

DESTINATION INDIA

CONVERSATIONS

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The Tulip, the Turban Flower of Spring

Amitabh Kant
Tourism can be
the Key Driver for
Indian Economy



Smriti Irani
Of Woman Empowerment,
Job Opportunities and New
Destinations

Lakshmi Puri
The Diplomat Debuts
as a Bestselling
Novelist



ANURAG THAKUR HANDS OVER CHESS OLYMPIAD TORCH TO BUDAPEST, THE NEXT HOST



After a successful hosting of the Chess Olympiad in India last year, Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Singh Thakur is seen handing over the Chess Olympiad Torch to Budapest, Hungary, the official host of the next edition. The handoff ceremony took place at Major Dhyanchand National Stadium, where the minister, along with Indian Grand Master Vishwanathan Anand played a friendly game of Chess against FIDE President, Arkady Dvorkovich and Hungarian Grand Master Judit Polgár.



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These are some extraordinary times, to put it mildly. The world is in the midst of two wars, some more than 50 elections in countries across continents, including India. While the ruling party here in our country shows hunger after two straight wins, eyeing a third term, ever on the prowl for weaknesses and chinks in the opposition armour, the opposition seems happy to be a giant gone to sleep, where appetite and hunger remain confined to the youth among them, but without the ability and will to decide. Nevertheless, this is countdown period, with some 90 days left to have a new government in power.

Our lead picture on the cover is the more recent discovery of the flower, the tulip, on which we carry a story inside. The tulip, as we uncover, is also an international symbol of beauty and poise, for us a hope for peace, law and order, and appreciation of what is good among us. In India, the tulip first came to the public imagination from the Srinagar Valley when the then CM, Ghulam Nabi Azad, developed a fascinating tulip garden, enhancing the tourism product of the state.

Earlier this last month, the capital witnessed the national convention of the Hoteliers' Association of India. It is a far cry today from its earlier impressions of being elitist, for hospitality is now a mainstream activity, much like airports, railways, hospitals - all infrastructure segments of a growing economy. Hotels are also the bedrock of the tourism industry, as accommodation is central to people travelling. Fortunately, our industry today is largely mid-market and the bulk of our tourism activity is centred around our own domestic tourists, which is what it should have been, to begin with. Happily, the correction has come, it is never too late.

A major book launch, from an accomplished career diplomat, Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri, saw a packed audience listening to her reciting verses from her book, while noted film actor Kabir Bedi shared some renderings and read passages from the book. A rare novel that brings together nuances of the freedom struggle, tales of romance and traditions in a Maharashtrian family, it also talks of social and political undercurrents of that time.

Navin Berry
Editor

VOICES



India in the 'Drivers' Seat in Quad: Eric Garcetti

US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti said India is in the "driving seat" of the Quad, while America is in the seat next to it with the "corrective steering wheel", and added that it is up to India to "forcefully define" the nature of the diplomatic partnership. Garcetti, speaking at the 17th edition of Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF), used a rather unique analogy of 'eating, drinking and sharing a ride together' to explain the different roles of member countries in the Quad.

"So, it is a great time and we love these different roles. I want to sit in the back, some other time and relax, but it is in some ways up to India to most forcefully define what we want to do with the Quad," said Garcetti on Saturday in a session, "Heart of the Matter: Quad and the new Indo-Pacific Vision". The 53-year-old said the Quad can be the "model for the world" as it is "very strong and stable", not just in geometry but in diplomacy as well - more than multilateral institutions such as the UN, which he claimed "don't have much efficacy".

"Bilaterals are always engaging but the two countries get a little bored of each other when it is just direct," he added.

Garcetti was taking part in a conversation about the Quad with former foreign secretary Shyam Saran, Australian Ambassador Philip Green, German Ambassador Philipp Ackermann, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India Shombi Sharp, former high commissioner of India to Canada Ajay Bisaria, Norwegian diplomat May-Elin Stener, and The Hindu journalist Suhasini Haidar.

– *The Asian Age*

Raisina Dialogue | West pushing Russia closer to China: Minister Jaishankar

The world must give Russia more options, rather than "closing doors" on it and pushing it towards a closer embrace with China, said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday.

Speaking on the last day of the Ministry of External Affairs's annual Raisina Dialogue, Mr. Jaishankar also said China should not be allowed to play "mind games" that deter countries from working with other partners.



Hitting out at China for breaking agreements and changing its "behaviour at the border" since the LAC stand-off in April 2020, he indicated that China wants the border issues to be resolved while not bringing other international players, namely the U.S., into India's strategic calculus.

"The mind games, which will be played, would be that it's just between the two of us, that no other country should exist in our relationship," Mr. Jaishankar said during a discussion on think tanks.

He said India wouldn't "give another country, which is clearly a competitive country, a veto over our policy choices...We should be confident enough to leverage the international system to create the best possible outcome" Mr. Jaishankar's comments were significant as they come a day after the Defence Secretary also lashed out at China during a discussion at the Indo-US X forum in Delhi, calling Beijing a "bully". Mr. Jaishankar was asked about the comments as well as his own earlier statement that a "non-Western" P-5 power was opposing India's claim for a seat at the UN Security Council.

When asked about whether India worries about Russia and China coming closer post the Ukraine conflict, Mr. Jaishankar said that it is a mistake for western countries to "railroad Russia into a single option."

"What's happened today with Russia is essentially a lot of doors have been shut to Russia in the West. We know the reasons why Russia is turning to parts of the world which are not West. Now, I think it makes sense to give Russia multiple options." Praising Russia as "a power with an enormous tradition of statecraft," Mr. Jaishankar asserted that Russia would not submit to "single relationship of overwhelming nature. It would go against the grain."

– *The Indian Express*

India Seeks Extra Rights in its Bilateral with Kuwait

India wants to tweak deal with Kuwait, seeks 9 extra air seats for every 1 given. In a first for India, the country has sought nine additional seats for every extra seat given to Kuwait under an enhancement of existing bilateral, or flying rights, sought by it.

India, which is seeking to develop its own hubs as Indian carriers (Air India, IndiGo, and others like Akasa) grow in heft, has proposed the 9:1 ratio as Kuwaiti carriers get nine points of call (cities they fly to) in India, while Indian airlines fly to only Kuwait city there.

“So far flying rights enhancement has always been discussed on a bilateral or 1:1 basis. This is the first time that aviation ministry has proposed a ratio to a foreign country seeking more flying rights with India,” said highly placed sources.

Under existing bilaterals, designated airlines of Kuwait and India can operate about 12,000 seats per week each. “These bilaterals have not been hiked for almost a decade. Kuwait sought about an additional 7,000 seats,” said people in the know.

India is not keen on giving more seats to nearby hubs abroad that have historically been used by passengers mainly to fly between India and the rest of the world via these hubs on the home airlines of these hubs - like Emirates at Dubai, Etihad at Abu Dhabi, Qatar Airways at Doha and Singapore Airlines at Changi.

“On getting Kuwait’s request for more seats, the aviation authorities spoke to Indian carriers and they expressed a willingness to fly to Kuwait. Our airlines will be flying point-to-point from India to Kuwait while their airlines will fly traffic from India to destinations beyond also.

Accordingly, the ministry proposed a 9:1 ratio keeping in mind the points of call offered by each side”; said sources.

-The Times of India

LAKSHA FOR DWEEP: PLAN TO TURN ISLANDS INTO A TOURIST HUB



More beachfronts, peripheral roads and ports; funding from Sagarmala scheme: India has drawn up a Rs. 3,600-crore-plus infrastructure upgrade plan to develop Lakshadweep islands as a tourist hub with more ports, peripheral

roads and beachfront facilities among others, people familiar with the development said.

“Port facilities will be developed at Androth, Kalpeni, and Kadamat islands. Beachfront and peripheral roads will come up at Kadamat Island (East), Agatti Island (East), and Kavaratti Island,” a top government official told ET.

Funds for these and other projects will be met out of the Sagarmala scheme for port development, the official said.

In all, 13 projects have been identified for the 36 Lakshadweep islands that cover 32 square kilometres, 220-440 km off the Kerala coast in the Arabian Sea.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had in her interim budget speech said, “To address the emerging fervour for domestic tourism, projects for port connectivity, tourism infrastructure, and amenities will be taken up on our islands, including Lakshadweep. This will help in generating employment also”.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Lakshadweep in the first week of January and posted pictures from his trip on social media platform X.

While Lakshadweep boasts of picturesque beaches, coral islands and crystal-clear waters, it lacks adequate infrastructure and facilities to accommodate a lot of tourists.

- The Economic Times



THE ISSUE OF TOXIC MASCULINITY

A notable trend emerges as violent and misogynistic movies gain blockbuster status. Of late, only violent and misogynistic movies are becoming blockbusters. Critics assert that these movies depict toxic masculinity.

What exactly is toxic masculinity? Shepherd Bliss, an academic, coined the term ‘toxic masculinity’. It refers to a set of negative behaviours and attitudes that certain men engage in to exhibit a misplaced sense of ‘manliness’. It arises from societal pressures for men to behave in a specific way, ultimately taken to a problematic extreme. Signs of toxic masculinity include homophobia, the need for control, promiscuity, refusing to help with household duties, risk-taking, sexual aggression towards women, stoicism, violence etc.

Toxic masculinity is caused by a dysfunctional family environment, exposure to social norms that encourage violence and male dominance, exposure to violence at home, in relationships, and in the community, lack of access to mental health services, lack of behavioural control, social rejection by peers etc.

The impacts of toxic masculinity are far-reaching. One example is that it can lead to more violence against women, as men may feel entitled or validated in their abusive behaviour. Unhealthy masculinity is also incredibly detrimental to men. Research has shown that men who display traits of toxic masculinity are more likely to experience isolation, poor health, and unhappiness. These men are at a higher risk of developing substance abuse and cardio-vascular health problems. People are attracted to toxic masculinity because they choose short-term highs stemming from unfulfilled aspirations and frustrations.

The social impacts of toxic masculinity include increasing violence, drug-related crime, antisocial behaviours, drug overdoses, and suicides etc. There is also a high correlation between toxic masculinity and the lack of accountability.

-The Delhi Age

Paytm Collapse: The Cookie Crumbles. How and Why?

The sudden action on Paytm raised many an eyebrow, even though the company has been in the eye, almost ever since it listed. Its promoter, Vijay Shankar Sharma, has been a poster boy of the fintech revolution, an enterprising and most expressive representative of the startup ecosystem.

by VIPIN MALIK and
DR. MANORANJAN SHARMA

The RBI allows payments banks, under its differentiated licensing scheme, to accept current and savings deposits and offer payments products without any lending. But in a sledge hammer move triggered by wanton and persistent non-compliance on various operational and other risks, the RBI invoked sweeping powers vested in the RBI in terms of Section 35 of the Banking Regulation Act 1949 to bar the Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) from:

(i) No further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups shall be allowed in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, National Common Mobility Cards (NCMC) etc. after February 29, 2024.

(ii) withdrawal or utilization of balances by its customers from their accounts including savings bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, NCMC, etc. are to be permitted without any restrictions, up to their available balance.

(iii) No other banking services, other than those referred to in (ii) above, like fund transfers (irrespective of name and nature of services like AEPS, IMPS, etc.), BBPOU, and UPI facility should be provided by the bank after February 29, 2024.

(iv) The Nodal Accounts of OCL and PPBL are to be terminated at the earliest, in any case not later than February 29, 2024.

The writing on the wall is clear, the message of history unmistakable: while there may not be any systemic issue, persistent non-compliance could have devastating consequences across the development spectrum.



(v) Settlement of all pipeline transactions and nodal accounts (in respect of all transactions initiated on or before February 29, 2024) shall be completed by March 15, 2024, and no further transactions shall be permitted thereafter.

Slew of charges against Paytm

The catalogue of charges against a recalcitrant Paytm covers a wide ground. Such charges

include KYC violations, alleged fudging of the customer base, linking the same Pan for onboarding multiple customers, conducting transactions beyond the limits, creating doubts about likely money laundering, etc. While the jury may still be out on the vexed issue of FEMA violations, there seems to be incontrovertible evidence of flouting of the KYC norms.

Regulatory Action

The RBI had earlier imposed a fine of Rs. 5.39 crore over non-compliance of its licensing guidelines, enhancing maximum balance at the end of the day, cyber security framework, and securing mobile banking applications, including UPI ecosystem. Accordingly, the RBI barred the PPBL on January 31, 2024 from taking any deposits or credit transactions or top-ups in any of its customer accounts. The RBI also stopped PPBL from providing any other banking services, such as UPI facility and fund transfers, after February 29, 2024, thereby causing an existential crisis. Larger issues of the macro-economy, consumer protection, the lackadaisical role of the board of directors, Board dynamics and due diligence and accountability in respect of auditing firms with punitive measures in cases of financial mismanagement, fraud, and corporate failures have also increasingly come to the fore in the wake of the Paytm imbroglio.

Some news even suggested that the RBI had asked Directorate of Enforcement (ED) to check for suspected breaches at PPBL. No wonder,

then, the shares of Paytm had a free fall steeply dipping 30% post the regulatory whiplash.

Extensive Concerns and Consternation

One97 Communications (OCL), the parent company of Paytm, owns 49% equity in PPBL, with Vijay Shekhar Sharma accounting for the balance 51%. There are also inextricable business linkages between OCL and PPBL. The parent company's Paytm app offers various payments instruments from Paytm Payments Bank, such as Wallet, Paytm UPI, FASTag, and fixed deposits. The stern regulatory action, which effectively banned PPB from operations, not only brusquely jolted Paytm but also caused extensive concerns and consternation in the broader ecosystem of the fintech industry in India. These concerns have been manifested in the closure of startups, viz., Coinome, Throughbit, Koinex, and Muvin and discernible business deceleration in case of Slice, Jupiter, PayU, and Instamojo. Such concerns stemmed from those of throttling innovation, high compliance cost, the negative impact on inflow of foreign and domestic investments, hit on digital transactions, closure of several fintech start-ups, and the destruction of the hard-earned money of end-consumers. These and other issues necessitate a balanced regulatory approach to prevent value or investment erosion and the hit on ease of doing business.

Compliance in letter and spirit - The Holy Grail

There seems to be widespread agreement that repeated non-compliance with statutory requirements and regulatory prescriptions, flouting of the RBI directives and repeated contravention of the rules brooks no soft-peddalling. These aspects have clearly to be non-negotiable.

Historically, the RBI's accent has been on licensing and greater supervisory rigor and subjecting fintech products to the customary regulatory instruments and mechanisms. Given the cognisable dilemmas, there could be a case for a more nuanced approach of the RBI to foster innovation within the regulatory sandbox in coordination with new-age regulators to salubriously influence the contours of fintech in India. While innovation is certainly necessary, particularly in the fintech ecosystem, innovation must proceed in accordance with the established rules of the game for a comprehensive assessment and perspective.

The issue of greater compliance cost has evoked protracted discussions but it has to be realized that any short-cut, any laxity or pursuit of "creative" banking or other policies could lead to a regulatory quagmire and even conceivably mean all the difference between existence and collapse as starkly reflected in the cases of Zee, Byju's, Paytm, Religare, etc.

In a limited holding-up operation, Paytm was constrained to partly salvage the situation by opening an escrow account with Axis Bank to ensure merchant settlements to Axis Bank to "...ensure seamless merchant settlements as before". This move, which was initiated in conformity with the RBI stipulation, meant that Paytm QR codes, soundboxes and card machines will continue to be operational after the revised March 15 deadline (earlier February 29) provided the merchants migrated to other banks. This measure assumed significance since 330 million Paytm wallets were ostensibly used for daily transaction.

Pathway to the Future

While the going was good, the major players had a ball. But it was too good to last and the business model was clearly unsustainable in the medium term. And, therefore, fail it did - but what caused extensive concern and consternation that it was not a minor fall but a free fall with devastating consequences not just on the individual entity but also on

the larger ecosystem.

The perils of violation of the statutory directives, the contravention of rules and regulations lured by the tendency to take shortcuts, being oblivious to the basic canons of corporate governance, the regulatory norms and compliance requirements have increasingly acquired centre-stage. In this sordid setting, the writing on the wall is clear, the message of history unmistakable: while there may not be any systemic issue, persistent non-compliance could have devastating consequences across the development spectrum. Hence, adroit and effective risk management must acquire primacy in the operational risk strategy to prevent any recurrence of such calamitous events. There can no longer be business as usual, a sense of déjà vu - a situation of "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" aptly described by the French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in 1849, i.e., the more it changes, the more it remains the same.

Despite disruptive effects and a shake-up in the system, there may not be any marked deceleration in investments in the early stage fintech because of their greater agility and adaptability.

In view of the myriad dimensions of this multi-layered issue, the Company Law Committee (CLC), which was set up by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs in September 2019, is also likely to examine various aspects of the regulatory regime for start-ups and suggest suitable policy prescriptions to make the financial system more sound, robust and resilient. **DI**



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THE STORY OF SANDESHKHALI: IMAGINE A BOLLYWOOD POTBOILER



Filed from **MEDIA REPORTS**

A local strongman starts as a driver with odd jobs, an assistant collecting fares from passengers; known to talk his way through, gets drawn into politics by his uncle, catches the attention of the local and powerful politician. Gets down to what the community knows best as business, notably the fish trade, grows his empire and clout, finally can influence votes. Grows immensely as both business and political leverage, even the police consult him and listen to him.

Then comes the sordid part! Officially it is said he owns one cluster of 14 acres and another of 16 acres but stories around him suggest his massive land grabs are all off the books, which is understandable too; as one can see huge fish farms today, converted from what was once villager's lands.

Stories emerge of intimidation, harassment and sexual abuse, all leading to villagers systematically being forced to hand over their lands on the promise of annual rents. In some cases, rent did come but only for a year or two; if anybody dared to remind, he would be punished, made into a lesson for others.

Years and years of organised crime, land grabbing built upon spreading fear and physical abuse, with connivance and the protection of law.

Stories emerge of intimidation, harassment and sexual abuse, all leading to villagers systematically being forced to hand over their lands on the promise of annual rents. In some cases, rent did come but only for a year or two; if anybody dared to remind, he would be punished, made into a lesson for others.

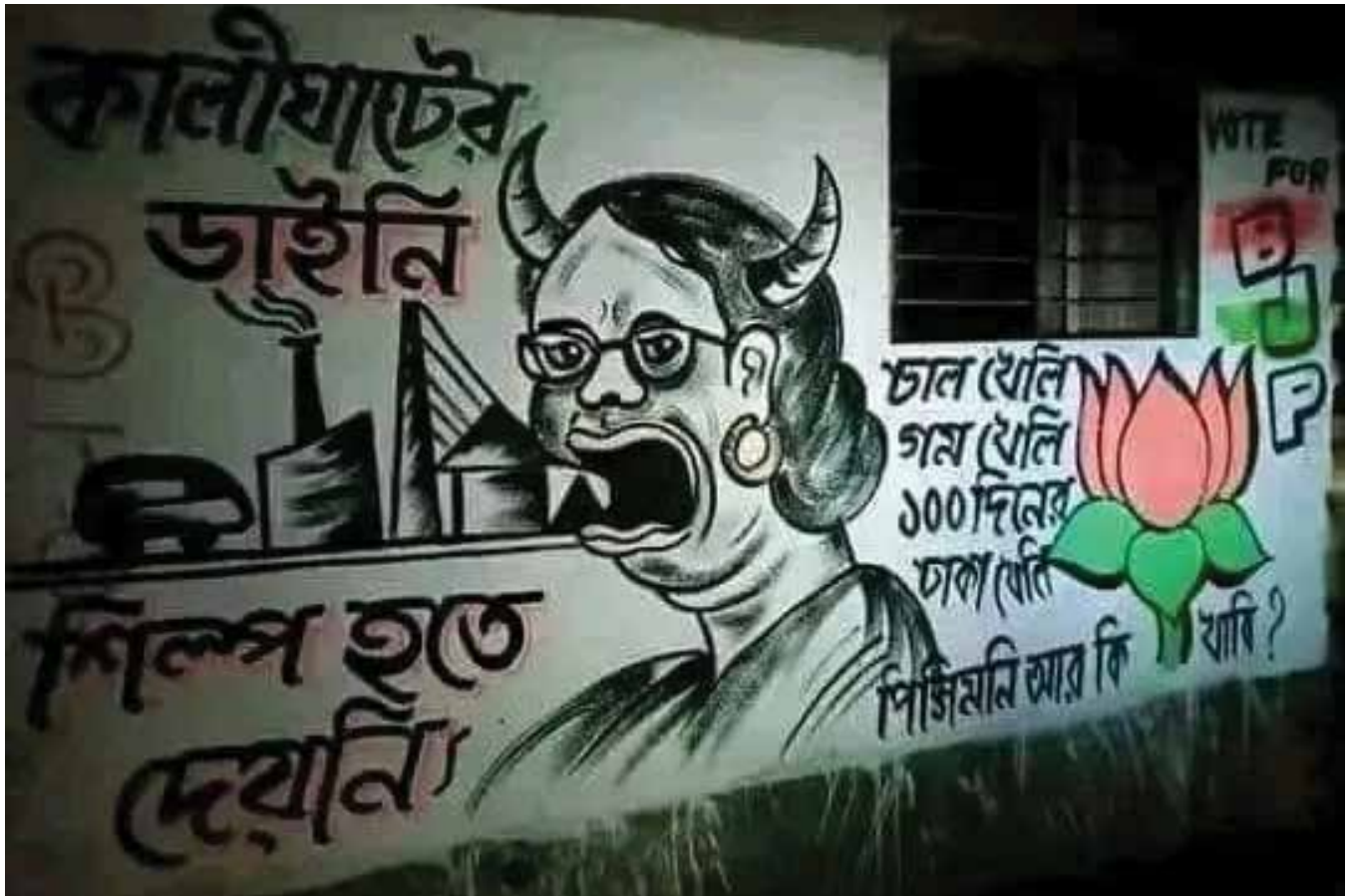
Now comes the twist. A scam in the state leads the police and the investigation team to this largely unknown location! When they arrive, the investigating team members are thrashed and chased away. This catches national attention and herein starts the next chapter in the story!

Samasthali is the area, some 80 km south east of Kolkata, an island with some ten villages bordered in between two rivers, Dansa and Kalindi, part of the Sundarbans delta. Farmland converted into fish farms. If the villagers did not agree to leave, shallow rivulets would be dug to allow saline water from the river to flow into the land, rendering it infertile.

Meanwhile, the rags to riches hero becomes the alleged villain and is absconding! The courts have ordered his arrest, the state governor has demanded he be apprehended.

Around this time, it is also the impending Lok Sabha elections and the state government has had to swing into 'save mode', initiating action to start having the grabbed land returned to the original owners. Reports suggest some 150 out of the 400 complaints have been addressed. The CM has said her government is against any form of land grab and the guilty would be punished. But the alleged atrocities have been committed by her party leadership in this area, the state police is unable to apprehend their own leader, it's the substance on which cinema thrives.

Unbelievable to imagine in today's day and age, such atrocities are regular par for the course! Such is the substance of a Bollywood movie, except these are true stories. Or, such stories become the content of our cinema! One is the image, the other the mirror. But which is what? **D**



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Elections 2024: Countdown Begins

This is that time of the year that comes every five years. When passions are highest, often reason takes a back seat. There is so much at stake, as the voter choice will decide who and how the nation will run its course for the next five years. A third term for PM Modi appears the most likely outcome, but then there can be surprises, and how and by whom?



by NAVIN BERRY

Why the 2024 elections are important, even more so than before? Even if we look back to five years ago, at 2019, much has changed. There is a more aspirational India, a Bharat on the rise; stakes are higher for all political parties, some for their survival as this may well be their last year to stay in circulation, for others to break free from old alliances that are no longer relevant, and yet others who have fire in their belly, see themselves as harbingers of a new India. And, it is time to see what is happening to the world around us?

Currents around us: we are different and how?

Look at what is happening in Pakistan, post their national elections? A returning officer

alleged a conspiracy that he helped rig results inspired by the parties that had together piled up the winning numbers! Resigned in a note of conscience awakening! However, only two days later, of his own accord, retracted his statement saying he had made the allegation on behest of Imran Khan on a promise of getting a lucrative posting! Imagine how a country can be left to ruse on just the actions and statements of just one individual! Where is the truth? Which one of his two versions should be believed? Perhaps neither, both should be forgotten and dusted, he has zero credibility. But in the midst of all this, he has left a huge question mark. How fair have been the elections, especially since Imran's party is alleging massive rigging! The new alliance and new government is unlikely to enjoy a smooth ride, even though logic will dictate they hang in together if they want to stay in power.

Look at Maldives. President Muizzo promises a government that is free from Indian influence, wins and proceeds to run a dubious and an unsteady ship. The opposition cries foul, insists India is a friendly country with which Maldives has strong cultural, economic and social relationships. Especially when as close neighbours, India provides them a hinterland which it does not have on its own. The country too will face instability, for some time to come. The perils of democracy in the works,



unreasonable promises that are playing to the galleries and foreign influences, not in their own national interests.

Now, let us take a look at what happened in our own Chandigarh? What happened there is an action of a single individual! Did he disqualify that many cast votes on the behest of another, an individual, or party or whoever else?

And how was there a video taken when he was actively engaged in the action of sabotaging? Did he tell somebody in advance that he was going to do this, so that he could be video-graphed? To what extent can he be believed? Thankfully for us the courts moved in, got his actions set aside and got the winning mayor into the seat! But the shadow of doubt and our vulnerability has been cast. So, we have an instance where the judiciary stepped in, was respected for their decision, the correction was made. So, in our system, the checks and balances available were initiated and respected. Full marks to a democratic India.

This incident is worth deliberating upon for its possible larger ramifications, especially this time when we begin our national campaigns and elections thereafter. This one was a local city mayor's election, an important city but nonetheless not a nationally representative or such important contest /election. But it also illustrates the reality as to how much people can be driven by the desire (read 'need') to win!

India is 'NOT' Pakistan, and yet? We need to be on Guard!

The common refrain would be, we are not Pakistan, and indeed, and most fortunate at that, we are not! We have proved to be a more responsible and mature democracy, overall, in spite of a few odd aberrations; these have been there, but fortunately so far, remain marginalised interruptions compared to what we have achieved on the more positive side.

These are turbulent times, with passions and desires, careers and futures in the balance, caution and respect for others is best showcased in practice. Very often, workers can be prone to zealous over reach, trying to outsmart the other; falling prey to unmindful greed for success. It is important for the leadership to advise restraint, pull up every erring action, in full public gaze. This responsibility falls across political parties, not just on the central ruling party. In fact, half the states have governments in opposition to the centre, there is

How fair have been the elections (in Pakistan), especially since Imran's party is alleging massive rigging! The new alliance and new government is unlikely to enjoy a smooth ride, even though logic will dictate they hang in together if they want to stay in power.

Look at Maldives. President Muizzo promises a government that is free from Indian influence, wins and proceeds to run a dubious and an unsteady ship. The opposition cries foul. The perils of democracy in the works, unreasonable promises that are playing to the galleries and foreign influences, not in their own national interests.

both a play of central forces as well as state officials. Respect for each other's territories and turfs must be maintained at all times. Such restraint and responsibility remain central to keeping India together as a truly respected federal entity.

Even more responsibility rests upon the shoulders of the central agencies, notably the EC and the SC; these must act so much above the ordinary that the nation and the global democratic order looks up to India as a model in conducting fair and transparent elections. Not only play fair, but must also be seen as playing fair. Perceptions are just as important as the reality. This is not asking for the impossible; on the contrary, it is quite easily done, as there is more in the domain of black and white, only a little in shades of grey. Contempt of the 'other' domain must be avoided. The Lakshman Rekha should not be crossed, as this is also a time when we are ushering 'Ram Rajya'.

A few recent decisions augur well for the nation. The Supreme Court judgement coming down on the nature of electoral bonds has been widely welcomed; it has come a little late, but it has, finally, to the satisfaction of the opposition. The judgement cancelling the Chandigarh mayoral elections was another step in the same direction.



There is no taking ourselves for granted, that this or that cannot happen in India. The slide can be all too sudden, if everybody is not watchful enough; if the checks and balances available in a democracy are not exercised with restraint and responsibility.

Social Media and Deep Fakes pose uncharted challenges

This is also a time when social media has erupted its deep fangs like only the heavens know, or perhaps the devil. Planting stories, using open platforms not just for information but even more so, for disinformation. This is also an era when deep fakes have reared their ugly head. One person's body, another's head, a picture taken in the pristine waters of the Arabian Sea, superimposed into a background of a ghetto or a casino; false videos suggesting fake party mandates can change the narrative last minute – votes could get cast, leaving no time for any remedial measures, or law to take action as the deed has already been done! Others, echoing fiery speeches and false accusations – can the political set up all stand up and take up the challenge unitedly, to not encourage such devilry. It more often helps only the enemy, not always ourselves; there is open talk of foreign powers playing roles in influencing results not just in India but around democracies, there are such cries coming out

There are allegations that media remains gagged, is not free, gets orders to remain silent. Yet much also gets reported, written and expressed. If the media has power which we all say it does, they could start educating the national voter, as best as they can.

of G7 countries such as Canada, just imagine.

Staying steady and united is more important than who wins or loses

India's case is unique and perhaps difficult from most. We are on the cusp of a great future opening up, with our economy and aspirational society showing promise to ride the future wave. This is not to

everybody's liking. We are also seeking a just and equitable world order, taking on the role to lead the global south. We have so far successfully walked the tight rope, in pursuit of a multi-polar world order. In staking our claims to be independent and walk our own path, this too has not been taken kindly, with threats looming across our coastline, in the high mountains. Our task in our immediate neighbourhood has been most challenging with nations with more economic and military heft threatening the peace in our region. Defending India has never been more challenging. Fortunately, we have exercised restraint and reached out globally with a message that we want peace and prosperity for all.

We will become vulnerable, if we are not careful. Domestic politics is less important than national security which remains uncompromisable. Who wins and who loses, who is the head of the country should be one that gives us stability and assurance of strength in leadership, commitment to democratic traditions and working towards an inclusive society. Within these considerations, it can be anybody, only India should matter.

What do the Stars Foretell?

These are yet early days. Indian elections have become like cricket, with all its formats rolled into a single match. We begin, at this point in time, as in the spirit of a five-day game. Soon it will look more like an ODI and in the last run up, in the slog overs so to say, become a T20 game. Last minute, or last mile collaborations, ditches and arrangements can alter the picture dramatically. If you recall the 2019 run up, there were voices to suggest a contest, a difficult forecast to make, and look what happened. The BJP did even better than it had in 2014, became the first party to form a government on their own, after a period of 30 years. After three decades, we did not have a coalition government at the centre. So, it is target 370 this time, as the PM is reiterating, while



the HM is more inclined to target 400. But there are voices to suggest that BJP has peaked in 2019; on what basis is this assumption only the pundits know. The advantage the BJP has is the sheer intensity of hard work their two top performers put in, day in and out, there is no rest day, whichever be the configuration of the cricket match. Not even a tea break, in fact. The focus is steadfast, the cadres backed with the parent organization intact and firing on all cylinders.

On the forecasting side, one thing can be certain. That regardless of the final actual numbers, the single biggest party to win in 2024 will be the BJP. And, as per the statute which must be respected, the single biggest party must get the first chance to make a government. If not 370, then it could be 300, or at best 270, or at worst, 230 or 250 – whatever, it should be the BJP that will most likely form the next government. Unless we don't know the voters mind at all.

Who wins and who loses, who is the head of the country should be one that gives us stability and assurance of strength in leadership, commitment to democratic traditions and working towards an inclusive society. Within these considerations, it can be anybody, only India should matter.

Which one cannot predict, not even the best forecasts. There are new vagaries as we take a current perspective. Not alliances, no sharing of manifesto, only seat sharing! To what extent would these work out, how will the cadres translate such understandings into votes on the ground, is early days yet.

The Role of the Media and its Challenges?

There is much to say on this aspect, or none at all. There are allegations that media remains gagged, is not free, gets orders to remain silent. Yet much also gets reported, written and expressed. In the mainline press, on select YouTube channels, there is plenty around to claim it is free to express. The bigger problem is false reporting, not necessarily deliberate, but unchecked. In fact, it may be a good idea for all the news channels to get together and ensure they become instruments to ensure fair and transparent election processes, by sharing best practices with the voter at large. As ultimately it is the responsibility of the individual voter to cast his choice in the most responsible manner. If the media has power which we all say it does, they could start educating the national voter, as best as they can.

Globally Politics is becoming Polarised around Individuals

Look at the US, considered the most mature of democracies. Is it

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about the Republicans or only about Donald Trump? In China, it is all about one individual. So, in Russia. In neighbouring Pakistan, too, it is more about individuals, rather than their parties. India's case is no different. It is increasingly becoming centred around individuals, in many of the states, as at the centre. How far this is good, is anybody's guess. It plays out well as an assurance, even to the extent that the present campaign of the BJP is around Modi's guarantee!

The Rajya Sabha results: Not all is Well

With so much hope on one's mind, that elections take place with least disruptions, there are many that arise out of internal and silent dissent and dissatisfaction. How can a party keep its flock together? And how can a party be so complacent that they are not even aware of this disenchantment? Impossible to understand how such innocence can be exercised, or shall we say ignorance, which is not a bliss, except for the opposition, which it can play upon and win. Which is what happened. And it is an early warning to all such erring acts of omission for the big days ahead. It is also an early warning how the ruling BJP will exercise hawk's eyes in looking for opportunity to take advantage of. Exciting times for sure, in the only hope that India fares well, and comes out the winner. **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.

A Journey from Crisis to Confidence

RBI Governor, Shakti Kanta Das, addressed delegates at the Davos Summit, earlier this year. We bring excerpts, as a reflection on the state of the Indian economy, its challenges and its prospects going forward.

by SHAKTI KANTA DAS

Recent information on the global macroeconomic front has been somewhat reassuring with inflation gradually descending closer to the target, even as growth has held up better than expected. The odds of a soft landing have increased and this has enthused the financial markets. Financial conditions have eased, and markets have scaled new highs, raising concerns that they might be running ahead of themselves. At this critical juncture, certain hard facts have to be kept in mind, namely, global growth is slowing down; geopolitical situation continues to be fragile with new flash points and fear of supply chain disruptions; geo-economic fragmentation remains unabated undermining global trade; and the daunting climate related challenges are holding their ground.

Macroeconomic Stability

Amidst an uncertain and challenging global macroeconomic environment, the Indian economy presents a picture of confidence, positivity and optimism. Recent growth outturns have surprised most forecasts on the upside. After clocking real gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 7.2 per cent in 2022-23, real GDP is expected to grow by 7.3 per cent during 2023-24 according to the latest release by the National Statistical Office (NSO). With strong domestic demand conditions, India remains the fastest growing major economy and is now the fifth largest economy in the world. In fact, in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, India is already the third largest economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected that India's contribu-



In fact, in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, India is already the third largest economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected that India's contribution to world growth will rise from the current 16 per cent to 18 per cent by 2028.

tion to world growth will rise from the current 16 per cent to 18 per cent by 2028. Strong domestic demand remains the main driver of growth, although there has been a significant increase in Indian economy's global integration through trade and financial channels. Higher reliance on domestic

demand cushioned India from multiple external headwinds.

Inflation is easing; bank and corporate balance sheets are stronger than before; fiscal consolidation is on course and its quality has improved; and the external balances are eminently manageable with strong forex reserves. The decisive and timely monetary policy actions of the Reserve Bank of India through appropriate policy rate and liquidity measures helped India's quick and sustained recovery. Added to this, the structural reforms undertaken by the government over the last few years in the field of taxation, banking, ease of doing business, manufacturing, inflation management, digitalisation coupled with a clear focus on physical and digital infrastructure have boosted the medium and long-term growth potential of the economy. These reforms are continuously helping the Indian businesses to improve productivity and adopt technology driven changes across the spectrum. The manufacturing sector is undergoing a marked shift with support from the production linked incentives (PLIs) scheme. Services sector, which contributes the largest share to total value addition in the economy, is fast adopting new technologies to improve delivery, reach, and competitiveness. The external demand for India's services is surging and diversifying rapidly from information technology related services



“Our research teams are in the process of making a comprehensive assessment for our forthcoming February 2024 monetary policy. At this stage, our expectation is that the CPI inflation will average around 4.5 per cent in FY 2024-25. As regards growth, my sense is that the GDP growth in India will touch 7 per cent in FY 2024-25. I am saying this on the basis of strong momentum of economic activity seen in India. Consequently, growth would be 7 per cent and above for four consecutive years starting from FY 2021-22.”

to other professional services like business development, research and development, professional management, accountancy and legal services on the back of rising competitiveness.

Headline inflation has substantially eased from its highly elevated level of the summer of 2022. This disinflation is underpinned by steady moderation in CPI core (excluding food and fuel group) inflation. There is easing of price momentum across core goods and services. This would show that our monetary policy action of increasing the repo rate by 250 basis points between May 2022 and February 2023, together with rebalancing of liquidity, is working. Even as the cost-push pressures induced by high commodity prices and supply-side shocks have eased, adverse transitory food price shocks with their increasing incidence and intensity, are imparting considerable volatility to headline inflation. Pro-active supply side interventions by the government have played a significant role to mitigate the impact of food price shocks. Going forward, the inflation outlook would be considerably influenced by food prices, which remain uncertain. Recurring food price shocks could lead to de-anchoring of inflation expectations and generalisation of price pressures. Monetary policy, amidst these uncertainties, needs to be alert and remain actively disinflationary to steer inflation towards the target rate of 4 per cent on a durable basis. Needless to add that a stable inflation will provide the bedrock to India's growth ambitions.

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Financial Stability

A stable and efficient financial system is pivotal in safeguarding monetary stability; meeting the financing needs of the economy; protecting depositors and investors interests; and achieving sustainable economic growth. The banking sector is now characterised by robust earnings, strong buffers, renewed focus on governance and strengthening of balance sheets. This has been possible due to the efforts of the banks under the overarching, prudent and proactive financial sector policies adopted by the Reserve Bank of India. Overall, the Indian banking sector has seen a remarkable turnaround in the recent period. The Reserve Bank's focus is not just on mere compliance with the regulatory parameters but on genuine strengthening of the internal defences of the banking system which has stood us in good stead as can be seen from the latest performance indicators.²

The non-banking financial companies (NBFC) sector is also reflecting sound performance parameters.³ Improved balance sheets of financial institutions are providing good support to durable and broad-based credit growth. Moreover, macro stress tests undertaken to assess the resilience of banks under adverse stress scenarios show that their capital ratios will remain sufficiently above the regulatory minimum. Rapid growth in



retail loans, especially unsecured credit, and growing interconnectedness between banks and NBFCs, however, necessitated the Reserve Bank to take pre-emptive policy actions to prevent potential build-up of risks and safeguard financial stability.

The recent developments in the banking system of some advanced countries drive home the importance of ensuring prudent asset liability management; robust risk management; sustainable growth in liabilities and assets; undertaking periodic stress tests; and building up capital buffers for any unanticipated future stress. The Reserve Bank has applied a judicious mix of micro and macroprudential measures to strengthen financial stability and support growth in the real economy.

The Reserve Bank has overhauled the regulatory architecture of Banks, NBFCs, Urban Cooperative Banks and other segments of the financial ecosystem. Steps have also been taken for mitigating cyber security risks and enhancing operational resilience of the regulated entities. Our approach has been to ensure that innovation is assimilated in the financial system in a non-disruptive manner while simultaneously ensuring appropriate customer protection.

In parallel, we have made a paradigm shift in the Reserve Bank's supervision of the financial sector. The thrust has shifted towards early identification and remediation of risk factors by identifying root causes of vulnerabilities and triggering timely interven-

tion before such factors culminate into distress. The systems have been recalibrated to be more proactive and forward-looking and to smell a distress early.

A key component of financial stability is to have a currency that is stable and appreciates or depreciates in an orderly manner. Various stakeholders in the economy including businesses, investors and, above all, the people stand to benefit from a stable currency. Excessive volatility has to be checked through market intervention by the central bank, more so in an emerging market economy (EME). The Indian rupee is a freely floating currency and its exchange rate is market determined. Its relative stability in the recent period is an outcome of the strength of the Indian economy, its macroeconomic fundamentals and improvements in India's external position, particularly the significant moderation in the current account deficit (CAD) and revival of capital flows on the back of comfortable foreign exchange reserves. Labelling the Indian rupee in any other manner by cherry-picking time periods for analysis is not appropriate and grossly inconsistent with reality.

During the recent period of heightened uncertainty, the emerging market economies (EMEs) were at the receiving end of excess volatility in US dollar and bond yields. In view of the systemic importance of the US economy in the global financial system, spillovers from these fluctuations are not unexpected, especially in the context of shifting expectations about the monetary policy trajectory in the US and its own fundamentals. In such a situation, the EMEs, which have their own domestic dynamics and challenges, cannot afford to be held hostage by international financial cycles. EMEs have to act to safeguard their own interest. We agree that there should be flexibility in exchange rates, but it should not be a destabilising influence on the domestic economy of EMEs. Accordingly, multilateral institutions would do well to take a more nuanced and balanced view of the policy perspectives of the EMEs.

Overall, domestic macroeconomic and systemic risks in India have declined and the improving balance sheets of financial institutions, together with prudent policies of the regulators, have strengthened the resilience of the financial system.



“The global economy is confronted with multiple challenges. There is a dire need for collective and coordinated action by all stakeholders and global agencies. As far as the Indian economy is concerned, it is now poised for a long haul of higher growth. There are challenges, but they have to be dealt with effectively. With a confluence of factors in its favour, the confidence on India's prospects is at an all-time high.”

Fintech and Payments Ecosystem

There are several aspects of the Indian economy which are reflecting a lot of promise. I have chosen one area which merits greater attention, namely, the FinTech and the Payments Ecosystem.

The FinTech ecosystem in India has tremendously improved the delivery of financial services by making them faster, cheaper, efficient and more accessible. India is currently the world's third largest FinTech ecosystem in terms of the number of FinTech entities operating in India. The adoption rate of FinTech in India is 87 per cent, which is well above the global average of 67 per cent. India's FinTech market is projected to reach USD 150 billion by 2025, a significant leap from USD 50 billion in 2021. The JAM trinity – a combination of bank accounts (Jan Dhan); Aadhaar (India's biometric identity system that provides a single and portable proof of identity); and Mobile phone numbers – has revolutionised India's FinTech ecosystem in terms of financial inclusion, digitisation of financial services, and overall service delivery.

The indigenously developed Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has been the game changer. Its success story has, in fact, become an international model. The interoperability of UPI across banks has created a unified payment ecosystem. Its user-friendly interface and QR code-based payments have made it very popular. It has facilitated digital payments for small businesses and street vendors, leading to greater financial inclusion. The success is visible with more than 12 billion transactions carried out through UPI in December 2023. Various recent enhancements to UPI like 'Conversational Payments' backed by an artificial intelligence powered system; offline transactions; and linkage of credit lines to UPI would further enhance its versatility. At the same time 'UPI One World' provides foreign nationals visiting India to transact payments through the UPI. The linkage between India's UPI and Singapore's PayNow bears testimony to the resilience of UPI as a potential global fast payment system. The journey continues as we have signed up MoUs with a few other countries to tap the benefits offered by UPI.

With 24x7 operationalisation of retail as well as large value payment system operated by the Reserve Bank, India is part of a club of select countries providing such round the clock facilities with real time gross settlement (RTGS). With such availability, more than 485 million digital payments happen every day. This phenomenal growth of digital payments is reflected in the Reserve Bank's composite Digital Payment Index which has increased almost four-fold in the last 5 years.


The Reserve Bank has taken several other initiatives to promote innovation. In 2019, the innovative Regulatory Sandbox framework was introduced. It allows live testing of financial products or services within a controlled environment. One of its notable successes is UPI-123Pay, which enables offline UPI payments. The Regulatory Sandbox framework has been made interoperable in 2023 across multiple

regulators. The annual Global hackathon, HaRBInger, organised by the Reserve Bank and the Innovation Hub set up by the Reserve Bank further amplify our collaborative efforts with the private sector in the pursuit of innovation.

As a step towards greater digitalisation, the pilot for our Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), e-Rupee, was launched in both wholesale and retail segments in November-December, 2022. Since then, 4 million customers have been onboarded. The CBDC will enhance digital transactions, especially in areas with limited internet connectivity. We expect our CBDC (e-Rupee) to become a global trendsetter and facilitate seamless cross-border payments.

Our approach to FinTech ecosystem is customer-centric, with focus on ensuring effective oversight, ethical conduct, risk management, and encouraging self-regulation by the FinTechs themselves by establishing a Self-Regulatory Organisation (SRO).

Conclusion

The global economy is confronted with multiple challenges. There is a dire need for collective and coordinated action by all stakeholders and global agencies. As far as the Indian economy is concerned, it is now poised for a long haul of higher growth. There are challenges, but they have to be dealt with effectively. With a confluence of factors in its favour, the confidence on India's prospects is at an all-time high. We have to make this happen in reality. All stakeholders need to be unambiguously focused and take measures to support this journey. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A former IAS officer of Tamilnadu cadre, Shakti Kanta Das is presently Governor, Reserve Bank of India. A former Revenue Secretary at the centre, he has been a G20 Sherpa, and actively monitored the 2016 de-monetisation of the Indian Currency.

‘Swallowing the Sun’

Diplomat Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri Debuts with a Most Compelling Novel



An arresting narrative that builds around the Independence struggle, the feisty young Malati, the love of her father for his two daughters, the romance between father and mother, the troubles in Indian society, the rigours of the caste system. It is all in there, imaginatively and passionately told. Some imagined, some built around her memories of her days gone by. Author Lakshmi Puri debuts as a novelist, having lived her life as an accomplished diplomat holding prestigious positions in global reckoning. Here, we provide a glimpse into a conversation between her and David Davidar, her publisher, at the launch of her book, *Swallowing the Sun*, in New Delhi at ITC Maurya.

(The book was released both in Delhi and in Mumbai. This brief account is a capture of the event in Delhi. Unfortunately, the audio recording did not live up to its promise. So, there are bits that could not be picked up adequately, where the editors stepped in. For any omissions, anywhere, in the text on these pages, we stand corrected - Editor)

Many of you here today would've already read 'Swallowing the Sun'. So, we need no introduction to it. For the rest, I hope today's session will pique your interest and make you pick up the novel. It is a big novel in every sense of the phrase. Big in Achievement, big in ambition, big in terms of its canvas and size. Fearless in its rendering

of big ideas and the big events of history. Equally, it is tender and intimate in the way it deals with the everyday concerns, its characters, their loves and losses. It's a novel that is super on many fronts; well, it has achieved bestseller status within a month of its publication, a rare distinction. There's a strong autobiographical element to "swallowing the sun". You credit your parents as inspiring the novel. Talk us through this.

Thank you, David for believing in the book, believing in me and taking this project forward, bringing it to life.

This has been a labour of love and it has been in the making for many years, but I really got down to it in the last few years. That is the covid years and then we'll come to that of course in a minute. But talking about my parents and how biographical this is, I have always been intrigued by Mark Twain's saying that truth is stranger than fiction, mostly because fiction is obliged to be tied down to possibilities and truth is not. And my parents' life indeed has indeed been extraordinary in terms of transcending possibilities and I could as well



have done a bio, but I wanted to reach out not only to the head, which biographies do, but to the heart, speak to the heart and also I poured in poetry so that it speaks to the soul and to bring forth the pain, the struggle, the love and much else of that very unique generation, very brave generation that I was privileged to have an insight into through my parents' storytelling.

I always felt that there was this story needing to be told, which no one had told before. It is one of those inspirations but of course the characters, the look-like characters in my book, of Guru and others, and I have taken them through different corridors of experience, of different destinations to different destinations of achievement. And thereafter, they have led me, rather than my leading them into wayward different ways, including the characters who have come around me out of nowhere and created themselves. It has been really inspired by the lived reality of my parents, but equally it has been for me an act of creation, a leap of imagination.

Another distinctive thread that runs and provides the background to the characters is the sense of place, the life around Maharashtra and Bombay. Tell us about your Maharashtrian heritage and why heritage is so important to you?

Well, I was counting the other day how many years I have lived outside India. I was born and brought up in Delhi and my parents used to always say we're now living in the North. So, there was that feeling of not exactly, some element of not being in there, so they created a Maharashtrian world around us as we were growing up and I was exposed to, Marathi plays, we used to see to go and live in Bombay, there was a kind of exposure morning and evening for seven days. That was the greatest holiday we could ever have. And then course my father used to read poetry to us every evening from his favourite poetry book. And I brought this today and I hope the camera can highlight this for me. It has been dedicated to me.

It was during the freedom struggle, he used to write for magazines like those of the young Khushwant and fiery other poets, and then he had his favourite poet's collection. So that is the atmosphere, then even our prayers were in Marathi and Sanskrit and that was the kind of the milieu that we grew up in and that never went out of me. So, half my life I seem to have spent outside India but this bit about Maharashtra couldn't be taken out of me. So that's that time and flavour is what I think many readers have appreciated and my dear friend Namita who



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has been my mentor in the journey of this book, pointed the South as a singular feature of this novel and many readers have appreciated it, enjoyed that Marathi flavour.

The title of the book, which leads you perhaps naturally, share with us why this Maharashtra has meant so much to you?

Well I don't want to be pretentious, but I have always been a spiritual speaker and fascinated by the mystic saints particularly, but one who was introduced to me by my mother because as a feminist she wanted to role model her as a woman saint who became a saint when she



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“I wanted to show how little actions also matter, how they add up and how they snowball into a mass movement, into a narrative change, mindset change. Many young people have asked me, why have you gone back to the freedom struggle? It's 75 years ago and I've tried to tell them that you must not forget. And also, you must realise your own potential and your own contribution to nation building today because everything you do counts too.”

was a teenager. And she wrote these accounts and I was completely taken up by their sheer poetry and the mystical power of that poetry and which I have picked up to be lead motifs and the epigraphs of my novel.

Dominant themes in the novel are the independence struggle and the strong independent women at a time who were feeling suffocated, let us say, independence struggle first, and then how much your family and talk about how they influence the characters in your novel?

My grandfather was very much involved in the Independence movement and much of the actions and engagement of the characters and my protagonist, Guru. And in the book, there is very much the thread that has been taken from the actual involvement and a very passionate involvement of my father's family and my mother in the freedom struggle. But I also wanted in this novel to celebrate the unsung heroes, the Indians who participated in the struggle and they were not Gandhi or Nehru, but without them the freedom struggle would not have led to the independence. That is something that I wanted to show how little actions also matter, how they add up and how they snowball into a mass movement, into a narrative change, mindset change. But it happened and it happened because all of these people were working at it. And that is what I also wanted to bring out. Many young people have asked me, why have you gone back to the freedom struggle? It's 75 years ago and I've tried to tell them that you must not forget. And also, you must realise your own potential and your own contribution to nation building today because everything you do counts too.

But one other thing I want to say David, is that in this there is also the aspect of how women participated in the freedom struggle and their engagement in different actions even as Malti, as a 13, 14-year-old girl, how she spots the preparations for the forthcoming conspiracy and all of that and how later she as a lawyer defends very ably, and in a history making way, she defends a revolutionary and even in Banaras how she interacts with revolutionaries there. So, it was also an attempt to show the revolutionary movement, the many strands of the freedom movement that we had and how young people were in many ways eclectic, how they could move from role to another.

Love stories, romantic characters, walk us through this aspect of the narrative?

Actually, what triggered my move shift from biography to fiction was partly the discovery of these 148 love letters that were exchanged. Mostly by my father, my mother was more matter of fact in her replies, and my father complained about them but whatever, just of the many that were in the three years when they were separated; she had gone to Banaras and Delhi, he finished his law because my grandfather had sort of excommunicated my father because he was wanting to marry my mother. So, these letters really then turned this whole novel into an epic love story. And I think some of you have said in the time of the freedom struggle and in the time of cultural exchange. So, these two elements are very much knitted into the love story. Their love and their romance with India, as much as with each other and also their love for poetry, literature and with English.

They used to talk to each other and I have often been asked if they could have spoken to each other in this grand language. And I have said, you had to listen to them and they did speak like this. So that was the kind of romance, the grand romance that some people said has not been written in some years. I tried to create through this and to explore the spiritual, the emotional aspects of the man woman relationship in so many ways. And the concept of how I just read a letter I have used





▲ Kabir Bedi, the veteran international star, read passages from the book.

of course some of the letters you didn't allow me to use, so many words there, but there shall be another book on it separately.

One of the things against the system. And talk us through this impact.

So, this novel is very much about how young people at that time trying to reimagine themselves as someone else from what they were born into and reimagine the society around them. They had this opportunity of being western educated and being exposed to liberal ideas. And at the same time there was a civilizational reawakening happening. And in that context, this is very much a part of the socio-political reimagining that some of the key characters Baba and Malti and it also affects their lives as you'll see, you've seen in the novel. So, it begins right at the beginning. I mean when Baba tries to argue with the sarpanch, that girls should be allowed to attend school with the boys, the sarpanch turns around and says, but that would lead to the blasphemy of a mismatch, because the girls there going and mixing with boys of all caste would result maybe in intermarriages, inter caste marriages and that is not accepted.

So, from that it goes on to many other discourses on caste and one of the points is of course that the two protagonists are of different castes and when they decide to get married, that becomes a barrier and then she has to sacrifice and he has to also sacrifice in some ways and that gives to a major disruption. Of course she reclaimed her space. But in between, this issue is there.

The caste system has been a talking point, how there is this divisions and how she's frustrated and she even has tried to campaign against the system. But it seems to be so ingrained and then it becomes an important element in the political contestations of the time. So, all of those elements have been brought out and how young people discuss the role of caste divisions in our society as being a weakness and allowing the British to conquer us, as part of their divide and rule.

Well along with the fight against caste, there's also a constant balancing the characters with their modern identity. There's no such thing as perfect in India and what that might be and how you explore that thing traditional and blending it with modern?

I think I was discussing this with someone and there are two interpretations of how I have shown it in the novel, but let me say what my final conclusion was. That is that my characters, particularly the main characters, of course there are men who are feudal, who are patriarchs and who are still caught up in the walk of bad tradition. There is a good tradition and there's bad tradition. And then there are men, who are the enlightened young people who blend the modern, who embrace the modern, whilst being self-aware and proud in their Indian skin and also of their civilizational identity. And so I think that's a combination and trying to explore that area, it deserves even greater exploration, particularly in our times when we are talking no more about colonialism per se, but colonialism of the mind and how we can surpass that, how we can transcend that. And again, I think this is evolving. We keep on evolving as individuals, as countries, as civilization. How do we combine the traditional with the model?

I would like to ask you how the novel came about. You say that you the past years, it must journey lifetime. Tell us about the process of how you became.

So, I began writing it when I was ambassador in Budapest and I had written a hundred pages, but I think at that time the conception of three



“I began writing it when I was ambassador in Budapest and I had written a hundred pages, but I think at that time the conception of three different generations, my mother's, mine and my eldest daughter's generation, I was trying to encapsulate that into one novel and that was daunting. I gave up after hundred pages and then I told myself I'm very busy with my profession. And then I came back to India and then Covid came and then my husband told me to pick up the pen again or rather pick up the iPhone again because I wrote mostly on my iPhone”

different generations, my mother's, mine and my eldest daughter's generation, I was trying to encapsulate that into one novel and that was daunting. I gave up after hundred pages and then I told myself I'm very busy with my profession. And then I came back to India and then Covid came and then my husband told me to pick up the pen again or rather pick up the iPhone again because I wrote mostly on my iPhone; and then you came along in August, I was just looking at all the email exchanges and then in August I got a response from you, a positive response from you saying that this has so many incidents, this has so many characters, so much drama that it has the makings of a first class epic. So that meant the world to me. And then of course you made some suggestions, which I hope I have lived up to all those suggestions including the, and some of the other aspects of the original draft. We soon signed up the contract and here we are today, with this launch. **DI**

Two Years of The Ukraine War Lessons For India



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

Peace is costly. Only thing is war costs more
– Shimon Peres, 2015

Introduction

As the war in Ukraine is entering its third year, few observers would have imagined that it would still be raging. After the dramatic swings in territorial control during 2022, when the Ukrainian military managed to recapture parts of the Kharkiv region and the city of Kherson, the war settled into a positional and attritional grind in 2023 with both the tempo of operations and the intensity reducing.

In spite of the momentum generated by Russia's success in the first year of the conflict, the frontline is now practically static. The Ukrainian counter offensive petered out, before it really started. The frozen conflict is fast growing towards a fresh Maginot line.

The US is wrangling over funding, and although most European leaders remain firm in their support for Kyiv, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to maintain that same level of support among their public. Cost-of-living concerns are leading many Europeans to question the sustainability of continued funding for Ukraine, and the outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip has divided the West's attention.

The Situation Today

In comparison to the previous year, Ukraine faces multiple challenges. The performance of the military has been average in spite of their possession of the best military hardware. The image was further tarnished due to the failure of its counter offensive. A Ukrainian victory will require strategic endurance and vision as well as the ability to sustain losses.

Apart from this the West—and particularly the US is struggling to provide the military aid Ukraine needs to sustain the fight. Ukraine cannot sustain without more Western military aid. The two key challenges are obvious. The first is how to get more weapons to Ukraine. The second is, how can Europe defend itself without US backing.

Russia on the other hand is now operating from a position of strength. After the capture of Bakhmut and the creation of the Surovikin Line they spent 2023 consolidating their positions. Coupled with improvements in shortening the time between target detection and battlefield strikes, the Ukrainians, are facing a battle-hardened adversary.

To overcome this evolved enemy, Ukraine was forced to adapt its tactics, technology, and operations, in part by sending some troops to Poland and other European countries for



additional combined arms training before the counter offensive began. But Kyiv's efforts were still insufficient.

This year the Russians have met with success by capturing Avdiivka. The now-destroyed city carved a bulge in the front line that undermined critical Russian logistical operations. It sits only a few miles from the city of Donetsk, which Russia had occupied in 2014. Its fall allows the Russian military to move troops and equipment more efficiently.

The issue is Ukraine cannot be faced with the prospect of having Western weapons without soldiers to operate them or soldiers without weapons in case the 'air bubble' regarding the supply of these weapons is overcome. Both these are disastrous. President Zelensky's famous response "I need ammunition, not a ride" to a US offer to evacuate him in 2022 holds just as true today. Without a constant stream of military aid, Ukrainian resistance will be very hard to sustain.

Negotiating a Ceasefire

The Ukrainians fear that discussing ceasefire with the present dispositions, they would be negotiating from a position of weakness having lost a considerable portion of their land to Russia. The fear that Russia will simply regroup and attack again also remains. The Ukrainians are in no mood to compromise. Even if a third party gets both sides to a negotiating table it is unlikely that the Ukrainian public will accept permanent loss of territory.

Arguably, principles and unacceptable compromises are one of the main reasons for countries to wage long wars. The gap between idealists and realists persists. Ukraine needs to overcome its ideological barriers and trade some degree of sovereignty for peace. Converting the present line of contact into the 'LoC' seems to be a workable solution to end the conflict.

Lessons for India

The Myth of Short Wars

The Ukraine War has upended many of the theories of war including one that modern wars will be short and swift. This has been particularly spoken of in the Indo-Pak context. Why is this war dragging on? The fact is that war is the worst way to settle political differences. As the costs of fighting becomes apparent, adversaries usually look for an agreement to end the conflict.

Many wars, of course, do last longer. There are many reasons why compromises fail to take place. These could range from public opinion against a compromise, to leaders thinking that a defeat or an end of a conflict could threaten their own position, when there is a lack of understanding on one's own strength and that of the enemy as articulated

Arguably, principles and unacceptable compromises are one of the main reasons for countries to wage long wars. The gap between idealists and realists persists. Ukraine needs to overcome its ideological barriers and trade some degree of sovereignty for peace. Converting the present line of contact into the 'LoC' seems to be a workable solution to end the conflict.

by Sun Tzu many centuries ago, leading to underestimating the damaging consequences of the conflict and when there is a fear of an existential threat. This manifests itself with Russia being uncomfortable with NATO at their doorstep and Ukraine fearing the loss of sovereignty. All these factors have kept the war going.

Of course, the above reasons are rooted in a situation where there is not a clash of ideologies such as Communism versus Capitalism and autocracies versus liberal democracies or on religious grounds. Peace is impossible, if ideological barriers prevent negotiations. Such values and ideas will continue to play a leading role in the wars waged in the future. The West has grown more rights-based over time: resulting in their defending certain liberal principles, whatever the consequences.

International Pressure to End Conflicts

The fog of war lifts slowly, and as it lifts you find that even the granted did not happen. The Ukrainian forces initially exceeded everyone's expectations by preventing the fall of Kyiv and by their dogged resistance and some successful campaigns. But then the Russians got going, and village after village fell. The whole world wanted it to end. Some began to broker peace. However, the war went on. Therefore, it is abundantly clear that war will end when the warring nations decide, and not by international pressure.

Most Europeans "are desperate to prevent a Russian victory" but do not believe Kyiv can win militarily. A European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) survey conducted across twelve EU countries revealed that most Europeans support Ukraine in its war against Russia but only 10% think Ukraine can win.

This pessimism about the war's outcome was being fuelled by Ukraine's failed counter offensive, a potential US policy shift and the

The question that needs to be answered is for how long can Europe sustain the support for Ukraine? A fatigue is setting in as costs grow. Domestic concerns from inflation-led cost-of-living could also make it difficult for governments to spend huge sums on Ukraine. This thought is not new, but is increasingly being echoed and reflects a grim truth.

possibility of Donald Trump getting into the White House. Could a Trump-led US abandon Ukraine in addition to the NATO.

The question that needs to be answered is for how long can Europe sustain the support for Ukraine? A fatigue is setting in as costs grow. Domestic concerns from inflation-led cost-of-living could also make it difficult for governments to spend huge sums on Ukraine. This thought is not new, but is increasingly being echoed and reflects a grim truth.

Power of a UN Veto

What has clearly come out from the two present ongoing conflicts is the helplessness of the international community represented by the UNSC, when a member of the P5, or a country which has the backing of the P5 is involved. The veto has exposed the core shortcoming in the UN.

The system was designed to prevent conflict between states and preserve stability through sovereignty. Yet those who designed the system also gave themselves the Veto. This has resulted in them dictating international politics in their favour. No wonder Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira stated that; "Multilateral institutions are not properly equipped to deal with the current challenges, as has been demonstrated by the Security Council's unacceptable paralysis."

Pakistan today is benefitting from China's support at various international forums when it comes to blacklisting terrorists. Presently, Israel is benefitting from US support while conducting its offensive in Gaza. While India benefitted from the veto by USSR in 1971 in the face of the genocide by Pakistan, there is no doubt that we need to ensure the backing of a member of the P5 until UN reforms take place.

Both the above points make our position clear. No international pressure will make a difference and no UN is going to end a war. We are on our own.



Need To Develop and Sustain Hard Power

At its core, war is about power, who has it, who doesn't, and who can effectively use it. The war in Ukraine is no exception. General Manoj Pande the Army Chief has clearly stated; "The current Russia-Ukraine conflict provides some very valuable pointers. The relevance of hard power stands reaffirmed with land continuing to be the decisive domain of warfare and notion of victory still being land centric." There is no doubt that the instrument of force has returned to the centre of the power calculus.

Countries need to develop hard power as deterrence based on their military capabilities to include weapon systems, training and doctrines backed by the resolve to use their military.

While Long-range precision fires have proved that distances do not guarantee safety, and air is no longer dominated just by manned aircraft. There is so much more. Technology has emerged as a new strategic arena of geo-political competition. However, come what may, the fact remains that you need boots and tracks on ground.

The very appearance of tanks over the horizon has a psychological impact on the enemy. Their employment is a fine art honed by meticulous planning and training. To seize and hold ground you need the king and queen of the battlefield, i.e., the Armour and the infantry. The war in Ukraine has not revealed anything fundamentally new about the tank. It has confirmed old lessons and reflected the challenges of armoured warfare. When there is peace the issue of armour getting redundant comes up time and again but moment there is war, countries clamour for armour, as witnessed in Ukraine where they have been clamouring for Chieftains, Leopards and Abrahms to ensure their safety.

Since the end of the Cold War and the advent of US-Russian arms control, the threat of nuclear weapons has become less salient. However, there has been certain signalling of nuclear weapons by Russia. US President Joe Biden also declared the risk of a nuclear armageddon to be at its highest level for 60 years, bringing the nuclear issue firmly back to the forefront. The issue of nuclear 'guard rails' by countries not part of the 'nuclear club' will no doubt have ramifications well after the conflict. Are nuclear capabilities the ultimate guarantor of national security?

Hard power also extends to relationships between states that are decisive in shaping conflict outcomes. While power is measured by looking at capabilities, such as military weapons or GDP. However, globalization and changes in technology have made it cheaper and easier for goods, services, and information to flow across borders and advance interconnectedness between countries, relationships such as alliances and trade networks have become as important to any assessment of national power



as capability-based measures. Though interdependence can be a double-edged weapon yet, in today's world, when two states compete, the one with stronger and more robust relationships may retain the upper hand, even in the face of capability imbalances. Hence relationships matter.

Self-Reliance Crucial to Sustaining and Winning Wars

One of the major takeaways is that India needs to wean away from import dependency. While the pursuit to infuse technology in our war fighting system indeed remains an enduring one, the conclusion that we can draw is that self-sufficiency in critical technologies and investment in R&D is an inescapable strategic imperative. The security of nations cannot be outsourced, nor can it be dependent on other nations.

Inadequacies in military-industrial complexes have come to light. As per reports North Korea has transferred more artillery ammunition to Russia than the West has been able to supply Ukraine. Further, the monthly consumption of some munitions is much more than can be produced in a year.

Possibly, the aspect of war wastage reserves is the greatest lesson one needs to learn from the Ukraine conflict. We have been cutting down our requirement of reserves, repeatedly stating that war will last only 10 days. Military officers have started believing in it and accordingly our war wastage reserves have been so catered for. This requires an urgent and immediate recalculation.

In India's case the initiatives under 'atmanirbhar' have been transformational but a technologically enabled innovation driven, industrial base is a prerequisite to winning wars. However, we need to appreciate since self-reliance demands long term capital and personal investments and since it is also dependant on the private sector, the government needs to lay down consistent policies and ensure financial commitments.

Conclusion


The war in Ukraine is an example of a fight that grinds on, not because of strategic dilemmas alone but because both sides find the idea of termination of the conflict impossible.

The conflict has also established new benchmarks in the ways of modern warfare and demonstrated just how dangerous the world we are living in is. Countries therefore need to remain 'fighting fit' which involves building deterrence by developing hard power, backed by a strong military industrial base to ensure a fair degree of self-reliance.

It's an old adage, that wars are world-shaping. Their outcomes are

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far-reaching: redrawing maps, establishing new fault lines, and ushering unprecedented changes. This war is proving to be no different.

One needs to be a realist. One needs to read and understand the environment we live in. You own a donkey, but everyone calls it a horse. Soon you too start believing that it is horse since that is what you hear day and night. However, do remember when push comes to shove, it will be a donkey you will be riding. 

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.

6th HAI Hoteliers Conclave

Hospitality - The engine for GDP Growth & Employment



hoteliers'2024
conclave

by NAVIN BERRY

Indian hospitality industry came onto centre stage at the one-day annual convention of the Hoteliers Association of India, held at the Taj Palace Convention Centre in the capital. It was a one of its kind, providing a rare interaction with the drivers of tourism, culture and urban development in the country, sharing their views on how they perceive the merits of hospitality industry, engaging with senior most leadership in hotels in India. A gathering of some 250 senior delegates belonging across the industry, the discussions brought to the fore, how increasing emphasis on infrastructure is giving a new momentum to travel and tourism in the country.

Hospitality industry, like some others, is witnessing a new upsurge like it has probably never seen before. And imagine this is just a few years since they were stuck dumbfounded with the covid lockdown. From zero, it has moved to hero, with a new enthusiasm, confidence and robust outlook to more development. Gone are the days when the industry was obsessed with fancy five stars, hospitality is today about mid-market, practical and responsible business ethics, accountable to their shareholders, associates, local communities and to the country.

The emerging understanding and realisation that is dawning across corridors of power is how the industry is NOT luxury, how it is indispensable to the growing economy and community. That too, after the recent successes of the G20 summit and full year events, which hotels across the country hosted as essential and pre-requisite components of all these events. Hospitality, in fact, must have played an integral part in all the international delegates going back to their homes, delighted with their India experience.

At the conference, among the sessions that stand out for their engagement with the outside world, was a conversation with Smriti Irani, Union Minister, who professed proudly how she was the daughter of a former Taj Mahal associate. She had seen the contours of hospitality industry as a young girl, who eventually made it to her desired school, thanks

to a Taj fellowship. Kudos to Ms. Irani for that revelation, loudly cheered by the audience.

And other session that stood out was an address by Delhi's Lt Governor, Vinai Kumar Saxena, who extolled the achievements of the present government in building suitable and much needed infrastructure in the country. Here, we produce his elucidation of the developments in the capital.

A keynote on the occasion came from Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa and a strong and consistent believer and campaigner for tourism in India. His emphasis and advice to the hotel industry was to drive home the advantage you create about jobs. Hospitality is the bigger creator of jobs across price points and education levels.

As Puneet Chhatwal, president, Hotel Association of India and MD/CEO of IHCL Hotels, said the industry has a small 'ask' at this juncture. An 'ask' that would give a new boost to more hotel rooms, as currently there is a mismatch between demand and supply, and only likely to widen more. His 'ask' was for grant of industry status in the states, to be implemented in full measure, and in the grant of infrastructure status at the centre. These two measures alone will provide a new momentum in hotel building.

There were other sessions, too, which we cannot carry on these pages, for restriction of space. More details are available on the website of the association. [D](#)

TOURISM CAN BE THE KEY DRIVER FOR INDIAN ECONOMY

Our current Infrastructure is Ready to Host MICE and global airport hubs, driving a new economy



hoteliers'2024
conclave

by AMITABH KANT

One thing that really comes across is that in every speech of the Prime Minister, he emphasizes the importance and the significant of tourism and how tourism can be the biggest driver of growth.

Even this budget spoke about tourism, because I think everybody in the government really believes that tourism can be a big driver of growth. And globally, if you look at tourism, it is actually a \$5 trillion economy. A \$5 trillion economy with India's share at about less than 2%. So less than 2% share to my mind is very dismal, and it's needs to be

very substantially increased. And if you look at the pre-pandemic level, the total arrival in Thailand was 40 million, in Malaysia was close to 28 million. India now 10, 10.8 or 10.9 million tourists.

I am not a great believer in just the volume. I am a great believer in per capita earnings. And I don't believe in the numbers game, actually. But if you look at tourism, I think from a perspective of a political lens, the politician only understands one thing. And that is how many jobs has the tourism sector created? And I and you know, tourism has a huge multiplier impact for every direct job that you create, you create seven indirect jobs. But I think somehow the tourism industry has failed to tell the politician that we are a big creator of jobs.

If you look at employment, Thailand creates close to about 20 million jobs. Malaysia creates close to about 15 million jobs from tourism sector. We create about 7.3 million jobs. But I think it'll be worthwhile for the tourism industry to have a target of creating, of telling the political system across the centre and the states that if you give attention to tourism, we will create 25 million jobs by 2030. And it is a do-able target. If you put this target before the political system, that 25 million jobs will be created by the tourism sector, that it will have a huge impact on the minds of the political system, and they will do everything possible for tourism. And to my mind, that's the only language which would be understood and that I think you should push at the state level.

Second, is that you know, when I was in the tourism sector, we had a huge challenge of not having clean sheets, clean bathrooms in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, et cetera. But I think India has been through a huge radical transformation in the last eight to nine years. We are now the fifth largest economy in the world. By 2027 end, will be the third largest economy in the world. We are heading to be a \$10 trillion economy by 2030, and by 2047, by the time we become a hundred years old as an independent country, maybe a \$35 trillion economy.

And if you look at the last eight to ten years, there's some remarkable things that have happened in this country. We made close to about 40 million houses in India. It is like making a house for every single person living in Australia.

We provided 110 million toilets and that's like providing a toilet with everyone living in Germany. That's the size of the population of Germany. And we provided 253 million piped water connections, which is like providing a pipe water connection to everybody, every single citizen of Brazil. That's the size, the scale of India, what India has done. But India has also, in the last 10 years, actually built about close to 77 to 78,000 kilometres of road. So, it's provided accessibility to everyone. And it's built close to about a close to about 70 to 75 airports in India. So, it is provided tier two and tier three cities with accessibility, with



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states and union territories of India and say that these are five states of union territories, where we are going to work for the next two, three years and really work in good private public partnership and transform them. And we will really make them world class destination in terms of their circuits, in terms of their destination. Because I believe that tourism is essentially a private sector activity, from the point of arrival to the point of departure.

If you are able to select five states and make them top class and challenge these states, really throw a challenge to these states that we are going to work to create world class museums. The states should do their bit, you do your bit and really make them really top class that might be so really if you are able to create a huge spinoff. If you can make states compete with each other for tourism, then you'll see a huge spinoff in subsequent years.

Second is my belief that actually one area where India has really lagged behind is the meetings, incentives, convention and exhibitions market; it's a 500 billion market. Now, when I was in the tourism sector, one of the challenges was that there was no world class facility. There was no world class infrastructure.

Look at both Yashobhoomi and the Bharat Mandapam. And I have seen all the top convention centres around the world, because I've got it designed and I've got it executed, this one at Dwarka. India never had these kinds of infrastructure facilities. Now you are dealing with a 500 billion market. India share is less than 1%. And in my mind for an industry which claims itself to be really dynamic, really vibrant, really energetic. If you're not able to capture a major chunk of that market, it is a shame. And what we should really challenge the world is that not a single exhibition or convention will be held anywhere else in the world other than India because we have the best in the world now.

airports which never existed. Now you'll have clean bathrooms, you'll have a huge focus on Swatchh Bharat, you'll have road connectivity, airport connectivity to all these areas which never existed in India.

And actually, we should not worry too much about the outlay, which has been provided to the ministry of tourism, because tourism is a multi-dimensional sector. If roads come up, if you know, you have airports coming up, tourism will automatically grow. And that's why if India grows, tourism will grow. And to my mind, the multiplier impact of what has been done in India in terms of infrastructure creation will be enormous in the years to come. But one of the key things that's happened is that the impact of G20 has been enormous. If you've had about 120,000 people coming in as the participants with G20, they've all gone back as brand ambassadors of India. We did not do the G20 in one city or two cities, but we spread it out over close 220 odd meetings in over 60 cities of India.

So in all these cities, we improved the drainage, the sewage, the solid waste, the roads, the lakes, all of them were cleaned up. So, the infrastructure redoing, redesigning redevelopment has been enormous of this impact of this G20. And I think that will have a long-term spinoff in, in terms of tourism.

But my view is that there are four or five key areas which are important. And I think first and foremost, I really think that enhancing the quality of tourism infrastructure and creating experiences in states is very important. And it's very significant. And to my mind, rather than looking at the whole country, because India is a very large country, it's bigger than 24 countries of Europe plus another 30,000 kilometres.

So, if you look at India as a whole, you'll never be able to make an impact. But my view is that the hospitality industry should really challenge all the states and union territories over here and really pick up five key states where there's huge tourism potential. You you have many, many associations, all of them should get together and challenge all the



The third big ticket thing to my mind is being that at a point of time when Indian civil aviation sector was weak, we gave away a lot of our bilateral rights to international carriers. And in the process since we gave away a lot of bilateral rights, we allowed many other airports to become hubs. And they became global hubs.

They are very big opportunities for the hospitality sector, for retail sector. They become very big drivers of those destinations. And that's how Dubai grew, that's how Qatar is growing. It's now time for us because India's never had great airports. Now with Mumbai, with Bangalore and Hyderabad it is important that we review these bilateral rights and really make our airports, the global hubs for direct operation from here to the rest of the world. We should really reposition India as global hub airports, which will ensure a huge amount of tourist inflow.

And therefore, there is a need for all of you to lobby and position for Indian airports to become global hubs.

And my belief is that there is, there is a very clear need. While the domestic market has been revived, it's been lively and vibrant. The foreign tourists need to grow in large numbers because they bring in value. And there is a need for a very lively, very vibrant, very dynamic and a highly digital version of the Incredible India campaign and that should penetrate every single market. And this is critical because foreign tourists are critical for India, and we need to do that. Leisure tourism is important because they bring in high value and there is a need for this market to grow.

The last point, why is it necessary to make tourism an industry? It is needed because when you treat a sector as a commercial sector, the power tariffs are much higher than the industry tariffs, much higher. The interest rates are higher, and it is necessary that tourism is treated as an industry. And your day-to-day operations then tend to get impacted. And my view on that is very clear that all states must treat every activity, every sector of the tourism industry, as an industry. I

think 11 states have done it, but they have not extended, many of them have not extended the benefits. They treated us as industry, but have not extended the benefits of what they give to the industry, to the tourism sector.

And I think we need to really work hard and really push the governments at the state level, centre also needs to put it as an industry because that will help.

So, my belief is very strongly that it is an important industry because it's a very major job creator. And pushing it as an industry will really help both at the state and central level. And to my mind you should work with states, you should work very closely with states which declare as an industry and provide all the benefits.

So, I am a very clear believer in tourism. I'm a very clear believer that the multi-dimensional impact of tourism is like no other. The Prime Minister is a great believer in tourism. He believes that this is a sector which has a huge impact on jobs. He believes that it can give you a huge amount of growth, and he believes that it can have a huge amount of equitable spread across many sectors. Because when you impact tourism, you are having an impact on livelihoods. You are having an impact on craftsmen. You are having an impact on the cuisine sector of India, many, many other sectors of India.

And therefore, I really think that we together with the government, we all need to work together to make tourism grow and expand and become the key sector. And I'm a believer that for India to grow, it needs to fire on manufacturing. It needs to fire on services, it needs to fire on agriculture, productivity. But more than anything else, it needs to grow and expand at rates of about 25% plus year after year, year after year for the next decade or so in the tourism sector. And this, to my mind, is very, very doable considering the very small share that we have in the global tourism market. And if we do this for the next decade or so, we truly transform the lives of many citizens of India, provide vast segments of jobs in India. **DI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amitabh Kant is presently India's Sherpa to G20 group, during a year when India holds its presidency. Kant is formerly a secretary in the Government of India, former CEO of Niti Ayog, and creator of globally acclaimed campaigns like 'Incredible India' for the Ministry of Tourism.

HOSPITALITY IS THE ENGINE FOR GDP GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT



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ideas, experiences, and innovations.

Let me very briefly share some of the hopes and expectations and our wish list, that the goodwill and the strong support and enormous reach of Mr Kant, will help in their fulfilment. We hope that the honorable Prime Minister's recognition of tourism as a pillar of development and the finance minister's policy announcement to make that happen in the mission mode will be quickly given a concrete shape and tourism and hospitality will get its due in economic planning of the country.

“We expect that the government's clear strategy to make PPP, the foundation of development will lead to the formation of the long talk about national tourism authority, where hospitality industry will be a very effective partner. Infrastructure status and industry status, both are totally logical, imminently justified.”

We expect that the government's clear strategy to make PPP, the foundation of development will lead to the formation of the long talk about national tourism authority, where hospitality industry will be a very effective partner. We hope that the industry which provides so much of employment and propels inclusive growth, which is composed of about 80% of small and medium enterprises, which played such a key humanitarian role during the pandemic, will be spared the elitist tag. Our wish list is very short and clear.

Infrastructure status and industry status, both are totally logical, imminently justified and essential for making the goal of a hundred million foreign tourist arrivals and \$1 trillion tourism economy achievable.

And our commitment to dedicate ourselves to be at the forefront of the essence of the Amritkal Journey towards a new Bharat with unwavering commitment to the people and the planet. **DI**

By **M.P. BEZBARUAH**,
Secretary General, Hotel Association of India

When we met last, there still had some amount of uncertainties, but all of you had shown a lot of optimism. The heart is despondent, but not without hope. Long are the sorrow's evenings, but it is an evening after all. Today as we meet, we have crossed that evening of sorrow and looking with confidence and resolve at the promise of a Morning Sun. We'd like to compliment, each one of you for making it possible.

HAI conclave is not a one-off event. It's a landmark in the continuous journey of introspection of togetherness. We look forward to a day of intense discussions and sharing of





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Christopher Wong, Senior VP Development - APAC, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts

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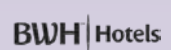
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summit, which Mr. Kant very ably organized and helped us position where we are today worldwide.

The recent opening of new destinations has once again put our country on the world stage. The economy is poised to grow at a steady rate, and that sets the direction for travel, tourism, and hospitality, which is bound to grow proportionately. Earlier, speakers made it very clear that how much it impacts with our own Prime Minister saying that tourism is one of the key pillars of economy. And when economy grows, we grow, economy grows. The government's continued thrust on infrastructure development, last mile connectivity, developing near destinations has resulted in an unprecedented growth in our domestic tourism.

Promotions like 'Dekho Apna Desh', 'India says, I do' – I am a great believer of this in my own company. We have, 'Yes, I can'. I think it resonates very well with what we can actually do and we must do. The latest buzzword in our industry is, which again, came from a leadership where in India we cannot underestimate. Mr. Kant actually spelled out the benefits of MICE. We don't even have 1% of that. Imagine weddings, which are going out of India. We need to focus on them as well. The government has actually never been more serious than what they are today. And our engagement with our own associations, it's true that we cannot work in a fragmented manner. We all have to work together to achieve ultimate success. And this has been possible by collaborating with each other. And we have seen how we have moved and we have well-wishers in the government. Mr. Kant said, North Block to the South Block can block a lot of things, but I can tell you, sir, it's really with great pride that people whom we deal with are actually positive. I think we as an industry have to come together and communicate what really means good for the country, if we focus on what we contribute to our economy and how many jobs we provide. Just in last two years, the hirings have increased by 271%. It's never happened before. So that's what and where we are today.

We hope our deliberations continue to harness the potential of our industry and create more awareness on how we can contribute to the economy. On behalf of the industry, let's pledge to build a brighter future for hospitality, fostering innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability. We have to care about Mother Earth. **DI**



by **K.B KACHRU**,
Vice President, Hotel Association of India

As Mr. Kant said, our focus to project hospitality as an engine of growth and employment will substantially serve our purpose. I think so it was with this in mind, the executive committee decided that, yes, it's time. We need to actually communicate what is right for us, when it's right for us. The industry has demonstrated extreme resilience from a period which was really a crisis for all of us. The last conclave was held in September 22 when we had just come out of shadows of such a serious crisis.

We all are looking forward for a great year ahead of us. The enthusiasm is at all-time high. And with a very successful G 20

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NEED TO DEVELOP NEW DESTINATIONS ACROSS INDIA: PUNEET CHHATWAL



hoteliers'2024
conclave

HAI President Puneet Chhatwal, in his inaugural speech reiterated the role of tourism in nation building.

The theme of our conclave is an ideal fit for an aspirational India - the engine of GDP growth and employment. When we last met, the atmosphere was one of expectations. And at the same time of some uncertainties. We meet today with the satisfaction of a year behind us, in which the industry showed remarkable journey of resilience to the path of unprecedented growth, hopefully also sustainable in the years to come. Today we gather here, as always, to share experiences, exchange ideas, and drive innovations at the same time. It is an opportunity to analyze the challenges

and deliberate on how to align ourselves not only to stay relevant, but how we stay fit in a fast-changing world and position our sector in the rightful place where it belongs. We have all been making an effort, and in many ways, we have succeeded in many ways.

There is a lot, lot, lot that needs to be done. Almost 18 months ago, I had also authored an article which said hospitality is in its 'AmritKaal' and the last 18 months have demonstrated that to a great extent. This coupled with a confident nation marching on strong economic performance is aiming at the GDP growth of 5 trillion. And last year I heard the chief economic advisor say 7 trillion in 7 years. So, 2030 would be that number of 7 trillion.

The theme of the conclave is an introspection on what role the industry can play in making the country achieve this objective. The role of tourism, that it is a pillar of development, creates about 10% of total employment, contributes 8% to GDP, and with a huge multiplier effect can help inclusive growth.

All these points are very well known, but these need reiterating, continuous repeating because unfortunately, there is often a gap between this realization and the actual policy implementation. I had earlier advocated that the unlocking of India's immense tourism potential requires a strategy that addresses the six key Ps - planning, place, people, policy, process, and promotion. Hope is not a strategy. Of course, hope is not a strategy. However, recent developments give much scope for hope. The Prime Minister has often referred to tourism and hospitality as an important pillar of development. The last two years' budget presentations did see tourism featured and mentioned either as a direct or as an indirect beneficiary. The indirect benefit of the government spend in infrastructure has created huge potential for our sector to grow. The kind of investment that has gone into road infrastructure and others that is fostering travel, and that is in return fostering stays in hotels.

It is important that a collaborative approach is taken so that we can develop in a mission mode with focus on convergence, PPP, creativity, innovation, digitization, and destination development. Ministry of Tourism has also shared the vision of a hundred million tourist arrivals by 2047. This goal is to be seen in conjunction with the booming domestic tourism, both globally in all countries as well as in India. And this domestic tourism, has helped us sustain during our worst crisis and has equally boosted the revival thereafter. In our executive committee of HAI, we have had really two main issues, but I come to the first, which we just added at the CII tourism committee level that needs attention.

So, there are three really priority issues.

First, a stronger drive on international tourist arrivals. Now we are not having a tourism conclave. We're having a hotel association conclave, but we can't do without each other. And our friends in the tourism sector, in the inbound sector are suffering. We are very, very much behind the pre covid levels. The rate of increase of foreign arrivals in India has really been sluggish. The G20 meetings created the groundwork



for projecting India in the prime source markets. We feel this advantage should be carried forward by aggressive marketing, and the recent slash in marketing budgets is not in sync with the strategy of attracting more people. We need the help, the blessings, the support of campaigns beyond the 'Dekho Apna Desh' to Incredible India, created by our distinguished guest or marketing campaigns like God's Own Country.

Number 2, is our drive for hospitality sector to be granted full infrastructure status at the centre level. I have just not understood what is such a difficult thing in just doing that. Almost 12 years ago, certain limitations were imposed and this would be just in sync with the government's effort in investment in infrastructure.

The projected national tourism growth, both domestic and foreign, will require huge coordinated developments in infrastructure, particularly accommodation. A recent report says that a record 14,000 rooms were added in 2023. This year, another 23,000 rooms are expected to be added. While these are welcome developments, they will definitely not be able to bridge the demand supply gap. As we all know, supply is not increasing at the same rate as the demand is, which is very good. That has driven occupancies, that has driven rates, but that's a short-term thing. Over longer term, if we are all a part of a larger pie, it'll help us in our sustainable profitable growth. The infrastructure status for hospitality sector can undoubtedly push greater investments not only to create accommodation, but also in the process boost income and employment generation.

Third, which is the third key point. We have never asked for any kind of money. We never asked for financial aid. Even in the worst of our times is just the positioning, and that is at the state level to get industry status. The government is aware of the urgent need to professionally develop new destinations. It'll disperse load from the already overcrowded unsustainable destinations, as well as distribute the benefits of tourism widely. Destination development is primarily the responsibility of the states. The travel and tourism industry can fill up many of the components of the destination development if, again, the benefits allowed to the industry are also extended to them. HAI has been in touch with the states to highlight the benefits of such a policy and is extremely happy that some states have taken policy decisions. We shall continue to pursue in larger interests of tourism and hope that more states will follow, and that the implementation of the policy will be meaningful.

Now, our introspection will not be complete unless we discuss the challenges we face and the opportunities we can seize. The greatest challenge, a stark lesson from the pandemic is of sustainability of which climate change is a part in the context of our operations. We see sustainability as being aware of the challenge, being alive to the small things that in daily operations can make a change and being committed


“Our introspection will not be complete unless we discuss the challenges we face and the opportunities we can seize. The greatest challenge, a stark lesson from the pandemic is of sustainability of which climate change is a part in the context of our operations.”

to do one's bit. We feel proud to say that HAI members have always shown the way, in recycling water, electricity, conservation, sewage and wastage management, use of plastic housekeeping operations, and so on and on. But sustainability is not a static concept. It is set that business and hospitality in industries transformative role must be resilient in its operations, regenerative and resource management,

and synthesized with the responsible and restorative principles of what is now called the circular economy. There is much scope for collaborative action with the government facilitating and incentivizing sustainable practices.

The other inescapable challenge is of technology, which has revolutionized travel and tourism industry. Fast changing technology, each new one, compounding the speed and capability of the ones that came before, provide challenge of adoption, as well as adaptation. Technology also offers immense, immense opportunities of efficiency in operations, reductions in cost, strong personalized service and consumer interface, and the bottom line of profitability. Already, digital concierge has become the in thing.

In the coming days. I can foresee three challenges before the industry and the government related to technology. First, how to widen and intensify the beneficial reach of technology across all segments of the industry. Second, how to create enabling capacity for this wider group. And third, how to guard against the misuse of this power. This is really not only for our sector, it's getting difficult for all sectors.

HAI will continue to be the face and voice of the industry, building strong collaborative partnerships with the government, networking with other industry bodies for common good and being industry's interface with the people. 

What's Trending in Hospitality: Sustainability, Digitization, Healthy Lifestyles



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In a session moderated by Nakul Anand, former Director, ITC Limited, participants included Manisha Saxena, DG-Tourism, Government of India; Jyotsana Suri, CMD, Lalit Hotels; Vikram Oberoi, MD, Oberoi Hotels; and Sanjay Sethi, CEO, Chalet Hotels.

NAKUL ANAND: When values change, it causes a systemic shift. And we've got to redefine our operating models. We've got to redefine everything that we are working on across all touch points. What are the three major changes that we saw post the pandemic?

First wealth is the new health. People now opt for health span over lifespan. Not only wanting to live longer, but they want to make these years count longer.

Sustainability, I can't be well in a planet that is unwell, and carbon dioxide is the currency of the future. Correct me if I'm wrong, I think 9 to 12% of total greenhouse gas emissions come from our industry. As of today, we generate or emit 5.2 gigatons. We need to bring this down to 3.1 if we are to be in line with the Paris Convention or COP 15, it looks like we think to do business as usual, we'll be at 6.2. In other words, as per COP 21, we need to bring about a 90% reduction. There is, of course, people say that 60% of the consumers, one report shows 94% of Indians would like to stay in hotels that are sustainable. But I must say there is a big gap in the say and do gap, what people say and what happens.

Last, but not the least, is the exploitation of digitalization, which is the third trend to enhance efficiency and consumer expectations. There's AI enabled personalization and decision making. There's marketing through consumer insights. There's redefining and determining consumer relations through direct digital communication. In other words, we need to reimagine all touch points to see what can be broken online. A derivative of these three trends, is what's going to happen to food and beverage.

I foresee a future for food and beverage 20 years from now, which is very different as the world becomes more and more aware of sustainability, the realization dawns that one third emissions come from food and beverage. And if we have to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees without significant changes in the way we eat our food nothing is going to happen. We waste 30% of our food waste emits methane, which is 20 times more harmful than carbon dioxide. It is a well-known fact that livestock production is responsible for 14.5% of greenhouse gases. Just to give you a global trend, some of the world's most famous restaurants have all become vegetarian.

Having said that, of the three trends, Sanjay, which one would you like to choose first and see what your company is doing about it? Would you like to speak about sustainability? Would you like to say how health is being woven into the fabric of your service design? Or would you like to speak about digitalization?

SANJAY SETHI: I think there's been a tectonic change in the mindset of us as people on the wellness side, and how the priorities have changed on taking care of yourself, living a better life and living the now has become just so, so critical.

Number one, people are expecting more social spaces in our products, and therefore, the ability to be able to interact with guests that had known they don't know before. So socializing is going to be a critical part. I think the millennium and the Gen Z mindset is also very typical, where they're happy to be alone in a crowd. So, we need to cater



“I foresee a future for food and beverage 20 years from now, which is very different as the world becomes more and more aware of sustainability, the realization dawns that one third emissions come from food and beverage. Just to give you a global trend, some of the world's most famous restaurants have all become vegetarian.”

Nakul Anand

to that part of it also. And of course, technology enablement is going to be critical from that perspective. But wellness is clearly going to be the big-ticket item. And these covers eating and restful sleep. It covers being able to do the necessary exercises and staying fit.

NAKUL ANAND: What's your take on this Vikram?

VIKRAM OBEROI: I think when we look at whether it's our guests, our colleagues who work in our hotels, sustainability, and we look at our future, whether it's for our country or for the planet, I think sustainability is something that we will need to pay greater attention to. And I'll take one step back. I think if we can move as a nation and be an example to the world on sustainability becoming a green economy, I think there's tremendous benefit for new job creation, for a better planet, for a better country. Now, what we are doing on sustainability, it's an important criteria for our guests. It's an important criteria for our colleagues.

And we are looking increasingly towards renewable sources of energy, whether that's solar or wind. We are introducing solar plants either on or off on hotel sites where we have land, and these are substantial where we can contribute. For example, in Gurgaon, our two hotels are 100% solar, in Udaipur, the Trident is about 60, just under 70% solar. And our endeavour is to continue this trend. I hope state governments introduce legislation that encourages private enterprise, whether it's in hospitality, otherwise, to engage and adopt renewable energy. It's important for our guests, it's important for our colleagues, and it's important for our planet.

JYOTSANA SURI: So if I can just take up sustainability as well, and we've missed digitization, but we can talk a little bit about that as

well. Sustainability, yes, is just not just about sustaining the planet, but it's also about sustaining ourselves. And what we learned in the pandemic was that we were sitting at the bottom of the well. So we need to be very cognizant of how we conserve our cash and how we are prepared for any such liability that came to all of us, when we were in the pandemic. Solar energy, for sure. We are all very, very keen to adopt as much solar energy as we can. Minimize wastage is one of our core values. We take pride in conserving water and of course recycling our water. And of course, wastage is not accepted at all.

We don't have any dust bins in our cafeteria because we do not encourage anyone to put any food into the dust bin. However, another element that I'll just quickly pick up is that workforce is becoming more and more difficult to get. And what we've done is that we've actually gone the inclusive way. We have in our fold, about 12, I said I don't call them survivors, I call them acid warriors. We have 150 people who are differently abled working for us. We have 200 people from the transgender L-G-B-T-Q-I community working



“We are looking increasingly towards renewable sources of energy, whether that’s solar or wind. We are introducing solar plants either on or off on hotel sites where we have land, and these are substantial where we can contribute. For example, in Gurgaon, our two hotels are 100% solar, in Udaipur, the Trident is about 60, just under 70% solar. And our endeavour is to continue this trend.”

Vikram Oberoi

for us. And believe you me, they really put their best foot forward. So, all of these things collectively help the sustainable formula that we are all looking for.

NAKUL ANAND: Every speaker this morning has spoken about sustainability, and one of the key things about sustainability is renewable energy. Now the wheeling laws are a state related subject. We are struggling as an industry to do that. There are places, Delhi, for instance, we haven’t been able to get it. I know very few hotels have been able to sort of wheel energy into it. In every particular state, what we are confronting that we are the cash cow because we are the largest guzzlers of energy, and we pay commercial tariffs. Therefore, governments are very reluctant to give us the permission to bypass that system and our own energy, et cetera. We look for rational law. We look for some support from the ministry. How can you refuse my application? If I am ready to invest in energy, which the whole country, the whole world is talking about, and you are not ready to give it to me. I’m investing, I’m not asking you for capital investment. All I’m saying is, give me an alternative source of energy. You cannot refuse it. To me, it is my fundamental right? And yet, for years we’ve struggled. Even court orders have not been listened to. We have not got anywhere.



MANISHA SAXENA: Every state has its own laws. There are some states which just don’t have any laws pertaining to generation of solar energy. But a lot of states have this INESCO???? scheme where you don’t even have to invest. There are solar service providers, some states have a cap on it, some don’t. Specific instances with state governments, I would be happy to sit together, resolve with them. And with the Ministry of Renewable Energy, we have a very dynamic secretary in the Ministry of Renewable Energy.

So please let me know the specific instances because these things are best solved as a specific case. But yes, on the policy front, we would be happy to do a policy paper because government approach is what we are looking at in terms of development of tourism.

NAKUL ANAND: And sorry to reiterate this point, but we all talk of sustainability. We’ve heard about sustainability, we’ve heard about ban of single use plastic. We heard about recycling of water become water positive, et cetera. None of these have the carbon footprint that energy has. And that is not in our hands. We are ready to get invest into it, but we need the approvals.

With that, I move to tourism. I think Manisha ji spoke about tourism. She spoke about Swadesh Darshan 2.0. We are aware of the PRASAD scheme. We appreciate the efforts that were done in the G 20 signing of Travel for Life, and how tourism goals were linked to SDGs and the document that was produced. A number of other mentions that have taken place in terms of Mr. Kant mentioned the convention centres that are coming. No wonder India has set for itself a target of 2047 of \$1 trillion in tourism receipts. 1 million international tourists and 50 billion in domestic tourists may seem a dream, but it isn’t. These figures are founded, and I’ve personally been involved in some of these calculation.

These are founded on a very strong foundation. If I was to look at this, there was a fear post pandemic that business travel would not return. It is now expected globally, and more so in Asia Pacific. By the end of 2024, business travel would’ve surpassed 2019 levels. The Indian economy has showed remarkable resilience. Our estimated growth is 6.5 to 7%. We are well on our way to becoming the third largest economy overtaking Japan and Germany by 2027-28. Our optimism is confirmed by WTTC that estimates that 8.4% is what India will grow in tourism over the coming decade, generating some 19.4 million jobs. If I may quote a report, the Spring 2023 India Development update by the World Bank notes that India stood out as the fastest growing major economies, the second highest in G 20, and double the average for emerging economies. Therefore, I think that we are in line to realize our dream of a



hundred million tourists.

I now address each of the panelists and request them that if there's one aspect of tourism that they would request the ministry to take forward as our messenger and that we should work on, what would that be?

SANJAY SETHI: I'm going focus on business travel. Especially the inbound foreign business travellers. I think my one-point agenda today, would be to urge increase in inbound flight seats for long haul flights. I think that's going make a tremendous difference to our hotels and the inbound tourists.

VIKRAM OBEROI: I'll again go back to Mr. Amitabh Kant. I think what Incredible India did for promoting India as a destination in our key source markets was tremendous. And I think we really need to have an Incredible, incredible India 2. Mr. Kant talked about digitization and revamping that if we to reach a hundred million foreign tourist arrivals in India, which is the goal you mentioned, then I think really promoting India in those destinations.

I'd also say it's really not the number, but also the quality. So, to me, whether it's a hundred million or not, but it's really the quality of tourism we get into our country is also equally important. So, the unintended benefits of promoting India, if people come to our country, they'll go back as an ambassador of the country. They look at investing in our country, which will help drive our economy, help drive employment, help drive growth in hotels. So, there are many, many benefits of doing this. We must do this in order to really succeed as a global tourism destination.

NAKUL ANAND: In other words, what you're saying is quality is important. I think it also addresses the issue of over tourism. And I think Mr. Kant, mentioned the same thing, the average realization for tourists is important.

JYOTSANA SURI: I think to boost that if the ministry of tourism could do some free visas. You know, there are neighbouring countries and you probably have a lot of examples of them, yourself Nakul, where free visas are given. And that really is a big draw. It's a big puller.

NAKUL ANAND: Was in Thailand day before yesterday, the crowds that were there at the airport, every flight from India was full. And it took a minute to clear the immigration because there's no question of even a visa on arrival.

JYOTSANA SURI: That's right. So, Thailand is one of the best examples that we can people who have been travelling to Thailand recently are saying exactly the same. It's not for the visa that anyone's waiting for, is just that the crowds are so immense. So, I think India could really



“I think there's been a tectonic change in the mindset of us as people on the wellness side, and how the priorities have changed on taking care of yourself, living a better life and living the now has become just so, so critical. Wellness is clearly going to be the big-ticket item. And these covers eating and restful sleep. It covers being able to do the necessary exercises and staying fit.”

Sanjay Sethi

benefit if we were able to give free visas, to some countries, particularly from where we do have potential of foreign tourist arrivals.

MANISHA SAXENA: I wish it was that simple, but certainly this is something that we can look at. There has been a proposal for a Buddhist visa so that people who come to India can also travel to like other places where Buddhist sites are there. I'm sure this is something which we really need to consider. But I really don't know from an internal security point of view.

It is something that we can't take a chance with, but I think what we can do is have more targeted marketing for places and for areas of tourism, which are not so sought after. So, while everybody goes to Delhi, Goa and Kerala, how many people are going to the wildlife reserves? And there are some fantastic hotels there. It's not even that there are no properties. Look at Khajuraho. It has everything going for it, and yet the facilities there are not even utilized to 10%. So, I think there needs to be some targeted marketing. And one very important aspect of the targeted marketing would be business and leisure together. So, while people are travelling to India for business, we really need to have all those events mapped. What kind of people from which countries, what are their interests and what we can offer them



“I’ll just quickly pick up is that workforce is becoming more and more difficult to get. And what we’ve done is that we’ve actually gone the inclusive way. We have in our fold, about 12, I said I don’t call them survivors, I call them acid warriors. We have 150 people who are differently abled working for us. We have 200 people from the transgender L-G-B-T-Q-I community working for us. all of these things collectively help the sustainable formula that we are all looking for.”

Jyotsana Suri

in advance? You are coming to India, you are attending a conference in Place A; this is what you can do. You are coming to Bangalore for a conference. You can go to Nandi Hills, you can go to Mysore, you can go to Coorg, et cetera. So those are the things that a person when he’s coming this side is able to plan in advance, what leisure activities they are ready to do, and probably even bring their families. I think that is one aspect that has been really not so well looked after in our entire planning. I was in Chennai looking at where the Port Trust has built a new cruise terminal building. And I was told that cruises come there, they are there, they’re docked there for entire 24 hours, but hardly 15% people come out because they don’t know what to do.

And if this is the case with Chennai, with Mahabalipuram and others all being within a driving distance and such beautiful drives, then I really don’t know what to say. Again, it comes to that micro level planning, and that is important because when an event is happening, we really need to see who the target clientele are.

The other thing is that while we have beautiful luxury hotels, what is the situation in the budget segment and what is the situa-



tion for the backpacker traveller? It is so difficult to find a clean bed and a clean bathroom for the backpacker tourist. And the way travelling is becoming a trend with the new generation, I think it is very important to cater to the needs of the backpacker, because today’s backpacker is going to be the luxury traveller tomorrow, and you really need to put a good impression on them.

And as travel is becoming more and more aspirational, we really need to look at the budget hotel segment also and make sure that the quality there. It may not have a luxurious sensibility, but a clean bed and a clean toilet is all people ask for.

So I think those are the things which we need to look at. I would also point out at, again, the G20, which I missed during my address. 60 venues, 200 conferences happened, and there has been a lot of capacity building at these venues. And when we talk of events, why just business events?



We could have art events, we could have literature events. People in these sectors are looking for newer places to visit, and these are the events we should be pitching for, however big or small they are, and take them to all the beautiful locales of our northeast India, to the coastal areas, to the islands also where volumes will not be so much, but the niche crowd and the high-end spending tourists would be much more.

NAKUL ANAND: So, would I be right in concluding that your ask from the private sector is to get into more budget hotels? Am I right?

MANISHA SAXENA: My ask would be to have capacity building for all kinds of hotels so that the staff there knows exactly what is the definition of a clean bed and a clean toilet and the luxury hotels should actually help the budget segment to arrive at that benchmark of quality.

NAKUL ANAND: Two additions to this ma'am, one is that land for budget hotels is not any cheaper than land for a five star hotel, right? Is there a way that land can be incentivized to encourage this? And we couldn't agree with you because at the end of the day, everybody would look at ROI and economics. If land cannot be subsidized, would there be other facilities that make the hotel project more viable, such as a higher FSI? Just the thought that I'm leaving with you.

MANISHA SAXENA: Yes, that again, brings us back to the industry status for tourism and the associated incentives, which again, as I told you is work in progress.

NAKUL ANAND: And, I come back again, I did mention that Puneet had mentioned infrastructure, which is the single largest ask of the industry. If you look forward, and we have got to think, we are talking of 2047. We are not too many years away, we are talking of a hundred million tourists, right? Which is 10 times what we are doing today, which means considering we are doing 70% occupancy today as a country average, we've got to create 10 times more hotels. If we were to look at 1.5 million branded hotels that we have, we have to have 15 million branded hotels. Where is the money for this going to come from? We are not asking for money from the government. All we are asking is that infrastructure status allows us lower interest and larger moratoriums, right and that is an industry ask that has been there for a long time. We will never achieve our hundred million tourists because we will not have the capacity. And capacity takes five to six years to build. We need to start this now.



“If you look forward, and we have got to think, we are talking of 2047. We are not too many years away, we are talking of a hundred million tourists, right? Which is 10 times what we are doing today, which means considering we are doing 70% occupancy today as a country average, we've got to create 10 times more hotels. Where is the money for this going to come from? We are not asking for money from the government. All we are asking is that infrastructure status”

Nakul Anand

MANISHA SAXENA: My first and foremost thought would be that I think there is definitely a mismatch between demand and supply because there are state governments who want to lease out the lands that are being held by them. There are a whole lot of new roads being built to a whole lot of new destinations, which will need that kind of infrastructure. And I think as the Ministry, we would love to have that mismatch addressed. In fact, we were supposed to have a global tourism investment summit, which somehow kept getting delayed. But it is still very much a proposal and the industry status again, I would say that yes, you keep bringing me back to it again and again and again, but I would still continue to say that it is work in progress. We are working on it, and I hope to see some action soon.

SANJAY SETHI: I think like almost all public companies, the rise in market capital has been very rapid over the last one year or so. And Chalet's journey of 1 billion to 2 billion has taken only 10 months. And it's sort of similar with other hotel companies in the country today. Our vision is a lot more than that, obviously, but I think what differentiates us with most of the hotel companies is the model that we work on, which is a more investment heavy



model. So, we are investment heavy, we like large box hotels. We like deep markets and that's why we go and invest; and the other is the freedom of the brand because we as hotel owners have the opportunity of deciding where we want to be, the size and type of hotel that we want, and then we have the freedom of what brand works best for that particular hotel. And we are completely flexible on that. And I think the third thing that we've been able to do very well is sort of learn best practices from across the brands and hotels and institutionalize them in the Chalet portfolio. For instance, I think the learning is about guest expectation has been very sharp for us, and we are able to roll out very quickly what the guest truly wants and not necessarily what we perceive as luxury or service in our minds.

VIKRAM OBEROI: When we look at growth, we look at our guests and we look at our colleagues, and of course we look at shareholder value. And for all those three reasons, it's important to drive growth within EIH and its associated companies. For our guests we would like to, ideally for them to stay with us when they travel rather than anybody else. For our colleagues, we want to give them a career and growth, so that they can grow in hospitality, contribute in hospitality and grow their careers. And of course, there's a strong correlation between growth and value creation. So, for all these three reasons, growth is important.

The other thing I want say is that we don't want to look at growth for the sake of growth, but it's really quality growth. We would like to grow with management contracts and with

our own hotels. EIH touchwood has a very, very strong balance sheet, as does our other publicly listed company, EIH Associated, zero debt with large amounts of cash. So, we will invest in hotels. We will partner with others to grow both for the Oberoi and the Trident brands. And our vision is to open 50 new hotels, big and small across our country and overseas by 2030. So that's broadly our growth plans.

NAKUL ANAND: What are the three or four interesting developments, which are under construction?

VIKRAM OBEROI: So, we have a palace outside of Khajuraho, the Rajgarh Palace. We're opening another managed hotel with our partners who own our two Gurgaon hotels in Madhya Pradesh as well. That's going to be a 22 luxury jungle resort. We have a beautiful site in Bangalore, which is a mixed-use development. We can develop about 1.2 million square feet. So, we're working on that. We have another site in Goa. And in addition to this, we're pursuing various initiatives around going through management contracts with equity in both without equity in terms of simple, straightforward management contracts.

NAKUL ANAND: Dr Suri, expansion plans for the Lalit Hotels?

JYOTSANA SURI: So, we have to complete a hotel in Sabarmati, which is on the river. It's a beautiful hotel facing the river. We are foraying into the religious sector. So we have a beautiful piece of land in Chirtakoot following the Ram Trail. So, we are going into a religious sector completely, and we will be opening smaller hotels, not very large, small inventories, so that they can be well managed and they would be in the mid segment. So, the growth, other than the Ahmedabad Hotel, which is luxury five Star, the others are going to be in mid segment hotels, which we call the Lalit Traveller. We are also expanding our footprint by taking on management contracts. We have a company on board who's helping us to identify all these management contracts. So sooner than later, that would also be something that we would be looking at.

VIKRAM OBEROI: Additionally, I may add we are opening a, we in fact now midst of designing a hotel, which is a small hotel, an Oberoi luxury hotel in Gandikota in Andhra Pradesh. And this is a most beautiful place for other hoteliers. It's really the Indian Grand Canyon. And the reason I'm highlighting this is that perhaps others in this room would like to look at that opportunity if we can really partner with others to develop



the destination. There's a huge benefit for, for all of us, and it's really an unspoiled destination. I also didn't mention we're opening a hotel in Tirupathi, a wonderful site that would be a Trident.

And our Trident has undergone a change. Our Tridents were for foreign series and group travel. That's now not our prime focus. Our prime guest is the Indian traveler today, who has an increased propensity to spend, who spends more time in the hotel. We're also putting another Trident in Vizag as well.

EIH has the OCLD we run a learning program, but I think the opportunities for people in our country, or for young people in our country, in terms of careers, is tremendous, which is a real positive. But the challenge for our industry is to answer the question, how do we attract the same level of talent we were able to attract 20-25 years ago.

NAKUL ANAND: Do you feel there's a gap?

VIKRAM OBEROI: If I look at, you know I've been doing OCLD interviews now for a number of years. I look at many of people sitting in this room who have either come from the OBEROI programme or from the Taj programme and others. And I think just the sheer logic, that today there are so many opportunities that are available in India, we would be foolish to think that we are the only choice. And I don't believe we're the only choice. We used to, for example, at OCLD years ago, get many more people who were not from IHMs who had graduated from, from other academic programmes and joined OCLD. That's significantly changed. So really, my question is what do we need to do to attract the best and the brightest talent into our industry? Because that is going to determine our future as well.

NAKUL ANAND: I could not agree more with you. And before I conclude and wrap up this session, ma'am, are there any destinations that you believe that the private sector is not looking at, which you believe would be a priority?

MANISHA SAXENA: I would say that any number of destinations, but top of mind recall would be Hampi. Gandikota of course, Mr. Oberoi said that they have a hotel coming up. There are a lot of religious destinations where the whole mindset is that people will just go, have darshan, and come back. I think those are the places we really need to look at. I think all the 42 World heritage sites are the destinations of the future.



“There are a lot of religious destinations where the whole mindset is that people will just go, have darshan, and come back. I think those are the places we really need to look at. I think all the 42 World heritage sites are the destinations of the future. The other thing would be the Northeast, because I have worked in the Northeast and the biggest challenge is absence of a branded hotel.”

MANISHA SAXENA

Of course, Agra is one of them. Delhi is one of them. But other than that, the other world heritage sites really need to be looked at and we need to develop. The other thing would be the Northeast, because I have worked in the Northeast and the biggest challenge is absence of a branded hotel. In Mizoram, while I was principal secretary of tourism, it was our endeavour to get at least one branded hotel and we were working on it. But that again, there are a whole lot of challenges. So, I think these are the demand and supply mismatches, which we need to look into.

NAKUL ANAND: One last question. We discussed during the last budget about the 50 destinations that were to be identified. And we had very clearly laid out the criteria as to how states could bid for those destinations and how those destinations would be shortlisted. How far are we into that?

MANISHA SAXENA: The list is available, the master plans are ready, and you'll be happy to know that the master plans also look at potential areas of private partnership for hotels, for other infrastructure, amusement parks, et cetera. That has very much happened. So, we have got more than a hundred proposals from states and we are looking at them. And 50 destinations out of that would also be the ones that we would go with. **DI**

OF WOMAN EMPOWERMENT, JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND NEW DESTINATIONS

A new world of Business for the Hospitality Industry



Big Infrastructure spends around destinations for tourism, pilgrimages, business and weddings open new vistas for hospitality industry in India, says Smriti Irani, while Puneet Chhatwal endorses happy days for the industry, with a small ask for better positioning. Central Minister Ms. Smriti Irani, in conversation with Puneet Chhatwal, MD and CEO, IHCL, moderated by Navika Kumar, Managing Editor, Times Now Group.



NAVIKA KUMAR: Hospitality is one of the biggest employment generators? What would you say in terms of your government? And it's promise to increase employment and create opportunities for people.

SMRITI IRANI: So, I have an insider's view, not only as somebody who represents or serves in the government, but also somebody who studied a good half of her secondary and higher education, courtesy a scholarship, because my mother was a housekeeper at Taj Mansingh.

I think that there are two aspects to your question from my perspective, if I may be

allowed to answer it so. There is a huge focus and impetus the Honourable Prime Minister is giving, not only to tourism, but infrastructure around tourism. This budget, which was an interim one, announced 11 lakh crore rupee infrastructural view of what we hope we build in the country. But apart from that, I think the footfall, when you

look at the spiritual tourism point of view, has a huge benefit for future investments and how we possibly would like to design future investments. 8 crore people coming for 'darshan' at the Kashi Corridor, 5 crore people who turned up for 'darshan' at Maha Kaal Corridor. Even now, if you look at the numbers of Ram Mandir, close to 20 lakh *darshanatis* who have already come, yesterday's number was that there were 5 lakh Ram 'bhakts' already at Ayodhya. So, in so far as spiritual tourism goes, we all, who, and I'm saying this, we, because I've looked at the hotel

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industry, like I said, from an insider's view.

What is the surety that international investors look at? They look at continuation of policy and policy makers. Now you are assured of 5 years more of Narendra Modi service to the country as the Pradhan Sevaka. And that is a surety and the guarantee that investors look at. If this is the kind of policy making, which is progressive, which is continuous, and which listens to people with regards to everyday challenges that come forth, do you have somebody at the helm of affairs who will then respond respectfully and within a timeframe knowing that investors don't like the time lag?

So, from a destination perspective, now, when Prime Minister Modi says, not only Make in India, but also Wed in India, that's another new chapter with regards to the hotel business. So, there has been, I think from many points of view, new opportunities, one from spiritualism, second from the weddings business, and the whole regalia that goes around our festivals and how families would like to come together. Third, the infrastructure spend. And fourth, if I look at another perspective, GCC, the Global Compatibility Centres in India now are going to tier 2 and tier 3 cities, which means that when you have MNCs from across the globe coming to India to service their service needs or the technology needs, we have 1.6 million Indians who now are a part of the GCC in India, servicing global company corporate needs. And most of them are coming to tier 2 and tier 3 cities because of 'Udaan', which means the international high paying population in the corporate sector is now also coming only to do business in India.

So that's another segment in which I presume that you will see a lot of growth in, where if you have a Taj, and I'm sorry because I'm from that faculty, I can give you kind of a comparative. What is the tier 3 typology of service that you can give? So now the hotel business, I mean, it's a win-win knowing that there are not just a few centres which become investment destinations in your country. There are other destinations which are now opening up from a travel perspective, be it travel for leisure, or be travel for business.

“From a destination perspective, now, when Prime Minister Modi says, not only Make in India, but also Wed in India, that's another new chapter with regards to the hotel business. So, there has been, I think from many points of view, new opportunities, one from spiritualism, second from the weddings business, and the whole regalia that goes around our festivals and how families would like to come together.”

Ms. Smiti Irani

NAVIKA KUMAR: Very well said. And she used the word infrastructure, which is music to your ears, Puneet Chhatwal, but hotel industry being in the infrastructure sector a demand which hasn't yet fortified. But when you have the Prime Minister, who himself actually becomes the poster boy of something like selling tourism in Lakshadweep as a destination, then you know that you are in the hands of a government that understands the business, that understands destinations and understands where the competition is and where to pull in the crowds from! In the middle of all this, Puneet, what still remain as challenges for the hotel industry?



“Hotels themselves have become a social thriving organism within a city place. Insofar as my constituency Amethi goes, yes, when you came there five years ago, there was no hotel. Now we have two hotels there, though small.”

Ms. Smiti Irani

PUNEET CHHATWAL: Actually, you know, firstly I have to say that everything that was just now said is already endorsed throughout the day in our speeches and in our interactions with the people. Of course, the whole spent on infrastructure where the trains, roads, doubling of airports that has a direct correlation with the growth of the sector, the spiritual destinations, the way Ayodhya was launched across the globe. It’s unbelievable that something like this could be done so well. So I think all that is really positive. Generally, the sector is very positive, and as our distinguished guest has spent time in her growing up years at the Taj, she understands that as challenging as the sector is, it is also very fascinating. So generally, we, people don’t complain and we did not complain throughout the day.

So, we generally thank the government, we thanked for everything. There are two simple things which the government can do at a centre level and a state level. One is granting this sector, the infrastructure status, which would be aligned with their own strategy of developing infrastructure, because you can build all these destinations. They also require investments coming in hotels. Hotels being capital intensive and labour intensive, needs 3, 4, 5 years of help, which you get by getting cheaper loans or loan moratorium. The second is industry status at a state level, because tourism also till now is a state subject. So that helps in it not being the highest taxed. I mean, how can a sector flourish or thrive when it is the most capital intensive? When it’s most labour intensive, it’s the highest taxed, thank God, in the recent times, the 28% GST came down to 18%.

So, there is a lot to thank for. There is a lot of gratitude of great things that have been done and are being done, but our ask has never been money. Our ask has been only the positioning, which would be in line with the aspirational India, eyeing to be the third largest economy. And it needs a lot of supply side catching up in all these destinations. And the capital usually goes into the sector, which provides, you know, if not the highest, at least very healthy returns and has less cyclicity. So if there is a certainty of return, and there is some kind of help, which comes through this positioning, it is good for India and it is good for the sector, and it is helping a sector that creates the maximum number of jobs through the multiplier effect as well as it’s easy to scale ability.

So, we just opened a 32nd skilling centre as the company that I represent in Ekta Nagar, 10 days ago. And in 17 weeks, and in 14 weeks, we would have on the job and theory trainings to get ‘adivasis and people from rural population in that area to come and work in hotels in front office or in food and beverage. And in one of the things, it was a hundred percent ladies, so the very first class. So I think the opportunity is huge. So when we talk about our ask, it is never give us this relief, that relief, this is just position it in a way that the mechanism works. Having said that, we are extremely, extremely happy that 11 states in the interim gave us industry status. Now, the execution may not be seamless. Maybe there is some work to be done.

And I do feel that infrastructure status will also come. It’s not that it’s not qualified as infrastructure, but 12 years ago, or maybe 13 years ago, some caps were put, and the amount that you could apply for, I think the time has come, it was maybe okay for that time, maybe now the time has come to remove those caps and let it function like any other industry, because luxury is only 7% of the total supply of rooms and hotels in India, 93% is non-luxury. And a lot of hotel supply is needed at least in midscale and lower than midscale. And a lot of work needs to be done on that front. And as I said, it’ll be good. And that’s our only two-point demand.

NAVIKA KUMAR: Ms. Irani, opportunities for women to be employed are very great in the hospitality and the hotel segment. Having said that, having been a reporter travelling across the length and breadth of India during elections, one has found that there are some places where ‘netas’ live, there are constituencies where there are no hotels, so to speak. And as working women travelling to these areas you know, it is a bit of



“Definitely women do get a lot of opportunities because the attrition rate is lower. Second, their service is excellent. They have, they have the feel for details. So that is why I see a lot of women now getting absorbed.”

Ms. Smiti Irani



a problem. I remember, I won't name the constituency because immediately it'll be called a political point that I am making, but certainly in the centre of India, there is a large state where in one constituency, which belonged to a high-profile politician, there was no hotel. And I sat in almost a guest house kind of a place.

SMRITI IRANI: For the benefit of everybody who's not politically possibly aware of the constituency, if you can name it, I'll tell you how many hotels there are now after I became an MP.

NAVIKA KUMAR: I know you've taken over the job of media people, you've just interviewed the Rashtrapati and my job is in danger, but here I am asking the questions, you are only answering them. So I, I'll stick by saying that there are no places that, you know, women can stay. They are scary and they're not even clean, not even a clean bedsheet put in those places. So investments and the gender angle to it. What do you think about that?

SMRITI IRANI: I think that hotels have reimagined themselves, and I'll take a point in case. It is not only how many rooms can be hired for people to stay. Now they're also becoming an attractive place for families to spend, let's say, their lunches or their dinners at or to service certain needs, which an aspiring class would like, for instance.

So apart from the hotels I think legend, they're now creating niche services, where a spa comes in or a beauty salon comes in, or a place for people to dine at or celebrate a wedding at. Because when you say the word hotel, people presume it's only for those who travel. So hotels themselves have become a social thriving organism within a city place. Insofar as my constituency Amethi goes, yes, when you came there five years ago, there was no hotel. Now we have two hotels there, though small, but I think that's also something that needs great reflection on our hotels, only those investments which are large. Only those investments that come with a legend or also are we now democratizing how hotels are looked at and give equal space for those who are coming up with smaller investments, but coming up in emerging markets domestically.

So that is something I think which needs great reflection on, because if there is some kind of an exchange of scale of how to manage that hotel, you will have greater service opportunities and create more opportunities locally for people including women. So they may be people who are well heartened enough to invest, let's say, have an investment size, which

is possibly one fourth of the investment that a large hotel needs, but they're servicing the region's population there. So can you find an interface or a platform where you can exchange your strengths with those emerging names who may not compete with you, but at least in terms of service, they can become the hallmark of service in their locality. So that being said, yes, most definitely women do get a lot of opportunities because the attrition rate is lower. Second, their service is excellent.

They have, they have the feel for details. So that is why I see a lot of women now getting absorbed. It earlier also was the same, but now given the Labour Code, which defines more opportunities under the law for how women can work, irrespective of the shift, as long as institutions can guarantee them safe transport back home. So it provides new opportunity for women to engage. What I also like about the hotel industry, apart from the front office, the rest of the administration and opportunities in the hotel business for women is not defined by a particular age because there are many service industries which in fact, exempt women from opportunities when they reach a particular age. The hotel business is the only business where age is no bar, as you are functionally contributing very well to your organisation. So I think the fact that it defies those challenges of age is also something to be considered, especially for women, because if you're not young, apparently you're not suitable for many segments of the service sector. I believe what I learned at Taj then just as an employee's daughter, is that hotels are in the business of serving and not in the business of asking.



“Insofar as what can be done under the infrastructure norms, that is a good question for the finance minister to answer. But I can only say this as long as things make fiscal sense, judicial sense, you will always have my support.”

Ms. Smiti Irani

So insofar as what can be done under the infrastructure norms, that is a good question for the finance minister to answer. But I can only say this as long as things make fiscal sense, judicial sense, you will always have my support.

NAVIKA KUMAR: And, and the fact that hotels actually encourage women to work in all segments, I think is a big thumbs up to the hotel industry and to gender empowerment, women empowerment. But Puneet I mean, I just can't get rid of the political 'bug' in my mind. And Smiriti ji, just talked about the spiritual prospects that are growing in India. So, everything that the BJP does has a 'mandir' angle to it.

SMRITI IRANI: No, I think that would be extremely indifferent to the Prime Minister's agenda in building infrastructure. The Atal Setu has no temple involved with it. Or if you build a bullet train, if you say that 40,000 boogies will be converted in the railways to 'vande' Bharat coaches, that is just servicing the needs of citizens at large and making it cost effective. So, for you to charge us by saying that infrastructure is only an area possibly, which has a 'mandir' inclination would be very unfair to the Prime Minister.

NAVIKA KUMAR: No, I didn't mean it in that way. You said there are opportunities coming up because of the spiritual renaissance. And you mentioned Maha Kaal, you mentioned Kashi.

SMRITI IRANI: But why also exempt from the conversation, adventure sports. So where is the new opportunity, let's say mushrooming in Arunachal Pradesh, in Uttarakhand, apart from the religious destination, you also now

have adventure becoming a big catchment area for the hotel business. The issue, which still is something that is considered by tourists domestically, possibly this is subject to correction by specific tourists who can ask, is whether you can assure safety of the adventure sports that you offer. So if that is something that can be underwritten or assured, you will find more and more opportunities then coming up.

NAVIKA KUMAR: Does that open up a whole new catchment area for tourism and for the hotel industry?

PUNEET CHHATWAL: Absolutely, it does. I think we are just at the start of it, the next two decades will completely change the whole landscape of tourism hospitality. It has already changed even in the last two years, if you see. So I think we are just at the beginning, and there are positives and other consequences of becoming fifth largest and third largest economy, including increase in per capita income. I think more and more people will travel, whether they do it for spirituality, whether they do it for adventure, whether they do it for business, setting up new businesses in tier two, tier three cities, whatever may be the reason. We are just really at the beginning of this. And if all the pundits that have predicted our GDP growth figures that are expected, and geopolitically the role India is expected to play it should be very good.

SMRITI IRANI: To add to this, it's also how India positioned the country and its prospects to the world during the G20 presidency. It could have very well been just two, three cities in which the G20 meetings were held. But the fact that the Prime Minister ensured that every state has an interaction with the G20 universe, the fact that infrastructure around those places where the hotels that hosted those meetings or where the dignitaries stayed, that too has in fact opened up. When we go, let's say to a Davos, we hear of the hospitality and the services that those guests enjoyed, they tell us.


Secondly, the Prime Minister, from what I see in the interim budget and from his pronouncements and his engagements, is very keen to go beyond those tourist destinations, which are anyways globally highlighted. And that's how you attract new attention to such spaces. Let's say we are all talking about Ram Mandir and Ayodhya, but there's also a history of Orchha. Now how many of us can celebrate that history or look at the hotel perspective or the opportunity there? So, there may be spaces like Hampi, how many of us actually on a national scale try and



bring attention to the domestic tourist towards, let's say Hampi. There is place in Arunachal called Zero, where if you trek for five kilometres from Zero in the village to the jungles, you will find one of the largest Shivilings you'll ever see.

NAVIKA KUMAR: If you talk about opportunities, yes, there are many. Let me also add the fact that Ms. Smriti Irani at Davos, when you mentioned Davos actually set up a global alliance for global good gender equity and equality to push women's empowerment this year at the World Economic Forum. I want to ask, this has been a first for India. It's been a personal achievement for you. Where does this take us, in terms of the statement India has made? Where does this take us?

SMRITI IRANI: A global alliance, which is going to highlight India's potential to investors, companies who come together to leverage India's digital capacity or investment opportunities in India. If the hoteliers' association wants to come and year mark, which are the women owned hotels or women owned or serviced only home stays in India, that is something that we are happy to offer to our global conglomerates who have joined this alliance so that when they come next, they know exactly how many women in the industry that they can support. Secondly, there is a buzz the world over about sustainability. Can we identify those hotels which are completely green and who can provide this unique destination then to those green warriors across the world who come to India from an investment point of view, but also see that aspect of the hotel business.

The alliance has been very strategically called the Alliance for Global Good, because it helps us deliver to the world what are the opportunities that we as Indians have to offer? What are the opportunities not only to attract footfall, not only to attract investments, but some of our best practices that we can share with the world. Through the alliance, if the Hotelier Association deems it fit, come together, tell those stories of upskilling and skilling so that if there are friends of ours in the global south who want to be encouraged by our contribution, we can connect you then to those friends in the global south who can take a leaf out of your efforts and possibly replicate it in their countries. So, the Alliance is a platform to engage not only from an investment perspective, but also from the best practices perspective. CII has already helped signed up 10,000 companies. We have close to 20 global conglomerates who are a part of it. Why not also the hotels of India? 



“There is a lot to thank for. There is a lot of gratitude of great things that have been done and are being done, but our ask has never been money. Our ask has been only the positioning, which would be in line with the aspirational India, eyeing to be the third largest economy. And it needs a lot of supply side catching up in all these destinations. And the capital usually goes into the sector, which provides, you know, if not the highest, at least very healthy returns and has less cyclicity.”

Puneet Chhatwal



“The fact that hotels actually encourage women to work in all segments, I think is a big thumbs up to the hotel industry and to gender empowerment, women empowerment. But Puneet I mean, I just can't get rid of the political 'bug' in my mind. And Smriti ji, just talked about the spiritual prospects that are growing in India. So, everything that the BJP does has a 'mandir' angle to it.”

Navika Kumar

DELHI AS A CITY HAS GROWN PHENOMENALLY AS A TOURIST HUB



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Vinay Saxena, Delhi's LG has been at the forefront of spreading the good cheer around tourism, leading the centre's efforts in Making the national capital a Global hub

Delhi is the capital of India. It is also home to a glorious heritage. It is supported by excellent connectivity. As such, it can be one of the major hubs of growth for hospitality sector. The hospitality sector in Delhi has grown remarkably in recent times.

However, Delhi is yet to realize its full potential. When compared to other global destinations, Delhi lags in some aspects of the hospitality sector, its associated parameters like night dining, open air eateries, and a vibrant

“When compared to other global destinations, Delhi lags in some aspects of the hospitality sector, its associated parameters like night dining, open air eateries, and a vibrant night economy are still largely missing. These have been various legacy issues like licensing and regulation.”

night economy are still largely missing. These have been various legacy issues like licensing and regulation. Because of these, enabling support systems have remained very restrictive and discouraging in Delhi. However, it has been my endeavor to address the issues with an open mind and sort them out. I'm happy to share that we have taken many decisions to encourage and promote ease of doing business in the national Capital. During the last one and a half year, we gave permissions to 667 establishments to operate on 24/7 basis. These permissions had

been pending since 2016 with the local government.

With my intervention, the MCD has now started granting licenses for open space dining to existing eateries. This has generated a robust response from about 300 establishments, which have already started doing so. As a major reform in the old licensing regime was introduced with a modified unified portal for licensing of eating and boarding and lodging service in Delhi. The licenses that were earlier taking three years to be issued can now be obtained in just 49 days. with a modified portal in place, an applicant can now seek a fresh license or renew the older one by getting simultaneous permission from all regulatory bodies such as Delhi Police, Delhi Fire Service, Delhi Pollution control Board, and MCD and NDMC on a single window without any human interface. The most notable feature of this portal is the provision of deemed approval of license. This means if the permission or the license is not granted





in the prescribed 49 days by the respective agency or the department, the applicant is deemed to have obtained it automatically. This is first of its kind initiative in the country, which aims at rationalizing and simplifies the licensing procedures. The documents required for grant of such clearances has been reduced to 28 from a staggering 103 earlier.

Online faceless police clearances certificate has replaced physical police verification, licenses are now being granted for three years by MCD, Delhi Police and Delhi Fire Service; earlier these were issued only for one year. Now the restaurants and bar in five-star hotels are allowed to operate 24/7 basis, while three-star hotels can operate up to 2:00am. This is a big step, in order to cater to the international tourist arriving in Delhi checking into their hotels mostly during the night hours. All other similar establishments are allowed to operate till 1:00am, which used to be only 11:00pm early.


Efforts were undertaken during the last one and a half years to develop new destinations for residents of Delhi and tourists. Attempts at preserving and restoring heritage to make them more attractive have been undertaken by the DDA. Massive efforts have been made to change the city's road scape by way of aesthetic upgradation. More than 150 fountains and over a hundred sculptures are now finding place of pride along the roads. All these are aimed at making Delhi more tourist friendly. I'm sure that these will go a long way in aiding the hospitality sector. The change is visible right from the time that one enters the city from the IGI airport; the stars of New Delhi to the Raj Ghat and the ISBT now have a new look. The roads of all of you must have seen at a dawn with life size statues and artefacts, fountains and vertical gardens, even the streets where we sit today. Sadar Patel Marg has undergone a transformation that is visible delight.

Cleanliness of the city has been accorded a high priority, and I'm sure all of you would have seen a noticeable improvement in the surroundings of your hotels. We are determined to change the aesthetic of Delhi. Lush green open public spaces with musical fountains, water bodies, and cafeteria have come up at newly developed theme parks on the west and east banks of Yamuna. These land spaces have been reclaimed from encroachment and waste. These newly made assets are attracting thousands of visitors daily. The DDA Mehrauli archaeological park replete with restored medieval, heritage structure and amphitheater, a water body and a cafe has emerged as visitors delight. The same is visible on various social media platforms like Instagram.

The Bharat Mandapam and the Yashobhoomi is Dwarika have come up as world class invention centres. These venues have the capacity to organize national, international conferences and exhibitions and hence have a potential to attract huge footfall in Delhi from abroad.

The historic St. James Church in Old Delhi and Hardayal Library have been recently restored to their deserving glory.

Even as a state enables you and your businesses, there lies upon you a corresponding responsibility towards society. I would request you to proactively come forward and partner with the government in all our efforts of enabling you. You can do this by playing your own role responsibly with regards to garbage disposal, disbursement of unused food to the needy, environment protection, value of water conservation, single use plastic, use of green energy number, all better services to your consumers in terms of quality as well as cost should be your guiding principles.

I would also invite the Hotel Association to come forward and partner with us to establish hospitality skilling centres for which we can provide infrastructure. I would also urge all hotels to adopt one road each and take responsibility for its greenery and beautification. Indian hotels have established strong tradition of world class hospitality, which draws upon Indian traditions of 'Atiti Devo Bhava'. I wish you all the best and hope that you will always put your best foot forward with maximum innovation in unity and efforts for the success of Indian hospitality, travel and tourism. Your efforts in strengthening the hospitality sector will play a key role in employment generation and nation building. 

ENERGY TRANSITION IN THE INDIAN INDUSTRY



We are at the cusp of monumental changes across the world on many fronts like water, waste, energy management and foremost is multi-layered climate threat which has systemic implications on multiple fronts like agriculture, water, health, and overall its impact the economic systems of the country.

by NIRANJAN KHATRI

My own journey in energy transition began in the 60's when I was in the 3rd standard. I was studying in the summer heat of Jamshedpur and I was reprimanded by my eldest sister for using the fan. She switched off the ceiling fan and asked me to learn to bear the heat while studying without use of electricity.

In hindsight, I am extremely grateful to her, she taught me EE-energy efficiency, resilience, adaptation and mitigation - the words that are being used in the context of how to tango with climate change! Those lessons I did not forget and I could sit in a room in Delhi's summers without a fan.

Dancing with complexity

I learnt EE in the deep bliss of a small pond in extreme geographical isolation when I was posted in Port Blair to run a small hotel in 1988. We stopped use of paper in many areas like moving from paper caps to cloth caps for the kitchen staff, the wasteful practice of using brown paper in the drawers of the guest rooms was replaced with lining the drawer with velvet cloth - a durable decision, made manure out of food waste - it did not go to the landfill site, repurposed spent cooking oil to soap for washing utensils.

All these simple steps seem insignificant but it has two dimensions, that of avoiding waste and defiling our natural resources lakes, rivers the seas and more importantly, the embodied energy of many products is avoided.

Our hotel was situated on a hill slope and I observed that the soil was going into the sea during the heavy monsoon in Port Blair. Being a naive hotelier those days, the only thing that came to my mind was to address the soil erosion by cementing the slopes.

My engineer reminded me that Charles Correa, the architect of the hotel, had conceptualized the hotel design in such a way that people were brought close to the beautiful nature in whichever direction of the hotel they walked in. The cementing of the slopes would deface the beautiful surroundings.

I was clueless about the concept of biomimicry in 1989, however, I observed that the spent tender coconut shells were littering Port Blair. We picked up a truck load of the unused shells. It was cut into half and anchored on the hill slope of the hotel, it helped us to arrest the soil erosion as opposed to using cement, sand and aggregate. It was my first foray into dema-



terialisation, a word which I didn't think about 34 years back.

Similarly, my office did not have AC in the mezzanine floor and the humidity was high, post monsoon. Instead of requisitioning for air an conditioner, I asked my engineer to puncture a hole in the ceiling and make a chimney on the top. My office became comfortable due to hot air going out naturally leading to thermal comfort of the occupants.

The reason why I am relating these examples is that today in world of declining resources and increasing population we have to think of radical, feasible ideas in resource reduction on a scale.

BEE has been playing a stellar role in reducing energy consumption through EE - energy efficiency through schemes like PAT- perform achieve and trade, ECBC- electricity conservation building code have been set for large buildings. Star rating code: 3, 4, 5 - star has been mandated for refrigerators, a/c.

The BEE certified AC carries a message that for every 1* temperature you raise, the electricity bill will come down by 6%. In 2017 the minister of power stated that the country has saved Rs 86,146 crores of energy through energy efficiency measures of BEE

Through consumer awareness, people buy devices which help to save power cost and give them returns in a stipulated time depending on the hours the device is used.

Recently fans have come under the ambit of BEE star rating. Old fans consume 65 watts of energy whereas EE fans introduced in the market consume 28 watts, more than 50 % savings over the conventional fans.

Hotels can dovetail these EE fans in the rooms and set the room AC temperature at 26 degree C as opposed to 18 to 20 degrees setting.

See the big picture

There is huge a potential of saving 15 to 20% energy on our current installed capacity. How can this be implemented? How do we discover hidden opportunities from the context of energy management in our country?

Delectable opportunities

There are millions of rest rooms across the globe where the lights are on 24x7, by adopting flexible service design, these lights can go off when there is no occupancy and light up when occupied (one or two lights can be on constantly from a safety angle). Similarly in the back of the house of many hotels the lights are on 24x7.

Organisations need to audit such locations and install day lighting fixtures and in the night bring the flexible lighting design into play. The same principle applies to millions of exhaust fans running 24x7. They should sense and operate on basis of occupancy.

Many hotels have beautiful views from the windows, yet all lights are put on with the smart card system when the guest enters the room during the day. If the curtains are opened, then there is no need to put on the lights in the day time (subject to time of the day and depending on agro climate conditions of the location - not recommended in the summer months)



“Organisations need to audit such locations and install day lighting fixtures and in the night bring the flexible lighting design into play. The same principle applies to millions of exhaust fans running 24x7. They should sense and operate on basis of occupancy.”

Decarbonisation

Earth heating cooling: The ambient temperature 3 metres below the earth's surface is always 23 degree C. Hence this can be used for cooling in summer and heating in winter. This technology can be used in new buildings and retrofitting in old building. The NIIT campus in Neemrana operates at 28 degree C in summer, when the outside temperature is 42 degree Celsius. CSE has started.

Waste heat recovery from DG set, air-conditioning plant is being used for heating water in many establishments

Solar energy through solar concentrators is an excellent example of biomimicry for generating steam for different applications.

Optimise the size of rooms not more than 300 sq feet, like in Japan. This reduces material intensity and energy use.

To summarise there are many areas where energy is being wasted, there is need to sharpen people's perceptual skills.

Energy efficiency is the world's 'first fuel' - and the main route to net zero, says IEA chief. **DI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Niranjan is Ex General Manager Environment Initiatives of ITC hotels. He pioneered the concept of eco designing in Welcomgroup Bay Island in Port Blair. Niranjan has headed CII's Renewable Energy cell and Founder and ex president of Andaman & Nicobar tourism guild.

ARPANA

A Multi-Dimensional Grass Roots Community Outreach, inspired by 'Maa'



by **MEETA JAIN**, General Manager, Arpana Trust in conversation with **PRIYAANKA BERRY IDNANI**

Arpana has been doing an extensive range of initiatives. What made you choose these fields and give these your priority? Arpana's story began in 1965 in a small two-room tenement nestled in the verdant fields of Karnal, Haryana. It began because of the arrival of a simple, charismatic, lady forever known as Ma, outwardly so ordinary but filled with an all-encompassing love with a unique attitude of adherence to the truth and reality. Ma being based in this community, identified with everyone around her and thus understood their needs. And as she said, when one sees the need, it is imperative to respond - to assist and alleviate their problems.

This simple credo has led to the establishment of a 100 bed Hospital at Madhuban, Karnal with multidisciplinary services providing

Set up only six decades ago, in a two-room tenement, this NGO has weathered local stigmas, the pandemic and other challenges, to become an effective instrument of social and economic change in the states of Haryana and Himachal. Read on a conversation that brings out the success story of Arpana, making the difference.

advanced medical care. It has led to the organization of landless 14,500 women into 1004 Self Help Groups in 106 villages in Haryana with an accumulated savings of over 65 crore rupees.

A similar sister program in Chamba district in Himachal has 81 SHGs with around 800 members saving 15 lakh rupees. These are tiny villages with the women having the saving potential of only a few rupees in a month. A big drive has been to make the women themselves responsible for their bookkeeping. *All the money is in Government banks in the name of the women!*

Many associated programs sprang up concurrently in the same villages be it sanitation drives, toilet for each home, building brick homes, training in digital technology, kitchen gardens, nutritional well being of women and children. These are simply too numerous to enumerate. They all came into being from the continuous evolving needs of the community. So the readers have to imagine a village in which the poorest of the poor woman who had absolutely no say in any matter even in her own house, living in a mud house with no toilet, mal nourished with not a rupee in her name now in the span of 25 years living in a brick house with toilets, owning a business with money in the bank and being elected to the village Panchayat! She maintains accounts and reports village problems via WhatsApp to the concerned government officials.



“A big push both in Haryana and Himachal has been to focus on the marginalized farmers. Arpana is a big believer in working with the Government and ensuring people are made aware of and can take advantage of the numerous government schemes. We have organised visits by experts and government officials to train the farmers in crop rotation, farming techniques, distribution of seeds etc.”

A big push both in Haryana and Himachal has been to focus on the marginalized farmers, i.e. those who own less than one hectare of land. Arpana is a big believer in working with the Government and ensuring people are made aware of and can take advantage of the numerous government schemes. We have organised visits by experts and government officials to train the farmers in crop rotation, farming techniques, distribution of seeds etc.

Arpana has constructed common irrigation tanks which has transformed the yield from farming in these villages. Farmers have been organized into Farmer Self Help Groups and registered under the NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) and thus can benefit under the various government schemes especially related to marketing of their products and micro credit.

Arpana's entry into the education sector came in the shape of handful of slum children in Delhi in 1991. Our volunteers began to work with illiterate families of daily wage workers whose children were first generational learners often bewildered and unable to keep up with their lessons in the Government schools that they attended. A holistic approach was adopted along with nutritious meals being provided and over the years numerous success stories of young lawyers, air hostesses, medical professionals have emerged. Today over 1500 students receive support in their education in Delhi.



Whether it is medical, education, rural women programs, disabled persons or supporting farmers one thing which unites is our belief that we become our best when we serve selflessly. We have seen this in the transformation of Arpana volunteers, all ordinary people doing extra ordinary work with immense passion and dedication.

We are all about the power of going 'local', starting at absolute grassroots with one village, one child, one woman. We are one with the community around us.

Ideally, we would like to take up one initiative at a time to begin with, the hospital in Karnal. If you can give us an idea of the scale and scope of the activities that go on there?

Arpana Hospital's OPD began in 1965 under a tree in Madhuban with rural folks queuing up to see the doctor. His only equipment was a first aid box, and the medicines were purchased from his own funds.

Today, it is a four storey multi-specialty Institute with excellent doctors and facilities, including four modular operation theatres, a 12-bed ICU, a Neonatal ICU, a 4 machine Dialysis Unit and a CT Scanner.

Additionally, there is digital X-ray service and a centralized laboratory, which functions round the-clock, ensuring timely diagnosis and initiation of treatment. There is a 24-hour pharmacy, and a canteen serving healthy meals.

The hospital has been accredited by the NABH (National Accreditation Board of Hospitals and Healthcare Providers). It uses the Government Insurance Program, Ayushman Bharat Yojna, for the uninsured and has been empanelled by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation.

It covers a population of one million persons in over 500 villages and towns. About 70,000 outpatients are served every year, as well as over 10,000 medical camp patients.

In the next five years, we plan to significantly augment our health-care services by establishing our own Catheterization Lab for advanced



Cardiac Care, our own fully functional Blood Bank, and by becoming a sophisticated Trauma Care Hospital.

This could not have been easy, scaling up from virtually zero to becoming a standard. What were the challenges on the rural development side and how did you meet them?

Our rural development program started with a focus on health services for mother and child. It was initiated in a single village 'Kutail Gamri', Haryana.

The time was the 1970's and the rural communities then were steeped in primitive, superstitious practices. It was a deeply patriarchal society, entrenched *purdah* system with women having no mobility, voice or recognition in the society.

The first five years were spent in combating deep resistance, fear and ignorance of the people. Nobody even understood the concept of vaccination and to inject oneself when one was healthy was considered blasphemy. There was a complete absence of government services. It was through sheer persistence and with one woman at a time that small breakthroughs were made. It was decided to use plays, stories, flashcards and skits to enable the women to gain visual literacy of the health information. The messages were woven into songs being sung in the villages in the local dialect. Slowly, over the next 20 years we could gain trust, especially of the women.

However, this all counted for nothing when seeing the dire poverty and marginalization of women, the micro credit program was started in 1997. Even though it was the women themselves who had come out to express their desire to start income generating activities and by now Arpana had inter-generational relationships with the families, it was still an uphill task.

The biggest handicap was the very low self-esteem of women coupled with the fear that Arpana would run away with their money! This time a team was created from within the women and a monthly stipend was paid. They were intensively trained in book keeping, conducting meetings and basic financial literacy. These in turn organized the women into self-help groups.

Today, the 1400 SHGs are welded into two dynamic grass root organizations - Janshakti Mahila Vikas Federation and Janshakti Mahila Unnati Federation providing a range of services. They have an accumulated savings of over 65 crore rupees with 98% of women taking loans and as a result there are now 6800 women entrepreneurs.

Women's skill development and the women support system are critical to the economy and social upliftment of our society. What has been your mission and your success ratio?

We have responded when we have seen the need in the community around it. Women being more vulnerable and marginalized have been at the forefront of our services.

Empowerment programs for rural women include:

- Facilitating self-help groups for savings,
- Enabling micro-credit loans,
- Enabling women to start their own businesses,
- Training in gender sensitization and digitalisation,
- Training in leadership roles, local governance and participatory community development.
- Nutritional awareness, sanitation drives, toilet building and kitchen gardening.
- Developing Handicrafts as an income resource.

The success of these programs is proven from the following success parameters:

- There are 14,500 women into 1004 Self Help Groups in 106 villages in Haryana with an accumulated savings of over 65 crore rupees. A similar sister program in Chamba district in Himachal has 81 SHGs with around 800 members saving 15 lakh rupees.
- 100% women have individual savings between Rs 10,000 and 250,000 and free access to credit.
- 6800 women have increased their financial security through their businesses.
- Earlier, there was not a single woman in any elected office. Today, women have fought elections and in 2022-2023, women have been elected as members of village councils in 54

- out of 100 villages in the program target area.
- 96% of the women have proper brick houses.
- Regular training has ensured that SHG members work for family and community health. 96% of the SHG women state that their families remain in better health than ever before.

Most importantly from earlier being victims of patriarchal orthodoxy, women have respect and a voice in their families and communities.

Arpana hospital has a dedicated mother and child wing equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and staffed by a team of highly skilled medical professionals dedicated to providing comprehensive healthcare services for mothers and children. Seeing the competency of our gynaecological department we have been requested by NDRI Karnal to operate the OPD in their premises also.

When Arpana started its educational support program it was very difficult to persuade parents to send their daughters as they were needed for household chores. Thanks to community mobilization, teachers and other stakeholders, the mindset of parents has changed and gradually from 50 girls in 2002 we have more than 550 girls coming to our educational program today. The parents over the years have seen their daughters become air hostesses, medical technicians, lawyers, teachers etc.

On the education front, it is important to get the child to school, to get the child to remain committed and be given an education that gets them jobs? How does this work for you in the field?

Arpana provides educational support, pre-school day care facilities (Bal Vatika), vocational training, career counselling and cultural opportunities to about 1500 slum dwelling children at Molarbund and Vasant Vihar in New Delhi.

These children are first-time learners in Government schools, bursting with energy, and full of potential – yet with no way to achieve their dreams in their present circumstances. Crowded classrooms, teacher absenteeism, impossibility of personal attention and lack of parental guidance leave them bewildered and unable to keep up with lessons, and hence drop out after primary school.

This is where the holistic approach of Arpana makes a difference:

- Tuition support is given to the children who attend Government schools so that they get the required knowledge to understand their lessons.



“Arpana Hospital's OPD began in 1965. Today, it is a four storey multi-specialty Institute with four modular operation theatres, a 12-bed ICU, a Neonatal ICU, a 4 machine Dialysis Unit and a CT Scanner. It covers a population of one million persons in over 500 villages and towns. About 70,000 outpatients are served every year, as well as over 10,000 medical camp patients.”

- With small classroom sizes ensuring excellent student teacher ratio personalised attention is possible to fill the gap of lack of guidance by illiterate parents.
- Teachers are additionally trained to counsel, guide, provide constant motivation and support to the children.
- Many of the teachers at Arpana come from the same communities as the students. In fact, some of them are ex-students and so understand the challenges faced by the students. They act as mediators between the parent and child, especially in the case of girls who are expected also to do heavy housework along with their studies.
- Scholarships are assured by Arpana where students wish to pursue higher education after Grade 12. This proves a great inducement to parents to continue the education.
- The Middle school is where there are high chances of drop out. To prevent this, especially for bright students, small scholarships are provided. Nearly all Arpana students go on to higher education or technical courses.

What have been the landmark achievements of the trust over its years of existence? What you feel proud of, what you feel says it all for the trust?

Arpana takes great pride and joy in many landmark achievements. Few of these and the people who achieved them we would like to share with you:

Prakashi along with her husband Dharambir is a resident of a small hamlet in village 'Kutail Gamri'. A daily wage labourer, she earned a meagre Rs. 20 a day. Her husband was a bonded labour to a local landlord. Her home was of mud, devoid of even minimal comforts.

After joining her SHG group, she began savings with Rs. 10/- per month. Gradually her savings grew. She took a loan to free her husband

“Arpana's entry into the education sector came in the shape of handful of slum children in Delhi in 1991. A holistic approach was adopted along with nutritious meals being provided and over the years numerous success stories of young lawyers, air hostesses, medical professionals have emerged. Today over 1500 students receive support in their education in Delhi.”

from bonded labour. Then she decided to become a business woman and took a loan to purchase 'combine', a machine which she rents out to farmers and earns a steady income. Her personal savings in the group now stand over Rs 1 lakh.

Chano Ram is the president of the farmer's group in village Chabri of the Jat kari Panchayat in Himachal. He took a loan of Rs. 15,000 from his group and put in some of his own money to start a small flour mill. All the village folk of Chabri and neighbouring villages now patronize his mill and he earns up to Rs. 10,000 a month.

Anjali was 5 years old when she joined Arpana school at Molarbund. She was a first generational learner with her parents being daily labourers.

She achieved her aspiration to become an advocate and cleared the All-India Bar Council Examination at her first attempt. Anjali is now a practicing advocate at Saket Court, New Delhi at Chamber Number 610.

There are innumerable such stories over the years which truly represent Arpana.

Outside recognition because of such achievements has been plenty and we are grateful and humbly accept them. To name a few:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) awarded Arpana the Sasakawa Health Prize for “outstanding innovative rural health services”.
- The Government of India's National Commission on Women honored Arpana programs to empower women, i.e. gender equity, and justice.
- In successive years, the Himotkarsh National Integration Award was conferred twice for Arpana's health and socio-economic programs in Himachal Pradesh.
- The State of Haryana has recognized Arpana's Family Planning activities and intensive Eye Programme with many awards and certificates over the years.



Who have been the inspirations and guiding lights behind your initiative? There are usually some big names like Narayan Murthy that come to mind. There are many who silently contribute their might!

Let's play the game of love, where both sides emerge victorious, and the score always remains 'Love All!'

These words of Ma encapsulate everything about Arpana. This concept of serving all selflessly, thus inculcating humane qualities in ourselves is what she blessed us with. This is our guiding light and Ma is our inspiration.

Funding is always the big issue. How have you ensured you are funding adequately? Or are these long-term commitments from corporates? There is so much of NGO work going on, is the task of fund raising becoming any more difficult?

Funding is always an ongoing process. We do have a corpus fund that gives us some measure of security. Both corporates and individual donors have supported us through the years. However, Covid has had a severe impact on our donations, and we are actively looking for support.

How can an MNC or corporate or an individual join in to help and donate at the organization?

- Individuals and companies can support us by both financial and In-kind donations as well as volunteering their skills and time.
- We are now intensively looking for CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funds from corporates to help fund our initiatives.
- Support can also be in the shape of sponsoring specific projects, events, or campaigns.

Please email harishwardayal@arpana.org or gm@arpana.org for further information.

What has been the nature of cooperation with governments, at the centre and the states? Is your funding coming also from government? Central ministries are also looking out for agencies who can execute on their behalf?

We have traditionally not received many government grants as a source of funds for our operations. We do get a small grant of Rs. 1 lakh from the Director General Health Services (Haryana) per year for Arpana Hospital.

Arpana is however an enthusiastic supporter of government schemes and one of our main aims is to spread the awareness of such schemes and also actively help people avail of such services.

In fact, government officials often approach us to help them in their projects because of our expertise and relationship with rural communities in Haryana and Himachal.

In recent years, government has clamped down on many NGOs and also on most of all foreign funds. What do you make of these moves from government? Has this affected you in any way?

For decades we have had FCRA registration without a break as Arpana is meticulous about following the rules and regulations that are set up for NGOs.

Early in 2022 we learnt that, along with thousands of other NGOs, the FCRA approval for both Arpana Trust and Arpana Research & Charities Trust to receive foreign funds, had been withdrawn.

But after Arpana's application for restoration, Arpana Trust received approval vide Registration Certificate from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, for the next 5 years for the Period 1st October, 2023, to 30th September 2028.

We have submitted our application for registration for Arpana Research & Charities Trust, which is still being processed. We expect it to be approved shortly.

We also feel that the Government would like to see less dependence on foreign funding for internal development. As our economy grows and we take pride in Indian achievements, we also would like to find more donors in India to fund our programs.

Your next moves? In the same fields or will you undertake newer verticals.

Arpana has over 60 years engaged in offering diverse services in multi locations serving over a million marginalized and vulnerable populations. Currently, we are in the process of reviewing, assessing and consolidating our existing operations before launching in any new area. We have also in this process realised that some of the initiatives have to be relaunched as with time, old problems have resurfaced. Just to give an example, substantial progress was made in the eradication of anaemia amongst village women. But recent government reports have suggested that rates of iron deficiency are again rising, indicating a new generation of women have to be educated and supported.

Is there any audit that you conduct that ensures your efforts are always in the right direction? Delivery, after all, is important for ongoing successes.

We have internal and external audits conducted annually. Over the years we have had several assessments done by professional agencies



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of our rural development programs. Arpana's Head of Rural Services regularly updates government officials in Haryana on the development progress Arpana is making in 106 local villages.

How big is your current organization's strength, in number of people, your total outreach?

Arpana has over 300 family members in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi. Arpana Hospital in Karnal serves 500 villages and towns serving a population of a million people. The schools in Delhi cover a population of 50,000 in slum resettlement colonies. The rural development programs in Haryana and Himachal cover a combined 166 villages with over 70,000 direct beneficiaries. **DI**

ABOUT

Arpana, based in India, has been carrying out programs since 1980, to improve health, provide education and enhance livelihood for over 500,000 marginalized and vulnerable people in rural Haryana and Himachal Pradesh and for underprivileged children in Delhi. These programs have received National and International Recognitions over the years.

The Incredible Mr. Ramachandran

The life and times of artist A. Ramachandran who transformed the way Indians looked at modern art.



Text by **KISHORE SINGH**

Photographs courtesy: **A. RAMACHANDRAN**

Sometimes you were introduced to him as a bird. Or you saw him perched atop a large lotus leaf as a turtle. Salman Rushdie, who gave us the term magic realism, would have been amazed by his ability to transform himself at whim into a fish one moment, a dragonfly the next. In the last drawing he made for me a few months before his demise, he posed himself as a painter with his sheets of paper and pens adrift amidst a lake of lotus blooms. I'd like to believe it was one of the last drawings he made over an eventful six-decade long career and is the more precious for it.

Born in Kerala, where he studied Malayali literature, A. Ramachandran might have pursued a career in music were it not for a

chanced glimpse in a journal of a sculpture by Ramkinkar Baij, the first modernist who was redefining the language of sculptural art in Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan. It was in that moment that Ramachandran Sir—as he came to be known by most—knew that he too wanted to be an artist. A scholarship found him arriving at Santiniketan in 1957, replacing one lush countryside with another, but his training would have to wait. Baij was a moody teacher and moodier artist. He took one look at Ramachandran's sketches and drawings and put them aside, advising the eager acolyte to learn from observing him at work—and so, for a year-and-a-half Ramachandran did just that. It honed his observation skills, but under the mentorship of Baij, Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee, the artist in him was finding nourishment. Later, he did a PhD on murals from his native Kerala where Tan Chameli, a Santiniketan-born Chinese artist whom Rabindranath Tagore had named, was asked to assist him. They married in 1967 and had two children—a daughter and son. Chameli, a watercolourist, has survived Ramachandran.

In those early years, Ramachandran would travel from Santiniketan to Calcutta (now Kolkata) where the influx of refugees, the violence on the urban streets, and Communist politics caused him to look at life through a Marxist lens. His early works were

His passing away on February 10 at the age of 89 years was a blow to the art world. The lotus ponds had lost their chronicler. Perhaps they did not bloom that day.

filled with the angst and anxieties of modern life. When, in 1964, he sent his works to New Delhi as part of a group exhibition, they were seen by Virender Kumar of Kumar Art Gallery and he was offered a remuneration to move to the capital and paint for him. It was incentive enough for Ramachandran and soon enough he was also offered the opportunity, along with artist Paramjit Singh, to set up the fine arts department at Jamia Millia Islamia University. That is when he became Ramachandran Sir to a legion of student artists.

Ramachandran was already a successful





Ramachandran was already a successful artist when the nuclear testing in Pokhran in May 1974, codenamed Operation Smiling Buddha, caused him a lot of grief. That the name of an apostle of peace and moderation should be lent to a weapon capable of harming millions was to him reprehensible, and his response to this was a series of paintings that he titled Nuclear Ragini in which images of shrouded women signified both beauty and death.

artist when the nuclear testing in Pokhran in May 1974, codenamed Operation Smiling Buddha, caused him a lot of grief. That the name of an apostle of peace and moderation should be lent to a weapon capable of harming millions was to him reprehensible, and his response to this was a series of paintings that he titled Nuclear Ragini in which images of shrouded women signified both beauty and death. These metamorphosed almost seamlessly into another series, Yayati, lending colour to a story in which a king asks for and appropriates his son's youth so he may continue to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh. That moment of epiphany came during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in New Delhi following the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "I happened to witness a number of ugly scenes around my residence in east Delhi that thoroughly shook my conscience," he told me. "Watching the gruesome scene of a mob chasing a young Sardar and killing him like a dog was so horrifying that I lost all appetite to paint



grotesque aspects of life. I felt I had no right to paint such subjects, creating a beautiful work of art out of cruelty and suffering with my skills in painting.”

It was on an excursion from Udaipur that he discovered Ubeshwar, Eklingji, Nagda and Jogi ka Talab surrounded by the low Aravallis and lotus ponds that saw him transform his genius into paintings of lotuses and the tribal people who lived in their midst. “I sat near the lotus pond and watched the changing hues of colour on large leaves, the tall stalks holding flowers and buds, swaying in the breeze along with golden reeds, like a graceful tribal dance,” he wrote of that magical moment. And all at

once, he found himself able to draw parallels between the aesthetics of Indian art—the Kerala murals, Ajanta frescoes and miniature paintings—and what he hoped to paint. Earlier, he had seen paintings of lotuses by Madhava Menon at Shrichitralayam in Trivandrum, and by Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee in Santiniketan. The latter half of his career he now devoted exclusively to painting the lotus ponds through day and night, sunshine and rain, summer and winter, in every mood and every light.


And along with the lotuses, he found himself painting portraits of the tribes that inhabited the region—the women (mostly) in their colourful skirts and mantles, the men in their turbans, going about their tasks, bathing in the lakes, celebrating weddings. So much so, he became a part of the family for the community who never missed a chance to be amidst them, travelling several times a year to capture the chimera of their lives.

Ramachandran was exuberant about these works; critics less so, lamenting that he had set Indian art back a hundred years. Ramachandran argued that aesthetics were always part of Indian art and could not be divorced from it. At any rate, his art found eager collectors. Exhibitions and retrospectives followed at prestigious galleries and the National Gallery of Modern Art. In time, he lent himself to representing the subject of his paintings—at least the people—as large, looming sculptures. It was at this time too that his own sardonic wit—for he never lacked in humour—exerted itself, and Ramachandran started inserting himself into these paintings as a voyeur. And a voyeur he was, after all. How else would he so evocatively paint the scenes that became a staple of his practice?

He was in his sixties when he started work on his most monumental paintings, often quadriptychs, that looked even more closely at the goings-on in the lotus ponds. These were among the largest oil paintings made by an artist in India, and he continued to paint them into his seventies, interspersing them with lyrical watercolours. He was bent upon creating a legacy—and he did.

Ramachandran was my go-to person when it came to knotty questions about art history in general, and about Santiniketan artists in particular, on whom he was an authority. These conversations in his Bharti Nagar studio in east Delhi were conducted over tea and laughter, for Ramachandran was self-deprecatingly funny, making himself his own butt of jokes. But over the last year or two, that wit had become to wilt a little. He was dispirited. He had attached an electric chair to the staircase railing to take him up from the ground floor to his spacious first floor studio. His gait was faltering. Worse, he was rapidly losing his eyesight. Yet, he jauntily labelled that last drawing he made for me “Lotus eater of Kerala”.

That was in August. We spoke again to each other over the phone in September. In December, I sent him a copy of a book that I was sure he could no longer read. His passing away on February 10 at the age of 89 years was a blow to the art world.

The lotus ponds had lost their chronicler. Perhaps they did not bloom that day. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kishore Singh is presently Director, Delhi Art Gallery. A most prolific writer, he has a regular column in Business

Standard. Author of several books, Kishore is a regular on seminars and talks on Indian art and artistes.

Where the Art Was

The 15th edition of India Art Fair dazzled as much with the art as it excelled in quality

by KISHORE SINGH

It was hard not to take Neha Kirpal seriously. Sunil Gautam, chairman of the public relations firm Hanmer & MSL, had sought an appointment, and the two wanted to discuss an exciting new project they were to launch in August 2008: the India Art Summit, at Pragati Maidan. Gautam lent the conversation gravitas, but it was Kirpal—whose brainchild it had been—who was its enthusiastic voice and votary. Ever since India's economic liberalisation, art galleries had been proliferating and art sales booming. The Summit hoped to provide a platform for galleries from around India, and some from overseas, to come together to offer collectors a taste of what the modern and contemporary art world had to offer. It would end up legitimising the art industry too, growing it into a force to reckon with as it chases a turnover target of Rs. 3,000 crore this fiscal ending.

It's another matter that 2008 was also the year the boom went bust with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the economic recession that caused ripples even in faraway India, and burst the bubble of the Indian art market. Rains played spoilsport too. When the exhibition halls at Pragati Maidan weren't leaking, they were playing host to pigeons whose droppings on artworks posed a potential hazard. Outdoor installations suffered the calumny of gale speed winds.

It wasn't a propitious start but by the second edition in 2009, the number of participating galleries had increased from 34 to 54, and the number of visitors who attended the fair had gone up from 6,000 to 40,000. Sunil Gautam divested his share, Kirpal picked up a majority 51 per cent, while the founders of the Hong Kong Art Fair, Sandy Angus and Will Ramsay picked up the rest. By the third edition, the Summit had been renamed the India Art Fair, and everyone wanted to see India-born British artist Anish Kapoor's dizzying sculptures alongside Damien's Hirst's butterfly-mounted paintings and diamond-encrusted skulls and Marc Quinn's refrigerated heads that explored "what it is to be human today". Instead of the rainy season, the calendar was shifted to end January-early February, and by the fourth edition it had relocated to the NSIC Grounds in Okhla where it has since continued to be held despite the





In the years since, the fortunes of the art fair have waxed and waned. While the number of visitors has continued to rise, international art galleries moved out (chiefly because of customs regulations regarding duties), and though as many as 91 galleries participated in 2014 and 2015, the number has since been curtailed to enhance the visitor experience.



crowded access that leads to traffic jams and chaos during art fair times.

In the years since, the fortunes of the art fair have waxed and waned. While the number of visitors has continued to rise, international art galleries moved out (chiefly because of customs regulations regarding duties), and though as many as 91 galleries participated in 2014 and 2015, the number has since been curtailed to enhance the visitor experience. In 2016, the owners of the popular Basel Art fair acquired 60.3 per cent of the controlling stake, with Angus now retaining 29.7 per cent and Kirpal 10 per cent as part of a bid to grow regional art fairs around the world. That changed soon enough and the company changed hands again with Kirpal too divesting her stake and moving on.

London's Jagdip Jagpal took over as fair director from her in 2017 and brought in a sense of leisurely informality. When she moved back to London in 2021, Jaya Ashokan took over as the fair director, ushering in its 14th and recently concluded 15th editions. Ashokan's major contribution this year was the introduction of design to complete the art experience and included designers Gunjan Gupta and Vikram Goyal (my favourites) as well as Karishma Swali of Chanakya School of Craft that was responsible for creating the giant tapestries of Madhvi and Manu Parekh's works for the Dior catwalks in Paris and Mumbai. The launch, in November 2023, of Art Mumbai—co-founded by Saffronart's Dinesh Vazirani, Chawla Art Gallery's Nakul Chawla and Grosvenor Gallery's Conor Macklin—added a competitive edge to the 2024 edition of the India Art fair, if only to see which is the better alternative.

The art fair, for those not in the know, consists of three large, weather-proof hangars which are split into booths where galleries vie to show the biggest names in South Asian (and some international) art, sourcing the greatest historical treasures especially to build their reputations, competing for the most popular contemporary artists, and participating in a four-day fiesta of talks, launches, openings, exhibitions, art performances, auction previews and after-parties. Exhibition venues outside the fair location, such as Bikaner House, are sold out a year in advance for major shows and city-based galleries reserve their best exhibitions to coincide with the fair. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art opens a new exhibition to kick off the celebrations and its founder Kiran Nadar's lunch for the movers and shakers of the art world is a litmus test



Well-known collectors were seen coasting through the booths on the VIP day led by that great doyenne, Kiran Nadar mingled with newbie collectors who came from the big cities and from small towns. The Congress Party's Sonia Gandhi dropped by too, as did G 20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant.

cial instinct to inform and educate audiences about better art in the hope of introducing them to newer artists and more avant-garde art. Yet, many boasted strong sales on the first day itself, some booths selling out the bulk of their inventory by the end of the fair.

Well-known collectors were seen coasting through the booths on the VIP day led by that great doyenne, Kiran Nadar. Mumbai's Kumaramangalam Birla and Kavita Singh, Dubai's Kito de Boer, New Delhi's Sunil Munjal and Vivek Burman mingled with newbie collectors who came from the big cities and from small towns. The Congress Party's Sonia Gandhi dropped by too, as did G 20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant. Of artists in the melee, one could hardly keep count: Paresh Maity, Jayasri Burman, Satish Gupta, Sakti Burman, Maite Delteil and Maya Burman, V. Ramesh and Veer Munshi, Manu Parekh and Madhvi Parekh, Vibha Galhotra, Jagannath Panda, Manisha Parekh, Seema Kohli, Subodh Gupta and Bharti Kher, Kavita Jaiswal and Kanchan Chander—a who's who of the Indian art world. Museum teams came in singly and in groups including Max Hollein of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and Tasneem Zakaria Mehta of the Bhau Daji Lad in Mumbai; the Kochi-Muziris Biennale's Bose Krishnamachari marked his colourful attendance, Chandigarh's Diwan Manna herded a group of art students from Punjab.

The fair management had announced 'art tours' that were led by specialist interns who pointed out the highlights at various booths among which DAG was a major pitstop with its Thomas Daniell landscape of Benares, Company Paintings and other rare masterpieces. Indian modern masters—in short supply and high demand—were represented at the DAG, Dhoomimal, Grosvenor, Aicon, Vadehra and Crayon booths by F. N. Souza, M. F. Husain, K. H. Ara, Himmat Shah, J. P. Gangooly, S. H. Raza, Tyeb Mehta, Nandalal Bose and that perennial, crowd-pulling favourite, Jamini Roy. Ravinder Reddy's heads, K. S. Radhakrishnan's figures of Musui and Maiya, and Thota

for who counts (or doesn't) in the rarefied world of art appreciation or promotion. (This year, the Museum opened a retrospective of the photographer Raghu Rai's works.) Artists turn up on most days to see and be seen, to be admired by collectors, swooned over by art lovers and wooed by galleries. Finally, of course, it is the collectors and curators, the museum directors and critics who show up who count for most.

There is no doubt that the quality of the art fair is world class, even though access and exits from the venue remain problematic. Both participants and audiences would be greatly pleased with a change in location with many hoping it will return to Pragati Maidan's vastly improved infrastructure in the shape of the recently inaugurated Bharat Mandapam. More importantly, the quality of art shown at the fair has improved too. If, previously, commercial transactions were important, most galleries that participate have now learned to rein in the commer-





That art is an appreciating asset was also a point to note as the term “investment” kept popping up time and again. But Investment or not, the India Art Fair remains one of the best forums in which to view, admire or buy art, and the recently concluded edition proved its vitality with a display and quality.

Vaikuntam’s vibrant men and women of rural Telengana were crowd-pullers. If Paresh Maity dazzled with his sizes, Manu Parekh was a compulsive draw with his colours. At Berlin-based gallery Neugerriemschneider, the huge panorama, a riff on Monet’s Water Lilies by dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, was a massive draw and selfie point.

There was as much air kissing as there were serious conversations. Veer Munshi’s work consisted of ‘miniature’ style paintings on wood that resembled Kashmiri carpets, reflecting the loss of homeland of the Kashmiri Pundits; Subodh Gupta’s bartans were a nod to hunger in a time of plenty; others concerned themselves with gender, economic or class marginalisation; Prayag Sonaghere’s compelling, large portraits were as realistic as photographs and addressed issues of loneliness in an ageing population. Artists were at pains to explain how their work was not static but experimental.

If there was too much art to take in, there was respite to be had on those cold February days over a drink or two at the various pop-up bars and restaurants that were nearly as popular as the booths and thronged with people who didn’t mind queueing up or sharing tables as long as there was a gin-and-tonic to be shared, or a kebab roll to be enjoyed. Chetan Seth’s daughter Ambika Seth-founded Caara and Elma’s are now staples but a food court made it a little easier to dispense food more efficiently to the thousands who wanted coffee and a bite of something. Even when the fair wound up nightly at 7:00 pm, the food court buzzed with diners and tipplers till much later while visitors decided where they wanted to go next. CMYK’s book stall showed off the range of art books published in India and overseas and was the venue for book launches including Seema’s Kohli’s much-awaited Restless Line in the Art of Seema Kohli that was launched at the Jaipur Literary Festival a day ahead of its debut at the art fair. Presenting partner BMW’s VIP Lounge was the venue for scintillating conversations, while other partners included



JSW, Stir, Tarun Tahliani, Rado, Chandon and dozens more.

At the end, though, an art fair isn’t just about experiences and exhilaration. For the serious viewer, this is Indian art at a glance, linking the past with the present, a mega-mall of known and lesser-known names whose works, seen together, provide a bird’s-eye view of the moment’s best on offer at prices both reasonable and exorbitant. If there were signed prints worth a few thousand, there were paintings worth several crore each in a marketplace brimming once again with exuberance and confidence. That art is an appreciating asset was also a point to note as the term “investment” kept popping up time and again.

But investment or not, the India Art Fair remains one of the best forums in which to view, admire or buy art, and the recently concluded edition proved its vitality with a display and quality that deserves to be recognised for its own heritage and legacy. **DI**



The Tulip, the Turban Flower of Spring

It's the time for tulips, diplomacy, and colours of hope. Tracing a recent history of the birth of the bulb, how it got transported into Netherlands, and in more recent times, to the valley in Srinagar, and now into New Delhi.

by DR NAVINA JAJA

In recent times, the alluring beauty of tulips has entranced Indians, and Delhi, the powerhouse of India has taken the lead to celebrate this Spring with Tulips.

Not only has India invested in projects to grow the bulb and indigenize the flower, but it has also gone ahead and organized a magnificent Tulip festival in the capital city!

The onset of Spring in India is marked by the "Vasant Panchami" festival, and this year, Delhi took on a kaleidoscopic background in the form of the second Delhi Tulip Festival. With over 2,00,000 tulip flowers blooming at over sixty locations, the central diplomatic road of Shantipath saw rows of vibrant tulips lined up, creating a mesmerizing sight. This initiative, which has spanned for some years now, is a part of the flora diplomacy between India and the Netherlands. While the initial flower bulbs came from the Netherlands, this year, the city's Lieutenant Governor declared that the bulbs were nurtured and procured from Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Himachal Pradesh, who have now invested in the Tulip economy.

The Tulip Festival, with its holistic approach, aimed at showcasing the heritage of a flower that has a history of power, religion, economics, and beauty amidst conflict zones. Tulip walks amidst banners on the Shantipath road illustrated the history of the Tulips and their significance. There were other interactive activities such as photography competitions and musical renditions, adding an extra layer of charm to the festival.

As summer dawns, The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar, Kashmir, the largest Tulip Garden in Asia, welcomes visitors to fields of colourful flowers.

Surrounded by a fascinating history, the Tulip stands amidst the Himalayan conflict zones of Afghanistan and Kashmir. It is a symbol of human resilience and human dignity. The Tulip carries an intriguing economic heritage from the Ottoman Empire to the Dutch Renaissance, illustrating the first major financial bubble. Presently, it is a visual phenomenon for flora tourism, which is placed as a lucrative commodity. Most of all, for the man in the seams of turbulent existence, the Tulip symbolizes hope and fuel to the human spirit.

The Persian tragic romance of Farhad and Shireen has Tulips emerging from the drops of Farhad's blood that appear after he commits suicide on learning of his beloved's death. The flower stands for martyrdom and selfless love. The tragic story is retold by Georgians, Parsis, Afghans, Kurds and many other communities.

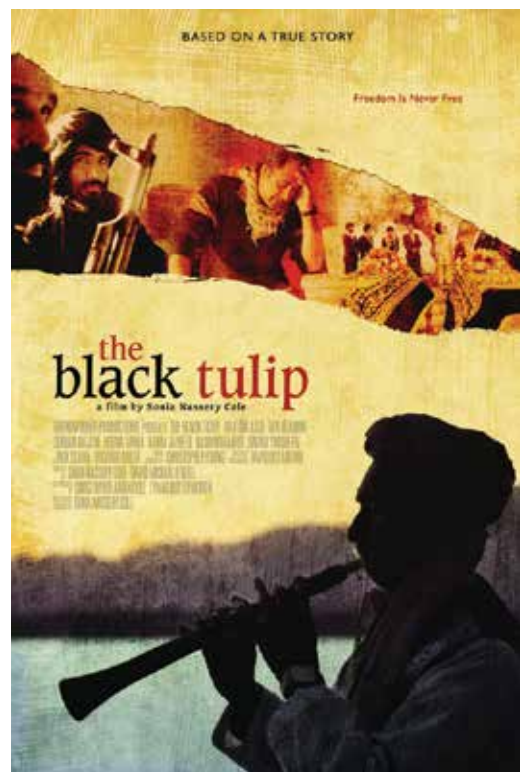
Tulip in Conflict Zones

The etymology of the three-petaled flower is "Turban". It is the national flower of Afghanistan, where the Black Tulip has gained contemporary relevance.

Says Afghan Sonia Nassery Cole, maker of the film 'Black Tulip' Afghanistan's entry at the Best Foreign Language Film (2011) Academy Award, "North Afghanistan in the Hindukush Mountains is the only place in the world where fields of the true black Tulips found. Many people have taken the bulbs to other countries, but no other soil has given truly Black Tulips. They represent the persona of an Afghan who is, despite everything, filled with pride, hope, and resilience." There are two stories linked to the Afghan Black Tulip. Cole narrates, "A young Afghan boy bravely fought the Soviets. He was killed. His family found a Black Tulip tattooed on his chest. The flower is delicate and resilient, and the petal colour forms a permanent stain. It has become a ritual among Afghans to mark the body of martyrs with the Black Tulip flower. In the 1970s, during the Soviet occupation, the helicopters called Black Tulips were in charge of picking the corpses of the Soviet soldiers lying in the fields."

Kashmir

For all the politics in Kashmir, the Spring has arrived, and the Tulips are set to bloom. In 2012, while Samina walked the brilliant flower fields of the Srinagar Garden, her father back home was bent embroidering shawls. "He will get 1500 rupees for the entire shawl. I get more by taking some women tourists around the Tulip garden," said young Samina. The garden provides an avenue of growth in the conflict-ridden region where jobs and shrinking agricultural land are critical socio-economic issues. Cultivation of flowers offers more significant profits than traditional farming. They require far less land and add to an early season of tourism in the state. Yes, even between the socio-political uncertainty in Afghanistan and Kashmir, the Tulip could provide the potential for unique soft diplomacy of floral trade and cultural skills.



Historical Journey

TULIP - OTTOMAN GARDEN

The Tulip is representative of the historical consumerist commodity culture. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Tulips were part of the interregional trade and growth of commerce both in the non-western Ottoman Empire and the phase of the European Renaissance heralding modernity. Tulips in the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) included floral - market channels comprising shops, footpath sellers, pushcarts, bazaars, and gardens. The players in this network had merchant guilds, governments, and research institutes. The Tulip phenomenon impacted popular culture; it integrated into fashion and decorative arts and depicted an elite status.

Indigenously grown in Central and West Asia, Tulip fever gained momentum in the 16th century. At the Ottoman Empire, an Austrian ambassador, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, observed the energetic markets related to the interregional floral trade and vibrant living consumption culture. Tulips were traded to Europe as exotic plants. Alongside the Ottoman's introduction, several legislative decrees were introduced to augment new flower markets.

Tulipmania- The First Financial Bubble

The Turkish Sultan, Suleman the Magnificent, presented De Busbecq with Tulip bulbs to take to Vienna. The latter, in turn, gave them to Charles de l'Écluse or Clusius. In the 1590s, Clusius was invited to teach at Leiden University in the Netherlands. There, he planted the bulbs and conducted several experiments as director of the botanical gardens.

The 17th-century Dutch History called the Tulip Mania represents an expeditious rise in demand and prices against the low supply of Tulips. Anne Goldgar argues in her book 'Tulipmania' that the economics around the flower is illustrative of the first major financial bubble. The Tulip became famous for several reasons. For example, it has a rare spontaneity to change colours. After the bulb remains in the ground



▲ Tulipmania



▲ Tulip Turban - Suleman The Magnificent

Anne Goldgar argues in her book 'Tulipmania' that the economics around the flower is illustrative of the first major financial bubble. The Tulip became famous for several reasons. Investors began to madly purchase Tulips, pushing their prices to unprecedented highs. The average price of a single flower exceeded the annual income of a skilled worker and cost more than some houses at the time. And soon, there was a crash.

and emerges only in the spring, people cannot comprehend why no one flower remains the same. The Tulip became more and more exotic and a symbol of upward mobility and higher social rank. People even poured red wine to get Red Tulips. Investors began to madly purchase Tulips, pushing their prices to unprecedented

highs. The average price of a single flower exceeded the annual income of a skilled worker and cost more than some houses at the time. And soon, there was a crash.

The Tulip period, the first quarter of the 18th century in Turkish History, was one where the oriental empire reached out to connect with the West. There was an inter-regional Tulip trade and culture representative of the initial modern consumer culture.

► TULIP
Shirin and
Farhad -
Rasool Majdi



Flora - Popular Culture, Arts and Religious Symbolism

Turkish History

Illustrates the flora culture of Tulips and other flowers. Flowers came to be part of the vocabulary of Turkish decorative arts. Floral and vegetal motifs, styles and designs were used by courtly artists. Ranging from Tulips, there were carnations, lilies, roses, and hyacinths, among others, seen in ceramics, carpets, fabrics, wall tiles and other decorative and textile arts for everyday consumption. Literary and religious energies captured flowers in poetry and symbolism.

Spiritual Symbol

The Turks called Tulips Laleh, derived from the Persian word Lale. The sound has an aural and orthographic essence of the word Allah. The Tulip gained importance as a spiritual symbol. Linked with the doctrine of Monotheism, the seed of the Tulip blossom emerges from only one branch. The Ottoman Sultan used the flower as a talisman against evil.


Intriguing Historical Vignettes

Tulips are edible and are used in salads. During the Second World War, the nutritious but bland Tulip bulb saved many lives in the Dutch famine called "Hongerwinter".

The flower has both cosmetic and medicinal uses. In 1980, the Red Tulip became the symbol of the Parkinson's Disease Foundation. Van der Wereld was a Dutch horticulturalist with Parkinson's disease. He developed a red and white Tulip called the 'Dr. James Parkinson's Tulip' was in honour of the English surgeon who originally described

Parkinson's in 1812.

The Tulip Gardens of Kashmir, the Netherlands and other countries present an idiom of coloured hope. Even in an environment of conflict, one recalls the famed romantic Bollywood song- "Dekha Toh yeh khwab toh yeh sislsile hue (The view of the blooming fields becomes the dream of elusive affairs). Tulips bloom in Spring as windows to paradise; standing upright, the single flower will not bend until the last leaf blows away. It is perfection, pride, and metaphorically inspired human dignity.

*"As then the Tulip for her morning sup
Of Heavenly Vintage from the soil looks up
Do you devoutly do the like till Heaven
To Earth, invert you – like an empty Cup!"*
Rubaiyat – Omar Khayyam 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

THE ORIGINAL RETURNS!

Test Match Cricket is Just as Much Fun!

by NAVIN BERRY

After a hiatus, we were back to watching a five-day series, a far cry from the quick fix T20 and its older version of ODI, the 20 overs and 50 overs miracles introduced to the game only recently. Before then, it was only the five days' matches, tending to become monotonous and long drawn out, tuk-tuk, with the likes of Bapu Nadkarni bowling 26 of his 29 overs as maidens. Easily, looking back, the time had come for a disruption and it did. Another remarkable 'Made in India', the T20 brand of cricket. Much like the 2-minute instant noodles that changed the history of how Indians changed the game in Indian food.

But, what did we see during these games. As we go into print, four from the five-day matches have concluded. Not long drawn out draws, as we used to encounter long time back, but invariably, not even entering the fifth day! What a change to see and consider. The term 'bazball' has been invented with the English thinking they were inventing that form of fast cricket. But whosoever invented it, it is here to stay as the new incarnation of the five-day format. Could this witness a newer version with a four-day affair, ensuring more interest?

Even more importantly, there was the return of the good old grace that we had long associated with the game, players dressed in whites, red ball, copy book batting, we saw the

There was the return of the good old grace that we had long associated with the game, players dressed in whites, red ball, copy book batting, we saw the sublimity was back.






sublimity was back. And indeed, we did watch the game, just as much on our JIO screens and the big screens at home, as we do the instant version. If it was a gentleman's game, meaning possibly confined to the well-to-do sections in society, those who can afford to play the game, that time has blissfully passed on. In India especially, the game has become more 'inclusive', as we remain so fond of using the term. It is no longer a game for the Bombay wallahs, no longer a big city sport, but now bringing a new crop from the real 'Bharat', across the country. Every other day, a new case study emerges, of how dreams are being made, how as a young boy he came to the big city, spent nights on the same maidan, where he is playing today as a champion. The five-day game only highlights, even more poignantly, how the culture of cricket has seeped into the hinterland, with sheer talent becoming the only consideration.

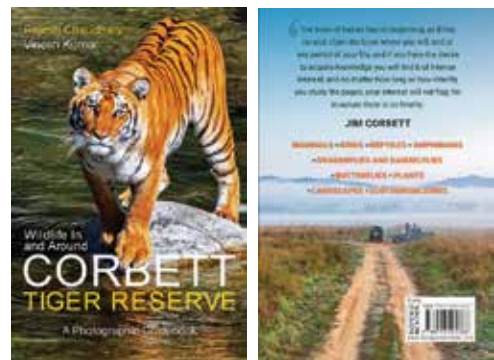


At this time, with India playing the maximum number of international games, across all formats combined, we fortunately have that depth of talent, with players in almost all positions vying with each other for a place in the final eleven. As an example, take the position of the wicket keepers – with two players in the chosen team, as is the norm, there are a few more equally talented ones behind the stumps, as well as with the bat, waiting in the wings. So it is in the pace department, and so in spin, we have plenty of back up available. And, while we may have thought we will split them across formats as per their style of play, many of them are showing their skills in more than one of them. Is the choice getting even more complicated?



Last year, at this time, we had Yashasvi Jaiswal on our cover, with his triumphant discovery unfolding in the IPL 23. It is a good chase for him to make it again, just a year thereafter. So, thus far, he has kept his tryst with his game. Perhaps only redoubled our faith in him, and his faith in his own game. All of his 22 years of age, he does look like the bright spot into our future game. Along with Subham Gill and not to forget the likes of Rinku Singh, Tilak Verma, Rituraj Gaekwad, we have plenty of young guns blazing on the international scene.

While one wishes the best to him, in his individual capacity and his possible contribution to Indian cricket into the future, and hopes he has many more miles to go, as Rohit Sharma said, much has been said about him already, the success so far of Yashasvi Jaiswal deserves to be refreshed, not that it would be forgotten so easily. The young crop is most heartening to see! Its their version of individual 'start-ups', playing their game as best as they can. 



A DIFFERENT GUIDE TO CORBETT

Holistic, detailed, not just about the animals, but Flora and Fauna

A recent release on Jim Corbett Reserve by Rajesh Chaudhry and Vinesh Kumar is a refreshing change. It brings a new range of documentation that would help both the tourist, the professional and also the local community.

by RAJESH CHAUDHRY in conversation with TEAM DI

What do you feel is the distinguishing feature of your book? Is this in any way, a first of a kind?

This book is about the wildlife, about Corbett Tiger Reserve and its surrounding areas. The book covers, in fact all the popular aspects, which a visitor would like to observe or see, for example, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, dragonflies, and then plants. The book also has a section that provides essential information to tourists on how to plan a trip. For example, there are several tourism zones in Corbett, these are eco-tourism zones. So, the book also provides the route map for these ecotourism zones. There are seven of them, and visuals and landscapes of each tourism zone as well as what are expectations. I mean, what kind of animals, landscape, and other things that are easily cited. The book is unique in the sense that the book is taking a holistic approach and not just describing tigers and elephants.

What was your idea of working upon it? Is there another book like this already?

No, there is no book on a particular Tiger Reserve. There are one or two similar books which talk about wildlife and a larger landscape. For example, there is a book called Central Wildlife in Central Asia by David Raju. There is another one, with a landscape approach. This book actually talks about a particular forest, a particular jungle.

And you have taken a holistic approach in terms of what all to see, what all exactly wildlife, flora, fauna, all that can be found. And, also in terms of a tourist experience?

Exactly. And in the starting chapter, we are basically also describing the physical setting, the historical background of Corbett. And then we have also explained something about nomenclature, a bit about biodiversity, how to preserve, why to preserve. And then inside the book there are about 700 species, which we have included. And each species has been given a key, how to identify the species in simple words, simple language. And then we have also added a few animals, which are known as ecosystem engineers, for example, dung beetle, termites, just to explain how they are important for the entire ecosystem. These animals by virtue of living and creating a habitat, they make habit habitat for other animals as well.

So, would you say that your book is, or your concern as an author, has been equally about environment protection?

Exactly. Exactly.

For how long have you been into wildlife viewing?

At least for past 12-13 years, yes, actively in wild places. And then I was observing wildlife in Delhi for another 10 years.



“We started our work sometime in 2015-16. We surveyed continuously, in fact, for five to six years. And after five to six years, we came out with the data and so-called observations.”

And what kindled or ignited your interest in wildlife?

Frankly speaking, I'm a zoologist. In fact, I did my BSc in Zoology from Hans Raj College. And then at that time only, I was also active in wildlife matters. And I think from there it all started. At that time there used to be a book by Toby Sinclair - Wildlife in India; this book I got from my then teacher. And I read it. And that is where I actually got hooked onto wildlife.

How long did it take you to put this book together?

Yeah, we started our work sometime in 2015-16. We surveyed continuously, in fact, for five to six years. And after five to six years, we came out with the data and so-called observations.

DI: These photographs, have they been taken by you?

Speaker 1

Most of them have been taken by us, but yes, there are certain photographs which have been taken from contributors which have been acknowledged. And these images, most of them, are from Corbett Tiger Reserve.

During these last few years, that you've been working on the book, have you noticed any changes happening in Corbett?

Lots of tourist activity has increased outside the tiger reserve. I would say at the boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve, lots of small structures like local tea shops have come.

But that is not disturbing the habitat?

I don't think that will not disturb. It is outside the boundary. It could be a passage for the animals from one part of the forest to another forest. So, in that way it will have some affect. The traffic has increased on the roads, in fact. These can be spoilt sports for wildlife if not checked.



But tourist activity otherwise is much more because in the sense, so many more hotels have come up.

Yes, many hotels have come up and people have started exploring their weekends at such areas. Adventure tourism and interest in wildlife is certainly increasing.

You had a formal book launch two days ago at the WWF facility. How was the book received?

I hope it is well received. It is going steadily, actually. We did get a good word on that day. Overall, it seems to be doing well.

DI: Any feedback that you have received that you may like to share?

Basically, the main suggestion at the book launch was that we should also write a Hindi version of this. So that it'll be also useful for local people and it will further penetrate in the deeper areas and reach those people who are living close to Corbett Tiger Reserve and that will be the real use of the book. So, we are looking into this. **DI**

ABOUT

Rajesh Chaudhry and Vinesh Kumar are the co-authors of this book, Corbett Tiger Reserve, an extensively researched guide to all that you need to know about the sanctuary. They are Delhi based. The book has been published by Niyogi Book. Prices at Rs. 1495/-

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