REFLECTIONS

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Transparency is the right drug for Ayush regulation

A simple regulatory remedy would be for the apex court to mandate state drug controllers to disclose all file-notings that form the basis of approval of "patent and proprietary" Ayush drugs

or over two years now, the Supreme Court has been hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the Indian Medical Association (IMA), on misleading advertisements made by Patanjali regarding its Ayurvedic products. The Ayurvedic industry poses a multi-dimensional challenge to public health in India today. It is important for both the Supreme Court and the lawyers advising it to be aware of the historical challenges in regulating the health care industry, lest they spend time reinventing the wheel.

Traditionally, there are five levers to reg-ulate the pharmaceutical industry: Advertising, safety, efficacy, standardisation, and good manufacturing practices. The Ayush (Ayurvedic, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy) industry today is subject to only the first lever — that is, its advertising is regulated. The common explanation offered by the Ayush industry to evade pro-viding data on the safety and efficacy of their products is that these have been used for centuries by many satisfied consumers. Except, this argument is not true on three

First, it is well known that one particular

branch of Ayurveda encourages the use of heavy metals, which is harmful to humans. There are well-researched and peer-reviewed studies published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) as far back as 2004 that document a heavymetal problem with Ayurvedic drugs. Other studies have focussed specifically on lead poisoning in Indian-origin patients known to consume Ayurvedic products.

Second, most Ayush products sold in India are classified as "patent and proprietary" — a category introduced via an amendment to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act (D&C Act) in 1982. These products, created with new ingredients that can't be traced to the old texts from where the industry generally draws its legitimacy, are practically "new drugs." When this category was created, there was no requirement that these products be tested to establish their safety and efficacy. In 2010, the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules were amended to introduce Rule 158B, which required the industry to provide evidence of safety and

efficacy. However, there was a catch. It did not require the industry to collect such evidence through standards that are applicable to modern medicine, for example, double-blinded, randomised clinical trials. Instead, it prescribed "pilot studies" as the preferred methodology, and nobody really knows what that meant. The Ayush ministry first said that it meant "clinical trial" before changing its mind in 2018

and clarifying that no "clinical trials" were required for Ayush products.

Third, India does not have a robust pharmacovigilance system to monitor adverse events as a result of Ayush products. In short, nobody has been keeping an eye on the adverse events faced by patients consuming Ayush products. Individual doctors often publish case studies, but this a poor proxy for a systematic pharmacovigilance programme that tracks adverse

events resulting from use of these products.

Since the Ayush industry has a licence to sell products without demonstrating any evidence of safety or efficacy, it is critical to exercise the only lever that can restrain the excesses of the industry, namely advertising regulations. However, the Ayush ministry deleted Rule 170 of the D&C Rules during the pend-ency of the IMA PIL in July 2024.

The history of Rule 170 of the D&C Act is crucial in understanding the modus operandi of the Ayush industry. Its origin can be traced back to continuous pressure piled on the Ayush ministry by the parliamentary standing committee (PSC) on health over the brazen claims

being made by the Ayush industry. In four different reports tabled in 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2018, the PSC repeatedly flagged this issue, pointing out that the existing law -Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act — regarding advertising of drugs was not effective in checking the claims of the Ayush industry, through advertisements that boasted of drugs that



India does not have a robust pharmacovigilance system to monitor adverse events as a result of use of Ayush products

could cure cancer, AIDS, and diabetes.

After repeated pressure from the PSC the Ayush ministry first floated the idea of Rule 170 on April 4, 2016, when it published a draft of the rule in the Gazette of India, inviting public feedback. This proposed draft created an ex-ante mechanism — the industry needed to seek permission for its advertisements from regulators before using them in their marketing campaigns. The regulator was to verify whether the advertisement made misleading claims about the effectiveness of the drug. For 37 medical conditions, it prohibited any advertisement by the industry.

The draft Rule 170 faced immense push-back from the industry. It did not get notified for years; the PSC continued to pile pressure on the Ayush ministry, questioning its "laidback" approach in a report tabled in 2018. Finally, on December 21, 2018, the ministry notified it into law. In early 2019, the Ayush industry challenged the constitutionality of the rule before three different high courts, claiming it infringed on their freedom of speech.

This is, at best, a questionable claim given India has a censorship regime for cinema and the fact that, in 1954, in a landmark case lost by the Ayush industry, the Supreme Court ruled that the fundamental right to speech did not include commercial speech such as advertisements. In any event, the legality of Rule 170 should have been swiftly decided by the high courts. Instead, the high courts stayed the rule without deciding on the matter. As a result, it was never enforced against the industry

Fast forward to the IMA's PIL, where the issue of Rule 170 and the lack of its enforcement came up before the court. The Ayush ministry issued a notification on July 2, 2024, while the case was sub judice, omitting Rule 170 from the law. A rule that was created to hold the industry accountable was removed from the law without ever being enforced. The Supreme Court has stayed the deletion of the rule, but this stay

is an untenable remedy in the long term. Going ahead, it is difficult to predict the direction of this PIL. The Supreme Court's track record in tackling regulatory issues via the PIL route is unfortunately not

impressive. A simple remedy with potentially longterm consequences is for the apex court to mandate all state drug controllers to disclose all file-notings that form the basis of approval of "patent and proprietary" Ayush drugs. Sunlight, it is said, is the best disinfectant. By providing consumers and doctors with more information about the approval process by which these prod ucts are marketed, the apex court will empower patients to make better decisions. That would be a victory for public health in

> Dinesh Thakur and Prashant Reddy T are co-authors of The Truth Pill: The Myth of Drug Regulation The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar

The good life of the Raj in a Calcutta hotel, club

Why I love LinkedIn, and LinkedIn stories

irst impressions, I admit, can be misleading, but they can also be indelible. That's certainly true of my trip to "Calcutta" last weekend. I don't know the city well and haven't visited for at least five years, but I came away irresistibly convinced that some of the West Bengal capital. And the Calcuttans I met wouldn't have it any other way. That's why I am deliberately using the city's colonial name.

In the heart of the city, just off Park Street, as it used to be called, in a nondescript building you wouldn't otherwise notice, nestles a delightful, Raj-inspired boutique hotel called The Glenburn. Once you get past the unsightly surroundings and the shabby entrance, you enter a

LOK ASTHANA. Why is your profile name in all caps?" I

asked my father, who had joined LinkedIn, funnily,

after his retirement. "It feels like you are shouting your name out there." I

explained the rules of the internet, and

my father listened like a student, like in all

matters of technology, where I was the

father figure, armed with an education he

"In our times, when we used to fill

paper forms, we had to write our name in

block letters. That habit stayed," came the

reply. I immediately noted this fake anec-

dote to share on my LinkedIn,

after appending a few leader-

network where you are happy

when a bald, 40+ male views

your profile — it could be a CEO

or a senior manager who could

offer you a better job or a pro-

motion. The unemployment

rate is being calculated by

counting the number of #OpenToWork

badges on LinkedIn. From the days of

encircling job ads in a newspaper, we are

now in the age of encircling profile pic-

tures with a badge: #OpenToWork. As if,

after years of being closed to the idea of

any hardship, you have finally warmed up

to the idea of actually working at your day

It looks a bit desperate. Having raised

money from VCs and worked in the cor-

porate sector, I can assure you, the first

step to get anything in life is to pretend

On LinkedIn, you can't even tell a per-

son what you really think of him. So, you

you don't need it.

LinkedIn is the only social

paid for.

ship lessons.

world from a forgotten past on the seventh and eighth floors. Its nine rooms have grand four-poster beds, parquet floors and chandeliers, carved wooden sofas and varnished console tables, chintz cushions and brass-framed antique floral prints. The enormous bathrooms contain old-fashioned enamel tubs you can sinl into and stretch to your full length.

There's a morning room where I breakfasted, reading a three-day old copy of The London Times. It felt more relevant than a contemporary edition of an Indian newspaper! The Times' Court Circular carried details of the King's programme — he was in Balmoral, perhaps shooting grouse and when I looked up, I found the Victoria Memorial staring back at me. Curzon couldn't have asked for a finer view as he sipped his morning coffee!

Dinesh

Thakur

Prashant

Reddy T

The view from the other side was of the Calcutta Maidan. Last Sunday, it looked verdant and inviting. In the far distance, I could spot men on horseback, merrily gal-loping on a cool monsoon morning. Watching them, it seemed, were ladies carrying parasols and little children and their pet dogs playing on the lush green. Would they be coming to The Glenburn for tiffin afterwards? Surely, pink gins would be the most appropriate way of concluding this excursion?

I had been invited to talk to members of the Bengal Club. It's a world apart from the Puniabi dhabas that Delhi's clubs have been reduced to. Here, the British connection is fondly cherished, painstakingly maintained, and thoroughly enjoyed.

The audience comprised elegant ladies in chiffon sarees and pearl necklaces and shirts. There wasn't a *kurta-pyjama* to be seen. Nor a bhadralok dhoti. No doubt, they knew Bengali, but I could only hear English. Spoken as it would be in Knights-

We dined under the stern gaze of a lifesize oil painting of General Outram. He was a former president of the Club now. no doubt, keeping a sharp eye on the new membership. He certainly would have approved of the menu.

It was a four-course meal with two wines, and the silver cutlery was resplendently laid on both sides of the shining white china plates. We had carrot and celery soup, rock lobsters, roast mutton with cranberry jelly and mint sauce, rounded off with delicate brandy snaps. The evening ended with liqueurs served frappe in crystal glasses with sleek stems. It reminded me of Curzon's vaunted boast: 'I dine at Blenheim once a week!

Blighty has changed, but there is a bit of Calcutta that remains defiantly the same. No doubt, the tragedy at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, the mass protests, and the uncertain future of the chief minister were discussed, debated, and, this being Bengal, argued over but they seemed to belong to a different world. The one outside these hallowed precincts.

start Sundays with a bowl of steaming porridge, followed by scrambled eggs and bacon, and you're wondering what Amrit Kaal is likely to do to you. I recommend The Glenburn and the Bengal Club. There, you can be confident that time will always stand still.

> Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story. The views expressed are personal

In Africa, China eyes minerals and UN clout

hina's Forum with Africa (FOCAC) was a success, with 53 of the 55 countries of African Union participating. The two that did not were Eswatini and the Sahrawi Arab Republic, which have no diplomatic relations with China. Though many African countries complained about summit fatigue, with a spate of recently concluded ones and more scheduled shortly ahead, all but the two turned up in Beijing.

This shows the sway China holds over a large swathe of Africa, wooing and being wooed by it. China advances an image of South cooperation. Through this, it intends to challenge India's narrative about

being the voice of the Global South. Beijing is clear that it doesn't want Delhi to walk off with that mantle.

China has announced \$59 billion for ten partnership programmes to be implemented in Africa. The nomenclature of some is intriguing — "mutual learning among civilizations" — but there are others that are more conven-

tional (green economy, development and supply chain collaboration, connectivity, and health care). Africa wants Chinese funds for development but doesn't want further debt stress. Of the \$59 billion in Chinese funding, \$30 billion will be regular loans, and the remainder will be interest-free loans and grants. On top of that, there would be \$10 billion of FDI by Chinese companies. This is akin to the earlier Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) commitments. Between 2000 and 2023. Chinese financial institutions lent \$182.28 billion to 49 African countries and seven regional DFIs, according to an analysis by Boston University researchers.

African leaders have spoken to China about trade imbalance. China is Africa's largest trading partner but has a surplus of \$63.5 billion. African leaders seek better access to the Chinese markets for African products, by adding value to minerals and resources that China acquires from African sources.

China has announced that it will allow tariff-free imports from African Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to help their exports. India had announced such a duty-free tariff

preference scheme for all African LDCs in 2008. There has been significant Indian FDI in African countries for products India needs, with the maximum impact seen in agro-processing. Will China channel its FDI into such buy-back arrangements? China's main economic partners in Africa however are not the LDCs.

Beijing's pursuit is more BRI projects, despite the poor run in implementing already contracted ones. BRI projects in Africa often do not build local capacities or provide local companies with subcontracttry. However, the latter find it difficult to bor-

row from others and thus return to China. Weak regulatory capacity in several African countries makes borrowing and repayments a difficult task. Most Chinese loans are compounded by restrictive options

for restructuring.
At the same time, Africa has Gurjit Singh newer alternatives, and can leverage them for better deals from

China, since the latter clearly sees Africa as a battle ground in its global rivalry with the United States. China will expand its Global Security Ini-

tiative by providing military cooperation funding to select African countries for training and capacity building. African troops are expected to visit China under this programme. Joint exercises and patrols are also on the table. China is seeking to follow the tradition of Russia stepping into countries from where western partners, mainly France, have exited. Unlike Russia's paramilitary option, China is offering a capacitybuilding approach to acquire military influence in target countries.

As China moves on an "all-weather China-Africa community", it will prioritise African preferences laid out in Agenda 2063. Yet, by working mainly bilaterally, China seeks more access to critical minerals and resources while expanding its reach for national prestige and African votes in UN bodies.

Gurjit Singh is a former Indian ambassador to the African Union, and is honorary professor, IIT Indore. The views are personal



LinkedIn is primarily used to get better jobs. Every comment, like, or share is a small step towards making yourself look good to a potential recruiter

After every move, you look at the camera, to notice it noticing you. Stalk other profiles, notice their career path and then come back to your own profile, and look at it from the eyes of a recruiter. Is it good enough? Repeat. That's how one spends time on LinkedIn.

business-to-business software-as-a-ser-

jobs. Every comment, like, or share is a

small step towards making yourself look

good to a potential recruiter. It's like

working under constant scrutiny of CCTV.

LinkedIn is primarily used to get better

vice (SaaS) lessons.

People here don't want to be **Abhishek** "friends", they want to "connect" Asthana and create plumbing for CVs, sales pitches, business proposals to flow easily. It's a giant mesh of

connections, with a pursuit to reduce the degrees of separation. LinkedIn is the only network that prominently displays this, right next to a profile name, to encourage social climbing. The goal is to reduce the degrees of separation between you and that guy you worship.

LinkedIn is like Pragati Maidan these days. There's always a trade fair going on, and every post on your feed is a stall to sale: "Please hire me. Please invest in my company. Please buy my courses. I am commenting-for-better-reach so that you visit my stall too. Also, while you are here, endorse me for a fake skill." It's the mutual back-scratching Olympics

For the more accomplished ones, LinkedIn only shows people who are doing much better than you. This triggers imposter syndrome. Someone who raised \$1 million from VCs will be shown a founder who's humble-bragging about raising \$10 million. It only shows successful outliers, to give an impression that it is just you who's struggling. Some might argue that this pushes you to do better or, should I say, plot better for that next promotion. And such competition leads prominent

B-schools to prey on this insecurity: "Attend a two-week course, and become a life-long alumnus of Harvard Business School" — a tag you can prominently display, replacing that private college you went to. Such LinkedIn jewellery has a lot of buyers.

It's not totally wrong, though. Often, people who have accomplished a lot to outgrow their local college brand, need that shiny name befitting their corporate Then, there are the storytellers, beyond

the earthly designations their HR typed

out on their appointment letter. Most of their stories are written by ChatGPT, which gets hundreds of comments, again written by ChatGPT. It's a fascinating contest of Artificial Intelligence. After collecting enough anecdotal evidence, I can tell you, anyone who has a display picture with a microphone in hand is most likely either a fraud or a potential fraud. If you feel offended, consider yourself an outlier. Another key benefit of LinkedIn is

stalking your schoolmates. When I see my classmates who were laggards at studies, made fun of teachers, and cheated copiously during exams and yet failed a lot, now sporting fancy designations and sharing work-related serious stuff — it's a funny feeling. It shows, everybody finds their own way. Life mends all and gives enough opportunities to do well, so that, one day, they can create a LinkedIn profile and rub it on the faces of judgmental classmates like me. That's why I love it.

Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur, and tweets as @gabbbarsingh. The views expressed are personal



{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Avoid inserting Pak in J&K polls This is with reference to

"Inserting Pakistan into J&K poll talk makes little sense" by DP Srivastava (Sep 1). The revival of democratic processes in Jammu and Kashmir is encouraging, but Pakistan's track record in POK and Gilgit-Baltistan offers little hope. Dialogue with Pakistan won't change much in J&K.

Shreya Mookherjee

A malicious accusation

This is with reference to "A strange accusation, and malice in Faujiland" by Karan Thapar (Sep 1). Raoof Khan's depiction as anti-national by the Pakistan authorities is a troubling portent for the politics in the country. The incident holds several lessons for India.

On the issue of English in India

This is with reference to "English, and India's legacy of languages" by Pavan K Varma (Sep 1). Too much has been said about the role of English in modern India. It is time to give the sentiments of Macaulay a quiet burial and deal with the issue as it is today.

Anthony Henriques

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

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Across THEAISLE



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In his speech, the prime minister said, "...today, the people of Bharat are filled with a renewed confidence." Just a few days ago, we saw news reports that 395,000 candidates, including 6,112 postgraduates, 39,990 graduates and 117,144 who had studied upto Class 12, had applied for the position of sweeper in the Haryana government at a salary of Rs 15,000 per month on a contract basis. Surely, that is

no sign of "renewed

confidence"

No comfort in 100 days

I WAS very happy that I was able to read an entire speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in English, thanks to Economic Times. He spoke in Hindi, and I assume the translation was accurate. Mr Modi congratulated his government and told the World Leaders Forum that in the past ten years "our economy has expanded by nearly 90 per cent". Admirable — if it was correct. The numbers that I have are:

GDP at constant prices On 31 March 2014 Rs 98,01,370 crore On 31 March 2024 Rs 173,81,722 crore

The increase was Rs 74,88,911 crore and the growth factor works out to 1.7734 or a growth rate of 77.34 per cent. Even that is good for a developing country. Of course, one must compare that rate with the rates of the previous two decades since liberalization. Between 1991-92 and 2003-04(13 years) the size of the GDP (proxy for the economy) doubled. Again, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (10 UPA years), the size of the GDP doubled. I had estimated that the GDP would not double in Mr Modi's ten years and said so in Parliament; the prime minister has now confirmed it. India's economy has indeed grown but we could have done better.

UNEMPLOYMENT— THE ELEPHANT

In his speech, the prime minister said,

"...today, the people of Bharat are filled with a renewed confidence." Just a few days ago, we saw news reports that 395,000 candidates, including 6,112 postgraduates, 39,990 graduates and 117,144 who had studied upto Class 12, had applied for the position of sweeper in the Haryana government at a salary of Rs 15,000 per month on a *contract* basis. Surely, that is no sign of "renewed confidence". I know there are apologists who will interpret the story to mean that people already employed are seeking the se-

curity of a government job! I do not wish

to break their reverie.

The prime minister also said "The aspirational youth and women of Bharat have voted for continuity, political stability and economic growth." Many observers think that the vote was for the opposite. The vote was for change, constitutional governance and growth with equality. The two sets of goals are poles apart: continuity vs change, political stability vs constitutional governance and economic growth vs growth with equality. Just as the prime minister tried to make a case for approval of his set of goals, a powerful argument can be made for people's disapproval of the BJP's governance, and desire for a re-set of

WANTED A RE-SET

I wish to stay on 'unemployment' in this column. The All India unemployment

rate, according to CMIE, is 9.2 per cent. The Congress Manifesto 2024 said that after 33 years since liberalization, "the time is ripe for a re-set of economic policy". The Manifesto put forward two specific proposals on 'jobs':

■ Apprenticeship scheme that will guarantee a one-year apprenticeship to every graduate and diploma holder to impart skills, enhance employability and provide regular jobs to millions of youth.

■ Employment-linked Incentive scheme (ELI) for corporates to win tax credits for additional hiring against regular, quality jobs.

I was delighted when the finance minister borrowed the ideas and included them in her Budget speech. Mr Modi and his ministers were sworn in on June 9, 2024. The BJP claimed that a third-term Modi government will have a plan ready to be rolled out in the first 100 days. The 100 days will be completed on September 17. The government has shown no urgency to roll out the two Budget announcements. Contrast the zeal with which the government tried to pass the Wakf (Amendment) Bill and push the lateral entry into senior government positions; they were forced to put both on 'pause'.

BAD NEWS MOUNTS

Meanwhile, we have more bad news on the employment front: Indian companies have laid off people in 2023

and in 2024. Among them are Swiggy, Ola, Paytm, etc. Tech companies have announced that they are in the process of rightsizing their workforce.

In a column in Times of India, September 5, 2024, two educationists reported that IIT Mumbai has been able to place only 75 per cent of its graduating class this year. Adjusted against the exchange rate, the salaries seem static. The placement of graduates of institutions other than the IITs is at a disappointing level of 30 per cent

The World Bank's India Economic Update (September 2024) reported that urban youth employment remained elevated at 17 per cent. Thanks to a muddled trade policy, India has not increased export earnings from labourintensive sectors such as leather and garments. The World Bank report advised a critical review of India's approach to trade and pointed out that India has not been able to take advantage of China's withdrawal from labour-intensive manufactured goods. The report pointed to India's protectionist policies and aversion to free trade agreements.

The issue of unemployment will not go away by denial or rhetoric or fake statistics. Unemployment is a ticking time bomb and the Modi 2.1 government has done nothing — absolutely nothing — to address to defuse it since June 9.

presentation of what was intended to be

and still is an independence gift". But,

he added, "the fine workmanship in-

volved in the making of this chair is

painfully time-consuming". On top of

that, one of the two craftsmen who spe-

cialised in that specific type of wood-

carving was out of commission for over

be anomalous to label this chair an in-

Commissioner said on a lighter note,

adding that "India of (Mahatma) Gandhi

and India of (Jawaharlal) Nehru salutes

this peaceful, forward-looking nation".

and Tobago's achievements over the last

six years in the fields of political advance-

ment and economic development, he

would perhaps not be wrong in not call-

ing this chair an independence gift but a "coming-of-age" present from an admir-

The gift was finally presented at 1.45

With the presentation of the gift, the

House passed a resolution to thank the

Government of India and its people. "The

gesture which we receive today in the

form of this chair, which will adorn this

House from now on, will be perhaps the

most tangible expression for us all to see.

Beautifully carved, it will be a constant

reminder of the art and culture of the

people of India, so many of whose sons

and daughters now form an integral part

ing brother (India).

Lal also noted how in view of Trinidad

"Perhaps, at this late stage, it would

a year on account of an illness.

dependence gift," the

Fifth **COLUMN TAVLEEN SINGH** Twitter@tavleen_singh

Humility works better than arrogance

THE DUST has settled, the shockwaves that the results of the general election sent have ebbed. It is time for dispassionate analysis. This is necessary because the main players on both sides, are displaying the same arrogance and that same delusional sense of power that they did before. In my opinion, the worst consequence of this is that the Bharatiya Janata Party's senior political strategists have shown no sign that they intend to stem the tide of hatred and hate crimes that have so shamed India in the past ten years. Here, I would like to remind you that although there were horrible communal riots, massacres and at least one pogrom before Narendra Modi became prime minister, what is new are hate crimes and the use of mobs to lynch Muslims in public places. This is always done to spread terror and it always does.

In my conversations with people since the results came. I find that even those who voted for Narendra Modi for the third time feel that the divisions his government's policies have created between Hindus and Muslims must be healed. In the words of a young businessman, "This Hindu-Muslim business has gone too far. I voted for Modi again because frankly I don't see Rahul Gandhi as an alternative, but I think this targeting of Muslims is dangerous." I quote him because I have heard similar things said by everyone who voted for Modi, but were pleased that the BJP did not get a full majority. For some reason, those seated in the highest echelons of the ruling party have become deaf.

In recent days, there have been three hate crimes. The first, against a young Bengali worker who was beaten to death in a Haryana village by young men who dragged him to a public square, charged him with eating beef and killed him. The second, was on a train going to Mumbai, in which young men beat up an old Muslim man in his seventies because he was carrying meat. Both violent incidents were videoed and uploaded with pride. I watched the old man being abused and beaten while he protested that he carried buffalo meat. Buffaloes do not count as cows. And India exports more buffalo meat than almost any other country. The final hate crime was against a Hindu student who vigilantes killed because they mistook him for a Muslim cattle trader. Not a single BJP leader has spoken out against these hate crimes because they

Here is what I think Opposition leaders are doing wrong. They are swaggering about as if they won the last election. They did not. And yet, almost not a day goes by when Rahul Gandhi does not pop up somewhere or other to say something offensive about the Prime Minister. Most recently, he has taken to boasting about how Modi's "56-inch chest" has shriveled so much that he now walks with a stoop. Other Opposition leaders are more circumspect and less childish in their comments, but somehow none of them are raising the serious political issues that

have been too busy in Bengal.

matter.

On the political front, they have failed to raise the issue of hate crimes. And totally failed to make political capital out of the recent judgment of the Supreme Court against bulldozer justice. The loudest reaction has come ironically from Bulldozer Baba himself, who seems undeterred by the strictures and wanders about making reckless foreign policy statements like dragging the events in Bangladesh into our own problems with caste. "If we get divided, we will be cut to pieces like in Bangladesh", is what he said recently. How the events in Bangladesh are connected to our own caste divisions is a mystery that needs explanation.

On the economic front, the Opposition

has almost totally failed to exploit the revelations against the head of SEBI. She has chosen to brazen things out but why is the Opposition not making at least as much noise about her refusal to resign as they made when the scandal broke about the **NEET examination? The Prime Minister** has shown more than once that his approach to a problem is to simply pretend that it does not exist. He could get away with this when he had a full majority in Parliament. He no longer can, but the new Leader of the Opposition seems unable to exploit his vulnerabilities.

around with that air of entitlement that he used to exhibit before leading his party to humiliating defeats in two general elections. Just the other day, while on a visit to Kashmir, he promised to restore statehood on day one when it comes to his turn. He has also promised a caste census on day one and many other things. When is someone going to explain to him that 'day one' is not visible yet?

Instead, he has taken to swagger

When is someone going to explain to Modi that although he is still prime minister, he is a much-weakened leader than he was and needs to listen more to what the people are saying. He has not achieved the great things that he promised, and it is because of this that people have lost faith. Businessmen continue to flee to more business-friendly countries, workers flee to countries with more job opportunities and students flee to foreign colleges. India is not yet the country he promised it would become.

inside **TRACK COOMIKAPOOR**

Perception test

ELECTORAL POLITICS is often more perception than reality. So if PM Narendra Modi is looking slightly jaded and faded at the start of his "historic third term in office", it is because the optics that favoured him in the past are now working against him. The BJP is, in fact, well ensconced, with just 32 MPs short of the halfway mark and more than double the Congress party's strength. The NDA's tally of 293 is 21 over the halfway mark. Unlike the Vajpayee government which was totally dependent on a mercurial Jayalalithaa, or Manmohan Singh's regime, which was at the mercy of several ever-demanding allies, the Modi government is not reliant on any single alliance partner for survival. If it chose, it could dump political fledglings like Chirag Paswan, Anupriya Patel and Jayant Chaudhary and still survive. Yet, the perception persists.

Modi's rather domineering style has grown over two unchallenged tenures as PM and three as the Gujarat CM. The image of wielding absolute power has both its plus and minus points. On the one hand, people appreciate a strong leader, but on the other hand, disrespect for democratic norms and the Constitution is frowned upon. Backtracking by a strong leader can also be perceived as weakness and recently, the Modi government has uncharacteristically retreated on several occasions.

Unusual U-turns

At the start of his third term, Modi gave the impression that he would continue his unilateral style of functioning. He refused to yield over the choice of the Lok Sabha Speaker, has yet to concede the Deputy Speaker's post to the Opposition and has kept the media in Parliament at an even greater arm's length than before. He mostly retained his old cabinet ministers and generally handed out minor portfolios to allies. Despite the outcry over the NEET exam leaks, he stood firm on not cancelling it.

But the façade of business as usual got dented after the proposed amendments to the Waqf Board Act, announced with fanfare, were dispatched to the cold storage of a joint parliamentary panel, following allies' objections. A UPSC advertisement for lateral entries in government was hastily withdrawn after protests that it violated the reservation quota policy. The revamped pension scheme for gov-

ernment employees seemed yet another sop to electoral interests. A Broadcasting Bill to include online content seems to have been put on the back-burner too.

Whether Assam CM Himanta Sarma's decision to end a colonial-era practice of a two-hour prayer break on Fridays for Muslim legislators will hold, with NDA allies already making noises, is uncertain. The proposed Waqf Board amendments and changes in the Assam legislature rules might appear fairly reasonable, but the perception of the BJP as "anti-minority" is too hot a potato for the government's allies to defend. The censor board is dragging its feet over clearing a film produced by actor Kangana Ranaut and two FIRs for hate speeches were filed against BJP Maharashtra MLA Nitesh Rane. The Supreme Court recently criticised courts for not granting bail to the government's political adversaries for long stretches.

The government's backsliding is in contrast to Modi 2.0, when the PM remained implacable for months over the powerful farm Bill protests and the overwhelming demand for the removal of Brij Bhushan Singh as chief of the wrestling federation. There is a belated awareness that the government's adamancy harmed it electorally.

POTHOLED ROAD

Neither Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi completed their last terms because of their untimely deaths. But long before their demise, they were viewed as lame duck PMs because of their flagging spirits. Modi, however, is respected for his resilience and combativeness. But can the PM change his style of functioning after over 20 years? He has to walk a fine line, projecting his image as a strong leader along with enough humility to be pragmatic when required. His unequivocal apology for the collapse of the 35-foot statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was a step in this direction. Normally, his short-sighted media advisers would have adopted a shrill counter attack and whataboutery as the best form of defence. With the Opposition using the caste card and minority appeasement to undermine the government, the ruling party has to tread cautiously. The RSS recently indicated it is not against caste census.

Extensive consultations before announcing a major move would be a good step for the BJP to adopt in future, along with stopping the practice of using a housetrained Enforcement Directorate to keep political rivals in check. Fickle constitutional bodies have belatedly developed a conscience, after their perception that the Central government is not necessarily here to stay. Modi stands at the crossroads in the battle of optics, with some tough Assembly polls and by-elections due in coming months, the road ahead has many potholes.

HEADLINE **DIVYAA**

the goals.



To Port of Spain, India's I-Day present — a chair

DURING HIS official visit to Trinidad and Tobago a few days ago, Pabitra Margherita, the Minister of State for External Affairs, posted a picture on X of the Speaker's Chair that was gifted by India to the Carribean nation to mark its independence from British rule on August 31, 1962.

Six decades on, the chair continues to remain the seat of democracy in Port of Spain and is currently being used by the country's ninth Speaker, Bridgid Annisette-George.

Interestingly, the wooden chair was in the making for quite a few years before it could be presented to the newly independent nation, both as an exquisite specimen of fine Indian craftsmanship and as a symbol of shared democratic values.

India's relationship with Trinidad and Tobago dates back to the mid-1800s. On May 30, 1845, the first ship, Fatel Razack, carrying 225 indentured Indian workers reached the shores of Trinidad, then a British colony. Arrival of ships from India continued till 1917, ensuring that the number of Indians there kept increasing.

Indentured Indians

The current descendants of those indentured workers, now in their fifth and sixth generations, form nearly 42 per cent of the country's total population, constituting an integral part of the economic, political and social fabric of the country, Indian High Commissioner Pradeep Rajpurohit told The Indian Express over telephone from Port of Spain.

In deciding upon the nature of the gift to be presented to Trinidad and Tobago on its attainment of independence, the Indian government — then under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi – chose the Speaker's Chair since it was a symbol of the supremacy of law and the democratic way of life that both the countries had chosen to pursue.

As per Trinidad and Tobago's parliamentary proceedings, the ceremony to hand over the chair took place at the hands of then Indian High Commissioner

Muni Lal on February, 9, 1968. As the House met at 1.37 pm, Speaker Clytus Arnold Thomasos informed the members that Indian High Commissioner Lal would address them "on behalf of the Government and peo-



The Speaker's Chair gifted by India in the Parliament of Trinidad and **Tobago.** *X/@PmargheritaBJP*

ple of India".

A SIX-YEAR DELAY

In his eight-minute address, Lal — calling the moment as a "high watermark" of his current assignment — made a note of the six-year lapse between Trinidad and Tobago's independence (in 1962) and the presentation of the chair (in 1968).

This gap also included a delay of over two months as Lal was not in Port of Spain. He told the House, "I shall be revealing no secret when I disclose that the intended gift (from India) arrived in Port of Spain just a day before my departure, nearly two-and-a-half months ago. It was very thoughtful and generous of you, Mr Speaker, to hold over this ceremony till my return from a spell of leave in India. I thank you sincerely for not depriving me of an honour, which providence apparently had earmarked to be bestowed upon me."

Lal said India was "conscious of the delay that has taken place in making this

pm, as per records. "Mr Speaker, we hope that this gift will forever serve as a reminder of the underlying unity of the peoples and government of our two countries," Lal said.

A SHARED HISTORY

of our nation," the resolution said.

"Brought here more than 100 years ago, in one of the worst periods of colonialism and in conditions approximating slavery, like those of their African brothers, they (the Indians there) have nevertheless risen above all their misfortune and today take an equal place in our new nation in every sphere of activ-

The resolution added, "Our association with India, therefore, is a long one

ity," it said. bound with ties of blood."

House applauded in unison and the sitting was suspended at 1.55 pm.

With that, the representatives of the

On the **LOOSE** leherkala@gmail.com

A FORTNIGHT ago journalist Rohan Dua moved the Delhi High Court against a toxic barrage of social media posts calling his interview with Olympian Manu Bhaker "sexist" and "unprofessional". The 12-minute exchange ran on The New Indian channel on YouTube that has 45.1k subscribers. It was shared on X, where Dua has 76k followers. His questions, initially about her terrific achievements in Paris, veered, with some innuendo, to her interactions with fellow medallist Neeraj Chopra. Clickbait perhaps, but YouTubers, and indeed journalists, in general know details of life on the circuit interest viewers. It must be noted that Bhaker was charmingly indulgent

with this gentle prodding. However, armchair activists on X, al-

All praise isn't creepy

ways looking to stir the proverbial hornet's nest, cherry-picked this alleged "link up" and Dua's admiring declaration that Bhaker was the most beautiful Olympian India has ever produced. Before Dua knew it, cleverly edited portions of his interview went viral, and he was getting slammed for "trivialising" Bhaker.

Of course, the viral clip failed to include Dua's several other queries on Bhaker's childhood in a Haryana village or her hatred of maths in school. In his defamation plea, Dua argued that other than his competence being attacked, this false narrative was distracting from Bhaker's stellar performance. The situation is absurd — that someone is forced to seek the intervention of the overburdened High Court to be absolved of the charge of sexism. Presiding Justice Navin Chawla or-

dered the social media handles to delete

the posts within a week. However, this somewhat comical feud raises the issue, are men not supposed to compliment women anymore?

It's true that appearance is the go-to compliment for women and it can be argued it shouldn't be, but there are nuances within all our conversations. In our climate of appalling crimes against women, when spiteful online bullies accuse a Dua of sexism, in our wandering imaginations, we unfairly write him off as a lascivious jerk. Besides, the presumption, that after all her staggering achievements Bhaker would be fazed by a couple of cheesy questions, is ridiculous in itself. She is objectively beautiful and like any gorgeous, accomplished woman, laughingly took

the compliment in her stride. Dua comes across as an earnest, harmless sort so it's puzzling that what really got the goat of the trolls were the questions from his rapid fire round: Have you watched Emily in Paris? The insinuated accusation being, oh my God, you're suggesting she's an airhead. It's not an unforgivable crime that Bhaker, or anyone else for that matter, enjoys a shut-down-yourbrains show. An atmosphere of insufferable feminist posturing has taken over, leaving no room for levity in interactions between men and women. Fun fact: you can be a critically think-

ing, highly ambitious sportswoman like Bhaker who would also enjoy a romantic date at the top of the Eiffel Tower (another of Dua's prompts). As Walt Whitman observed, we contain multitudes. If anyone would bother analysing the crowd who objected to this interview, I'm willing to bet my left leg, they are people who have never received a compliment, can't dream

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of reaching Paris or being asked out on a date to the bottom of the Qutb Minar, forget the top.

Who started this sanctimonious nonsense that it's inappropriate to praise a woman's looks? It depends on who's doing it and the context. As a woman I can say, of course it's nice to be appreciated for one's work. But I'm also aware that the morning newspaper is the evening's trash. It's not just what I do, almost nothing anyone does really matters — but we all live with ourselves. If someone thinks I look radiant, I am happily cheered and I'm damned if I'm going to be made to feel guilty for admitting so. For sanity's sake, let there be space, occasionally, for the light-hearted contradictions within all our personalities.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

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DINDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2024



Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan stitched together an unbeaten 32-run stand to get Bangladesh over the line

Pak vs Bangla: An upset that was on the cards



IT'S FAIR TO say that the result of the Pakistan-Bangladesh Test series wasn't what most people expected, even the most diehard supporters of the visiting side. But the 2-0 verdict didn't flatter the Tigers in the least—as the 10-wicket and 6-wicket margins would suggest. As with all things, there are two ways to look at this result. While there will be lot of chest-beating in Pakistan, the improvement in Bangladesh—especially their fast-bowling arsenal has been eye-catching. Add to it, the spectre of turmoil and political instability back home, and one has a riv-

eting storyline.

One has seen some highs in Bangladesh cricket in recent years, but hopes of a sustained upturn in their fortunes were dashed when such results turned out to be exceptions rather than the rule. But the series outcome in Pakistan could be expected to be a sign of Bangladesh turning the corner. A prominent reason could be that the wins were secured in clinical fashion in the second half of games. A target of 185 in the fourth innings of the second Test could have prompted anxiety, especially with arguably the biggest series result in the country's history on the line. But the top six batsmen all made valuable contributions — even if the individual scores in themselves were not eye-catching—with grizzled veterans Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan coolly getting them over the line. Shakib didn't set the world on fire in the two Tests, but made vital contributions to the team. He is Bangladesh's greatest cricketer of all time and performed despite being charged in a murder case related to the political turmoil back home. The backdrop seemed to have given Bangladesh inspiration to overcome the odds. Their overseas coaching staff could only join the team in Pakistan due to the instability in the country. While on tour, they constantly received news of friends, family members, colleagues, and even fellow cricketers injured, arrested, missing or worse during the political agitation. Floods in the country made the situation worse. The players in Pakistan were determined to provide their countrymen a reason to smile. What else could explain the proceedings on Day 3 of the second Test? Aftermanaging 274 in their first innings, Pakistan had Bangladesh at 26/6 with all their specialist batsmen back in the pavilion. Khurram Shahzad and Mir Hamza were making the ball talk under helpful conditions. It seemed that normal service was restored after the upset in the previous game.

Turning the tables

But wicketkeeper-batsman Litton Das and spin-bowling all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz refused to toe the script. They got themselves entrenched in the middle, survived the tough period, saw off the main bowlers, milked the others before putting their foot on the gas to reverse the pressure. The 165-run stand for the seventh wicket, and the 69-run partnership for the ninth between Das and fast bowler Hasan Mahmud demonstrated that Bangladesh were never ready to give up. In the second half of the game, the visitors did what they had done in the first Test, bowling out Pakistan for well below 200 and chasing down the target

without much drama. That the two wins were secured with a lot of time lost to the weather just underscores which side played better Test cricket for a longer period. That all 10 Pakistani wickets fell to pace in the second innings of the second Test proves the evolution of Bangladesh's bowling attack that could make them competitive away from home. Shakib will not go on forever and while Mehidy is a class performer with bat and ball, the emergence of speedster Nahid Rana and Hasan Mahmud gives them another dimension, for which Bangladesh should be grateful to legendary pacemen Allan Donald and Courtney Walsh, who worked as bowling

Bangladesh will soon be in India for a Test series, and though what happened in Pakistan would not alter the fact that the hosts will be overwhelming favourites, Najmul Hasan Shanto & Co can be quietly confident that the home team, which rarely does anything other than win on its own turf, may not have things all its own way. Bangladesh's middle-order batting and spin bowling is in experienced hands and they have unearthed a promising battery of pacemen, which needs to be taken good care of. The reversal at home is likely to prompt a lot of soul-searching in Pakistan. Some former players have called it the darkest chapter in their cricketing history, but that's just over-reaction.

House in disarray

coaches in the past.

But the decision-makers in Pakistan cricket have reason to ponder whether they have accorded long-form cricket the respect it deserves. Preparing for Tests entails playing first-class cricket, and the home team was undercooked in that regard. It explains what captain Shan Masood meant when he said that Pakistan prepared for a maths exam by studying science. In this era of franchise T20 leagues eating into more and more of the cricket calendar, that's not a problem exclusive to Pakistan. And with the country hosting the 50-over ICC Champions Trophy early next year, there is no easy solution in sight. But Pakistan's plight in Test cricket is not limited to one series. Masood has lost the first five matches he has led his country in, and it has been a long time since they won a game on home soil. They don't really know what constitutes home advantage for them, alternating between placid tracks and green-tops, depending on the opposition, without getting the desired results. Their main batsman, Babar Azam is going through a prolonged lean patch, and it seems a long time since he was considered to be knocking on the door of the 'Fab Four' comprising Virat Kohli, Steve Smith, Joe Root and Kane Williamson. Not many prolific young batsmen appear to be coming through the ranks. That wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan is their most reliable batsman as well as troubleshooter shows the brittle nature of their line-up.

The cupboard, as far as spin bowling is concerned, seems to be bare, but the manner in which the Pakistan pace attack was out-bowled by Bangladesh in the city of Shoaib Akhtar adds insult to injury. Not too long ago, Shaheen Shah Afridi was considered one of the premier fast bowlers in the world before injuries and loss of pace made him ineffectual. Naseem Shahwas once touted as a future star, but he hasn't yet displayed the fitness to perform in Tests on a consistent basis. And with the likes of Haris Rauf effectively turning their backs on Test cricket, things don't look promising ahead of England's arrival.



In his speech, the Prime Minister said, "...today, the people of Bharat are filled with a renewed confidence." Just a few days ago, we saw news reports that 395,000 candidates, including 6,112 postgraduates, 39,990 graduates and 117,144 who had studied up to Class 12, had applied for the position of sweeper in the Haryana government at a salary of ₹15,000 per month on a *contract* basis. Surely, that is no sign of 'renewed confidence'

read an entire speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in *English*, thanks to *Economic Times*. He spoke in Hindi, and I assume the translation was accurate. Mr Modi congratulated his government and told the World Leaders Forum that in the past ten years "our economy has expanded by nearly 90%". Admirable — if it was correct. The numbers that I have are:

Year	GDP at constant prices (₹ cr)
March 31, 2014	98,01,370
March 31, 2024	173,81,722

The increase was ₹74,88,911 crore and the growth factor works out to **1.7734** or a growth rate of **77.34%**. Even that is good for a developing country. Of course, one must compare that rate with the rates of the previous two decades since liberalisation. Between 1991-92 and 2003-04 (13 years) the size of the GDP (proxy for the economy) doubled. Again, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (10 UPA years), the size of the GDP doubled. I had estimated that the GDP would not double in Mr Modi's ten years and said so in Parliament; the prime minister has now confirmed it. India's economy has indeed grown but we could have done better.

Unemployment — the elephant

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apologists who will interpret the story to mean that people already employed are seeking the security of a government job! I do not wish to break their reverie.

The prime minister also said "The aspirational youth and women of Bharat have voted for continuity, political stability and economic growth."

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"renewed confidence". I know there are

Bharat have voted for continuity, political stability and economic growth." Many observers think that the vote was for the opposite. The vote was for change, constitutional governance and growth with equality. The two sets of goals are poles apart: continuity vs change, political stability vs constitutional governance and economic growth vs growth with equality. Just as the prime minister tried to make a case for approval of his set of goals, a powerful argument can be made for people's disapproval of the BJP's governance, and desire for a re-set of the goals.

Wanted a re-set

I wish to stay on 'unemployment' in this column. The All India unemployment rate, according to CMIE, is 9.2%. The Congress Manifesto 2024 said that after 33 years since liberalisation, "the time is ripe for a re-set of economic pol-

specific proposals on 'jobs':
Apprenticeship scheme that will

icy". The Manifesto put forward two

Indian Youth Congress workers protest over the issue of unemployment in Jaipur

No comfort

in 100 days

Apprenticeship scheme that will guarantee a one-year apprenticeship to every graduate and diploma holder to impart skills, enhance employability and provide regular jobs to millions of youth.

• Employment-linked Incentive scheme (ELI) for corporates to win tax credits for additional hiring against regular, quality jobs.

I was delighted when the finance minister borrowed the ideas and included them in her Budget speech. Mr Modi and his ministers were sworn in on June 9, 2024. The BJP claimed that a third-term Modi government will have a plan ready to be rolled out in the first 100 days. The 100 days will be completed on September 17. The government has shown no urgency to roll out the two Budget announcements. Contrast the zeal with which the government tried to pass the Wakf (Amendment) Bill and push the lateral entry into senior government positions; they were forced to put both on'pause'.

Bad news mounts

Meanwhile, we have more bad news on the employment front:

in 2023 and in 2024. Among them are Swiggy, Ola, Paytm, etc. Tech companies have announced that they are in the process of rightsizing their workforce.

Indian companies have laid off people

In a column in *Times of India*, *September 5*, *2024*, two educationists reported that IIT Mumbai has been able to place only 75% of its graduating class this year. Adjusted against the exchange rate, the salaries seem static. The placement of graduates of institutions other than the IITs is at a disappointing level of 30%.

The World Bank's India Economic Update (September 2024) reported that urban youth employment remained elevated at 17%. Thanks to a muddled trade policy, India has not increased export earnings from labour-intensive sectors such as leather and garments. The World Bank report advised a critical review of India's approach to trade and pointed out that India has not been able to take advantage of China's withdrawal from labour-intensive manufactured goods. The report pointed to India's protectionist policies and aversion to free trade agreements.

The issue of unemployment will not go away by denial or rhetoric or fake statistics. Unemployment is a ticking time bomb and the Modi 2.1 government has done nothing — absolutely nothing — to address to defuse it since June 9.



Website: pchidambaram.in Twitter: @Pchidambaram_IN



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Potholed road

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New Delhi

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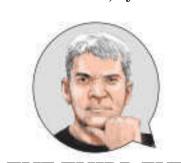
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QUESTIONS ON THE HARRIS-TRUMP TABULA RASA

HEN we fight, we win." This familiar campaign chant is triggered nowadays when Kamala Devi Harris, US vice president and presidential candidate, arrives at rallies in step with the tune of Beyoncé's song 'Freedom'. Harris defines the mood and the message with questions: "Do we believe in freedom, do we believe in opportunity, do we believe in the promise of America? Are we ready to fight for it?" When she sets up the cue, "And when we fight...", the crowd chants "We win".

Beyoncé croons, "Tryna rain on the thunder." Harris has rained thunder on Donald J Trump's party. A little over six weeks back, punditry predicted a second Trump presidency. The ex-president took it as a foregone conclusion—and then everything that could have gone wrong seems to have gone wrong. Harris, in contrast, got it right—starting with the presentation of her identity. She scripted her acceptance speech to pivot the narrative to the centre as she called on Americans to "move past the bitterness, cynicism and divisive battles of the past".



THE THIRD EYE SHANKKAR AIYAR Author of *The Gated Republic, Aadhaai* A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India (shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com)

It was a calculated move to get the attention of 'Rockefeller Republicans' and disaffected Trumpians. If Obama presented the audacity of hope, Harris deployed the Kamalaism of 'what can be, unburdened by what has been' to signal change. With over 50 days to go, it's still early days. Meanwhile, Harris has redefined campaign chemistry and revived hope for Democrats. A win seems to be a possibility: polls inform us Harris now has a 3-point edge over Trump, with leads in four of the seven battleground states. Winning requires a playbook for victory. It's of-

ten said that if a campaign is poetry, governance is prose. Tuesday is the next moment of reckoning for Harris and Trump as they face off in a presidential debate in Philadelphia. Harris, who arguably turned her conspicuous invisibility in the Biden regime to her advantage, must step out of the veil of ambivalence and present her script—the prose and the playbook. Trump squandered his early-mover advantage in a debate with his self, wallowing in claims of not losing the 2020 polls. To reclaim hope, he must start from scratch.

The term 'tabula rasa' is Latin for blank state. It owes its popular usage to an essay on human understanding by John Locke, where he argued that at birth the human mind is a blank slate on which experience writes. Trump and Harris have revelled in constructing ambiguity around their policy choices. The contest for Americans and the world is one of known unknowns, a blank slate that awaits answers on the candidates' policy prescriptions.

The state of the economy—along with immigration and abortion rights—is a top concern of Americans. Harris and Trump have promised sops to assuage sentiments. Trump has promised to exempt tips and social security from taxes, expand child tax credit and tax private university endowments. Harris has promised to exempt tips from taxes, expand child and earned income tax credits, fund first house purchases and give other incentives for housing. There isn't much detail on how the sops will be funded. US fiscal and monetary policies travel through the financial markets of the world. The US's gross debt is at \$35 trillion and a trillion dollars are added to it every 100 days; high interest rates worsen debt service costs.

At the Economic Club of New York, Trump said he will impose new tariffs (60 percent on Chinese imports) that will bring down inflation; deficits can be reduced with spending cuts via an government efficiency commission headed by Elon Musk. Harris has spoken about a 25 percent minimum tax on corporations and total income, and has flirted with the idea of a tax on unrealised gains on assets over \$100 million. The prescriptions have already met with studied criticism and are unlikely to go past the push-back.

Presidential polls in the world's largest economy and biggest military power are consequential for the world. It is said that America has no permanent enemies or friends and, as Henry Kissinger observed, it has permanent interests. But the definition of interests is just as impermanent. In 2016, Obama authorised a nuclear deal with Iran that was disbanded by Trump in 2018. Trump threatened to pull out of NATO and Biden strengthened it. Global warming is a reality—this summer was the hottest recorded in the northern hemisphere. In 2019, Trump withdrew from the Paris Agreement and the Biden regime re-joined it in 2021. Such flip-flops ricochet on relations.

Do the candidates have a plan to end wars? The seemingly endless Ukraine-Russia war, prosecuted by the Volodymyr Zelenskyy regime and funded by NATO, has enriched the militaryindustrial complex. Trump claims he can end the war in a day. In West Asia, the bludgeoning of Palestinians continues as Benjamin Netanyahu and Yahya Sinwar parry peace and spew death; they are mocking a humanity held hostage by history. In Israel vs Hamas, the candidates are different without a distinction. What about China's plans to annexe Taiwan? While Harris will continue with the Biden approach, Trump wants Taiwan to pay the US for its defence.

Tuesday's tabula rasa will see the questions being raised. As for the answers, remember that ambiguity is weaponised in close electoral contests. The world will most probably fill the blank slate assuming meanings in what is said—and in what is not.

CASTE MOULDS THE RSS COLOSSUS



POWER & POLITICS PRABHU CHAWLA prabhuchawla@newindianexpress.com Follow him on X @PrabhuChawla



S the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh turns 100 this year, it is learning to adjust to the realities of realpolitik and listen to the demands of the Naya Bharat it helped birth. Pushed by the current sociolog-

ical, political, economic and cultural narratives, the RSS is learning to tweak its identity and ideology.

Over these 100 years, it succeeded in turning the invocation of secularism into an act of social apartheid. But never before did it encounter such a bellicose opposition targeting it for communal polarisation and caste discrimination. In the past, the RSS ignored what it believed were motivated accusations. But of late, it has chosen to take its ideological foes head on to save its credibility, acceptability and efficacy as a unifying force of Hinduism. Pushed by the current sociological, political, economic and cultural churning, the RSS is learning the ropes to handle both unsavoury and scrumptious perceptions about its genuine identity and ideology. It believes it's more misunderstood than understood by motivated illiberals.

Nowhere is this sentiment more obvipoliticisation. ous than in the top leadership's recent somersaults over caste convulsions. Last week, the leadership made it unambiguously clear that it was not against both a caste survey and reservation in government jobs. After a meeting of over 300 senior functionaries in Kerala, including the chiefs of its frontal organisations, its publicity chief Sunil Ambekar said: "In our Hindu society, we have the sensitive issue of our caste and caste relations. Of course, it is an important issue of our national unity and integrity.

It should be dealt with very seriously, not on the basis of electioneering or election practices or politics."

He added: "The RSS thinks that for all welfare activities, particularly those targeting such communities or castes that are lagging behind, if the government needs the numbers it is a well-established practice. But it should be done only for the welfare of those communities and castes. It should not be used as a political tool for elections. So we put this forth with a line of caution for everyone."

Ambekar made the stand public after long deliberations in which BJP president J P Nadda was present along with senior leaders from the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The BJP has so far refrained from committing to a nation-

wide caste survey, even though its allies like the JD(U) have already done an extensive caste count in their own state of Bihar.

Sangh parivar warriors are wondering about the timing of the change in stance. With good reason, because the RSS has been adamant on Hindu unity without any dis-

tinction. Not just that, many senior leaders have taken an active stand against caste-based reservations. In 2015, RSS sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat called for a review of the reservation policy, criticising its

In an interview with *Organiser*, he said, "We believe that a committee comprising individuals genuinely concerned about the nation's interests and committed to social equality, including representatives from various sections of society, should decide which categories require reservation and for how long... If we would have implemented this (reservation) policy as envisaged by the Constitution makers instead of doing politics over it, then the present situation would not have arrived. Since inception it has been politicised."

The statement created a furore in Bihar which was going to the assembly polls, where it was interpreted as a demand for a review of the reservation system. Later, in January 2017, Manmohan Vaidya, one of the six general secretaries, insisted: "Reservations for SC, ST were introduced in a different context. It was provided for in the Constitution to remedy the historical injustice done to them. It was our responsibility. So, reservation for them has been there since the inception (of the Constitution). But, even Ambedkar has said its continuance in perpetuity is not good. There should be a time limit to it."

But within a couple of days, the RSS decided to refute the interpretation given by the media. In a joint statement,

Dattatreya Hosabale and Vaidya reiterated, "Castebased reservation to SCs, STs and OBCs, according to the Constitution, should be continued. The reservations should continue till caste discrimination exists in Hindu society." During the last Lok Sabha elections, Bhagwat made the RSS position more emphatic

when he said: "The Sangh has always supported reservations as provided by the Constitution. Reservation should continue as long as it is necessary for those who need it. Until discrimination exists, reservation should remain."

It is evident that the RSS has come under pressure from opposition parties and the criticality of poll politics. Earlier, political attacks on the RSS were muted and limited to certain individuals. Not so now. Leader of the opposition Rahul Gandhi has picked the RSS as his primary target with the twin objectives of wooing Muslims without sounding anti-Hindu and rallying all non-BJP parties. Even while attacking the Modi government and its policies, Rahul makes RSS the main culprit. Moreover, Rahul and the Congress are worried about the

enormous growth in RSS's numbers and massive expansion of its frontal organisations that influence tribals, students, youths, cultural organisations, business communities and even artists.

During the past decade, the RSS and its backers have floated over 500 NGOs and think tanks to dictate and define the nationalist narrative. Retired civil servants, diplomats and defence officials with an RSS background have been drafted to counter any anti-RSS propaganda. Yet, it has also decided to modify its public posturing by adopting a more flexible response to criticism. Instead of sticking to its old tradition of holding morning shakhas, it has evolved a better networking architecture. Instead of keeping a low profile, its top leaders now speak more often on public platforms while shunning direct media interviews. It has chosen to fight its own battle instead of trusting its swayamsevaks in the establishment.

The image of a khaki-shorts-clad civilian army marching in lockstep to an authoritarian diktat is outdated. The RSS has given India and its states two prime ministers, a president, a vice president, over 40 chief ministers and hundreds of Union and state ministers. But now it has realised that power isn't a permanent integrator. Instead, it has ignited caste conflicts all over again.

Even now, though, over a million people attend RSS's 70,000-odd shakhas. Its core agenda of preventing conversions and expanding its Hindutva footprint remains non-negotiable. But its success in bringing various castes under the Ram Mandir movement is now facing political and social diminishing returns. The recent Lok Sabha elections showed that the BJP was not to sustain the saffronisation of castes that gave it a majority for two consecutive terms. Now it is left again to the motherload, the RSS, to re-engineer its social code, and support the marginalised and deprived classes. The RSS's process of recasting its philosophy on castes and communities has only just begun.

It follows the realisation that acquiring political power alone is not a panacea for all Hindus. It temporarily unites for glitter, but also divides to ensure an equitable distribution of power among all classes and castes.

MOMENTARY MALEGAONS OF MOVIEMAKING



OPINION NAMRATA JOSHI Consulting Editor

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AROGH Jafri once told me in his shabby, tiny, book-lined room in Malegaon—"slightly bigger than a grave", as he described it—that his life resembled Javed Akhtar's; and yet, not quite. Like the famous screenwriter-poet-

lyricist, Farogh was born in a progressive, intellectual family. His mother was a primary school teacher, father used to bring out an eveninger called Shaam*nama*. However, unlike Akhtar, Farogh could never find far-reaching appreciation and success for his writing.

Farogh was a diehard cinephile and scriptwriter of the wacky spoof films Malegaon Ke Sholay and Malegaon Ka Superman, which the small town in Maharashtra became synonymous with apart from infamous communal clashes. An artiste who dreamt of crossing over to Bollywood but never could, Farogh was frustrated by privation and lack of opportunities in his hometown

which he referred to as a big hell.

He passed away on September 13, 2020, unsung and unable to bridge the 300-odd km that separated Malegaon from Mumbai, the yawning distance that he spoke about eloquently in impeccable Urdu in Faiza Khan's outstanding 2008 documentary, Supermen of Malegaon, on the making of the local Superman.

It's ironic that Farogh is set to posthumously get the spotlight he desperately craved for in life, with Vineet Kumar Singh of *Mukkabaaz* fame playing him in Reema Kagti's forthcoming Superboys of Malegaon—a film backed by none other than Javed Akhtar's children, Farhan and Zoya. Its world premiere is set to happen exactly four years from Farogh's death, this September 13, at the Toronto International Film Festival.

However, this is neither about Farogh nor Kagti's film that chronicles the life of Farogh's friend and collaborator Nasir Shaikh, often called the 'Dadasaheb Phalke of Malegaon'. It is an occasion to reflect on the spirit, creativity, resourcefulness and audacity of the selfmade, subaltern, almost-zero-budget cinema that has now gone beyond Malegaon to occupy platforms like YouTube and Instagram, fuelled by cheap and accessible technology and riding on the democratisation of the medium.

What drives this 'of the people, by the people, for the people' filmmaking beyond the urge for self-expression? It certainly goes beyond catering to the gaze and patronage of privileged viewers

Ref: Student expelled from UP school for biryani in

tiffin (Sep 7). The expulsion of a seven-year-old

schoolboy merely for bringing a non-vegetarian

lunch is shocking. Educational institutions should

promote inclusivity, not intolerance. Derogatory re-

marks from the principal revealed a dangerous bias.

It is crucial to take strict measures against those

who abuse their position as educators to impose

their personal beliefs. Schools should not be used

as a platform for ideological indoctrination; in-

stead, they should encourage critical thinking, em-

Labanya Dey, Bengaluru

pathy and a respect for diversity.

Biased teachers

who get tickled by the rustic special effects or crude crane shots managed with cameras mounted on bullock carts. There are far more entrenched reasons for the centrality of this local, community cinema in lives less ordinary.

Locally-made, low-budget films had also been flourishing in north and west India, till video parlours and VCDs turned extinct. The owner of a confectionery shop in Ahmedabad's Kuber Nagar, Chander Danwani produced



Crude spoofs of superhero films made Malegaon famous years ago. Subaltern, sub-regional video films were also made in Garhwal, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh. Now all of them are trying to adapt to the era of Instagram reels and YouTube shorts

original Sindhi films in partnership with 25 other small businessmen to preserve the language, identity and culture among the young. A Garhwali video film industry took roots in Dehradun for the same reason and Chhatisgarhi cinema emerged out of the shadows of Bhojpuri cinema in Raipur. Together, they turned sub-regional or 'dialect cinema' into a genuine genre.

In some instances, hyperlocal film in-

dustries have been prompted to come into being by Bollywood's own steady erosion of the marginalised from its narratives and their disregard as an audience. They have struck back by deciding to take the camera and filmmaking in their own hands to see themselves and their concerns reflected on screen.

In Bhopal, *Turup*, a full-length feature film on contemporary socio-political issues got made through collaborative efforts of blue-collar workers under the aegis of Ektara Collective with no single individual credited as director. In Orissa and Jharkhand, indigenous communities have been participating in filmmaking workshops to eventually make movies on the issues affecting them.

Unfortunately, the fate of this kind of grassroots filmmaking has also been bound by the vagaries of times, trends and technology. The last time I visited Malegaon almost a decade ago, Nasir had given up filmmaking and started selling readymade clothes, and the spoof wave had made way for horror flicks and films borrowing titles from upcoming Salman Khan movies. The small industry Nasir founded has grown and mutated now into Khandeshi video channels on YouTube. The villain of the Superman spoof, Akram Khan, is starting a Malegaon celeb podcast called 'Coffee With Khan'.

As the nostalgic tribute to Malegoan spoofs takes flight at TIFF, it's also time for the sobering reality of the tenuousness of artistic chutzpah to sink in.

QUOTE CORNER

First, [Joe] Biden recommended all his supporters to support Ms Harris. We previously said Biden was our preferred candidate. So now we will do as he said, we will support her. Second, she laughs so expressively and infectiously. That means that she is doing well.



Vladimir Putin, Russian president, at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok

They shot my son thinking he was a Muslim. Are Muslims not humans? Are they not our brothers? Why would you kill a Muslim? They protect us.

Uma Mishra, mother of 19-year-old Aryan who was killed when cow vigilantes in Haryana mistook him for a Muslim

Cristiano was so good and so annoying at the same time. He's probably not as good now, but is probably just as annoying.

Wayne Rooney, footballer who played with Cristiano Ronaldo at Manchester United

MAILDAC WERESTO MALLIAU letters@newindianexpress.com

Diverse federalism

'Assimilating Assam with the rest of India' was a well-analysed article. The last paragraph is to be studied soberly without prejudice by the ruling party at the Centre and the 'double engine' concept may need to be put in cold storage for now. We need a heterogeneous federal mindset in allowing diverse schools of thought in a Westminster type of polity; else we switch over to the presidential system practised in many Latin American states.

Sankara Venkataraman, email

Integrate Northeast I come from Meghalaya, a beautiful state in Northeast India. The whole region boasts of a rich history, vibrant culture and immense talent. Yet, its heritage has not been adequately recognised nationally. It's high time for India to integrate these states and acknowledge their unique contributions.

Sylvester Pariong, Chennai

Inclusive allocation

The Madras High Court's order to give a share of the smart pushcarts under the Marina Beach beautification scheme to persons with disabilities (PwDs) is a positive move. It is hard to be complacent considering the obstacles PwDs face in getting a fair share of opportunities. The Greater Chennai Corporation should come up with policies that make it easier for physically challenged entrepreneurs. It is only then that we will be able to call ourselves a society that embraces diversity.

Shreya Gupta, Bengaluru

Ujjain horror

Ref: Ragpicker forced to drink alcohol, raped in broad daylight (Sep 7). What a blatant apathy! No passerby even informed the police. The shameless people just shot videos of the crime. Humanity and morals are lost when wickedness enters people's minds. Ujjain is a historical, spiritual city. Where was spirituality among the passersby? By just worshiping in temple does not make a perfect citizen. Jayaprakash Reddy, Nalgonda

Aparajita eye-wash

The Aparajita Bill is just an eye-wash for Bengalis to wipe their tears for the time being. The proposed law, stricter than what exists, hardly addressed the core, entrenched issue of misogyny. The patriarchy of governance sees sexual violence as power.

Calicut Krishnan Ramani, Tiruchirappalli

It has been reported that 42 MLAs in Karnataka have claimed Rs 2.23 crore in medical bill in 15 months. This startling revelation has come from an RTI query. Social activist Marilingegowda Mali Patil, who obtained this information, has urged the government to bring legislators under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. He wants the legislators to experience the service at government hospitals, which will help in improving the public health system.

K V Seetharamaiah, Bengaluru

Financial fraud

The recent loan frauds in Bhubaneswar through fake PhonePe employees are not surprising. These types of frauds happen often with exporters. A trader exports goods against a letter of credit issued by a bank abroad. But these banks and letters of credit are often forged. A similar thing happened when PhonePe verifications were fraudulent. Quick action is needed to deter criminals from damaging the confidence in banks.

Sunil Pradhan, Nuapada

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REFLECTIONS

Para-athletes, champions all



GOOD SPORT

ROHIT MAHAJAN

N a cruel world that emphasises limitations, the greatest service a para-athlete performs for society is to normalise physical disability—to bring it right under the _public eye, and then perform sporting acts of such skill and courage that even 'normal' people can't emulate.

Several years ago, when a para-athlete was awarded the Khel Ratna, the country's highest award for sportspersons, hitherto won only by 'normal' athletes, a colleague couldn't hide his contempt: "These 'non-elite' athletes getting the top sports award — the very idea!"

Having watched para-sports over the years, this person is now a fan, for the story of each para-athlete, medal-winner or not, is fascinating and inspirational, worthy of a book.

Let's talk about, say, Sumit Antil, just one among the para-heroes.

Javelin in his right hand, a spring in his steps, Antil jogs rather than sprints to the white line. With a mighty heave, he sends the spear flying. There's a hush. There's a roar. Antil looks at the giant screen flashing the distance the spear has travelled — it's over 70 metres. It's a personal best. It's good for gold. Antil turns around and slaps his right thigh — he's very unlikely to ever slap his left thigh because it's a prosthetic limb. It's due to this artificial left limb that he jogs rather than sprints; it's this artificial left limb that presents him the greatest difficulty in his dream of hitting the 80metre mark.

"My left leg, which is my blocking leg, is an artificial limb. It's difficult to balance on it. There are just two nails at the base of the prosthetic that get a grip on the ground. Balancing your entire body on just two nails is very difficult," said Antil aday



Para-athletes Sheetal Devi and Rakesh Kumar after winning bronze in the Paris Paralympics. AN

The story of each one of them, medal-winner or not, is fascinating and inspirational

after winning gold at the Paris Paralympics. "After your hip has done its role while throwing, the blocking leg has to move into action, I was losing my balance a couple of times, which is why I couldn't throw even better."

"When I will be at my peak, just once in life, I want to touch the 80m mark. I want to know how it feels when the javelin crosses that distance," said Antil, 26.

Antil, two Paralympics gold medals to his credit, wants to expand his horizons.

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. The courage of the para-athlete reshapes perceptions, breaks down physical and emotional barriers, and redraws the limits of possibilities. Antil has had to be very courageous - there was no other option after a

motorcycle accident led to the amputation of his left leg when he was just 17.

Sheetal Devi, born without arms, had to be very courageous. The archer, who hits bull's-eye using her feet, won a Paralympics medal last week. "Before, I used to live in a small village. And then I started para archery, I saw that people with disabilities could also achieve something," Sheetal, 17, wrote on social media. "There was a timewhen I felt incomplete and sought external validation. It took time to embrace my true self, but the moment I did, magic unfolded."

Sport does create magic. But, as Anais Nin wrote, life indeed does shrink or expand in proportion to courage - and it's not just about bravery, it's more about stepping out of our comfort zone and confronting and defeating fears.

VINESH'S COURAGE

One brave person who's stepped out of her comfort zone is Vinesh Phogat, the greatest female wrestler from India. Vinesh, having done nothing but wrestle for two decades, put her career on the line when she started a campaign to bring to justice Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, then Wrestling Federation of India president and a powerful BJP MP. This required physical and mental courage of the highest order. Her dream of an Olympics medal - she had suffered a horrible injury in 2016, heartbreak in 2021 — seemed to be over. Yet, Vinesh came to winning gold at the Paris Olympics last month after shocking the world with her upset of Yui Susaki, the Japanese superstar, in the final 15 seconds of their first-round bout. This was followed by heartbreak - she was 100 grams too heavy to fight for gold.

She's again stepped out of the comfort zone, quitting sport to enter politics. Politicians have immense power, and the taste of even minimal power creates little despots. But Vinesh, a victim, just might do some good for sport and women if she gets political power. She's always declared herself to be a non-political person but by now, at 30, she knows that everything is politics and politics is everything. Stepping into the discomfort zone of politics will be a lifechanging decision — hopefully, a fruitful one in her quest for gender justice and equality.

Lessons learnt the hard way



RAAJA BHASIN

ROUND this time of year, my 'speaking circuit' begins and continues through the winter till the onset of summer. Some of this is a part of the 'history and heritage' walks in the hills and elsewhere. Some part consists of more formal indoor lecturing. Most of the audience is from Great Britain or from other former British colonies like Australia and Canada. A few still arrive with a dated and pre-conceived 'elephants and snake-charmers' image of India. Most, fortunately, are aware of and well in tune with a rapidly changing world. There are moments of gentle amusement like the time when a gentleman carried a set of notes made by his uncle to help him on his visit to Shimla. Among other exhortations and bits of advice was the invaluable information, 'There are no cars in Shimla and rickshaws are the only means of transport.' Another, having heard with great reluctance and considerable resistance about the civilisation of ancient India, wanted to know why there wasn't a greater sense of gratitude towards the colonising British.

at management institutions. Most want and expect me to talk about writing, nature and my beloved hills. To speak of how this slow life is not so bad. However, occasionally, one is thrown a googly. Once, someone in the audience, during the Q&A session, said, "But what you have spoken about teaches us nothing about management, business and the real world for real people." So, there it was. The ivory tower had been reduced to dust. At that moment, I mumbled something about Nietzsche having said that "art was there so that we did not die of the truth". And the muttering continued to add, "Suppose the world was populated by only one sort of people. That could be accountants or managers. There would be no music and art. It would be a very dull and bland world."

For the next lecture, one wanted to be more coherent. I spent some time rifling through my head to see what appropriate episodes or anecdotes could be used. A surprisingly large number popped up. If one were to take them all, many lessons would contradict others. A little bit of sifting and some stood out more prominently than the others. These may not have had much to do with textbook management, nor could they provide ground-breaking management techniques, but they were simple everyday lessons that may have relevance in our lives.

One thing that has been rightly ingrained in us is a deep respect and regard for our armed forces. That respect goes beyond the high regard for the uniform and includes the numerous institutions and bodies that

are attached to this. One occasionally misused and sometimes maligned institution is the canteen. Needless to add, much fuel to the fire is added by civilians in search of cheaper (and 'pure') liquor. On principle, one has never accepted something from the canteen. It is not meant for us civilians and that's all there is to it. Decades back, there was, however, a moment when there was a slip. A certain somebodywasposted to town and wanted to let everyone know that he had arrived in more ways than one. Repeatedly, he would ask if I wanted something from the canteen. Whisky? Rum? My answer was a flat "no". But then, one morning, his batman was at the door with two bottles of rum which I made the mistake of accepting and paying for. Those two bottles of cheap rum subsequently cost me more than the best possible single malt. Over the next several months, whenever that certain gentleman would meet me, he would call out (loudly, and preferably with enough people within earshot), "Did

Never ever compromise on basic principles, and avoid making presumptions

you get the bottles of rum I sent you?" The time came when that person moved on and I learnt an invaluable Occasionally one is also asked to speak lesson, "Never ever compromise on basic principles. The costwill be higher than you can ever imagine."

> Another less on came from a fine set of worthies — who in their heyday were big shots in their own world. They were holding forth with convictions set in stone and worldviews that only retired worthies, with secure pensions, can hold. Sitting nearby was another person whom I'd met for the first time. He joined the conversation and asked a few simple but remarkably pertinent questions. One of the worthies turned to him and with great condescension asked, "And, what is it that you do?"

> The gentleman named a company that none of us had heard of and said he was its managing director.

"Oh, never heard of it. Where are you based? Baddi or Barotiwala?" This was followed by loud laughter.

"We have operations in different parts of the world," was the quiet gentleman's reply.

"So, what do your different operations do?" This worthy wasn't letting go. "We are into space technology and we launch satellites on behalf of various governments into space."

Expectedly, this was met with suitably stunned silence. The bravado had suddenly vanished. Here was another lesson: never presume. Don't think you are the biggest gun at the table. Some cannons are far bigger if not louder.

Do either of these incidents have any relevance, apart from a vague feel-good factor? I don't know. All one can say is that there may be something to them, as both have become a fairly indelible memory.

Amid bravehearts, in the hero's honour

COLASHOK AHLAWAT

HE young Captain of Rashtriya Rifles got a patrol ready in five minutes. He must have wondered at the improbable demand of the visiting middle-aged Colonel to scale the nearest hill. The soldiers spread out and started climbing up the hill terraces in which maize was sprouting.

The over-eager visitor's knees started creaking. He asked a soldier for a light machine gun. It felt heavy and he climbed for a few hundred yards up the farm terraces. He returned the weapon and wished he had a sturdy walking stick. He felt all his machismo melting away. The soldiers kept moving up. They were super fit. You know it when you climb with them. Your brain and college certificate don't tell you that. Your legs and lungs give you that education when you move up a mountain with them.

Cries of 'Jai Hind' rang out from the old men living in the mud houses. They offered water. It was scarce in the mountains and they had to buy it in tankers. They pulled out plastic chairs and offered hospitality, as they started talking about their Army stints. I served in so and so battalion of JAK LI (Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry).' Then came the long list of sta-

tions they had served in. The Armymen had been climbing for two hours. When they descended from the hilltop, the Colonel stopped at a shop on the road bend. The owner let out a sonorous 'Jai Hind'. From almost every mud-roofed hut that he passed, he could hear 'Jai Hind'. Old men, their faces washed with deep lines, proclaimed having served in JAK LI. Buffaloes stood tethered in solid mud and the timber huts were built on hewed slopes. A listless Bihari mason stood and stared as the patrol passed. When asked what he was doing so far away from home, he said he earned ₹600 a day as most young men of the village

worked in foreign countries. The shop was well stocked with provisions. A beaming, handsome, 6 foot tall young boy came and stood there. In this part of India, people are generally good looking. The mountains and woods all around are a wanderer's delight.

The lad insisted that the Armymen come to his house. Another good-looking young man came out. He had long, curly brown hair. A tall man who looked in his sixties stood outside the simple house in a salwar kameez. He welcomed the officers and took them to a drawing room with plastic chairs and a centre table.

A matronly woman came and sat next to the man. Another young man fetched tea, almonds,

pistachios and biscuits. The tea was thick-sweet buffalo milk with just a whiff of tea leaves. In rural communities, such tea is an honour. Not much different from the customary offerings in the Colonel's native Haryana.

The young men were shy and there was a tall young girl, their sister, who went away briskly. The boys had come home from their regiments on leave. It was Eid and homecoming season.

The father was strong, dignified and had little to say. Clouds of sadness remained settled on the mother's face. The father of the boys got up and went into another room, returning with a framed medal. It had a green ribbon and a bronze circular disc with the Ashokan wheel. On the mother's face, the lines of sadness and memory became deeper. The boy to whom the medal belonged had left the world.

The brave woman had five sons. She had permitted all of them to wear the olive green. One of them had given up his life in the service of the nation.

Darkness set in on the mountain slope. It was time to leave. The Captain sat quietly. The Colonel got up, saluted the parents and the patrol started walking back.

Rifleman Aurangzeb was conferred the Shaurya Chakra, the third highest gallantry award, posthumously in 2018. Jai Hind!

Steppe eagles, the vanishing voyagers from Central Asia

PARTH JOSHI

HE morning mist was rising slowly as we stepped into the ochre-coloured grasslands of Tal Chappar in Rajasthan, known as a haven for birds of prey. Staring across the open expanse, a large silhouette caught the eye. On training the binoculars, it turned out to be a Steppe eagle, the ubiquitous post-monsoon visitor across many parts of India, undertaking long and arduous migrations each year to spend the winter in the temperate climates of the Indian subcontinent, as well as Southeast Asia, Middle East and Africa.

A large raptor with a wingspan of over 2 metres, the Steppe eagle (Aquila nipalensis) is a member of the 'booted eagle' family, meaning it has feathered legs. As the name suggests, grasslands or 'steppes' constitute the bird's natural habitat. While it mainly breeds and resides in Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia, as temperatures drop in these regions, it undertakes an annual migration southward. Like many migratory species, it has remarkable navigational skills, using the same route year after year, guided by an array of cues like the Earth's magnetic field, position of the stars and wind patterns to tra-



verse thousands of kilometres. There are a few unique characteristics that set the Steppe eagle apart from other eagles. It prefers to nest on the ground as opposed to the canopy, a factor of its natural habitat, and prefers to walk or 'strut' a lot, spending far lesser time soaring in the air like other birds of prey. A specialised predator of squirrels, it also hunts other small mammals like hare and reptiles, and when fresh prey is scarce, also consumes dead animals, or 'carrion'.

In terms of appearance, it can often be confused with the tawny eagle or the spotted eagle, and an easy way to distinguish it in the field is its elongated 'gape' or the end of the beak, and oval-shaped nostrils. Despite its fierce expression, it is quite approachable and relatively tame, and can adjust to a moderate level of human presence.

The Steppe eagle is not just a casual visitor. It provides important ecosystem services. As an apex predator and scavenger, it controls

the rodent population and consumes carrion, preventing the spread of diseases and maintaining the health of their habitat. This natural 'clean-up' service reduces the reliance on chemical pest-control methods and promotes a healthy ecosystem. Their presence signifies a well-balanced environment with adequate prey availability and minimal human disturbances.

However, the species faces a multitude of threats today. Rapid urbanisation, agricultural expansion, and infrastructure development are encroaching upon open grasslands and wetlands, leading to habitat loss and diminishing prey availability. Increasing use of pesticides in agricultural fields is resulting in secondary poisoning, as they consume prey exposed to harmful chemicals. Collision with overhead powerlines and wind turbines is also emerging as a key threat.

These factors have led to a rapid decline in their population. In Kazakhstan, a major breeding ground, the population has halved in just 15-20 years, while surveys in India have revealed a long-term decline of nearly 31 per cent. As the threats to these avians persist, the species has been classified as 'endangered' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Concerted efforts are needed to protect this keystone species that plays a crucial

role in maintaining ecosystems across continents. Awareness campaigns highlighting the ecological importance of these raptors can encourage local communities and civil society to participate in conservation efforts. Better enforcement of regulations on pesticide use, and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices can help reduce instances of indirect poisoning.

Driving around a bend in the meandering mountain roads of Uttarakhand, the sight of branches of a pine tree struggling to bear the weight of their occupants made us bring the car to a quick halt. About a dozen Steppe eagles crowded the canopy surrounding a carcass dumping site, far out from their usual habitats or rolling grasslands. Trying to get a clear sighting, one couldn't help but marvel at their amazing adaptability, travelling mind-boggling distances so nonchalantly, and keeping a diverse range of ecosystems healthy.

Yet, it also felt as if they were clinging to the dwindling branches of survival. Their flight, a testament to the freedom of the skies, now carries the weight of a world struggling to remember that without its wild guardians, it loses more than just eagles. It is up to us to ensure that these majestic creatures continue to grace our skies for generations to come.

INDEPTH



Members of the film fraternity and the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) stage a protest march to the Secretariat demanding fair wages and safety and security at the workplace in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. PTI

FINDING THEIR WOLCE

Based on testimonies from 51 movie professionals, the Hema Committee report's damning indictment of the Malayalam film industry is a wake-up call for systemic reform across the country

BINDU MENON

ADELEINE ALBRIGHT, in an interview, recalled a meeting at the White House with US President Bill Clinton and several senior officials. Albright had just been appointed the Secretary of State, the first woman in American history to hold the post. She said that during the meeting, she tried several times to make a point but couldn't edge in a word. And she thought to herself, "My goodness, how powerful a woman does one need to be in order to get heard?" But that was a lesson. Albright would later famously say, "It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."

Something similar is happening in the Malayalam film industry. Women professionals, who have long faced sexual discrimination and unfair treatment, have found their voice. And that voice of unison is getting louder, angrier and clamouring for justice. At the heart of this churn is the Justice K Hema Committee report.

The 232-page report, based on testimonies from 51 movie professionals, is a damning indictment of an industry where illegal bans by power groups, casting couch culture, pay disparity, drug and alcohol abuse and unsafe working conditions make it hard for women to survive. The report has not been made fully public, with 63 pages redacted to protect the privacy of the respondents.

The three-member Hema Committee was formed in the aftermath of the 2017 abduction and sexual assault of a young female actor by a group of men in a moving car in Kochi. The perpetrators also filmed her harrowing experience. The incident sent shockwaves across the nation, coming as it did from an industry that is celebrated for its boundary-pushing and genre-bending cinema. An industry don, actor-producer Dileep, was alleged to be the mastermind behind this sordid episode. Though he was indicted by court, there has been no closure in the case yet. The survivor was able to garner support largely through the pressure exerted by the WCC, or Women in Cinema Collective, a band of feisty women film professionals from Kerala, who came together following the assault.

WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD

Again, it was Albright who said, "There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other." The WCC, however, went through a hellish experience when it tried to be that voice of dissent in a largely acquiescent industry. Film critic and researcher Aswathy Gopalakrishnan says the emergence of the WCC, initially backed by the leftist government, is a radical event in a space long dominated by patriarchal, feudal and strong capitalist forces. "Although the government later remained passive and even back-pedalled during the sexual assault trial, its initial welcoming of WCC and establishment of the Hema Committee crystallised the collective as a pivotal entity in Kerala's sociocultural sphere. It set an imitable model for women in other Indian film industries





A protest against actors Mukesh, Ganesh Kumar, Siddique and others after the Justice Hema Committee report revealed instances of sexual harassment in the Malayalam film industry; and (right) actor Mohanlal, president of AMMA, holds a press conference after his resignation.

on how to organise and press for structural reforms," says Gopalakrishnan.

The WCC, she adds, made it plain that women actors are not merely subjugated, second-class members of the film industry but artistes with independent minds.

This backing spurred Bhavana, the actor who was assaulted, to waive her anonymity in an Instagram post even as she faced an undeclared ban for some years — an indication of the immense clout that a powerful male lobby within the industry enjoys. The persistent efforts of the WCC forced the state government to form the Hema Committee. Though the report was filed in 2019, it took another five years for it to see the light of day.

After the report was made public, many women from the industry came forward to share their accounts of mental and physical abuse. Some of the accusations were levelled against cinema stalwarts and key functionaries of film bodies, including one that is ironically called AMMA, or the Association of Malayalam Movie Actors.

SHOWING THE WAY

What has also been disappointing but not surprising is the rather belated and bland response to the whole issue by the two superstars who rule the industry — Mohanlal and Mammootty. Mohanlal, who is president of AMMA, simply chose to resign from the post, along with all office-bearers, and cried hoarse about the Malayalam industry being crucified. Mammootty, too, signed off his statement saying, "Ultimately, the industry must survive." Both the actors also denied the existence of any power group, which the Hema Committee report repeatedly mentions.

However, what is heartening is that the report has served as a wake-up call.

"We saw a handful of young actors speaking out, albeit hesitantly, against the AMMA leadership. The weakening of the old order is discernible, and it will have an impact on how the industry will go ahead from here," says Gopalakrishnan. For better or worse, the Malayalam film industry has shown the way.

Women professionals from other movie industries too have demanded a similar clean-up within their fraternities. Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu urged the Telangana government to urgently publish a "sub-committee report on sexual harassment, which can help frame government and industry policies, to establish a safe working environment for women in the Telugu film industry". In West Bengal, film organisations have together launched the Suraksha Bandhu Committee that aims to take on and resolve complaints of sexual misconduct on film sets. The Women's Forum for Screen Workers in the Bengali film industry has issued a charter of demands, signed by 50 actors and technicians, seeking safe working conditions.

WILL THERE BE CHANGE?

Acivil society group, comprising over 70 eminent personalities like Arundhati Roy, Indira Jaising, Vinta Nanda, Aparna Sen and others, has made an appeal to the Kerala government seeking a "360degree approach" to the issues of women safety. "The state government's reaction to the Hema Committee's findings, as well as media coverage, have both placed an inordinate focus on the sexual misdemeanours and crimes described in the report, to the virtual exclusion of the considerable space devoted in its pages to discussing working conditions in the industry, lack of contracts, pay disparities and so on," says its letter.

Cautioning the media against "selective" coverage and the government for its visible inaction, the group has called for a "systemic reform of the industry".

The WCC, which saw many of its members sidelined in the Malayalam industry for daring to fight back and question the entrenched patriarchy, is firm in its resolve for actionable change in the industry. Actor Parvathy Thiruvothu, one of the outspoken members of the WCC, has cautioned against sensationalising the report and bringing the focus back on safework-

ing conditions for women in cinema.

Thiruvothu, who has headlined many women-centric films like the Tanuja Chandra-helmed 'Qarib Qarib Singlle' and the more recent acclaimed Malayalam movie 'Ullozhukku' (Undercurrent), has asserted that the issue is not endemic to Malayalam cinema.

NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Women actors from Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and other film industries are calling out the rampant sexism that exists in their fraternity. They are speaking out about better working conditions, more professionalism and pay parity. Priyanka Chopra once revealed that she received 90 per cent less pay than her male co-stars in Bollywood. That changed when she starred in an international web-series, where she received an equal pay cheque as her co-lead. Chopra said she didn't know she had the power to ask for more until her agents in Hollywood said she could. In other words, it shows the power of having a voice and using it.

It's a similar sentiment shared by actor Salma Hayek, who opened up about the blitz of sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of the now jailed movie producer Harvey Weinstein. "Men sexually harassed because they could. Women are talking today because, in this new era, we finally can," Hayek wrote in The New York Times.

While it's much more than a Harvey Weinstein moment in the Malayalam film industry, one wonders whether the ramifications of the Hema Committee report will have a pan-India effect. Gopalakrishnan puts it rather eloquently, "WCC has succeeded in creating a new consciousness among women in cinema, to organise against a system that uses shame and fear as weapons of oppression. While it's too early to say what the report will engender, this novel consciousness is sure to reorder the filmmaking space."

NO LOOS, NO EQUALPAY

- "The stars do not twinkle, nor does the moon look beautiful... Do not trust what you see: even salt looks like sugar." These are some of the opening lines of the Justice K Hema Committee report. These lines capture the double-faced nature of an industry known for its cutting edge cinema but also, in many ways, the regressive treatment of its women workforce.
- The committee, headed by retired Justice K Hema, also comprised retired IAS officer KB Valsala Kumari and veteran South Indian actor Sarada.
- The report highlights the inequities, power games and unsafe working conditions skewed mostly against women in the cinema space.

 "Compromises" and "adjustments" two euphemisms for sexual favours for work opportunities stand out in this report. Women who enter the industry are made to believe that this is a requirement to get ahead in their career and face the inevitable "midnight knocks on hotel doors".
- Another damning revelation follows: "It has come out in evidence that 10-15 individuals in cinema who are in the forefront of the Malayalam film industry constitute a power group and they are controlling the industry."
- Highlighting the rather misogynistic attitude of this male preserve, the report also says that the industry ostracised outspoken members of the Women in Cinema Collective because producers are "afraid of women who make complaints" and would rather cast those who "don't create problems".
- Then comes the rather depressing issue of working conditions. All the women who spoke before the committee underlined the absence of toilet facilities or changing rooms on the set, especially while shooting in remote outdoor locations. Many would go without water till the shooting schedule ended to curb the urge to relieve themselves in the open. This has caused many ailments for women, the report reveals.
- In one instance, a junior artiste was refused permission by the production unit to take a loo break as that would have meant walking 10 minutes to reach the nearest toilet facility. The report also mentions that when queried about such problems, a prominent actor was dismissive and said it was only a question of adjustment and not a serious issue.
- The document calls attention to 17 major issues that point to the insidious ways in which the industry operates and how some of these impact men too. Informal bans against an artist or technician by power groups over "silly reasons", non-execution of contracts, online harassment, pay disparity and the absence of a legally-constituted authority to redress grievances are some of the pressing issues highlighted in the report.

the pioneer

"People say to me, 'You're so lucky. You get to see the world.' But I don't. I go to the hotel and to the pools and back again. That's it"

n the last two years, India's travel and tourism industry has flourished in an unprecedented manner. In the past, Westerners and even visitors from other Asian countries associated India mainly with landmarks like the Taj Mahal, Lal Qila, Qutub Minar, and Jama Masjid. Although India had several opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s to showcase its rich heritage to the world, leadership failed to seize the moment and market the country's lesser-known attractions. Events like the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in 1982 and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1984 were limited to New Delhi. The same pattern followed during the SAARC summit under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's tenure.

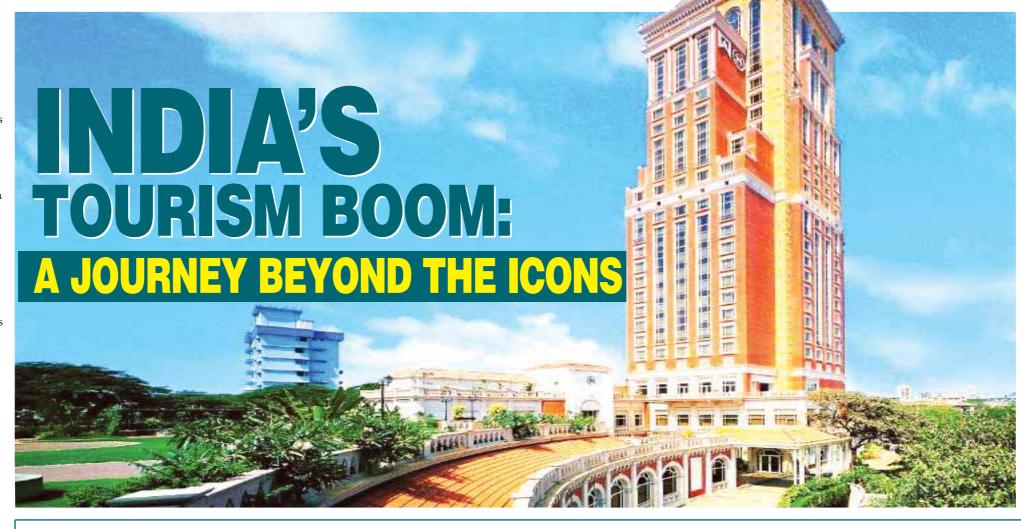
The world, however, took notice during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India in 2014, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted him in Ahmedabad and Raj Nagar, Gujarat. This visit stood out for the unprecedented camaraderie between Modi and Xi. The "Chai Pe Charcha" and stroll along the Sabarmati River, along with traditional Gujarati delicacies, were a new experience for Xi (though, in an ironic twist, while enjoying hot and crispy pakoras, Xi had already instructed the PLA to provoke incidents along the India-China border).

After this visit, India hosted several significant events, including the G-20 summit. For the first time in India's history, global dignitaries were taken beyond the capital to experience the diversity of the subcontinent. They were captivated by India's opulence and natural beauty, pushing the country to the forefront of desirable travel destinations.

India truly has something for everyone. The enchanting beauty of Kashmir, the stunning landscapes of the northeast, the lush jungles of the south, and the winding rivers of Krishna, Kaveri, and Godavari, along with the mesmerizing western coastline, are sure to attract hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. The concept of tourism has evolved over the last decade, and it is no longer just about leisure. The serene locations across India can rejuvenate the spirit, and the ancient Ayurvedic medicine system offers a holistic experience, revitalizing both body and soul.

An untapped potential in India's tourism sector is MICE tourism—Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions. Pradeep Shetty, president of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India, believes that MICE tourism could play a crucial role in positioning India as a global tourism

Beyond its cultural and scenic wealth, the sector offers immense job and business potential, catering to both skilled and unskilled labour, as well as entrepreneurs. Hotels in India are no longer limited to luxury chains like Taj Residencies or Hilton. Even clean, hygienic, and safe accommodations that serve regional cuisine with a smile can qualify as excellent hospitality options,



UNVEILING THE FUTURE OF INDIA'S HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

PRADEEP SHETTY, President of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), is currently preparing for the association's 54th annual convention, set to take place in October 2024. In an exclusive interview with Kumar Chellappan, Shetty shared insights into the immense potential of India's hospitality and tourism sector, its challenges, and the expectations from both the central and state governments

What is the real potential of the hospitality and tourism industry?

India's hospitality and tourism industry is on a remarkable growth trajectory. According to Mordor Intelligence, the sector is projected to reach a valuation of USD 247.31 billion by 2024, with forecasts indicating it could soar to USD 475.37 billion by 2029, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.96%. Key trends driving this growth include a shift towards sustainable tourism, with ecofriendly accommodations and communitybased initiatives gaining traction. India's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and geopolitical stability further bolster this expansion. However, to fully capitalize on its potential, the industry must address sustainability, infrastructure development, and adaptability to evolving consumer preferences.

How do you view the current and future employment trends in the hospitality sector? Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 rebound strongly. The India Food Services Report-2024 projects that by 2025, the sector will employ approximately ten million people. The industry's resilience, coupled with advancements in accommodation and government initiatives to promote tourism,



PRADEEP SHETTY President, Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI)



What are the prospects for job creation in the hotel and restaurant industry over the coming years?

India's hospitality and tourism sector has the potential to generate 50 million direct and indirect jobs in the next 5-7 years. This growth will depend on robust government support, including granting industry and infrastructure status at various levels. The sector's resilience and strategic investments, along with effective policy implementation, are critical for shaping its employment landscape. Notably, the industry has already seen a 14% increase in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) in the first half of the current fiscal year, with expectations of a further 15-20% growth in the latter half of

business-friendly environment by simplifying licensing and permits. Public-private partnerships and engagement with industry stakeholders are also key to enhancing tourism growth.

Has the Government of India shown any commitment to granting infrastructure status to the hospitality sector?

The Government of India's interest in granting infrastructure status to the hospitality sector is a promising development. If approved, this status could attract more investments and empower the sector to contribute to the development of the 50 new destinations recently announced by the government.

What benefits would infrastructure status bring to

Associations of India (FHRAI), founded in 1955, is the apex hospitality association in India and the third largest globally. It represents 55,000 hotels and 500,000 restaurants across the country. FHRAI advocates for the industry's interests, engaging with government bodies, regulatory agencies, and other stakeholders to promote growth and address challenges.

What are the major issues facing the industry, and what do you expect the government to do about them?

The hospitality industry faces

several critical challenges that require strategic solutions. First, GST rationalization is needed to implement a uniform rate of 12% across all hotels. Second, separating GST on food services support industry growth.



festival II

ONAM SADYA AT SANTOSHAM,

Santosham Foods is thrilled to unveil its

beloved Onam Sadhya, where tradition

meets taste in a celebration that promises to be nothing short of

At Santosham, which aptly translates to 'Happiness' or 'Joy' in Malayalam and

Tamil, the team is passionate about delivering an experience that lives up to

Founded in May 2022, Santosham

Foods has become synonymous with genuine South Indian flavors in Mumbai. While the city is known for its love of South Indian cuisine, finding

those truly authentic tastes amidst a sea of fusion trends is rare. That's where

Santosham comes in, offering a slice of

The Head Chef and Co-Founder, Bhagyalakshmi Gohokar, brings her

rich heritage to her kitchen. Growing up in the bustling environment of Shanti Bhavan in Nagpur, she has always been surrounded by the irresistible aroma of freshly brewed filter coffee and crispy medu vadas. Her childhood memories of watching the magic of South Indian cooking unfold have inspired her to bring these authentic flavours to This year's celebration promises to be even more memorable, with a menu featuring over 40 traditional dishes that will transport your taste buds straight to South India. From the rich and sweet

Palada Pradhaman to the spicy and tangy Lemon Achar & Manga Kari, each dish is crafted with love and care, reflecting the true spirit of Onam.

"Last year, we had the pleasure of serving over 2,000 delighted diners during Onam, and this year, we're set to create even more unforgettable."

create even more unforgettable experiences. Our Sadya is not just a

meal; it's a vibrant celebration of

tradition, culture and culinary So, come and join us at Santosham for a

feast that's brimming with flavour and

festivity. Whether you're a longtime fan

or a first-time guest, our Onam Sadya is

sure to leave you with a smile and a

satisfied belly," says Bhagyalakshmi.

Dates: September 13th, 14th, 15th,

EXQUISITE SADHYA AT THE SHERATON GRAND PUNE BUND GARDEN HOTEL

Celebrate the spirit of Onam with a

traditional Sadhya at the Sheraton

Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel. Feast

starts with classic starters like Dal Wada, and Medu Vada, perfectly

complemented by refreshing Sambar and the Ingi Thayir. Next are the

traditional condiments like Sarakara

Uperi, Nendran Chips, and Mango Pickle that set the stage for the main

course. A vast range of authentic delights such as the Avial, Kadla Curry,

Olan, and Thoran, all served with the

aromatic Ponni Rice, flaky Pooris and

finished with the comforting Thayir

Sadam. Indulge in Paruppu Payasam

and the Banana Sheera to complete the

Lunch On 13th, 14th, and 15th of

At Feast, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund

Location: Powai, Chandivali

Date: September 14th & 15th

Location: Manpada, Thane

21st, & 22nd

home with every dish.

spectacular.

its name.

New Delhi, September 8, 2024

BY SHARMILA CHAND

nam, the harvest festival of Kerala, is renowned for its grand feast known as the Šadhya. Also known as Thiru-Onam or Thiruvonam, this is a harvest festival that celebrates the return of King Mahabali/Maveli to his beloved state. It's a time of thanksgiving for the bountiful crops. Truly, what adds to the festival is the tradition of the 'Onam

Traditionally, an Onam Sadhya consists of around 24 to 64 dishes. What sets this meal apart is its intricate balance of tastes-sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and spicy—all harmoniously combined to create a delightful experience.

The number of dishes vary based on the

region. There is a specific order in which the dishes are served on the banana leaf. It usually starts with serving the rice, followed by various curries, pickles, and desserts.

Interestingly, the feast is traditionally eaten with the hands, believed to enhance the sensory experience of the varied flavours. Families and communities come together to enjoy the feast, which is a way to celebrate the bountiful harvest, express gratitude, and bring people together in a spirit of joy and togetherness.

People decorate their homes with floral arrangements called "Pookkalam" and wear traditional attire during the festival for a holistic experience, an integral and cherished part of the celebration.

Folding the Banana Leaf Is Important Towards You: Once you've finished eating, fold the banana leaf towards you. This helps to signify that you've enjoyed the meal and are satisfied. The grandeur of Onam Sadhya awaits you offering annual culinary extravaganza in Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Pune and Bengaluru.

EXCLUSIVE ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA AT SOUTH OF VINDHYAS, THE ORCHID HOTEL, MUMBAI

South of Vindhyas, the authentic Southern Indian restaurant at The Orchid Hotel Mumbai, is all set to



welcome the diners for the much-awaited ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA feast. This exclusive culinary experience promises an immersive experience for guests to the rich flavors of Kerala, in authentic style.

Chef Bala Śubramaniam, the culinary maestro behind South of Vindhyas, has 56 authentic dishes that capture the true essence of Southern India. Upon arrival, guests will be greeted with a refreshing Kachia Moru (Buttermilk) or a warm Thakkali Rasam (Tomato Soup), setting the tone for the culinary journey ahead. The feast unfolds with a variety of crispy and flavorful chips, including Banana Chips, Jackfruit Chips, Plantain Chips, and the ever-popular Nendrankai Chips. Guests can indulge in an array of traditional breads like Appam, Kal Dosa, and Malabari Paratha with main course, which includes a diverse selection of vegetarian dishes that celebrate the harvest. From Olan (Chowlibeans & White Pumpkin) and Kalan (Suran) to the flavorful Avial and Kootu Curry and much more, each dish is a celebration of Kerala's culinary heritage. A variety of pachadis (pickles) such as Vellari Pachadi (Cucumber Pickle), Pavakkai Pachadi (Ridge Gourd Pickle), Bhindi Pachadi (Okra Pickle), and Manga Curry (Mango Curry) add a tangy twist to the meal. Complementing the spread are rice preparations including Red Rice, Steamed Rice, Lemon Sevai, and Coconut Sevai.

To conclude the meal, guests can indulge in a range of traditional sweets Ada Pradhaman, Kadala Pradhaman (Black Gram Payasam), and Mambazha Pradhaman/Chakka Pradhaman (Mango/Jackfruit Payasam), along with other delightful treats like Pazham Pori (Banana Fritters) and Panchamrutham (Sweet

Step in and you will be transported to Kerala with the venue adorned in beautifully arranged banana leaves and vibrant rangoli patterns. Enhancing the authenticity, the staff will be dressed in traditional South Indian attire adding a genuine touch of Kerala's rich heritage to your dining experience. The ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA at South of Vindhyas is not just a meal; it's a celebration of culture, tradition, and the joy of sharing food with loved ones. The meticulously prepared dishes, the vibrant ambiance, and the warm hospitality make this an experience not to be missed.

LUNCH & DINNER

12th to 16th September At South of Vindhyas, The Orchid Hotel Mumbai Contact: 7506010316



SADHYA CULINARY VOYAGE AT

SANA DI GE, DELHI Sana-di-ge, the well known culinary haven for coastal cuisine enthusiasts, is set to treat the patrons once again with an exceptional Sadhya experience. The acclaimed restaurant, like every year, promises a sensory journey into the diverse and aromatic world of coastal

India's gastronomic legacy.
The stunning entrance with beautifully oil lit diya is the reminder of its name -Sana-di-ge, derived from the Tulu language meaning a brass lamp. The restaurant is known for its authentic coastal recipes curated with freshly sourced ingredients. The extensive menu comprises delicacies from Mangalore, Goa, Maharashtra, and Kerala. The food here is served on brass plates lined with plantain leaves giving an experience of Dakshina Kannada dining.

Savour a symphony of Sadhya feast with dishes, elegantly served on traditional banana leaves. Says Executive Chef Sukesh Kanchan, "In our Sadhya menu, each dish captures the essence of Kerala's culinary heritage. The highlights of the menu are Sambharam -Spicy buttermilk with fresh coriander, ginger and curry leaves; Upperi -Banana chips; Sharkara Upperi - Sweet banana chips; Kosambari Salad -Traditional Kannadiga salad; Cabbage



THE ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA AT SOUTH OF VINDHYAS IS NOT JUST A MEAL; IT'S A **CELEBRATION OF** CULTURE, TRADITION, AND THE JOY OF SHARING FOOD WITH **LOVED ONES**



Thoran; MezhukkuPuratti - Stir fried raw banana finished with coconut silvers & crushed dry red chilli; Avial and a lot more. The feast concludes on a sweet note with the signature 'Chana Dal Payasam, a melding of jaggery, cow's milk, coconut milk, and chana

The culinary art and decor of Sana-dige are sure to transport patrons to the kitchens of the coast bringing in a oneof-a-kind experience.

LUNCH & DINNER

12th to 16th September 22/48 Malcha Marg, New Delhi Contact: 01140507777

Carnatic music playing in the background. These performances offer guests a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of Kerala and add to the festive atmosphere. By celebrating Onam with traditional food and cultural performances, Taj Holiday Village and Taj Fort Aguada are fostering a sense of community and preserving the rich heritage of Kerala.

Venue : Caravela at Taj Holiday Village **Date :** Lunch On 15th Sept

Venue: Kokum Kitchen at Taj Fort Aguada Date: Lunch on 14th and 15th Sept

ONAM SADHYA EXTRAVAGANZA AT TAJ RESORTS, GOA

Celebrate the joyous occasion of Sadhya at the luxurious Taj Holiday Village Resort & Spa and Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa. Chef Dibyendu Roy and Chef Somnath Rakesh are all set to prepare Sadhya where each dish comes in its authentic style, ensuring that the flavours and textures are true to tradition. The meal is served in a traditional setting, complete with banana leaves and copper vessels, service team in traditional ensemble, creating a truly immersive experience. Beyond the culinary delights, the Onam celebrations at these resorts also feature

BANGALORE EMBASSY GOLFLINKS

GRAND SADHYA AT HILTON

September

Garden Hotel

Savour timeless classics like the appetizing Neyyappam, wholesome Avial, Kootu Curry, Thoran, Olan, Kalan, Pachadi, Inji Puli, and Erissery, each crafted with a perfect balance of spices to awaken your senses to be enjoyed with the wholesome goodness of Parippu, Matta rice and the delightful flavours of Sambar and Rasam, all served on the traditional banana leaf. Conclude your Sadhya on a sweet note with desserts such as Paal Payasam.

Venue: MOF, Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks Date: 15th September **Timing:** 12:30 pm to 04:00 pm

Sharmila Chand is a senior Journalist and Author who writes on Food, Travel,

THE BEST COMEDY COMES FROM A SPECIFIC VIEW POINT, AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE INDIAN CULTURE HAS IT IS OWN TAKE ON THE WORLD — BRIAN QUINN

New Delhi, September 8, 2024









A FUSION OF LUXURY, TRADITION AND CULINARY EXCELLENCE

Discover how Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla, brings dreams to life with its exquisite and personalised approach to creating unforgettable wedding celebrations, says SAKSHI PRIYA

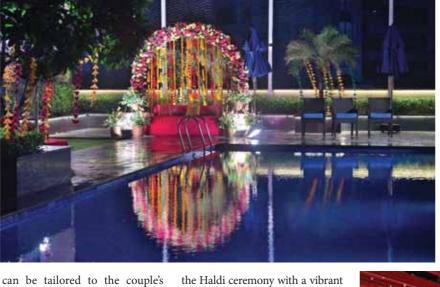
Plaza recently **v**owne presented a magnificent ✓ Wedding Showcase, offering an immersive experience that symbolises elegance and grandeur. The event showcased the hotel's ability to create unforgettable wedding celebrations with a blend of stunning venues, luxurious decor and exceptional culinary

A GRAND WELCOME: SETTING THE TONE FOR ELEGANCE

The red and white theme, aesthetic lighting and wedding-themed photo booth set a vibrant and warm tone for the evening. Guests were greeted with an opulent welcome as they entered the beautifully decorated lobby. The grand entrance was further enhanced by the Red Wedding Hues Tunnel, accompanied by the traditional shehnai music, creating a memorable and enchanting atmosphere from the very start.The grand welcome was a perfect introduction to Crowne Plaza's commitment to blending luxury with tradition, ensuring that guests felt special and immersed in the wedding experience right from the beginning.

EMERALD BALLROOM: A GLAMOROUS COCKTAIL EVENING

The Emerald Ballroom was transformed into a glamorous cocktail venue with a black and glitter theme, highlighted by a breathtaking chandelier. Accommodating up to 400 guests, setting enhanced by a soulful Sufi live band, which created a magical and romantic ambiance for the evening.The Emerald Ballroom exemplified Crowne Plaza's ability to create a luxurious and adaptable space, making it an ideal setting for a grand wedding reception that



preferences.

JADE LAWN: A SERENE OUTDOOR

The Jade Lawn offered a picturesque outdoor setting for the wedding ceremony. Adorned with floral decor and soft lighting, the lawn, which can host up to 500 guests, provided a serene backdrop for the bride and groom's vows.

The vibrant mandap, decorated with red and white flowers against lush greenery, created an elegant and natural atmosphere. The Jade Lawn was an ideal venue for couples seeking a tranquil and naturally beautiful outdoor setting Crowne Plaza's ability to create and picturesque environments.

OPAL BANQUET: A VIBRANT HALDI CEREMONY

Banquet was The Opal transformed into a lively venue for

yellow and blue theme. The banquet, which accommodates 180 guests, featured joyful decor, including entries decorated with yellow marigold flowers, capturing the essence of the traditional ceremony. The Opal Banquet's vibrant and traditional setting perfectly captured the joyous spirit of the Haldi ceremony, reflecting *Crowne Plaza's* attention to detail and commitment to creating memorable pre-wedding rituals.

POOLSIDE: A FESTIVE MEHENDI CELEBRATION

The poolside venue was styled for a vibrant Mehendi night with decor in red, pink, and green. This intimate space, accommodating 60 guests, featured delightful food and drinks, creating a lively and festive atmosphere for an unforgettable celebration. The poolside setup was perfect for an intimate yet vibrant Mehendi

celebration. demonstrating Crowne Plaza's expertise in environments for wedding events.

CHAOBELLA: A CHIC BOHEMIAN DINNER EXPERIENCE The evening concluded with a Bohemian-themed sit-down dinner at ChaoBella. The al

fresco setup, adorned with chic

bohemian decor, offered a stylish and intimate dining oviding a end to the showcase with its elegant and relaxed ambiance. ChaoBella's Bohemian-themed dinner provided a sophisticated and unique dining experience, showcasing ability to deliver memorable and stylish wedding

CULINARY EXCELLENCE: A FEAST FOR THE SENSES Food is an integral part of any

celebration and Crowne Plaza excelled in delivering an exceptional culinary experience. The showcase featured an array of mouthwatering dishes, like kulkad mouthwatering dishes, like kulkad wale taka-e-tak, a variety of idlis - ragi, vegetables and steaming hot idlis - paired with five types of chutneys. Street-style chats and pani puri's added a burst of flavours, while the dessert table was a highlight with options like herry panna cotta, tres leches cake berry panna cotta, tres leches cake, tiramisu, brownies and the star dessert - badam halwa. Each dish, from the street-style treats to the hotel's dedication to providing an extraordinary dining experience with a diverse range of flavours meticulously prepared by talented chefs. The culinary offerings were a standout feature of the event, showcasing Crowne Plaza's commitment to excellence with a



diverse and delectable menu that catered to all tastes and preferences, enhancing the overall wedding experience.

CRAFTING UNFORGETTABLE WEDDING EXPERIENCES

"At Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla, we believe in creating wedding experiences that are as unique and special as the couples themselves," said the General Manager. "This showcase was a glimpse into the endless possibilities we can offer, from personalised decor to gourmet cuisine, ensuring that every wedding is truly unforgettable." Wedding Showcase exemplified their commitment to creating exceptional wedding experiences. From the grand entrance to the diverse and delectable culinary offerings, every detail was designed to impress. As the General Manager noted, "We strive to make every wedding unique and unforgettable.

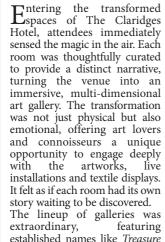
The Wedding Showcase at Crowne Plaza exemplified luxury and attention to detail. With stunning venues, exquisite decor and a demonstrated dedication to crafting unforgettable wedding experiences. Crowne Plaza is ready to turn every couple's vision into a unique celebration, ensuring each moment is as special as their love story.

Photos: Pankai Kumar

awaited sequel in New Delhi, once again dazzled art enthusiasts by bringing a vivid fusion of indigenous and global art to the forefront. The event, held at *The Claridges Hotel*, showcased the power of creativity, seamlessly blending the worlds of tribal art, textiles and luxury and creating an unforgettable experience for both artists and visitors

says SAKSHI PRIYA

Artix 3.0, the much-



featuring established names like *Treasure* Art Gallery, Artrise Art, 108 Art Projects, Bespoke Art Gallery, Ashvita's and Vision Art Gallery, among others. These galleries, along with solo artists like Aanchal Garg, Shobha Broota and Cholamandal,

created a vibrant mosaic of artistic expression that was diverse and profound. Artists such as Raza Husain, Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Anjolie Menon and Prabhakar Kolte showcased their alongside works, renowned names like FN Souza, Laxma Goud Manu and Parekh, adding depth and dimension to the event. The inclusion of

activities that encourage interaction and exploration, enriching a vibrant dialogue between artists, collectors, and art lovers. The exhibition also paid tribute to the lesser-known but equally captivating traditions of Indian art. The Devi Art Foundation presented "A Little Bird Told Me..." featuring artworks by the Tribal Women Artists Collective from Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.
This collective has worked tirelessly to keep the centuries-old traditions of the Kohvar (marriage) and Sohrai (harvest) luxury brands such as paintings transitioning these from the Heeramaneck & Son Fine Jewellery, Lotus mud walls of village homes to Arts de Vivre and paper, ensuring their survival Chayroot x Prabhu and giving women artists a Viswanathan further means to sustain themselves. enriched the event, These panels, with their vivid

creating a confluence of art, fashion, and design that was

truly mesmerising.
A special highlight of the

opening was an engaging session

featuring luminaries like Satish Gupta, Prayag Shukla, Sanjay Bhattacharya, Shobha Broota and Arpana Caur, followed by a curatorial walkthrough by Jyoti Kathralia, The discussions were

Kathpalia. The discussions were

insightful, providing a deeper understanding of the themes

and ideas that shaped this year's

Artix. Each day was packed with





another layer of cultural richness

Shobha Broota, one of India's most celebrated contemporary artists, showcased her ethereal

canvases that possess a deceptive

characterised by abstract forms,

rhythmic lines and rich textures,

brought a sense of calm and

introspection to the event.

Broota's unique artistic journey,

from portraiture to abstract and

Her

works,

to the exhibition.

simplicity.









her ongoing exploration of the depictions of flora, fauna and

life, evoked a deep connection to spiritual and metaphysical, the past while providing a captivated visitors and provided glimpse into the future of tribal a contemplative counterpoint to art in India. Similarly, the work the more vibrant displays. of Usman Tirandaz from The corporate social initiative Rajasthan, known for his intricate depictions using pigments on cloth, added

AADYAM Handwoven, by the Aditya Birla Group, added another dimension to Artix 3.0 by showcasing the intricate craftsmanship of weavers from various parts of India, such as Varanasi, Pochampally, Bhuj, Kashmir and Bhadohi. Their efforts to create a self-sustaining ecosystem for artisans were evident in the quality and diversity of the textiles displayed, which celebrated age-old weaving techniques while appealing to contemporary

What made Artix 3.0 truly special was its ability to humanise the experience of art. It went beyond just exhibition spaces and brought together a community, creating a dynamic space where art was not only viewed but felt. It challenged the conventional gallery model, making art more accessible and intimate. The organiser's, led by Payal Kapoor, Malvika Poddar and Sethu Vaidyanathan, envisioned a traveling art affair that not only defied traditional norms but also celebrated the multitude of forms that art can take. Their dedication and passion were visible in every corner of the exhibition, making Artix a unique and memorable

the essence of what makes art truly powerful, its ability to connect people across boundaries, evoke emotions and inspire new ways of thinking. The atmosphere was electric, filled with conversations that ranged from the technical aspects of a painting to the deeper philosophical questions it raised. Artix 3.0 was more than just an art exhibition - it was a celebration of creativity, a gathering of minds and a bold statement that art is for As Artix 3.0 works to expand

Artix 3.0 succeeded in capturing

to other cities like Bangalore, Mumbai and Kolkata, it is hoped that it will continue to build on this momentum, bringing its unique blend of luxury, creativity and accessibility to new audiences. For those who had the chance to experience Artix 3.0, it was a reminder of why art matters and how it has the power to transform spaces, people and even our understanding of the world. *Artix 3.0* served as a vivid reminder that art is not just something to be looked at but something to be experienced, felt and lived. And that, in itself, is its greatest achievement.
Photos: Pankaj Kumar

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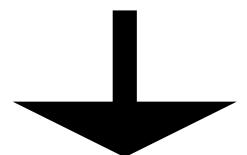
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