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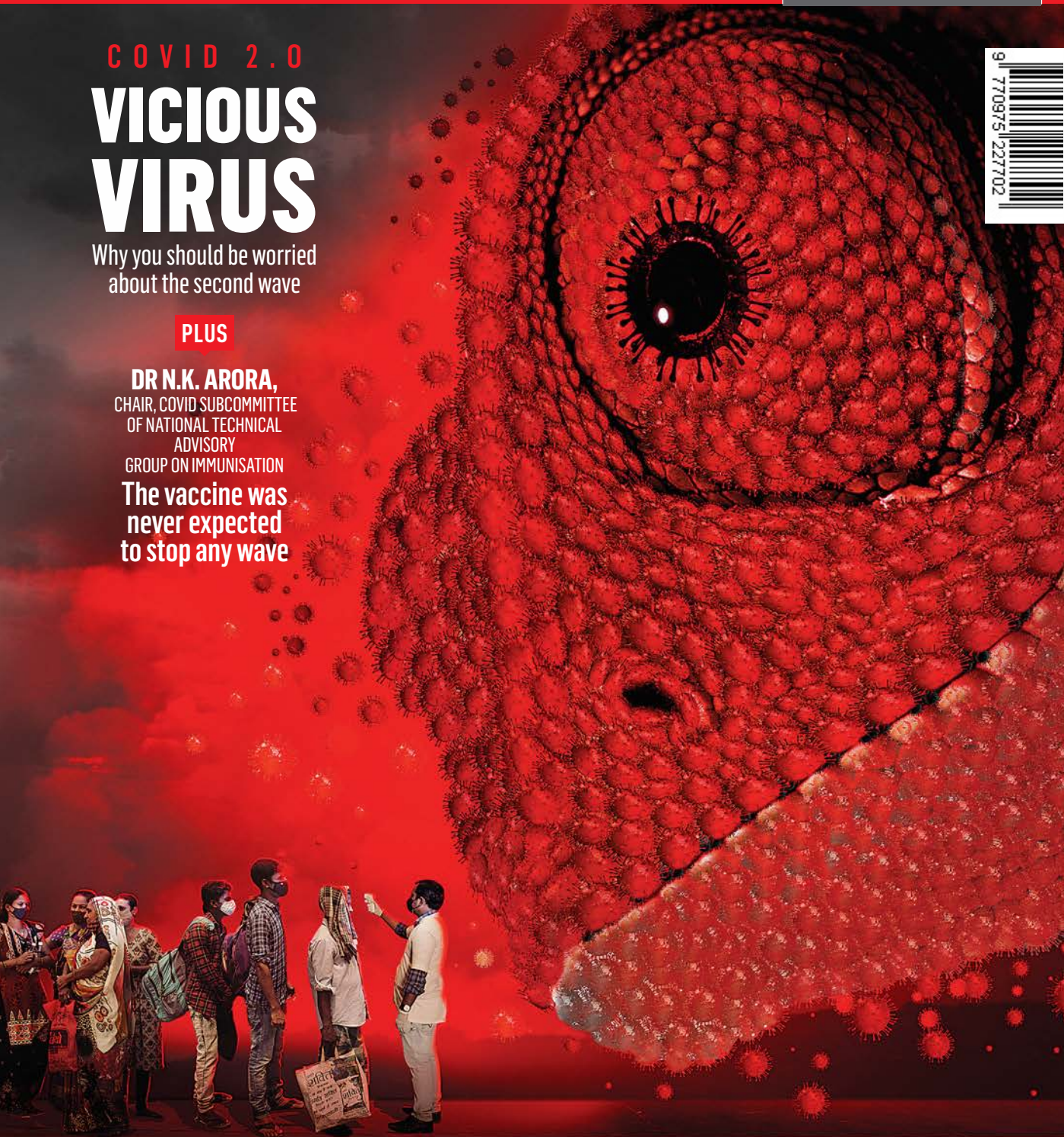
Why you should be worried
about the second wave

PLUS

DR N.K. ARORA,
CHAIR, COVID SUBCOMMITTEE
OF NATIONAL TECHNICAL
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**The vaccine was
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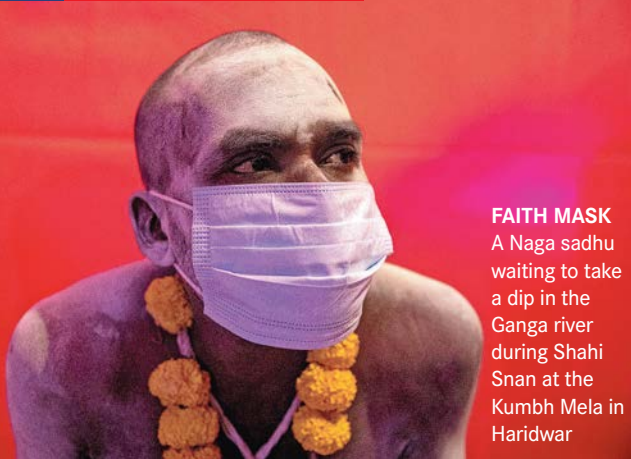


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@LEISURE

Lucknow's heritage warriors are fighting a tough and lonely battle while officials are turning a blind eye

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REUTERS

FAITH MASK
A Naga sadhu waiting to take a dip in the Ganga river during Shahi Snan at the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar

RESURGENCE OF THE MENACE

In barely a month since the onset of the second Covid-19 wave, India has already surpassed its previous highs of daily new cases. The below-40 population has been hit harder this time. Reining in the resurgent virus would require strict adherence to Covid protocols and a more nuanced vaccination approach.

PLUS

- The vaccine was never expected to stop any wave: Dr N.K. Arora, chair, Covid subcommittee of National Technical Advisory Group of Immunisation
- Faster vaccination is key for India's economic prospects

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A tragic death birthed an NGO that promotes a culture of road safety awareness

COVER IMAGING **BINESH SREEDHARAN**

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Yogi: the problem solver

In 2017, the BJP surprised many by announcing Yogi Adityanath as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Many seasoned politicians opined this to be the biggest mistake of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah ('The big battle of perception', April 11).

In the last four years, Yogi proved everyone wrong with his unwavering approach to solve chronic problems of the state. He has shown his ability to analyse problems and provide direction in all spheres of governance. Under Yogi, Uttar Pradesh has made remarkable progress, and this is quite visible.

**S.P. Ashta,
Delhi.**

Yogi is a forceful orator and has successfully forged ahead in his political career.

As a taskmaster, Yogi personally supervised implementation of welfare schemes introduced by the Centre and took effective measures in checking the spread of Covid-19. His

devotion to administration was prominent when he stayed away from his father's funeral.

**B. Gurumurthy,
On email.**

Need combatant DGs and generals

We need to have a combat-

ant, who as director general (of paramilitary) will plan fights in jungles. Let us leave all war games in cyber space to paper tigers ('Party snacks', April 11).

**P.S. Muthanna,
On email.**

Sushila, yes; Mamata, no

I liked the story of Sushila *didi* by Swara Bhasker ('Bitter chocolate', April 11). It was nice knowing more about Sushila *didi*. I appreciate her frankness and dedication towards work. I am sure Sushila *didi* will win the election that she is contesting. But I doubt whether the other *didi* [Mamata Banerjee] will win.

**Ramanathan,
On email.**

Waiting for 2026

I agree with you that Kamal Haasan is unlikely to become kingmaker in the assembly polls; even he knows that well, I suppose ('Picture imperfect', April 11). Kamal used the elections as a testing ground for the assembly elections in 2026, where he could emerge as a formidable player.

This time, at best, Kamal's party may win seven to

eight seats.

**Suresh Narayan,
On email.**

Don't forget R.D. Burman

I was astonished to read your report on 50 years of Dum Maro Dum (April 11). You do not give enough credit to the creator of the song, R.D. Burman. Dev Anand's story is well told, but he only approved the song.

Without Burman, there would have been no Dum Maro Dum. It was his desire to experiment, his genius at fusing diverse music forms, and his daring in bringing in new instruments that led to such songs.

No doubt, Asha Bhonsle and Zeenat Aman deserve some credit for the song. But why this injustice to Burman?

**Sudarshan Shidore,
Mumbai.**

Need common rule

It was painful to read about Shubham Gupta ('Last word', April 11). Had Gupta suffered same injuries in a road accident, he would have got all help under the Motor Vehicles Act. Unfortunately, we do not have any such provision for other accidents. It is time

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we have a common rule for all types of accidents and negligent acts of tortfeasors, so that victims get their rights legally.

Pravin Bihari Sharan,
On email.

Hope it helps

Shashi Tharoor's column ('Updating the Kerala model', April 4) has come as a great relief in the din of electioneering.

Whatever may be the final outcome, we, the common citizens, earnestly look forward to a dispensation, who will take sufficient initiatives to weed out the malice that affects the state.

I feel Tharoor's column will serve as a foundation for the industrial and financial development of Kerala, which will ensure steady rise in employment.

Narendran R. Vettiyattil,
On email.

Stalin next CM?

Many people in Tamil Nadu want M.K. Stalin to be the next chief minister ('Rising son', April 4). This is the closest that Stalin can get to the chief minister's chair, as the AIADMK is battling 10 years of anti-incumbency.

Whenever there is a talk of the possibility of the DMK coming back to power, people mention about the lawlessness that prevailed in the state when the DMK was in power in the state. I think a government led by Stalin will be different, as he will try for an image makeover.

R. Sairam,
On email.

Sindhu is on a roll

P.V. Sindhu, with her never-say-die attitude and fighting spirit, is India's biggest hope for a medal in the Tokyo Olympics, due later this year ('Pushing for the podium', April 4). Sindhu has always displayed a positive attitude on court and is fully equipped to take the competition head-on. Having notched up wins against all top players in the world, Sindhu's morale should definitely be high and she should be in a position to gain the world number one ranking soon.

Vijayalakshmi Aravind,
On email.

Sindhu started her career at the age of 16 and is an epitome of perfection for many young girls.

Sindhu's determination, confidence and hard work has paid off. She will enter into the Olympics as a most exhilarating woman, who is willing to learn from her mistakes.

Barani Priya L.,
On email.

Fearless journalism

What India needs is fearless journalism that sustains the core of democracy by highlighting dissent as the bedrock of the constitution. THE WEEK has always tried its best to uphold the supremacy of truth over falsehood, and you have vigorously upheld the values of the fourth estate.

Karanam Rao,
Hyderabad.

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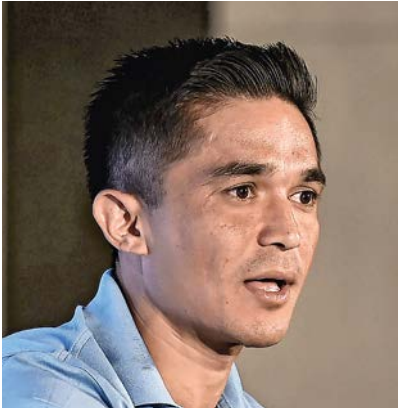
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POINT BLANK



When you don't have Covid, and you think or read about it, you think that you will be fine.... You are a fit person and nothing will happen, but I really struggled. I have never felt that kind of physical pain ever in my life. It was brutal.

Sunil Chhetri,
footballer, after recovering from Covid-19

PTI

There are those who feel that if they attack Yediyurappa, they are indirectly hurting the image of the BJP. Yediyurappa and the BJP are synonymous.... Yediyurappa cannot be without BJP, just like the BJP cannot be without Yediyurappa.

B.Y. Vijayendra,
BJP leader and son of Karnataka CM B.S. Yediyurappa

I went and got a salad with my partner and my dog, and ate it in the park. That was about it.

Jacob Duffy,
New Zealand cricketer, on being named in the Test squad

You [Rahul Gandhi] must undo what the Congress itself failed.... It is time for the grand old party to bat on the front foot.... At stake is the future of the world's largest democracy on the brink.

Sanjay Jha,
former Congress spokesperson



AFP

Life changes, and it is always for you to decide in which direction... a change of pace and headspace is a wonderful way to take your life from strength to strength.

Pooja Bedi,
actor

WORD PLAY

As the pandemic continues, **spread booking** is the new buzzword in the luxury travel sector. Spread booking refers to the practice of booking several holidays to different places, to cancel all but one of them before the date of travel. It is intended to deal with "lockdown risk", by having multiple options in hand for a holiday trip. Now many travel companies are offering flexible spread booking options to their rich customers.

MILESTONES

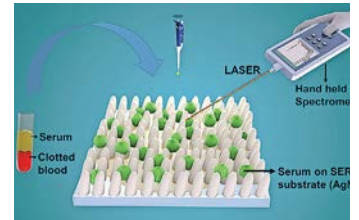
WITH FLYING COLOURS

Nomadland director Chloe Zhao became the first woman of colour to win the top prize at Directors Guild Awards. *Nomadland* dominated the recently announced BAFTA 2021, too, with four honours—including best film.



INDIAN INNOVATION

Researchers at IIT Delhi developed a handheld device that will help in the early and rapid diagnosis of dengue. The Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy-based platform can also be used in the rapid detection of human immunodeficiency virus.



NEW LIFE

A Japanese Covid-19 patient, who faced severe damage to her lungs, became the first person in the world to receive a lung transplant from living donors. The patient received healthy lung parts, to replace her failing lungs, from her husband and son.



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— **APERITIF** —
THE BIG PICTURE

THE BIG CATCH

Workers carrying a fossilised fish uncovered at the archaeological site of a 3,000-year-old city, called The Rise of Aten, by an Egyptian mission near Luxor. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of an ancient city in the desert outside Luxor that dates back to a golden age of the pharaohs.

PHOTO BY AFP



Outsourced support

She wears a red cap, but she is not a communist. Her political outfit, the Samajwadi Party, has not fielded a single candidate in the assembly elections in West Bengal. Yet, Jaya Bachchan gets a huge crowd response in the state, as her roadshows and meetings are organised by the Trinamool Congress.

The veteran Bollywood actor, whose family hails from Bengal, makes it clear that her party president Akhilesh Yadav has asked her to help Mamata Banerjee in her campaign. Jaya avoids strong language as she pitches for Trinamool Congress candidates against the BJP.

Jaya, who is married to superstar Amitabh Bachchan, has been more vocal than her husband when it comes to politics. Amitabh, who had a brief fling as an MP from Allahabad in the 1980s, has stayed away from electoral politics since then. But he has been close to political leaders from Narendra Modi to Mulayam Singh Yadav. Jaya has been elected thrice to Rajya Sabha from Uttar Pradesh, on a Samajwadi Party ticket.

Mamata wanted regional parties to support her as she had faced the onslaught of the BJP, led by Modi and Amit Shah. Both have continuously conducted personalised campaigns against Mamata, her nephew and the Trinamool Congress.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal of Bihar is lending a helping hand to Mamata. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been supportive, but he did not make an appearance in the election campaigns. The Shiv Sena also offered its support to Mamata, but the party has no base in West Bengal for its supremo Uddhav Thackeray to campaign in the state.

The West Bengal BJP relied more on the star power of dancing star Mithun Chakraborty. A chopper has been allocated to him by the party to attend the rallies. Apart from Jaya, Mamata relied a lot on stars from Bengali cinema and televi-

sion, to match the BJP in terms of glamour. The left-Congress front, which is struggling to be an alternative between the bruising giants, has had less stardust to claim.

On the other hand, the regional parties of other states did not take much interest in the election campaigns in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, unless they had state units in the two southern states. Even though the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has shared power with regional parties in the National Front, United Front, National Democratic Alliance and United Progressive Alliance governments in the last three decades, it could not attract the support of dominant parties of other states, because the DMK-led front includes the Congress and the communist parties. Unlike Mamata, who had sent

out what sounded like an anxious appeal for support against the BJP, the DMK remained circumspect in soliciting support from outside forces. Even though Tamil Nadu has several Telugu-speaking pockets, the leaders of the YSR Congress, Telangana Rashtra Samithi or Telugu Desam Party from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were conspicuous by their absence.

Similarly, the contesting fronts in Tamil Nadu did not bring any Bollywood stars, as they had enough of their own from Tamil cinema. Even the BJP relied more on campaigning for women votes by fielding Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, rather than yesteryear heroine Hema Malini—who is from Tamil Nadu—though she is a Lok Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, in Kerala and Assam, too, the firepower for the campaign came more from political leaders, though there was a sprinkling of actors in the contest.

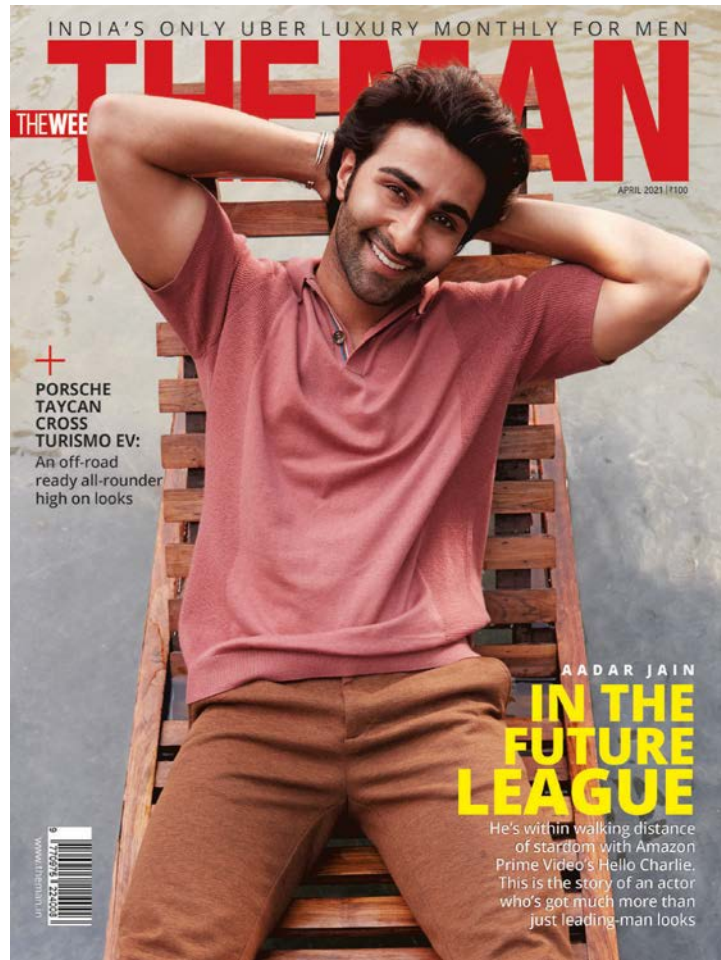
For Jaya, the success of the Trinamool Congress in the constituencies where she had campaigned would not only boost her image but also make her one of the most in-demand campaigners for the SP in the 2022 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh.



NOW ON THE STANDS

CATCH THE APRIL 2021 ISSUE

ACTOR
AADAR JAIN
BELONGS TO THE
FIRST FAMILY OF
INDIAN CINEMA.
BUT HE BELIEVES
IN FINDING HIS
OWN FOOTING
IN THE INDUSTRY
WITH THE
UNUSUAL ROLES
HE PICKS FOR
HIMSELF



FAMILIAR TUNES

+ Diving into the depths of darkness

Dubai-based adventurer Hamish Harding has reached where no man has ever dared to: diving into the farthest depths of Mariana Trench

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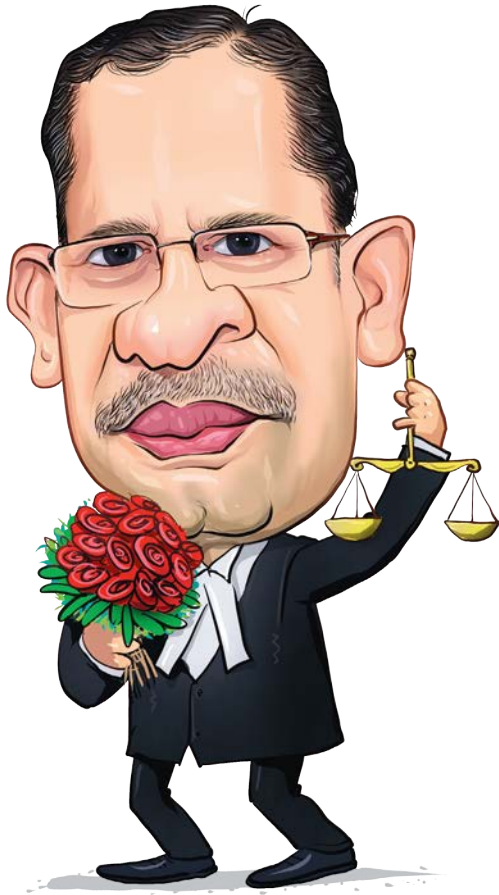
ANGRY CALLER

Many officials seem to be getting missed calls from an unknown number in West Bengal. The number happens to belong to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. It is learnt that she has been calling up the election commission officials and central paramilitary forces officers during her election campaigns to register complaints. While she managed to get through to a few officials, many others missed her call as they had not saved her number.

ILLUSTRATIONS JAIRAJ T.G.

PERSONAL WIN

Union Minister Piyush Goyal scored a small but key victory for the Centre in pushing its reforms with farmers. As Punjab's farmers, government and commission agents have been stalling Modi's direct benefit transfer scheme, Goyal adopted a take-it-or-leave-it approach. He told the state government that money would be transferred to farmers' accounts for crops sold, not otherwise. With harvest in full swing, and elections less than a year away, the Punjab government gave in. This came as a boost for the Centre. Goyal was given additional charge of the department of consumer affairs after Ram Vilas Paswan's death.



HOLD YOUR HORSES!

The Twitterati among the BJP's top brass received a sobering message last week. Within minutes of the announcement that President Ram Nath Kovind had signed the warrant appointing Justice N.V. Ramana as the next chief justice of India, Twitter was awash with congratulatory messages from BJP chief ministers, MPs and leaders. A senior party leader then realised that if the messages were only from the ruling party, there would be misinterpretations. The congratulatory tap was quickly turned off.

WHO DID IT FIRST?

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressed on the need for home isolation and micro-containment zones during his interaction with chief ministers, the Aam Aadmi Party pointed out that he was talking about concepts that were first implemented by the Arvind Kejriwal government in Delhi. For effect, AAP leaders also recollected Union Home Minister Amit Shah's interventions in dealing with the pandemic in Delhi to point out how his concerns with regard to the capital were misplaced. They said the Centre was forced to acknowledge Kejriwal's model of governance.

SUPERSTAR EFFECT

While many are waiting for the vaccine, the Andhra Pradesh BJP believes it has already got a shot in the arm ahead of the crucial Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll. The party's new-found enthusiasm is tied to the success of the Telugu movie *Vakeel Saab*, starring Pawan Kalyan, actor and founder of Jana Sena party, an ally of the BJP. Sunil Deodhar, BJP co-in-charge in Andhra Pradesh, not only praised the film but also said that similar to the movie's success, the BJP candidate K. Ratna Prabha would also be successful and win the seat.





GANESH MISHRA

BRINGING MANHAS HOME

THE WEEK brings you the inside story of how a nonagenarian social worker, a tribal leader and a group of local journalists secured the safe release of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, a CoBRA commando captured by the Maoists of Bastar

BY SRAVANI SARKAR



THE BIG DAY

Constable Rakeshwar Singh Manhas being released by the Maoists in Tummel village in Sukma on April 8

“MANHAS WAS BROUGHT IN BY AROUND 3PM UNDER ARMED ESCORT; HIS HANDS WERE LOOSELY BOUND WITH A ROPE. HE WAS TAKEN DIRECTLY TO THE JAN ADALAT ORGANISED BY THE MAOISTS.”

sitting on a charpoy surrounded by a growing throng of villagers, at the Tummel settlement in Sukma district.

It was April 8, five days after Maoists ambushed a joint team of the 210th Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) and the Bastariya Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and the District Reserve Group and the Special Task Force of the Chhattisgarh Police, and killed 22 jawans. Tummel is barely 10km from the ambush site that lies between Jonaguda and Tekulguda villages in Sukma district.

“Come with me, the commanders want to talk to you,” the young man said. Boraiya agreed, but he insisted that Sukhmati Hapka, the 38-year-old vice president of the Bijapur Gondwana Samaj, go with him.

The duo was taken on a motorcycle to a spot about a kilometre away, where six senior Maoists, headed by a lady commander in her early 50s, waited. They were later told that she was Manila,

secretary of the Pamed area committee of the CPI (Maoist). “Her appearance was not so daunting, despite the uniform and the gun,” said Boraiya. “But her presence was quite intimidating.”

Boraiya and Hapka had a difficult task—to negotiate the release of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, a member of the ill-fated CoBRA battalion, who was being held captive by the Maoists.

Meanwhile, a crowd was building in the clearing surrounded by the tamarind trees; villagers were pouring in—on feet, on bicycles and even on tractors. The afternoon sun was harsh. Despite the shade, the atmosphere was hot and oppressive. The tension only added to the discomfort.

On the charpoy that Boraiya and Hapka just vacated sat Dharampal Saini, 91, Padma Shri awardee, Jagdalpur-based social worker and founder of the Mata Rukmini Ashram; he was accompanied by his associate Gururudra Kare. He had been told that he would be taken to meet the Maoist commanders once Boraiya and Hapka returned. After about 45 minutes, Boraiya and Hapka were brought back, but no summons came for Saini.

A while later, Manila and two dozen armed Maoists appeared. Saini, a promoter of girls’ education, noted with interest that almost half of them were women, some as young as 16 or 17 in his estimate.

Manila and some of the senior Maoists approached Saini and put some questions to him. First of all, they wanted to know his political affiliation. “I made it clear that I was an apolitical social worker, and I started my career under the guidance of the late Vinoba Bhave,” said Saini. “The Maoists looked satisfied.”

Manila told Saini that just as social workers like him appealed to the Maoists for securing the release

His heart skipped a beat when he saw a young, masked gunman in military fatigues walking out from behind the stand of tamarind trees. He later told me that it was not out of fear or anxiety. He just realised that the crucial moment had finally arrived.

“Who is Telam Boraiya?” asked the young man.

“That would be me,” replied Boraiya, 71, the Bijapur district president of Gondwana Samaj, a prominent tribal organisation in Chhattisgarh. He was

of the commando, they should make similar efforts to protect innocent villagers from being harassed by the police and the administration. “She also asked me to ensure that the commando was sent back home at the earliest and they wanted to see his photograph with his family,” said Saini.

Manhas was brought in by around 3pm under armed escort; his hands were loosely bound with a rope. He was taken directly to the *jan adalat* (people’s court) organised by the Maoists. “He looked patient and composed, despite spending five days in captivity,” said Saini. By then, nearly a thousand villagers had assembled. As they sat in anticipation, Manhas was brought forward and his ropes were untied, the final act before his formal release.

The silent planning

The efforts to launch the mediation for Manhas’s release began on April 5. The day before, rescue teams had saved 31 injured soldiers and retrieved 22 bodies from the ambush site. As Manhas was not among them, he was reported “missing”.

Ganesh Mishra, a Bijapur-based journalist, got a call from the Maoists on April 5. They told him that they had Manhas and were willing to release him. Mishra and a few other journalists who received similar messages conveyed it to Sundarraaj P., inspector general of police, Bastar Range. The formal offer was made through a press statement issued on April 6 by Vikalp, the spokesperson for the Dandakaranya special zonal committee of the CPI (Maoist). It said the Maoists were willing to release Manhas to government mediators.

After some local journalists raised doubts, the Maoists released a picture of Manhas, seated in a temporary shelter. Around the same time, Manhas’s friends and relatives blocked the Jammu-Akhnoor Highway on April 7 as they felt that the Union government was not doing enough to secure his release.

Tribal activist Soni Sori and members of the NGO Jail Bandi Rihai Samiti, too,



GANESH MISHRA

had tried to intervene. They ventured into the forest, hoping to establish contact with the Maoists. But the attempt failed, and they returned on April 7 after leaving a letter for the Maoists with local villagers.

On the same day, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel convened a meeting of Home Minister Tamradhwaj Sahu and senior officials in Raipur in an attempt to resolve the crisis.

Two surprise mediators

Senior police officers had contacted Saini on April 5 itself, seeking his help to mediate. Over a career spanning several decades, Saini

“**MANHAS’S FRIENDS AND RELATIVES BLOCKED THE JAMMU-AKHNOOR HIGHWAY ON APRIL 7 AS THEY FELT THAT THE UNION GOVERNMENT WAS NOT DOING ENOUGH TO SECURE HIS RELEASE.**”



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Rakeshwar Singh Manhas with Dharampal Saini (fourth from left) and Telam Boraiya (second from left), and their associates Gururudra Kare (left) and Sukhmati Hakka (right) after being released by the Maoists

took Hapka with him. The four were to be taken to the rendezvous by a team of seven local journalists. The journalists—Mishra, K. Shankar, Ranjan Das, Mukesh Chandrakar, Yukesh Chandrakar, Chetan Kapewar and Ravi Punje—gathered at Basaguda, 12km from the Tarrem camp on the night of April 7. Mishra informed the Maoists about the plan and the names of the mediators and got their green signal to lead the party into the forest the next morning.

Trip to Tummel

The team of 11 left the Tarrem camp on six motorcycles on the morning of April 8. They were not given their final destination. Their instructions were to meet Maoist couriers at Jonaguda.

After the team left the Tarrem camp, a local youth entered the picture, someone whose mission and identity would cause a lot of confusion later. Kunjam Sukka was said to be a local guide, who accompanied the team to the site of the *jan adalat*. There was, however, speculation that he was a Maoist sympathiser or might even be a member of the pro-Maoist People's Militia, who was detained by the police at the Tarrem camp after the April 3 ambush and was "released" in exchange for Manhas.

Later at the *jan adalat*, Sukka narrated how the police tortured him, but it was not clear to those present whether that was before or after the ambush on April 3. The mediators and the journalists were, however, unanimous that Manhas's release was unconditional.

Sundarraj confirmed to THE WEEK that no Maoists or villagers were arrested after the ambush and,

has always confined himself to providing education for tribal children, especially girls. "I was somewhat surprised when the police sought my help. But as it involved saving a life, I agreed to cooperate," said Saini. But he needed details. Whom was he supposed to meet and where?

On April 7, Saini was told that he would be taken to the Tarrem camp of the security forces at night and could proceed into the jungles the next day. He agreed, knowing that he would have to ride pillion for at least 30km on treacherous roads running through dense forests on a harsh summer day.

About 200km away in Awapalli, Bijapur district, Boraiya was also caught by surprise when the sub-divisional police officer approached him on the afternoon of April 7. Boraiya, too, agreed to mediate and, like Saini, asked for specifics. Kamlochan Kashyap, the Bijapur superintendent of police, briefed him over phone. "I was told that I would be taken to the Tarrem camp, about 30km from Awapalli, that night itself," said Boraiya. "But as it was late, I suggested we leave at dawn. And, it was agreed."

Both Saini and Boraiya were allowed to take along an associate each. While Saini chose Kare, Boraiya

therefore, there was no question of releasing anyone. “Some local people helped the security forces during the rescue operations and a few of them stayed back at the camp and returned to their villages later. Sukka might be one of them,” he said.

The 11-member team reached Tummel by 8:30am, led by Maoist couriers who joined them on motorcycles at Jonaguda. The negotiators were met by mid-level Maoist operatives who welcomed them with cups of milk tea. They were then asked to wait.

Saini and Boraiya had discussed and agreed that they would stick to the limited agenda of securing Manhas’s release. They were not going to discuss anything further with the Maoists. Saini said most of the people assembled for the *jan adalat* were young. “I saw young men dressed in modern apparel like jeans, shorts, trousers and shirts. I managed to speak to a few young girls who were sitting close by and I was happy to note that they were all pursuing studies,” he said. Saini also observed that while most houses he saw were made of mud and were thatched, those were well maintained, colourful and equipped with solar lights.

Mishra, 37, said this was the first time that such a *jan adalat* was held to release a “high-profile hostage”. He had attended a few such events in the past when local cops were released. “I certainly was not afraid. After all, the Maoists themselves had made an offer to us to come with the mediators to secure the jawan’s release,” he said.

As they kept waiting for Manhas, the team was served a lunch of rice, tomato chutney and a curry of fish, fresh from a nearby pond; all cooked by villagers at the instance of the Maoists. Being a vegetarian, Saini stuck to rice and chutney. Once they finished lunch, Boraiya and Hapka were taken to meet Manila and her associates.



The discussion

Acutely aware of the life-saving mission they were on, Boraiya and Hapka started answering Manila’s questions. She was flanked by two female and three male commanders, and she spoke with an accent of a non-tribal, probably of south Indian origin. The questions came fast: What exactly was Boraiya’s social position? How did they come about to be part of the delegation? Which political party were they affiliated to?

Boraiya was candid and told Manila about how senior police officers spoke to him about Manhas and convinced him that initiative from community leaders was necessary to secure his release. “I told her that I

agreed to mediate also because I had seen the videos of the captive’s family, including a fervent appeal by his little daughter,” he said. “I said that if something untoward happened, it would be very tragic and painful.”

Manila told Boraiya that she, too, had seen the videos and was aware of the family’s pain. She said she knew that Manhas was from Jammu and had joined CoBRA in Bastar only four months ago and, as such, had not caused any harm to the locals. She said he was found unconscious by her cadre several hours after the ambush. They gave him food and water and also medical aid. She assured them that he was fine and would be released soon.

After this, Manila started talking



JOY OF FREEDOM

Family members and relatives of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas celebrate after hearing the news of his release at their residence in Jammu

her that the local people probably did not consider me as someone to be approached for such matters,” he said. “But if they do, my associates and I will certainly help.”

Discussions—mostly in Hindi, interspersed occasionally with the native Gondi—continued for almost 45 minutes. “Finally, we were asked to go back and wait with others. We were told that Manhas would be released soon, but only after he gave a testimony before the *jan adalat* about how the Maoists treated him in captivity,” said Boraiya.

In the people's court

Manhas was brought to the *jan adalat* an hour later. As the waiting journalists started shooting videos and photographs, Boraiya objected to the Manhas's hands being tied. But Manila told him that it was part of the *jan adalat* process and was not intended to harm or disrespect Manhas.

The Maoists then formally started the *jan adalat* by informing the people present about the way Manhas was taken into captivity and

about the alleged excesses of the police and how locals were being arrested without warrants. She said they were often beaten, women subjected to physical and sexual violence, and their meagre belongings looted. She wanted community leaders like Boraiya and Hapka to take up the issue with the police and the administration. On a lighter note, she added that if the police did not care about the people, why should the Maoists care about the police.

Boraiya assured her that as community leaders they were always ready to help people who faced injustice. He also promised to take up the matter with authorities if the people approached them. “I told

asked them whether he should be set free. A small section of the crowd objected, saying the security forces often harassed, arrested and even killed innocent villagers. Some of them presented testimonies of such alleged excesses.

The Maoist commanders said Manhas personally never harmed anyone and, therefore, it was not correct to punish him. A majority agreed, sealing his release. Manhas was then asked to speak about how he was treated in captivity, to which he replied that he was given medical aid and food, and was not harassed in any manner. He also explained how he got separated from his team during the ambush and passed out because of dehydration, following which he was taken captive by the Maoists. He said he did not know where he was kept as he was moved repeatedly and was always blindfolded. He also expressed gratitude to the mediators and the journalists for facilitating his release.

Saini had by then conveyed the news of the release to Manhas's family in Jammu over telephone. “A while later, as I found myself close to him, I told him that I spoke to his family and that they were delighted to hear the news. A slight smile spoke of the happiness he felt,” said Saini.

Journey back to safety

As journalists proposed waiting a little longer at the spot for more elaborate interviews, the seasoned Saini realised that Manhas's safety was now their responsibility and it was important to return to the Tarrem camp at the earliest. At his insistence, the Maoists made an appeal to the crowd to provide the team safe passage back to the camp.

Saini then directed the team to leave the spot immediately. Manhas rode pillion with Shankar and could be heard asking him to go fast. As the six motorcycles started the journey back, Saini noticed a look of relief on

“**THE MAOIST COMMANDERS SAID MANHAS PERSONALLY NEVER HARMED ANYONE AND, THEREFORE, IT WAS NOT CORRECT TO PUNISH HIM. A MAJORITY AGREED, SEALING HIS RELEASE.**”

Manhas's face for a fleeting moment, a break from the composure he had maintained for hours.

The extremely tired, but exceedingly happy team reached the Tarrem camp at around 6:30pm, and Manhas was formally handed over to Komal Singh, deputy inspector general of the CRPF. After a thorough medical examination, he spoke to his family members and to Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He was treated at the Basaguda field hospital and later at a hospital in Jagdalpur. "Manhas continues to be under observation," said Sundarraaj. "He is likely to be granted leave once he is found fit for travel."

Manhas is expected to return to Jammu on April 16 and will be accompanied by a few members of the rescue team. Sources told THE WEEK that Boraiya, Mishra and Mukesh Chandrakar are likely to accompany him to Jammu.

Baghel felicitated Manhas, Saini, Boraiya, Kare, Hapka, Mishra and Mukesh Chandrakar in Raipur on April 12. "No praise could be enough for the work that the mediator team has done," said the chief minister. "Not just the people of Chhattisgarh, but the entire country had its eyes on the developments. The members of the team acted as responsible citizens and undertook their task with courage." ❏

Guru of Bastar

Dharampal Saini was THE WEEK's Man of the Year in 2012.

Born in 1930 in the princely state of Dhar, now part of Madhya Pradesh, Saini was the second of four children. His father was the head of the horticultural department in Dhar. At school, Saini's commerce teacher introduced him to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. He soon began working with Gandhian institutions like the Bhil Seva Sangh, which worked for the uplift of the Bhil tribe of western Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

Saini was 46 and a confirmed bachelor when he set out to Bastar. Essentially a jungle bigger than Belgium, Bastar was then severely underdeveloped, rich in mineral resources and plagued by the Maoist threat. Saini had the blessings of his mentor, the venerable Gandhian Vinoba Bhave, to set up an ashram in Dimrapal, a village near the district headquarters of Jagdalpur.

Saini opened a primary boarding school for girls in December 1976, with two teachers and two support staff. The modest initiative grew, and by the time Saini won the THE WEEK's Man of the Year award, his ashram had 37 residential schools—21 of them for girls—spread across Bastar. Nearly 20,000 girls had been educated.

"Bastar has come a long way," Saini told THE WEEK's special correspondent Deepak Tiwari in 2012. "Earlier, hardly any government employees wanted to come here and the posts were always vacant. Those posts are now filled by the natives of Bastar, because of education."

All of five feet and four inches, Saini does not cut an imposing figure. But he commands great respect among the people of Bastar. Affectionately called *tauji*, Saini always wears khadi clothes, stays in a two-room *kuccha* house, filled with books and bags of seeds for the next sowing season. "It will take the next two generations to completely eradicate this [Naxal] menace," Saini said. "I am hopeful that Naxalism will end. There is no reason why it should not, with the spread of education."





Consider the PESA path

The ambushing and killing of 22 members of the Central Reserve Police Force's CoBRA unit in Chhattisgarh—following 76 deaths of security personnel in April 2010 and about 150 since—underlines the need for an immediate rethink of our strategy for dealing with armed “Maoists”. Mao Zedong had described the guerrilla as “fish that swim among the people”. If Naxalism has had such a long life in the heart of India, where no malign “foreign hand” can operate, we must look to other instruments than the gun to find a more humane and lasting solution.

That instrument has been in our armoury since at least 1996, when Parliament passed the Provisions of The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA). As the D. Bandyopadhyay committee appointed by the Planning Commission in 2004, and the Aiyar Expert Group under my chairmanship underlined in 2013, the conscientious implementation of PESA will release the people from the trap of having to choose between predatory government officials and a vicious guerrilla movement, by offering the alternative of genuine self-government. Once the people are offered that alternative, the swamp will be drained for want of the sustenance that the people's support offers them, and the Naxal alligators captured. If not, the ambushes and massacres will be repeated ad nauseam.

Successive home ministers of all hues have consistently preferred larger budgets, bigger forces, more arms to governance changes that would put real power in the hands of the tribal people to draw them away from the solutions offered by Maoist guerrillas. The guerrilla prevails because he lives among them, serves their elementary needs and, in return, receives their protection and assistance. If the tribal people could be enabled to govern them-

selves—instead of being thrown to the mercies of the forest guard and the *thanadar* (policeman), the *thekedar* (contractor) and the local *patwari* (village registrar)—as is their right by Constitutional law and the PESA legislation, they would much rather be self-reliant than beholden to the armed outlaw in their midst. All that is needed is state action to devolve functions, finances and functionaries to the duly constituted tribal panchayats, as they are obliged to do by Article 243G of the Constitution and the PESA.

Proponents of armed action offer two justifications that need to be put in perspective. The first is that



through Operation Greyhound in the northern districts of Telangana and operations of C60 commandos in Gadchiroli district of Vidarbha, Maharashtra, the security forces ended the Naxal menace in those areas. They did not. They merely pushed the Naxals from well-policed areas in those states to less effectively policed areas in the Abhujmad areas of Bastar district in Chhattisgarh and Malkangiri in Odisha. If they are now pushed out

of these tribal redoubts, the danger is that they could resurface in urban areas. Armed action on its own is only an expedient, not a final solution.

The second argument is that under UPA-II a special action plan was devised to ensure government delivery of welfare and development measures that, along with armed action, has reduced the worst concentration of Naxals from nearly 200 districts 15 years ago to about 90 districts now. In my view and those of my expert colleagues, government delivery is no substitute for ownership of the programmes to give the tribal communities a sense of genuine participation in their affairs through their democratically-elected institutions of self-government—the PESA panchayats. That is the humane, Gandhian way and, eventually, the most sustainable forward.



GUEST COLUMN • K.V. MADHUSUDHANAN

Fighting our people

CoBRA is burdened by law, which demands that it upholds the Constitutional and human rights of civilians. Naxals have no such burden

SEPTEMBER 2009: My memories of the young Manipuri officer haunted me during my drive to the technical area of Palam airport. I was going there to pay my last respects, before his body was flown to Imphal. Six months ago, during the interview to enlist officers into the newly raised CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), the tough-looking Manoranjan Singh came across as confident and determined to join the force while many others were unsure.

After Delhi was convinced about the need for a specialised force to tackle left-wing extremists, the Central Reserve Police Force was given this stupendous task and a close deadline. There were high hopes, a lot of hype and the CRPF was straining to meet the deadline. So, within six months of the interview (Singh was inducted, trained and deployed in Chhattisgarh in the meanwhile), I found myself on the tarmac in Palam. Singh had died while leading a major offensive against left-wing extremists. During the pre-mission briefing, he had told his men that this was to be a litmus test for the newly-raised special force; he declared that his would be the first CoBRA blood to be shed, if it came to that. True to his oath, he was the first CoBRA we lost.

We, at headquarters, knew that

we had taken on an enormous task. Mandated to raise 10 units (roughly 10,000 personnel) of CoBRA, the CRPF—already understaffed, over-deployed and showing signs of strains from continuous engagement on insurgency and terrorist grids—had to identify and develop 10 centres in affected states, and induct, train and equip personnel. In addition, senior staff had to formulate SOPs, methodologies and strategies.

The Maoist menace is a grievance-driven movement and ideology-driven insurgency. Hence, CoBRA would require new tactical doctrines, skills and resources. While the Maoist struggle is total—no time limit or fixed geographical target—CoBRA

had to operate under limitations of law. There were no drawn lines of conflict, and CoBRA had to account for every person apprehended, injured or killed. The extremists have no such liabilities.

The Greyhounds of Andhra Pradesh was the only model before us. The induction of former Greyhounds chief K. Durga Prasad as inspector general and head of CoBRA did help a lot in the initial months. But he had to go back to Andhra Pradesh due to compelling domestic reasons. As founder DIG, frankly, I was under severe strain to measure up to the difficult task. Raising an armed force unit is always a challenge, and here we had to raise 10 units of special forces. Only the CRPF could have done it. It had already raised special wings like the Rapid Action Force, the Special Duty Group and had pioneered in raising women battalions. So, it was a jolt to lose a young officer even before CoBRA was full-fledged. We had to keep the morale high, but with no compromise on human rights.

Salwa Judum, a concept developed by Congress MLA Mahendra Karma, could not pick up momentum. (Karma was assassinated by Naxalites on May 25, 2013. His convoy ran into landmines, after which he was

“
UPGRADING THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT IS A PREREQUISITE. EQUALLY URGENT IS THE REQUIREMENT OF MAINSTREAMING THE MARGINALISED TRIBAL POPULATION IN AFFECTED AREAS.
 ”

dragged out, shot and stabbed.)

Abujmad (literally ‘unknown area’) was declared by Maoists as a liberated area. Detection and disposal of explosives, especially IEDs, were the real challenge. If IEDs did not explode, you lived to tell the tale. Only those who have heard the whine of bullets whizzing at 2,700 feet per second or more, just inches above their head, can truly appreciate the challenge of fighting a well organised, motivated and armed adversary. An adversary who can never be identified easily even if he is seen gossiping at a wayside *dhaba*, so then imagine taking him on in his own *adda* (den).

It is just skewed warfare when you do not know who the enemy is, and you cannot disrupt village life, though you are sure the extremists are hiding among them. You do not have Armed Forces Special Power Act on your side, like in insurgency-affected areas; your adversary enjoys all rights under a vibrant democracy.

In the glow of bright hindsight, analysts can easily punch several holes in battle drills and SOPs. Armchair experts are prompt to point out that the troops did not wear body armour, etc. While patrolling in the humid heat of deep tropical jungles, when operations on foot continue for many days, one often feels like peeling off the shirt to escape the life sapping humidity.

It is understandable when elite intellectuals clamour for human rights, unmindful of the rights of soldiers and innocent villagers. But it is depressing to hear the top brass commenting uncharitably like a state police chief himself did when 76 CRPF soldiers were butchered on April 6, 2010, in Bastar: “Who will teach the CRPF to walk?”

It is a fact that field commanders make the mistake of spreading their force thinly to cover larger areas, and inadvertently provide an easy



SALIL BERA

target. Even ultramodern US and NATO forces face casualties. Recall how they fared in tropical jungles in Vietnam. Here, the Central Armed Police Forces are not operating in a war zone, the adversary is unseen and he is our very own citizen with terrain advantage.

I feel that the Maoists are undertaking probing operations to demonstrate that they are in a commanding position, so that the local population toes their line. It boosts the spirits of their own cadre while weakening the morale of special forces. They are able to muster people’s militia or base force to the tune of hundreds. To 200 regular guerrillas they add a thousand militia and easily take on battalion strength special forces. Mobile warfare is a decisive stage in guerrilla warfare and its objective is to liberate pockets of influence. They set up rudiments of alternative administration where the government control is weak. This is called mobile revolutionary offensive tactics.

Now, how do we deal with it? Through a twin-track response of firmly tackling the security threat, and simultaneously implementing socio-economic development programmes in vulnerable areas. The Maoists openly oppose and disrupt

ACTS OF VALOUR

CoBRA commandos during a combing operation in West Bengal

developmental projects—especially infrastructural progress essential for overall development and investment. Hence, upgrading the security environment is a prerequisite. Equally urgent is the requirement of mainstreaming the marginalised tribal population of the affected areas, especially in the Bastar region.

The example of Kerala shows that the Naxal movement is more grievance-ridden than ideology-driven. Had it been ideology-driven, Maoists could not have found a more fertile soil than Kerala, with its Left leanings. But the fact is that despite their best efforts they have not been successful in spreading their tentacles because successive governments have taken care of tribal welfare and mainstreaming of the marginalised. The even spread of facilities and infrastructural development ensured proper integration of urban, semi-urban, and so-called tribal belts. And, hence, “liberated zones” remain a distant dream in the state. ❶

Madhusudhanan, who retired as IG north-eastern sector of the CRPF, was founder DIG of CoBRA.

■ INTERVIEW

S.N. Shrivastava
commissioner, Delhi Police

Due procedure followed in case against activists

BY NAMRATA BIJI AHUJA

THE 2020 DELHI riots, which claimed 53 lives, the farmers' protest at the Red Fort and the arrest of activist Disha Ravi on sedition charges have all taken place during S.N. Shrivastava's tenure as commissioner of Delhi Police. He spoke to THE WEEK about the status of investigations in these cases, monitoring social media and terror threats to the capital. Excerpts:

Q/ Did the 2020 Delhi riots impact Delhi Police's image? What corrective steps were taken?

A/ I joined amid the riots. Soon after the riots were controlled, a number of steps were taken to address the grievances of people. The community leaders met me and shared their concerns regarding security of residents and other related issues. We provided more security in areas where people felt insecure. They wanted the repair of religious places and residences to begin soon; this was facilitated. Slowly and steadily, things were brought to normalcy.

At the same time, since 53 people had died and more than 500 were injured, it was necessary that the legal process should start. A total of 755 cases were registered over a few days. Important cases were handed over to special investigation teams created in the crime branch. One

case was registered with the special cell to unearth conspiracy behind the riots and the remaining cases were assigned to police stations. More than 400 of the 755 cases registered have been worked out and charge-sheets filed, in most cases. Over 1,800 people were arrested. This information is based on the last review I conducted.

Q/ What was the larger conspiracy behind the riots?

A/ Investigations showed that when information about the arrival of former US president Donald Trump came in, a conspiracy was hatched to show the government in poor light, on account of passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. A group of people wanted to embarrass the government by causing disturbances and communal disharmony. Besides, those who are inimical to the interest of the country may have taken interest in the communal riots.

Q/ Is it true there was a Khalistani conspiracy behind the recent farmers' protest?

A/ The farmer agitation case is still under investigation. It will be premature to suggest anything.

Q/ Is Punjabi actor Deep Sidhu still under arrest?

A/ Yes, he is still in judicial custody. His role is being ascertained.



Q/ Why were sedition charges brought against activists and protesters?

A/ Section 124A of India Penal Code says, 'Whoever by words, spoken or written, or by signs and otherwise, brings, or attempts to bring, into hatred or contempt, or excites, or attempts to excite, disaffection towards the government established by law, shall be punished with imprisonment for life.' So long as any action fulfils the criteria as above, legal action can be taken.

Q/ The court said there is nothing on record to suggest that Disha



AAYUSH GOEL

Ravi subscribed to secessionist ideas. How do you see the case today after she got bail?

A/ The case still exists. On February 3, a toolkit was tweeted by someone. [It] contained a tweet bank and other materials to be used for a Twitter storm proposed for February 4-5. One tweet mentioned that police forces have used force against peaceful protesters and that many protesters died. Drafting such a tweet, which was used by someone not knowing that the same has already been leaked out, shows the sinister design to create a surcharged and volatile atmosphere which could have turned dangerous.

Creating a tweet bank when nothing of this sort has happened was done with the sole purpose of misrepresenting facts and spreading misinformation to create law and order problems resulting in large scale violence. Based on the electronic evidence, through the inadvertent leak of the toolkit, a case was registered and investigated.

Q/ There are allegations of overreach by Delhi Police in arresting Disha.

A/ The police team took all precautions. A lady officer, the investigating officer and technical experts had gone to see [activist] Nikita Jacob in Mumbai. Following all due procedure,

she was questioned and asked to show her tweets and social media posts. With reluctance, she shared it with the investigation team. It also revealed that many were already deleted. But the available evidence was sufficient. Since it was late in the evening, she was asked to remain at home and make herself available the next day. Next morning, she absconded. The question arises, why did she abscond?

Later on, [activist] Shantanu [Mullik] was also missing from his house in Pune. The team later went to Disha Ravi in Bengaluru, where she was questioned. She, too, had deleted many posts. In view of the experience of [the other] accused persons absconding and in the interest of the investigation, she was taken into custody and brought to Delhi and produced in court. Such investigations are long-drawn as it is based on technical evidence and information from service providers based abroad.

Q/ Was Bengaluru police not informed?

A/ Disha was arrested in front of the local station house officer and her mother. A proper diary entry was made at the concerned police station in Bengaluru. This is sufficient to refute any claim that Bengaluru police was not informed.

Q/ Is Disha Ravi still an accused?

A/ The investigation is continuing and any conclusion at this stage is premature.

Q/ Has Delhi Police created a special unit to monitor social media?

A/ We have set up a social media cell which goes through social media posts and any fake news is cross-checked and countered. If there is any post which is fake, the cyber cell takes steps to inform concerned service providers to delete those posts. 📌

Full interview @ www.theweek.in

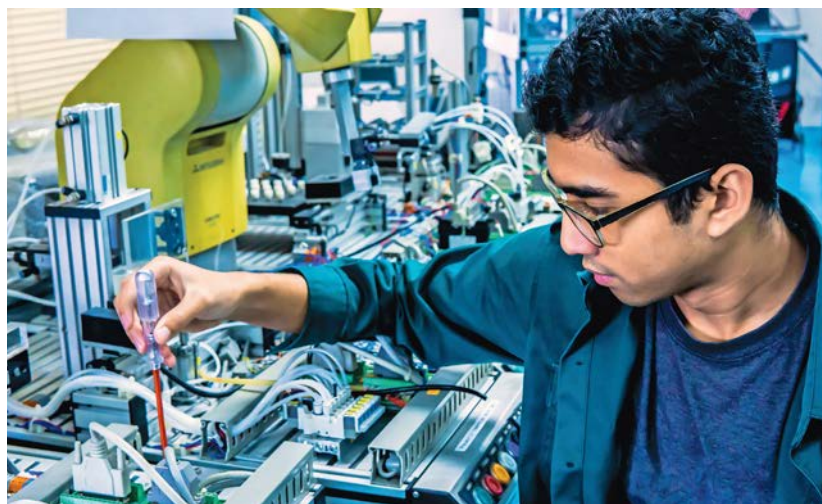
NEW LEARNING FOR THE NEW WORLD

Choosing the right course and the right career is the recipe for success

The world is indeed changing and changing fast, specially post pandemic things are expected to change like never before. As we move to a new normal and a post pandemic world the demand for technology and digitization will grow further. Over the years globalization and digitalization have already replaced the traditional business strategies of organizations. The current world is pushing the limits of technology and the future is going to revolve around Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and big data analytics as well as many courses that are related to it. The dynamic and new industrial requirements demand highly skilled professionals. It is at this time that a student should choose the right course that helps him or her choose the right career path in these challenging times. Lot of new courses are on offer from different institutes across the country but a student has to carefully evaluate which one is suited best for him or her.

THE WEEK spoke to a few institutes that are offering different unique and popular courses in technology and other fields that are aligned with the needs of the industry globally as well as in India. Take for instance the Lloyd Group of Institutions, at Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh that is specialized in legal and management education has now started offering industry oriented engineering and technology courses too. Its engineering programme in Computer Science (CS) and IT-related programmes (B.Tech. CS/IT) is aimed at preparing professionals who can understand and meet the challenges of the Business 4.0 world. These futuristic industry relevant courses that are being offered by Lloyd have been drafted and developed after due consultation with industry leaders and experts.

“The CS and IT employment market is employer driven and companies are extensively hiring professionals with



sound technical knowledge and skills to compliment their business strategies. Several statistics are already pointing out the huge gap in the availability of talent. A few studies indicate a shortage of 85 million IT professionals by 2030 as per the current demand. Also, a U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics report has predicted 11.5 million job openings by 2026. The course that we are offering will align with the needs of the current environment,” remarked Prof. (Dr.) Vandana Arora Sethi, Group Director, Lloyd Group of Institutions, Greater Noida.

“Major industries are already formulating their business plans in alignment with the opportunities created by AI, Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT) and the small businesses looking to identify the potential of the same. The Computer Science Engineering and IT courses offered by us will actively involve industrial partnerships and mentoring by leaders from the industry to make the students industry ready with highly sought professional skills,” added Sethi.

Experts feel that there are many jobs that are now emerging in the digital landscape. Jobs around coding, block chain management, Virtual reality technician,

Ethical hacker, Big data analyst, Data Inspector or detective, Augmented reality developer, Data brokers, etc. Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology (Deemed to be University), Meerut and Shobhit University, Uttar Pradesh, Gangoh Saharanpur UP are offering unique courses such as bio medical engineering, agriculture information technology, Bioinformatics engineering aimed towards a multi disciplinary approach that is helping students to clinch different new job openings in the future.

“Bio medical engineering is one of the best examples of multidisciplinary education and is a perfect blend of electronics, instrumentation and biological science. After completing a course in B.Tech Biomedical Engineering, a student can opt for various career opportunities ranging from corporate to government, from research to content writing. Similarly the different job options that a candidate can take up after pursuing a degree in B. Tech Biomedical Engineering includes Biomedical Engineer, Microbiologist, Project Manager, Biochemist, Biomedical Managers, Research Analysts, Biomedical Technician, etc. The starting salary of a candi-

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date for B. Tech Biomedical Engineering is ₹5 to 7 lakh per annum,” said Devinder Narain, Director, Corporate Relations, Shobhit University.

Other courses on offer from Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology (Deemed to be University), Meerut UP is B. Tech in Agricultural Information Technology which is a combination of Agricultural Studies and Information Technology. It also offers B. Tech, M.Tech and PhD in the same stream. The duration of the course is 4 years including 8 semesters. The candidate is required to have passed the class XII examination with Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics as the main subjects. Admission to the course is done through State level entrance tests and is based on performance therein. The course fee for B. Tech. per year is ₹1 Lakh. Some of the important subjects covered in the course are Introduction to Computers, Introduction to Agriculture, Communication Skills, Physics, Programming in C Language, Introduction to World Wide Web and Botany.

“Successful graduates of B. Tech in Agricultural Information Technology get employed as Land-Use Planners, Landscape Ecologists, IT managers, eCommerce System Designers, Agricultural ERP Specialists, Biological Database Designers, eLearning Specialists, Commodity Traders, Farm or Plantation Managers, Supply Chain Managers,

Crop Insurance Managers, etc.,” added Narain.

Another popular course is the Bio Informatics Engineering that includes bioinformatics or computational biology is the use of information technology in the field of molecular biology or applying computer technology to biological research and management. Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology (Deemed to be University), Meerut UP, is offering B.Tech, M.Tech and PhD in this stream. Computers are used to gather, store, analyse and merge biological information.

There are many other popular courses that are in great demand these days. All of them are designed in tune with the new requirements of the industry. The Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science in Chennai is offering B.Tech in Aeronautical Engineering and Aerospace Engineering with practical and maintenance training on live aircraft, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (in collaboration with IBM), Cloud Computing (in collaboration with IBM) Information Technology (in collaboration with IBM), Automobile Engineering (in collaboration with Volkswagen) and Robotics and Mechatronics (in collaboration with Yaskawa). Some of the other courses such as BSc in Avionics, BBA in Aviation Management with IATA certification Travel and Tourism Management, BMS Aviation Services and Air Cargo (In

Collaboration with Logistics Sector Skill Council) and BCA in Multimedia and Animation and MBA in Aviation Management and BSc in Cardiovascular Technology, Anesthesia Technology, Physician Assistant Optometry are also in demand.

“The scope of employability of our students is very high because the course curriculum is designed in collaboration with industry partners and therefore the students are industry ready by the time they graduate. Besides, the delivery of curriculum is partly done by experts from IBM, Aviation sector, Volkswagen, Doctors from Hospitals, etc. The students are exposed to the industrial requirements,” Dr Anand Jacob Verghese, Pro Chancellor, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Chennai, told THE WEEK.

Institutes such as the Ajay Kumar Garg Engineering College (AKGEC), Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, offers B.Tech courses in all major disciplines of engineering. The college also offers postgraduate courses in Computer Application (MCA) and M.Tech in four engineering disciplines. The college is affiliated to Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Technical University (AKTU), Lucknow.

“The scope of these courses is extensive in industry, education and research. All the courses are directed towards good employability of our students. The placements in the college are excellent, some of the prominent recruiters include companies such as Infosys, HCL, Torrent Power, TCS, Robert Bosch, Ashok Leyland, Lohia Group, HSBC Software, Amazon, Wipro, Capgemini, Cognizant, IBM and many more,” remarked Dr. R.K. Agarwal, Director General, AKGEC.

He further adds that the courses his college offers are aligned with the needs of the industry. In addition, the college has established a number of Centres of Excellence in collaboration with eminent multinational industries. The primary objective of these centres is to provide industrially relevant training in interdisciplinary state of the art technologies to bridge the gap between academic curriculum and industry needs. These centres also promote research and industrial consultancies.

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AKGEC SKILLS

CREATING A FUTURISTIC ENGINEERING COURSE FOR JOB MARKET IN 2025

With Industry 4.0 propelling technological developments forward, and devices communicating with each other on a large scale, there are immense opportunities and lucrative positions for software engineers with scope for a reliable career, varied specializing opportunities, and a domain-centric future for the aspirants. The CS/IT employment market is employer driven and companies are extensively hiring professionals with sound technical knowledge. Studies have shown that organisations are facing a hiring challenge as the data science talent supply is not enough to keep pace with the demand. Jobs in CSE/IT and Data Science are currently reigning the job market. The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics reports that the rise of data science needs will create 11.5 million job openings by 2026; with a jump of 45% annual job increase in India. Studies have predicted a shortage of 85million CSE/IT professionals by 2030, in the context of big data scientists partnering with data engineers to streamline data management and mainstream use of machine learning algorithms and small businesses turning to the potentials of data analytics. The projected demand spike of 28% for professionals, the potential for CS/IT engineers from India is immense as currently the country only provides for 6% of global requirements.

Modern world is pushing boundaries of technology on a daily basis and it is an exciting time to start a career in engineering. It has been predicted that the business trends of “Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing and Internet of Things” are going to be the future and as these areas grow, computer and information technology



Prof. (Dr.) Vandana Arora Sethi
Group Director,
Lloyd Group of Institutions

professionals will be in high demand and it will provide a challenging opportunity for talented engineers who wants to have an impact on the future!

Lloyd Group, since its inception, is continuously striving to achieve excellence, which has been recognized through numerous reputable awards, rankings and collaborations. Lloyd offers bachelor and masters programs in streams of Business Studies, Law, Pharmacy and Education. Lloyd have been continuously ranked amongst top 3 institutions in North India and top 10 all India best colleges of India - Annual Survey by India Today, Outlook and CSR. Lloyd was awarded the “SILF-MILAT Institutional Excellence Award” in 2018 from Shri Venkaiah Naidu, the Hon’ble Vice-President of India.

Currently, Lloyd offers program in business studies with industrial partners IBM, Microsoft, Manpower Group, NSE Academy, etc., and has active academic

collaborations with Pennsylvania State University, USA; Buckingham University, UK; Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal; ELCOP, Bangladesh; University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and various national regulatory institutions. Lloyd ensures that its students are intensively skill trained through active industrial collaborations.

With 16 years of successful expertise and excellence in Law and Business Studies, Lloyd is now entering into industry-oriented Engineering and Technology education stream. The niche engineering programme in Computer Science and IT-related programme (B.Tech. CS/IT) offered by Lloyd, aims to prepare professionals who can understand and meet the challenges of the Business 4.0 world, which will surely be rooted in artificial intelligence, big data and machine learning. The course will align with the needs of the current environment, with industry-relevant curriculum with active participation from leading industries and academic institutions, to make them a ready-force for the industry and bring it to the aspiring students.

Lloyd Institute of Engineering is a futuristic engineering and technology education institution, aiming to align technical education with the needs of the current industrial environment to make a ready professional force, for the industry. With collaborations from market leaders across the globe, Lloyd is ready to embark on a journey of excellence in Technology and Engineering.

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BCA / BMS (Air Cargo / Aviation Services)

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AKGEC has excellent infrastructure with state-of-the-art laboratories, computing facilities, automated library with e-journals, modern well furnished hostels for 1500 students and faculty residences on its wi-fi enabled 40 acres campus.

The college also has highly qualified and experienced faculty lead by its Director General, Dr. R.K. Agarwal, who is an alumnus of IIT Kanpur, CIT UK and IISc Bangalore with vast teaching, research and administrative experience.

The college has been consistently maintaining excellent results with large number of its students appearing in AKTU merit lists every year. The college students have also received the Chancellor's Gold Medal for best performance across all B.Tech branches for five consecutive years, since its inception. The college conducts a number of industrially relevant programs to make its students

globally competitive. During the year 2019-2020, over 900 students have been placed in reputed companies like Infosys, HCL, Torrent Power, TCS, Robert Bosch, Ashok Leyland, Lohia Group, HSBC Software, Amazon, Wipro, Capgemini, Cognizant, IBM and many more.

It is a matter of pride for the college that our student Neeraj Srivastava, 2009 B.Tech graduate from EC stream, has been awarded the Distinguished Alumnus Award by AKTU. This is the first time that the University has instituted the award in 2021.

The college has established a number of Centres of Excellence in collaboration with eminent multinational industries. These include Industrial Robotic Training Centre in collaboration with Kuka Robotics, Centre of Excellence in Automation Technologies with Bosch Rexroth, LabVIEW Academy with National Instruments, PLM Centre of Excellence with SIEMENS, Centre of Excellence in factory automation with Mitsubishi Electric, Industrial Pneumatic Knowledge Centre with Janatics India, Siemens Centre of Excellence with Siemens SITRAIN India, Joint Certification Centre in Automotive Technologies with Bosch Ltd. and a Competency Development Centre in Integrated Automation with Automation Industries Association and industry partners like Pepperl & Fuchs, B&R, Festo and Siemens. The primary objective of

these centres is to provide industrially relevant training in these inter-disciplinary technologies and to promote research and industrial consultancies.

Advance Welding Technology and Advance Manufacturing Centre have been established under the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship.

The college has the unique distinction of being the only college to receive the Academic Excellence Award for Best Engineering College in UPTU (now AKTU) for two successive years from His Excellency the Governor of UP. The college is also the recipient of 'Best Industry Institute Interface' from the Hon'ble Minister of Science & Technology, U.P. Government, as well as from Royal Academy of Engineering, UK. The college has been honoured with the prestigious STEM awards during 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The college plans to promote collaborative industry relevant projects, R&D and consultancy to raise the overall academic standard as well as to bridge the gap between academic curriculum and industry requirements to make its students globally competitive. The college believes in setting audacious goals and infusing fresh ideas to achieve the same.





UNCLOS outlaw Uncle Sam

Better to have an enemy who slaps you in the face, than a friend who stabs you in the back—so goes an old saying.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi learnt this a year ago. Hardly had he sent back Donald Trump after feting him like a king-emperor in an Ahmedabad stadium, when the old boor turned around and asked Modi for shiploads of Covid-19 drug hydroxychloroquine. If you don't send the stuff, he threatened *mon ami* Modi, "there may be retaliation."

Now it appears, it is not just one ex-prez, but the US as a nation is like that—a boor who bullies buddies. The Pakistanis have known it for a while now and have been quietly unfriending the Americans. Now it is India's turn to learn.

The Yanks had been wooing us as a major non-NATO ally and celebrating us as the world's largest democracy. A few weeks ago, their newly inaugurated president, Joe Biden, joined Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Australia's Scott Morrison, in a Gang of Four (pun intended) to teach the truant Chinese a few lessons in the laws of seafaring.

Seafaring countries had been claiming coastal waters from three to 12 nautical miles (depending on the range of their coastal guns) since the 17th century. By the 20th century, countries found that technology enabled them to fish, mine and drill in deeper waters, and they began to claim more sea acres. Laws, pacts and treaties were slowly evolved—and concluded by the 1990s as the UN Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)—by which it was agreed that a coastal state can claim 12 nautical miles as territorial sea, and another 24 miles as a contiguous zone where it can do some policing (such as chasing the Italian marines who shot Indian fishermen a few years ago). A 200-mile stretch was recognised as an exclusive economic

zone (EEZ), where the coastal state has monopoly over fishing and mining rights, but is open to foreign merchantmen and men-of-war for free passage.

However, certain states made national laws which stipulate that though foreign ships may pass through their EEZ, the passers-by ought to inform the host state as to what they are up to. India has such a law which, in effect, is aimed at prohibiting the Pakistani or Chinese navy from playing wargames close to our coast.

The US refuses to recognise these national laws, be they China's ownership claim over stretches of the South China Sea or India's insistence on being informed prior to passage. To show that

it means business, and to our deep embarrassment, the US sent a warship right across our Lakshadweep Sea on April 7. That was a cowboy way of showing the Chinese as to how they punish countries that encroach sea acres.

It appears, Delhi did not choose its friends wisely. When it comes to enforcing the law of the sea, the US is the last country that you can count on. For, the US is

a self-declared outlaw, having refused to ratify the UNCLOS, which 168 countries, including India and China, swear by.

Simply put, Uncle Sam is an UNCLOS outlaw. China, legally put and in comparison, is only a violator. So, it is a case of the outlaw asking violators to follow the law!

Tailpiece: Foreign ships had occasionally been spotted surveying Indian maritime zones on the sly. In 2001, THE WEEK had broken the story of how the Indian Navy had spotted the USNS Bowditch surveying the sea 30 miles east of Car Nicobar, and the HMS Scott snooping around 138 miles off Porbandar. India had lodged strong protests with the US and the British missions then, and warned that "such activities will not be permitted in the Indian EEZ."



Fallen star

With K.T. Jaleel forced to step down as minister, the Pinarayi Vijayan government suffers a big blow at the fag end of its term

BY CITHARA PAUL

HE IS THE “face of the left front” in Kerala’s Malappuram district, and the “face of Muslims” in the ruling left front. He is K.T. Jaleel, who till recently was minister for higher education and minority welfare, and the CPI(M)’s personal-cum-political bridge into the Muslim heartland. But with corruption charges having forced him to step down, he has fallen from grace.

On April 9, the lokayukta in Kerala held Jaleel guilty of nepotism and abuse of power. The verdict came on a complaint that alleged that Jaleel had unlawfully appointed a close relative as general manager at the state-run Minorities Finance Development Corporation (MFDC). As pressure mounted on him to resign, Jaleel moved Kerala High Court to obtain a stay on the lokayukta’s verdict. But on April 13, even as the court was considering his plea, he announced that he was stepping down as minister. “The anti-left coalition in the state can kill me; but they cannot defeat me,” he posted on social media after announcing his decision.

The incident related to the complaint happened barely two months after the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front came to power in 2016. On July 28 that year, Jaleel wrote to the general administration department recommending that the eligibility criteria for the post of general manager at MFDC be revised to suit his relative’s educational qualifica-

tion. The department replied that the criteria were fixed by the finance ministry after cabinet approval, and that any change would require cabinet nod. Jaleel, however, insisted that only the chief minister’s approval was needed as the specifics of the criteria were being expanded only and not necessarily changed. The chief minister’s office agreed with Jaleel’s contention and sanctioned his recommendation. The decision enabled the appointment of Jaleel’s cousin K.T. Adeeb, who had been an employee of a private-sector bank, as general manager “on deputation” at MFDC.

But Adeeb was soon forced to resign after his appointment sparked a political row. Jaleel had since been denying allegations of wrongdoing. “It is a case that has already been dismissed by the High Court,” he said after the lokayukta verdict. “The governor, too, had refused to entertain the complaint as there was no merit in it.”

But even as Jaleel filed a petition in the High Court against the lokayukta verdict, the opposition hit the streets demanding his resignation. “Jaleel has no moral right to continue,” said opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala. “Whenever the lokayukta has passed similar orders, the ministers concerned have resigned. That is the precedent.”

The state government, however, soon took up cudgels on Jaleel’s



behalf. “This was not an appointment but a deputation, and the said official was already drawing a higher salary [from the private-sector bank],” said Law Minister A.K. Balan. “Also, there is no rule that says that one cannot be appointed on deputation if he or she is the cousin of a minister.”

V. Muralreedharan, BJP leader and Union minister, said Chief Minister



FAHAD MUNEEK K.M.

The answer is that he entered the left front as a 'giant killer'. In the 2006 assembly polls, he defeated P.K. Kunhalikutty, the tallest leader of the Indian Union Muslim League in Kerala, in the party's bastion in Malappuram. Before he locked horns with Kunhalikutty and quit the IUML, Jaleel had been an up-and-coming leader of the IUML's youth body. He had entered politics

been an IUML bastion.

As he helped the CPI(M) make inroads in Malappuram, Jaleel increasingly became a powerful figure in the left coalition. In 2016, the coalition swept the assembly polls and Jaleel won from Thavanur, a constituency in the IUML heartland. He was the only independent MLA to be appointed minister in the Pinarayi Vijayan government.

In the past five years, Jaleel has faced a slew of allegations. He was alleged to have been involved in the gold smuggling case, which had led to the arrest of the chief minister's principal secretary last year. He was also questioned by the customs department after it was alleged that he had helped unlawfully import "250 cartons of the Quran into the state" using the diplomatic route.

Officials in the ministry say Jaleel does not care two hoots for procedures. "If he thinks something needs to be done, then he just takes a decision unilaterally," said a senior IAS officer who worked under Jaleel. "We have had a hard time with him."

Even as the CPI(M) leadership has been vigorously defending Jaleel, veteran party leaders have aired their disapproval. "Jaleel still has not come to terms with the LDF's style of functioning," senior CPI(M) leader told THE WEEK. "Like most IUML leaders in the [Congress-led] United Democratic Front, he gives scant regard for procedures. All that is okay within the IUML. But the public will not tolerate any such things from an LDF government. Jaleel is yet to realise that." ❶

“
Officials say Jaleel (in pic) does not care two hoots for procedures. “If he thinks something needs to be done, then he just takes a decision unilaterally,” said a senior IAS officer.

through the Students' Islamic Movement of India, an organisation that was later banned by the Union government.

As an independent legislator, Jaleel was an ideal find for the CPI(M), which had been struggling to find a foothold in Muslim-dominated constituencies in northern Kerala. As an intellectual who holds a PhD in history, Jaleel, too, was happy to join hands with the CPI(M). His oratorical skills and dynamism energised the party cadre in Malappuram district, which had for long

Pinarayi Vijayan should have asked Jaleel to step down the day the lokayukta passed the order. "Why is Jaleel getting preferential treatment that even CPI(M) ministers had not received?" he asked, referring to a similar situation in October 2016, when charges of nepotism forced party veteran E.P. Jayarajan to step down as minister. "It is as if Jaleel is the supreme Polit Bureau member of the CPI(M)."

So, what makes Jaleel so uniquely powerful?

RETURN OF FEAR

A health care worker collects a test swab from a man at a temporary shelter for homeless people in Delhi





INDIA ON GUARD

**THE SECOND WAVE OF
COVID-19 CAUGHT US LACKING
AND SLACKING. REINING IN
A RESURGENT VIRUS WOULD
NEED BETTER ADHERENCE TO
SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND A
MORE NUANCED APPROACH TO
VACCINATION**

BY REKHA DIXIT

Oorjita Lath had not stepped out of her Gurugram house or met anyone since mid-March. But on April 1, when vaccinations opened up for the 45+ age group, she went to a facility nearby to get her shot. A day later, she had fever, fatigue and aches that people said were known side-effects of the vaccine. When, five days later, her condition had not improved, she consulted a doctor through telemedicine, who recommended she get a Covid-19 test done. She tested positive. Subsequently, so did her husband and two daughters, all of whom are in home isolation, grappling with bone-breaking pain and fever. The doctor feels she picked up the bug from the vaccination centre.

Lath may have got the bug because the vaccine had not even had time to get cracking with producing antibodies. But across hospitals, doctors and health workers are testing positive in droves, despite having received both doses of the vaccine. A few had to be admitted, too, because of existing comorbidities. Reinfections in patients—around 1 per cent—may not be that rampant, but the numbers are enough to establish that acquired immunity does not last long. And at a time when fresh cases are rising, reinfections add to the load.

Then, there are patients returning to hospitals with complications developed as a result of the damage the disease wreaked on them. “We are seeing patients with lung fibrosis and kidney problems, all caused by their encounter with the virus,” says Dr Suranjit Chatterjee, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital’s senior consultant in internal medicine. By one rough estimate, 5 per cent of Covid-19 cases (which is a high number, say



SKewed PRIORITIES

A protest in Kolkata against holding elections during the pandemic

doctors) suffer from a condition called long Covid, which manifests itself in different ways—tremors even months after recovery, chest spasms, breathlessness, anxiety and erratic heartbeat. Not every doctor recognises that these are not just psychiatric issues that can be solved with counselling. The body, which had to go into fight mode to deal with the virus, produced adrenaline, and even months later, the adrenaline spikes continue. The treatment is through low-cost medication to counter the hormone, but it requires trained professionals to recognise this need.

Just when the nation was smugly patting itself on the back for having managed the pandemic rather well as compared with other countries, it

resurged with a vengeance. Ambulance sirens have begun pealing again, almost continuously in some parts. Comparisons with other countries often do not give the full picture. So, saying India has surpassed Brazil to second slot with highest daily cases may have policy makers rushing with different explanations. Look at it this way: In barely a month since the second wave, India has already surpassed its own previous highs of daily new cases, and the dying continues at alarming numbers. Last year, it took four months into the “wave” for deaths to reach the highest toll of 1,114 on a single day (mid-September). This time, within two months of the surge, the single-day death count has crossed 1,000. Union Health Sec-



SALIL BERA

On April 13, Delhi alone reported 72 deaths and more than 13,000 fresh infections. Only a few weeks ago, its daily rise was down to two digits.

retary Rajesh Bhushan was forced to admit that this was a cause for worry. While the death rate itself has not gone up—it is around 1 per cent as in last year—in sheer numbers it might increase as the case load rises to new highs.

On April 13, Delhi alone reported 72 deaths and more than 13,000 fresh infections. Only a few weeks ago, its daily rise was down to two digits and there were days with no recorded deaths. During its worst time last year, the daily hike was below 9,000. Daily cases are increasing by over a lakh nationally, and we do not even know whether this is the crest of the wave, or if the peak is yet to come. “This virus is like nothing we have

seen before,” says Chatterjee. In this fresh round, there are more symptomatic cases than asymptomatic, say doctors. And the below 40-population has been hit in a bigger way.

Over the last one year, the nation had prepared itself for the ongoing war against the virus. An ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ turned to desi production of both low-cost personal protection

equipment and high-tech life support systems. It ramped up pharmaceutical production and even developed vaccines. It developed a team of administrative officers, health workers and scientists who, having learnt through experience, were now expert hands and not shooting in the dark. With a varied arsenal, one would have thought the next battle would be easier to win.

But the SARS-CoV-2 virus had tricks up its sleeve. It came up with an updated version of itself, mutating into several variants, some of which are adept in the Houdini-like skills of immune escape and RT-PCR test evasion. Most importantly, though, the virus found a huge breach in the opponent’s defences—pandemic fatigue. With neither individuals nor systems stressing on the Covid-appropriate behaviour of masks, hand hygiene and social distancing, the virus found it easy to infect swathes of population. Perhaps it need not even have mutated to cause the present havoc, the territory was its for the taking. A population that had laid down its armour and was hedonistically celebrating festivals and marriages, congregating in droves at markets, election rallies and the Kumbh, was foolishly challenging a virus it had underestimated.

But was it really underestimation? Or, was it a case of deliberate blindness? There were examples from other countries, like the UK and Brazil, which went through second waves deadlier than the first. It is true that the virus has behaved unpredictably and all models that predicted its run have failed miserably. “There were colossal mistakes in the reading of the epidemic at the community level, and misleading narratives didn’t help,” says Samiran Panda, head of Indian Council of Medical Research’s epidemiology and communicable diseases division. “There were premature reports, based on limited sampling, which declared that over

half the population in Delhi, Pune and Vadodara was already seropositive and people began seeing a false dawn. Firstly, those studies were based on limited numbers. Secondly, three cities do not represent the entire nation. The National Serological Survey done by ICMR earlier this year clearly indicated that over 75 per cent of Indians were uninfected and therefore vulnerable.”

Yet, in the haste to push the pandemic behind, authorities prematurely wound up many of the special Covid-19 facilities that had been set up. To give the economy a boost, almost all restrictions, except in educational institutions, were lifted, the government leaving it to the people to be responsible for themselves. Thus, Pandemic 2.0 quickly stretched health capacities. Be it the corridors of upscale Lilavati hospital in Mumbai, where patients are spilling into corridors, or the Government Medical College Hospital in Nagpur, where 65 patients are crammed in a facility for 19, the situation is grim everywhere. And as Covid-19 cases flood hospitals, regular OPDs are shutting down again, creating a parallel health crisis. In Gujarat, crematoria are collapsing under the pressure of endless funerals. In Delhi, too, authorities are scrambling to find more space to bury the bodies.

Every resource is facing a crunch. Testing capacities have reached their limit. “Till we get more kits, how can we test anymore?” asks Tripti Shirke of SLR Diagnostics in Mumbai, which stopped taking fresh requests on April 10. The government has had to stop exports of remdesivir, the antiviral used for treating cases that land up in hospitals. “As practitioners, we now know what works and can manage cases better. However, our doctors and health workers have been fighting the war for a year now, and the fatigue is setting in. Many are themselves ill, or suffering long Covid. We are in for a tough ride over the



AMEY MANSABDAR

next two months,” says Dr Shuchin Bajaj, founder-director, Ujala Cygnus group of hospitals and core member of Project StepOne, an initiative started last year by doctors and paramedics nationwide to provide free treatment and care to patients.

As numbers began spiralling out of control, authorities did what they do best—indulge in a political slugfest. The Centre coined the poetical Vaccine Maitri term to describe its vaccine diplomacy, but back home, there is neither *maitri* (friendship) nor diplomacy where vaccines are concerned. The fight between the Centre and states (mostly non-BJP led ones) is an ugly and no-holds-barred one. In the most paradoxical of situations, states reported vaccine shortage and even shut down centres temporarily, while the Centre came out with figures highlighting the poor vaccination coverage among target groups, and worse, the high rates of vaccine wastage. “It is bad vaccine management,” claimed Bhushan.

Even mild-mannered Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan went ballistic, accusing states of diverting attention from their failures at handling the pandemic and making “deplorable attempts to spread panic”. He accused the Chhattisgarh government of having the “dubious



AP

distinction of being perhaps the only government in the world to have incited vaccine hesitancy”, since the state had initially refused to use Covaxin. Amid the squabbling, the Centre kept releasing graphs to show how its vaccination ramp-up was the fastest in the world, its coverage the most comprehensive.

The blame game has quietened a bit now, as states take a hard look at themselves and face even harder decisions of imposing fresh lockdowns. The nightmares of last year’s lockdowns have not left collective

LATE VIGIL

Health workers collect nasal swabs from passengers at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in Mumbai

HOLES ON THE WALL

Some vaccination centres in Mumbai have been turning away people due to a shortage



memories. States have the headache of holding state board examinations after CBSE announcement of cancelling X and postponing XII.

The narratives around the vaccine itself are many, and conflicting. Indifference towards vaccination is perhaps more responsible than vaccine hesitancy for the sluggish turnouts. Then, there are those who considered the vaccine as their licence to go back to the past 'normal', only to belatedly realise the limitations of these vaccines. "These are disease-modifying vaccines, not

disease prevention ones," says Panda. The message, however, has driven home only after a string of reports of post-vaccine infections.

While the demand from Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to open up vaccination to all may come from a political posturing, there is clearly a need to have a more nuanced approach towards vaccination. Right now, the Centre procures vaccines from manufacturers and allots them to states, whose task is to distribute them to centres and coordinate the vaccination. The Centre's policy is that with limited supplies, for the present, only the 45+ age group is eligible. India, however, is a young country, and 65 per cent of its population is below 35. This group also has comorbidities like autoimmune disorders and cancers, but so far, is ineligible for vaccination. "We should not have a situation of black markets and stampedes, but the vaccination process should become more open now, so that those who need the vaccine get it, as against those who want it," says Bajaj.

The Centre's tight control over vaccination has already resulted in Serum Institute of India having problems with AstraZeneca for reneging on international commitments. The grand plan of garnering the international market did not take off as envisaged when manufacturing capacities remained limited. You cannot claim to be vaccinator of the world, and then regulate exports. To give desi industry a fillip, the Centre was also slow in allowing other firms in. On April 13, it finally announced that it will give Emergency Use Approval without mandatory clinical trials to Covid-19 vaccines developed and manufactured in other countries, which have been cleared by the drug regulatory authorities of the US, European Union, the UK and Japan, or which are listed by the World Health Organization for emergency

use. This announcement, following close to the import approval to the Russian-made Sputnik vaccine (which will subsequently also be manufactured by Indian partners like Dr Reddy's) will augment the vaccine basket and, hopefully, inject the much-needed vigour into the vaccination programme. Perhaps, in a later move, these vaccines may also be available commercially.

None of these vaccines, experts are quick to warn, will stop the chain of transmission, and any premature lowering of guard will be extremely foolhardy. Bad as the situation now seems, it could get much worse if the virus spreads rampantly across the country. So far, the bulk of the cases—85 per cent—are restricted to 10 states, including Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Gujarat, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Admittedly, more testing, as is done in these states, also throws up more cases. Its spread into Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh, which were previously rather unaffected, is a portent that needs to be heeded. With the poorer infrastructure of the less developed states, India could head for an unprecedented crisis. "Vaccination will continue to be important in limiting hospital admissions, in addition to a strong adherence to Covid-19 appropriate protocol," says Panda. Vaccine acquired immunity will augment the natural acquired immunity in ending the pandemic one day.

And where exactly is that day? "Given that all predictive models have failed, we can only go back to history and understand the progress of the Spanish flu a hundred years ago. It came in big waves and then disappeared on its own after around two years, without a vaccine," says Bajaj.

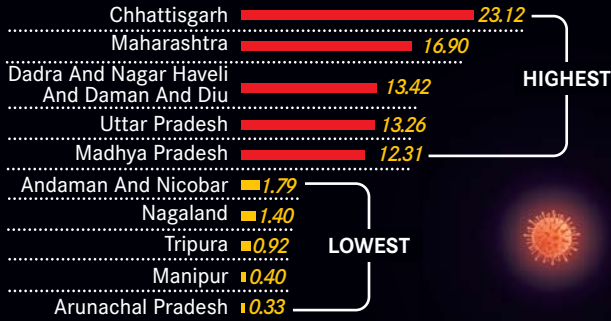
There is hope that scientists might develop a vaccine that can break the chain of transmission. Till then, the masks stay firmly in place.

with Pooja Biraia Jaiswal

THE SECOND WAVE

ACTIVE RATIO (%)

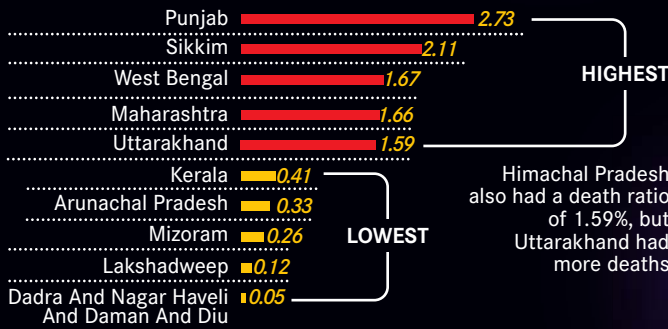
ACTIVE CASES AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CASES



TOTAL CASES

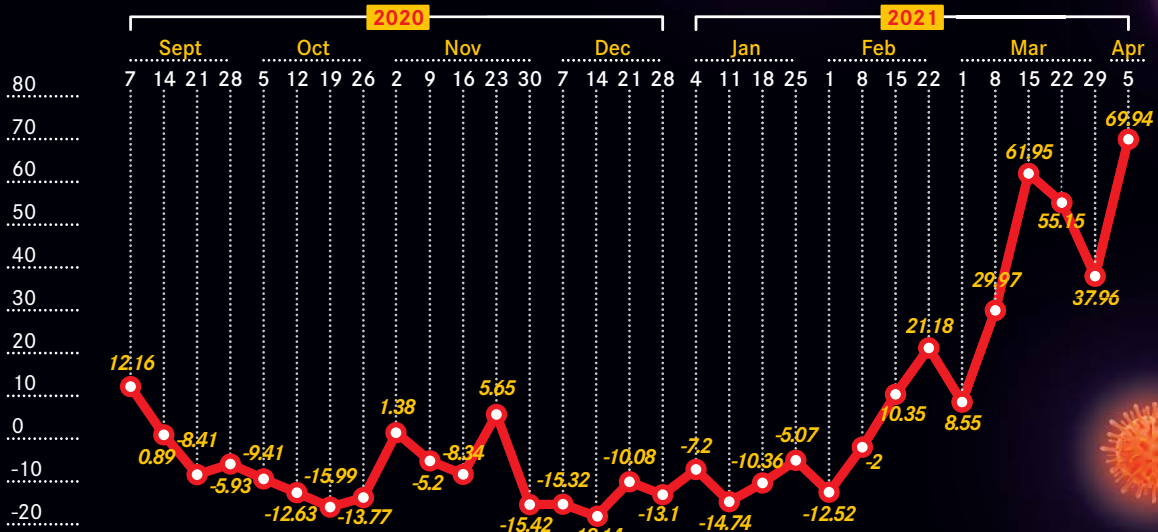
DEATH RATIO (%)

DEATHS AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CASES



WEEKLY CHANGE IN COVID-19 CASES IN INDIA

SINCE THE PEAK OF THE FIRST WAVE IN SEPTEMBER 2020 (%)



SOURCES MYGOV.IN AND WHO



MAHARASHTRA
35,19,208

KERALA
11,80,397

KARNATAKA
10,83,647

TAMIL NADU
9,47,129

ANDHRA PRADESH
9,32,892

DELHI
7,50,156

UTTAR PRADESH
7,23,582

WEST BENGAL
6,24,224

CHHATTISGARH
4,71,994

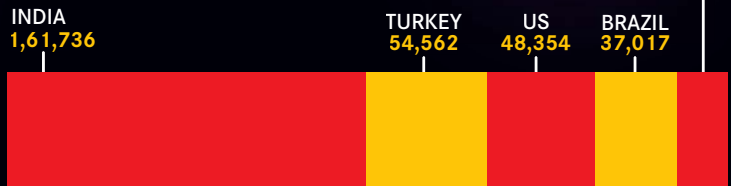
RAJASTHAN
3,75,092

Note: Data as of April 14

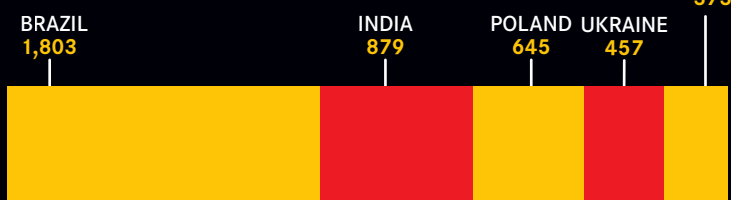


24-HOUR SPIKE

CASES



DEATHS

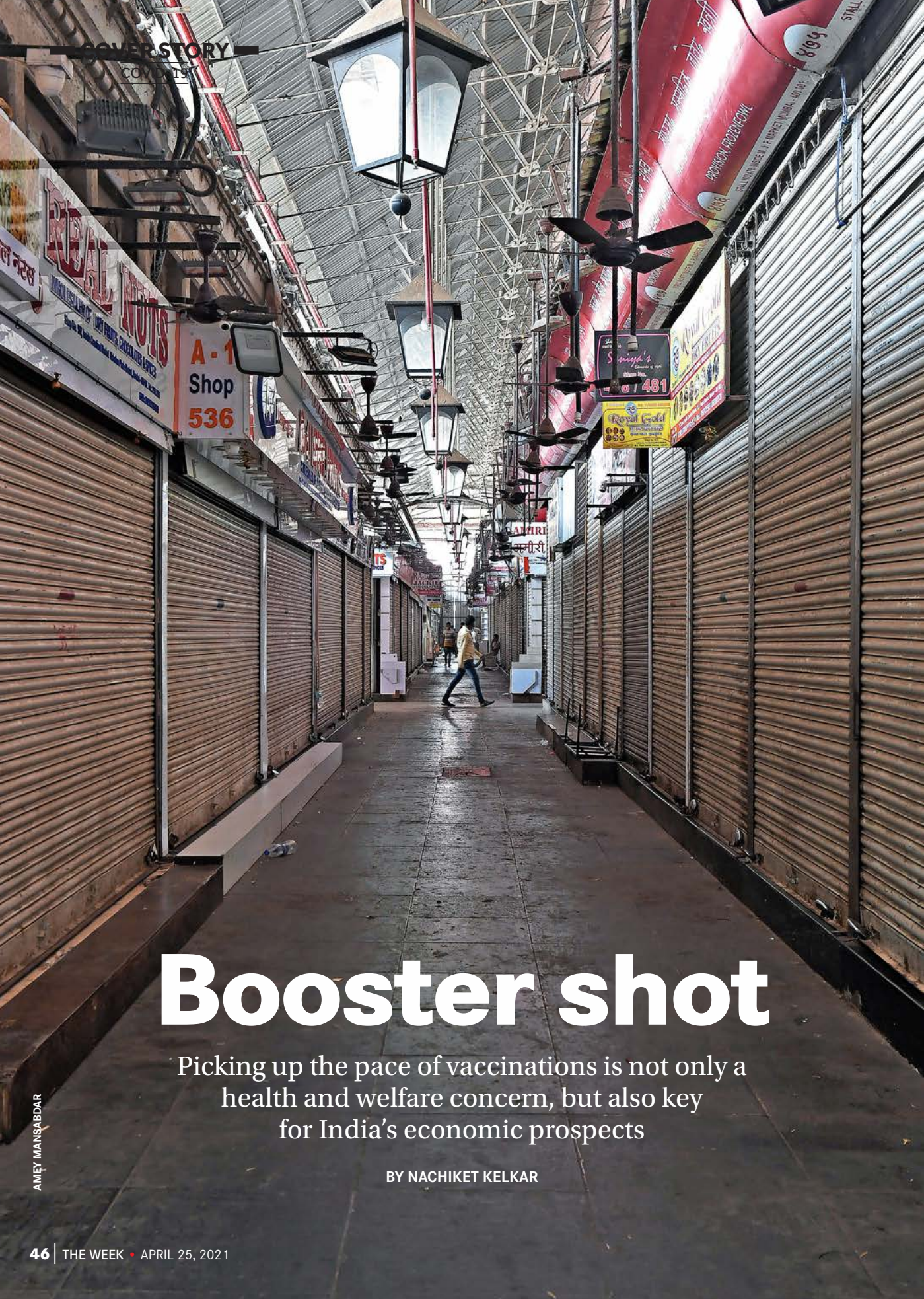


Note: WHO data as of April 13

TOTAL VACCINATED

AS ON APRIL 13

MAHARASHTRA	1,07,53,947
RAJASTHAN	1,00,80,932
UTTAR PRADESH	97,19,899
GUJARAT	97,05,299
WEST BENGAL	83,45,753
MADHYA PRADESH	65,61,386
KARNATAKA	64,46,477
KERALA	52,67,532
BIHAR	50,50,288
CHHATTISGARH	45,60,518
ODISHA	44,44,241
TAMIL NADU	40,21,060
ANDHRA PRADESH	39,18,529
HARYANA	26,58,779
JHARKHAND	25,06,678
TELANGANA	23,18,292
DELHI	23,04,986
PUNJAB	20,02,937
ASSAM	15,50,113
JAMMU AND KASHMIR	14,20,799
UTTARAKHAND	14,03,195
HIMACHAL PRADESH	11,11,867
TRIPURA	8,42,397
GOA	1,92,556
MEGHALAYA	1,52,855
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	1,51,893
MANIPUR	1,39,978
SIKKIM	1,35,661
PUDUCHERRY	1,29,271
CHANDIGARH	1,26,849
NAGALAND	1,20,854
MIZORAM	1,13,106
DADRA AND NAGAR HAVELI AND DAMAN AND DIU	76,065
LADAKH	75,319
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR	48,901
LAKSHADWEEP	14,571



Booster shot

Picking up the pace of vaccinations is not only a health and welfare concern, but also key for India's economic prospects

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

AMEY MANSABDAR

INDIA'S ECONOMY CAME to a grinding halt after the lockdown in March 2020; the GDP contracted 23.9 per cent in the April-June quarter. However, as the restrictions were eased, the rebound was sharp, across the board—be it passenger vehicle sales, airline traffic, industrial production or retail consumption. But, the second wave of Covid-19 now threatens the nascent economic recovery.

The situation is already bad in Maharashtra, one of India's most industrialised states. The state government has imposed Section 144 till May 1. While it is not a complete lockdown, there are major restrictions, including closure of non-essential retail, hotels and bars. Manufacturing, not part of essential services and not export oriented, has been closed, too. Several other states such as Delhi, Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, have night curfews.

The restrictions are already having an impact on business across the country. As per the Confederation of All India Traders, retail business fell 30 per cent in one week, while consumer footfalls reduced by almost 50 per cent. People reducing travel is affecting airlines, too. In the week ended March 27, there were 2.51 lakh average daily fliers, according to ICICI Securities. This reduced to 2.39 lakh in the week ended April 3.

The hospitality industry, too, is set to take a big hit with international travel restricted and domestic travel plans being postponed. In 2020, hotel occupancy rates in Delhi tumbled 32 per cent, while Bengaluru saw a 39 per cent slump, as per consulting firm JLL. It stated that the surge would have some impact on both

OUT OF BUSINESS

Crawford Market, one of the busiest markets in Mumbai, is largely deserted these days after the government imposed restrictions



SALIL BERA

SAFE JOURNEY
Pilots at Kolkata airport

commercial and leisure hotel markets across the country. In particular, business travel, which accounts for a lion's share of the market, is expected to see a muted recovery.

Several festivals—like Gudi Padwa, Ugadi, Vishu, Vaisakhi, Bihu and Chaitra Navratri—fall in April. However, Covid-19 has dampened overall consumer sentiments and this is likely to have an impact on automotive sales, said the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association of India. “Fear among consumers has started keeping them away from making high-ticket purchases,” it said. “The effects of the same can be seen in the two-wheeler category, where inquiry levels are low.” Maharashtra contributes around 10 per cent to 11 per cent of the auto retail market and the current lockdown will have “catastrophic effect” on overall sales in April, it added.

The services sector undoubtedly has been impacted a lot, because of the restrictions across states. But, a fall in consumer demand will also have an impact on industrial

production. Manufacturing activity already remains weak, with the index of industrial production contracting 3.6 per cent in February. Industry body CII conducted a poll of 710 CEOs and as many as 75 per cent of them indicated that they expect partial lockdown measures could impact the movement of labour and goods, which would affect industrial production significantly.

Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ratings agency ICRA, said the immediate impact of localised restrictions will be on contact-intensive services (such as tourism). “The impact on the wider economy will depend on how long the surge continues and to what extent additional restrictions are imposed,” she said. “The pace of GVA (gross value added) growth in Q1 of FY22 may be restricted to 20 per cent to 25 per cent, the way the restrictions are panning out, versus our earlier expectation of a 27.5 per cent growth.” She added that growth though restricted would still be high given the low base of the lockdown in April-May 2020.



AMEY MANSABDAR

Further disruption in economic activity in key states would be a setback for fragile business sentiment and will, in turn, weigh on NPAs.

MATTER OF LIVELIHOOD

Traders in Mumbai staging a protest against the restrictions imposed by the state government

Ratings and multilateral agencies forecast a double-digit rebound in India's economy this year. Credit ratings agency S&P forecasts a growth of 11 per cent. Fitch sees the GDP growth even higher, at 12.8 per cent. However, controlling Covid-19 remains key, said S&P.

Last year's lockdown resulted in a rise in non-performing assets. Further disruption in economic activity in key states would be a setback for fragile business sentiment and will, in turn, weigh on NPAs. They are already expected to have risen in the

previous quarter, after the apex court lifted the moratorium on loans announced post the lockdown last year. But, despite Covid-19 cases hitting record highs, the impact of current restrictions is unlikely to be as big as that of the last lockdown, say analysts. Sonal Varma, chief India economist at Nomura Securities, said: "Lockdown measures are less draconian and it is being countered by an aggressive vaccination campaign." But Varma feels that a worsening second wave could have an impact on GDP growth in the April-June quarter. Nomura has lowered its 2021 full year GDP growth estimate to 11.5 per cent from 12.4 per cent.

Employment in February 2021 compared with the average of 2019-2020 shows a loss of three million jobs among business persons, of 3.8

million jobs among salaried employees and 4.2 million among daily-wage earners, as per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). Mahesh Vyas, MD and CEO of CMIE, said that the recovery of jobs seemed to have stopped 2 per cent short of its earlier level. "Recovery of non-farm jobs seems to have stopped 4 per cent short," he said. "It is important that a fresh lockdown does not make this worse. Vaccines and masks are a better bet."

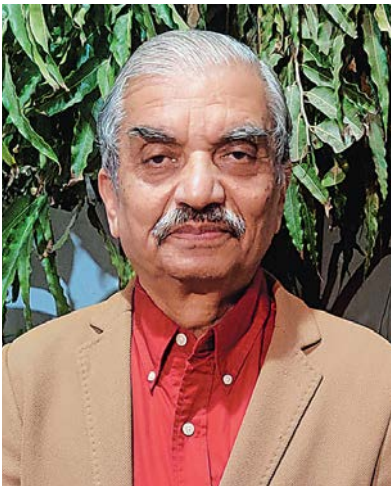
With India approving a third vaccine for emergency use, the hope is that the Centre will now focus on how people could be vaccinated speedily. "Vaccinating a much larger proportion of the population will be vital for India's growth prospects," noted S&P. The bottom line then is that inoculating the population fast and effectively may well help in saving livelihoods, too, not just lives. ●

■ INTERVIEW

Dr N.K. Arora,
*chair, Covid subcommittee of
National Technical Advisory
Group on Immunisation*

No value in vaccinating everyone at this stage

BY REKHA DIXIT



The second wave hit India despite the vaccine rollout. And, vaccinated people are now getting infected.

The vaccine was never expected to stop any wave, second or otherwise. All the Covid-19 vaccines available in the world right now have this handicap, that they cannot stop transmission of the virus. This is unlike the vaccines for polio or smallpox, which can interrupt transmission and thereby eradicate the disease eventually.

The Covid-19 vaccine will only help in reducing the severity of the disease. Thus, the aim of the vaccination programme right now is, firstly, to reduce the proportion of symptomatic individuals, and secondly, to reduce the hospitalisation and death rate.

Most of those who have got infection after vaccination have had mild

symptoms, not requiring hospitalisation. Also, they got the infection because they lowered their guard after getting the shots.

With post-vaccination infections, won't the vaccination drive get a setback as people question the point of taking the shots?

I think the messaging on 'why the vaccination' is loud and clear, but it has to be re-emphasised. Vaccines can reduce severity of the infection by as much as 70 per cent. That is almost akin to being hit by a common cold. Otherwise, patients could get into distress and even lose lives.

There is a rising clamour for universal adult vaccination.

There is no value in vaccinating everyone at this stage. The value is in reducing hospitalisation and eliminating fatality. This is why the vaccination programme is targeting those at highest risk, so that we do not end up losing our loved ones.

What, then, do you recommend be done to stop the virus?

The most effective way continues to be to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour. The three-pronged strategy of wearing masks, observing hand hygiene and social distancing are the most effective. Why is wearing masks becoming such a problem? In India,

we regularly use the *pallu* or *gamcha* (stole or towel) to cover our faces; in urban areas, people use scarves for protection from pollution and sun. Then, why is it becoming so difficult to wear a mask? And, hand hygiene is a good habit to inculcate anyway. I understand maintaining social distancing at all times may be difficult, especially in a country as populated as ours. But we are getting lax with the other two approaches, too.

When can we ever hope for the transmission chain to break?

Hopefully, by the end of the year, there will be vaccines that are able to intercept transmission.

Among people who have recovered from Covid-19, there are reports of tremors, palpitations and other complications.

There is actually a term for these complications; we call it long Covid. It is the residual impact of being hit by the disease. It is more evident among the elderly who have recovered. We have seen that even those who did not have diabetes or hypertension or respiratory problems earlier do display these after they recover. Here is another reason why the elderly need the vaccine more than others. It is still a new disease and we are learning more as we progress. ●

SAFFRON ON RED

Can left veteran Ashok Bhattacharya overcome the BJP's surge in Siliguri?

BY RABI BANERJEE

He was once called the king of Siliguri. But veteran communist leader Ashok Bhattacharya's influence in the north Bengal city seems to be waning. This was evident in the thin crowd of supporters around him as he went about seeking votes for the seventh consecutive time. The sitting MLA has won all but one (2011) election from Siliguri since 1991.

Once a heavyweight minister in the Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee governments, Bhattacharya was seen as a development man who brought together the varied sections of the Siliguri population. The city is close to Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Tibet, and is seen as an important strategic point for India.

Wearing a plain shirt and crumpled trousers, Bhattacharya extended his hands to voters while campaigning. "Vote for our future. Do not vote emotionally," he told them. The people smiled, but did not commit. The violence in the state has marred the flavour of the elections this time.

Bhattacharya, who has previously survived challenges from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress, is now on a sticky wicket because of the recent saffron surge. His confidant Sankar

Ghosh has joined the BJP. An internal study by the BJP had found that it was Bhattacharya and not Mamata, who was its main challenge in Siliguri. And so, a coup was apparently arranged. Ghosh and several others switched to the BJP. He will now take on Bhattacharya.

Asked about this, an unflustered Bhattacharya said, "I am not at all worried about who has left me. I have groomed many others. If they desert me, it is their own problem. Mind my words, I will win this seat again."

Bhattacharya is also known as the bridge between the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the influential people in the state, including superstar actors and sports legends.

And so, apart from ideological

Bhattacharya was seen as a development man who brought together the varied sections of the Siliguri population.



differences with the Marxists, the BJP was reportedly more annoyed about Bhattacharya dissuading former Indian captain Sourav Ganguly from entering politics. Senior BJP leaders had been wooing the BCCI president to join their party. A confused Ganguly had reportedly reached out to Bhattacharya, who told him: "Politics should not be your cup of tea. As a player, you are loved by everyone. Do not split your fans on the basis of their political affiliations." Ganguly has decided to stay away from politics for the time being.

Bhattacharya smiled when asked about it. He admitted that he had been in regular touch with Ganguly. "He is a Bengal cricket legend," he said. "He fell ill. He is popular across Bengal, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Should I not give him a suggestion about entering politics?"

Did Ganguly call him when he decided to contest? "He called and wished me luck," said Bhattacharya. "I have always maintained good rela-



SALIL BERA

LONE STAR

Ashok Bhattacharya during the campaign

win? “You only look at the TMC and the BJP,” he said. “Do not fail to see the undercurrent in favour of the united front, which was seen in 1967 and 1969.”

One of the reasons for Bhattacharya’s confidence was his party’s forward-looking candidate list. “We have fielded young faces in a majority of the seats. They will be the future of our party,” he said.

Should the CPI(M) not have done this before? “You are right,” he said. “Perhaps things would have been different then.”

The BJP, meanwhile, is confident that its recent rise will see it through. “We will win Siliguri with a huge margin,” said BJP district president Praveen Agarwal. “In fact, we will win most seats in North Bengal. There is a wave in the BJP’s favour.”

The people of Siliguri, however, are non-committal. “Ashok *babu* has a chance, but this time no one can say who will win,” said Swapan Majumdar, a local trader. “The BJP is gaining ground each day. We are confused.”

He said people had suffered a lot during the pandemic. “Our hospitals lacked facilities,” he said. “Many people died without being treated. Business also suffered. So, a section of people in Siliguri would show their anger through voting.”

Sources said Mamata has been trying to woo Bhattacharya for the past few years. Perhaps seeing the rise of the BJP, she has scaled down her attack on Bhattacharya. But he rejected all such advances. Many people said that Mamata has put up a weak candidate—Jadavpur University professor Om Prakash Mishra—against Bhattacharya this time. Both the BJP and the CPI(M) have local candidates. The Trinamool, however, has denied that there was any such adjustment. ❶

tions with good people like Ganguly.”

Apparently, Bhattacharya has admirers in other sports, too. Former Indian football captain Bhaichung Bhutia, who contested against Bhattacharya in 2016, has wished him luck this time. Bhutia, who also contested and lost the 2014 Lok Sabha elections on a Trinamool ticket, said, “There cannot be a better man than Ashok *da*. He is such a gentleman. He should win.”

Bhattacharya laughed when told about Bhutia’s statement. “Not only has Bhaichung decided to issue a statement supporting me,” he said, “but also he would love to campaign for me. I am extremely happy seeing his love for me.”

Though Bhattacharya is sure of his victory, the religious polarisation in Siliguri could spoil his chances. The constituency has around 30 per cent of non-Bengali voters, who are mostly Marwaris, Biharis, Gorkhas, Bhutias and Lepchas. The BJP has increased its vote share among this

group since 2014. It has become more popular with the Bengalis, too. Given that the Trinamool would also be a key player in the fight to corner the Bengali vote, should Bhattacharya not be more worried? “I do not think so,” he said. “Religious polarisation would not work in Siliguri. Also, non-Bengalis and other ethnic groups like the Gorkhas like me as well.”

He said everyone should be alarmed over the recent killing of four people (Muslims) in police firing and a Rajbangshi man, reportedly by his political opponents, at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar. “Both the BJP and the TMC are playing the communal card,” he said. “They are not thinking of the region, which is very crucial for India’s integrity. Politicians need to be responsible, otherwise North Bengal will go the northeast way. I am happy that the Hindu-Muslim game will not work in Siliguri; demographically, it cannot be played here.”

Was this why he thought he would

■ INTERVIEW

Sunil Arora,
former chief election commissioner

There is a pattern to the attack on Central forces in Bengal

BY SONI MISHRA

Sunil Arora, who demitted office on April 12, chose THE WEEK for his last interview as chief election commissioner. He said he was anguished over the constant attacks the commission faced, especially from the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal. He also said that the attacks on Central forces in West Bengal was worrying and had a pattern.

On West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee terming the death of four persons in the Central Industrial Security Force firing in Cooch Behar a genocide, he said the commission would go through the reported statement and discuss what was to be done.

Excerpts from the interview:

Q/You had described holding Bihar elections amid Covid-19 a “leap of faith”.

A/Conducting elections in Bihar, with 7.3 crore voters, has become a watershed moment in the history of elections worldwide. It was indeed a leap of faith, but not a leap in the dark.... The commission’s confidence was based on meticulous advance work done by our officers. I have to

compliment the Bihar bureaucracy, too. Some of the officers contracted Covid-19, but they jumped back right in as soon as they recovered. A new parameter was added in the context of Covid-19, which is having a safe election.

Q/We have another round of elections amid a pandemic.

A/While planning the Bihar elections, the commission deliberated with political entities, the state chief electoral officer and health ministry officials, and came up with broad guidelines for conduct of election during Covid-19 in August 2020 itself. The updated guidelines have been reiterated for the ongoing elections.

Q/But you must be concerned about the crowds in rallies.

A/The commission reiterated the Covid-19 guidelines in an advisory sent to all political parties recently, and we plan to take some drastic action in the coming days. Our submission is that we require the willing cooperation of political parties.

Q/The commission is being attacked regularly by the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal.

A/The commission has been inter-



ARVIND JAIN

acting regularly with representatives of the political party whenever they have sought time. The allegations seem only an attempt to belittle the institution with repeated innuendos and averments. The commission maintains the position that we would not like being put in the dock for alleged proximity to any political entity.

Q/There is constant criticism of Central forces deployed in West Bengal.



A/The systematic attacks on the uniformed forces is quite worrying. In the notice issued to the most senior leader of the Trinamool Congress, we mentioned that there is a pattern to it. They had initially raised the issue about the Border Security Force allegedly threatening villagers, but did not provide any concrete evidence. We should not castigate any force, be it Central or state, anecdotally and demoralise them.

Q/Mamata Banerjee called the Cooch Behar incident a genocide.

A/Anybody who uses the word 'genocide' could perhaps first Google to check what it means. But if it has indeed been said, we will get the text and go through it. The commission will discuss what is to be done.

Q/How big a concern was the use of money power in Tamil Nadu?

A/For the Tamil Nadu elections, the commission deployed 118 expenditure observers. It also appointed two special expenditure observers for more focused monitoring and to curb distribution of cash, liquor, drugs, precious metals and freebies. Of the 234 constituencies, 118 were marked as expenditure sensitive. Cash, liquor and narcotics worth ₹446.28 crore were seized.

Q/When will remote voting become a reality?

A/A large number of voters are outside the spectrum of voting on account of their physical location, because of their occupation or education or other reasons. The commission had earlier this year started a research project for enabling remote voting for such voters in consultation with IIT Madras and eminent technologists from IITs and other institutions. A dedicated team has been working hard to give shape to this project. Hopefully, it will see the light of day by 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Q/Is there a proposal to allow NRIs to vote using e-postal ballot?

A/The commission has taken up a proposal to amend the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to facilitate electronically transmitted postal ballot system for overseas electors. The matter is under consideration with the ministry of external affairs.

Q/At what stage is the proposal to link voter ID cards with Aadhaar?

A/The commission has proposed to

link electoral roll with Aadhaar to curb multiple enrolment of persons. Amendments need to be made in The Representation of the People Act, 1950, and in the Aadhaar Act for permitting the election machinery to obtain and use Aadhaar numbers for purposes of electoral roll. The matter is under the government's consideration.

Q/There are demands that the proportion of EVMs taken up for VVPAT verification be increased.

A/The issue of 100 per cent counting of VVPAT slips was raised by various political parties during the 2019 Parliamentary elections and some petitions were also filed in high courts and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has held that the number of EVMs subjected to VVPAT verification would be five per assembly constituency or assembly segment in a Parliamentary seat.

Q/Experts have raised issues of transparency with regard to electoral bonds.

A/The matter is sub-judice. The commission has already furnished its reply before the Supreme Court. Earlier, the commission sent a letter to the ministry of law and justice, dated May 26, 2017, highlighting issues such as non-reporting of receipts through electoral bonds in contribution leading to opacity regarding receipts from prohibited sources; non-disclosure of political party-wise donations by corporate entities due to amendments in the Companies Act, 2013; and removal of limit of 7.5 per cent of average net profits in the preceding three financial years, which could give rise to the possibility of use of shell companies to make political donations.

For full interview,

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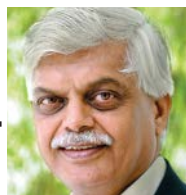
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Power elite? Who? Me?

Few among the power elite in India seem willing to be classified as such. It seems a very Indian thing, this faux humility. The upper castes claim they no longer are the privileged. Business elites complain that politicians and bureaucrats have more power. Politicians lament that they are beholden to vote banks and money bags. Bureaucrats say they have always been only civil servants. All this adds to the additional complication that in India there are multiple hierarchies of power defined by class, caste, language, culture and so on. So, who are the power elite?

An amusing reaction to my new book, *India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution*, has been a universal denial of their elite status and their elitism by the powerful. The IAS will tell you that they are no longer the elite corps they once were and that colleagues in the police and revenue services now rule the bureaucratic roost. Business leaders draw attention to tax raids and regulations to point fingers at politicians as the really powerful. Either money no longer fetches power or far too much of it is demanded in exchange for too little patronage. Military officers argue that they have been excessively subordinated to civilian control. Celebrities in the world of media, academia and even entertainment question my arguments about their power, drawing attention to the many attacks on their freedom by politicians in power. Even a powerful prime minister complains that government officials have become roadblocks and bottlenecks in governance. So, who are India's power elite?

When American sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote his classic study on *The Power Elite* (1956) in the United States, he had no problem identifying who controlled the levers of power in 'post-war' Amer-

ica. Business barons, military leaders, wealthy and influential celebrities and well-heeled politicians were Mills's power elite. "The power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences," wrote Mills. "They are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of the state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centred the effective means of the power and the wealth and the celebrity status which they enjoy."

Inspired by Mills's classic, I tried to define the Indian power elite and soon came up against the complexity of our society. Apart from the obvious additional dimension added by caste, the Indian reality presents a matrix of cross-cutting hierarchies that few sociologists have been able to clearly delineate in terms of their power. The socialist leader and political guru of the so-called "other backward classes," Ram Manohar Lohia, offered a simple definition of who constitutes India's power elite by identifying three features—upper caste status, inherited wealth and command over the English language.

This simple definition, offered in the 1960s, has been challenged by the social, economic, political and what I define as cultural change over the past half century. Middle castes have acquired as much, if not more, political power as the upper castes; power has yielded wealth for the newly rich; and, English language is no longer such an important social differentiator. Change is afoot and my book tries to capture this change. Interestingly, many from the 'old elite' have called to concede the decline in their social standing, but many among the 'new elite' are irritated about being so identified.



Baru is an economist and a writer. He was adviser to former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

Fit for the future

DRDO labs are being closed or merged to prevent duplication and to focus on futuristic technologies

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

ON JULY 14, 2017, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was scheduled to present his government's first budget in the assembly. Suddenly, alarms were raised when a loosely wrapped paper packet containing about 150gm of white powder was found on the premises. Multiple forensic agencies said that it could be PETN (pentaerythritol tetranitrate), a powerful plastic explosive.

Soon, sleuths from the National Investigation Agency flew in, gathered samples and sent it to the Defence Research and Development Organisation's Laser Science and Technology Centre (LASTEC). Within hours, LASTEC gave its analysis; the powder was harmless. Founded in 1958, LASTEC is the DRDO's mother lab—more than 15 defence laboratories were born as its sub-projects.

LASTEC was working on everything from laser dazzlers for mob control to high-powered lasers that can take out aerial threats. It was also in charge of India's 'Star Wars' project (Project Aditya), which was based on directed energy weapons. But, LASTEC was closed down last November in line with the DRDO's new makeover plan.

Major changes are afoot at the six-decade-old research organisation. Going forward, the DRDO is aiming to focus on high-end and futuristic

technology for air, ground, maritime and space systems. This means offloading "redundant" tasks, which academia or industry can do.

The unprecedented shake-up is the outcome of recommendations by a committee headed by V. Ramagopal Rao, director, IIT Delhi. The committee included S. Somnath, director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre; Air Marshal Sandeep Singh, deputy chief of air staff; Samir V. Kamat, director general, Naval Systems and Materials, DRDO; and Benjamin Lionel, director, Instruments Research and Development Establishment (IRDE), DRDO. The committee was set up in August 2020 and reviewed the charter of duties of DRDO laboratories and suggested steps to redefine the system for "current and futuristic defence and battlefield scenarios". Part of the recommendations dealt with minimising overlap among laboratories.

"Contactless warfare" has already been recognised as the future of conflict. A senior Army officer pointed out that Saudi Arabia's advanced air defence system failed to stop cheap, low-flying drones and cruise missiles launched by Houthi rebels based in Yemen against an Aramco facility.

India is among the world's top five defence spenders, but it puts little focus on advanced or futur-



LONG SHOT
The DRDO stall at Aero India 2021

istic technology. Military analysts say that most of India's defence manufacturing achievements are limited to outdated tanks, guns, helicopters and weapon platforms, or the setting up of manufacturing units to make foreign weapons after a technology transfer. Moreover, despite its network of 52 laboratories across the country, the DRDO has often faced criticism over delayed projects, missed deadlines and huge cost overruns. Defence scientists



BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

have received flak not only from the military, but also from parliamentary panels and the comptroller and auditor general.

Dr William Selvamurthy, a distinguished scientist who served as chief controller, research and development (life sciences and international cooperation), at DRDO, said that the changes were the need of the hour. "In view of the emerging trends and technology and looking towards futuristic technology, performance

Military analysts say that most of India's defence manufacturing achievements are limited to outdated tanks, guns, helicopters and weapon platforms.

of the scientific community also has to be geared up," he said. He added that, for the first time since its inception, the DRDO was reinventing itself into a consolidated unit. Selvamurthy also said that managing a network of 52 labs was challenging.

The Defence Terrain Research Laboratory (DTRL), LASTEC, System Analysis and Modelling, and the Advanced Numerical Research and Analysis Group are no longer functional as independent entities. The

DTRL, which provided geospatial solutions and terrain intelligence to the armed forces, and the Chandigarh-based Snow and Avalanche Studies Establishment were combined to create the Defence Geological Research Establishment. The new entity has now been tasked with providing an assessment of the flash floods that devastated Uttarakhand earlier this year. The LASTEC team was divided between the Centre for High Energy Systems and Sciences, and the IRDE.

Efforts are also on to club the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences, and the Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences. The Defence Institute of High Altitude Research, the Defence Institute of Bio-Energy Research and the Defence Research Laboratory, too, might be merged. Some DRDO labs might also be transferred to other entities like the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). There is already an attempt to foster coordination between the Defence Food Research Laboratory and the Central Food Technological Research Institute of the CSIR.

Considering the changes, it seems that the DRDO is looking to follow the DARPA model in the US. DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) was created in 1958—the same year as the DRDO. Its principle, according to its website, is that the US should be “the initiator and not the victim of strategic technological surprises”.

Lieutenant General D.S. Hooda, who was Northern Army commander during the 2016 surgical strike, said that the annual DARPA budget is around \$3 billion, while the DRDO gets close to \$2.5 billion. Then, why does DARPA accomplish so much more than the DRDO, he asked. “To my understanding, the majority of the DRDO budget goes into running these large number of laboratories,” he said. He added that DARPA is

DRDO REDO

CLOSED

Laser Science and Technology Centre

Defence Terrain Research Laboratory

System Analysis and Modelling

Advanced Numerical Research and Analysis Group

MERGERS/TRANSFERS*

Defence Avionics Research Establishment into Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (CAIR)

Scientific Analysis Group into CAIR

Vehicles Research and Development Establishment, and Research and Development Establishment (Engineers) into Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment

Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences, and Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences

Defence Institute of High Altitude Research, Defence Institute of Bio-Energy Research, and Defence Research Laboratory

High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, and Defence Food Research Laboratory will be handed over to Council of Scientific and Industrial Research

*Including proposed mergers

RESEARCH PRADIP R. SAGAR

merely a funding agency with no laboratories or research staff; all research is contracted to universities, industry and government R&D institutions. “On the other hand, the DRDO has around 30,000 employees, of which only 30 per cent are scientists,” he said.

He added that while it may not be easy to emulate the DARPA model at this stage, the DRDO should at least get rid of some of its ongoing tasks (like labs producing food). “Focus should be on high-end technology, artificial intelligence, robotics and

high-end communication technology,” he said. In a report to the national security advisory board in 2018, Hooda had recommended forming a directorate of future technology with scientists and military officers on board. Recently, the DRDO directed all its technology clusters to create a dedicated team of scientists with a mandate to focus only on futuristic technology in their respective departments.

Defence scientists claim that for several years, the DRDO was mandated to meet the immediate demands of the armed forces. This left hardly any money to focus on future technology. Ravi Gupta, a former defence scientist, said India's spending on defence research has been low, while countries like the US spend close to 15 per cent of their defence budget on it. “We were mandated to indigenise existing military platforms,” Gupta said. He added that as technology progressed, quite a few areas within the DRDO overlapped and work got duplicated.

There have been other attempts in the past to restructure the DRDO. Notably, the P. Rama Rao Committee had in 2008 recommended that the DRDO concentrate only on “core technology” of “strategic importance” instead of venturing into making juice, mosquito repellent, titanium dental implants and so on. The committee had also suggested making the DRDO a leaner organisation.

Looks like the 2020 committee has finally got through. It remains to be seen how this rather late orientation towards futuristic technology will play out for the DRDO. Apprehensive about the restructuring, a senior defence scientist said the effectiveness of the exercise would depend on whether it is a mixture or a compound (a mixture does not lose properties of its constituents). “To my understanding, it should be a compound,” he said. 📌

For the savvy investor

If you are ready to stay invested for at least three years, focused category of funds is a good bet

BY TEJAS G.V.



THE EQUITY MARKETS

worldwide witnessed a tumultuous period a year ago. However, their comeback has

been equally fascinating. The Indian equity markets have almost doubled between March 2020 and March 2021. In such a situation, the feeling to be part of the journey is natural for those who have not yet invested in the markets in one form or the other. For those who are already invested, finding a good investment vehicle that gives a good mix of diversification and return is a struggle. If you fall in any of the two categories mentioned above, it is time for you to consider focused equity funds.

What is a focused fund category?

As per the mutual fund categorisation defined by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), a focused fund is a special category of equity mutual funds that focusses on a relatively small number of stocks. While there is no restriction on choosing the stocks, the scheme is only allowed to invest in a maximum of 30 stocks.

This fund is different in a few ways. As highlighted above, it invests only in up to 30 stocks, while most other open-ended equity mutual funds do not have such a restriction. You can also consider these funds to be somewhere between a diversified equity scheme and a thematic or sectoral equity scheme. This makes it a com-

bination of a concentrated portfolio that has the right amount of diversification.

Success factors for a focused fund

To be sure, achieving the right balance between diversification and concentration is the trickiest part. And that is where the skill and finesse of an experienced fund manager comes in. A highly-skilled fund manager can choose the 30 companies from across the board without any restriction of market capitalisation or sectors. This effectively could mean choosing the best companies even if they may or may not be the most popular ones. In other words, the decision taken will be a high impact one.

It invests only in up to 30 stocks, while most other open-ended equity mutual funds do not have such a restriction.

While this might sound easy in theory, bringing this into practice is the real test of the acumen of the fund managers. It demonstrates the processes that they follow and the research that they do while selecting the companies. Moreover, in a volatile market, the process of choosing the best companies is an ongoing process where one sector replaces the other or one company replaces the other at the pole position.

Who should invest in focused funds?

Investing always comes with some

risks, which is also true for focused funds. Due to the relatively concentrated nature of the investment basket, the risk is slightly on the higher side. Investors willing to take some degree of risks can definitely consider investing in these funds.

The stock selection criteria applied here would play a crucial role in decision making. Hence, ensure that the fund you are choosing to invest in has well-defined strategies and processes in place. This is crucial as only 30 stocks need to be selected and the right selection determines the returns.

For instance, the ICICI Prudential Focused Equity Fund checks the right boxes. The fund house has a clear process of shortlisting companies. The criterion is not just limited to market leadership, but also takes in to account factors like valuation of a particular stock, future potential and processes of the company that determine its cost structures. This has worked well for the fund thus far. This can be gauged from the fact the ICICI Prudential Focused Equity Fund has been one of the most consistent performers in its category. As of March 31, 2021, the fund has delivered 76 per cent on one-year basis and a solid 13.4 per cent and 14.3 per cent on three- and five-year basis.

To conclude, if you are an investor who is ready to stay invested for at least three years, then focused category of funds is a good bet.

Author is partner at Cerebral Investments & Fiduciary Services.



A POIGNANT SMILE

A tragic death birthed an NGO that promotes a culture of road safety awareness

BY OSHIN GRACE DANIELL

May 3, 1999—it was not a regular Monday for 17-year-old Durva Bhasin. While her classmates were headed to school, she was off to her Kathak practical exam. It was a morning of preparation and mental rehearsal of the intricate footwork, fast pirouettes, graceful movements and exquisite expressions. She also had stories to tell as this dance form is attributed to the travelling bards of ancient northern India known as ‘kathakars’ or storytellers. But little did she know that her stories would not be heard that day. The dancing storyteller was hit by a school bus on her way; her stories forever silenced. It was too late before she got help; she succumbed to injuries. According to her family, it was a case of hit and run.

“Nobody helped her; nobody called 108,” says Durva’s mother Dr Mridul Bhasin. “The school bus (on contract) was being driven by a government driver who had joined back that very day after being suspended for drunk driving. Neither did the driver nor the teachers stop to help her.” That morning, the Bhasin family—Pramod and Mridul, and their elder child Shantanu—saw a vibrant teenager go from “full of life” to lifeless. However, the devastated family embraced the true essence of making beauty from the ashes. This thought birthed Muskaan—an NGO that promotes road safety. “We were very sceptical as the demise of

our daughter had totally upturned our normal life; we were clueless at that point,” says Mridul. “It was our daughter’s teacher Sandeep Sethi who suggested the idea of this NGO to us as he had also experienced the loss of many of his loved ones in road accidents.”

Though a personal tragedy catalysed the foundation, Muskaan is not a family trust. It is a registered not-for-profit trust committed to building a culture of safety on roads through awareness, education, training and advocacy. It was registered as a charitable trust in 2001. Mridul left her job as manager of public relations at an ITC hotel in Jaipur to devote all her time for the NGO. Even Pramod, who runs a value-added stone business, diverted his attention to Muskaan. “We realised the issue of road safety needed full attention and it now gives us immense satisfaction to be working for a multifaceted issue. The word ‘road safety’ is not so alien now,” said Mridul. “Durva was an ever-smiling girl, sensitive about

The dancing storyteller was hit by a school bus on her way; her stories forever silenced.



other people’s pain. We named the NGO Muskaan after our daughter to keep her spirit alive and to see other people smile.”

The Jaipur-based NGO looks at training, capacity building, awareness generation, community-based programmes, advocacy for ignored issues related to traffic, transport and road safety. It also drives policy—like the Good Samaritan Law which still remains unacknowledged at government and public levels—and audits of roads and road safety-related issues. “We regularly organise road safety activities including training programmes for all stakeholder department personnel like police, teachers and youth in educational institutes and general public, advocacies and campaigns,” Mridul says. “Ours is the oldest NGO working in this field, however, we could do better to make our work known.”

Muskaan employs professionals in social service, road safety and IT. Although they are based in Jaipur, Rajasthan, the NGO takes up projects in other states as well. “We believe in multitasking which means taking care of training, advocacies, projects and social media outreach as per the need of the organisation. All office employees double as trainers too. My husband and I work full time and Shantanu, our son, devotes about three to four hours every day,” says Mridul.

According to her, there is no streamlined or institutionalised funding in the domain unlike with other social issues like women, girl



LOOKING FORWARD

Pramod Bhasin and his wife Mridul; (right) an old photograph of Durva with her mother



child and environmental problems. “Road safety still remains ignored at all levels. However, the ministry of road transport and highways has started giving seed money and corporates have now begun to consider road safety as a part of its CSR activities. Our NGO survives on these things,” she says.

Muskaan has also designed—with inputs from Jaipur Traffic Police, road safety experts and eminent educationists—an interactive curriculum on road safety to be taught to schoolchildren in Jaipur. The age-specific curriculum covers students from playgroups and of Classes I to XII. The NGO also organises campaigns in collaboration with the Traffic Police team. Roadshows form another part of its road safety awareness programme; it comprises street plays, songs by folk singers, puppet shows and performances by street magicians.

In November 2020, on the occasion of the UN World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, Traffic Police Jaipur, Muskaan Foundation for Road Safety, Mohan Foundation and Jaipur Citizen Forum and Neuro Trauma Society Rajasthan along with bereaved family members paid a floral tribute at Yaadgar Jaipur Police Headquarters to those who

had succumbed to road accidents. Right before the event, Muskaan volunteers conducted an on-road campaign under the supervision of the traffic police, holding placards with safety messages at the Ajmeri Gate crossing.

Mridul believes the surge in the number of road accidents nationwide is due to “utter lack of civic sense and an overall culture of slackened attitude among road users.” She feels the government is just beginning to be aware of the high fatality rate on Indian roads (11 per cent of worldwide fatality is borne by India). “Lack of fast emergency response and technological interventions to minimise human contact, apathetic professional attitudes towards issues like licence, bad roads, potholes, need for training and accountability issues are some of the main reasons for the increase

in fatality,” Mridul says.

According to Pramod, it is pivotal to make our road network safer. “While the novel coronavirus claimed 2,250 lives during the period April to November, 2020, there were 5,720 accident deaths on the roads of Rajasthan,” he says.

India has one per cent of the world’s vehicles but accounts for six per cent of the world’s road traffic accidents, according to a 2018 World Health Organization report. Though India’s traffic laws are strict, the big question is, are they enforced efficiently? That is where NGOs like Muskaan step in to raise awareness. The pandemic may have slowed down their work but with creative plans and road safety ideas in their kitty, the NGO is looking at newer strategies to sensitise people. Now, that is something to smile about. 📍

Dear readers, have you ever been in a road accident?
Do you have a story or experience to share with us?
What are your suggestions for road safety?
You can mail us at drivetolive.theweek@gmail.com



Did we learn anything last year?

A few days ago, I celebrated yet another birthday. Another year of ostensibly turning older and thus apparently wiser. A stray comment from a friend got me thinking. “A year older and none the safer,” she declared.

I recalled my last birthday, in early April 2020. The nationwide lockdown was two weeks old and in full force. We could not leave our homes. My friends and family had organised an unexpectedly fun birthday party on Zoom and kind neighbours surprised me with cake. This time around I was back at work, on shoot in Goa, and had a small celebration with my cast and crew, in addition to the new staple in family interactions—the Zoom call. But the pandemic was still raging and was more insidious, varied and arguably more lethal despite the vaccine. The possibility of a lockdown was still lurking!

The situation makes you ask a simple question: What has changed, if anything?

I look back at my own life and find that actually a lot has changed. After 10 years of living on my own in Mumbai, I have, in my thirties, moved back to my parents’ home in Delhi.

The pandemic taught us different things—a friend of mine discovered the hidden chef in her, my hairstylist rediscovered motherhood and the pleasures of domesticity as she was forced to stop shooting and spend days at home with the family, another team member said she discovered the importance of saving.

The enforced ‘me-time’ has made people around the world take a break from the treadmill of our daily lives and reassess how we are living and what we are living for. I, for one, learnt many lessons. I realised how grounding and stabilising family is. I realised how sometimes as we chase career goals, we forget the growth of our personal lives. I realised I want children. I (belatedly) realised I had been betrayed in love. I learnt to be grateful for the many blessings and privileges my life has. But, perhaps, most critically, I learnt that the human

heart is more resilient than emojis, love songs and Bollywood films.

And, while the lockdown last year was arguably one of the worst and most shameful human impact stories of our time, there were numerous acts of goodness by strangers toward one another that reaffirmed our hope in the human species. Activists and NGOs tried to assist migrants to get back to their homes and villages. Corporates donated funds, shoes and slippers to distribute to migrants who were walking to their homes. Citizens donated in good faith to various relief funds and efforts. And, medical professionals rose to the occasion to become the hero of our times.

But, a year later, as we grapple with a diverse, speedier and invisible variant of the virus, face vaccine shortages, as bodies pile up in hospitals, samples queue up in labs, positive cases skyrocket and once again livelihoods of the most vulnerable sections of our society seem endangered, we as citizens expect our government to care about the people who elected them, who blindly celebrate every *thaali bajaao, taali bajaao, diya jalaa, tika lagaao utsav*. Care enough to tell them the truth about the danger that is still not over. Care enough to suspend election rallies and festivals and actually govern the nation through a crisis.

However, like a toxic boyfriend, what we have instead is criminal negligence on the part of our ruling party, as it keeps relief efforts at bay to drum up huge crowds at election rallies and allows lakhs to congregate for public celebrations of Hindu festivals, and its leaders roam the countryside mask-less. I wonder in desperation what to do with these lessons of resilience, gratitude, hope and kindness that I learnt in the last year. As I go through the now familiar cycles of frustration, anger, indignation, shock, disbelief and hopelessness on following the news cycle in our country I ask myself—is hope nothing but the last resort of the helpless?

The writer is an award-winning Bollywood actor and sometime writer and social commentator.

TREASURED LEGACY

Lucknow's heritage warriors are fighting a tough and lonely battle

BY PUJA AWASTHI

KISS OF LIFE

Syed Mohammed Haider Rizvi, a lawyer, and his wife Sanobar, in front of the restored Sibtainabad Imambara in Lucknow



In a tightly packed neighbourhood of narrow lanes and narrower homes in Lucknow's Talkatora lies the tomb of Begum Akhtar—the queen of ghazals. For more than 37 years after her death, most residents of the area were clueless about the final resting place of that singer with a luminous voice. To them, it was just a dark, tin-roofed mausoleum best bulldozed to make some space.

In 2010, Shanti Hiranandani, one of Akhtar's best-known disciples, who addressed her as 'ammi', voiced her distress at the condition of her ustad's grave. Hiranandani, then past 70, was afraid that the grave might fall into further disrepair after her time.

A restoration effort was launched by Lucknow-based Sanatkada, a space for arts and crafts, co-founded by social activist Madhavi Kuckreja. In response to Hiranandani's request to then prime minister Manmohan Singh, the ministry of culture granted ₹5 lakh for the project. A couple more came from donations—but none from Lucknow's own residents.

"I have never understood the reason for that," said Kuckreja, whose next project is Lucknow Bioscope—a museum of the city's culture.

Sanatkada, itself, is housed in Qaiserbagh—a heritage zone, where no alterations that take away from the original spirit of the space are permitted. Yet, the municipal authorities have painted tree trunks bubble gum pink and bright blue.

For Akhtar's tomb, the restoration team had just one clue—that the singer wanted to rest beneath the skies. Thus, the tin roof had to go. The tombs of Akhtar, and her mother, were covered in marble with inlay work. A fan was fitted to permit her admirers to pay their tributes in



comfort during the summer months. Hamid Ali, a handyman and the immediate neighbour of the tomb, now ensures the site's upkeep. And, every year on her death anniversary, renowned singers such as Shubha Mudgal perform for a small group (around 40 people) which can fit into the space.

Access to the grave is still difficult. The administration's sole contribution has been a small signage to mark its presence. In a city of numerous world-renowned artists and writers; and monuments that are marvels of science and beauty—such neglect is difficult to understand.

Said Yogesh Praveen, an author, "When I ask officials why they do not take a greater interest in preserving heritage, they tell me that from 10am to 5pm, their biggest task is to save their jobs." Praveen, who is a





PHOTOS PAWAN KUMAR

1
Wajahat Habibullah (sitting), with his son Amar and daughter-in-law Jyotsna in front of the restored Habibullah Estate

2
Habibullah Estate before restoration

3
A garment showroom inside Habibullah Estate

a collusion between the rich lobby of builders (or developers as they are called) and political parties.

According to the Archaeological Survey of India, an ancient monument is “any structure, erection or monument, or any tumulus or place of interment, or any cave, rock-sculpture, inscription or monolith which is of historical, archaeological or artistic interest and which has been in existence for not less than 100 years...”

Syed Mohammed Haider Rizvi, a lawyer, stumbled into the role of the restorer of one such monument—the Sibtainabad Imambara (a place of prayer and mourning especially during the month of Moharram) by chance in 2008. In a city of many imambaras, Sibtainabad, was an abused gem hidden in plain sight. It lay behind an imposing *darwaza* (gateway) laced with a tangle of electric wires, in the heart of Hazratganj—one of Lucknow’s busiest markets. The lawyer was chosen by the Shia Waqf Board to be a trustee of the committee tasked with restoration and care of the monument. Haider (the name Rizvi goes by), a student of history, discovered that the monument served as a car garage and a furniture storehouse, among other things. This, despite the fact that in 1919 the monument—the



specialist on Awadh culture, died on April 12.

Vipul B. Varshney, an architect and convenor of the Lucknow chapter of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, said preservation of heritage required “both political and administrative will”. A couple of years ago, Varshney compiled a 1,000-page document of 175 heritage monuments in Lucknow and handed it over to the administration for action. She has not heard about it since.

“Heritage conservation has to be built into town planning. Yes, this will mean that certain infrastructure [like flyovers] will not be permitted to be built around protected areas, but in many cities of the world, the old and the new exist happily,” said Varshney.

Why that does not happen in India could in large parts be attributed to

construction of which was initiated by Amjad Ali Shah, the fourth king of Awadh—had been declared protected by the lieutenant governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (now Uttar Pradesh).

Haider's first step was to hunt for information. He was stumped by its paucity. He asked the ASI what it had done for the protection of the monument, and the Lucknow Development Authority how it had laid claim to the monument and collected rent from houses that surrounded it.

"It then hit me that this would become a lost monument," said Haider.

Haider, and his wife Sanobar, also a lawyer, filed 15 applications under the Right to Information Act. The latter took it upon herself to document the imambara's glories in a book called *Sibtainabad: Through the Lens of Time*.

In that book is a quote that described the imambara "...The materials used... are bricks of the usual small Nawabi type and stucco; the interior is sumptuously decorated... in a variety of hues." None of that was visible in 2008. There was a cracked ceiling through which water would gush in, bringing the neglected monument closer to ruin.

Under the guidance of the Shia cleric Kalbe Jawwad, and support from the imambara management committee, the constant follow-up by the Haiders elicited response from the ASI. Between 2008 and 2017, ₹2.11 crore was spent on its restoration. It caught the attention of Lucknowites like few monuments ever had.

The Haiders petitioned the High Court in 2013, asking that the ASI and other authorities be asked to locate lost heritage monuments, remove encroachments, demolish illegal constructions and the like. In 2018, the Sibtainabad Imambara became the state's first monument to have its own set of by-laws under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites



and Remains Act, 2010.

Haider, now designated caretaker of the Sibtainabad Imambara said, "The biggest challenge to preserving our rich heritage is that the state does not have heritage by-laws".

Across this larger slice of history, is the erstwhile Delhi and London

Bank—a property that is now the residence of the Habibullah family.

The family matriarch, Inam Fatima Habibullah (1883-1975) was a prominent social activist and a member of the Muslim League, who had vocally opposed the idea of separate electorates for Muslims. Her daughter, Tazeen Faridi, was a women's rights activist of renown like her daughter-in-law Hamida Habibullah, a widely respected parliamentarian. Wajahat Habibullah, Hamida's son, served as chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities and was the first chief information commissioner. His grandfather Sheikh Mohammad Habibullah was vice chancellor of the University of Lucknow (1938-41) when the likes of Shankar Dayal Sharma (the ninth president of India) were students. His father, Enaith, served as founder commandant of the National Defence Academy



PAWAN KUMAR

(1953-58) in Khadakvasla.

As a piece of history, this is an important home—visited by the likes of governor Sir Harcourt Butler, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Mohammed Yunus.

Said Wajahat Habibullah, “The original house remained of political and social importance until the passing of Sheikh Mohammed in 1948. It remained a social hub thereafter, but we had to wait for my mother to enter politics in the ‘60s for it to have political significance again”.

In 2011, his son Amar and daughter-in-law Jyotsna Kaur, with the approval of their grandmother Hamida—then the only resident—restored the crumbling facade of the older property. This predated the family’s living quarters, built in the 1930s.

“Except for replacing the roof—



4 Madhavi Kuckreja of Sanatkada in front of restored tomb of ghazal singer Begum Akhtar

5 Tomb of Akhtar before restoration

6 Restored Sibtainabad Imambara

7 Sibtainabad Imambara before restoration



which was of Burma teak, we maintained the original look of the building,” said Jyotsna.

The restored space—which recasts most of the original bits of the building including the iron grills, gates and fireplaces—now forms Lucknow’s only high-end retail space housed in a heritage property. An open seating space for a café is shaded by trees—some of which are close to a century old. Spacious bathrooms still have centuries-old French tiles, while railway sleepers buttress the 22-foot-high ceilings.

Said Jyotsna, “We wanted to retain the integrity and the strength of the space, so opted for brands which were high value and would match the

grandeur of the building.” She hopes the couple’s sons, now aged 15 and 12, will appreciate that they live in a space that is not “matter of course” for everybody.

“You leave it behind for posterity,” said Jyotsna.

This act of saving the past for the future often falls in the hands of those who are not officially tasked with it. Saiyed Anwer Abbas, an engineer, now 82, has documented numerous structures of Lucknow.

He said, “Lost monuments are either completely destroyed, effaced or not looked after. It [the neglect] might be a matter of government policy as maintenance requires money. But to leave behind history is also to leave behind its lessons.”

And that is what Lucknow’s heritage warriors are battling against. ●

PAWAN KUMAR

STITCHED TREASURES

In Netflix's *Worn Stories*, a group of people unpack the stories behind their most meaningful pieces of clothing

BY ANJULY MATHAI

Never do a gig without a codpiece," says saxophonist Timmy Cappello in the eight-episode docuseries, *Worn Stories*. His was gifted to him by singer Tina Turner, with whose band Cappello was a saxophone player till 2000. They were in front of a sex shop in Berlin when Turner turned and saw the codpiece in the window display. She bought it for Cappello, and when he put it on before a concert, she told him: "That's it. That's what I want on my stage."

Things did not go well for Cappello after that. Although in the 1980s every band had a saxophone player, all of a sudden that stopped. Towards the 2000s, there was not one saxophone solo on a hit record. Cappello faded into insignificance. He got addicted to drugs for a while and had a bad anxiety problem. A 12-second cameo in *The Lost Boys* (1987) changed that. Thirty years after the film released, that cameo went viral. Everyone started calling him. *Saturday Night Live* did a sketch on him. That cameo revived his career. "When I go onstage and when I have

that codpiece on, I can be anyone I want and still feel centred," says Cappello. "I can dance however I want to and I know that people are going to be smiling and laughing with me."

So many experiences are intricately woven into specific items of clothing. For Carlos, who spent eight years behind bars, it is the pair of jeans and the shirt that his wife bought for him to walk out of prison in. For astronaut Mike, it is the 'Columbia' shirt that NASA allowed him to take with him into the spacecraft. For Jewish teen Spirit, it is the gender-neutral outfit

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AN ARDENT FAN OF ANYTHING BLACK. I FIND IT CLASSIC AND EVERGREEN.

—Radhika Apte, actor



that she carefully picked out for her b'nai mitzvah ceremony.

Clothes have incredible power to define who we are. So often, society tries to straitjacket your personality through the clothes you are expected to wear. "Clothes carry so many gendered expectations," says Delfina, a gender-neutral person from Chennai. "They have become expressions of masculinity and femininity. Women from a certain social stratum are only expected to wear saris and men are looked down upon if they wear nail polish or floral shirts. Personally, I shop from the women's section of department stores, as I find clothes in the men's section to be too boring. But that's my choice. Everyone should have the freedom to wear what they want to wear."

Sartorial choices say so much about a person, whether it is Will Smith's zebra-striped Zubaz pants

COURTESY NETFLIX



or Lady Gaga's 'meat dress', dripping with actual beef, that she wore to the 2010 MTV Video Music awards. Everyone has favourite wearables that hold special significance for them. For actor Minissha Lamba, it is a pink printed dress that she bought in 2007. "It is a classic in cut and style and can be teamed up in various day looks, with or without a jacket," she says. For actor Radhika Apte, it is a black Iconic Link Ceramic watch that she gifted herself. "I have always been an ardent fan of anything

SARTORIAL PLEASURES
(Clockwise from top left) Spanish actress Charo in *Worn Stories*; Anuja Chauhan in her grey vest; Radhika Apte sports her black Iconic Link Ceramic watch

black," she says. "I find it classic and evergreen. It has always been about simplicity and minimalism for me; I don't like big, glittery things. I call it the little black watch that can elevate my look." For author Anuja Chauhan, it is her grey exercise vest. "It is 15 years old and very tattered, but it makes me feel strong, fit and healthy," she says. "It is much better than any snazzy new sporty outfit."

Clothes do not just lend identity to people; they define ages, too. The black turtlenecks of the 'Beatniks', the hip-hugger bellbottoms of the hippies, or the corsets and bustle skirts of the Victorians are all sartorial bookmarks of history. Iconic clothes are seared forever into collective memory. Who can forget Mumtaz's orange drape from *Brahmachari* (1968), Dimple Kapadia's polka-dot co-ord from *Bobby* (1973) or Audrey Hepburn's little black dress from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), which introduced the ubiquitous LBD into the fabric of fashion?

But the most special items of clothing are the ones that hold precious memories. For Samyukta Nair, granddaughter of Captain C.P. Krishnan Nair, founder of the Leela Group, her most valued possession is her grandfather's reading glasses. "They are these horn-rimmed glasses that look a bit like the Harry Potter ones," she told THE WEEK. "They are very precious to me because they symbolise the way my grandfather saw the world." For singer Shankar Mahadevan, it is two exquisite, hand-crafted shawls gifted to him by Ustad Zakir Hussain and Javed Akhtar. "These people are like my godfathers who supported me when I was a nobody," he says. "They had more faith in me than I had in myself. They would talk about my talent to anybody whom they met. I have worn these shawls at so many of my concerts."

Ad man Prahlad Kakkar recalls the time he lost his favourite Ganesha necklace gifted to him by his mother-in-law. "I had gone for a dive when the chain broke and I lost the Ganesha," he says. "I was devastated. Seeing my woebegone expression, the boatman suggested we look in the boat once more. And there, hanging precariously on the edge was the Ganesha. I feel it was meant to come back to me. After that, I have never taken it off. Even during my heart surgery, I kept it under my pillow. I have long conversations with my Ganesha. Most people make requests to their gods through bhajans and gifts. I do it by rubbing the stomach of my Ganesha. He always appears when I do that."

With Pooja Biraia Jaiswal and Oshin Grace Daniell



HAPPY SPACE
One of the rooms in
Hyderabad's Open
House

ON THE HOUSE

Andhari Illu has its gates open for anyone looking to heal and survive

BY RAHUL DEVULAPALLI

As we made our way into a private property in Kothapet, Hyderabad, colourful banners and plants greet us outside the house. Entering the two-storey building, we spot two men sitting, surrounded by bookshelves and basic furniture. In a second room, clothes were arranged in a corner and there were more bookshelves. There was also a kitchen with utensils and provisions. People walked about the house, oblivious to our arrival. It is a typical day at Andhari Illu, aka Hyderabad's Open House.

"We never ask anyone who they are or why they are here," said V. Surya Prakash, a doctor who founded the NGO Life-Health Reinforcement Group in 1999 and Open House in 2006. Anyone who walks in can read, cook, eat and even borrow clothes, free of charge. "In my absence, he is the elder of the house," said Prakash, pointing to Arun (name changed), who has flowing grey beard and hair.

A banker, Arun came from Chennai a few weeks ago. He does not wish to open up about his struggles, but he says that the place has prepared him to bounce back in life.



**I KEEP AWAY
FROM EVERYTHING
THAT TURNS INTO
A BUSINESS.**

—V. Surya Prakash,
founder, Open House



Prakash and his wife, Kameshwari, a gynaecologist who has her clinic on the first floor, have been serving society for long. The couple started selling bananas in 2001 to fund their outreach. Prakash later started a dosa counter on a similar model. The couple had treated victims of the 1999 Odisha floods and 2002 Gujarat riots, and more recently offered free online consultations to hundreds of Covid-19 patients. The house stayed open throughout the lockdown with the permission of local authorities.

"I do not have bank accounts or properties in my name," said Prakash. "The easiest thing in this world is to earn money and I keep away from everything that turns into a business."

"I used to go out looking for people who are hungry. People thought I was insane," he said. But things are different now. His work has spread across the country and Prakash has set up 100 mini libraries. People donate groceries for the house or send clothes for the needy. Visitors are discouraged from staying the night, but are not stopped from doing so.

We met Gyaneshwar Rao, a retired government employee who was playing the flute. "It feels good to be here. So, I drop in sometimes and also get groceries for the kitchen," he said. "I also find appreciation for my [playing] skills here."

Many visitors are youngsters who have lost jobs, home and hope. "We had a software professional who lost his job," said Prakash. "He did not have any money and could not go home. He used to cook and eat his food here. Once he got a job, he conveyed his gratitude and moved on." Other youngsters spend hours preparing for exams under a tree, which has a treehouse on it, too.

"Anyone can start this facility," said Prakash. "Just imagine if every colony has such open houses. It will make such a big difference to our society." 📍

WINNER ALL THE WAY

Rolex's 2021 collection ticks all the right boxes

BY PREETIKA MATHEW

Every time an annual watch event that features Rolex rolls around (Baselworld in the past, Watches and Wonders today), conversations on what to expect from the behemoth start flying thick and fast. To say Rolex is popular is an understatement, something the brand uses to its advantage by remaining tight-lipped, rarely “dropping hints” on their new offerings ahead of the event. All this in turn contributes to the eventual thrill of discovering their novelties. To that effect, the brand's 2021 offerings did not disappoint.

Leading the pack was the Oyster Perpetual Explorer, a line whose legacy can be traced back to 1953—the watch was part of the expedition that saw Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay scale the Everest; the Explorer line was launched shortly after. What has shocked most Rolex purists is that the watch, for the first time ever, has appeared in a two-tone Yellow Rolesor (gold and steel) and Oystersteel version on the dial and bracelet. The dial has been scaled down to a 36mm after being a 39mm for more than a couple of years. The watch appeals to me for several reasons—the new look, the freshness—but most of all, I am excited about this icon having an update.

The second in line is the Oyster Perpetual Explorer II, a line that is celebrating 50 years. And to commemorate that, there is a redesigned

case and bracelet. Featuring a white lacquer dial, its hour markers have a PVD coating, and the 24-hour orange hand allows one to tell whether it is night or day in extreme weather conditions. The 42mm Oystersteel watch also has a Chromalight display (like the Explorer); the new, innovative material allows for the hour markers to glow bright blue in the dark and in a brighter white hue during the day. Overall, the brand has kept the celebrations subtle, and that is not a bad thing.

If beautiful dials catch your fancy, Rolex has offered up the Oyster Perpetual Datejust 36 in four new models. Two of them have a palm tree motif in green or golden with Oystersteel. There is an Oystersteel and Everose gold with a fluted bezel and dual-toned jubilee bracelet and a golden fluted dial and bezel with

a dual-toned Yellow Rolesor and Oystersteel.

For that ‘out of this world’ touch, the 40mm Oyster Perpetual Cosmograph Daytona—with its three bracelet versions in Oysterflex, yellow gold and Everose gold—has a metallic meteorite dial with captivating Widmanstätten patterns.

There are also two jewellery timepieces—the diamond-studded Oyster Perpetual Day-Date 36 (in coral, turquoise and burgundy), and the 28mm Oyster Perpetual Lady-Datejust.

According to a report released by Morgan Stanley in collaboration with LuxeConsult in March, in 2020, Rolex SA became the largest watch group in Switzerland for the first time. This new collection is well placed to keep the watchmaker on that winning streak. **7**



Oyster Perpetual Lady-Datejust



Oyster Perpetual Explorer



Oyster Perpetual Cosmograph Daytona

MURDER SERVED HOT

The upcoming Ridley Scott directorial, *House of Gucci*, has been making news for the deliciously bawdy photos of **Lady Gaga** from the sets. In one, she and **Adam Driver** drip Italian oomph on the deck of a ski chalet. In another, she nails the virgin-vamp vibe in a lace wedding gown and come-hither eyes.

There is only one thing that can outshine Gaga—her character in the film, Patrizia Reggiani. She was convicted in 1998 for orchestrating the assassination of her ex-husband, Maurizio Gucci, grandson of the Italian fashion house founder, Guccio Gucci. When asked why she did not shoot him herself, she reportedly replied: “My eyesight is not so good. I didn’t want to miss.” Don Vito Corleone himself could not have come up with a better answer.



AFP



TANYA MARWAH, singer

SCORING BIG

Tanya Marwah is a Delhi-based singer and producer who performs and releases music as Komorebi. She co-wrote the score for Netflix’s *Bombay Begums*. After doing the theme track for the first season of the web series *Made in Heaven*, she is now working on season two.

Q What is your favourite part about composing for shows like *Made in Heaven* and *Bombay Begums*?

A Bringing the stories of every character to life, creating worlds for them in the comfort of your studio and getting to share this world with audiences. Another really cool part is to watch scratches and short melodic pieces evolve into huge cinematic scores.

Q As an artist whose sound and aesthetic are quite distinctive, how did you educate yourself about scoring for a series?

A Before I became an indie electronic artist, my dream was to work on music scores for film and television. Luckily, the skill sets I picked up while performing as Komorebi came in useful. I believe both musical identities co-exist and contribute to each other.

The ground work required to score for film is primarily research on interesting sound libraries and plug-ins. It is important to listen to tracks by other composers for inspiration, so we store them in the archives for a good listening session every now and then.

Q How dependent are you on the director’s vision for the music?

A Luckily, so far, we have worked with directors who have matched our wavelength as far as the music is concerned! We like to have a chat prior to composition for every episode, to understand the director’s vision for important scenes. Once there is clarity on this,

the writing process becomes smooth. We are pointed in the right direction and then continue to lead the way.

Q You and Gaurav Raina comprise *Midival Punditz*, which composes music for OTT shows. What are your respective strengths?

A I believe my strength lies in composition, and Gaurav's in sound design. However, we are constantly switching hats and multitasking. This seems to be a must as a smaller team working on high stakes projects.

Q What is next for you?

A We are currently working on *Fallen* and *Made in Heaven* season two in the OTT realm. Komorebi is all set to release another album in 2021, four years since the first one! I am releasing the album with a digital comic, to aid the storytelling, and all six songs are chapters of the comic which are going to have their respective animated music videos.

—By Sneha Bhura



PTI



TWITTER WARS

You better not mess with the Big Bull of Bollywood **Abhishek Bachchan**. When a troll asked British singer Sophie Choudry if she had been paid to praise Abhishek's new film, *The Big Bull*, Abhishek replied: "Wait... what? Sophie, you should have told me. Not fair! I would have paid you for all the previous tweets, too."

Abhishek is among an elite club of stars who 'give as good as they get'. Remember Priyanka Chopra Jonas's "pit-stopping" picture when the debate was raging about her baring her armpits on a magazine cover? Or Taapsee Pannu's comeback when a troll called her a 'cheap actor' whose mental state was not right? She asked him for therapy sessions and for tips on how to become an 'expensive' actor as inflation was becoming a real bother. Other troll-slayers include Shah Rukh Khan and Anurag Kashyap, whose fiery darts could make even the biggest street thug turn red in the face.



STAR BITES

It should be fun to watch celebrities getting down and dirty in a kitchen. We are talking about those like **Kareena Kapoor Khan**, Malaika Arora, Arjun Kapoor and Karan Johar who are appearing in a new Disney Plus food show called *Star Vs Food*. "It was love at first bite for me, creating the mouthwatering pizza," Kareena posted on social media about her culinary creation. The stars seem to have been good sports, with the famed celebrity tantrums—Kareena complaining of aching hands and Karan not wanting to ruin his "pretty face"—mostly for show. Now the question is: Who is going to eat all the food they make? We are guessing not these size-zero stars whose systems will probably go into shock mode at the sight of a pizza loaded with cheese.

COMPILED BY ANJULY MATHAI





Begging, the question

In a written reply to a question in Parliament on March 10, Minister for Social Justice Thaawar Chand Gehlot gave us the number of beggars, aggregate and by state. The total number of beggars is 4,13,670—2,21,673 males and 1,91,997 females. Most beggars are in West Bengal, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Large states will have large populations. It is natural they will have large numbers of beggars, too. Therefore, one should make numbers comparable, by dividing the number of beggars by population of the state or Union territory. If that is done, most beggars are in West Bengal, followed by Assam. Least beggars are in the northeast (minus Assam), Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. I do not know why these numbers were widely reported in the media. The figures are old, from Census 2011, and a similar question (with identical numbers reported) was answered in Parliament in February 2015.

But one must be careful. These census numbers are not for beggars; they are for beggars and vagrants. What is the difference? The word beggar does not figure in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, unless one has in mind “relief of the disabled and unemployable” figuring in the state list. Unlike ‘beggar,’ ‘vagrant’ is mentioned in the Constitution. “Vagrancy, nomadic and migratory tribes” are mentioned in the concurrent list. That is the reason the census not only collects the number of beggars, but separately reports those who are disabled and vagrants. Instructions to the census enumerators say beggars and vagrants are those not engaged in any economically productive work.

But how is a beggar different from a vagrant? Different states have different laws against begging. Most follow the Bombay Prevention of Beg-

ging Act, 1959, which does not mention vagrancy. As titles of the legislation suggest, Bengal Vagrancy Act and Cochin Vagrancy Act are on vagrancy. For West Bengal, “vagrant means a person found asking for alms in any public place, or wandering about or remaining in any public place in such condition or manner as makes it likely that such person exists by asking for alms but does not include a person collecting money or asking for food or gifts for a prescribed purpose.” Cochin has similar provisions.

Is a ‘vagrant,’ therefore, a beggar who wanders around, with no fixed abode? Roots go back to English Poor Laws, such as England’s 1494 Vagabonds and Beggars Act. The implicit value judgment was that no able-bodied person should beg. Vagrants, equivalently vagabonds, were “sturdy beggars” and should be punished. Beggars were not sturdy, so to speak.

They were sick, elderly and disabled, who would be given a licence to beg.

We have imported and implanted those Elizabethan (not even colonial) value judgments into the Constitution and even the Criminal Procedure Code. “People beg on the streets

not because they wish to, but because they need to. Begging is their last resort to subsistence, they have no other means to survive. Begging is a symptom of a disease, of the fact that the person has fallen through the socially created net.... Criminalising begging is a wrong approach to deal with the underlying causes of the problem.” This quote is from a 2018 Delhi High Court judgment. Skills, social safety nets and empowerment—in Shakespearean times, or even that of Dickens, we would not have thought of these. We would have thought of workhouses. Government and civil society interventions have led to rehabilitation, and there are success stories.

Despite Covid-19, we are in the midst of the 2021 Census. I wonder what those numbers will be, for both beggars and vagrants.



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