inspired by Rajasthani tantric paintings. And keeping this very minimal. And Bauhaus influence, which is the German aesthetic. So I was trying to blend them together because they have some correlations in terms of form. When it comes to the content, I was focusing on mainly tantric imagery. Including things which are very common, like the downward triangle and the forward triangle representing the female and the male energies. The use of circles represents either 'punyuta' or 'shunyata'; either fullness or the void.

In terms of colour choice, there are two aspects to it. The visual aspect is basically black,



red, and white. They create a very stark contrast. So it can catch your eye from a distance.

But again, if I have to get into an esoteric level, I would say the 'Trigunas' – Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Sattva is purity, which is white. Rajas is dynamism, which is red. And Tamas which is black depicting inertia. So it's the play of these three 'gunas'.

However, it wasn't that calculated or theorized, I was just doing it in a flow.

What has been the role of your father in your journey so far?

He is been like the preceptor and the guide. He knows where to encourage me and what to not let me do too much. He is also like a direct instructor for me. He is not just an esoteric guru. Generally, when I finish a drawing, I show it to him and he will let me know the 'gunas' and the 'doshas' of the drawing as he views them. And then I incorporate what feedback I resonate with; I'm not following him blindly. Sometimes I also take my stand, you know, I've done it for a purpose. I'm not changing anything.

And how would you say your work is different from his?

That's a very tricky question, actually. He has a way more established background and foundation in realism. And I started off in fantastical and mythological subjects like Mesopotamian gods and goddesses. Even our styles are different.

How has your series, AghoraTech been received so far? If you can tell us something on that.

Jehangir Art Gallery is a place where in contrast to Delhi or any other place that I've seen so far, the footfalls are way more than any gallery. And you get to meet people and you get to interact with people from all walks of life. So that actually, gives you a lot of inspiration and perspective to how your works, are being received. So it was a very learning experience. People connected to the works according to their levels of understanding. There were some naive questions. There were some very profound questions that were raised. And I enjoyed them both.

About the title, whats the significance of AghoraTech

Well, I chose the title as AghoraTech because I took it as an opportunity to actually let the audience know that Aghora that we know today, thanks to popular culture have perpetuated a myth, about them being practitioners of extreme heterodox practices and all that. But as they say, the rules of the cremation ground and the rules of the 'grihasta' or householder are very different and they keep away the wrong elements from the allure of the dark. They keep



Arijoy with his father Sanjay (extreme right) and Pritish Nandi (centre).

I was basically trying to create a blend of Indian elements inspired by Rajasthani tantric paintings. And keeping this very minimal. And Bauhaus influence, which is the German aesthetic.

away the negative elements. Contrary to popular culture, they have been at the service of society for a very long time. I mean, modern Aghori's they have in Varanasi for example, opened up hospitals for leprosy patients. I wanted to kind of connect to the audience to the positive side to the Aghoras, which we are not aware of.

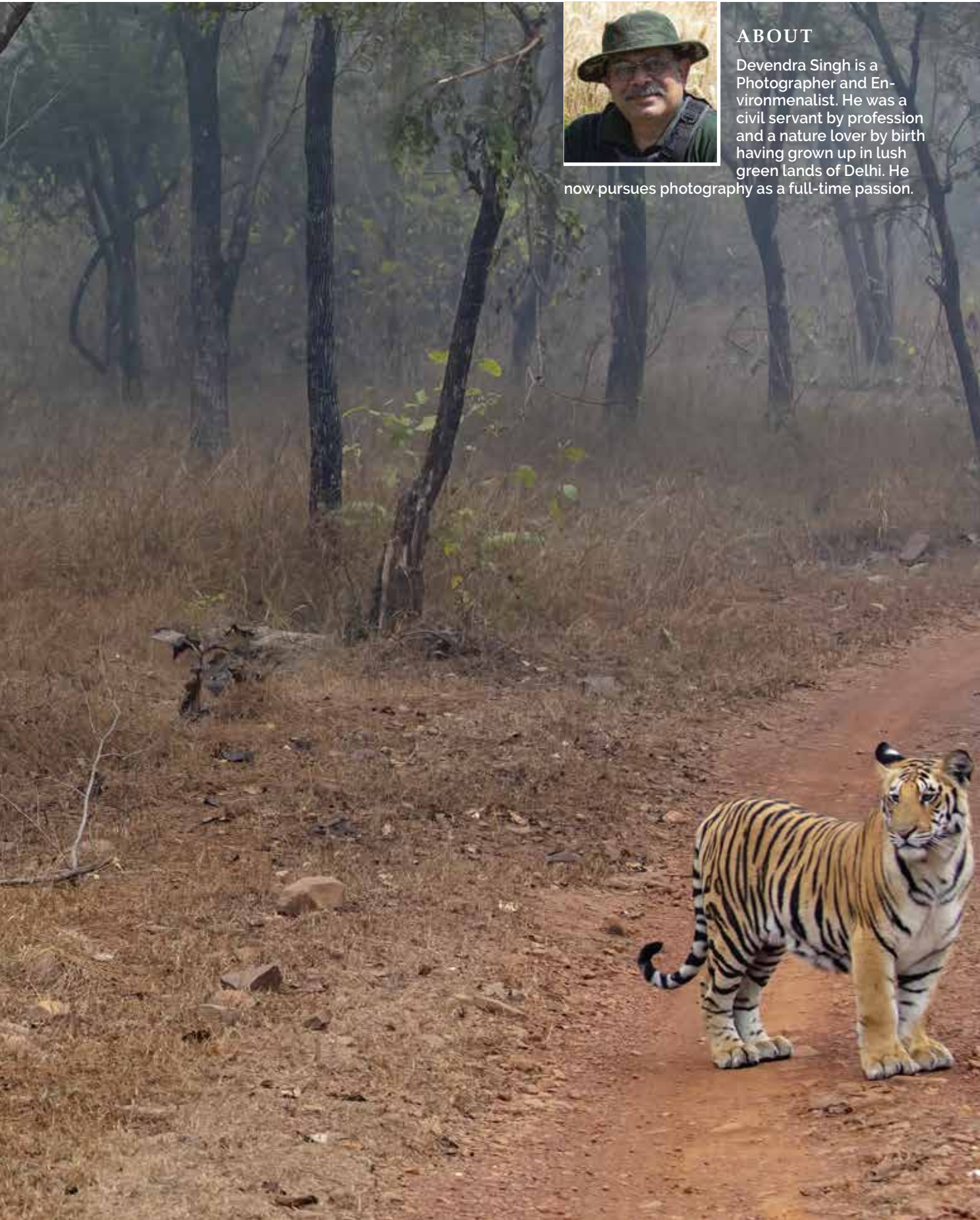
They say, as long as you are in the cremation ground, you are using it as a laboratory for experiments. Once you're done with it, then you are absolutely out of it. You are there for society. You are there to serve society with whatever wisdom you've garnered from your experiences. **Di**

NOT ONE, BUT FOUR

by DEVENDRA SINGH

The thrill and the unique experience of visiting any National Park during winters is always most memorable. You need to get up really early and bathe and move in an open vehicle around 05.45 am. Visibility is hardly 2-4 meters on foggy days. But the experience is mystical and mesmerizing. It transports you somewhere else, a happy place, as you find yourself repeating it year after year. On one such occasion during a visit to Panna Tiger Reserve, I came across the King and Queen in multiples! It is a rare sighting when you see more than one. Sharing one such mesmerising moment! **Di**





ABOUT

Devendra Singh is a Photographer and Environmentalist. He was a civil servant by profession and a nature lover by birth having grown up in lush green lands of Delhi. He

now pursues photography as a full-time passion.

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