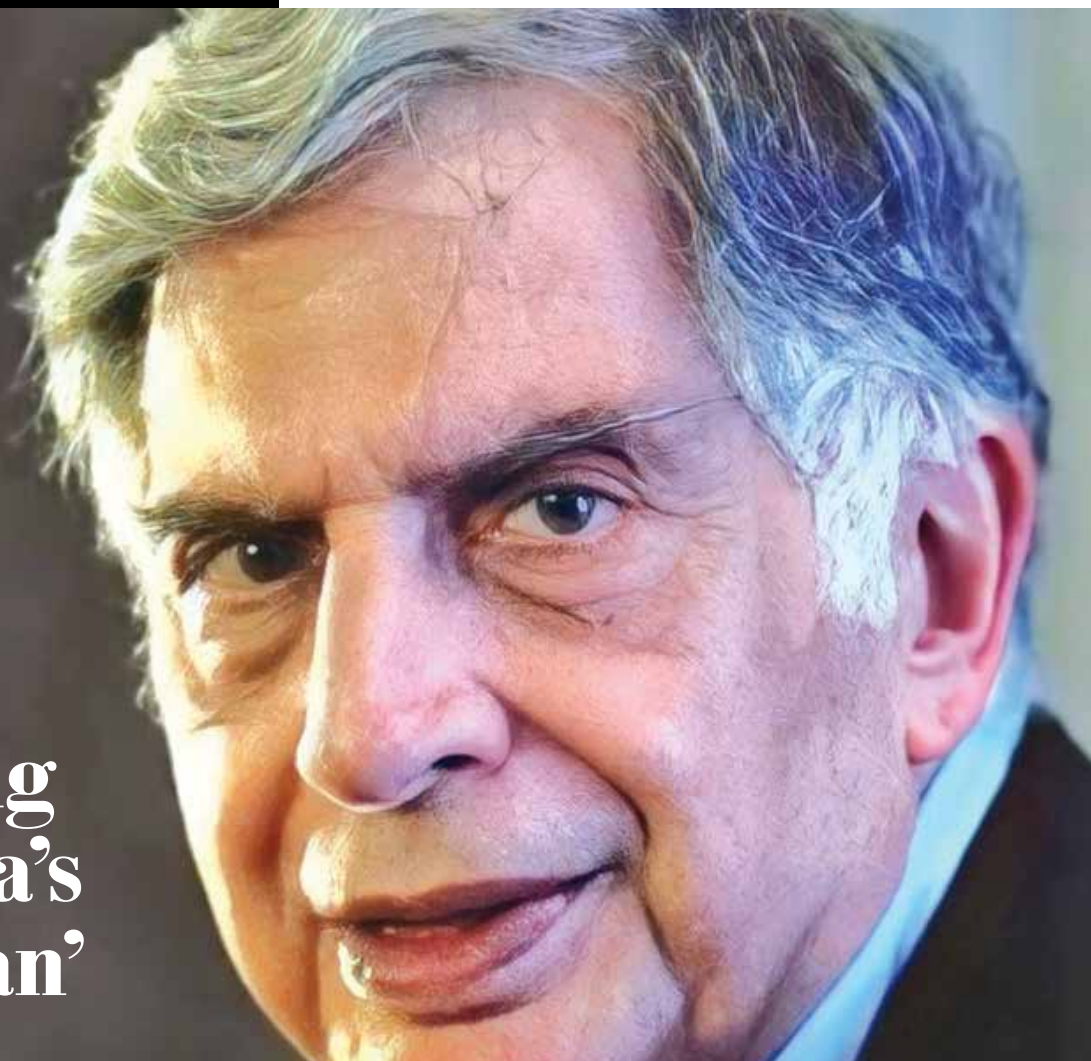


'Idea of A Nation' as seen by Maqbool Fida Husain at the Delhi Art Gallery on Janpath, New Delhi

Eclectic and Everything Indian. Chor Bizarre reopens doors this season; a must especially for its traditional Kashmiri cuisine



Mourning the Passing on of India's True 'Ratan'

DESTINATION INDIA

NOVEMBER 2024. ₹100

CONVERSATIONS

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A Conversation on "A United Nations for the 21st Century"



Implications Of A Wider Conflict In West Asia On India

WE WISH OUR READERS A HAPPY DIWALI



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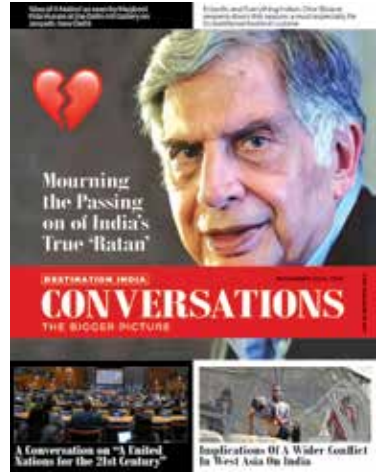
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FROM THE EDITOR

October typically ushers the start of the festive season in our country, starting with auspicious events such as Dhanteras and Dipavali; time to celebrate, ring in the new, start of the traditional new year. Many of the old timers will recall, many an accounting in the corporate sector began with October and ended the following year in September. Until the government decided to ensure only one common accounting year, April to March. Diwali is an occasion to remember that truth will triumph; good will triumph over evil; it is time to re-dedicate ourselves to an inclusive and just society, where everybody is same before the law – basic tenets of *Ram Rajya*, that we as a nation all cherish. This is equally the time to celebrate the concept of wealth – *dhan* - for the good of the people, the diverse stakeholders in our society. Making money is not a crime, wealth creation is essential in a democratic society.

The last month marked the passing on of a rare titan among men, the true *rattan* in our society. Ironically, the same month has marked a milestone in the country’s journey to ensure we make in India, for our own needs and then for the global community. That the private sector champion of Made in India, Ratan Tata’s group company, started the manufacture of the ambitious C-295 aircraft, to be built between Tata’s and Spain’s Airbus. This indeed is a moment of gigantic proportions towards ensuring our defence preparedness. We bring a brief capsule of the readiness of Indian Air Force as the nation also celebrated its Air Force Day.

The United Nations is a common trust between 195 nations of the world. Imagine how the organization has traversed decades in its journey, navigating numerous obstacles during every other crisis affecting the world. We convened an exclusive conversation around the success and future of the UN; its diverse roles that go beyond only calling out when there is war between member nations. Like it was concluded, it is impossible to put together another such organization again; its limitations apart, it has a most worthy role to perform, and it is for the member states to define their future expectations.

Navin Berry
Editor

DLF set to launch India's most expensive project in Gurugram

DLF, the country's biggest realty firm in terms of market capitalisation, is set to launch the most expensive project in India's real estate history DLF The Dahlias, right across the road from the existing Camellias, on Golf Course Road in Gurugram.

The Dahlias will include 400 residences, with a starting price of ₹80,000 per square feet. The average ticket size of an apartment expected to be around 100 crores, according to real estate consulting firm PropEquity.

With sales value of 34,000 crore, this is 2.5 times the value of Camellias, said PropEquity. The existing Camellias, home to top Delhi National Capital Region-based chief executive officers and high net worth individuals, was launched at 22,500 per square foot (price for super area) a decade ago and is currently among one of the most expensive condominiums in the country.

The Camellias has consistently recorded some of the highest transaction prices in the NCR, with recent sales averaging between 265,000 to 85,000 per square foot. Unfurnished apartments are renting for a minimum of 10.5 lakh per month, with furnished options commanding up to 14 lakhs. In February 2024, a 10,000 sq ft apartment at The Camellias was bought for 95 crores by Smiti Agarwal, the wife of Hemant Agarwal, CMD of retail giant V-Bazaar. Historically, only one of the poshest areas of Mumbai and Delhi have seen the highest real estate prices, exceeding 100,000 per square foot.

– *The Business Standard*



Emhoff offers glimpse into Harris's personal life



Offering a rare glimpse into Kamala Harris's personal life, and normalising the idea of a "blended family" in the White House, Doug Emhoff, Harris's husband, charmed Democratic delegates in Chicago on Tuesday with his self-deprecatory humour and his decade-old love story with

the Democratic nominee for president.

Emhoff, who is the first Second Gentleman in American history and may become the first First Gentleman, in a role that has only known First Ladies, took the stage after a short video made by his son, Cole, and produced by his first wife, Kerstin, introduced him to the audience.

He spoke about his upbringing, life, divorce and then how in 2013 a client had set up him on a blind date. "For generations, people have debated when to call the person you're being set up with. And never in history has anyone suggested 8:30am. And yet, that's when I dialled. I got Kamala's voicemail and I just started rambling. Hey, it's Doug... I'm on my way to an early meeting. Again, it's Doug... Kamala saved that voicemail and she makes me listen to it on every anniversary."

They spoke on the phone for an hour — "We laughed. Well, you know that laugh. I love that laugh" — went for a date, and got married the following year.

– *The Hindustan Times*



Musk refutes rumours of love affair with Meloni

Elon Musk said on Wednesday that he was not having an affair with Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, replying to a joke after their mutual praise at a black-tie event

in New York this week drew headlines on both sides of the Atlantic.

Photos of the two lit up social media after Musk presented Meloni with the Global Citizen Award from the Atlantic Council thinktank on Monday. New York Post called it a "public love-in" between the world's richest man and the first female Italian prime minister.

"I was there with my mom. There is no romantic relationship whatsoever with PM Meloni," Musk wrote on X in reply to a post of a photo of the two of them gazing fondly into each other's eyes, which had the jokey caption "we all know what happened next".

In a speech before handing over the award, Musk said Meloni was "someone who is even more beautiful inside than outside". The right-wing PM replied that the US entrepreneur was a "precious genius". Meloni, who split from her partner in 2023, requested Musk be the person to hand her the award, while the tech businessman flew to Italy twice last year to meet the Italian leader, in June and December.

– *Reuters in The Times of India*



No documentary proof of Hasina's resignation as PM, says President

BANGLADESH'S PRESIDENT Mohammed Shahabuddin has said that he does not have any documentary evidence of Sheikh Hasina resigning as prime minister before she fled the country.

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, 84, became Bangladesh's interim government's Chief Adviser on August 8 after PM Hasina fled to India on August 5.

President Shahabuddin said he heard that Hasina had resigned as prime minister before she fled Bangladesh, but he does not have documentary evidence, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported on Monday, quoting excerpts from his interview with Bangla daily Manab Zamin.

Despite numerous efforts, the president said, he had failed to find any documents. "Perhaps she did not have the time", Shahabuddin said. Narrating the events of August 5, he said that at around 10:30 am, a call came to Bangabhaban from Hasina's residence, informing him that Hasina would meet him. "Hearing this, preparations began at Bangabhaban. Within an hour, another call came, saying she was not coming", the president said.

"There was news of unrest everywhere. I asked my military secretary, General Adil (Major General Mohammad Adil Choudhury), to look into it. He also had no information. We were waiting and checking the TV scrolls. There was no news anywhere. At one point, I heard that she (Hasina) had left the country without informing me. I am telling you the truth as it is.

"When the army chief, General Waker, came to Bangabhaban, I tried to find out whether the prime minister had resigned. The answer was the same; he heard she had resigned but probably did not get the time to inform us. When everything was under control, one day, the cabinet secretary came to collect a copy of the resignation letter. I told him I was also looking for it", Shahabuddin said.

– *The Indian Express*

Andhra comes up with new liquor policy: One more state goes private!

The revenue generated will go into funding welfare schemes in Andhra Pradesh, a source in the government said. "With the easing of the liquor policy we are expected to match the revenue generated by states like Telangana and Haryana," the source said.

According to excise department officials, the state saw a decline in liquor sales because of the huge inflow of illegal liquor into the state. According to government records, over the last five years, an estimated 1.78 crore litres of illegal liquor was seized. But the amount of liquor seized was just "10% to 20% of the existing inflow of illegal liquor", excise department officials explained.

"Moreover, as the state was selling liquor it failed to generate revenue through application and licence fees. With the new liquor policy, we have already raked in ₹1,800 crore in application fees and ₹2,000 crore in licence fees," an excise official said.

Under the new policy, private retail operations have restarted with 3,736 shops notified across Andhra Pradesh. "The state has also invited different known brands to trade in the state," excise department officials said.

The government has also decided to introduce low-cost brands — to be sold at ₹99 per quarter of a bottle as per the policy — to prevent people from turning to adulterated liquor. For expensive brands, the state has also decided to allow liquor malls. The model, an excise official said, has been adopted by many states, including Haryana.

– *The Indian Express*



In the Making: A Ratan Tata Building by Tata group and Oxford University

The Tata group and Somerville College, University of Oxford, are partnering to build the Ratan Tata Building to honour late Ratan Tata. The construction is set to commence in Spring 2025.

The new building will enhance Somerville's teaching and learning facilities, promote research, and embody the College's vision of a sustainable and progressive academic community, the Tata group and Somerville College said in a statement.

"In Tata's vision for India, research and critical inquiry went hand in hand with development and prosperity. This partnership with Somerville College is a tribute to Tata's values. The building in his name will be a home to research that is necessary and urgent for India", N Chandrasekaran, Chairman of the Board of Tata Sons, said.

The project was made possible by the decade-long friendship between Somerville College and Chairman Emeritus of the Tata Group, Ratan Tata. While the decision to name the new building in honour of Tata in recognition for his lifelong work as a philanthropist and humanitarian was taken some time ago, his death, felt so keenly throughout India and the world, gives even greater meaning to this lasting tribute to him, the statement said.

– *The Times of India*



Shifting Sands

All out for 46! India Canada Row: Is it Heading Beyond Belief and Relief? Is India China Heading for a Truce, After All. Hoax Calls, a Worrisome 300 plus and Still Counting!



By NAVIN BERRY

All out for 46!

It must have required a Herculean effort, of another kind, to achieve this magical score. It was the lowest ever on our own soil, the second lowest we ever managed. Of course, the statistics keepers belt out other such dismal performances, every time we manage such heroic efforts. As if it were to comfort us, that even before, such things have happened. It is not as if this was for the first time; we have done them before, too.

Erratic displays have become more common, I get this sense. One great day, when the real records to be proud of, start rolling out. Is there a sense that as different formats play out, each with their own demands on the players, each with their own sets of rules, scattered in between – five days, ODIs and T20s playing out with different countries. Intermingling, almost seamlessly. Between formats, captains, teams and countries. We seem to have become the playground of the global cricketing world!

So, as expected, perhaps, splendid displays are getting suddenly marred by a dismal performance. A five-day test can be concluded in just two days! Much to the joy of one team, horror and shame for the other. It's aggressive kind of cricket, of one kind, where one can win, and also lose. And we do! Is this the new brand of ball bazz that we were talking of, only a few years ago!

The statistics keepers belt out other such dismal performances, every time we manage such heroic efforts. As if it were to comfort us, that even before, such things have happened. It is not as if this was for the first time; we have done them before, too.

Given different formats, we have different sets of players for each, often leaving many of us confounded. Which format game, who are the players, and who is the captain? There are multiple players specialising in multiple formats, a few better at one or the other. Often, we have a team eleven that features multiple captains from various formats or from the different IPL teams. You could have half the team as captains! Do they listen to each other, what chemistry is there between them? In this intensely competitive world, with multiple formats, captains, and relationships, are these creating the right kind of camaraderie for a 'national' team?

The other moot question is are we playing too many games, one series moving onto another. One series has one set of five days matches, ODIs and T20s; another has its own mix. One supposes this is dependent upon availability of other country calendars, our own mix of matches, and our deep engagement to hold as many as we can.

Is this all a given, considering the array of sponsorships available, is there a lack of opportunities among available matches, and therefore the need to play more, provide more opportunities for sponsorship. Like they say, the more the merrier. There are no losers, only winners! One question does arise, is 'cricket' any loser? You could ask how does it matter, who wins or loses? Playing the game is what matters. And that, too, could well be the correct answer.



No country should be allowed to evade accountability, and India is no exception. But as Canada pursues justice, Canadians as people must ask themselves if this is what they want their nation to look like to the outside world. As a safe haven for convicted and aspiring terrorists, all of one community, a small portion of them, all aimed at one target, Punjab in India? And Canada has continued to accuse India of bringing terror.



India Canada Row: Is it Heading Beyond Belief and Relief?

It looks surrealistic sometimes. That the civilised world is only worried about themselves, their own perceptions, their fears and security. The same yardstick cannot be applied to aspiring nations. In full public glare, in utter disregard to human sentiment, a war is being waged endlessly, with enemies being singled out, and killed in open public, one after the other. These are their enemies of state as Israel tirelessly fires on all its cylinders. Drones and missiles locate the target and finish him off. Remember the fate of another arch enemy, Saddam Hussein, who was dragged amidst public scrutiny, and finished off, while the world watched. Nobody is taking sides, but there are two sides of the same story. The other side was never heard.

Nijjar's lawyer, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a designated terrorist the same year, has been making repeated and veiled threats at Air India and warning Sikhs to avoid flying the airline, and promised to give another name to New Delhi airport after Indira Gandhi's killers. He has warned Hindus to leave Canada and declared that his group, Sikhs for Justice, was going to "Balkanize" India. Senseless rhetoric, with zero substance on the ground back in Pun-

jab, and yet being given substance in the name of freedom of expression.

There are widespread reports of him giving support to supporters of a non-existent K state, only existing in their failed imagination. But what is Justin Trudeau doing about it. Despite reminders, time and again, all the Indian pleas continue to fall on deaf ears. Remember, during his disastrous visit to India his office had the temerity to invite a convicted terrorist to an official reception.

No country should be allowed to evade accountability, and India is no exception. But as Canada pursues justice, Canadians as people must ask themselves if this is what they want their nation to look like to the outside world. As a safe haven for convicted and aspiring terrorists, all of one community, a small portion of them, all aimed at one target, Punjab in India? And Canada has continued to accuse India of bringing terror, the moot question remains if the Canadian government will become a facilitator of international terrorism? No surprise then, some 29 MPs of the ruling party have asked the PM to quit!

So, the area of concern for the US and Canada remains Nijjar and Pannun. These are two known terrorists, who are mouthing venom openly against a friendly country, India. Both governments show no remorse; both governments are only claiming concern with the safety of their own nationals, which are these same people breathing terror. The rules of engagement are blatantly showing up as one-sided; what applies to the global South does not apply to them, and what applies to them does not apply to the global community. The elite club will hold sway. Has the South begun to question this status quo?

The India Canada tussle, meanwhile, is witnessing some relief with both governments saying these strains should not get reflected in people to people contact. This is of utmost importance, as Canada and India enjoy decades of the best of relationships; our growing diaspora is proof of the pudding. No single person, whoever he be, should be allowed to spoil this goodwill of our two people.



As Barkha Datt wrote in *The Hindustan Times*, “most egregious of all is the narrative in the West that uses Sikhs and pro-Khalistani groups as interchangeable nomenclatures. Not that any Indian has to prove their patriotism, but survey after survey shows that is otherwise a dead and buried issue. Khalistan is in Punjab.”

“These are tricky and challenging issues for India to navigate in the stand-off with Canada and the US. But no Indian irrespective of political leanings, is willing to be lectured by nations that celebrate the elimination of their adversaries – or those of their allies (see the responses to Israel’s attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, for instance) – and cast other nations like sinners in a morality play.”

Here, the casting has been worse, in fact. More than a lack of morals, India is being portrayed as a devil while the forces of devastating fire power have been unleashed in other parts of the world, to which they have turned a blind eye. This too when India has repeatedly denied in any role in these killings.

Is India China Heading for a Truce, After All.

A much longed for announcement, came all of a sudden, when avid watchers were hoping for an announcement of a bilateral meeting between the PMs of the two countries. Typically, our media has gone into an overdrive, calling it the big truce, much awaited breakthrough, their tickers suggesting it is peace already. The truth is that indeed, it is a most welcome step. It is an announcement that can, hopefully, lead towards a breakthrough. In a time and day when non-practitioners become experts and ‘China experts’ thrive with saying the ‘last’ word, we need to be cautious and exercise restraint and patience. It is always important to weigh in, government officials are not always obliged to tell everything, they most often cannot. They are sufficiently grounded, know from experience the difficult lines of an overall engagement. China is also a difficult relationship, not just bilateral, our ties figure within a larger global eco-system.

Any talk is positive. It is a most welcome step. As we understand the fine print, as and when it trickles down, we will know more. Why has China conceded its high ground? With all its might, when it is all that powerful, what has changed in their perception and interests? So, the best course is to wish this new chapter a success, that works well for both countries.



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Complexities are plenty. There is an industry lobby that is pleading for easing of Chinese workers. China has marched into becoming India’s top most business partner, with our imports outsmarting the exports by far. We need to derisk our economy; often, China has not proved to be a reliable supply chain partner. In any case, the need for self-reliance was never more.

Is this a climbdown, if yes, why did China agree? Ambassador K C Singh writes in *The Asian Age*, and I quote: “There could be multiple reasons. Firstly, the Chinese economy faces challenges which cannot be remedied without serious structural reform. It needs to modify its economic model depending on growth from housing investment, exports and big infrastructure. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, currently 90 million housing units stand unsold. Chinese households have invested 80 per cent of their savings in that sector. Meanwhile, industrial profits are down by 17.8 per cent. Youth unemployment is up consequently. China can hardly afford to see its Indian market constricted when higher tariffs by Western nations, and the fear of a second Donald Trump term, are looming. Thus, China may have chosen detente with India for now.

Secondly, Russia would have also argued that to negate US designs India needs to be with them, even if one Indian leg is in the

American camp. In fact, India and China have concurring views on many issues like climate change amelioration and reform of international institutions covering global finance and trade. However, when dealing with China, clarity is required to distinguish their tactical outreach from their strategic desire to dominate Asia and rival the United States globally.”

Meanwhile, imports continue to rise from China, which has climbed to becoming India’s number one trading partner, with an ever-increasing yawning gap in their favour. While it is critically important to derisk, withdraw as much as possible, none of this is an easy task. It would take time. The consistent efforts to Make in India will bear fruit, but not overnight.

Hoax Calls, a Worrisome 300 plus and Still Counting!

As we write this column, there is no stopping. What nobody is talking about is the trauma that every passenger undergoes when an aircraft in the sky is alerted on account of a call, that there is a bomb on board. That it turns out to be hoax, is a matter of relief. But some heavy damage has been done already. If I was on one such flight, carrying my rosary becomes all that an essential item to carry. Not to mention the trauma that falls upon the family!

Every such call is given its due respect; every aspect of an exhaustive drill is carried it. It costs money, inconvenience and ‘fear’ in the top bracket category. Fortunately, all these calls have turned out to be a hoax. It has however sent our aviation eco-system into a spiral. There is cost of re-adjustment, of flight and schedules, passengers being settled in unknown places, such flights being escorted by air force aircrafts of third countries. It is not any ‘joke’, we can all say a million times each.

This has assumed a serious matter going well beyond airline and passenger security. Are these calls inspiring other pranksters, newer ones, with every passing day? Is this only the work of pranksters at play? Is there something more to it than meets the eye. It is not for uninformed public to comment, except to express concern. And to believe and understand that those in authority must be actively seeking answers and solutions to this nagging display.

That we do not have a law that covers such situations is a sad reminder of the perils of democracy. Wreaking mayhem like of this order, and saying we will put such a prankster on a no-flyer category for five years? It is almost saying we will give you candy! Such calls, such pranks, deserve jail for five years, with no appeal. Serve this on two such pranksters and you will not have one more. It is areas like these, we appear as a soft state before the horror of terror. Arguably, any such situation, never happened before, should witness a quick joining



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of the three pillars of our democracy, acting in concert, making sure a new law can be put into effect within a matter of days.

Is there a bigger ploy at play? Is there a sinister design to test our patience, our state of readiness, to probe into our vulnerabilities. Rest assured, our concerned agencies will not be caught napping.

Meanwhile, none other than the PM himself has alerted citizens to be careful against cyber threats. These too are increasing on a daily basis. Here again, it is the centre and states, both, to be conscious of the need to allocate more resources for the police, especially on the cyber security aspect. This needs experts, who are well paid and respected. The spate of hoax calls, now spreading to hotels as well, need to be given a befitting response, the sooner the better. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Pure Politics

***Congress High Command Scripts Haryana Poll Defeat;
Bhagwat's Clarion Call Needs More Indepth Understanding;
Delhi Can Do with More to Tackle Pollution;
Priyanka Gandhi in Wayanad Poll Fray***



by PANKAJ VOHRA

October witnessed its own spate of political events. Here is a free-wheeling account with the personal assessment of one of the seniormost journalists in the capital.

Congress High Command Scripts Haryana Poll Defeat

In the past several years, the Congress has perfected the art of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. The recently held Haryana polls were no different when everything was in the party's favour, from perception to the ground level realities, but because of reasons, which are clear by now, the Congress lost the battle to the BJP, ensuring that the Saffron Brigade scored a hat-trick. However, full credit should be given to the BJP for this historic victory since it entailed superior strategy and some very clever electoral moves.

The Congress High Command which should be viewing its own role in the entire election is now ready to once again introspect in order to ascertain the reasons for this

unexpected result. The supreme irony is that those responsible for the developments would themselves be looking into the factors that contributed to the debacle. On paper, the Congress and the BJP have an identical vote share but in reality, the number of seats the BJP has won is much more than that of its rival. The Congress High Command should first introspect and find out why it was unable to mollify rebels who were in the fray; in at least 18 constituencies, the dissidents polled more than the difference in the winning margins between the BJP and the Congress. In other words, had steps been taken to address this issue, the outcome would have been in favour of the grand old party. One fails to understand why after every election, the Congress undertakes the same exercise and continues to make the same mistakes even after knowing fully well what went wrong.

The supreme irony is that those responsible for the developments (Congress defeat in Haryana) would themselves be looking for the factors that contributed to the debacle.

The BJP also had its rebels but they managed them better and they also ensured that the Congress dissidents did not withdraw themselves in the middle of the battle, thus enabling it to win yet another time. It is a fact that the BJP was on the defensive and was unable to make the election into Jats versus non-Jats. The mood of the people was for a change and all indicators pointed to a Congress win. Despite all these limitations, the BJP won in the end, largely

because the Congress had no strategy to back its plans.

Although the blame game has commenced, it is unlikely to lead anywhere.

The same or perhaps even greater mistakes would be committed during the Maharashtra polls, where the Congress would be now bargaining from a defensive position rather than a superior one. This would have been so, had it won in Haryana. The Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge needs to take immediate steps to rectify the situation.

There needs to be a party overhaul of some departments, and the pending proposal to revive the Parliamentary Board must be again reconsidered. There are commentators who are claiming that there were BJP sleeper cells or moles within the Congress. This matter should not be dismissed but properly examined by the High Command to ascertain if there was any truth in these allegations. The elections may have also marked the final battle of Bhupinder Singh Hooda, whose nine and half years' tenure as the Chief Minister (2005 to 2014) is coinciding with the state celebrating the 58th anniversary of its formation on November 1. Time for Kharge and Gandhis to wake up.

Lt. Governor's stand on tree felling on Ridge baffling

With heightened pollution levels becoming a cause of immense worry in the national capital, the Lt. Governor VK Saxena has ignited another debate with his affidavit in the Supreme Court regarding felling of trees in the Ridge area. Saxena has stated that while clearing a project in February for a medical facility which entailed cutting of 600 trees, he was not aware that permission from the court had to be obtained for such an action. The Lt. Governor who is also the head of the Delhi Development Authority, along with other senior functionaries, can face action if the Court decides to initiate proceedings against them. His affidavit to the court is something which implies that the constitutional head of the Delhi government was unaware of the rules and regulations and has in the process infringed the law. The Ridge is the lung of the city which is facing enormous problems arising out of increasing population, more vehicles and stubble burning in the neighbouring states. Over the past four decades, the Ridge cover has been diminishing with so many buildings coming up in the forest area.

There are two distinct stretches of the Ridge, one which commences from the Delhi University till the Baraf Khana Chowk and the other from Pusa Road till Dhaula Kuan. Jagmohan as the Lt. Governor of Delhi in the early 1980s in the name of sprucing up the Ridge, cleared it of bushes and thickets that were an integral part of the flora fauna. Subsequently barbed wire fencing was done but it did not halt the tree cover denudation. The stretch near Delhi University is not what it used to be earlier and while widening the road from the Hindu Rao hospital towards Rajpur Road near the Civil Lines zone MCD office, many trees

The Lt. Governor who is also the head of the Delhi Development Authority, along with other senior functionaries, can face action if the Court decides to initiate proceedings against them.



were cut. The patch near the Tirath Ram Shah hospital has lost a lot of its tree coverage. Similarly, the main ridge from Pusa Road also is not what it used to be. In the 1960s, there were very few projects that had been started. The Rabindra Rangshala which was for cultural programs and is largely in disuse had come up. Then, there was a listening post or a wireless network of the All India Radio or some government agency and the Buddha Jayanti park towards Dhaula Kuan. Gradually, the Ashram of a Godman came up and then some schools. The Army and the Defence Ministry was also given land and some construction activity saw trees disappearing. On the Sardar Patel Marg, three petrol pumps were closed down as was one on the Willingdon Crescent but the commitment for maintaining an ecological balance was lacking. Under Sheila Dikshit, a tree plantation drive with much fanfare was initiated on the Ridge and other parts of the city. No one knows what happened to these saplings.

The trees and pollution have a close relation with each other. The governments, both at the Centre and in the city have over the past many years failed in preserving the environment. An aspect that needs to be re-examined other than the stubble burning fires that bring in pollution are the use of the CNG vehicles. It should be scientifically established whether this step has helped in any manner or was initiated at the instance of some powerful lobby wanting to promote certain kind of technology. What also often gets overlooked is that the pollution caused by vehicle tyres on roads which are in a terrible state also emanates very dangerous fumes. The authorities have to be held accountable for the state of affairs of the roads which continue to be a cause of immense concern.

The problem arises when the follow up is not taken care off. There are several roads which need immediate attention. A kilometre long stretch between Rajokri and Kapeshera was given a concrete coating about 14 years ago. It is in such a terrible state with no one willing to even have a look. This despite the fact that this is the route taken by various vehicles belonging to the BSF, CRPF, Delhi Police and the CISF.



The Congress leadership has to understand that in addition to Priyanka's charm and captivating appeal, the organization needs to be strengthened in Wayanad.



Priyanka Gandhi in Wayanad

There are a lot of expectations from Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who shall be making her electoral debut from the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency, which goes to polls on November 13th. The seat had fallen vacant after Rahul Gandhi retained Rae Bareilly while giving up on Wayanad, which he represented in the previous Parliament.

Priyanka, if elected, would certainly add to the fire power of the Congress and along with her brother, shall spearhead her party's agenda both nationally and in various elections that shall follow. Her speeches during the last Lok Sabha polls had touched a chord with the voters and her method of electioneering reminded people of her grandmother, Indira Gandhi, the greatest mass leader of the last century.

However, Priyanka has a long way to go before she can emulate Indira Gandhi, whose connect with the common citizen was phenomenal and whose popularity and appeal was unmatched. A mere resemblance with her illustrious granny is not sufficient to be successful in political life. Her body of work and the effort which went into the making of Indira Gandhi, need to be replicated, if she has to make her mark.

Priyanka cannot take her electoral debut for granted since it entails reaching out to the people of Wayanad and Kerala, who have on multiple occasions stood behind the Congress. Her entry is looked forward to by the party cadres, who would certainly be energised by her inspiring presence. There is no doubt that Priyanka has a certain charisma which is unmatched when she is campaigning.

Nevertheless, the Congress leadership has to understand that in addition to Priyanka's charm and captivating appeal, the organization needs to be strengthened. This can only be done by focusing on the grassroots workers at the block and district levels and by bringing in more fresh faces, who have some sort of a base.

The commonsense logic is that if the Congress is strengthened,

the Gandhis would be automatically strengthened. Therefore, all the energies should not be spent on the image makeover of either Rahul or Priyanka, but on the party. What could happen is that since Priyanka is contesting this time from Wayanad, Congressmen would be rushing there to show their faces. This could be at the expense of both Maharashtra and Jharkhand where the polls would be very significant.

The high command must ensure that the role of party activists is clearly defined. In addition, the services of sitting Chief Ministers to campaign should be enlisted instead of bringing in former CMs, who are by and large past their prime. In Haryana, the party did not sufficiently use Himachal Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Suku or Telangana CM, Revanth Reddy. This should not be repeated. Both of them as also Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah must be inducted for the Assembly poll campaign where the stakes are high and the expertise of those who have won are needed to augment the effort.

The High Command requires re-structuring also. The Parliamentary Board needs to be revived and attempts should be made to assign tasks to those who have worked in the field and have been successful there instead of giving importance to those unfamiliar with the political dynamics and who could perform better as lobbyists rather than as office bearers of the Congress.

Priyanka already has a voice in the party and it is very strong. There is always a talk of her differences over issues with her brother but this kind of narrative suits those who enjoy proximity to the Gandhi siblings and benefit from this supposed rivalry. The Gandhis may have their own way of thinking but publicly, they would never disagree with each other. Sonia Gandhi has ensured that this would never happen.

Bhagwat's strong message to political parties including the BJP

The Vijay Dashmi address of the Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh Chief is an event which provides a glimpse into the thinking of the organization regarding various developments taking place within not only India, but throughout the world. The speech has always had many layers that need to be properly understood in the context of the times we live in and without any prejudice or bias. On Saturday, Mohan Bhagwat, the Sarsangchalak of the Sangh made multiple



The RSS and the BJP both have to understand that excluding one community from the political narrative within the country was not going to help in unifying the nation nor would it lead to easing tensions.



points during his discourse. His speech has evoked strong reactions from the Opposition while within the BJP, an attempt has been made to selectively pinpoint certain portions of what he said. The address assumes significance since it coincided with the beginning of the centenary celebrations of the RSS, an outfit designed to safeguard the interests of the Hindus.

However, Bhagwat did not name any political party thereby allowing a scope for the interpretation of his text in more ways than one. His clarion call to the Hindus to unite was equally for the opposition parties as it was for the BJP, which has been pursuing divisive politics, where candidates are selected on basis of castes and community rather than their contribution to the party. Similar pattern of nominee selection is done by the opposition as well and the point sought to be made by the RSS boss is that such activities were creating divisions within the society which needs to protect itself and the country from forces which are wanting to weaken it.

The RSS has been worried that its thesis of keeping the Hindus united was increasingly being threatened by the rise of the caste agenda. Therefore, the castes which had the means and resources should consider it their responsibility to come to the aid of those who needed assistance. It was not the job of the government alone to bring about parity and upliftment of the deprived sections, but also of the people of this country.

Bhagwat's call for Hindu unity was also aimed at focusing attention on the atrocities being committed in Bangladesh against the Hindu minority and has demanded an end to such acts. Although there was no detailed reference to the minorities within India, yet the RSS Chief has been advocating inclusive politics with the objective of providing education and other facilities to the Muslims in particular. It is another matter that the Muslims view the Sangh and its affiliates with suspicion and thus

are not likely to be impressed by any sort of sermons. The relations between the RSS and the BJP have been strained and the Sangh has been wanting to re-assert its supremacy which has led to tensions within both the organizations. In this context, the RSS and the BJP both have to understand that excluding one community from the political narrative within the country was not going to help in unifying the nation nor would it lead to easing tensions. Therefore, the first priority should be to make the minorities as participants in the electoral process so they feel reassured about their stakes in the future of the country which is so diverse and complex, that it is extremely difficult to have a single formula for keeping it together.

The RSS has nationalist credentials and has come to the aid of the country on multiple occasions. During the Sino-Indo conflict of 1962, the RSS did exemplary work in discharging civil defence duties, a fact that was even recognized by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. It is not without a reason that he allowed the RSS to participate in the Republic Day parade of 1963 to acknowledge its contribution towards the national cause. The problem with the RSS is that it is viewed as a secretive organization which has an extensive international network; many countries abroad have full scale RSS branches under different names and also conduct Shakhnas in these regions. The international wing of the RSS was founded by the late Chaman Lal who also did some exemplary work for the Indian origin people in many distant countries such as Surinam. What Bhagwat is today warning is about the stepped-up activities of many international forces which were wanting to weaken India or rather divide it. He has warned against an attempt similar to what took place in Bangla Desh. Bhagwat's address needs to be understood for many things it has stated between the lines. While those opposed to the politics of the Sangh Parivar have every right to be critical of his assertions, it should also comfort them somewhat that the Sarsangchalak has also given a strong but subtle message to even the BJP. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pankaj Vohra is a veteran journalist based in Delhi. A long time contributor to The Hindustan Times, he is

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Mourning the Passing on of India's True 'Ratan'

October witnessed the passing on of an era, marked most of all, by both humility and generosity, both shared with abundance and consistently, as a lifestyle and spirit statement on the man himself. None other than Ratan Tata, a name that had come to embody the natural art of 'giving'.

His career was marked earlier with a few upsets, made a few mistakes, that only made him more human. Not once did he flinch, steadfast in his demeanour, always the same, the self-effacing gentleman that he was.

'If only words, it's words that all I have". Yet, words do not suffice, best is to observe his greatness in silence and adulation. And, most of all, for a people so given to ostentation, to imbibe the spirit for which Ratan Tata stood. It is in humility that we will achieve greater good.

The baton of the Tata empire has passed onto his half-brother, Noel Tata who has been, in the meanwhile, playing a relatively quieter and passive role. Accomplished in his approach to business, he is known for keeping an equally low profile as his late brother; though people in the know, suggest him to be more conservative. Companies in his portfolio have done exceptionally well. It is too early to say, but over the ensuing months, one could expect some new directions.

Meanwhile, coming out of the mourning stage, the group is steadying itself to uphold the ideals and dreams of the its late chairman, who will eternally remain the 'ratan' of Indian industry and corporate responsibility. As one of the prime proponents and supporters of the Made in India, only a few days ago, India's first private sector aircraft manufacturing facility was inaugurated, where 40 C-295 aircraft will be made, as a collaboration between Airbus of Spain and Tatas.

by NAVIN BERRY





“ India has lost an icon who blended corporate growth with nation building, and excellence with ethics. A recipient of Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan, he took forward the great Tata legacy and gave it a more impressive global presence. He inspired seasoned professionals and young students alike. His contribution to philanthropy and charity is invaluable.”

President Droupadi Murmu



“A visionary business leader, a compassionate soul and an extraordinary humble being. He provided stable leadership to one of India's oldest and most prestigious business houses. At the same time, his contribution went far beyond the board- room. He endeared himself to several people thanks to his humility, kindness and an unwavering commitment to making our society better. His passion towards dreaming big and giving back. He was at the forefront of championing causes like education, health-care, sanitation, animal welfare to name a few. I would meet him frequently in Gujarat when I was the CM. We would exchange views on diverse issues. I found his perspectives very enriching.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi



“He selflessly dedicated his life to the development of the country. Every time I met him, his zeal and commitment to the betterment of Bharat and its people amazed me. His commitment to the welfare of our country and its people led to the blooming of millions of dreams. Time cannot take Ratan Tata Ji away from his beloved nation. He will live on in our hearts.”

Union home minister Amit Shah





“Saddened by the passing away of Shri Ratan Tata. He was a Titan of the Indian industry known for his monumental contributions to our economy, trade and industry. My deepest condolences to his family, friends and admirers. May his soul rest in peace.”

Defence minister Rajnath Singh



“He will long be remembered as a “man with a vision”. He has left a lasting mark on both business and philanthropy. My condolences to his family and the Tata community.”

Congress lawmaker and LOP, Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi



“He will be remembered as the great industrialist and philanthropist. Shri Ratan Tata's simplicity, foresight and spirit of service will remain a source of inspiration for ages. His departure is an irreparable loss for the country.”

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla

“Apart from his (Tata's) invaluable contribution as an industrialist, he leaves behind a legacy of benevolence and compassion, underlined by his immense love for his country.”

Maharashtra Dy CM and NCP chief Ajit Pawar



“The Tata Sons Chairman Emeritus had been a foremost leader of Indian industries and a public-spirited philanthropist. His demise will be an irreparable loss for Indian business world and society. Few men have left such an enduring imprint on this world with their vision and integrity as Ratan Tata.”

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee



“Today, we have lost not just a business titan, but a true humanitarian As I mourn his passing today, I also reflect on his remarkable contributions to industry, philanthropy, and nation-building that will forever inspire generations. A life well lived. An iconic legacy to cherish,” he said. Several industrialists also paid homage to Tata, citing him as an inspiration.”

**Andhra Pradesh CM
N Chandrababu Naidu**



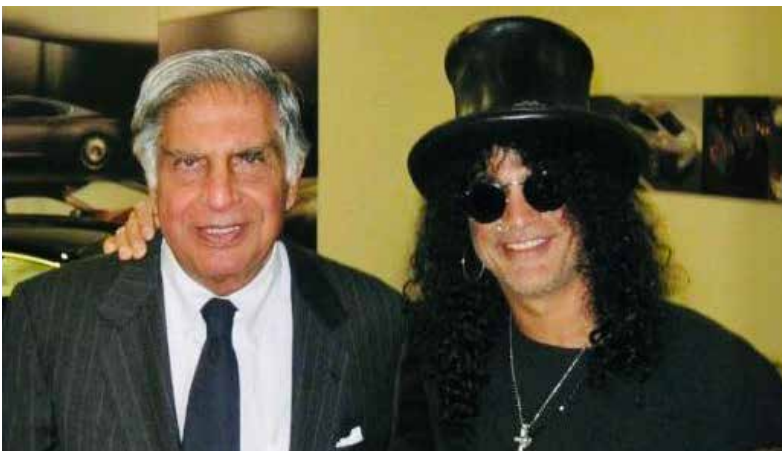
“I am unable to accept the absence of Ratan Tata. India's economy stands on the cusp of a historic leap forward. And Ratan's life and work have had much to do with our being in this position. Hence, his mentorship and guidance at this point in time would have been invaluable. With him gone, all we can do is to commit to emulating his example. Because he was a businessman for whom financial wealth and success was most useful when it was put to the service of the global community.”

**Mahindra Group chairman
Anand Mahindra**



“India has lost a giant, a visionary who redefined modern India's path.... Ratan Tata wasn't just a business leader- he embodied the spirit of India with integrity, compassion and an unwavering commitment to the greater good Legends like him never fade away. Om Shanti”

**Adani Group chairman
Gautam Adani**





Strength and Innovation on Display on Air Force Day

by AIR MARSHAL SANJEEV KAPOOR (RTD)

The Aerial Display: A Showcase of Strength and Innovation

The aerial display for last three years has been conducted outside of National Capital Region, and this year it was at Marina Beach, Chennai. This airshow was witnessed by some 12 to 15 lakh spectators (probably one of the largest gatherings to witness any aerial display) underscored the IAF's superior air capabilities.

Why was Marina Beach chosen this year? Marina Beach in Chennai along the Bay of Bengal is India's longest and world's second longest beach. This predominant sand over nearly 12 kilometers extends from Beasant Nagar in the south to Fort St. George in the north. This display which was conducted at Chennai after 21 years, involved 72 aircraft including the indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, Sukhoi Su-30MKI, Apache attack helicopters, C-17 Globe Masters to the formidable Rafale. The sky was filled with aircraft that symbolized a robust blend of domestic and foreign technology. The Surya Kiran and Sarang aerobatic display teams, known for their synchronized manoeuvres, captured the essence of aerial mastery. These displays were not only a testament to the advanced operational capabilities of the IAF but also highlighted its journey of modernization and technological integration over the decades.

The participation of the Akash Ganga skydiving team, along with display of various fighter jets, helicopters, and transport aircraft reinforced the IAF's ability to swiftly respond to a variety of operational scenarios, be it combat or humanitarian assistance. This aerial spectacle emphasized the IAF's preparedness to defend India's skies while also assisting in missions of national importance, such as disaster relief operations and rapid troop deployments.

Tambaram Parade: A Reflection of Tradition and Discipline

The parade at Tambaram Air Force Station was a majestic affair, with air warriors marching in unison to showcase the ethos of the IAF. The parade honoured the legacy of its heroes, recalling the countless sacrifices made by generations of air warriors to protect the nation's sovereignty. It also served as a reminder of the commitment, dedication,

The 92nd Indian Air Force (IAF) Day was celebrated with grandeur at the Air Force Station, Tambaram in Chennai from 06 to 08 Oct 2024, marking yet another significant milestone in the glorious history of the world's fourth-largest air force. These celebrations highlighted the resilience, strength and future vision of the service. The celebrations featured a spectacular aerial display, where the nation witnessed both the might of modern technology and the agility of its air warriors. A ceremonial parade, reflecting the discipline and precision of the IAF, further highlighted the tradition of excellence that defines the force.

and discipline that is the hallmark of the IAF.

Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, reviewing his first parade as Chief of the Indian Air Force, in his address, emphasized the need for continued modernization and readiness, highlighting that the Indian Air Force is not only evolving to meet the challenges of modern warfare but is also focused on maintaining operational preparedness across all domains, including space and cyber.

Challenges Facing the Fourth-Largest Air Force

There are a few challenges that the world's fourth-largest air force is facing right now both in terms of short and long term.

One of the most pressing concerns is fleet modernization. With aging platforms and de-



One of its greatest strengths lies in its human capital—its highly trained and motivated air warriors. The IAF has a healthy mix of old and new platforms. Its focus will remain on modernization, enhancing joint operations with the Indian Army and Navy

pleted fighter squadron numbers, the IAF must accelerate the acquisition of advanced fighter jets and multirole aircraft to maintain a technological edge. The induction of the Rafale jets from France has given a significant boost, but the long-term vision includes the expansion of indigenous projects such as the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

Another challenge is the integration of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and cyber capabilities into its operational framework. Modern warfare demands a force that is technologically superior, agile, and capable of handling asymmetric threats such as drone warfare and cyberattacks. The IAF is actively working toward enhancing its cyber warfare capabilities, which are crucial in an age where digital threats can compromise critical infrastructure.

The geopolitical scenario surrounding India, with rising tensions in its neighbourhood, demands an air force that is not only capable of safeguarding national airspace but also projecting power in contested zones. There are a large number of lessons which the IAF is processing on regular basis from the two ongoing wars that is Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars. The IAF's challenge is to balance its modernisation efforts with the need to ensure readiness for multiple conflict scenarios, including two-front wars, as India's strategic environment evolves.

The Strengths of the Indian Air Force

Despite these challenges, the IAF remains a formidable force.

One of its greatest strengths lies in its human capital—its highly trained and motivated air warriors. The selection and training process of IAF officers and Agni veer Vayu is rigorous, producing a cadre that is both physically and mentally resilient. The National Defence Academy, Air Force Academy and Air Warriors Training Centre ensure that young cadets and trainees both men and women are groomed into highly professional air warriors, ready to take on the evolving challenges of modern warfare.

Additionally, the IAF has a healthy mix of old and new platforms. While the older aircraft such as the MiG-21 that are being phased out, newer acquisitions like the Rafale, Apache attack helicopters, Chinooks, C-130 and C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft provide the IAF with a cutting-edge capability. Indigenous platforms like the Tejas fighter jets and the upcoming AMCA project showcase India's growing self-reliance in defence production, which will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the IAF.

The Role of Agniveer Vayu and Future Pathways

A significant milestone in this year's celebration was the parade participation by Agniveer Vayu, under the Agnipath scheme. This bold

initiative aims to induct young air warriors for a short-term tenure, providing them with a dynamic career path while infusing fresh energy into the ranks. The Agniveer Vayu have already started contributing to various operational and technical roles, with many displaying the enthusiasm and competence required to meet the challenges of modern-day warfare.

The scheme is seen as a way to create a more youthful, tech-savvy force, with an eye on future battles that will be fought with advanced technologies. The induction of Agniveer Vayu also aligns with the IAF's vision to create a lean, agile force, adaptable to the needs of a rapidly changing battlefield environment.

The Way Ahead for the Indian Air Force

As the IAF moves forward, its focus will remain on modernization, enhancing joint operations with the Indian Army and Navy, and building indigenous capabilities. Technology integration will be a key driver of future success, with emphasis on AI, cyber warfare, and space-based operations. The IAF will also continue to expand its strategic reach through acquisitions and partnerships, ensuring that it remains a dominant force in the region.

In conclusion, the 92nd Indian Air Force Day not only celebrated the rich history of the IAF but also offered a glimpse into its bright future. The aerial displays, the induction of Agniveer Vayu in the parade and the ongoing modernization efforts reflect a force that is constantly evolving to meet the challenges of tomorrow while remaining deeply rooted in its tradition of excellence and service to the nation. As India strengthens its position in the global order, the Indian Air Force will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in securing the nation's skies and beyond. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Air Marshal (Dr) Sanjeev Kapoor (Retd) a pilot, with over 8000 hrs of flying. He is a flying instructor and a pioneer in aerial refuelling

in IAF. He commanded the air-to-air refuelling squadron, a large operational base, Air Force Academy and National Defence Academy. He holds an Airline Pilot License and is part of various think tanks, boards and studies.

Iran Israel War: Economic Implications for India



As we enter an ever-increasing inter-dependence upon nations in the global supply chain, there is that inevitable contrary push to achieve self-reliance. There is therefore this lingering Israel Iran war, that threatens one more time the global economy.

by MANORANJAN SHARMA

Macroeconomic Implications for India

Where do we go from here? It's difficult to connect the dots because of the myriad inter-layered issues of attack and retaliation, anger and restraint. With the US standing clearly with Israel, its long-time strategic and military partner, all bets are off and things could move from bad to worse. It needs, however, no clairvoyance to perceive that there are multiple factors at play in the real world besides the raw physics of production. At the global level, this flare-up has ignited fears that make the overall situation grim, the recovery ascent difficult and the Fed rate cutting cycle extended. This sabre-rattling has wide-ranging ramifications and repercussions across geographies, economies and sectors with volatility in bond and equity markets though temporarily. Bond prices will fall, cost of credit will rise for companies, crude price will rise and stock markets will fall both because of reduced profitability of



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the corporate sector and heightened uncertainty. A marked reduction in oil supply and consequently surging crude oil prices would raise domestic inflation and interest rates could remain persistently high and “sticky” for long. The disconcerting mix together with the tortuous path to recovery supports the safe-haven dollar and gold.

Bottom line: Greater Impact on Sector Specific Companies

While surging oil prices in the aftermath of the Iran-Israel war have a cascading macro-economic impact across sectors that could trigger a sell-off, oil-based sectors like automobiles, transportation, aviation, paints, tyres, cement, and chemicals could take the greatest hit. The market could be disrupted by the war-related risk but hopefully, the supply-demand oil dynamics would continue to be largely unfettered. The Indian stocks with an Israeli connection include Adani Ports, Sun Pharmaceutical, Dr. Reddy's and Lupin, NMDC, Kalyan Jewellers and Titan. Further, oil marketing companies could be adversely impacted. The war could slacken India's plan of building an India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor as reflected in the prices of railway stocks like IRCON, Jupiter Wagons, and RVNL. With crude oil output of almost 3 million barrels per day (mb/d) i.e., about 3 % of the global production, Iran is a major oil producer and exporter and more importantly, 20 % of the world's crude oil supply passes through the Hormuz Strait (60 % of Indian crude supply is accounted for by the Hormuz Strait), there could be a 'super-spike' raising crude oil prices per barrel per day raising it from the present level of US\$ 78 to US\$ 80 and even to US\$ 100, depending on the nature of the events. This is not as far-fetched as it may apparently seem. For, supply disruptions in Iraq and Venezuela triggered a bull market in July 2008 with oil prices zooming to \$145. In the event of major supply disruptions in the global oil market, OPEC+ might consider reducing voluntary cuts and increasing production.

India's strategically time-tested relationship with both Iran and Israel is fraught with difficulties on the policy and operational fronts. Israel has long been a trusted defense and security ghanistan landscape, and the geo-strategically significant Chabahar port.

In the case of the Indian economy, heightened oil security risks and concomitant surge in oil prices would negatively impact the triple deficits of the trade deficit, current account, and fiscal deficit. Since apart from macroeconomic fundamentals and the growth prospects of the firm and the industry, the capital market is also sentiment-driven, this war would negatively impact the BSE and NIFTY levels. But contrary to popular perception, extensive pessimism is unwarranted. It would be inappropriate not to factor in the strength and resilience of the Indian economy for a comprehensive assessment and perspective.

India's Cognizable Dilemmas

As deterrence collapsed, the crisis escalated, the stakes rise higher necessitating the intervention of major world powers for peace in the multi-party West Asia conflict. India's strategically time-tested relationship with both Iran and Israel is fraught with difficulties on the policy and operational fronts. Israel has long been a trusted defense and security partner. Iran is a major crude oil supplier and has shared concerns about terrorism, the Afghanistan landscape, and the geo-strategically significant Chabahar port.

One thing is certain, there are gathering storms, these are uncertain times, with difficult days ahead. **DI**

Note: This is an expanded version of the Op-ed first published in Financial Express on October 5, 2024.



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Implications Of A Wider Conflict In West Asia On India

by MAJOR GENERAL
JAGATBIR SINGH, VSM (RETD) and
MAJOR GENERAL VK SINGH,
VSM (RETD)

Introduction

On 7 October 2024 marked one year since Hamas stormed into Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing more than twelve hundred people. Israel's response has killed more than forty-one thousand Palestinians in Gaza. Israel has invaded Lebanon, where it is battling Hezbollah. One year later, West Asia is in a precarious state. Israel and Iran are on the brink of all-out war.

As we read this, war is still raging in the Gaza Strip, the hostages have not been returned, millions of Palestinians live in inhuman conditions and the hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon are resulting in bloodshed and devastation.

As Israel continues to grapple with the loss of its aura of inviolability following the Hamas attack, Iran is struggling to maintain influence as its proxies in Gaza, Lebanon and Yemen suffer heavy losses. Both countries know that an all-out war would be catastrophic, yet neither side wants to back down.

The rapidly escalating tensions have raised the fear of a conflict that threatens to push the region into deeper crisis, with grave economic and geopolitical fallouts. This situation has significant ramifications for India.

India- Israel Relations

India and Israel have forged closer cooperation in number of fields, specially defence, information technology, agriculture, renewable energy, and pharmaceuticals.

India and Israel have already joined



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hands for joint innovation in agriculture, water and digital health, through the India-Israel Global Innovation Challenge. This partnership can expand to shape a startup corridor or bridge, that brings together their respective national innovation communities.

Greater involvement of their militaries, innovation ecosystems and corporations will undoubtedly help in maintaining the upward trajectory of this partnership between the two countries as they work to protect each other's interests in a turbulent region.

Expanded ties with Israel constitute a critical element of Indian power play. This remains a priority for India, even as it has advanced ties with other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. With the entire region thrown into turbulence, the future of the cooperation hangs in an uncertain balance.

Ties with Iran

India and Iran share a millennia-long history of interactions. The contemporary relationship draws upon the strength of these historical and civilisational ties, and continues to grow further marked by high-level exchanges, commercial cooperation, cultural and robust people-to-people ties.

Shia clerics and scholars often receive theological training at seminaries in Iran, especially in the city of Qom. These seminaries maintain

close contacts with the Indian Shia community. This is in addition to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala visited by Indian Shias.

India's relations with Iran are also commercial, as major investments are at stake at Chahbahar Port and Bandar Abbas, as amplified in the succeeding paras.

Certain analysts have posited that India's efforts to strengthen its relationship with Israel may have come at the cost of its support for Palestine, an issue that has recently assumed renewed significance.

Trade Routes

Turbulence in the region and continuing US sanctions on Iran have already delayed the critical India-Iran Chahbahar Port project that seeks to connect India with both Afghanistan and the Central Asian markets. The Chahbahar Port acts as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia and is important since Pakistan does not allow land transit to Indian goods.

The North-South Trade Corridor (NSTC), a 7200 km sea, road, rail transit corridor connects India-Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia and Europe. It was developed as an alternative to the Suez Canal. The current route facilitates movement of cargo from Mumbai (India) to Bandar Abbas (Iran) by sea, from Bandar Abbas to Bandar-e Anzali by road, from Bandar-e-Anzali to Astrakhan, a Caspian Port in Russia, by ship, and from Astrakhan to other parts of the Russian Federation and further into Europe by Russian railways.

The NSTC was operationalised in June 2022 when the first cargo left Russia's Caspian Sea port zone of Solyanka in Astrakhan, and reached Nhava Sheva in Navi Mumbai. But the Ukraine War and tensions in West Asia are a setback to its progress.

The Iran-Israel war could also impede the progress of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEEC), which was announced last year during the G20 meeting. The IMEEC plan comprises an Eastern Corridor connecting India to the Gulf region and a Northern Corridor connecting the Gulf to Europe. It will include a ship-rail-road transit network.

Israel is a critical part of this corridor with Haifa port, one of the largest ports in the Eastern Mediterranean serving as a trans-shipment hub for Europe. India's Adani Group is involved in the development of this port. The IMEEC will therefore potentially provide opportunities for more Indian Companies to expand their presence in the Middle





East. All these economic corridors have been adversely affected by the ongoing conflict(s).

Shipping Lines

The Strait of Hormuz located between Oman and Iran, connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea is the world's most important trade transit choke-point. Bulk of India's crude flows through this which along with the Red Sea is critical to global trade. In case of any disruption, oil supplies from West Asia will be affected.

The inability of ships to transit a major chokepoint, even temporarily, can create substantial supply delays and raise shipping costs. The Red Sea is another choke point which connects the Arabian Sea to the Suez Canal.

Ships passing through the Red Sea region have been attacked by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen. This resulted in re-routing of ships and increased insurance costs. Re-routing of ships entails going around the Cape of Good Hope and then reaching the European and North American markets. The Red Sea conflict has already increased insurance costs by 30 percent besides lengthening the freight journey time by two-three weeks.

Crude Oil

The tensions have led to rise in crude oil prices. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has projected crude oil prices for the country's

basket at \$85 per barrel in FY25.

The worry for the Indian Government is, the price fallout of any disruption in Iran's oil supply lines or damage to its oil assets. As there is talk of Israel wanting to target Iran's oil infrastructure in case of further escalation. Though India no longer imports Iranian crude but a disruption of Iranian crude will drive up the prices.

Iran's oil industry plays a critical role in the world's energy markets. It has the world's third largest oil and second largest natural gas reserves. According to a Morgan Stanley report, a \$10 per barrel increase can impact consumer prices by 0.2 to 1.4 percentage points across Asian economies.

In India it is said that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rises to 0.5 percentage points for each \$10 per barrel increase in oil prices. The increase in cost impacts India's import bill, worsening the trade deficit and putting pressure on the rupee. A weaker rupee will make imports costlier, adding to inflationary pressures.



Higher oil prices, especially diesel, increase transportation and production costs, spiking inflation. This could hurt consumer demand and lead to higher prices of goods and services across the Indian economy.

India's net oil import bill is projected to increase to between \$101 billion and \$104 billion in the current fiscal year, up from \$96.1 billion in 2023-24. Any escalation in the Iran-Israel conflict could further drive up the value of these imports, which will directly impact consumer prices.

Air Travel

The West Asia crisis is complicating travel plans. Air India has cancelled flights to and from Tel Aviv, citing safety concerns, while carriers like Vistara and IndiGo, along with several international airlines, are avoiding Iranian airspace.

The re-routing of flights can mean longer flight paths and higher costs for airlines operating to and from Europe and West Asia. For airlines, diversions add to fuel costs and heighten airfares. The other worry is that escalation of conflict will lead to a rise in prices of aviation turbine fuel. These price surges can impact travel affordability. It is also bound to impact global air traffic, including from India, especially at a time when large sections of the Indian diaspora will be homebound due to winter holidays in Europe and North America.

Diaspora

India has many citizens living in this region. They are spread from Israel, Lebanon across the Gulf and in Iran. India has a large diaspora in Israel of around 97,467. Of this more than 18,000 Indians work mainly as caregivers and agricultural workers. India also signed an agreement for 1,500 Indians to be employed as construction workers. The first batch is already in Israel. There is also a sizable population of Indians in Iran. In case of an Israel-Iran war, their safety would be at stake.

Import/Export

Trade with Iran dipped to under \$2.33 billion in FY23 from \$17 billion in FY19. Experts believe that a direct conflict involving Iran could make India's trade with Tehran even more difficult. Major Indian exports to Iran include rice, tea, sugar, pharmaceuticals, manmade staple fibers, electrical machinery, and artificial jewelry. While major Indian imports from Iran consist of dry fruits, inorganic/organic chemicals, and glassware apart from crude which we have now stopped purchasing.

About 25 percent of Basmati rice exported from India is sent to Iran, but the uncertainty has worried Basmati rice farmers, as the big exporters and millers have reduced the quantum, they earlier used to buy in the grain markets and the price of Basmati 1509 variety has fallen to ₹ 2700 per quintal compared to ₹ 3500 per quintal last year.

Similarly, Israel-India trade, the export of petroleum products, diamonds, and chemicals and imports of precious stones and fertilizers has taken a hit.

UNIFIL

On 10 October 2024, the UN Interim Mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported that an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) tank had fired at an observation tower at the mission's headquarters, causing it to collapse and injuring two peacekeepers. The attack was strongly condemned by UNIFIL and co-signed by 34 countries including India.

With 903 soldiers, India has the third-largest number of troops in UNIFIL after Indonesia and Italy.

Defence Cooperation

The military implications of the current conflict are also very significant. Increased military activity could lead to greater instability across West Asia, particularly if other regional powers get involved. Enhanced military readiness in the region might also require India to reconsider its own security postures.

The India-Israel relationship received a significant boost in 1999, during the Kargil Conflict. Israel supplied mortars, ammunition, and laser-guided missiles, which added precision and lethality to the Indian military campaign. The Israeli assistance remained unwavering including provision of satellite imagery. Consequently, defence and security cooperation emerged as an anchor of the bilateral relationship.

India has been consciously diversifying its defence supplies away from

Soviet origin equipment. Israel is now among the top arms exporters to India.

In 2000, India and Israel signed their first defence deal for the purchase of the Barak-1 surface-to-air missile system. Defence equipment purchased by India consist of the Phalcon airborne early warning and control system (installed on Russian IL-76 aircraft), an array of UAV systems including Heron, Searcher II, and Harop, as well as surface-to-air missile systems such as Spyder and Barak, air-to-surface missiles such as Popeye I and II, Spike anti-tank guided missiles and a host of sensor systems.

The Indian Army operates Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) Heron drones for extended surveillance with real-time imagery along with Israeli sensors, hand-held thermal imaging devices, and night vision imaging equipment to check militant infiltration from Pakistan on the line of control and in counter-insurgency operations.

In February 2019, Indian Air Force used the Spice 2000 guided bombs in an aerial raid targeting a terrorist training camp at Balakot in Pakistan following the suicide attack on an Indian Paramilitary convoy in Pulwama.

The Iran-Israel war could also impede the progress of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEEC), which was announced last year during the G20 meeting. The IMEEC plan comprises an Eastern Corridor connecting India to the Gulf region and a Northern Corridor connecting the Gulf to Europe. It will include a ship-rail-road transit network.



Indian Special Forces are equipped Israeli assault rifles such as Tavor, Galil, Negev machine guns, and the B-300 man-portable anti-tank weapon system.

Israel's active engagement in the Indian Government's Make in India initiative underscores the significance they place on the Indian market. Israel's defence industry is currently establishing fruitful partnerships with India's private sector to boost domestic production. Israeli defence giants IAI, Elbit Systems, and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems have partnered with Indian companies Bharat Forge, Tech Mahindra, Adani Defence and Aerospace, and Tata Advanced Systems to manufacture advanced sub-systems and homeland security systems.

The production of the Drishti-10 Starliner a MALE UAV, is symbolic of the thriving India-Israel defence cooperation. The drone is an Indian-made version of Israel's Elbit Systems cutting-edge Hermes-900 UAV. Produced by Adani Defence and Aerospace, the drone is likely to be inducted in the Indian Navy later this year, significantly boosting the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities across the Indian Ocean Region.

In 2020, the Adani Group launched an additional facility for assault rifle manufacturing in Kanpur. This facility is slated to produce around a dozen types of guns with Elbit Systems.

Besides co-production, both sides have also explored the co-development of defence technologies. The successful development of the Barak-8 missile defence system by IAI and India's DRDO stands as a major achievement of this collaboration. This system, offered as land and maritime variants, is a formidable air defence system. In another project, IAI is partnering with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited to convert previously used Boeing-767 civilian aircraft into aerial refueling tankers for the Indian Air Force.

In 2022, during the visit of Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz, India and Israel signed the India-Israel Vision on Defence Cooperation agreement to put together a comprehensive 10-year road map to identify new areas of defence technology collaboration.


The escalating tensions no doubt are much wider than a mere Israel-Hamas and Hezbollah showdown and as Israel looks inwards to cater for its defence needs, the affect will be visible in Israel's defence exports to India.

Conclusion

The current Iran-Israel conflict engulfs the entire West Asia region which has openly affected global politics and the global economy. As

a victim of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan for several decades, India understands the consequences of terrorism not being tackled head-on. Therefore, it unequivocally condemned the Hamas terrorist attack and expressed its solidarity with Israel. At the same time, India has maintained that Israel has an international obligation to observe humanitarian law and underlined that the only viable path out of the current quagmire is a "two-state solution."

The Indian position is also reflective of the domestic divisions that have arisen vis-à-vis the Israel-Hamas hostilities: Some groups have defended Israel's right to self-defence against terrorism, whereas some have castigated the Israeli response for causing humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip.

The Prime Minister clearly stated at the ASEAN Summit on 11 October. The conflicts going on in different parts of the world are having the most negative impact on the countries of the Global South. Everyone wants that whether it is Eurasia or West Asia, peace and stability should be restored as soon as possible. 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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

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



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

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

DAL LAKE IN SRINAGAR WINTER?



Unfortunately not! It is the foam in Delhi's own Yamuna River! Toxic wastes from industry around, this has become commonplace. While government agencies accuse each other, with repeated promises to cleanse the Yamuna, the results are here for us to see. Is there any relief in sight?

A Conversation on “A United Nations for the 21st Century”



ADI CONVERSATIONS *Exclusive*

A panel titled “A United Nations for the 21st Century” was convened, chaired and moderated by **Kamal Malhotra**, former United Nations Resident Coordinator and the UN Secretary General's Representative in Malaysia, Turkey and Vietnam (2008-2021), with Panelists Ambassador (retired) **Vijay Nambiar**, previous Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations (2002-2004), Special Adviser to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (2006-2007) and Chef de Cabinet of UN Secretary General Ban ki-moon (2007-2012); **Shombi Sharp**, UN Resident Coordinator and Representative of the UN Secretary General in India and **Ms. Ruchira Kamboj**, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in New York (2022-2024). Vietnam's Political Counsellor in India also attended. It was held exactly one month after the UN's 2024 Summit of the Future which concluded in the UN General Assembly in New York on September 23, 2024. The Summit concluded with consensus amongst the UNs 193 Member States on a Pact for



the Future, and its accompanying Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. The Pact for the Future has 56 commitments. It is indeed remarkable that full consensus was reached on these historic documents in a very polarized global context.

The discussion was held just two days before the commemoration of the 79th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations on October 24. It was timed to reflect a “We the Peoples” (the first three words of the UN Charter) discussion on the Pact for the Future and UN Reform issues more broadly. The panel is also timely because the world is at a critical juncture, given the multiple simultaneous crises and the extreme polarization that currently exists.

As a result, one of the questions all panel participants were asked by the moderator was: are we at a 21st century equivalent of the 1942 moment when the Declaration for a United Nations was put forward as the precursor to agreement on the UN Charter in San Francisco, USA on 26 June, 1945 and the creation of the United Nations on October 24 that year, exactly 79 years ago, today?



KAMAL MALHOTRA: The United Nations is arguably the world's greatest and most enduring, all encompassing, global public good. Any independent, objective assessment of the Organization will probably conclude that it has made an enormous, largely measurable, overall positive and constructive contribution to the world and its citizens over the last almost 80 years.

The UN Charter's principles and values are timeless and are as relevant today as they were in 1945, notwithstanding that some important amendments to the Charter are necessary in the changed context of the 21st century. We currently face unprecedented global and transnational challenges, which only a politically legitimate body such as the UN can have a hope of addressing.

It should be obvious, therefore, that the Organization has a continuing relevance despite its many naysayers and detractors. The three documents agreed in New York by consensus a month ago are a testimony to the fact that the United Nations will remain at the center stage in terms of the world's current and future global, regional and national governance architecture.

There is no doubt that the UN needs urgent and serious reform at global, regional, and national levels if it is to retain political legitimacy and have a real chance of resolving the world's current, complex growing and intractable problems as well as its future challenges.

In addition to the urgent need for the transformation of the UNs global governance architecture, there is an equally urgent need for a One UN approach at country and regional levels if the UN is to live up to the promise and aspirations of the human rights based Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 adopted by consensus by all 193 UN Member States in 2015.

Vietnam has been the world leader of the One UN at country level for the last 20 years. I witnessed this firsthand since I had been privileged to Head the UN there for almost five years and lead the One UN there between 2017 and 2021. The One UN House in Hanoi, provided by the Government of Vietnam in 2015, and its ownership and leadership of the One UN process from the pilot days of the "Delivering as One" initiative in 2006 till the present, had created the essential building blocks for the success of the One UN in Vietnam.

The One UN Communications Team in Vietnam was created 17 years ago in 2007 and has been essential in conveying a consistent One UN message since then. Since the move to the One UN House in 2015, there has been one Common Back Office (CBO) Team. And, while a Programmatic One UN was the hardest part, everyone working on similar substantive issues began working and sitting together in a One UN Team, linked to



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Kamal Malhotra

the four strategic areas they worked on after the signing of the One UN Strategic Plan (2017-2021). It did not matter which UN agency a staff person worked for. They clustered around either Inclusive Social Development, Inclusive Growth, Climate Change or Governance and Justice, the four strategic outcome priority areas of the joint UN-Government of Vietnam One Strategic Plan.

The Government of Vietnam fully supported this. Of course, there was resistance, and there is still resistance from some UN

agencies, but while there appears to have been some rolling back of this arrangement in 2023, I continue to believe that while staff sitting together according to what they substantively do is not an end, it is an essential step if the institutional barriers of different UN agencies are to be transcended in order to deliver on Agenda 2030.

AMBASSADOR NAMBIAR: It has become a truism when you talk about the United Nations that it is based on three pillars which are **Peace and Security, Sustainable Development and Human Rights**. However, that in 2001, when the UN Intellectual History project was being discussed, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had written a Forward to the publication. In that, he had identified four big ideas that have animated humankind, and which are in a sense embodied in the United Nations three pillars, but also a fourth one which, now of course, is not talked about very much, but which continues to be important and relevant: **Independence**.

Independence was very relevant in the early years of the UN. From only 52 UN Member States at the time of its founding in 1945, the UN has 193 Member States today. The main reasons for this dramatic increase in independent states were decolonization and the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Decolonization has been one of the historic achievements of the United Nations.

However, in the process, 152 nations today, or even more, are part of the Group of 77 developing countries. Many of them are facing multiple crises. Moreover, they have been dependent on external assistance from their very inception. Most also have entrenched poverty and public health problems.

There are major shortcomings which the system has not been able to find solutions for. One of the major reasons for the failure of multilateralism in this respect was its inability to provide public goods for these developing countries, particularly the vulnerable among them, especially its inability to tackle their financial requirements and debt. Public debt has become the biggest problem, particularly after the 2008 global economic and financial crisis and felt that this is the biggest problem developing countries currently face. Instead of financial safety, developing countries are faced with an outdated, dysfunctional, unjust global economic and financial system that is not meeting their needs.

The isolation of many developing countries because of these crises is not an accident. It is an inevitable result of the way the global system was designed. The Bretton Woods institutions, particularly the World Bank and the IMF, were designed for the world of our grandparents, not the world of today, let alone the world of our grandchildren. Over three quarters of today's countries were not present at the founding of the World Bank and the IMF at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA. Many were still under colonial rule. The Bretton Woods institutions were designed by the richest countries and remain dominated by them. Today, many developing countries are stranded in the Bretton Woods system which symbolizes the failure of the international financial, and especially glaringly, its handling of debt. The last four years have been nothing short of a debt disaster. Developing countries also face the bias of credit rating agencies, paying much higher interest rates than rich countries.

In this post-pandemic period, interest rates have soared to astronomical levels. Development plans are quickly swamped by the tsunami of debt servicing. There is urgent call for the re-configuring and reimagining of the multilateral development banks to meet some of the major needs of the sustainable development goals, particularly in debt ridden developing countries. The Pact for the Future has at least five action points connected with the financial architecture. It is unfor-



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Vijay Nambiar





“India has been delivering development at scale. When it comes to peace and security and political sides, then of course, the first thing we think of is the UN Security Council. That’s where the United Nations is very, very much behind. That’s where an institution established by our grandparents or for our grandparents cannot deliver for our grandchildren.”

Shombi Sharp



tunate that the IMF is neither able to increase Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) nor allocate unused rich country SDRs to developing countries.

It is critical that the multinational development banks to be re-configured to meet some of the critical, priority needs of developing countries as well as for international tax cooperation with a focus on making high net worth individuals (HNWIs) contribute more substantively, through higher taxes.

Many transnational corporations use digital methods to engage in base erosion and profit shifting, allowing them to siphon their profits away from the host country without it even knowing, often to a remote tax haven. As a result, the legitimate tax, which the countries, particularly poor countries, should be getting from the activities of such corporations are not available to them.

While this set of issues has been addressed by the OECD, there is a conflict of interest. It needs to be addressed in the United Nations.

Of the total annual budget for the entire UN family of about USD 60 billion, 62% are ear-marked funds. Moreover, 80% of the UNs development funds are earmarked. This is a retreat from the true spirit of multilateralism. The UN needs to get core resources which can be put to use for what the UNs country analysis and Cooperation Framework prioritizes, not what donors earmark their funds for, since even if earmarked for certain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), donors often cherry pick the ones they want to support.

The SDG core Funding Compact has not succeeded. It stands at around only 20% whereas a minimum of 30% was the target. How to increase this to the target is the big challenge.

KAMAL MALHOTRA: Mr. Sharp, can you share your idea of the formation of the UN out of the ashes of World War II and comment upon the interconnectedness and indivisibility between the three UN pillars of peace and security, sustainable development and human rights, and the need for them to be viewed as an integrated package.

SHOMBI SHARP: You cannot have one without the other. The United Nations should not be looked at as one monolithic structure. Like governments, it is a complex array of, of, of structures interacting with each other in different ways within a broader framework. Within the UN which the Secretary General has direct influence and control over, we have seen a lot more progress in terms of reform and keeping up with the times, but not enough by any means.

Various Secretaries General have implemented various reform initiatives, and the current Secretary General Antonio Guterres launched a significant reform back in 2019 which we have seen percolating its way through headquarters, the regional and the country level. For example, from 2019 the role of the UN Resident Coordinator across all of the program countries was really cemented as the direct representative of the Secretary General in the country. Second, the UN created what is called the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework which is a revitalized singular strategic partnership offer with the host country whereby the entire United Nations system present in the country is comes together to deliver with synergies for the greatest impact at the request of the host government.

India has been delivering development at scale. When it comes to peace and security and political sides, then of course, the first thing we think of is the UN Security Council. That’s where the United Nations is very, very much behind. That’s where an institution established by our grandparents or for our grandparents cannot deliver for our grandchildren.

There is no greater proponent for reform at that level than the

Secretary General himself. But that is the prerogative of the Member States which goes beyond the remit of the staff of the institution. We have to look to the member states to drive this agenda and help us be fit for the 21st century.

We just barely got out of a pandemic. 40% of the world's population live in countries paying more on debt service payments than education or health. The good news is that the world has woken up on climate, coming together under the Secretary General. The Pact for the Future and the Digital Compact really bring fresh momentum for the future.

International Financial Architecture reform has historically been seen as a Bretton Woods or the Bretton Woods institutions issue, not United Nations which has looked more at social, humanitarian or human rights or just development without money. But we have realized that money is needed to drive development and that we need a step change in the ability of the financial system to bring financing aligned with the SDGs.

During its G 20 presidency, India put forward the Summit experts report, which aligned precisely with the Secretary General's call for a stimulus package of \$500 billion a year aligned with the SDGs, crowding in another \$3 to \$4 trillion of blended and private sector finance to meet the SDG financing gap of three to \$4 trillion a year. This gap seems huge, and it is, but when you look at the more than USD 120 trillion dollars, we have in global capital markets, it really is not a lot. The issue is not money, per se, but how it is aligned and who has influence over it is spent?

KAMAL MALHOTRA: Ambassador Kamboj, you have only recently returned from your assignment in New York. What are your impressions on the role and impact of the UN today?

AMBASSADOR KAMBOJ: Regarding the One UN, it was correct to point out the inherent challenges of coordination between the different agencies of the United Nations which are not unique to it. This is common to any large complex organization with multiple autonomous bodies. The One UN initiative while ambitious has indeed, as has already been rightly pointed out, faced difficulties, precisely because of these coordination challenges, and the UN Secretary General's broader push for UN reforms is centered on the One UN.

The Secretary General has been advocating, as we know, reforms that include enhancing the authority of the UN Resident Coordinator as well as streamlining the system to make it more effective and accountable. What are the solutions for this apparent lack of coordination on the ground? What could be some of the urgent steps forward? Well, first and foremost, in an ideal world, a full buy-in by the leadership that is involved. Governments and agencies must re-commit recognizing the authority of the UN Resident Coordinator as far as possible as well as the harmonization of regional structures. The role of the UNDP and the Regional Economic Commissions should be clarified, focusing on complementary strengths.

In an ideal world, nothing is complete without financing. New partnerships with private sector entities, philanthropic organizations and non-traditional donors could be explored to overcome financial shortages, particularly for countries which are unable to contribute at previous levels in the post-COVID pandemic. In an ideal world, there should also be accountability mechanisms and transparent performance benchmarks to ensure that the reforms remain on track. What I would say about the lack of coordination is that while the ideal formulation is always unrealistic, reforms could aim for pragmatic coordination, focusing on areas where coordination makes a tangible difference, leaving some room for flexibility. In some cases, complete unification may be impossible, but there are indeed areas where better alignment



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Ms. Ruchira Kamboj





“Vietnam has been one of the first countries to join the United Nations’ Delivering as One (DAO) initiative in 2006. And within that framework, the Government of Vietnam and the UN actively cooperated on the UN One Plan (2012 to 2016), consistent with Vietnam’s Five-year Socio-economic Development Plan.”

Tung Truong Phong



can yield benefits. Coordination efforts are undoubtedly difficult, and we’ve all seen that, but they are not necessarily doomed.

Some areas, such as humanitarian crises and development planning, have seen improvements in coordination when there is strong leadership, clear mandates and joint funding mechanisms in place. The challenge lies in balancing the autonomy of agencies with the need for strategic alignment and a coherent approach at the country level, prioritizing strategic unity and operational autonomy. The idea isn’t about erasing agency independence but creating mechanisms that can allow for better collaboration where it matters the most.

KAMAL MALHOTRA: Would you, Ambassador Kamboj, comment on the central issue of Security Council reform.

AMBASSADOR KAMBOJ: There had been three decades of proposals and that there has never been a time without some discussion on it.

The Security Council reform stood high in the list of priorities during discussions on the Pact for the Future she had been involved in and that there was a very strong case for Africa, for India, and for Brazil. Bringing greater diversity and democracy of voices to the table meant more seats, more voices and greater legitimacy, so there is a very strong case for that. It would take time since it is the most complex process in the entire United Nations. The Pact for the Future was not particularly helpful here since while it did recognize that there is need to reform the United Nations Security Council, it was very vague in the specificities. In the continuing discussion on this issue there was a need to look at it from a fresh lens and see how the entire process could be expedited.

Most of the UN Member States support a comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council which means an expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, not a piecemeal reform. Only a small minority of countries support piecemeal reform. I do not see the abolition of the permanent member veto happening at all, at least not yet. In fact, there is a contrary move in the General Assembly among member states which is a move to restrict the use of the veto. She recalled both the 2022 Initiative of Liechtenstein as well as the French-Mexico initiative to restrict the use of the veto which should be used only under certain situations and circumstances.

There have been many proposals in the past calling for a restriction on the use of the veto. It is another matter that many countries, and I do know that the African Union has this very maximalist position, either that the veto should be extended to all new permanent members, or that it should be completely abolished. I do not see member states giving up the veto very easily or very quickly. How to strengthen the role of the United Nations General Assembly when the United Nations Security Council has not quite delivered on peace and security, is the question.

Measures are afoot and there is a very vital discussion going on in



the United Nations about the revitalization of the General Assembly. The Uniting for Peace resolution of 1950 has been invoked quite often, both in the case of Ukraine and Gaza. She felt that much more can be done in the General Assembly, but unfortunately, there is a limitation because any radical reform of the General Assembly's role, like, for example, giving it the power to pass binding resolutions on matters relating to peace and security, would necessarily require an amendment of the UN Charter. Such an amendment of the UN Charter requires a buy-in of the Permanent Five in the Security Council, which she felt was not something which was going to happen very easily. Despite these difficulties, she felt that there are lots of possibilities and that we should not give up because there is a crying need to make the United Nations fit for purpose for the 21st century. I agree with Ambassador Nambiar that the current system was created for our grandparents. If we want the system to work, we cannot bequeath the same system to our grandchildren.

KAMAL MALHOTRA: Would any of the panel want to add on UN Security Council reform or the role of the UN General Assembly in terms of strengthening it vis-a-vis the role of the Security Council.

AMBASSADOR NAMBIAR: I broadly agree with Ambassador Kamboj on UN Security Council reform. I see the Security Council as the cockpit of the United Nations because it was tasked to deal with peace and security which is the touchstone of the UNs work.

Any big power, by definition, is not going to give up its veto power; so calls for its abolition seem unrealistic. Big powers will continue to use the veto on issues of absolute importance to their national interest whether the UN likes it or not. The abolition of the veto may in fact undermine the UN, if big countries start to increasingly act unilaterally or otherwise, outside the United Nations.

The UN Security Council permanent member veto power is built into the system and is an insurance that the system itself will work. While I agree with Ambassador Kamboj that there must be some restraint on the use of the veto, it should be used for matters which are central for the absolute national security of a state. The abolition of the veto would eventually lead to the disappearance of the United Nations system.

The situation today was very different from the 1942 Declaration of the United Nations moment. Because the world is polarized today in a different kind of a manner from how it was in 1942. The power balance in the world is changing, and it is high time that the rest of the world including UN Security Council permanent members take note of this. They must know that things are changing in the world, and that they are going to change even further. While recognizing this, the BRICS should be recognized. Whether such new members can live up to the expectations of permanent membership of the UN Security Council, it was not a popularity contest, and recognizing the reality of power shifts, therefore giving a seat at the table to an important nation is something that was merely recognizing a fact.

Providing permanent Security Council membership to additional countries was not a favor to the country concerned, but to the Organization. While some of the countries who have the current power may view the addition of new members as a problem, it was not for them to see this as something for them to give.

While Ambassador Kamboj did not view the Pact for the Future as promising on the specifics of UN Security Council reform, it had at least three action points dealing with the restructuring of the Security Council. And while it use of the words representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic, and accountable are all like motherhood



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Vijay Nambiar



“While I agree that no permanent member of the Security Council was likely to give up its veto powers, I feel they needed to recognize the risk of holding on too long. I feel they risk losing everything, or of throwing the baby out with the bath water if they do not broaden permanent.”

Shombi Sharp



“Regarding the One UN, it was correct to point out the inherent challenges of coordination between the different agencies of the United Nations which are not unique to it. This is common to any large complex organization with multiple autonomous bodies. The One UN initiative while ambitious has indeed, faced difficulties.”

Ms. Ruchira Kamboj



“From September 1977, Vietnam had transformed from a country depending on UN assistance to one which has strongly contributed to the UNs regional and global agenda, demonstrating its role as an increasing active member of the international community, including contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and the UN Women Peace and Security agenda.”

Tung Truong Phong

which no one can't dispute, the crucial instrument to take all this forward will be the continuing UN intergovernmental negotiations.

The intergovernmental negotiations would ultimately lead to the two thirds majority required for UN Charter amendment which I think is important.

It is possible to modernize the UN Charter but that any attempt to start a new process of building a new international organization to replace the current United Nations would be a mistake and result in shambles.

KAMAL MALHOTRA: Mr. Sharp, any final comments.

SHOMBI SHARP: People should not forget that the women and men of the United Nations are out there, providing shelter to over 117 million people who have had to flee their homes; it is helping vaccinate 45% of the world's children; it is providing food assistance to 160 million people in 120 different countries; while 87,000 men and women in uniform are providing peacekeeping duties with India, of course, being one of the world's greatest provider of peacekeeping service personnel since the very beginning.

I agree with Madeline Albright who had said that if you did not have a United Nations, then you would have to reinvent one. In terms of the Security Council reform, which are absolutely needed, only the Member States, not staff of the UN can decide what will happen.

While I agree that no permanent member of the Security Council was likely to give up its veto powers, I feel they needed to recognize the risk of holding on too long. I feel they risk losing everything, or of throwing the baby out with the bath water if they do not broaden permanent Security Council membership. The rising middle powers and those who were left out of the 1940s formulation will start using other multilateral bodies for their purposes.

At the G 20, at India's very welcome initiative, this was a perfect example. The African Union has now joined the G 20 and made it a much more inclusive body. The BRICS is now expanding with new members either joining or expressing an interest in joining. While the world needed more multilateralism, the UN was the only global forum with 193 Member States. The P5 should realize that the longer that the Security Council goes without reform, the more other bodies are going to try and fill the perceived vacuum of legitimacy. The UN Secretary General is the greatest proponent for both Security Council reform and UN reform more broadly.

KAMAL MALHOTRA: I will now go back full circle to the One UN Reform at country level. Let me ask the Political Counsellor of Vietnam, Tung Truong Phong, to share his government's perspective since Vietnam has been at the forefront of the One UN initiative at the country level. The delivery of the sustainable development goals must be on the ground at the country level and that to enable this, what is going on globally or even regionally is less important.

TUNG TRUONG PHONG: Vietnam celebrated the 47th Anniversary of it joining the UN exactly a month ago on September 22. From Vietnam's perspective, the One UN initiative and UN operations in Vietnam over nearly 50 years have been very successful. Vietnam has been one of the first countries to join the United Nations' Delivering as One (DAO) initiative in 2006. And within that framework, the Government of Vietnam and the UN actively cooperated on the UN One Plan (2012 to 2016), consistent with Vietnam's Five-year Socio-economic Development Plan.

The two sides also completed the Joint One Strategic Plan (2017-2021) within the framework of the One UN. From September 1977, Vietnam had transformed from a country depending on UN assistance



“It would be impossible, today, to reinvent a UN or a UN Charter that comes anywhere close to the inspirational UN Charter of 1945, since we are living in a world of many illiberal nations and leaders. As a result, any new, alternative global governance institution design will be far worse than the Allied forces and their leaders were able to come up under the leadership of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1942 which became the basis for the creation of the United Nations.”

Kamal Malhotra

to one which has strongly contributed to the UNs regional and global agenda, demonstrating its role as an increasing active member of the international community, including contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and the UN Women Peace and Security agenda. Vietnam, with the UNs support, has lifted 40 million people out poverty in the last few decades.

KAMAL MALHOTRA: It is important for the government leading the One UN on the ground. If a government does not lead it, it will not happen. Vietnam’s case has been one where the government has led it for the last two decades, first in its Delivering as One pilot phase and then as One UN. While I was the UN Resident Coordinator between 2017-2021, the Government treated me as a one-stop shop for anything to do with the UN, including the political and human rights sides, not just development, effectively allowing the three pillars of the UN to be under a broad One UN umbrella.

Returning to the global level, there has been an active discussion about broadening representation and participation in the UN General Assembly to bring in the private sector, civil society groups, academia, local elected bodies in essentially what is referred to as a “whole of society” approach reflected in point 55 of the Pact for the Future. The Bretton Woods institutions specialized agencies of the United Nations, are no different from the WHO or the ILO, yet they have been given a life of their own with little or no accountability. Such accountability needs to be prioritized to a strengthened UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

I would also like to refer to the need for a strengthened Peace Building Commission which can take on some of the UN Security Council’s agenda. I agree with Ambassador Nambiar that the world does not appear to be at a 1942 moment, given the emerging two broad blocs in the polarized geo-political world.

It would be impossible, today, to reinvent a UN or a UN Charter that comes anywhere close to the inspirational UN Charter of 1945, since we are living in a world of many illiberal nations and leaders. As a result, any new, alternative global governance institution design will be far worse than the Allied forces and their leaders were able to come up under the leadership of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1942 which became the basis for the creation of the United Nations.

Questions from the floor:

DR RASHMI JAIPAL: With reference to the 2023 General Assembly mental health resolution, are civil society organizations were engaged with the One UN at country level, especially during implementation.

RADHIKA KAUL BATRA: Is there any lack of specificity on UN Security Council reform in the Pact for the Future and is there any special lens that countries like India and the G77 would like to see in the future if UN Security Council reform is to be realized.

AMBASSADOR NAMBIAR: Each Member State will require a level of specificity which is intrinsic to its own interest. Furthermore, it will be difficult to have something which is agreed to in general. The UN intergovernmental process will be critical for this. If the P5 are opposed to any reform proposal, it will not go through. He indicated, however, that there was value in putting the same proposals again and again to publicly shame the countries or people who are standing in the way of what almost everyone recognizes as an urgent area for change.

On mental health and civil society participation the C20 have been working on issues of public health very closely with the United Nations in several countries including India, not just by making statements but






on implementation through an integrated One Health paradigm.

AMBASSADOR KAMBOJ: I agree with Ambassador Nambiar on the crying and urgent need for the United Nations to be reset because it is not business as usual. I think we can all agree with that. Having been part of the Pact for the Future negotiations, when they started, ambitions and hopes were high, but as they progressed, it became quite clear that the proposals would be diluted. It is very heartening to see that there are segments on Security Council reform in the Pact for the Future, and there is an acknowledgement to reform it. However, the proposals in the Pact lack specificity and are vague about the details. The devil would lie in detail.

I agree with Ambassador Nambiar that the whole Security Council reform process needs to be looked at afresh through the intergovernmental cycle which starts in 2025. India was not pinning too many hopes on it because this has been going on for years. However, the inter-governmental process is the only one that we have in the UN General Assembly right now to deal with this issue. Everyone needs to work harder. Whether and how we can achieve that consensus is another matter. This issue is very important. The bottom line is that reform is the crying need of the hour. The bulk of speakers who spoke during the 79th UN General Assembly supported a comprehensive reform of the United Nations system. And as far as India is concerned, four of the five current permanent members supported India's presence in an expanded Security Council as a permanent member. This process is still work-in-progress. While there is every reason to be a little skeptical, there is also every reason to be a bit positive, particularly given the current momentum for comprehensive changes. The growing political climate is increasingly more favourable for reform, driven by demands from emerging powers and under-represented regions like Africa and Latin

America. Countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa, along with others in the Global South, are making stronger, more coordinated calls for greater inclusion in global governance.

Moreover, geopolitical shifts, including the diminishing influence of the post World War II order, provide an opening for countries to push for a more equitable system. The growing recognition that the UNSC must reflect today's geopolitical realities, not those of 1945, add further wind to the sails of the reform efforts. The support for a more representative and accountable UNSC is broadening beyond traditional advocates, creating a positive environment for change.

SHOMBI SHARP: There is unanimous agreement that we need UN Security Council reform. On mental health, the One UN in India has health and well-being as very central issues in the UN's current Strategic Cooperation Framework, ensuring that services are reaching the most vulnerable, marginalized populations. The UN in India have increasingly understood that mental health is a critical part, not just of health, but of life skills and of being a 21st century citizen. Also, the UN in India often worked through civil society organizations since the UN itself did not have the community-based presence. 

Can India China Ties be Resilient or Renewed *in the face of the ongoing border standoff?*



We bring here excerpts of **Kanti Bajpai's** views from a session at the Khushwant Singh Literary Festival 2024 on India's China Challenge. This was a part of a session at the recently concluded Khushwant Singh Literary Festival 2024. The subject was India's China Challenge, the speaker **Kanti Bajpai**, who was interviewed by **Suhasini Haider**, senior diplomatic correspondent, *The Hindu*.

'Zhongguo' which refers to the Middle Kingdom, was used to refer to parts of India that were spiritually central. But by the 15th or 16th century, as Buddhism had kind of gone into remission in India, but was vigorous in China, in any case, by the 15th or 16th century, China's a great maritime power and a great imperial power was drawing tribute from various Indian kingdoms in Bengal, in southern India. So, China looked up to India for several hundred years, and then for a couple of hundred years, at least, if not longer, they were tribute sending Indians who looked up to China.

And then the Europeans came along. And in a way, the relationship was broken with China until about really the 19th century, when a lot of negative things happened from the Chinese perspective related to India, which is that British Indian troops and policemen were in India. Of course, the famous you know drug trade as it were from India into China which devastated Chinese society occurred. They were sort of images of unscrupulous Indian businessmen working in China and so on. So, quite a negative opinions arose, but I think it climaxed in about the late 19th century when young Chinese intellectuals facing the possibility of China becoming an India, being subordinated by the Europeans, asked themselves what happened to this great civilization in Southern Asia to their west.

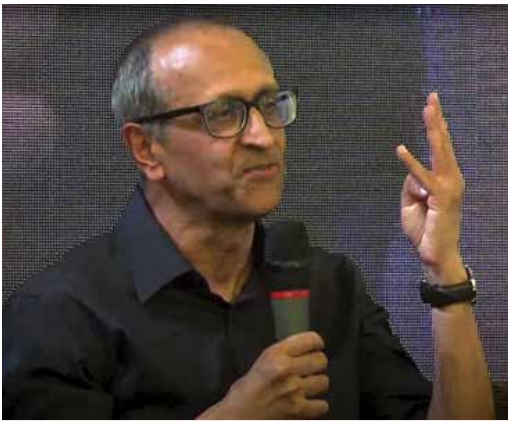
A DI CONVERSATIONS Report

They can be friends, but with difficulty, this book was commissioned to present the pessimistic view in a sense. So, I'm a bit more optimistic than the book title indicates, but my charter was to write a book in 2020, a month after Galwan one, and I had to write in three months on why, in a sense they couldn't be friends or why it was so difficult and why things had gone wrong spectacularly in the summer of 2020. I was going to talk about these four Ps very quickly. They are related, but in the book, because I was a lazy kind of person, I couldn't trace through the exact ways in which the four Ps are interrelated, but I think you can work it out for yourself.

It's a little algorithm, just an easy way to try and think about the India China relationship beyond just the border issue, which I wanted to get away from. So, what are the four P's.

The First P - Perception

The first 'P' is perceptions or images of each other historically. And what you see there, tracing it through from the time Buddhism went to China is that for about five or six or 700 years, China looked up to India because it was the land of Buddha. And there's even some evidence that their



“It’s a little algorithm, just an easy way to try and think about the India China relationship beyond just the border issue, which I wanted to get away from. So, what are the four P’s. These four P’s are Perceptions, Perimeters, Partnerships and Power.”

“Treatment of Chinese Indians during the ‘62 war also was quite a bad moment in terms of the way we reacted to people of Chinese origins. The first problem is there’s quite a big perception or image problem on both sides. These are very slow to change. So, if we want to be friends, that’s going to be a bit of a long haul.”

And young intellectuals, they said, oh my god, you know, India a chaotic place, became a slave nation, and they lamented it. But there was also a kind of a tinge of contempt there for India. And I think as we project forward, some of that attitude has remained although it’s inflected differently in contemporary times, there’s still a sort of a feeling that India, some kind of rather dirty, messy, unfathomable, not very interesting or exciting place to go to. And there’s tinge with racism and ignorance. And of course, in large part, or in quite substantial part, there are Indians who repay, the mutual contempt. Racist or ignorance or otherwise. And then if you look at some of the behaviour during Covid and so on, it wasn’t pretty in India associating the virus with the Chinese virus and so on.

So, treatment of Chinese Indians during the ‘62 war also was quite a bad moment in terms of the way we reacted to people of Chinese origins. The first problem is there’s quite a big perception or image problem on both sides. These are very slow to change. So, if we want to be friends, that’s going to be a bit of a long haul.

The Second P - Perimeters

The second P is perimeters, that’s borders. And I think that’s a very long story, but it seems to me that at the heart of the problem there is Tibet, because it’s Tibet that borders India, and it’s Tibet that’s such a difficult point for the Chinese vulnerability even now. And indeed, we may be coming to a time when things will sharpen even further because sadly, obviously the present Dalai Lama will pass from the stage. A new Dalai Lama will be chosen, and there will be a moment when Chinese will put forward inevitably, I think, Dalai Lama and there may be another Dalai Lama nominated by Tibetans elsewhere and others and India will have to, in a sense, will be under pressure to make a choice. But whenever I think of the problem around the border, I think of the domestic problem of China around Tibet, and I can only see it sharpening. That’s one very serious problem. My short point about the border is I think that both sides know what the solution is, more or less, but because of Tibet, and because today there’s no leader of the size of Deng Xiaoping or Mao or Nehru or whatever, in India who can sell that potential agreement, it’s going to be very difficult come back to say something about what a deal could look like. But it’s not just a border deal. It would have to be a much larger political adjustment and even a security adjustment.



The Third P - Partnerships

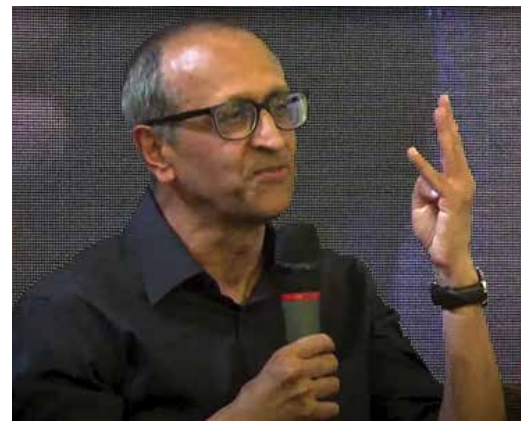
The third P is partnerships. So, Russia, the Soviet Union in the Cold War, the United States, India and China have always been part of a kind of geopolitical quadrilateral. But the most striking thing about those four powers together is that in this entire period from 1949, they're the only two, give or take a period of xxxxx between them, particularly against the Americans in the fifties and sixties. And then after the Cold War. These are the only two that have never been strategic partners against either Russia or the United States, which means at the sort of grand strategic level of decision making, high political, high military, and so on, they've never had that kind of lips to teeth engagement that perhaps the Chinese and the Americans had in the second half of the Cold War, or the Soviets and the Chinese had in the first half of the Cold War, and perhaps they have today.

So, these are the only two that have always been on opposite sides of this kind of set of strategic partnerships. They have no military geopolitical capital, as it were, to draw on, to get them over bad times because they've never been partners.

The Fourth P - Power

The last P is the one that, we talk about the most and it's the most evident. And so, I won't say a lot about it, but just to sketch it in for a moment, and that is the power asymmetry. So, in 1980, I think it's pretty clear, at least at the economic level, perhaps even at the military level, except in respect of nuclear weapons India and China were more or less balanced even. But since then, we know that the Chinese economy in nominal terms today in GDP terms is five times India's size per capita income, roughly also about five times India's. And the absolute difference in their economies is about \$17 trillion today, even if China slows down on a base of \$21 trillion and India grows 8 or 9% on a base of 3 trillion, means that the gap with China, in an absolute sense will grow. It won't reduce.

In hard par terms, that is military terms. I think what the good news here, ironically, is that as the economies are pulled away, geography helps us on the military front, at least for, I would say the next decade or so. It's just so hard to fight up there in the Himalayas. You can't do a lot, you can't win much, and you can't lose much. And that's I think a great solace to us here in India and in the maritime space, geography helps us again because it's a long way from Hainan base with the



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“But what would be the deal? I mean it can't be simply the territorial swap. The Chinese have always said and I think India has come round to the view that there's a much bigger issue that has to be settled. And I think it really relates to Tibet in the end.”

Chinese Navy egress from into the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. They have long supply lines and the Indians are quite well placed.

Again at least for the next decade or so. It seems to me on soft par, it's interesting that on some measures of soft par that are out there, that people have done, India scores rather poorly. And one of the reasons it does, it seems to me, is that the very thing that some extol India for, which is open, pluralistic, democratic and relatively liberal - many countries around the world and societies actually look to China for the opposite reason. Very well ordered and more centralised than India. And so, for countries that want to fast track development, they look at China and they say, hey, that's what we want to be. And we look after the democracy problem later.

And when they look at India, on the other hand, it's like somewhat stumbling along, and they think democracy gets in the way. They may be right, and they may be wrong on that, but that's their perception. In a sense, because the Chinese are so far ahead, they have a bit of a sense of why should we make a compromise when we are so much more powerful than India, let the Indians come to us. And on the Indian side, precisely because we are so relatively weak, there's a sense that any concession we might want to make reasonably, would be portrayed as a surrender and might be a slippery slope to more compromises or concessions. So, the Chinese won't concede because they're superior in par, and we won't concede or compromise because we're afraid it'll amount to a surrender. So that's a real structural problem. So, I think the most dynamic issue is a border settlement, which is most in our hands.

Likely Deal Outlines and a Solution Ahead

First, I will address is the possibility of some kind of a deal. And I won't take on the Nehru issue. I think it's pretty well recorded that it was a complex time. He made mistakes, he got some things right and he got some things wrong. So did the Chinese. Neither side was quite sure of their maps and by the time they were, positions had hardened over various things. And mistakes were made on both sides, including by Nehru. But I think more importantly at this point, let's look at the possibility of a deal. I think both sides, and probably everyone here can name the broad outlines of the deal, which is the swap in some fashion or the other, with some adjustments here and there.

That is the western sector where the Chinese, more or less, get to keep their claims. India gets to keep more or less all its claims in the eastern sector, which is Arunachal Pradesh. And there's a relatively simple problem in the middle sector in Himachal / Uttarakhand. And then you know I think I guess I'm assuming Sikkim is more or less settled, but perhaps not, but there might be some adjustments somewhere



in and around there.

But what would be the deal? I mean it can't be simply the territorial swap. The Chinese have always said and I think India has come round to the view that there's a much bigger issue that has to be settled. And I think it really relates to Tibet in the end.

And as I said earlier, we're coming to a difficult time. And I think it'll have to be that and, and this is hard and possibly controversial, but India will have to kind of sign off as it were on Tibet, which is to say more or less, accept you know, the Chinese, I would say nominee for, for the Dalai lama. I think if that doesn't happen, then Tibet is still alive between the two. Of course, that's a difficult decision internally in India. And it'll be difficult for the Tibetan diaspora perhaps and other countries who have people of Tibetan / Buddhist leanings and faith. But I think that will be one very hard call. And if it can't be made, then a deal will be very difficult.

The Chinese on their side, I think you know, what is the crucial thing about this is you know, as some Chinese interlocutors have said, what is it that India can give us that they can't take back? So that's one thing. The Tibet deal. We could ask the same thing of the Chinese, which is what is the one thing they can give us that they can't really take back that would make the deal attractive deal? And I think that is they have to come out once and for all openly and support us to get the UN Security Council permanent veto membership and they can't take it back. And I think that symbolically, politically, diplomatically would be the kind of solution. The last point relates to Tawang, which is a real problem and perhaps some internationalisation of Tawang that is given an international personality of some kind. So perhaps the Chinese get real access to and perhaps some sort of control over the monastery. But the governance of the district of Tawang still remains under India, and that's some kind of a secondary swap that allows the deal to go through. **DI**

India must Display Resilience in the Bangladesh Quagmire



by MAJOR GENERAL SC MOHANTY, AVSM (RETD)

It was in June 1996, when I met Major Mohammad Tasnim of East Bengal Regiment (Bangladesh) at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. It was a course for middle level armed forces officers, attended by officers from many friendly foreign countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and Afghanistan. I was nominated as the sponsor officer to Major Mohammad Tasnim (and my wife to his wife, Lipi) and happened to be his friend, philosopher, and guide during the one-year course.

All foreign officers attending the course were required to make a presentation about their respective countries to the rest of the participants. I recall, Tasnim's riveting presentation that commenced with a warm tribute to India and its valiant soldiers who helped Bangladesh achieve freedom. As I moved along in service, I interacted with many more armed forces officers from Bangladesh including at the National Defence College, which conducts courses on National Security and Strategic Studies at the apex level. There has always been great bonhomie and mutual respect among the officers of India and Bangladesh.

The tumultuous events that unfolded in Bangladesh on 05 August 2024, was not without a simmering discontentment and evolving socio-political milieu triggering its tenuous fault lines. The turmoil was the

The tumultuous events that unfolded in Bangladesh on 05 August 2024, was not without a simmering discontentment and evolving socio-political milieu triggering its tenuous fault lines. The turmoil was the result of multiplicity of factors including political exclusion, economic distress, wide spread unemployment amongst youth, cost of living crisis, especially after Covid 19 and Sheikh Hasina's disdain for political opponents.

result of multiplicity of factors including political exclusion, economic distress, wide spread unemployment amongst youth, cost of living crisis, especially after Covid 19 and Sheikh Hasina's disdain for political opponents.

Prelude

What started as a protest against 30 percent reservation for descendants of freedom fighters, precipitated into a wider revolt against the ruling dispensation marked by contentious and autocratic practices of governance. Interestingly, over the 15 years that Sheikh Hasina was in power since 2009, Bangladesh GDP had grown at 6.29 % from \$100 bn to \$460 bn in 2022. Its GDP per capita grew from \$698 in 2009 to \$2500 in 2023 surpassing that of India. Its exports (predominantly garments) tripled from \$15.1 bn in 2009 to \$54.7 in 2022. Poverty declined from 11.8% in 2010 to 5% in 2022 lifting nearly 30 million people out of poverty, and the country was to graduate from a least developed country to a developing one by 2026. Post independence in 1971, Bangladesh had as much as 80% reservation in government jobs which was reduced to 56% in 2012. Ironically, it was Sheikh Hasina who scrapped the 56% reservation in 2018 following nation-wide protests. This was restored by the High Court in June 2024 before protracted riots in July 2024 forced the Supreme Court intervention and reduction of percentage of



The Author (in the centre) attending a Security Strategies discussion in Dhaka in 2019.

reservation for descendants of freedom fighters to 5%. The mayhem however continued after a brief pause due to use of excessive force, extra judicial killings, enforced disappearances, deteriorating governance and complex interplay between economic performance and political challenges. This has thrown the economic trajectory into complete disarray.

Role of Army

To say that the Army played an unobtrusive but a dominant role in Bangladesh politics would be an understatement. While it may be more overt and blatant in Pakistan, it is inconspicuous but assertive in Bangladesh. During a visit to the country in 2019, I learnt that eight Exclusive Economic Zones in the country were headed by serving or retired major generals. The Armed Forces Headquarters had a direct approach to the Prime Minister bypassing the entire bureaucracy and often got what they wanted. It is thus no surprise that it was the Army Chief who advised the deposed Prime Minister to leave the country before even she could make a final TV appearance having first refused to act against the protesters. Often within the same unit / establishment one could find officers of varying political, social, and religious orientation.

Prevailing Situation

A military backed 16 member caretaker government was constituted under Chief Advisor Mohammad Yunus which resolved to undertake radical reforms in the fields of Judiciary, Constitution, Election Commission, Police, Administration and Anti-Corruption. It is a moot point how these reforms would be promulgated without an elected government. Since the unrest, there have been multiple attacks on places of worship, houses, and business of minority communities, especially Hindus. There are reports of ransom for celebrating Durga Puja, cancellation of national holidays linked to the liberation struggle, commemorating the death anniversary of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, absolving Pakistan of its genocidal war crimes, while at the same time vandalising structures of father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Lifting ban on JEI, display of flags akin to ISIS by elite college students and recognition of Hizb-ut Tahrir banned in 2009 as it stood for an Islamic caliphate of Bangladesh, portray a dangerous jingoism in the socio-political landscape of Bangladesh. It is also reported that judges of the Supreme Court allegedly

Eight Exclusive Economic Zones in the country were headed by serving or retired major generals. The Armed Forces Headquarters had a direct approach to the Prime Minister bypassing the entire bureaucracy and often got what they wanted. It is thus no surprise that it was the Army Chief who advised the deposed Prime Minister to leave the country.

owing allegiance to the Awami League have been deprived of conducting judicial functions in response to protests. The latest is the controversy surrounding the President's statement on Sheikh Hasina's resignation.

The country through a series of actions seems to be cosy up to Pakistan despite the atrocities perpetrated by it in the run up to 1971 liberation war. Statements on re-energising SAARC, an organization in cold storage due to Indo-Pak differences and outlandishly seeking nuclear agreement with Pakistan are part of an insidious agenda against perceived threats from India. **It is intriguing why Bangladesh a more prosperous, modern, and secular democracy is warming up to Pakistan, a country afflicted by severe economic distress, security, and political turmoil.**

Indo-Bangladesh Relations

Curiously, there have been intermittent Bangladeshi animosity towards India despite the latter having sacrificed over 3800 lives and 9800 wounded to secure its independence.



India and Bangladesh relations have made giant strides over the last 10 years. This strategic advantage must not be attenuated due to temporary upheavals in the neighbouring country.

Way Ahead

India cannot afford to have another adversarial country with which it shares a 4096 km border. In the past our relations with Nepal suffered a setback consequent to the 2015 blockade and with Sri Lanka post the IPKF operations. However, of late, Indian diplomacy has been nuanced and displayed remarkable strategic patience, restraint, and maturity in harmonising relationship with Maldives. It reached out to Sri Lanka during its acute economic distress. What is imperative is to patiently await the current wave of anti-India sentiment to wither and a semblance of normalcy to return. The two-armed forces enjoy an excellent rapport which must be exploited to maintain communication and remove unnecessary suspicion against each other. Bangladesh is passing through a very sensitive social, political, and economic turbulence. India must consider non reciprocal economic assistance to Bangladesh as it has done with Sri Lanka. People to people engagements, cultural, educational and student exchanges must be facilitated. Sensitive issues like citizenship amendment act (including the recently passed Supreme Court Judgement on Article 6) and infiltration must be calibrated to mitigate misperceptions and detoxify people to people relationship. India and Bangladesh relations have made giant strides over the last 10 years. This strategic advantage must not be attenuated due to temporary upheavals in the neighbouring country. 

There are of course areas of dispute which are not unsurmountable. Chiefly; The Teesta River water issue, transborder smuggling of cattle, drugs and narcotics and migration. Bangladesh is also unhappy with India for not using its leverage to resolve the Rohingya issue with Myanmar.

There is no precedence in the world where a country has fought a full-fledged war to secure freedom for a neighbour and yet completely withdrawing with no territorial claims and even forfeiting strategic necessity of a secure corridor to its north eastern region, despite its perpetual vulnerability. India displayed magnanimity in reaching the land boundary agreement where it

ceded control of over 111 Indian enclaves in exchange for 51 Bangladesh enclaves in 2015. The multiple rail and road connectivity projects on the anvil will immensely benefit Bangladesh besides Nepal, Bhutan, and India's NE Region (under BBIN, a sub-regional grouping) by boosting trade and tourism. The Rooppur nuclear power plant under construction in Bangladesh, with assistance from India will significantly ameliorate its power situation. Even today, Bangladesh owes over \$1bn to Indian power companies which have remained steadfast in supplying power despite eight to nine months of delay in payment of dues.

There are of course areas of dispute which are not unsurmountable. Chiefly; The Teesta River water issue, transborder smuggling of cattle, drugs and narcotics and migration. Bangladesh is also unhappy with India for not using its leverage to resolve the Rohingya issue with Myanmar. Politically motivated statements during elections with adverse reference to infiltration from Bangladesh has also ruffled feathers.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major General SC Mohanty, AVSM (Retd), was commissioned in June 1983. The officer commanded a Mechanised Infantry

Battalion, a Mechanised Brigade and an Infantry Division (RAPID Strike) in the Western Sector. As a Brigade Major, he took active part in the Kargil Operations while located at Drass. As part of Military Operations Directorate, he headed the Information Warfare, Cyber and Electronic Warfare branches. Post retirement, he was the Security Advisor to Government of Arunachal Pradesh from July 2020 to May 2023

PRESIDENT MURMU HONOURS TOP TALENT IN INDIAN CINEMA



The prestigious National Film Awards 2024 ceremony was held in New Delhi, with President Droupadi Murmu honouring film industry's top talent for their exceptional work in Indian cinema. The Dadasaheb Phalke Award was given to veteran actor Mithun Chakraborty. Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor's *Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva* scored big, winning Best Male Playback Singer for Arijit Singh, Best Film in the AVGC category (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comic).



Modern Day Patrons of Art

DAG Gets them Together to Share Trends today in the Business



A panel discussion on art and philanthropy with **Kiran Nadar, Sunil Kant Munjal, Tasneem Zakaria Mehta and Rajeev Sethi** in conversation with senior journalist **Shekhar Gupta** was held against the backdrop of DAG's ongoing exhibition, **India's Rockefeller Artists: An Indo-US Cultural Saga**. This panel delved into how philanthropy has shaped the arts in India, from ancient times to now.

A DI CONVERSATIONS Report

SHEKHAR GUPTA: Patronage and arts have always gone together. So, there was funding from royal courts in the past. Then came the state, then came the corporates. Now, if you look at the US, the corporates came first. The state came later in the early 19th century, and then corporates have again taken over. And then the museums have become corporatized. If you look at the oldest and the most enduring art museums in the US, they were funded by private capital in the beginning of the 20th century, the Fords, the Rockefellers were part of this. One of the earliest instincts behind this was that of a civilizing mission directed at the new immigrants flooding the American shores, who had to make them American.

And then you had to mould them in an American idea, which was drawn from western culture. So, museums then played a role. So, beyond charity, they also fancied this as scientific philanthropy, which meant creating knowledge, creating philanthropy. Then the state took over. Smithsonian came up and then came the venture capitalists and banks and philanthropy, and then the debate on whether museums should make money, they should work for profit. And that that led to the corporatization of museums.

In India for a long-time art was trapped in government patronage. The important thing is whether it was in the western world, India, royal patronage, government patronage, corporate patronage, this has never amounted to censorship. Art has remained free. And one reason, the main reason art has remained free is that art has found sponsorship or patronage from people who saw larger value in it.

So, in India, art remained trapped in state patronage for a long time, the Nehruvian and Indira era, but still, there were no footnotes that art will have this and not have this. And then corporates moved in. And then the Indian art market developed, of which DAG is a very good example because international art is a frontier hunter. They're looking for where new art is available, which might get value, and that's how artists came up. In the process, Rockefeller also played its role in the, and others got inspiration.



RAJIV SETHI: I feel sad that there is really no patronage that picks up people and takes them, exposes them, through their universities, their grants, which do happen to education, but not enough. So, all these things I think are important. The second part, I think, well, I still think we are completely in the hands of an extremely uneducated government. And we always have been. The IAS doesn't mean the Indian Art Service. It is people who are in control, and we all have to sell our shops, and they are people who know, who's sitting on all the decisions.

And we as a group haven't really come together to fight it all the way. I can't believe, for example, when I came last to see some of the paintings that Ashish (Ashish Anand, Owner DAG) has bought from outside, that he had to pay tax to pay for Indian art coming back. Forget about smuggling and making a big hooah of bringing back smuggled goods from outside. But we do not have a group that stands up and says, let's fight all these things. Art still is in the hands of people who know less, and I don't believe it's going to get there till there is a movement recognizing issues that are much larger than a few paintings on the wall. It's about identity. It's about us as a people, an edge that the world has heard of, has begun to understand. But unfortunately, I think we haven't begun to understand who we really are.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: Kiran, you look at the picture from the other side, because you are a patron and you are a mega patron now and I see art museum coming up.

KIRAN NADAR: I'd like to start with a comment you made that the state has supported the art industry across many, many years in India. I beg to differ. The state has done not that much. The state museums, which are run by the state, are in decrepit shape, and they have for a long time. It is only individuals who are doing something like Tasneem has done in Bombay, which is picking up the museums and giving them a base. The state's involvement in art has been very, very negligible. So, I mean this concept that the state has done a lot for art, no. Yes, India has a very large history and heritage of art. So, when we talk about, for example, the Mughals' patronage for miniature painting or that level of state involvement, it was different.

And so that patronage is what brought Indian art to the situation that it is valued as an institution. But going down the line today, what is the involvement of the state in promoting art? It is very, very negligible. I just want to give one example. The government of India gave us as a museum, not only us, but all museums in India who were wanting to import works back to India, would not pay duty. This was done 12 or 13 years ago. Last year, they put in a review of this policy, and the culture ministry was asked to give their opinion on this, which they did. And the finance ministry got back and said, okay, we have studied this, and for the next two years, this policy will be continued with. On the basis of what they said to us, we thought, this is two years, it's done,



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Shekhar Gupta

and whatever we have imported has never been sold, has never been shown at personal places. It's only at the museum. But the price of that is dependent on what we can buy at an affordable price. So, if I have to pay 25% duty, because now it is duty plus GST, it becomes very difficult to buy abroad.

Then they got back to us and we restudied it, and we will give you two years moratorium, which was fine. On the 11th of September this year, they pass a notification that from 7th of September, we have reconsidered this policy and the tax exemption is withdrawn.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: Let me interrupt you for a second, the two years had not passed yet from this moratorium.



KIRAN NADAR: We just got the moratorium in June or July. Now the policy is that once you buy a work of art, you pay for it, it has to go to the culture ministry for approval. That is then sent to the FM, then you get to import the work. So, we had a shipment of a certain value, which had come into the country. We're sitting in customs, we've had to pay 25% duty on it, although all the procedures were done before, we tried to speak to the finance ministry. They say we've passed this law. So, I am telling you the arbitrariness of what is happening. I have raised this with the finance ministry and also with, we have the new minister of culture. So, we've raised it. Hopefully he will take the necessary steps, but he's just taken over. He wasn't even aware that this has happened. On the level of bureaucracy and on the level of the state, we definitely need more participation and more support. How can a policy that has been given two - three months ago suddenly unilaterally be changed? This is a very personal thing, which I've raised, but it's a point that which affects all the art world.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: I think that affects everybody. And also, the larger mission of getting your art back in your country.

KIRAN NADAR: The point of the thing is not to appreciate anybody bringing Indian art, which has gone out of the country or bringing it back. Firstly, in my opinion, it should be duty free for everybody, not just for a museum, but okay, you're not giving it to the common person. You're giving it a museum under the law that they're not allowed to sell it. They are not allowed to display it anywhere except in a museum, which is okay, we accept that, but the rest of it is just not, not valid. If you look at the state museums, look at what has happened to the National Museum. The National Museum, they are going to junk it and move it to somewhere in Dwarka. Now there's been a lot of hue and cry about it.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: Tasneem, you've actually built one, right? Tell us what enabled you to build it, and was it in spite of the state or did you actually get a supportive state?

TASNEEM MEHTA: No, so we did have a lot of support from the state, and that's the area that I've worked in, is to try and build a constituency for art, to get the people, to get the larger public involved. Because



“The arts in India and going back in history did not have the partition and the silos that we currently have. Arts were taught and practiced as one; all arts by the way. And so that is one of the things we attempted to do when we set up the Serendipity Arts Foundation. I had a regular event in Ludhiana to start with, the city which I belong to.”

Sunil Kant Munjal

you see the way the government functions and having worked with the government for 20 years, if you have a very small number of people coming into the museum or attending these festivals or interested in art, it is seen as an elitist preoccupation. And then they completely dismiss it because they think it doesn't matter. And so, I have tried really hard, and that is what the BDL museum did. I mean, of course, everybody knows the story of how it was restored, won the cultural UNESCO's, highest award, et cetera. But the idea was the ticket is still 10 rupees.

The idea was to bring ordinary people in, get them to engage, build that constituency and that is what will change. There is that tension when you talk to art historians or you talk to curators, et cetera, many of them are not really concerned with the larger public response, unlike say in the other arts, unlike say with film or something. But with art it is intellectual, it sometimes gets very precious. They're speaking to their own community. It needs to go beyond, it needs to be reaching out because then when they see the numbers is when they will start to respond. Then there are all kinds of other involvements also, like there has been, I mean, at various institutions



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Kiran Nadar

that we all know about at the NGMA, at other places. Now the state has taken over and is going to build this Central Vista Museum. What is the intention? How are they going to configure? What are the premises? I have to backtrack and say Naman P Ahuja and myself are on that committee, but only one meeting of that committee has been held. And I have been on several committees, several states, you know, just a large young national gallery of modern art, et cetera. And you push and you push, and it, a lot of it depends on a bureaucrat who is prescient or who has an interest. Otherwise, it’s very difficult. It’s like banging your head against the wall. So, to combat that, the only way I think of doing it is to reach the public, is to make sure your footfall is there to make sure you are getting attention. Of course, that’s what happened with us in Bombay. I mean, even if I say so myself, the public loves us, the press loves us.

SHEKHAR GUPTA: Sunil how are you managing? And what exactly is it that you are doing? Tell us about your contribution, the challenges, plus you can answer some of the points that they’ve raised.

SUNIL MUNJAL: So let me go back to where you started. The early patrons were the



royalty, and this was the case in many parts of the world, not just in India. From there, we got the temples coming in, became patrons, and then the traders came in and became patrons. And then, when we got colonized, we were actually told that you have to follow the company rules. So, they started a company style, which is what Ashish has had shows about, okay? There was a company school style of painting. So, we had the Bengal School, we had the Baroda school, and then we were kind of directed that this is the way it has to be done. So, it’s quite interesting actually. The artists that you spoke about were in effect, the pushback as India became independent. You think this is the Bombay progressive group, and by the way, as a progressive group, my style is my individual style, and yours will be yours and yours will be yours. And that actually set a very interesting tone for a shift in how art got developed, distributed, and perceived.

We are focusing more here on visual arts, but I do also want to bring up a comment. I think Rajiv made this a little bit earlier. The arts in India and going back in history did not have the partition and the silos that we currently have. Arts were taught and practiced as one; all arts by the way. And so that is one of the things we attempted to do when we set up the Serendipity Arts Foundation. I had a regular event in Ludhiana to start with, the city which I belong to. My friends would say, why don’t you do them here? And I said, why would you need to do it in a city like Delhi? It’s a big city. It has theatre, it has galleries. But when I looked around, I actually found it does not have access for everybody to everything at all. Actually, this is highly limited and limiting. For some reason it has become an exclusive domain of a few. So, if you get invited to an art show, you’re considered special. And I’m not. So, the exclusivity of art became one of its selling points. Which I thought was a little bit unfair because all our, all of us have similar interest, aspirations, desires to see things which are nice, which we enjoy. And in many ways, the education of the arts is one of the things we let it go by the wayside. It became engineering medicine law, have to be the primary education medium in the country. Actually, just to address that, we’ve just set up something called the Steam House. The Steam Houses arts, in addition



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Rajeev Sethi



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Tasneem Zakaria Mehta




to the STEM subjects, even in our university that is just outside Delhi. All teaching is done in a completely interdisciplinary manner.

And even engineers have to earn credits in the arts. So, the idea is to open people's minds. And all over the world, the most successful leaders had right side and the left side of their brain functioning. None of them had a single unitary focus. And this is true for most successful leaders across the globe, which is why I think it is important, especially for a country with its history like ours, with almost, I would say the richest cultural heritage in the world for us, not just to preserve it, but to also contemporize it, to make it relevant today and for tomorrow.

So, we work with multiple objectives. One is to make access available. So, the festival that we do in Goa now over nine days gets a footfall of roughly a hundred thousand a day. And it focuses on all art forms at the same time. And we keep the same focus to visual arts as we give to performing arts, as to culinary arts and performance arts is distinct from performing arts. And in each one of them, we've also tried to make it experiential. So, it's enjoyable, it's fun. People get engaged. So, we have workshop in every art form.

We also have a conclave going on, we invite academics and researchers from around the globe to come in and, and talk to us about what's going on in their world on these same themes. The idea also is to see if we can build a bridge as a track to connect the world, especially a world which is getting fractured right now. When you connect people across sports, across music, across theatre, it is a win-win. Nobody seems to lose. So that was the second stream that we were trying to set up. So, we now have visitors coming from about 50 countries to the festival in Goa.

We also have artists now from about 30 countries. The idea is that India is not an isolated island, and we never were. This was a temporary isolation that we created for ourselves. So how can we use the arts as a vehicle to bring India into the global mainstream? So, access is one, education is the second one. And we encourage artists with very little experience, to the top end of the spectrum those who are globally recognised. We also take parts of it to places like Mumbai, to Hyderabad, to Delhi, to Dubai, to London.

So, in May of next year, we are taking the Serendipity Arts Festival to Birmingham UK, to demonstrate what Indian art or South Asian art is and what it can do to connect the rest of the world in a happy, easy, friendly manner. 

'IDEA OF A NATION' AS SEEN BY MAQBOOL FIDA HUSAIN

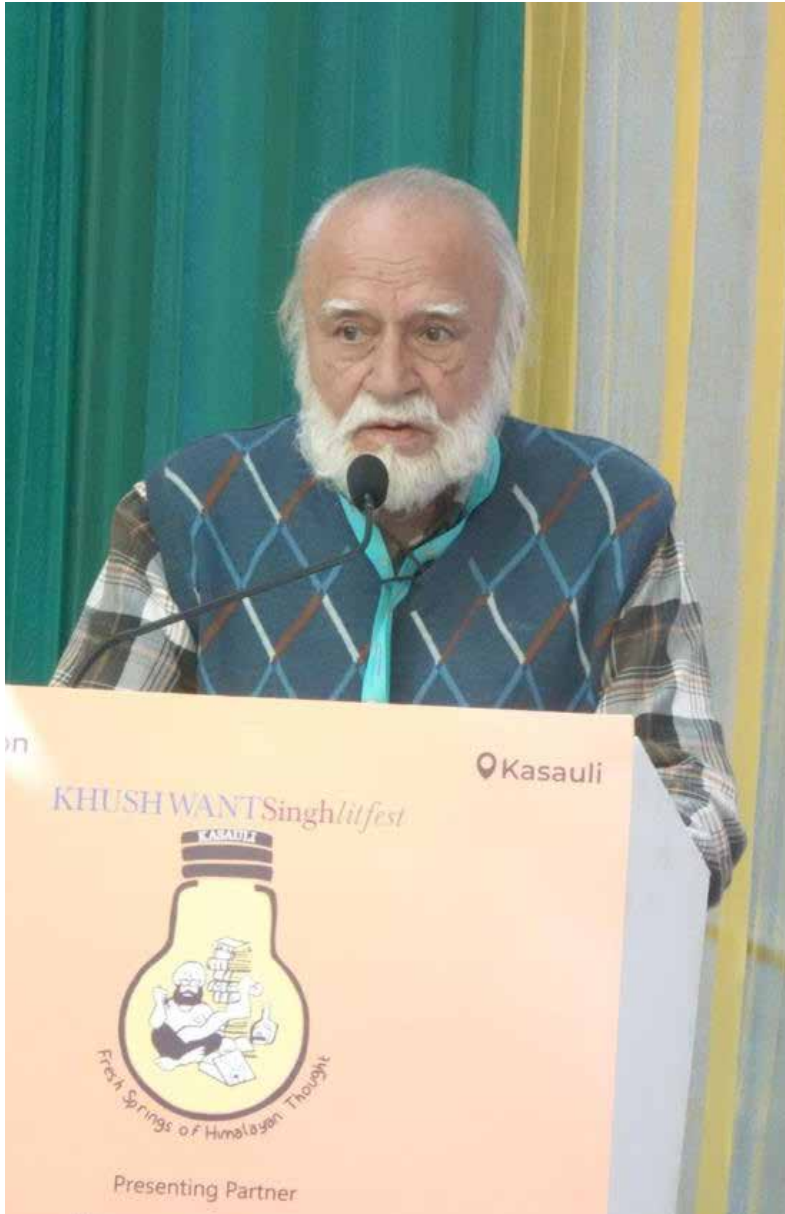


Installation of some of the 'Timeless' art, of the modernist M. F. Husain, at the Delhi Art Gallery on Janpath, New Delhi. Now on view, it is an elaborate exposition, a tribute to the master whose every stroke on the canvas, at its core, was a love letter to the nation he cherished.



Eclectic, Absorbing, Engaging

KSLF fondly relives the Nostalgia around the legendary Khushwant Singh



The curtains came down on the 16th edition of the Khushwant Singh Literary Festival in Kasauli, a small hill station, 20 minutes away from the main highway connecting Chandigarh to Shimla, cutting off from Dharampur. With the excellent new 4-lane motorway, it takes some 75 minutes of comfortable driving. It is under a two-hour drive from Chandigarh airport.

A report by NAVIN BERRY

This was where Khushwant Singh's ancestors had their home, some decades back, and it is here where his son, Rahul Singh, a formidable journalist in his own right, having edited publications like the Readers' Digest, among others, has taken upon himself to hold, year after year, a literary event that celebrates the spirit of his late father.

Khushwant was an IFS class, quit to take on journalism, edited **The Illustrated Weekly of India**, with great aplomb. Even more so, he was known for writings, put together in numerous books and essays. He had a most liberal outlook on life, willingly and openly flaunted it, lived by his credo in full honesty. His was an unusual class, made friends with the rich and famous, with a rare stamp of integrity.

It is this spirit that Rahul keeps alive, displaying a sense of liberalism and free flow of thought and ideas, from across the spectrum of new writings that make a mark every year or other.

This edition, the 16th, marked a milestone in a sense that it had more buzz going than ever before; easily, the most largely and successfully attended that I have seen – as a disclaimer, I have been attending only in recent few years, ever since I became a regular at the Kasauli Club, a cantonment relic of the British Raj. The club has in itself become a major hotspot in this hill station, now gathering steam as a destination in itself, with newer

In today's mushrooming of similar literary events, KSLF stands apart. It is first and foremost in memory of a person, an individual, who had his own trademark writings that have yet not found another peer, at least in India. It is a yearly festival that has kept its date, thanks to the perseverance of his son, Rahul Singh, and his partner and fellow organizer, Niloufer Billimoria.



KSLF 2024 brought together the writers of today, in yet another coming together of minds, both young and old, yesteryears and contemporary. The opening session was a conversation with William Dalrymple, the flavour of our times. His current best-seller, *The Golden Road*, has brought rave reviews at a time when the present dispensation is fostering the idea of a new India, harking back to a time when it was considered the golden peacock.



branded hotels opening and designer villas coming up in gated communities.

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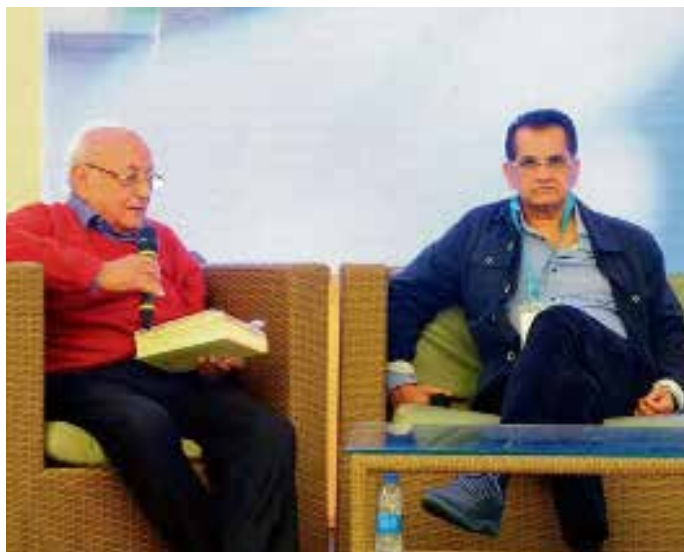
Over three days, 18th to 20th October, some forty speakers held the stage, in stand alone presentations, or in conversations with equally renowned personalities. The choice of subjects was all-embracing; eclectic, absorbing and inclusive. Some 800 attendees walked through the event.

a new India, harking back to a time when it was considered the golden peacock. William's book is a long narrative, researched in adulation of an India long gone by, when it traded its silks and spices with the Romans; when it had maritime trade with the Middle East, and when Buddha brought India close to the Eastern powers including China and much of the Far East. In an hour of spell-binding dissertation, Dalrymple took the audience in rapt attention, through a march in history, of which they knew little or nothing. His books sold out in plenty, as the author happily asked every buyer for his/her name and happily autographed it.

Full Circle has been endorsing the festival in recent years. It has a significant book counter where many of the attending writers fondly display their recent works, and typically, brisk sales do happen.

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L Subramaniam spoke with Namita Devidayal, on the harmonising Indian raga system with Western harmonic music; Army veteran **Ian Cardozo** spoke our amazing soldiers highlighting the human dimension of war; advertising guru **Prahlad Kakkar**, shared how he sent his suited and booted clients flying high; **Tasneem Zarkaria Mehta** shared how Mumbai had been her muse in energising museum culture; **Suhasini Haider** shared a conversation on India-China challenge with a panel that included **Ananth Krishnan**, **Alex Travelli** and **Kanti Bajpai**; historian **Radha Kumar** was interviewed by television anchor Bhupendra Choubey on democracy in times of conflict; there was film maker **Imtiaz Ali** conversing upon the golden period in Bollywood; eminent lawyer and activist **Saurabh Kirpal** spoke on justice, liberty and equality, a subject that he speaks on from his heart; Vikram Sahney spoke with veteran diplomat and socialite **Bhaichand Patel**; India's G20 Sherpa, **Amitabh Kant**, was in conversation with Rahul Singh on Viksit Bharat, in his capacity of author.



In his interaction with eminent journalist Prem Shankar Jha, India's Sherpa Amitabh Kant shared how the balance sheets of the government, the banks and those of the private sector have never been as good. Driven by government spending where its capex has moved from 1% to 4%, it is now the turn of the private sector to spur growth. Kant is a strong votary of growth at 10% per annum if we have to reclaim our space in the global economy. He recalled how post covid the government spending has gone into vast social sector sectors, building homes, toilets and infrastructure like over 80,000 kilometres of roads. These have become enablers for the private sector to build upon. He remains optimistic that the best is yet to unfold.

The choice of subjects was all-embracing; eclectic, absorbing and inclusive. Some 800 attendees walked through the event over the three days; at any time, there were a few hundred in rapt attention. The sessions went full day, from morning to evening, followed by much reverie and bonding over functions marked by music and entertainment. Never has one seen such a buzz around the bar, the outside lawns – each a loving recall of the charm and tranquillity of the club, at some 6,200 feet height, among the highest points in the hills of Kasauli.

KSLF has become an annual event to look forward to, for local residents, members of the club, coming from all over. This year, we saw an increased level of support, with prominent builder Viaanar being the presenting sponsor. Still, it is a labour of love, considering the Herculean costs involved in inviting speakers, what with soaring airfares, accommodation and the works. An extremely well-orchestrated event, flawless in execution, with a host of invited media, streamed live with dedication on Youtube. All those interested in hearing the debates this year, best is to get onto the Youtube channel.

Altogether, an educative and entertaining three days, much to remember, and much to look forward to, for the next edition of the same. Thanks Rahul, thanks Niloufer, for keeping the spirit of Khushwant Singh going, giving Kasauli its annual reason to be come together, to celebrate a much loved hill station that we all hope stays this way, retaining its charm as a quaint and lovable home to so many. 📺

Indian Sports on the Right Track

GOI Providing Adequate Support to our Athletes



Former shooter and veteran sports administrator Raja Randhir Singh became the first Indian president of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) last month. The 77-year-old's tenure will run from 2024 to 2028. We speak with Randhir, on the prospects for Indian sportsmen and what holding Olympics in India can do for us.

RANDHIR SINGH *in conversation with*
NAVIN BERRY

How are you seeing the sports scenario in the country at the moment? Especially when the nation expects more medals from our sportsmen and women.

There is nothing that we can find fault with. They are doing their best and the government is encouraging them programmes such as 'Khelo India', they encourage it everywhere. And the athletes are supported through top programmes. And now sponsorship is also coming in, but one thing I am very much for, which I think the government should immediately come down upon, is the representation of India in International Sports Federation. This is very important for us.

Seeing Ukraine, you must have your say in the world body. You must have a say in the International Federations. And, what we have done is impose this limit upon our own people; this way, none of the people from the foundation will make it to the world body.

Why is that?

Let somebody survive for 12 years. After 12 years, he has to leave the federation in India. Because we have imposed this rule, limited an individual tenure for a maximum of 12 years. Why are we doing this, why we cutting our own feet? You know, the thing should be, it's, it should be left to the international federation. If any International Federation has a rule. We should follow that. If they have no limit, then why we do impose on over ourselves; you know, we are, we are, instead of encouraging our federations to make it to the international body, we are discouraging them by, by not letting them get into the world bodies. So today, outside four federations, one is sailing where an Indian is the president in Asia.

And basketball, we have our people in just four globally. And there are two others. The third is a Secretary General of Judo and the fourth is cycling. Any sport, any foundation. We are not there, in neither Asian, neither Olympic, in no other sport.

So, are you saying that this 12-year rule is coming in the way?

Of course. A hundred percent. Because what happens is if you going to fit into the National Federation, first you have to get into a national federation. First four years, you have to feel your way around in the National Federation. Then you try to get in the international body. Who then cares about you there. No body. People have to be there for some time to establish themselves in the international field. Why are we restricting our tenures? I think government should do a rethink. They should look at the tenure and age limit. In some federation, there is no age limit. And we are putting in an age limit. Why are we doing it? We have to basically follow the International Federation. And in the case of the Olympic Committee, the Olympic Committee rules must be followed.

We should follow those rules. Not a rule made by us. The government is following rules because somebody said something and someone said another, or if somebody goes to court and which is wrong, but we should be looking at our representation, as a nation, on the global stage.



“Instead of encouraging our federations to make it to the international body, we are discouraging them by, by not letting them get into the world bodies. So today, outside four federations, one is sailing where an Indian is the president in Asia.”

“Being a sports administrator is a different ball game. Totally. It doesn't have to be a politician or sportsman or somebody. You need dedication and dedicated people to run that association or the Olympic committee. So, we can't lay down that only sportsman should get in and only this should get in.”

And government should be very seriously looking into this. So what is the obstruction? You are blocking them yourself by saying not more than 12 years, disregarding international rules.

So, if I understood you right, you are saying our national associations must adopt rules as per that particular sports federation internationally. Correct. Exactly.

So, on another similar related issue is that of too many politicians in our sports bodies, and are they better served by sportsman or sportspersons such as yourself. You have been a legendary sportsperson yourself. So, what is your take?

I've seen sports people and I've seen the politicians working. It's not every politician who can club the same category. There are some politicians who work hard and they're interested in sport. They help sport find sponsorship. And they do a great job. And in the same way some athletes who you bring into sports also do a fine job. But not every athlete, just because he is an international sportsman, is an administrator. Being a sports administrator is a different ball game. Totally. It doesn't have to be a politician or sportsman or somebody. You need dedication and dedicated people to run that association or the Olympic committee. So, we can't lay down that only sportsman should get in and only this should get in. Look at the mess going on in the Indian Olympic Association. And if you look at the majority of the Olympic executive called sports people, and you know, and everyone is fighting everyone, so it cannot stop anybody. Remember one thing, there's politics and everything in your life, in your family, everywhere is politics.

That is true.

Yes. But if your children indulge in politics, you have to deal with them. You have to be politically correct. But the same thing happens for anybody. See, when you are in an organization, your organization should be number one for you. Correct?

Right.

And what should matter is how you manage the organization. There are two aspects of any sports federation. One is your prime consideration, that you look after the sports person. That's number one. Second is how you administer the federation to achieve that. And administer the association properly.

So, you are saying there is no blanket rule that politicians should be barred, but how can you have checks and balances to ensure proper administration?

It's the person. You know, my family is into politics. My cousin brother, my sister-in-law, they're all in politics. But that doesn't stop them, if they were looking after a National Federation, it wouldn't come in the way of being a politician. It will be helpful. And you know, you need support. You need people to help. You are running coaching camps. You are sending teams abroad. Now the government of India is paying for everything. Earlier there was no money coming in. And so, if you have no money coming, somebody who can raise the funds for you is important. Just as important.

And you are saying if the person is from politics, it can also be an additional help?

Why not? Why not? Think of it yourself. If you are somebody who's a nobody and he's sitting on the head of the federation or anywhere else, right? Who cares about him? You won't get sponsorship. You get nothing. You get no support.

During Princely India there were so many 500 plus states in India. But not everyone took interest in sports. Only some, some took interest in sport. But it grew. You have to find people who are interested and people who are ready to invest either financially or they can invest with their time. But for training athletes, everything has to be done by only the top and best coaches.

The government is giving them money. They're talking to international psycholo-



gists; they're talking to international coaches. They're learning from that. Everything is there. Only thing is that we have to manage it properly. For that, you can't put a limit. You can't say, let's say I'm a wrestler, and every wrestler should be able to be a person who should be a president of a federation. You have to find the right people and the right place.

In your opinion, what is holding us back from becoming a more vigorous sporting nation? We are not there.

Earlier, we didn't have a base. There were pockets in India, in one pocket where a certain sport prevailed. Now all sports have spread all over the country. There are facilities all over the country. I'm only giving a reference on shooting. Now there are thousands of people who are shooting.

That's number one. Number two, some of the people who have done well, are world champions. They become heroes for the people. And then everyone wants to emulate them.

Then the encouragement the government gives you, you have the Prime Minister who calls you. You have prize money. You have the states giving them funds. It has all become attractive. The eco-system is developing, for sure.

Do you think funding is adequate at the moment?

Look at the national camps and the numbers that are being held. I know from the shooting side of it, they get enough money, more than adequate. If you look at it worldwide, this sort of money, few other governments are not paying. Except for countries like China or Russia or a few others. But very few countries give this sort of support to the athletes as we are doing. Then our base is basically improving higher. Now it is slowly going up. And now we are winning medals. You won over a hundred medals in the Asian Games.

And now we are knocking on the doors of, as far as the Olympics are concerned, medals are concerned. Every sportsman, that went there who didn't make it to the finals or semi-finals, was very disappointed. That means they have the will to fight. And win they will.

Most of us including you, when the Olympics were over, we were a little sad. We think that somewhere we lose out every four years in every Olympics. We are at the bottom of the table. We are not there where we should be.

That's a multi-sport event, okay. If you look at the individual world championships, look at the amount of world champions we have! Look

at the young juniors. So it shows a whole crop, we are now moving up. These children, in another five years, six years, they'll be world champions in the city. Nothing stopping them. And they have the facility, they have the ammunition, they have the guns, they have the ranges coming up. Even shotgun people, will set up their own speed ranges. It's just a question of time. And the government is fully supportive. Once you make it to the national camps and travelling, everything is done by the government. And sponsors are coming.

Regarding sponsorship from the private sector. Say for instance, without naming any names, whichever companies are there, all doing an admirable job, but somewhere they're not adequately inculcating or spending enough money at the grassroots. It is more at the sponsorship of a world festival or a world championship. So, the money is going only to the top.

I agree with what you're saying. This is where the National Sports Federation at the sub junior, junior level has to find the talent and then train them. Number two, Khelo India is that particular unit, which is helping those sports people. They're adopting these younger generation sports persons. And they're getting a stipend a month. And they are getting all the training, facilities, coaches, camps.

So you are saying we are in many ways on the right track, we will have to be a patient for results.

Exactly. Now we are getting there. In the pyramid, we have come right on the top. Now we are knocking the doors.

Any thoughts on our talk about hosting 2036 Olympics?

We have two countries from Asia that are competing. Qatar is bidding. There is India and then there is Istanbul and Budapest. So, it's very difficult to say. We are capable of holding it. And so are all the four countries in the reckoning.

One last question. Holding Olympics is a very expensive proposition.

It's definitely so, but you create the infrastructure and environment for sport in your country, and the Olympic movement spreads through that. People are more excited when you have something happening at your doorstep. It makes a tremendous difference to sports in that country. You just can't hold the Olympic game if you're not going to win enough medals. So, there's a tremendous push, extra push that sometimes is required. And it helps the overall eco-system of sports in the country. India's case will be no different. **DI**

ROHIT BAL, 'GUDDA' RETURNS !



For all his fans, this was a moment to cherish. After a serious illness, fashion designer Rohit Bal returned to the stage, with an awesome display of what he loves best - extravagance in design. We wish him good health and all success, for more such performances to happen!



Lead Poisoning: An Invisible Public Health Emergency



by **DR INDU BHUSHAN**, *Founder-CEO, Ayushman Bharat*

Lead poisoning is one of the most under-recognised public health challenges in the country. We should learn from a recent tragedy known as the Flint Water Crisis. In 2014, Flint city in Michigan USA switched its water supply from Lake Huron to the Flint River to save costs. This seemingly small decision led to a public health catastrophe—Flint’s new water supply was contaminated with lead, putting the entire city at risk. Over time, this discovery led to a community-driven campaign to reverse the decision and mitigate the damage. What began as an effort to save \$200,000 a year ended up costing the government nearly a billion dollars, including a \$600 million settlement for Flint’s residents.

The Flint crisis occurred in one of the world’s most advanced countries, just a decade ago. If such a disaster can happen in the United States, the risk in developing nations, including India, becomes even more pressing.

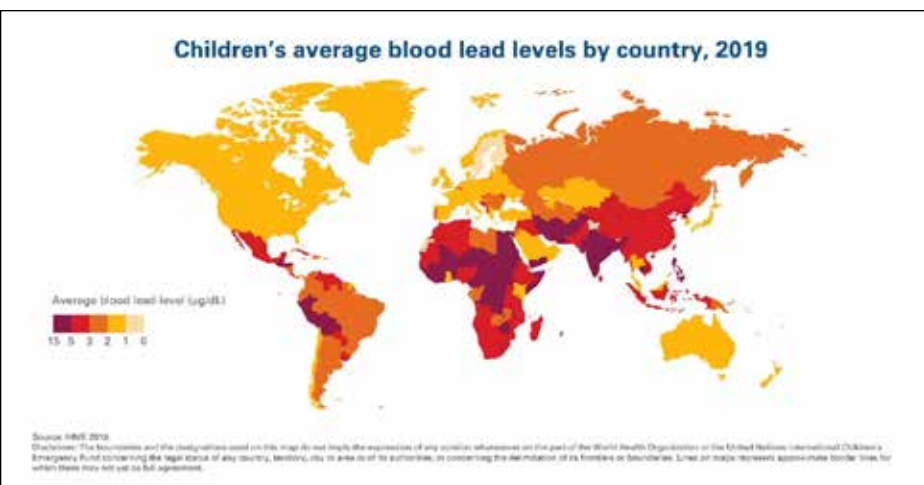
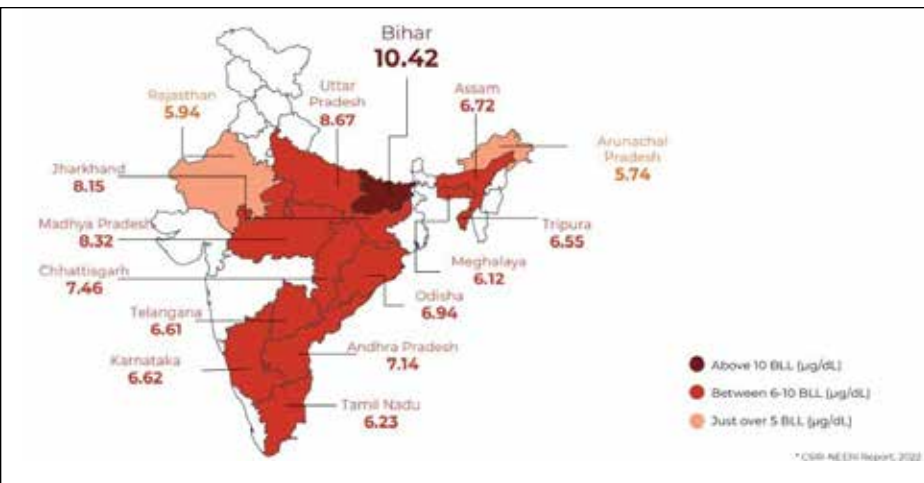
This crisis has been documented in several books including “What Eyes Don’t See” by the paediatrician Mona Hanna Attisha, who started the movement. The title of the book captures the essence of the problem. Lead is a silent, invisible killer—it cannot be seen, tasted, or smelled, but its effects, especially on children, are devastating. Lead exposure leads to cognitive deficits, developmental delays, and numerous long-term health problems. Sadly, more than half of Indian children have

Lead poisoning is one of the most under-recognised public health challenges in the country. Sadly, more than half of Indian children have unacceptably high levels of lead in their blood, and the lack of awareness around the issue only exacerbates the crisis. A recent survey in Jharkhand found that more than 80% of healthcare professionals are not even aware of the issue of lead poisoning.

unacceptably high levels of lead in their blood, and the lack of awareness around the issue only exacerbates the crisis.

Not surprisingly, in India, the dangers of lead exposure have been largely overlooked. Government programmes and policies do not focus on mitigating the danger of lead exposure and addressing its impact. A recent survey in Jharkhand found that more than 80% of healthcare professionals are not even aware of the issue of lead poisoning. Government health facilities are not equipped to test lead levels in blood. Without awareness and action, lead poisoning will continue to harm the most vulnerable, especially children. To address this crisis, a multi-faceted approach is needed, with government leadership, healthcare reforms, and public awareness campaigns playing a central role.

The first step in addressing lead poisoning is understanding the scale of the problem. The country needs a robust national surveillance program that monitors blood lead levels, especially among children, pregnant women, and industrial workers. Establishing a national lead registry could be a critical first step. This would allow policymakers to gain a comprehensive view of where lead poisoning is most prevalent, helping to direct resources and interventions where they are needed most. Collecting data at this scale is crucial for informing policy and public health measures.



Identifying the sources of lead exposure is the next priority. In India, lead enters the body through many channels, including contaminated water, lead-based paints, certain spices, cosmetics, and even air pollution. Mapping out the regions where lead exposure is most likely to occur, such as industrial areas, urban slums, and informal recycling sites, will allow for targeted interventions. For example, informal recycling of lead-acid batteries is a major contributor to lead exposure. In such cases, informal recycling practices must be discouraged, while formal recycling processes should be incentivized through tax reductions and better regulatory frameworks.

Strengthening the regulatory framework is essential to controlling the sources of lead exposure. India already has some regulations governing lead content in products like food, cosmetics, paints, and water. However, the enforcement of these regulations is often inadequate. Enforcement agencies need to ensure that standards are followed strictly, especially in sectors where informal practices dominate. Expanding “extended producer responsibility” could be one way to hold manufacturers accountable for the safe disposal of lead-containing products, ensuring that lead is handled properly from production through to disposal.

Alongside regulatory efforts, the healthcare system must be strengthened to deal with lead poisoning more effectively. Doctors and health workers should be trained to recognize the symptoms of lead poisoning, and lead screening should become a routine part of health check-ups, especially for children and pregnant women. Ayushman Bharat Arogya Mandirs and schools could play a critical role in screen-

ing, and positive cases must be followed up with investigations to eliminate the sources of exposure. Moreover, investing in cost-effective technologies for testing blood lead levels and detecting environmental contamination is vital to long-term success. Integrating this issue into medical and public health education would ensure that future healthcare workers are equipped to tackle lead poisoning.

Public awareness is the backbone of any successful health intervention. Lead poisoning remains largely invisible to the general public in India, meaning many do not know how they or their children might be at risk. National awareness campaigns should focus on educating people about the dangers of lead exposure and how to prevent it. This can involve partnerships with NGOs, schools, and community groups to spread the message, while advocacy aimed at policymakers and industries highlights the economic and social costs of inaction.

Addressing lead poisoning is not a challenge that any one organization or sector can take on alone. It requires a multi-sectoral effort, involving various ministries, government departments, private industries, and community organizations. Ministries focused on health, environment, and industry all need to work together to reduce the sources of exposure and protect public health. Collaboration between the public and private sectors will be key, especially in regulating industries that contribute to lead contamination.

The Flint Water Crisis serves as a reminder of what can happen when invisible health threats are ignored. India cannot afford to let lead poisoning continue unchecked, nor can it wait for a disaster to take action. This is not just an environmental issue—it is a public health emergency that affects millions of children across the country. India must take this warning seriously, for the future health of its children, and by extension, the future of the country, rests on it. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Indu Bhushan is a former Indian bureaucrat and economist. He was the first CEO of Ayushman Bharat, an Indian government agency providing

national healthcare coverage to the low-income population of the country. His career spans over 40 years and across a multitude of sectors.

Seher Presents Indian Heritage in Music at the European Parliament



Sanjeev Bhargava has been impressing audiences last many decades, with his dedication to India's hallowed traditions in art and culture. This invocation was one more, this time in the European Parliament.

us dissolve our differences and stand as one.

These vehicles of soft power of India have over time immemorial also acted as symbols of Cultural tourism. Having served on National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC) of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, I have personally worked for decades on advising how heritage and Culture can serve to propel tourism throughout our nation. Through Seher, my organisation, we have established several destination festivals such as the annual and very popular Udaipur World Music Festival in the lake city of Udaipur which attracts lacs of international and domestic tourists interested in Music festival tourism circuit. In 2019 this festival was featured in CNN International for their show 'Travel Trends India' highlighting the Udaipur World Music Festival as one of the most sought-after destination festivals in India. The film is being featured across 354 million full-time households and hotel rooms in more than 200 countries.

For the last three decades Seher has had a tradition of taking music dance and visual art into numerous innovative venues across the world. From establishing historical Purana Qila and Qutub Minar as regular venues of presentation of Classical dance and music to Trafalgar Square and Regent Street in London to Villa Borghese in Rome, Seher has been presenting numerous cultural initiatives including Italian Operas to Manipuri Dance and innovatively presented Jazz concerts and of course the richness of world cultural heritage across the world. Seher has had the privilege of organising both the official cultural banquets for visiting dignitaries such as President Obama in the precinct of the Rashtrapati Bhawan in Delhi in 2010 and 2015 during the VIP visit to India.

by **SANJEEV BHARGAVA**

As somebody has said "There is no distress in life which one hour' of divine music cannot mitigate". As the world goes through turmoil and makes us all somewhat restless and anguished, the sound of Indian classical notes and the words of Kabir Tulsidas and Bhakti saints bring a sense of relief and inner peace. What yoga does to our body and brings "sthirta" to our being, the sound of Vedic mantras bring inner peace to our mind, particularly in times of anxiety and distress.

Indeed, India's soft power, its music, classic dance, our handicrafts and hand-woven textiles, and of course our diverse cinema, acts to bind people coming from diverse backgrounds, with varied schools of thought. While there are many things that divide humans, it is these soft power initiatives that act as a balm and binds us in one thread of 'Unity in Diversity.' Music certainly is one such language that makes


The aim of organizing a concert of Indian devotional music, signifying inner peace, at the European Parliament in Brussels in October was to showcase the richness of Indian civilization and heritage before the Members of European Parliament and Ambassadors of 27 member states, bringing India's rich soft power to centre stage. It was for the first time that notes of Indian Classical music were resounding in the hallowed precinct of the European Parliament. The evening was attended by members of parliament of all European nations as well as ambassadors and diplomats of various countries residing in Brussels. It was also attended by some of the top people of Indian origin living in Belgium. The entire curation and the selection of music was to underline the symbolizing of 'inner peace' and the equilibrium, the Indian devotional music can bring through its very essence. The presented tracks included an invocatory song that welcomes the dawn of a blessed day, few compositions descending from the Nirguna stream that approaches the divine sans form and attributes, and Sufi Qalam celebrating love and oneness between the lover and the beloved. With a selected audience of 200 in attendance, the event's timing and the prestigious venue highlighted the significance of this unique presentation of India's spiritual and cultural heritage.

When the world is celebrating the centenary of legendary Pt Kumar Gandharva, his grandson Bhuvanesh Komkali presented various Bhakti saints of Indian tradition including Tulsidas and Kabir in front of the august gathering in first of its kind recital. Concluding the one-hour mesmerising rendition with the much needed "Shanti Mantra" from the Upanishads, while the audience immersed themselves into raagas and compositions they were given textual context as translation which helped them understand what the essence of each track was meant to convey in these turbulent times.

For the last three decades Seher has had a tradition of taking music dance and visual art into numerous innovative venues across the world. From establishing historical Purana Qila and Qutub Minar as regular venues of presentation of Classical dance and music to Trafalgar Square and Regent Street in London to Villa Borghese in Rome.



The evening was organised by Embassy of India in Belgium and EU-India Association conceptualised and curated by Seher, it started with a special address by Ambassador Saurabh Kumar and Excellency Sandro Gozi, MEP Renew Europe, and President of the EU-India Association.

As told by Sanjeev Bhargava, Founder Director, Seher, one of India's premier cultural organisation and can be contacted at sanjeev@seher.in. 

Eclectic and Everything Indian

Chor Bizarre reopens doors this season; a must especially for its traditional Kashmiri cuisine

by PRIYAANKA BERRY IDNANI

Welcome back to Chor Bizarre; a restaurant synonymous with experiential dining much before it became a cool trend. This iconic space recently reopened with a fresh look and an extended menu while retaining the old classics and their signature Kashmiri dishes.

We are greeted by founder Rohit Khattar and his wife Rashmi. You can instantly feel the warmth, charisma, and humility that are associated with traditional Indian hospitality and a sense of welcoming someone to your home.

The design ethos, as Rohit describes it best, is “nothing matches, yet everything gels”. Rashmi, the group’s Design Director and Rohit have over many years sourced and curated an eclectic collection of curios from across the country. The vibe as you enter is very much traditional Indian, and a few pieces are sure to catch your eye at the newly refurbished Chor Bizarre. There is a four-poster bed converted into a dining table, a Singer sewing machine table used as a table as well, a 1927 Fiat repurposed as Chor Bizarre’s Chaat Mobile and a cinema-themed bright red booth. The Broadway Bar is the perfect ambience for a cosy date night.

There is character, a love and respect for history and an inviting feel throughout. Rashmi shared that “overall there has to be a sense of order and comfort in the design”.

But what makes you really go back to any restaurant, we feel is definitely the food. Chor Bizarre serves large, wholesome portions of regional Indian cuisine and authentic signature Kashmiri dishes. Their south Indian Head Chef, Chef Srinivas A, who completes 17 years with the group proudly and excitedly speaks of his menu. He explains that the menu now includes “more starters and kebabs than before and I highly recommend trying the chicken barra and the lamb chops. For the mains, the Kashmiri tarami is what we are famous for and the Sharabi Kababi Chicken Tikka Masala which is flamed with brandy, which is a registered dish”. Rohit adds that the menu now includes a good offering of South Indian dishes such as the Jackfruit Moily. Come April, Chef Srinivas plans to alter the menu and include dishes using seasonal ingredients.

They are also actively planning regional food pop-ups—either their own brands or expert chefs or home chefs from across the country. They just did a chaat pop-up as a tribute to ‘Purani Dilli’. The next pop-up in November is Hosa from Goa which is well known for its innovative South Indian dishes. “This way the regulars keep on getting a reason to come back and try something new,” says Rohit.

Located on Asif Ali Road, just about ten-minute drive from Connaught Place and in close proximity to Red Fort and Chandini Chowk,



it is quite an obvious stop for tourists coming to explore Delhi, not only for its location but also the true Indianness of the experience and cuisine. Many a tour operators’ local itinerary is developed around an early dinner at Chor Bizarre, for an assured truly Indian experience. But what about the regular South Delhiite who has plenty of food hubs closer to home?

“This location in itself is also a massive hub. If you see the hospital across, Maulana Azad Medical, that probably has a few thousand doctors”, says Rohit. “When my grandfather built this in 1956, when the Broadway Hotel opened, it was not commercial at all. It was just the stock exchange and residential and a couple of shops. Today, it is all commercial with many showrooms and there is Civil Lines nearby. For a South Delhiite, if you want Kashmiri food, then you have no choice but to come here. So, the diehard Kashmiri lovers will come. Even in 1990, when we first opened, the cuisine was our USP and you didn’t get this food anywhere else”.



The relaunch of the restaurant is a well thought out decision to bring back and grow a brand that already has a loyal following and brand recognition.

Much of their history is adorning the walls of the establishment. The history and the legacy of the brand is being carried forward with much love and care. Rohit shares an interesting backdrop, “my nana, Mr. Tirath Ram Amla was looking for a winter home for the family because he lived in Kashmir. In those days, Purani Dilli and Daryaganj were the hotspots. There was no South Delhi. In 1954, he put in this bid for a new development next to Daryaganj, called Asif Ali Road. And he didn’t read the small print that it had to be four stories. So, when he read the four stories part, he was stuck. So, he said, what do I do now? And they said “why not open a hotel”?

And so, he did. And got a manager to look after it.

“Until, my parents moved here. So, then he told my mother, why don’t you start working at the hotel? So, my mother also had no idea about hoteliering but with the woman’s touch, she started refurbishing the rooms and everything. And she did a really good job and it ran really well, till I came in to disrupt. My nana’s logic was very simple. He wanted the restaurant to be a clubhouse only for the hotel residents. He didn’t want people coming off the road. And I remember as a little kid, because my grandfather was here, I would come running to spend the weekend with him. It was fabulous and I would go to the Sunday Bazaar.

Then my mother was running this and in 1986 when I came back, my mother said, why don’t you now think of a restaurant here? I was running a restaurant in the US. And then Rashmi and I got married in 1986 and we started figuring it out. In 1990, we opened



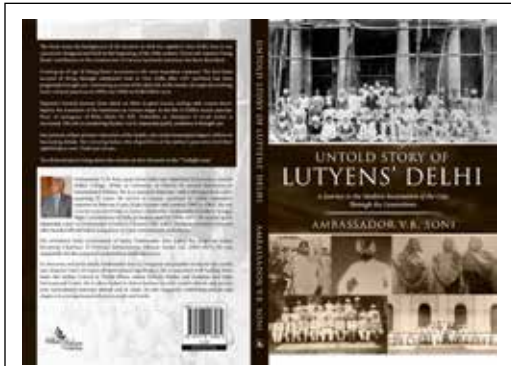
this, and it all came together. It became an overnight success. And then from here we built more; we got the contract to India Habitat Centre. We built many more restaurants, opened Indian Accent and kept on expanding”.

In terms of customers, Chor Bizarre because of its nostalgia and the past, is definitely attracting our earlier customers. They never really left us because we were at the Bikaner House. But what we started seeing at Bikaner House, and now there are a lot of youngsters because retro is in vogue. They love the old songs. They love the fact that this is done in a certain way. And more importantly, it’s the food. The entire team has been with us for like two or three decades. The Kashmiri cooks have been there right from the beginning. You know our food will be good. So that is actually the brand’s salience. Everybody’s heard of it.

The relaunch of the restaurant is a well thought out decision to bring back and grow a brand that already has a loyal following and brand recognition. The plans are to open Chor Bizarre in other major cities which is very much underway, and it made sense to first reopen the flagship in Delhi.

“We are very lucky. We don’t go out looking for places anymore; developers come to us, they put in the money. They say that they want one of our brands. And if that works for us, we’ll do it. So, whether it’s Indian Accent or Comorin in Bombay or any other place, they come to us. We evaluate the place if it makes sense, we open it. Like this, we have many in the pipeline”. We have 7 brands in our portfolio and the plan is to focus on these. Each of them is an icon, heralding its own brand ethos, each dominating its own space.

Up next is more expansion with Comorin, Fireback and Hosa opening in major metros and the iconic Indian Accent overseas. The Broadway Hotel is also set to reopen in the next couple of months. **DI**



V.B. SONI: "UNTEOLD STORY OF LUTYENS DELHI"
(white Falcon Publishing,
Chandigarh, 2024)

Book Review

V.B. Soni's "Untold Story Of Lutyens Delhi"

Ambassador V.B. Soni, a valued if somewhat junior colleague in the Indian Foreign Service, has written a fascinating story of the building of Lutyens' New Delhi, in which his family was deeply involved.

Reviewed by **MANI SHANKAR AIYAR**

The family had its humble beginnings in Makrana, Rajasthan, where in the mid-1800s, the family set up a small business to mine by hand the marble extracted there (that) requires no chemical reinforcement, which even Italian marble does", and was the source of the marble used by Emperor Shahjahan in building the Taj Mahal. Under the supervision of Soni's grandfather, Nanig Ram, the hero of the story, to create through the last decade of the 19th century and into the first decade of the 20th century, a group of expert marble sculptors who specialized in intricate stone work for chhatris (umbrellas), chajjas (sun-breakers), jaalis (latticed windows) and lotus replicas.

All these Indian motifs were incorporated at Henry Baker's instance, over-riding Edward Lutyens' more Imperial/ Greece and Rome-oriented reservations. And Nanig Ram got the contract for such works in the Viceregal Place, Durbar Hall and the Parliament complex (then known as the Council Chamber) after Nanig Ram demonstrated immense courage before the British engineers by going down a shaft when the dynamite failed to ignite. The fuse ignited just as he reached the spot and shrapnel entered his eye, forcing him to wear a false eye through the rest of his life. But he won the contract, to which was later added Central Vista (now Kartavya Path) and the canopy over the statute of King-Emperor George V (now replaced by Netaji Subhas Bose) installed right behind India Gate, the monument to the Allied victory in the First World War and Indian

soldiers' little acknowledged contribution to the victory. This required either advanced or intuitive knowledge of trigonometry.

Nanig Ram had no education in mathematics but an excellent eye for perspective. So, he won not only the contract but also world praise for the accuracy of the canopy's placement.

Clearly recognizing that he lacked the sophistication and Europeanization to meet with the colonial British on their terms, he tied up an arrangement with the far more renowned Sir Shobha Singh, the major contractor, who had found a way of pleasing the stuffy British by respecting their desire to eschew all "bribery" but were delighted to receive Shobha Singh's abundant and carefully packed gift hampers on Christmas, Easter and other Christin festivals! Shobha Singh's people were put in the "front-office" to deal with the Brits in English, while Nanig Ram's artistes were put to the task of aesthetically carving the stone work that lends Indian magnificence to the essentially Europe-based structures that went into the making of Lutyens Delhi between the 1911 Durbar announcement of shifting the capital from Calcutta (now Kolkata) to the Viceroy moving into his new palace in 1931. Raisina Hill, not the environs of Shahjehanabad, became centre-piece for Imperial British New Delhi (why not 'Nayi Dilli', as most Indians call it?). Nanig Ram meanwhile died in 1929, having completed his life's work, displaying not only huge native talent but also dragging his family out of destitution into high prosperity by buying "decent sized plots at Hanuman Road, where Kothi number 53 became his dwelling place". He also branched into cinema, making a second fortune of the venture.

It was into this family that the author was born in 1942. The abiding influence in his life has been his father, Bankey Lal, son of Nanig Ram, the family patriarch. There follows abiding cameos of New Delhi's shopping plazas and residential colonies, Jantar Mantar and other landmarks of the new city, temples and gurudwaras already in place or coming up. The secular, Ganga-Jamuni composite culture of the country before Partition is symbolized by Nanig Ram's principal partner being a practicing Muslim, Haji Nathu, named after Nanig's father's closest friend, Nathu Ram. Bankey Lal. It does not prepare one won for the terrible Partition riots, described accurately, succinctly and horrifically.

The Bankey Lal family leaped into the highest echelons of India's

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post-Independence elite. The eldest, the author, joined the Indian Foreign Service and served as Ambassador in various exotic posts, his brothers made names for themselves as bankers, the law and the hospitality business. The sisters were married to IAS officers, other civil services and the judiciary. It is an inspiring tale of moving over two generations from minor marble mining to millionaire status, a striking demonstration of how a poor family with entrepreneurial “animal spirits” can make it big in both colonial and post-colonial India.

The end is, however, discouraging. It shows how the abandonment of family traditions and the lust for Mammon can bring down the best of the best. The author, however, ends his family’s “Kaliyug” with the heartening phrase, “the next cycle starts afresh”.

I would strongly recommend this book to all those who love our city, New Delhi, as much as I do. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mani Shankar Aiyer is a senior politician, a former IFS officer and a seasoned author. He has served as Union Minister in the Congress regime, and been a

Rajya Sabha MP.

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Disclaimer: Please note that the service is currently offered for select countries. Availability and the service charges for the above mentioned service may vary depending upon the country/location where it is procured. The choice of location for availing the service may vary depending on the concerned Embassy. The grant or refusal of the visa is at the sole discretion of the Embassy and availing above value-added service will not affect the processing time or decision of your visa as VFS Global is neither involved in the process nor is liable or responsible in any manner whatsoever for the grant or rejection of the visa application of any customer by the Embassy. For further information on the same, kindly refer to the VFS Global website. The above mentioned service is optional and will be charged in addition to the visa application fee. The customer hereby accepts and confirms that they, prior to availing the above mentioned service, have read, understood and agreed to be bound by, without limitation or qualification, all of the terms and conditions associated with the service. | Statistics as on 30 September 2024.