

MARCH OF THE MIGRANTS

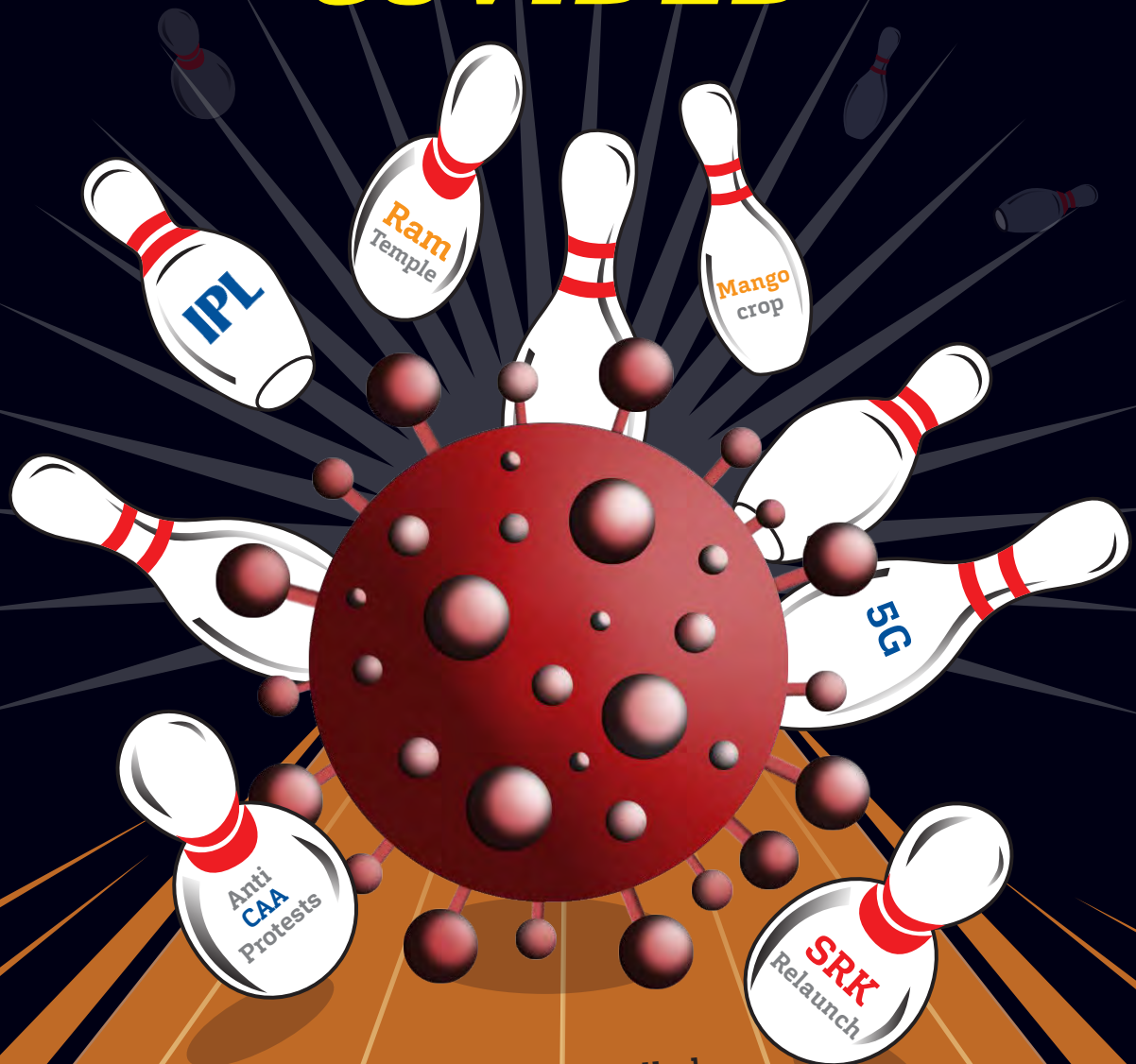
DIGITAL ISSUE

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THINGS THAT GOT *COVIDED*



**Covided:* (verb) to be finished off, killed, postponed, brought to life, revived, hastened...i.e. to be fundamentally affected or altered one way or the other

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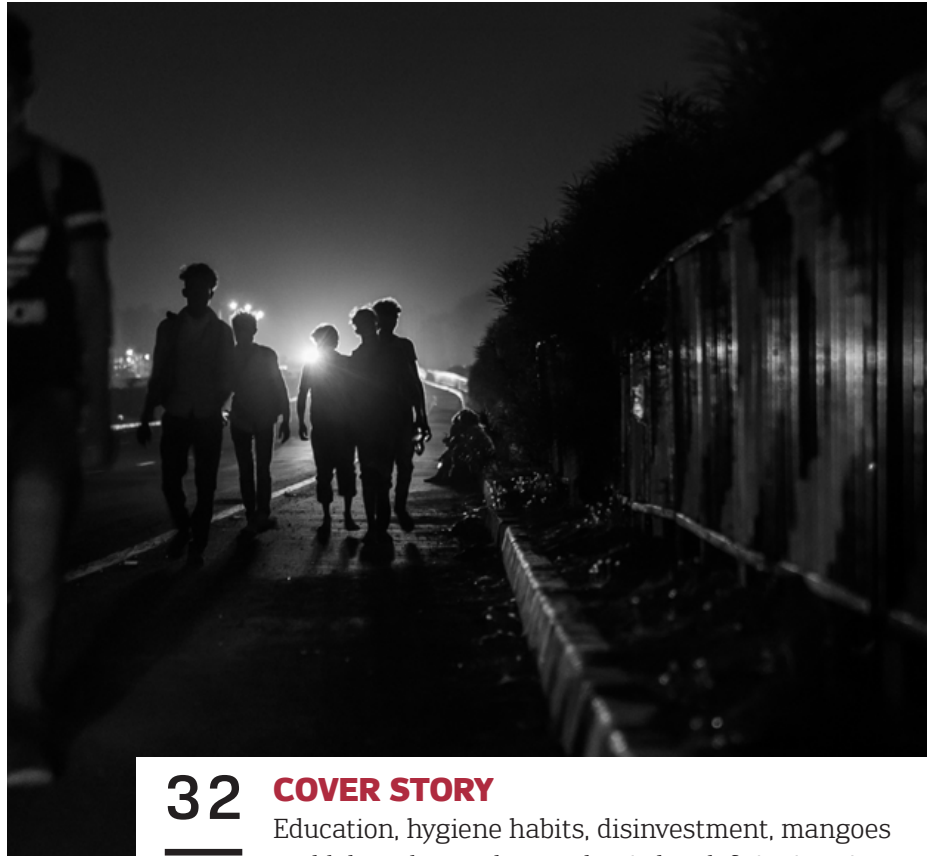
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32 COVER STORY

Education, hygiene habits, disinvestment, mangoes and labour laws—the pandemic has left its imprint on all of these and many more. *Outlook* explores the wide-ranging effects of COVID-19 and why some things will never be the same again.



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With the Indian Premier League postponed indefinitely, what are the repercussions for the sporting jamboree?

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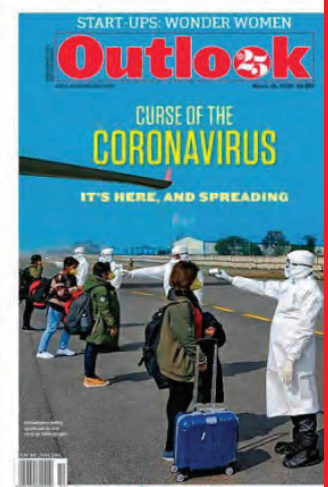
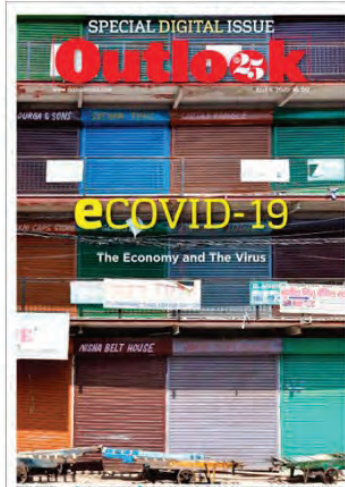
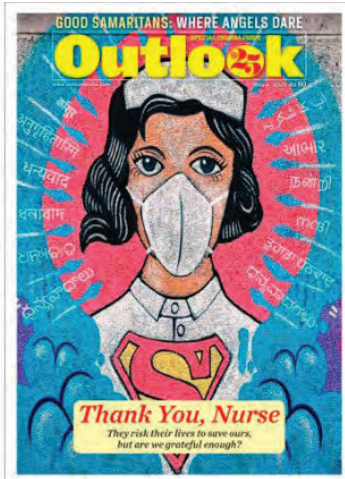
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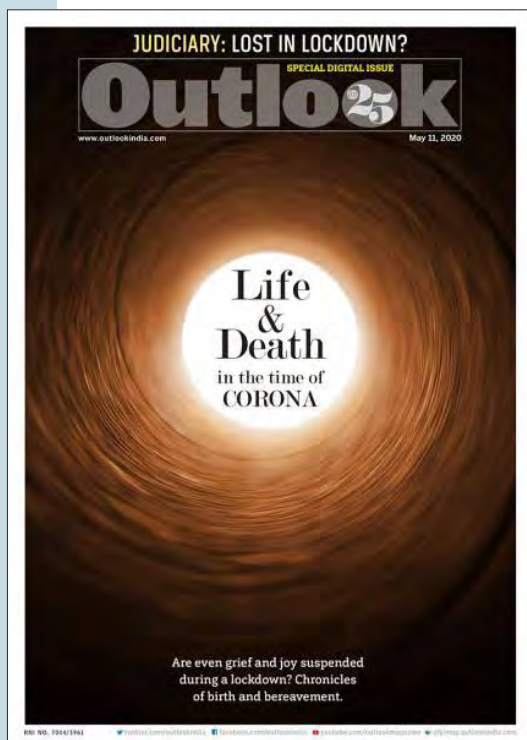
COVID confinement has not stopped us from doing what we are known to do.



Team Outlook is continuing to produce stories that cover new ground, are thought-provoking and certainly ahead of competition.



11/5/2020



Cycle Of Life

ON E-MAIL

Vijai Pant: This refers to your cover story *Life And Death In The Time Of Corona* (May 11). For centuries, despite the travails and tribulations of everyday life, the 'show' kept going on. However, not any longer. The present circumstances have abruptly forced us to come to terms with a new kind of life in which, irrespective of society, we are living a solitary existence. As Greek scholar Aristotle noted, man is by nature a social animal. But now, even momentous events like births and deaths have to remain not only subdued, but also devoid of all markers of human emotions. The disease has thrown established norms out of the window. Things become more painful at the time of bereavement. Grief has always been a personal journey, but withholding the storm brewing in is leaving individuals scarred for life. For as they say, grief shared is halved, joy shared is doubled.

JIND

Mahendra Singh: No one can fight against fate, no one can see beyond the present and no one can change the course of stars. Birth and death are part of a cycle, like day and

night. It is a universal truth that one starts after the end of the other. Mahatma Gandhi rightly said that birth and death are not two different states, but different aspects of the same state. This is the time to realise this bitter truth. COVID-19 puts us all in the same examination hall and tests what we have learnt till now in life. Love, respect, tolerance, kindness and trust are the subjects of the question paper. Remember the words of Mufasa in *The Lion King*, "We are all connected in the great circle of life."

LUCKNOW

M.C. Joshi: Those who lost their near and dear ones were never as helpless as during the lockdown. Public transport is not functional and even many of those with private transport could not attend funerals. Rishi Kapoor's daughter was in Delhi when her father breathed his last in Mumbai. She obtained a travel pass from Delhi authorities and journeyed by road in

her car, but could not reach Mumbai in time for a last glimpse of her departed father. Death is the only inevitable and eternal truth of mortals. Medical science can delay it for a while, but nothing can prevent it. Saint Kabir aptly said, One who has born has to die, whether a king, commoner or beggar. The grief of being away



from near and dear ones at such moments hurts for a long time. It will take time before a vaccine is developed, so COVID-19 is here to stay. We have to learn to live with the disease.

Nursing The Nation

OXFORD

Natasha Dole: This refers to *Thank You, Nurse* (May 4). I am a doctor. Each day brings with it new angst coupled with multifaceted fears. "Unprecedented" has been used so often that I no longer take cognisance of it. The mental and physical exhaustion among my colleagues is palpable. Some patient interactions leave you feeling disheartened and with a sense of impending doom. Many of us had initially mistaken this deadly virus for something far less

severe. We were wrong. This pandemic has surpassed any knowledge previously instilled in me despite having practiced medicine for over a decade now in both developed and developing countries. Donning and doffing PPE is not something I find comfortable despite performing this terrible task with every shift. The way to do this is modified almost every hour, which adds to my inner turmoil. We were warned that the days to come would not be easy, but my apprehension is that the worst is yet to come. Is this the calm before the storm? Like almost everything at the moment, I do not know. Numerous countries around the globe are in lockdown, yet the curve



INTERVIEW

Samir Modi: Master of Beauty Innovations, 'Mr. Mom' to Everyone Who Loves Him

In conversation with **Samir Modi**, Founder & Managing Director of Colorbar Cosmetics on Mother's Day

Samir Modi, Managing Director of Colorbar is fondly referred to as 'Mr. Mom' for all the expert advice that he doles out on make-up and skincare and can speak on the subject endlessly. In business circles, he is the rebel who chooses to be whimsical about his business choices. To the insiders, he is a determined man who believes in the principle of Meraki, seeking to spring magic out of the ordinary. Says he, "Creativity fuels me and I thrive in charged environs. I believe it is all about thinking differently. Meraki is what defines my business strategy. This principle is distilled into my philosophy of SAMIRNESS."

As the Managing Director of Modi Enterprises, Samir Modi drives the growth of – Modi Care, Colorbar, and 24x7 chain of retail stores. He leads from the front to drive a highly charged and creative team to ensure each of the enterprises hold a strong position in each sector. Here is an exclusive interview with 'Mr Mom'



Q Why are you called as Mr. Mom?

It started with me doing things that my wife wouldn't do. I started to cook for everybody in the house. I am the chef and am also very fond of makeup mainly because I run a cosmetic company. I constantly discuss makeup with my family. Their fashion wardrobe also soon became department of my expertise - helping them shop and eventually choosing and buying for them when we travel together. So, I was nicknamed as Mr. Mom. Initially, it was my family who used to call me as Mr Mom. Later my colleagues also started calling me Mr Mom. I like to nurture people and taking care of them and driving them is more important than just the turnover of the company.

Q As an entrepreneur, what is a new and better tomorrow for you?

I think for me it is a reset. One has to re-evaluate on how we plan to lead life. Health should be given priority and working from home culture has picked up rapidly now. I did not agree with the work from home concept before but now it become perfectly acceptable for me. So like everyone, I am getting used to the new normal now. It has become a way of life. Zero based budgeting which I didn't think of earlier, I am giving it serious thought now.

People have also started realising the value of family and things that they have. Life will not be taken for granted for many years to come. We will see a rise of consciousness, empathy and awareness in the world. And, in this better tomorrow, we will keep encouraging each other, reminding each other of our strengths and gifts. I hope that as future innovators we are all able to approach our changing reality with a renewed sense of purpose - one that is strong and sensitive enough to notice the magical miracles waiting to be discovered, and embraced.

Q Which qualities of your Mom do you look up to especially in hard times?

I think it is her zeal, steadfastness, her belief and the fact that she holds onto life against all

adversities. In a nutshell, I love her for her positivity. She is my pillar of strength. During the rough phases of my life, my mom has always been by my side. Given the recent incident of my father passing away in November, she started managing the business brilliantly. After my father's death, she took over the role of being both my father and my mother.

Q How do you both like to spend time together? Do you both share a hobby over which you bond?

We love to talk and exchange ideas with each other. We like to travel and go shopping. Though my mom is not a brand person, she has got a unique style of dressing and putting things together and I love that. I admire that she has the ability to be effortlessly stylish. Weekend market buys from Bangkok, boutique in Florence - she knows how to carry herself with a lot of grace. My mom is a lot of fun and I love her spirit. She loves to travel and eat out. We bond over many common passions.

Q How early is too early to begin introducing your child to makeup? What would you advise them?

Skin care should start as early as twelve. And girls can apply light makeup as early as sixteen. It should of course be very basic makeup like a lip gloss, nail polish and maybe eyeliner. As she becomes a young adult, she can apply lipstick, eye-shadow, but should not use foundation and instead she can apply is a tinted moisturiser.

Q If there's one thing that kids need to thank their moms every day for, what would it be?

I would say that mothers are superwomen. I have to thank my mother for the person I am today. I thank her for the knowledge and confidence that I have inherited from her. She really knows how to multi-task.

Q In what manner does your mother



Dr. Bina Modi
President
Godfrey Phillips
(I) Ltd. K K
Modi Group

challenge you to bring out the best in you, at home and on the work front. Is she more of a friend or a hard critic?

I think she is a bit of both. She is there to support and guide me too. When I am going wrong, she is the first person to correct me. She doesn't hesitate to call a spade a spade. She is gentle and truthful. She doesn't stop from positive criticism. She holds the family together.

Q You have been creating disruption in the market with Colorbar for years capturing a significant amount of the market, with a product dedicated to women. Tell us a little about that.

When I started Colorbar, I did not know anything about makeup. I had no idea where to start. I saw there was a gap between Lakme and Revlon. I wanted to fill up the space between the two brands for the college goers. That's how the journey of Colorbar started. We created the bridge. Gradually we started to change our positioning from a teenage gap brand, to becoming a masstige brand to starting point of a premium brand. There has been a boom in the beauty segment with awareness going to multi-fold as women become more knowledgeable and awareness of self-care. With the rise of digital and social media, the awareness of beauty products and consumption patterns have improved the purchasing power amongst women and they like to make informed choices.



is not flattening. It is a matter of time before we see the dire consequences that will follow—crime, domestic violence, spiralling divorce rates, mental health emergencies, the non-COVID-19 illnesses and deaths that we clinicians will miss. And this, I surmise, is only the beginning. My brain reinforces that the lockdown will have to be extended and more stringent measures will be needed. Alas, it is merely a matter of time before I am infected. It is not an ‘if, but a ‘when’.

DEHRADUN

Rakesh Agrawal: When the intrepid mayor of Mumbai, Kishori Pednekar, adorned her nurse uniform once again to motivate the

second- and third-year nursing students deployed at Nair Hospital and said that it was her responsibility as a mayor to serve COVID-19 patients, she brought laurels to this sacred job. She had served as a nurse at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust Hospital for over 10 years. We need to respect nurses and paramedical staff, not just doctors and health experts. In the fight against the deadly pandemic, nurses must not be treated as second-class health workers. In our caste-based society, nursing is considered low on the rung of occupations. But it's time to go beyond the divisions of caste, class and religion and recognise the importance of nurses.

BANGALORE

H.N. Ramakrishna: This refers to *Scourge Of Unscience* (May 4). These scientists are rendering a great service to the nation by busting fake narratives circulating on social media platforms. India needs more such people. With the ubiquity of cell-phones, fake narratives spread like wildlife, often at the behest of our leaders, who should be acting otherwise. As the public scrambles for information on the virus, false prophets claim they have an answer. In these times of fear, anxiety and uncertainty—with a cure months, if not years, away—such claims sadly gain traction among the gullible public. The solution does not lie in clapping or zapping with laser waves, but in laying our trust in science. As of now, faith in science

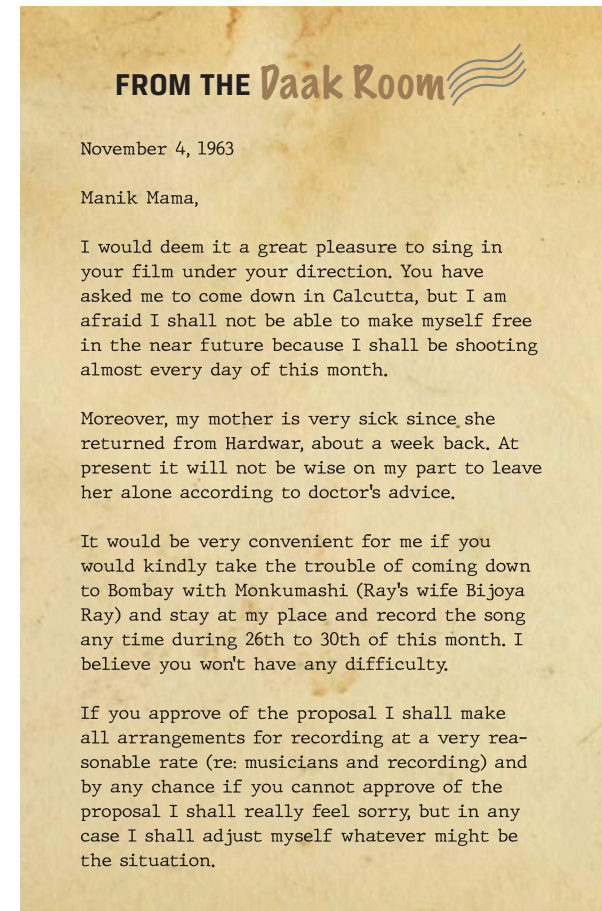
and not in myths or anecdotal evidence is the best weapon we have to understand and deal with the virus. The government must heed scientific evidence and not propound ancient myths.

MARUTHANCODE

David Milton: This refers to your cover story *Ration State* (April 13). Along with the ‘health pandemic’, we also need to take the ‘hunger pandemic’ seriously. Hunger is already part of everyday life



SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE



📌 **From The Nest** Letter from Kishore Kumar to Satyajit Ray that his son, Sandip Ray, unearthed at the director's house on Bishop Lefroy Road, Calcutta. Amit Kumar, Kishore Kumar's son, said Ray had probably agreed to go to Mumbai in December that year. The song *Ami Chini Go Chini* was recorded for *Charulata* (1964), a film based on Tagore's *Nastanirh* (The Broken Nest).

for the poor. True, it exists far more acutely in certain parts of the world, but it exists in varying levels everywhere. There is dehumanising poverty in our country too. Hunger persists despite overflowing granaries and our extensive public distribution system. The pandemic has given it more visibility. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), the

pandemic could double the number of people facing acute hunger and push about 265 million people to the brink of starvation by the end of the year. Swift intervention is imperative to avert mass starvation deaths. We must help WFP raise sufficient funds to feed the hungry and save their lives. In the long run, the underlying causes of hunger too must be tackled.



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WE TAKE OEM AND BULK ORDER

Future of Flexible Workspaces: With Adversity comes opportunity

The largely unknown nature of the corona virus has caused much speculation and uncertainty along all industrial avenues. Amidst the chaos, companies face significant challenge as they attempt to prepare the workplace of the future. While the times are as worrisome as they could be, business leaders have a unique opportunity to shape how employees do the work in the future without compromising on their safety as flexible workspace providers formulate new techniques to offer a more conducive and adaptive ecosystem to cope with disruptive elements.

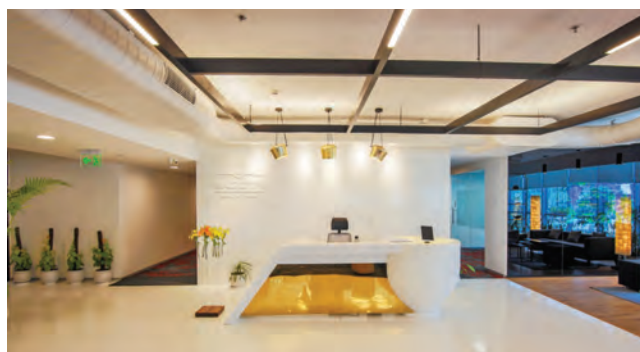


Ankit Jain,
Co-founder



Sensitivity towards surfaces

The agile workspace providers such as Skootr are working towards identifying and developing a touch-less system in areas of high activity and interaction such as reception, meeting rooms, cafeteria, and lobby. When it comes to aesthetics, designers are looking at alternatives to source such fabric & surface materials for the interiors which can be treated with cleanable solutions, without ruining its integrity, to avoid the possibility of any pathological contamination.



Well-sanitized common areas

Regular cleaning and sterilizing of common areas, improved footfall management equipped with screening protocols along with the prerequisite of isolation zones within offices will become an essential part of every workspace. Asset managers of properties that include mutually shared services such as cafes, retail and agile spaces will need to improve their existing hygiene policies to safeguard tenants and employees from any health-related risks in future.

Throughout all economic and social avenues, including the real estate sector, factors such as reduced demand and delayed business decisions are creating significant impediments to business operations. However, there emanates an encouraging glimmer of hope that what appears to be an enormous hurdle to businesses is in fact an opportunity to grow, learn and evolve. At Skootr, we are ever committed to business excellence and ready to take up these challenges head-on with a positive resolution. And, with this dedication and perseverance, we see the office sector will recover ultimately.

Inclination towards wellness-oriented designs

Occupiers will place a stronger emphasis on meeting international standards of building specifications as they strengthen their commitment to employee health and wellness. Grade A properties with sustainability, safety and wellness features, particularly those related to indoor air quality, ventilation systems, water drainage systems and other indoor environmental features, will draw greater claim in the future.

De-densification of workspaces

The new pivotal point in the segment of workspace design is social distancing. Industry standards are likely to improve wherein the unit space acquired by individuals may go up considerably. Hence, the workspace designs will embody comfortable density of people to maintain appropriate distance and cleanliness.



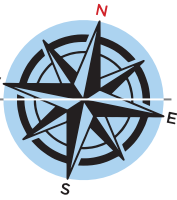
For the glass of milk every morning.
For the lullabies every night.
For the lessons behind the tears.
For the strength above all fears.

Thank you mom. For everything you do.

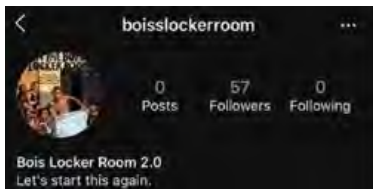
Happy Mother's Day.

#SheMakesYouStronger

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Counter-militancy forces shot dead Hizbul Mujahideen leader Riyaz Naikoo at his home village in Pulwama after militants killed eight security personnel, including Col Ashutosh Sharma, the Commanding Officer of 21 Rashtriya Rifles, and **Major Anuj Sood**, in two separate attacks since Sunday, indicating a surge in militant activities and counter-steps in Kashmir.



Leaked screenshots of BoisLockerRoom, an Instagram group of school students in Delhi, has stirred a storm as the boys were seen sharing obscene messages and morphed pictures of underage girls, and planning gang rapes. Police have identified 10 members, one of them was detained.



At least a dozen people were killed after a **toxic gas leaked** from the plant of LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam early on Thursday. More than a 1,000 people in five villages within a 3km radius reported sick. The synthetic chemical styrene leaked from the plant, which workers were preparing to restart after it was closed during the lockdown.

Oxygen In Viral Season

Has COVID-19 brought the Congress back in the game?

Puneet Nicholas Yadav

EARLY morning on May 4, interim Congress president Sonia Gandhi announced that her party was prepared to foot the bill for transporting stranded migrant workers by rail to their home states. The message sent the Centre scampering for cover amid mounting criticism of its apparent decision to charge migrants not just the train fare, but also a surcharge. Within hours, Lav Agarwal, joint secretary (health) at the Centre, told the media that the fare would be split 85:15 between the Centre and the respective states.

From Rahul Gandhi's February 12 tweet cautioning the Centre against the challenges the pandemic would pose, to scathing criticism of apathy towards migrants and the poor, the nationwide lockdown's socio-political and economic impact has given the Congress ample ammunition. The ruling BJP had little choice. It had to announce damage-control measures suggested by the 11-member Congress consultative group on COVID-19. "The Centre simply has no plan," says senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal. "After aggressively dismissing everything Rahul or the Congress suggests, it ends up doing exactly what was proposed, be it testing more people, safety net for MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises), or waiving train fares."



PTI

The crisis also seems to have hastened plans to bring Rahul back as Congress president—perhaps soon after the lockdown is substantially relaxed, insiders suggest. Rahul has been rebuilding his portfolio—abandoned only a year ago—for the challenge ahead. "He is more involved with the party now," says a close aide. "Being in the consultative group was the first indication of his willingness to be back at the helm. He has taken charge of formulating the party's line on various aspects of the COVID crisis."

A senior leader says Rahul has been trying to present himself as making "an extra effort to personally gather expert opinion from outside the predictable confines of political drawing rooms". Rahul has announced a series of pre-recorded conversations between him and experts on the pandemic and its impact on India. The first, a 28-minute conversation with former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan, was streamed on social media platforms. Rahul's second guest was Nobel laureate economist Abhijit Banerjee.

Both Rajan and Banerjee have criticised the Centre's economic policy prescriptions in the past. In his conversation with Rahul, Rajan called for a Rs 65,000-crore package for the poor and Banerjee backed the need for a NYAY-like scheme (mooted in the Congress's Lok Sabha manifesto) for direct cash transfers. These are reiterations of the Congress line since the lockdown was announced. By getting economists of international repute to back his party's position, Rahul hopes to send a strong message to people on the government's inability to feel their pain. 🔴

SNAPSHOT



PTI

BSF men escort central team members visiting Bangur hospital

Coronacation Street

Rajat Roy in Calcutta

W. BENGAL

Even as the rest of the country followed a strict

COVID-19 lockdown, the laxity in Bengal, and Calcutta in particular, was striking after some days: meat, fish, paan and sweet shops were doing brisk business, some taxis were allowed to ply and people thronged markets. The police, mostly, were passive enablers. Laxity in surveillance and testing, too, was glaringly apparent. The Mamata Banerjee government's efforts in downplaying the spread was equally remarkable: contrary to the global practice, Bengal decided to not count COVID-19 deaths due to comorbidities as part of the total death count. Add to that the tell-tale non-cooperation towards the inter-ministerial central teams (IMCTs) that arrived in Bengal for a review. All these had, over the past weeks, resulted in a battle between an alarmed Centre and a defiant Mamata; particularly severe is an epistolary tussle between governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and the CM. The fight has now reached a new height as both sides issued fresh accusatory salvos.

The two IMCTs that were here to audit the state government's performance in containing the coronavirus spread returned to Delhi on May 5. ICMT team leader Apruba Chandra sent a report to the state chief secretary Rajiva Sinha, sharing some findings. The most serious was the observation that at 12.8 per cent, the state's COVID-19 death rate is by far India's highest. Weak surveillance and a smaller number of testing, it says, are mainly responsible. It also pointed out discrepancies in the report by Sinha and that of the state health secretary.

The IMCT pointed out that on April 30, Sinha in his press briefing had put the number of active COVID-19 cases in the state at 572, with 139 being discharged and 33 deaths, making the total

The fight between Mamata and the governor reaches new intensity over COVID-19, as the central audit teams reveal a dire fact.

number of cases 744. However, in a communication to the Union health and family welfare secretary on the same day, the principal secretary of the state health department stated the total number of cases was 931—a discrepancy of 187. Sinha in his briefing admitted some discrepancies, but didn't elaborate. The IMCT will submit its report on West Bengal to the Union ministry of home affairs.

It was unclear as to how the ICMT reached at the death rate of 12.8 per cent. Did they take the April 30 numbers of either 744 or 931, or did they base their calculation on earlier data? Interestingly, if one goes by the data given in the Union health ministry website, on May 4, the total number of confirmed cases in West Bengal was 961 and the total death toll 35, thus reducing the rate to merely 3.63 per cent. Evidently, there exist some discrepancy between the Centre's data and that of the state, as also between the versions of chief secretary and health secretary of West Bengal, the latter providing a stick to the IMCT and governor Dhankhar to beat the state government with.

The latest move by the Centre to send 20 health teams to various states sparked a fresh controversy. Consisting of medical experts, these teams are to assist states in their COVID-19 fight. Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh will be visited by three teams each; Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh will get two teams each; West Bengal, Telangana and Tamil Nadu get one team each. Citing these figures, TMC parliamentary party leaders Sudip Banerjee, Derek O'Brien and Dinesh Trivedi said that since the Centre felt the need to send only one team to Bengal, it shows the state is doing well in combating the pandemic. The old chestnut about the Centre's efforts to "vilify the image of the state" was paraded too. When asked to comment on Dhankhar's charges against the TMC's nexus with 'syndicates', the leaders said the governor's comments did not deserve any response. ❑

A woman walks past a wall with an awareness graffiti on coronavirus in New Delhi



PTI

MAHARASHTRA

Sign of a Patch-Up?

Giridhar Jha

AFTER continual bouts of sabre-rattling between the BJP and the Shiv Sena, decks have finally been cleared for chief minister Uddhav Thackeray to get elected to the state legislative council. It's an anti-climax of sorts in the Maharashtra high drama that has triggered speculation about a possible rapprochement between the erstwhile allies.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) will hold elections to nine seats of the Maharashtra Vidhan Parishad on May 21, exactly a week before the deadline for Uddhav to meet the statutory requirement of becoming a member of the either house of the state legislature ends. Uddhav, heading the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition government, had taken oath on November 28. He has to become an MLA or an MLC within six months from the date he was sworn in, failing which he will cease to be the chief minister. Since all elections across the country had earlier been put on hold by the ECI owing to the pandemic lockdown, clouds of uncertainty hovered over Uddhav's fate.



P.TI

On April 9, the state cabinet had passed a resolution, advising governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari to nominate Uddhav to the council against one of its vacant seats. But Raj Bhawan showed no hurry to take any decision and sought legal advice. It prompted Sena leaders to accuse Koshyari of acting at the behest of the BJP in a bid to create political instability.

As the controversy snowballed, Uddhav called up Prime Minister Narendra Modi to express concerns over the developments and reportedly sought his intervention. Two days later, much to Uddhav's relief, the ECI announced the date for the polls. The ECI decision apparently came in response to a letter written by the governor requesting for the polls.

The decision of the BJP top brass to



Firmly in Saddle CM Uddhav Thackeray

facilitate Uddhav's entry is not devoid of political implications. Among other things, it is being interpreted as the BJP's big gesture to patch up with the Sena, with which it had shared power for many years before they fell out over sharing of the chief minister's post after the October 21 assembly elections. The Sena has since joined forces with the Nationalist Congress Party and the Congress to run the government, but political observers still believe it is ideologically closer to the BJP. Sooner or later, they think, internal contradictions will lead to the downfall of the MVA coalition and that is why the BJP has chosen to leave its door ajar for its former ally. □

brevis



J&K photojournalists (L-R) **Channi Anand, Yasin Dar** and **Mukhtar Khan** working with the Associated Press (AP), have won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in feature photography.



Lokpal member Justice (retired) **Ajay Kumar Tripathi**, who tested positive for COVID-19, has died following a cardiac arrest. He was 62.



Egyptian filmmaker **Shady Habash**, 24, who was imprisoned over a video that mocked president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has died in jail after two years in detention.



Kannada poet **K.S. Nisar Ahmed**, 84, has died. The Nityotsava Kavi, known for the poem *Jogada siri belakinalli* which went on to become a popular song, had cancer.



President Trump has nominated Indian-American attorney **Saritha Komatireddy**, who also teaches law at Columbia Law School, as a judge to a New York court.

Mixed Shots

SANITISED MARY

WITH alcohol shops opening in many states, tipplers are throwing social isolation to the winds, ostensibly to enrich state coffers and revive the economy. But the efforts of a man in Raisen district to raise the spirits of the exchequer did not impress the Madhya Pradesh government much. The man was trying to concoct a cocktail from hand sanitiser, whose primary constituent is alcohol. Considering how many were trying to make sanitiser at home from intoxicating brews, this innovative reverse engineering was only to be expected. 




SHIMLA, TOO HOT TO HANDLE

GETTING trapped in a sheep pen in Spiti turned out rather disastrous for a snow leopard. The government is transporting the highly endangered creature to Shimla, 350 km away, where it will eventually stay in a rehabilitation centre-cum-zoo on the city's outskirts. But this unprecedented translocation has annoyed wildlife experts. The reason? Shimla is too warm for the cat habituated to high altitudes. The zoo in Shimla, however, has been home to snow leopards before as it runs a breeding programme to conserve the species. 



TASTE THE DELECTABLE DOCTOR

BANGING pots, candle lights, flower showers...the government has been inspiring people to thank 'corona warriors' in unusual ways, but none of these gestures was enough for Haji Kalimullah. So, to express his profound gratitude, he developed a new variety of mango known as 'doctor mango'. A variant of the Dusshehri cultivar, it is supposedly sweeter and has a longer shelf life. But the doctor variety is just another bud on Kalimullah's fecund branch. The enterprising horticulturist, a Padma Shri awardee, has grown more than 300 varieties of mangoes, including 'Narendra Modi', 'Aishwarya Rai', 'Amit Shah' and 'Sachin Tendulkar'. 




PEDAL TO SAFETY, SAFELY

THOSE crowding despite the government advisory could learn some lessons from Tripura's Partha Saha. The man takes social distancing so seriously that he even invented a bicycle for it! The two-seater bike is unique because the distance between the seats is more than a metre. And if you'd rather not exert your lungs during the pandemic, worry not. The bicycle uses a lithium-ion battery, which on full charge, can propel it for 80 km in three hours. However, this is not a new feat for Saha. For the past five years, the enterprising automobile mechanic has been using his savings to make electric bikes and promote green energy and the 'Make in India' campaign. 



MADRAS HC BLUE-TICKS WHATSAPP

JUSTICE N. Anand Venkatesh of Madras High Court settled 23 insurance claim petitions with a single order. What makes the case special, however, is that he accepted the insurer's evidence of the petitioners' digital consent to its offer for settlement via WhatsApp messages. "These are unusual times. This is an unusual order," he observed. But WhatsApp and the judiciary have not always had such rosy encounters. A judge in Gujarat High Court pulled up a municipal corporation commissioner for sending him a message on WhatsApp and asked him why a contempt of court case should not be initiated against him. In Pakistan, a judge stopped proceedings after he received a transfer order on WhatsApp! 





Jyotika Sood

“Stopping advertising to save money is like stopping your watch to save time.”

—Henry Ford

LOCKDOWN or no, the show must go on. That’s the principle India Inc has embraced during this nationwide shutdown to stem the spread of COVID-19. The bazaars are shuttered, as are most factories, and shoppers have been sequestered for nearly two months. So how are brands winning people’s hearts when everyone is worried about their lungs? The answer is creativity, as David Ogilvy professed long before the pandemic changed the rules of the game: “If it doesn’t sell, it isn’t creative.”

Take Unilever’s Surf Excel campaign #DaagGharPeRahenge. The advert created using stills and the narration of seven-year-old Grishma Mohan motivates kids to stay at home with a message they can grasp: The swing, the bicycle, the playground will wait for us—if we just stay at home for a few days.

Prabha Pandey, mother of a six-year-old, says, “My daughter has been insisting on going to school and the playground. Such advertisements help convince kids..” Although she is not on Instagram, where Surf Excel is primarily running the campaign, she feels such advertisements can give pointers to parents on how to explain things to kids. “Like in the video, I tell my daughter that the swing is tired and needs rest, which she understands,” says Prabha.

Such ads remind us of American futurist Alvin Toffler’s words: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Reckitt Benckiser’s Dettol, for instance, is a household product, with tremendous recall and goodwill value. But it too needs a push in this age of hand sanitisers, soaps and bleach. So it unleashed a social media

JUST DO IT

Brands are turning adversity on its head by reaching out to consumers in innovative ways during the pandemic



campaign with one of the most viral platforms in the market, TikTok. Its #HandWashChallenge campaign has got over 93 million views so far, many from tier-II and tier-III cities.

Pankaj Duhan, marketing director, Reckitt Benckiser, South Asia, Health, says, “When the pandemic struck, it changed a lot of things for consumers and governments. Since there is no vaccination and preventive measures are the first line of defence, Dettol, being the most trusted brand, had all the more responsibility.”

He explains that Dettol launched the campaign with three milestones. The first was to educate people to clean their hands with soap or hand sanitiser. Second, show the right way to wash hands and third, the right duration, that is, 20 seconds. “With these objectives in mind, we created many commercials by partnering with popular celebrities,” says Duhan. Lara Dutta, Shikhar Dhawan and Neha Dhupia were some of the stars who washed their hands with Dettol soap for the video. He adds that the celebrities themselves shot their clips and their videos were edited together to make a commercial, thereby ensuring that social distancing and other lockdown guidelines were followed.

Reckitt Benckiser also made commercials for products like Moov—working from home might give you aches and the company espoused the use of Moov



Dettol created ads with celebrities like Lara Dutta and Shikhar Dhawan about the importance of washing hands.

along with yoga and exercise. Unilever, a brand with a wide range of hygiene products, also changed its advertising strategy. The company engaged several celebrities, including rapper Badshah, for its #LifebuoyKarbona campaign and other promotions.

A creative director, on condition of anonymity, says, “The pandemic

changed a lot of things. The advertising industry was also not immune, but they have to be applauded for coming out with such creative ideas despite the challenges. In the past month, almost no advertisements were shot and yet there is a lot of variety.” Shooting videos without directors and actors shooting themselves without professional DoPs are some of the changes the industry had to embrace. “But most surprising was corporates coming up with responsible campaigns,” he says.

During the first phase of the lockdown, e-commerce giant Flipkart started a campaign called 21 Days of Safe Living. It gave one activity every day to people to help them beat the lockdown blues.



Sample activity 12/21: 'Hiding a talent? Record and share a video with your gang.' Activity 13/21 recommends soaking sunshine for at least 20 minutes to get Vitamin D. Durex put out an advert urging people to "come inside", a cheeky way of asking people to stay at home during the lockdown.

Dairy producer Amul is known for its quirky billboard advertisements. After Doordarshan announced that *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* would be broadcast again, Amul's marketing team tuned into the commercials of that era. Its old ads were a rage on social media; they made people nostalgic and ignited conversations. Amul also dedicated its new doodle to the success of *Ramayan*, which recorded an unprecedented 7.7 crore viewers on the night of April 16.

Amul MD R.S. Sodhi says, "We have always resonated with the emotions of our customers and listened to their feedback. Recently, when everyone was enjoying *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* on Doordarshan, we received many requests to showcase our vintage ads from the eighties and nineties, so we decided to air our Amul Classic collection of ads featuring the first ad for our butter, chocolate and milk among others. This initiative resonated strongly with our consumers who grew up with the

According to market experts, advertising demand is decreasing, except for categories like essentials, health and hygiene.

brand over the past 60+ years"


In a social media post, communications consultant Karthik Srinivasan writes, "Any brand that used to advertise during the first airing of *Ramayan* or *Mahabharat* on Doordarshan in the late 80s and 90s could have gone on this nostalgic trip using nothing but its advertising archives. This includes many brands like Bajaj, Vicco, Dabur Chyawanprash etc. But it took an Amul to pull it off first."

Advertising campaigns in India can be broadly classified into three categories— advertising campaigns where one brand is pitted against another, purpose advertising campaigns where brands persuade for a cause, and purely social campaigns.

"Forging partnerships for social campaigns between brands could have sent a strong message, but there was no such effort, which is a bit disappoint-

ing. Brands banding together in such testing times makes a strong statement to the public," says the creative director who doesn't wish to be named. Several corporates are now looking forward to collaborations since the pandemic is a long-term scenario rather than a short journey, he adds.

According to market experts, advertising demand is decreasing, except for categories like essentials, health and hygiene. Industries are responding differently. While advertisements for travel agencies, hotels and restaurants are next to negligible, essential commodities have taken over TV screens, newspapers and magazines. Most companies are slashing their advertising expenditures, while some brands are doubling it to highlight their COVID-19 response along with their products.

As per the Dentsu Aegis Network report, India's digital advertising in 2019 witnessed a 26 per cent increase over 2018 to reach Rs 13,683 crore, with overall advertising witnessing a growth of 9.4 per cent. The report says digital outreach continued to increase and was likely to grow at 27 per cent to Rs 17,377 crore by the end of 2020. However, with the pandemic, market pundits are unsure if the numbers are attainable. An ad with a good recall value though? Always attainable. 

THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION



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General Secretary,
Bihar, BJP



Prof Pushendra Kumar Singh,
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Shovel For The Spindle

Shuttered silk looms force weavers to work the dirt in construction sites

Abdul Gani in Guwahati

THE looms have long gone silent. The traditional hand-operated, bamboo-and-wood contraptions on which skilled artisans weave dreams in threads of silk. And the modern machines that usually whirred day and night to churn out traditional dresses. But Sualkuchi, the silk town of Assam, is silent as a cemetery nowadays, with its fabled weaving industry shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Some 35 km from Sualkuchi, Ananda Das, 27, is working at a construction site these days. He has traded his weaver's tools for a spade and shovel, like many other fellow-weavers, to feed his family in these hard times. Assam, and the Northeast, may not have been as hard hit by coronavirus like the rest of the country, but the region has also been put under lockdown to prevent spread of the virus. The state has recorded one death from COVID-19, out of 44 positive cases.

While lockdown measures have been relaxed to reopen the construction sector, the weaving industry of Sualkuchi is still shuttered. "We had little option. As the days (under lockdown) increased, our sufferings grew. We just couldn't sit idle. So, we decided to move out and work here at the construction site," Das tells *Outlook*. The weaver



"We have looms but they are useless now. If we don't venture out of home to work, our family will starve."


says he, along with 27 more men from his neighbourhood, had been working at the construction site for the past fortnight. They are getting Rs 500 a day, which is way below the minimum wages for weavers.

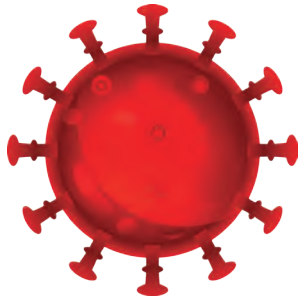
Another weaver, Jyotirmoy Rajbongshi, shares a similar story. "We have looms at home but they are useless now. We all are weavers who have been working here. We are helpless. If we don't venture out of our home to work, our family members will be starving. So, what do we do? We don't know when things will be normal," Rajbongshi adds.

Sualkuchi, where weaving of silk clothes dates back to the 11th century, has an annual turnover of Rs 1,000 crore. According to the organisation representing the weavers, the

coronavirus outbreak has brought the 7,200-odd active looms to a standstill for more than a month.

Hiralal Kalita, the secretary of the weavers' association, who is also a master weaver, says the age-old silk industry of Sualkuchi employs an estimated 15,000 craftspeople. "It's a terrible situation...We can't sell our products. Our foreign clients have already cancelled their orders. Clients in the US have told me that they are not buying anymore. And the Japanese clients have asked me to wait for another six months," Kalita says.

The weavers at the construction sites, however, still wear their identity like a badge of honour—in the form of designer face masks made of silk and golden muga, the same masks they were making before the lockdown kicked in. 



Novel Coronavirus Disease: What Cancer Patients and Caregivers Need to Know

Dr. Kush Gupta and Dr. P. K. Julka

The emergence of the new coronavirus, COVID-19, poses a serious impact on the lives of many people, including cancer patients and caregivers. Some types of cancer and treatments such as chemotherapy can weaken the immune system, thereby making people with cancer more vulnerable for developing infection caused by viruses like coronavirus. Currently, very little is known about the effect of COVID-19 in cancer patients, and only two retrospective studies are available from which to draw conclusions.

One such study assessing 28 COVID-19-infected cancer patients in Wuhan, China demonstrated that infected patients were mostly male (60.7%), with lung cancer as the most frequent cancer type (25%), and reported an overall mortality rate of 28.6%.¹ The risk of developing severe adverse events was associated with the administration of anticancer treatment within the last 14 days. Another retrospective analysis of 355 patients in Italy showed that 20% of patients who died of COVID-19 had an active cancer.² Hence, there is an urgent need to address the management of cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is at risk:³⁻⁶

- Patients receiving chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or other cancer treatments that affect the immune system,
- Patients receiving extensive radiotherapy,
- Patients with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukemia, lymphoma, or myeloma,
- Patients who have undergone bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months and are currently taking immunosuppressive drugs.

Cancer patients and caregivers should be screened for common symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, shaking, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell. A central helpline number should be contacted when experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

How to protect yourself:³⁻⁶

The best way to protect against COVID-19 is to avoid exposure. It is important that both patients and caregivers follow precautions to lower their risk of getting COVID-19:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, coughing, or sneezing.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from others, even while wearing a face mask/covering
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Stay home as much as possible.
- Cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces on a regular basis.

Cancer treatment during coronavirus pandemic:³⁻⁶

The risks of missing cancer treatment during the pandemic must be evaluated against the possibility of exposing a patient to the virus. While some cancer treatments can be safely delayed, treatment of patients with high-risk disease must be scheduled wherever possible. Based on the urgency and condition of the patient, the cancer specialist may adopt a tiered approach of high, medium and low priority:

- High priority approach:** This approach shall be considered for curative therapies among high-risk patients with an expected survival benefit or among patients with an anticipated risk of early mortality. The specialist may consider giving colony-stimulating factors to manage immune suppression brought on by chemotherapy regimens.
- Medium priority approach:** This approach shall be considered for treatment indications with modest survival benefit. The specialist may consider replacing infusion procedures with subcutaneous or oral therapies where possible, as well as telemedicine/video consultations as a substitute for face-to-face consultations. For patients undergoing radiotherapy, a shorter or hypo-fractionated radiation scheme may be considered where appropriate.
- Low priority:** This approach shall be considered for stable patients or for those having no expected survival or quality of life benefit. The specialist may consider postponing treatment for patients on maintenance therapies, delaying elective surgeries where appropriate, and cancelling routine cancer screening.

Clinical trials are the mainstay for developing newer, better, and safer medicines. Clinical trials for the development of vaccines and treatment strategies for COVID-19 are underway, and scientists are hopeful of achieving a breakthrough soon. We must remain positive during this pandemic and wait for the right time to bounce back to full capacity. This too shall pass.

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The Grand Mosque
in Srinagar, off limits for
the faithful because of
the COVID-19 lockdown

Raudra Raag In Darbari Strain

Shifting away from Srinagar, power goes right out of J&K

Naseer Ganai in Srinagar

THE Centre's move to shift all service matters from the Jammu and Kashmir High Court to the Chandigarh bench of the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) drew little reaction from Kashmiris, who saw it as *fait accompli*, but evoked anger and disbelief in Jammu. The move, notified on April 29 by the Union ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions, was a result of the Administrative Tribunal Act, 1985, becoming applicable to the two Union territories—J&K and Ladakh—that were created from the united J&K state following the

abrogation of Article 370 last August. With it, over 37,000 cases pending before the J&K High Court were shifted to Chandigarh, infuriating Jammu-based lawyers and employees' associations. The lawyers say the move will render them jobless and also inflict a huge toll on around 6 lakh employees, both retired and working, as all service matters like promotion,

“Kashmir has been reduced to a municipality, so Jammu will be just a block,” says a mainstream leader.

transfer and suspension will now be heard in Chandigarh.

“Jitendra Singh (MoS, PMO) had told me there will be a permanent CAT bench in Jammu and no lawyer would have to go to Chandigarh to fight cases,” says Jammu High Court Bar Association president Abhinav Sharma, who is with the BJP. Another senior lawyer, Sunil Sethi, says the government should withhold the decision of transferring files to CAT until its benches are established in Jammu and Srinagar.

On May 1, the government said service matters of government employees in the Union territories of J&K and Ladakh will be heard by the J&K bench of CAT. But the lawyers describe it as hogwash. “We need four benches in Jammu and three in Srinagar, not a circuit bench of CAT in Jammu,” says Sheikh Shakeel, a senior advocate and member of the Jammu bar association.

Lawyers and intellectuals in Jammu are hopeful that the government would buckle under their pressure. Earlier, when young people in Jammu protested against the new domicile law that opened up government jobs

in J&K to every citizen of the country, the Union home ministry was forced to reverse the decision and reserve the jobs exclusively for the domiciles of J&K.

Lawyers in Kashmir, who mostly deal with service matters just like their Jammu counterparts, however, didn't question the move. They hope the Jammu bar association would succeed in forcing the government to establish CAT benches in Jammu and Srinagar. "Who will listen to us? Our bar association president has been in prison since last August and had to approach the high court to get summer clothes in jail," says a Srinagar-based lawyer. On August 5, 2019, the police picked up the Kashmir Bar Association president, 76-year-old Mian Qayoom, from his residence and booked him under the Public Safety Act. He was then shifted to Agra Central Jail in Uttar Pradesh and has been held there since.

A series of moves, including the arrests of three former CMs (Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti), the domicile law, halting the Darbar move in Jammu and shifting cases to Chandigarh from J&K, have given the impression to people in the Valley that power has shifted from Kashmir to Jammu.

"Jammu is the salient space of public authority and non-government action," says former J&K finance minister Haseeb Drabu. "In line with such a change, whatever the de jure status, the de facto capital has changed. Capitals, apart from administrative and material functional considerations, are the seats of political power and authority. Whenever that changes, capitals change. Whether one likes it or not, much like Article 370, the substantive basis of Srinagar as a capital has been eroded over time. It has been emaciated by successive governments at the Centre. Its administrative importance started dwindling in the 1980s and was completed in the 1990s. All the central government institutions, departments, agencies and undertakings have chosen to locate their regional offices in Jammu."


Conceding there is no disagreement over the fact that Kashmir has lost power, others argue, however, that Jammu has little to gain from it. Jammu-based author and political



commentator Zafar Choudhary says the Kashmir Valley has been seen as the centre of power within J&K since 1947. "Even as Kashmiris have always complained about powerlessness on account of Delhi's alleged control over the decision-making capacity of the Kashmiri elite, power, in whatever form it exists in the region, has been seen to be with Kashmiris. The events since last August have sought to effectively dismantle not only the narrative, but also the structures of power," he says.

Choudhary adds that while the

perception in Kashmir is that power has shifted to Jammu, the story in Jammu is different. "After initial jubilation over the abrogation of Article 370, which the Dogras believed gave special privileges to Kashmiris, there is cluelessness in Jammu. Just like powerlessness in Kashmir," he says. "Following a series of decisions, Jammu has come to believe that the local leadership or sentiment has no influence over decision-making in New Delhi or at Jammu's Raj Bhawan, but they suspect Kashmiris are still in touch with Delhi and that is how power is going to be restored to them at an appropriate time."

A mainstream political leader, who does not wish to be identified, partly agrees with Choudhary. "For long Jammu has been used to counter-balance Kashmir. Jammu was enjoying huge value and power when Kashmir had some semblance of power. Now that the government of India has reduced Kashmir to a municipality, Jammu will be just a block. It has lost its value too. The divisional commissioner of Kashmir now holds the authority once invested in (former J&K PM and CM) Sheikh Abdullah. That is Kashmir's current reality. The Centre has resolved Kashmir in its wisdom," says the politician. 



"Now there is cluelessness in Jammu and powerlessness in Kashmir."

ZAFAR CHOUDHARY,
Jammu-based author

TAKE THE BULLYON RIDE

Gold may become a tool for revival of household fortunes and small enterprises

Yagnesh Kansara in Mumbai

In the Hindu calendar, Akshaya Tritiya is considered an auspicious day for people to buy gold. But this year the COVID-19 lockdown has dampened the demand for the precious metal. But given its resilience as a safe-haven asset, experts are forecasting that prices may cross Rs 5,000 a gram by the end of 2020.

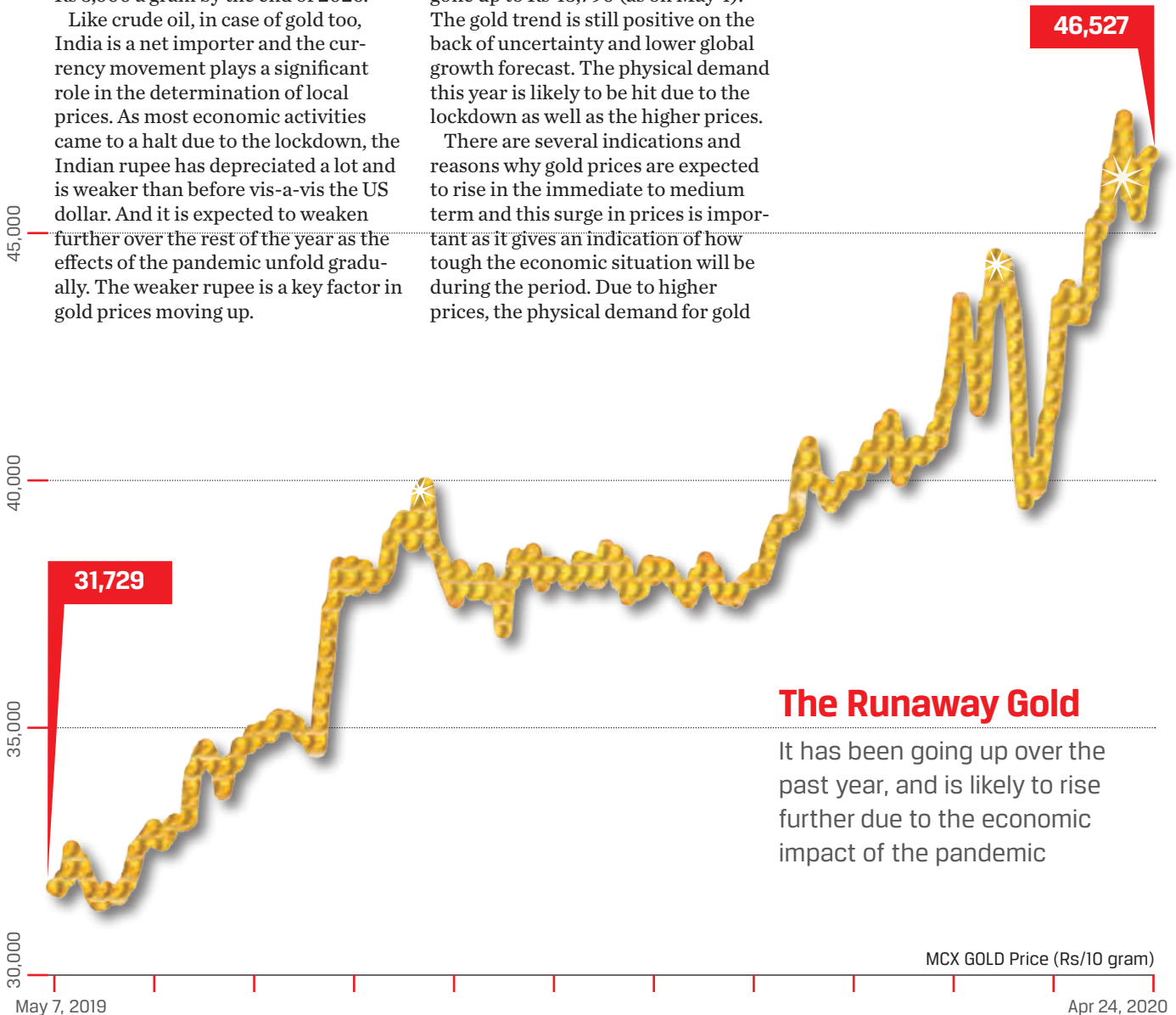
Like crude oil, in case of gold too, India is a net importer and the currency movement plays a significant role in the determination of local prices. As most economic activities came to a halt due to the lockdown, the Indian rupee has depreciated a lot and is weaker than before vis-a-vis the US dollar. And it is expected to weaken further over the rest of the year as the effects of the pandemic unfold gradually. The weaker rupee is a key factor in gold prices moving up.

In 2019, around 33 to 35 tonnes of gold was sold on Akshaya Tritiya (May 7). In the past two months, import of gold to India has dipped more than 73 per cent on a year-on-year basis. This March, India imported just 25 tonnes against around 94 tonnes in March 2019. Last year's Akshaya Tritiya saw gold being traded at Rs 31,500 per 10 gm and gave almost 47 per cent returns to gold investors. Now the price has gone up to Rs 45,790 (as on May 4). The gold trend is still positive on the back of uncertainty and lower global growth forecast. The physical demand this year is likely to be hit due to the lockdown as well as the higher prices.

There are several indications and reasons why gold prices are expected to rise in the immediate to medium term and this surge in prices is important as it gives an indication of how tough the economic situation will be during the period. Due to higher prices, the physical demand for gold

has declined, but the investment demand for the yellow metal has risen due to rising institutional demand.

According to World Gold Council (WGC), Indian demand for January-March 2020 declined by 36 per cent in volume terms to 102 tonnes, while in value terms it declined by 20 per cent and 22 per cent in rupees and US dollars, respectively. During the quarter under review, jewellery demand for

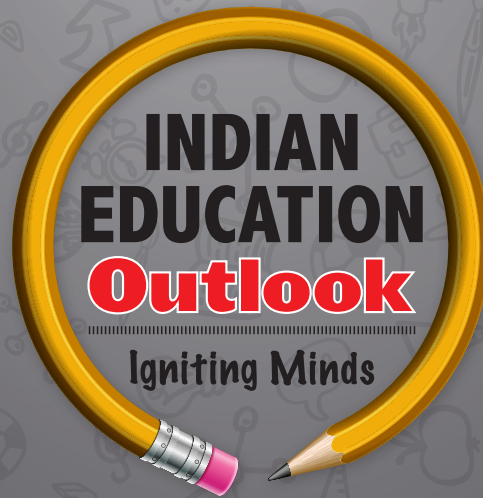


The Runaway Gold

It has been going up over the past year, and is likely to rise further due to the economic impact of the pandemic

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Zaki Ansari
Sigmoid Frogs



Dr Ayesha Kidwai
Professor of Linguistics at JNU



Shreyasi Singh
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gold in Asia's third largest economy declined by 41 per cent to 73.9 tonnes, while investment demand declined by 17 per cent to 28.1 tonnes. According to the WGC, the drop in physical demand for the yellow metal was attributed to a combination of factors such as high and volatile prices, economic uncertainties and, towards the end of the quarter, severe logistical freeze due to the lockdown.

However, the total gold recycled in India in the quarter was 18.5 tonnes, up by 16 per cent from 16.1 tonnes in the corresponding quarter last year. "This increase was expected due to the lifetime high prices of gold," says P.R. Somasundaram, managing director of the WGC India chapter.

"Recycling and collateralised loans against gold are expected to grow exponentially in the next few quarters as the lockdown's immediate economic impact becomes evident and, hopefully, fundamental reforms follow, easing business sentiment."

With the pandemic bringing the world economy to a near-halt and a possible contraction ahead, gold seems an attractive option as a hedge against uncertainty and a good investment vehicle in the current scenario.

Moreover, as the central banks of developed nations have been on an easing spree to fight the contraction, the fiat currencies are expected to face pressure in the near future. "In such a scenario, gold is likely to emerge as a safe-haven asset," says Pankaj Bobade, head of fundamental research at Axis Securities. "One should have a part of the portfolio invested in Gold ETF as an insurance against the possible volatilities expected in the global financial market. So, if you are looking to buy gold, Gold ETF would be a good option from a long-term perspective."

Governments across the globe have announced various stimulus packages and are in process of bringing in more. Global interest rates have fallen sharply as global central bankers have cut around 750 basis points of rates to combat economic slowdown. The major central bankers are forced to adapt accommodative monetary poli-

cies and support the crumbling economies with everything they can, which includes quantitative easing too. Talk of helicopter money is not rare anymore.

Although physical demand for gold remains weak in key consuming nations like India and China, it is strong in the US, Canada, Australia, etc. The fact that NYMEX has gone for a provision of negative pricing mechanism for WTI oil underscores the severe distress in the economy, huge volatility amid unpredictability, and an extremely grim overall situation. "The COVID-19 contagion doesn't appear to be peaking anytime soon and weak currencies are likely to favour gold


their long-term gold allocations. In dollar terms, gold is up 14 per cent year till date (YTD) and up 34 per cent over the past 12 months. "Safe-haven demand always supports the gold prices," says Anuj Gupta, DVP-Commodities & Currencies Research, Angel Broking. "This time gold is trading on higher levels (recently gold touched the lifetime high of Rs 47,327). Technically, we recommend waiting for some correction till Rs 38,000-40,000 to buy gold for the target of Rs 50,000-52,000 in gold prices. In the international market, gold may test \$1,780-1,800 per troy ounce (1 troy ounce = 31.10 gm). Closing above \$1,800 levels may lead this rally

towards \$1,880-1,950 levels."

Gold is looked upon as a critical barometer during uncertain times in the economy. All major central banks have embarked on a "once in a lifetime" monetary expansion policy that will radically increase money supply.

COVID-19 has resulted in implied volatility at historical highs. "Price outlook on gold remains positive with prices expected to rise significantly to meet the investor demand as a safe-haven asset and due to depreciation of the rupee," says Shekhar

Bhandari, senior executive vice president (precious metals), Kotak Mahindra Bank. "We can expect gold prices to continue the rally, to settle above Rs 5,000 per gm by the end of this financial year, primarily driven by the COVID-19 crisis and its significant impact on the global economy."

The rising prices will not only benefit the investors who begin their investment journey at every dip in prices to reap the benefits of higher prices at the end of the year. It will also benefit economies like India and China, the biggest importers of the precious metal, as due to higher prices, their physical demand may take a hit, leading to lower imports. This will ease the burden on India's current account deficit and support the Indian currency. In that scenario, gold may become a tool for revival of many small and medium enterprises and household fortunes. 



Lower physical demand for gold, leading to lower imports, will ease India's current account deficit.

prices as buying gold would provide a hedge against weakness in the currencies," says Praveen Singh, AVP-Fundamental Research, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. "Although huge volatility is expected, we expect gold price prices to rise to US\$2,000 in the medium term, and thus suggest buying at the dips."

Real yields are a strong driver of gold prices, now in negative territory. Inflows into Gold ETFs are on rise. Asset managers too are increasing



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My Friend Siras

Ten years after an Aligarh Muslim University professor's death, his friend mourns a beautiful life cut short by homophobia



JITENDER GUPTA



A Single Man
Professor
Shrinivas
Ramchandra
Siras at
Aligarh Muslim
University

THE memory of him walking down the street—ruffled shirt and trousers loosely hanging over a gangly body, worn-out sandals, *jhola* on the shoulder, a leisurely pensive walk—continues to haunt me. A lonely, pathetic figure after the suspension order from the university. I wondered what was on his mind, what his plans were, how deeply had the recent events affected him. The street with potholes wore a deserted look—dry leaves and torn pages blowing in the wind, hardly any traffic or people—and was acutely depressing. In retrospect, the foreboding of a pending tragedy.

Two days earlier, a colleague in his department phoned me late in the evening and told me that some journalists had forcefully entered Siras's

The injustice and derision of his homophobic colleagues and the university made him feel humiliated and despondent.

home. He was found with his partner, a rickshaw puller, in an intimate position. Photographs were taken and public shaming was planned. At the time, the university proctor and public relations officer were dining in the guesthouse some two hundred yards away. I immediately contacted Siras to verify and comfort him, only to find him shaken, unsure of himself, insecure, unable to comprehend the injustice meted out to him. Before these events unravelled, I knew little of his sexual orientation.

However, I vowed to take the matter to its logical conclusion, which eventually did happen, but Siras was not there long enough to celebrate it.

Siras was from Nagpur. He wore a moustache and was usually unshaven. An eccentric, sombre, rarely excitable man, he was sincere in his approach and would often smile dreamily. He was lost to the world most of the time, but had an intensity about him and was always attentive when we met. We were just acquaintances until 1998, when he was suspended in an unrelated case and I represented him as defence assistant before an inquiry

committee. The flimsy charge was based on a newspaper report of a minor incident in Nagpur, where he was picked up and suffered the wrath of the police. A false FIR was lodged, but he was eventually acquitted.

After that, we met off and on till this incident of the invasion of his privacy in February 2010, when he faced another suspension. He was despondent; the university administration was pressuring him for an unconditional apology for “bringing disrepute to the institution”. I asked him about his plans—he had none. He did not want to do anything and preferred the suffering; he felt alone and alienated. I informed him that the law was with him—the Delhi-based Naz Foundation had been successful in its struggle for decriminalisation of alternative sexual preferences at Delhi High Court. He confessed he was deeply disturbed and sad because he had managed to conceal his sexual orientation since he was 13 and now, on the verge of retirement, he stood exposed. And then, there was the injustice and derision of his homophobic colleagues and the university administration. He felt humiliated, he could not control his emotions—tears in his eyes, he looked away from me.

After calming down somewhat, he agreed to approach the media, seek help from NGOs and file a case at Allahabad High Court to fight for his dignity and liberty, to live life the way he wanted. We started to get in touch with the media, with the Naz Foundation and other prominent NGOs. Within a week, international publications carried the story. He filed the case at the high court. Siras felt more at ease, fully confident to confront the situation. His joviality returned.

We met often, writing, communicating, strategising the campaign. Help started to pour in from within the university too, including from students. In the meantime, the university evicted him from the campus accommodation and cut off his water and power supply. I recall him loading his meagre worldly possessions onto a rickshaw to carry to his new home. But a week later, his landlord learnt about the case and asked him to vacate the flat. Siras had to move to yet another house. However, invigorated with progress in his case, he retained his optimism and



↑
Pensive Manoj Bajpayee plays Siras in the film *Aligarh*

Alas, a life lost. And for what? He has become a metaphor, a spectre that looms large on our conscience.

courage and continued the struggle unabated.

The case was scheduled for a final hearing, before which Siras had to leave for Nagpur. When he returned on April 5, I found him frantically strolling on the faculty lawns early in the morning, waiting for me. He had a gleeful, shy smile. Amazingly, his every word and gesture were impregnated with joy, excitement and impatience. I knew he had some good news. He could not wait. We climbed the stairs to my chamber and the moment we entered—not even wait-

ing to sit down—he announced he had won the case in the high court!

He had won the freedom to choose, his dignity, without any animosity towards anyone, including the university. He had overcome the heteronormativity of a perverted society we live in. He left promising to meet me at my place. He came over early in the evening; we sat and chatted. My wife was very happy. She congratulated him and he promised to bring sweets to celebrate. Siras was waiting for his nephew to come a little later with a copy of the high court’s order. That was the last time I saw him, walking down the lane, with a bounce in his steps.

I had gone to Delhi and was about to board the train back to Aligarh on April 7 when I got a message—Siras was gone. The last I saw him, he was so happy. I could not believe it—I was stunned, shocked, dismayed, not knowing what to say or do. Alas, a life lost. And for what? My friend has become a metaphor, a spectre that looms large on our conscience. The celebration he had promised remains unfulfilled. □

(Views are personal)

Yours Truly, Moi Axomiya

Why it's wrong to deech Assamese litterateur Syed Abdul Malik's patriotic poem from 1941 with communal dirt



THE sharp clinical scalpel of an analyst is sometimes required to protect the compassionate nib of a poet, an author. Such an occasion has risen from a recent post on social media—that blank verse of the free world in which moral goalposts shift as easily and frequently as sand dunes. This virtual world of chicanery found an odd candidate for an unfettered slanging match: an ode to Assam, its people, culture, diversity and natural beauty written by a 22-year-old dreamer in 1941. The poem is *Moi Axomiya* (I'm Assamese), which has held out the sands of time. It was first published in *Banhi*, a popular Assamese magazine edited by the legendary Lakshminath Bezbarua. The poet was Syed Abdul Malik (1919-2000)—a Padma Bhushan and Sahitya Akademi award-winning author, one of Assam's finest, whose biographical *Dhanya Nara Tanu Bhaal* is considered the best-ever tome on Sankardev, the 16th-century Assamese philosopher-reformist who founded the Bhakti or Vaishnav movement in this corner of the planet straddling the Brahmaputra.

Every artist/author offers up their work and their selves to critics. But in the grand scheme of things, will Shakespeare's soliloquies lose their meaningful place in his oeuvre if critics dismiss them as rambling monologues of a deranged prince? No. Malik's poem is no exception. It is there to be critiqued. Yet, when criticism becomes a personal attack for the faith he followed, it needs to be called out. *Moi Axomiya* landed in a social media maelstrom and set off TV debates on patriotism, nationalism and, of course, Assamese identity after a college teacher picked a stanza from the poem and accused Malik of glorifying the Mughals. But is the critically acclaimed eulogy a poetic appraisal of the Mughals who invaded Axom more than a dozen

times but were defeated, repelled and many PoWs 'assimilated'?

The answer is plain misreading of the text, and the context, in one stanza rather than the whole poem. Misreading forces incorrect interpretation, breeds dissension. One misstep in observing the entirety of the work, or the perspective, creates confusion, tarnishes the creator's image and it festers like an untreated sepsis. First, it is important to refer to the time the young poet dwelled in. Patriotism ran high; the call to freedom was at its peak. The selfhood of the poet being an Assamese pervades through the diction, with history providing the background. He

broadcasts his patriotic sentiments and celebrates the assorted, multi-dimensional concept of Assamese identity.

The opening stanza is identified as the focal idea of the thought trail. "Bijoy" or victory finds mention twice, indicating the bipolar status of the Mughals—an invader's dream of conquest, and the triumph of the lush green land and its people in subsuming the vanquished soldiers under a new organic identity. *Axomiya* or Assamese. Two narrators frame the text: the Mughals speak for themselves in the first to the fourth stanzas, not the poet as alleged. Don't be misled by the *Moi*, or the first person I, in the title and heart of the narrative. It would be unethical to assume that the dreams and intentions of the Mughals were that of the poet. The poet is simply the interpreter, role-playing the Mughals to prise out their feelings. He lends his voice, not his conscience, to the Mughals to present their case.

From the fifth stanza, the poet-narrator speaks out: how the Mughals were drawn to Axom, and why a defeated army surrendered its soul to the land's composite culture, beauty and solidarity. *The same Mughals who brought the Rajputs to their knees/Now stood listless before an army/That fed on water and hand-pounded rice.* Another expression—*Duror Moogal aahi hol Axomiya* (Mughals from afar came here and became Assamese)—highlights the harmonic assimilation and patriotism.

Religion has no role in *Moi Axomiya*; the poet steers clear of that brocaded fabric of society. He rather celebrates the land's history of humanitarianism and the cosmopolitan badge it wears with pride. A young Malik, at a time of socio-political turmoil, leaves an indelible mark of patriotism in a simple poem. *I am Assamese in life/And in death/I am Assamese when alive/And when I die/It's a peaceful Assamese death I crave.* It is regrettable that a patriot-poet is evaluated on communal anvils that fail to soak the hits. ❑

(Views expressed are personal)



It would be unethical to assume that the dreams and intentions of the Mughals were that of the poet.

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WORLD TOUR



TANZANIA The National Health Laboratory director was suspended after a papaya sample, faked under a woman's name, tested positive for coronavirus. Vehicle oil under Jabir Hamza's sample tested negative, while a jackfruit sample called Sara Samwell was inconclusive. But the papaya sample, faked as Elizabeth Anne, exposed the fraud.



UNITED STATES Donald Trump revised his earlier estimate and warned that 1,00,000 people could die of coronavirus. But he expressed optimism that a vaccine could be found by the year-end. Experts believe it will take 12 to 18 months. Over 67,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the US.



VENEZUELA The government claimed it foiled an attempted sea incursion by "terrorist mercenaries" from Colombia. It said the terrorist group arrived on speedboats at the coastal state of La Guaira. President Nicolás Maduro often accuses adversaries of attempting to overthrow him with US backing. The Opposition and Colombia, the neighbouring country with which Venezuela broke diplomatic relations last year, dismissed the claim.



FOREIGN HAND

THE coronavirus outbreak in France was not caused by cases imported from China, but from a locally circulating strain of unknown origin, a study by French scientists at the Institut Pasteur in Paris says. It comes at a time when many European nations have joined the US-initiated move to blame China for the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is made public when posts by the Chinese ambassador in France, criticising the West's handling of the pandemic, has strained Sino-French relations.

France was among the EU members that expressed concern over China's alleged predatory takeover of strategically important European companies in the wake of the pandemic.

Genetic analysis showed the dominant types of the viral strains in France belonged to a clade—a group of organisms with common ancestry—that did not come from China or Italy, the earliest hotspot in Europe. "The French outbreak has been mainly seeded by one or several variants of this clade....we can infer that the virus was silently circulating in France in February," the *South China Morning Post* quoted researchers.

The new coronavirus has infected 1,28,000 people in France; 23,000 died till the time of writing. It was detected by France in late January, before any other European country. A few patients with a travel history that included China's Hubei province tested positive in January. Decisive measures to trace contact of the infected delayed further infection.

However, researchers say the clade strains were not found in patients tested after the initial imported cases, suggesting "the quarantine imposed on the initial COVID-19 cases in France appears to have prevented local transmission". The Institut collected samples of over 90 other patients across France and found the strains all came from one genetic line that had so far only been detected in Europe and the Americas. The earliest sample was collected from a patient who had no travel history and no known contacts with China-returned travellers.

To researchers' surprise, some of the later strains collected were genetically older—or closer to the ancestral root—than the first sample in this clade. Thus, they say, local transmission had been occurring in France without being detected. Researchers also found that three sequences later sampled in Algeria were closely related to those in France, suggesting that French travellers might have introduced the virus there.

The new findings reported by the *NYT*, did not go down well with the US President. "So now the Fake News @nytimes is tracing the CoronaVirus origins back to Europe, NOT China. This is a first!" said a Donald Trump tweet.

As COVID-19 frontliners are busy guarding your health,



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Nabard disburse ₹12,767 cr to state co-op banks, RRBs

RRBs to provide ₹50,000-crore refinance facility to AIFIs

THE NATIONAL Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Tuesday said it has disbursed ₹12,767 crore to state co-op banks and regional rural banks

Nabard disburses ₹12,767 crore to State Co-op Banks, RRBs

HAKRISHNAN
 The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday announced a ₹50,000-crore refinance facilities to three AIFIs - Nabard, the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), and the National Housing Bank (NHB). The refinance has been taken by the RBI to meet the credit needs at a time when the economy is facing a sharp downturn.

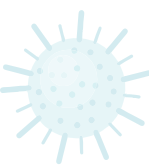


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COVER
COVID-19
STORY

THE PAUSE BUTTON

G.C. Shekhar

 Maybe it was a hex gone wrong for what would have been Season 13 of the IPL. Maybe when an Andre Russell or a David Warner was smoking sixes around the park last year, a rival captain wished for some godly device to do some rasta roko—and it worked too well. And the world itself was adjourned sine die...

And things got Covedid. By that we mean two contrary ideas. Things got cancelled, called off, declared dead on arrival, deferred. A Shaheen Bagh here, an Ayodhya temple there. But they also got catalysed as the nature of the emergency around us allowed normal due diligence to be waived. All manner of events were to test COVID-positive. From exams that would have left kids discussing more than just misogyny on Instagram (a career, for instance), to the mango that flavours India's summers, to the slow-burning drama of Rajya Sabha elections. Also, those festivals. India is a land of festivals. Not just the religious ones. Every occasion, every context comes with its own dose of festivities that makes celebration here a unique mode of being—be it the release of one superstar's comeback movie or another superstar's political launch. An unseen virus has interrupted us, mid-sentence. All of us, without class distinctions. Superstars are on pause as much as migrant labourers waiting for their train, telecom mavens have their 5G calls put on hold, fiscal planners have their Excel spreadsheets all messed up, purohits and muezzins are missing the throng of devouts, even the gods have been conferred with some splendid isolation. Did corona also kill capitalism? Or did it just force it to mutate? We'll find out if we live long enough! Meanwhile, we set ourselves the humbler task of surveying the landscape, and listing out the COVID casualties—mostly things that got nixed, and a few that got speeded up.

Rajini Proposes, CORONA DISPOSES

The pandemic could be the villain worthy enough to upset the hero's plans

As an actor and public figure, Rajinikanth's star appeal vies with gravity. Then, the superstar is the subject of a cottage industry of fondly concocted tall tales with the same denouement—a truly titanic force humbly accepts Rajini's omnipotence. Yet, for once, Rajinikanth's famed super power has met its match. The unseen villain that goes by the name of COVID-19 has delayed his latest film and threatens to derail his carefully laid out political plans.

Just before coronavirus swept ashore, Rajinikanth (69) had unveiled his out-of-the-box political plan—he would lead the party, but not be its CM candidate, so that the government will not be a tool at the hands of his political outfit. The very proposal dampened the enthusiasm of his fans, who fear that without Rajini as the CM face, his party would not be a viable political alternative to the two DMKs. Further, his high-minded gambit would only be seen as a ploy to escape accountability. But the superstar stood his ground and exhorted his fans to create a political wave by selling it to the public as the ideal panacea for the state's political ills.

But the positive feedback that the actor hoped to generate didn't get time to coalesce—the lockdown intervened. As Rajini's footsoldiers were confined to their homes, the public, whose pulse was sought to be gauged, went on survival mode, their mindspace occupied only with fighting the pandemic. The media, too, has eyes and ears only for this unprecedented threat. "Ideally, he wanted to announce his party's launch by April end and start addressing public meetings from August. That looks impossible now when social distancing is the norm," admits M.A. Suresh, an office bearer of the Rajini Makkal Mandram, an organisation formed from his fan clubs prior to the launch of a political party.

Thus, the frisson of excitement needed before the launch this anxiously awaited political party—the buzz over its name, the debate around its programmes and keeping the public engaged with statements and press meets—will have to wait till the pandemic starts ebbing. "True, precious time has been lost because of this unexpected development, which means Rajini has to fast forward many of his plans to emerge as a political alternative," says S. Ramesh of Thuglak magazine, a confidant of the star.

Then again, with chief minister E. Palaniswami of the ruling AIADMK at the forefront of Tamil Nadu's fight against COVID-19 and being increasingly perceived as the state's key leader, Rajini's political relevance stands sud-

Rajini exhorted his fans to guarantee a political wave for his party. But the positive feedback didn't get time to coalesce.



Lone Star Rajinikanth's political relevance suddenly stands diminished.

denly diminished. Predictably, political challenge to the CM emanated from DMK leader M.K. Stalin, but took the anodyne form of statements and barbs on social media. Rajini was nowhere in the picture, underlining the intrinsic relevance of the two DMKs in the state's polity.

Rajini, of course, will never run out of supporters. Former deputy mayor of Chennai, Karate R. Thiagarajan, a diehard supporter of Rajinikanth, is confident that there is enough time and space for a perfect political entry. "Elections are due only in April 2021, so even if he launches his party in August he would have ample time to strategise. Once he arrives on the scene, there will be a beeline of leaders from other parties extending hands of alliance. That would create the hype much needed for a new party. And once he starts campaigning from January the political landscape would change," he predicts. The demand for Rajini as CM would reach such a crescendo, adds Thiagarajan for good measure, that 'thalaivar' himself would find it difficult to ignore it.

The counter view is that the film star, who has dragged his feet for years about his oft-bruited plunge into politics, might actually use the crisis to opt out of the race altogether. "Once he realises that there is no room for him to pitch his tent he would continue acting in movies, giving politics a wide berth," observes DMK spokesperson Saravanan. Time, then, for Rajinikanth to toss a coin and tell us his decision. ❑

— G.C. Shekhar

Signal DROP

The cutting edge 5G technology will arrive late

HERE is bad news for those who wince at the 'buffering' status of videos on their smartphones, cursing the low speed of their connections, who keep a sharp eye out over the brewing 5G contest between China and the West, with a well-thumbed copy of *Wired* by their side. India, it seems, will delay its auction of 5G spectrum by four-eight months. Scheduled to be held in April 2020, it is likely to be pushed ahead to August-December this year. However, the delay will not impact the government's estimated revenues in this fiscal year, as long as the auction is held before March 31, 2021. In Budget 2020-21, the finance ministry estimated a revenue increase of 125 per cent from telecom licence fees and spectrum usage compared to the previous year. The launch of 5G services may also remain on track.

For telecom operators, though, the postponement is a



huge, albeit a short-term, relief for three reasons. One, the profitability of several players like Vodafone and Airtel was impacted due to lower tariffs dictated by the entry of an aggressive and cash-rich competitor, Reliance Jio. Two, late last year, the Supreme Court ordered telecom operators to pay massive dues that were contested by them, and demanded by the telecom department. Three, the cash-strapped sector was saddled with huge debts.

Even before the impact of the COVID-19 crisis was felt, a beleaguered Vodafone had admitted that it would find it tough to participate in the 5G auction. Experts hinted that there could be a subdued participation by telecom players, and they might bid selectively, and in a muted manner, which would depress government's expected revenues. In fact, both Vodafone and Airtel urged the telecom ministry to postpone the auction by two-three years. They maintained that the late introduction of 5G services would not

impact Indian users.

But India was in a hurry. One reason was detailed by a media report thus: "By delaying its rollout, India stands the risk of missing out on the first flush of the 5G-powered innovation cycle." Most nations had decided to launch 5G services in 2020 or 2021. Several, like Thailand and Vietnam in Southeast Asia, had accelerated their moves to graduate to 5G. Hence, India did not wish to lag behind in this new spectrum race. India, too, had initiated trials for 5G services by various global technology suppliers.

Ironically, the usage of this new-generation spectrum may become imperative in the post-COVID world, where virtual offices and a work-from-home culture become popular and acceptable. Since that time is almost upon us, India, like other nations, will need to garner and leverage the benefits of high speeds, higher capacity, and better security of 5G. It is this technology that can enhance and enable the use of such avant garde technology as AI, Internet of Things, and virtual reality by the corporate sector, as well as better and faster data downloads by individual users. □ —*Alam Srinivas*

An Axe On DISINVESTMENT

Government plans to sell PSUs hit a wall of disinterest and low returns

THE sowing eyed an impressive harvest, but as the scythes were being sharpened, the Grim Reaper's deadly emissary devised a counter stroke. On February 1, 2020, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a grand plan to raise Rs 2,10,000 crore from disinvestment. Little did she expect COVID 19, which had begun to spread its deadly tentacles, to tarnish those dreams. Concomitant to that disappointment is the bloodbath in Indian and global markets and a dissolving appetite for public issues and IPOs.

Although disinvestment exercises are on, it will be difficult for the government now to go ahead with strategic sales in the state-owned Air India and BPCL, as well a sale of minority stake in LIC. According to former finance secretary Subhash Chandra Garg, it will be almost impossible to reach anywhere near the ambitious Budget revenue estimates.

"Market conditions are not favourable for the sale of minority stakes in PSUs, and there may be little interest in strategic sales," he says. He adds that the idea to put smaller PSUs on the block "does not make sense as their market values have slumped". Moreover, such PSUs can help to raise only a miniscule portion of the budgeted amount.

Explains CARE Ratings chief economist Madan Sabnavis: "The stock market will never reach the 40,000 level this year, which means that valuations will remain affected. Secondly, there will be deep-rooted problems in the oil and aviation sectors that will impact BPCL and Air India. LIC is just too big, and needs a lot of work before a minority stake can be sold."



Senior officials agree that they will adopt a wait-and-watch attitude until December 2020. They contend that due to extreme changes in market dynamics, rules may need to be rewritten. A finance ministry official says, “The expenses due to the pandemic will increase, and have not been accounted for in the Budget. Hence, the government will look at various options to raise money, including sale of stakes in smaller PSUs.”

To add to the crisis, US-based Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund recently decided to close six of its Indian debt funds, creating a ripple of insecurity amongst investors. This will further impact the Indian market, despite the RBI’s prompt move to shore up the other ailing mutual funds. Disinvestment has to return on track, but one doesn’t know when. In these uncertain times, timetables are among the first casualties. ▣ —*Jyotika Sood*

A Bitter CROP

COVID-19 restrictions add to an imperfect harvest season of India’s famed mangoes

IF there is one consolation to the demoralising heat of the Indian summer, it’s the sight of the pyramids of mangoes on carts and fruit stalls—an invitation to a luscious, fleshly sensual experience. Then there are the many varieties, the texture of each exploding with its distinctive sensory signal on the palate. It’s approaching midway of the Indian mango season, but for growers of premium and export-oriented varieties such as Alphonso, Safeda, and Banganappalli, among others, there is little joy. Yields were below expectation to start with, a rise in costs dampened moods, and the blight of COVID-19 delivered the coup de grace—distribution, important for a perishable commodity, became tedious. While farmers’ incomes plummeted, consumers end up paying higher-

than-usual prices.

“The late monsoon resulted in lesser yield, which was 50-70 per cent lower for many of us,” says Prasad Subhash Jadav, a grower. He adds, “Due to the lockdown, we did not get good prices for the early-harvested crop.” In Ratnagiri (Maharashtra), which grows the famed Alphonso, orchard owners had to bank on online sales to individuals rather than bulk buyers. Market realities played a ruthless hand: it was difficult to get better prices as local traders knew export prospects were not bright.

S. Insram Ali, president, Mango Growers Association of India, says that sales of Safeda and Banganappalli from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka were affected by the lockdown. “Hardly 15-20 per cent of the produce was sold,” he laments. Ali is a farmer from Maliahbad, the mango heartland in Uttar Pradesh. He fears that recent hailstorm and caterpillar infestation will impact the output in his area.

Not just the king of fruits, the lockdown has impacted other horticulture crops such as banana, watermelon, pineapple, pomegranate, mosumbi and others, says national horticulture commissioner Srinivasa Murthy. “A large portion of these fruits are sold in the open market by small traders, either as fresh fruits or cut fruits and juices. Due to the lockdown, these activities have halted, hitting sales,” he explains. A stop in bulk buying by fruit and food processing units that are shut has been another blow. Sale of exotic fruits like dragon fruit and kiwi were also hit by the shutdown of the hospitality sector. Recently, a few dozen traders came together on social media to share and seek solutions to their problems.

Murthy assures that the Centre and state governments are trying to ease transportation and supply-related issues, especially since most fruits are perishable. The authorities have also eased procedures to allow exports from Mumbai port. The delectation of a freshly cut mango for dessert, it seems, shall not be denied to the world. ▣

—*Lola Nayyar*



Corona: The LONGEST SHOT

An endless wait for King Khan's next hit movie

#WeWantAnnouncementSRK@iamsrk if you don't announce your next on 1st January I will suicide I repeat I will suicide..#ShahRukhKhan

#WeWantAnnouncementSRK@iamsrk, if you do not announce on January 1, I will cut my penis#ShahRukhKhan Behold the tweets above: slick with idolatry, sick with the madness of obsession and self-love, pitiful in its lack of agency. Yet such is the stuff of Bollywood fandom—a total saturation in its unique weave of dreams enabled by a more than willing suspension of disbelief.

A few hours before 2019 drew to a close,

#WeWantAnnouncementSRK began trending globally on Twitter, with legions of Shah Rukh Khan admirers pressing their screen idol, with tweets like these, to announce his next movie on New Year's day. Desperate fans lobbed weird threats—the sample above should be enough—to give vent to their frustration over a delay in his eagerly-awaited comeback.

SRK has avoided signing any movie ever since his 2018-Christmas release, *Zero* tanked at the box office. After waiting over 16 months, his fans have resorted to clamorous means. The 54-year-old superstar eulogised the world over as “Badshah of Bollywood” has had a lean trot recently, with movies like *Fan* (2016) to *Jab Harry Met Sejal* (2017) flopping. Predictably, the faith of his admirers lies unshaken by such vagaries.

They believe SRK is biding his time by reading scripts, in consultation with leading directors, to chalk out a winning project. Trade circles have also been agog with speculations that he is contemplating a return with more than one project. As fate would have it, all his plans for a triumphal re-entry have been put on hold in the wake of the nationwide lockdown over the COVID-19 pandemic.

For diehard fans, the global shutdown deals a bitter blow—they were expecting the launch of his next movie sometime in April. Their speculations were not off the mark too—Bollywood insiders say SRK had been holding talks with top directors like Rajkumar Hirani, Raj Nidimoru-Krishna DK, Atlee Kumar and Siddharth Anand. The lockdown, which brought the film industry to a standstill, intervened before he could finalise any project.

Veteran trade expert Atul Mohan says that Bollywood is not likely to return to normal until Diwali, but the lockdown may well have come as a blessing for SRK. “It could be a case of sabra ka fal meetha hota hai (patience is fruitful in the long run) for his fans,” he says. “Since Shah Rukh has not finalised any project yet, this gives him extra time to fine-tune everything. In any case, it takes about four months for a big film to



go on the floors from the time of its launch.”

It seems the possibility of the release of SRK's new movie this year is a distant dream. Thankfully, the setback has not robbed him of his (often) self-deprecating sense of humour, nor has his prolonged absence from theatres eroded his fans' fierce loyalty. During an interactive #AskSRK session on Twitter, which trended globally at No. 1 on April 20, when a follower advised him to sign a movie since he must have read a handful of scripts by now, he quipped: “Abe sign to kar doon...abhi shooting kaun karega!! (I can sign a movie right now but who will shoot with me.)” When another fan complained of getting tired of rumours about his upcoming ventures, SRK told him to take it easy. “It's obvious I will do some films...it's obvious they will be made. And it's obvious you all will know.”

The star of the now-iconic *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), however, did drop enough hints to add grist to the rumour mills that he had chosen Rajkumar (Raju) Hirani

(*3 Idiots*) to helm his comeback project. When a follower at the Twitter session asked him to pick his favourite director between Martin Scorsese and Christopher Nolan, SRK had a ready riposte: “Wow both are awesome and I have met them both ... but Raju apna sa lagta hai...nahi? (Rajkumar Hirani looks like one of our own. Doesn't he?)”

It was enough for trade pundits to assume that SRK had made up his mind to return with the director, who had originally offered *MunnaBhai MBBS* (2003) to him before it went to Sanjay Dutt. Nonetheless, it remains in the realm of speculation...until he makes a formal announcement after the lockdown ends. As SRK once told them, “Boy & girls, I do a film when I am doing it...otherwise it's just post truth.” 📌

—Giridhar Jha

HERO'S ZEROES

2016
FAN

2017
JAB HARRY
MET SEJAL

2018
ZERO

Since then no movie has been released so far



Screen Time Experts say the lockdown is a chance to blend online and classroom education



Right to Digital EDUCATION

The COVID-19 stasis pushes pedagogy to contemplate a switch to online courses

CORONAVIRUS, and the confinement it has imposed upon us, has exacted a grisly toll in lost lives, ravaged health of thousands, and the endless effects of an economy lying inert, from jobless and starving labourers to professionals staring at darkness. Students, too, are victims, and not only those whose imminent entry in the job market is compromised. The acute anxiety about promotions, those lost classroom hours, unfinished syllabi, even lack of study materials has had a telling effect. A limbo, indeed, is not a holiday.

A panel appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) has suggested that the new academic session in colleges should be postponed from July to September. The National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts entrance exams, including the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and the Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) has postponed all its tests.

A section of educationists argues against these postponements, saying that the spread of COVID-19 hasn't peaked in India yet. "What if we come to know after a few months that the COVID-19 spread has worsened? Will we further move the session from September to January?" asks S.S. Mantha, former chairman, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). He emphasised the need for reinvention and innovation.

"The right approach will be to exploit all available digital resources to reach out to students and continue education. First and second-year students should be promoted on the basis of their previous semesters' performance and class performances. Final year students should be asked to appear in an online test," he suggests. M.M. Ansari, former member, UGC, agrees. He says complete curricula should be over-

hauled to transfer it to the digital mode and teachers should be trained for that. Institutes where practical training and lab-based activities constitute a major part of the curriculum also disapprove of the idea to delay the session.

Prof. R.S. Rathore, dean academics, Shri Vishwakarma Skill University, Haryana (India's first government skill university), says that the lockdown has given an opportunity to blend online with classroom education. "This has also given an opportunity to innovate on assessment methodology," Rathore says.


K.P. Singh, VC, Chaudhary Charan Singh Hisar Agriculture University, agrees that agriculture is more of a practical subject and says, "We must be well-prepared for the future for providing even practical knowledge by online methods through live video calls from field areas."

However, experts agree that a digital leap is possible only when a large section of students who don't have access to computers and internet are brought into the digital fold. Rajive Kumar, AICTE member secretary, has advised technical colleges to allow students of other colleges in the vicinity

to access their internet facilities. Sanjay Gupta, VC, World University of Design, says that though connectivity issues persist, the smart phone revolution has made it possible for everyone to access learning material.

Many universities in the West—with Indians on their rolls—have started online classes; some are waiting to take a call on admitting international students after hearing from the

public authorities of their respective countries. Adrian Artimov from Sommet Education, a group that specialises in international hospitality courses, says that as the opening of borders might take longer, digital solution holds the key.

"Online mentoring coupled with available access to online resources 24/7 will allow for a more personalised approach adapted to the needs of all students regardless of their location," Artimov says. Shall future generations look upon 2020 as the year education changed forever?  —Jeevan Prakash

UGC postpones the academic session; experts say all digital resources must be tapped to continue classes.



Model Temple
Architect
Chandrakant
Sompura says the
design may see
minor changes

GETTY IMAGES

The Lord WAITS TOO

*Ram Temple at Ayodhya gets delayed,
this time by the coronavirus*

ENTIRE political movements were shaped by the curated desire for a Ram Mandir in Ayodhya—to be realised in brick, mortar and sandstone. The idol of Lord Ram or Ram Lalla, as the deity is referred to in Ayodhya, spent over three decades in a tin shed near the disputed Babri Masjid demolition site. Four months after the Supreme Court cleared the way for the construction of the Ram temple at the site, and as Shree Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust was working at full throttle, the unforeseen COVID-19 lockdown has brought the project to a grinding halt.

The Trust had designated April 30 as the auspicious day for Bhumi Pujan and the beginning of work. The construction of the “grand sky-high temple” was to be completed in three to three-and-a-half years—in time for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. With the pandemic wreaking havoc with the well-laid plans and the tight timelines, the construction is likely to be delayed indefinitely.

To put a timeline is difficult now, says chairman of the Ram Temple Construction Committee Nripendra Mishra. “It is far too early to give a deadline on the completion of the temple. Just about half per cent of the total 100 pc of work has been done,” the former bureaucrat tells *Outlook*.

Mishra, former principal secretary to PM Narendra Modi, had visited the site on February 29 and interacted with Trust members. “We were supposed to meet again on April 4 to address preliminary issues of design, soil quality etc. We have fallen behind the schedule because of the lockdown, much like the entire country and the world,” he says.

Regarding the design, there is agreement between Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Ahmedabad-based architect Chandrakant Sompura, who designed the original model lying at the ‘karyashala’ (workshop) at

Karsevakpuram in Ayodhya. “The plan and the design are there on paper. Translating it on the ground is a different thing,” adds Mishra.

Sompura tells *Outlook* that the design may see minor changes. “We tried to speed up things; it is not in our hands anymore,” he says. Soil samples had been picked up for testing before the lockdown, but since all the labs are shut, it will have to wait. “Unless soil testing is done, we can’t finalise the foundation.”

Before the lockdown was announced on March 25, work on the temple was going on at a feverish pace. Stone-carvers and artisans were back at the karyashala, which was shut pending the Supreme Court order. The workers were busy cleaning the already carved stones and pillars. Orders had been placed for slabs of pink sandstone at Bansi Pahadpur in Rajasthan. Around 1.75 lakh cubic feet of sandstone is required for the temple.

But silence has engulfed the workshops again. “We can just wait and watch. Everything is shut now. The workers have gone and the machines are quiet,” says Bimlendra Mohan Pratap Mishra, a member of the Shree Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust. A descendent of the erstwhile Ayodhya royal family, Mishra is not willing to hazard a guess on a restart. “It all depends upon when the lockdown is lifted, and on the availability of experts, workers and machines,” he says.

The deity, meanwhile, was shifted from the tin shed to another temporary structure at Manas Bhawan within the Ram Janmabhoomi premises on the early morning of March 25, the first day of the nationwide lockdown—and also of the auspicious Chaitra Navratri—in a ceremony attended by UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath. Ram Lalla is now seated on a silver throne donated by Mishra. Weighing 9.5 kg, the 30-inch high throne has been made in Jaipur with a Surya insignia on the back. It is uncertain how long this will be the Lord’s new abode. □

—Bhavna Vij-Aurora

Citizen CAINS

As COVID-19 halts the anti-CAA stir, protestors slam the police for 'witch hunting'

IF there's one activity unrelated to COVID-19 that has gathered pace in recent weeks, even as others lie in a catatonic stupor, it is the police's crackdown on organisers of the anti-CAA protests. On April 9, two weeks after the countrywide pandemic induced lockdown, 25-year old Gulfisha was arrested by Delhi Police from Northeast Delhi's Seelampur on charges of sedition. In the same week, Jamia Millia Islamia University student Safoora Zargar and former municipal councilor Ishrat Jahan were also arrested by the police under various charges.

All three were part of the protests led by Muslim women in Jamia University and Shaheen Bagh against the controversial new Citizenship law—the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA, the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR), which rocked the country between December 2019

and February 2020. Though the anti-CAA protests were called off in February as the pandemic loomed large, many of the protestors have been arrested across the country for participating or organising protests.

While Gulfisha, an MBA student, was at the forefront of anti-CAA protests in Seelampur, Ishrat Jahan was active in the protest in Khureji Khas in Northeast Delhi. The arrest of Zargar, who is pregnant, has sparked a row, as she was booked under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and has been denied bail despite pleas on humanitarian grounds. Arrested along with Zargar was another Jamia student, Meeran Haider, the media coordinator of the Jamia Coordination Committee. Shifa-Ur Rehman, the president of the Alumni Association of Jamia Millia Islamia (AAJMI) was arrested on April 26 and was also booked under UAPA. Many stu-

dents have also been summoned by the Delhi Police for interrogation and their mobile phones confiscated, claim Jamia students.


The Delhi Police alleges that the anti-CAA protests led to the riots in Northeast Delhi in February that left at least 53 dead, many injured and property worth tens of crores of rupees destroyed.

The police say anti-CAA protests sparked the Delhi riots. Students say they're just a soft target.

A Jamia student counters that instead of arresting the perpetrators of violence, the police, in a bid to suppress dissent, is taking aim at the softest targets of all—students. "The government should be focusing on the humanitarian crisis rather than hunting us down. They didn't arrest people who fired at students in Jamia," he says.

Lawyers who are dealing with the cases say that police is using the lockdown as a cover to crack down on protestors, as they have little access to legal aid during the current crisis. Advocate Akram Khan, who is handling Meeran Haider's arrest, says that students have been falsely implicated for the Delhi violence and that it's an attempt to instil fear among the community. "It's witch hunting on the part of the police and the students have been targeted for participating in anti-CAA protests. They are not criminals or in hiding. But they all are slapped with serious charges,"

However, Delhi Police in a statement last week denied charges of being partial and claimed to be doing their job "sincerely and impartially". In a tweet, it further claimed that arrests have been made on the basis of scientific and forensic evidence, including video footages.

Right activists say that this is a systematic crackdown on the peaceful and constitutional anti-CAA-NRC-NPR movement across the country. Activist Kavita Krishnan says that the state is using the shield offered by the pandemic to warn people who dare to speak out. "It's shocking that police hasn't used the UAPA against the man who fired at the students in Jamia. Instead, they are charging students. We only know when the knock arrives at the door. There is no transparency about the cases or the FIRs," says Krishnan. 

—Preetha Nair



AP

Swallow THE GOB

Helped by the ban, will the pandemic put a stop to spitting?

DURING the first, full flush of the COVID-19 induced lockdown in April, it appeared that a well-aimed government directive would rid India of one of its most irksome and ungainly habits—indiscriminate and copious spitting by (usually) males, their coloured projectiles staining public avenues and sullyng stately edifices and offices. Spitting has been an offence under many municipal laws, though it fails to deter anyone. Then, in a bid to halt the spread of the pandemic, the Union home ministry made spitting a punishable offence under the Disaster Management Act. In addition, states like Bihar, Jharkhand, UP, Maharashtra and Telangana, among others, banned the sale of smokeless tobacco products like gutkha and pan masala. In Hyderabad, a milk van driver, Abdul Muzed, was promptly arrested by the police for spitting. Will this encouraging start be sacrificed now? For enforcing a ban on spitting while allowing the sale of gutkha and pan masala could prove to be challenging, if not impossible.



ILLUSTRATION BY SAAHIL

The government's latest notification which extended the lockdown till May 17 has allowed the sale of tobacco products for the first time since March 24. Pan or gutkha chewing makes spitting practically inevitable. Yet banning their sale robs the livelihood of lakhs.

Health professionals say that spitting is a major cause of the spread of the virus as well as other diseases. They welcome the ban and say that such prohibition should be continued even after COVID-19 ceases to be a threat.

How far can making spitting a punishable offence be a deterrent? Under the law, a person can be fined up to Rs 1,000 or jailed for a maximum two years for malignantly committing an act likely to spread a serious disease.

However, the all-pervasive and indiscriminate threat that the pandemic poses to everyone have convinced legal and behavioural experts that COVID-19 will bring a paradigm shift in personal hygiene. They believe people will, for example, imbibe and inhere the habit of washing hands and using sanitisers, but say that legal intervention is necessary to inculcate a sense of public cleanliness.

Lawyers say that there are ample legal provisions that have empowered police to enforce such restrictions. Nishant Kumar Srivastava, lawyer, Delhi High Court, says that the new restrictions can be continued even after the pandemic is contained. "The Indian Penal Code has various provisions which may be interpreted to also include spitting in a public place an offence, though the word 'spitting' has nowhere been used," Srivastava says.

Enforcing a ban on spitting while allowing the sale of gutkha and pan masala could be challenging, if not impossible.

He adds, "Spitting at a public place, in the light of the contagious nature of COVID-19, may easily fall in the definition of 'an act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life'."

So, the police can arrest an offender, lodge an FIR and the courts can impose punishment. Yet, in reality, it is difficult to impose the law on an offence as ubiquitous as spitting: the police, certainly, can't keep

an eye on every nook and cranny.

"There are several illustrations in India's judicial history where different courts in order to maintain cleanliness have issued various directions," D.K. Garg, a Supreme Court lawyer, says. "Despite that, we can't maintain basic hygiene at public places. That's why the PM initiated Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to bring mass social awareness among people."

Behavioural experts say that changing habits takes time and requires a dedicated and concerted effort by an individual. Kamna Chhibber, head, department of mental health and behavioural sciences at Fortis Hospital, says that a ban will be helpful only if it is followed by prescribed action or punishment in a consistent manner later as well. "Lack of consistency encourages people to revert to old habits which one had internalised," Dr Chhibber says. She adds, "The reminder to not do so cannot just come from authorities but also needs to come from those around, as citizens themselves become more socially responsible and support efforts towards the change." □

—Jeevan Prakash



PTI

Labour PANGS

With some states raising working hours from 8 to 12 hours, trade unions fear the lockdown is being used to speed labour reforms hurtful to workers

ABANDONMENT, hunger, loss of employment...if there is a single class of people worst hit by the pandemic it is India's working class, migrant or otherwise. On this Labour Day, there was little for them to be optimistic—unemployment loomed, as did dilution of hard-won rights. The Centre's decision to ease industrial activities in the third phase of lockdown has seen at least five state governments increasing the working hours of factory hands from the existing eight hours to 12 hours a day—a major departure from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) norms, ratified by India in 1921. The state governments say the step was taken to reduce footfalls and to enforce social distancing.

Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana have amended the Factories Act (FA), invoking special powers—permitted during a public emergency. The extension of working hours will be applied to establishments across the states. However, trade unions and experts claim that the government is just fast tracking—using the COVID-19 shutdown as an excuse—some of the vexed proposals in the Labour Reforms Bills now pending before Parliament. They add that the changes are being pushed through states, since labour is a concurrent subject in India's federal system.

The Modi government has introduced the labour reforms bills to attract investments to boost the economy and generate employment. As part of labour reform initiatives, the Union labour ministry merged 44 labour laws into four

Informal sector workers, who don't have trade union strength, won't be able to oppose the change in labour laws

'codes'—wages, industrial relations, social security, and occupational safety, health and working conditions.

The proposal to review working hours figured in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code Bill. A parliamentary standing committee on April 13 has submitted its recommendations on the labour reform code bills, which have fuelled speculation that the Centre may take an ordinance route or executive order to pass the codes, say trade unions. While wage code has already been passed in Parliament's winter session, the other three codes were met with resistance from trade unions and opposition parties. Subsequently, the bill was sent to the parliament standing committee.

K.P. Kannan, former director, Centre for Development Studies, says that an increase in working hours is in violation of labour laws and will deal a blow to the working class. Only two states have announced double wages to extra hours so far. "The government says that it's a temporary arrangement. But it's a political excuse to hoodwink poor labourers. If they implement it in the informal sector, workers won't be able to oppose it as they don't have trade union strength in small enterprises," says Kannan.

Though the Factories Act has not been amended by the

Centre, trade union leaders say that by permitting states to change the law, it is using the lockdown as a cover to push through the labour codes.

Tapan Sen, general secretary of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) notes that the states have amended the FA under the public emergency, which is defined as external or internal

"The government's move is an excuse to hoodwink poor labourers,"

K.P. Kannan


Former director, Centre for Development Studies.

attack on security. Thus COVID-19 is not a public emergency under the Act. “There is no rationale for adding hours. This is a sinister plan to benefit employers and to extract more hours from workers,” says Sen, adding that the ministry hadn’t consulted unions before taking such a step.

However, economist Pronab Sen says that since there are no alternatives in sight, 12-hour shifts seem to be a feasible idea to start economic activity. “Unless there is a significant increase in the working capital, small companies won’t be able to resume production. It’s a better alternative than companies shutting shop,” says Sen.

Another major bone of contention, according to experts, is the parliamentary panel’s endorsement of a proposal empowering companies to ‘hire and fire’. The Industrial Relations Code proposes that companies which employ staff up to 300 people can sack workers and close units without the approval of the government. Earlier, that threshold was up to 100 staff members.

Some states—Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh—have already raised the threshold from 100 to 300. Kannan says that this is done in order to benefit the employer rather than safeguarding the interest of the worker. “Ninety-nine per cent of Indian establishments employ less than 100 people; so this proposal will benefit large corporates. Corporates will have a free ride as most of them employ more than 300 workers,” says Kannan.

Ritu Dewan of the Indian Society of Labour Economics says that the proposals in the labour codes, such as restrictions on strikes and forming trade unions, are heavily stacked against workers. “There is a proposal that payments to workers during natural calamities would be ‘unjustifiable’. Considering the COVID-19 crisis, these are totally anti-worker changes,” says Dewan.  —Preetha Nair

Locked Out Families of jobless labourers get off a truck to go home—native places hundreds of miles away



Also controversial is the parliamentary panel's agreement to a proposal empowering firms to 'hire and fire'.



PTI

Prayers ON HOLD

A cruel pandemic vapourises our beloved religious festivals

YES, we saw some newly invented faux festivals—Balcony Diwas No. 1 and 2. But the colours leached out of India’s real festival calendar this spring—especially if the celebrations were of the sort that revolved around congregating. We just about sneaked in a subdued Holi, on March 10—both Prime Minister Modi and Delhi’s Arvind Kejriwal abstained. The first big event to be officially cancelled was a mega show in Ayodhya for Ram Navami, on April 2. The long phase of Lenten austerity didn’t really seem to end on Easter, April 12. For the cluster of traditional New Years around April 14—from Vishu to Bihu—all the festivities stayed at home.

As the month turned to May, the ilanji tree outside Thrissur’s Vadakkumnathan temple stood lone witness to a strangely empty vista—no percussion from paradise, no ecstatic lakhs. The Pooram had been cancelled, perhaps for the first time since 1962, the war with China. The chariots are being readied at Jagannath, but will they roll on June 23? Puri, in the green zone, hopes so. Madurai saw a quiet Chithirai—this Monday, Goddess Meenakshi opted for a spartan wedding (even best man Vishnu cancelled his appearance). Shiva, meanwhile, is feeling lonely up in



GETTY IMAGES

Rajasthan's Hadoti region—it's the practice here for unmarried men to kidnap Parvati idols, to prod the Lord into granting them a consort too, after which they return the divine loot. This year, no shaadis, so all the Parvatis are still in the hijacker's hands! Another goddess, the storied Kamakhya of Guwahati, also awaits an empty hush around the Ambubachi mela in June. The million footfalls will be missing for the first time in remembered history. Before that, around May 23-24, an Eid will go by where communion will have to be minimised—the traditional embrace forsworn. Already, Ramzan is bereft of the aroma of haleem and the delights of the nocturnal food bazaars.

If everything else had been normal, we'd have missed an ancillary political festival—the month of Ramzan is also, after all, the season of political iftar parties. Who hosted? Who didn't...these were matters of routine headlines. It was as expected of senior Congress leaders to throw lavish iftars, to showcase their 'secular' credentials, as it was of Hindutva icons of the BJP to skip such displays of religious pluralism. BJP leaders who did host iftars did so after careful consideration. In his earlier stint as Madhya Pradesh CM, Shivraj Singh Chouhan rarely missed hosting an iftar party at his official residence—even donning the skull cap on occasion. His softer way was seen as a sign of great statesmanship. In Bihar, Nitish Kumar too embraced iftar politics—it may have chagrined his saffron allies,

New Years from Vishu to Bihu were subdued. So were the Thrissur Puram and the Ambubachi mela in Kamakhya.

Will this year's Ganesha festival and the Jagannath Rath Yatra (left) go the way of Eid and Ram Navami?

but here the Bihar CM was more in the line of his old socialist pals like Laloo and Mulayam.

Then there was the rara avis: the Sonia Gandhi iftar. Whenever it did happen, her party leaders would be in a tizzy; the media worked overtime to decode 'the message'; and the inner coterie worked meticulously to plan every detail, the list of invitees, who would get to share her table, and yes...the list of people to exclude! A Ramzan pot-pourri of religious leaders, public intellectuals and 'secular' politicians' always made it. In 2015, her iftar was designed as a statement of Opposition unity against the nationwide saffron surge. Nitish, having then severed ties with the BJP, was promptly sent an invite to Sonia's high table. Three years later, Rahul Gandhi pretty much botched up his first iftar as Congress president, shifting the event from the modest precincts of the party HQ at 24, Akbar Road to the five-star Taj Palace. Also, unlike Sonia's rainbow coalitions, he only called some party colleagues and UPA representatives—no actual rozedars, nor anyone from the SP, BSP, Left. (Rahul ended up spending most of his evening chatting with Pranab 'Citizen' Mukherjee.) But an iftar of iffy quality is still an iftar. Modi not only ended an established tradition of the PM hosting one, he even skipped the President's iftar—his cabinet too duly abstained. After Pranab Mukherjee demitted office, the iftar hosted by the Rashtrapati Bhavan too became history. And you cannot miss what was already missing. □

—Puneet Nicholas Yadav



A model shows how a refurbished Central Vista will look like changes

New Blocks IN TOWN

The Centre, in a tearing rush, pushes through its plan to recast India's seat of power

E CLECTICISM was a guiding principle of British architecture in India, and over a century and a half, the Neo-Classical, Gothic, Palladian and Neo-Gothic styles were married, happily and unhappily, with Indian-style cupolas, verandahs, domes and kiosks. 'Indo-Saracenic' merely subsumed such sub-types as the 'Hindu-Gothic' and the 'Renaissance-Mughal'. When tasked to lay out a new seat of government that would adequately reflect imperial grandeur, architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker had a certain history to conform to. The new edifices of New Delhi, especially in the Central Vista and around, lacked the brash confidence of buildings built in the high noon of imperialism, but followed them in their blend of East and West: the circular Parliament building was inspired by Roman styles, while the dominating central dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan evolved from a Buddhist stupa; grand Mughal Gardens rested cheek-by-jowl with English rose gardens and Connaught Place was clearly modeled on Bath, with elements of a London high street. No one would dispute that the huge complex, built—from 1911 to 1932—when the imperial purpose itself was fading, was grand.

The iconic stature of the whole complex, however, was accreted over seventy years of the Indian republic, as it hosted successive governments and generations of bureaucracy. It is now considered by citizens to be as Indian as anything, synonymous with the history of our republic, a repository of

national pride and majesty.

Now, nearly nine decades after New Delhi was officially inaugurated, this grandiloquence in stone and marble is set for a makeover amidst a raging pandemic and controversy. The central vista redevelopment project—estimated at a whopping Rs 20,000 crores—covers a three-km stretch from Rashtrapati Bhavan, North Block and South Block, up to India Gate. The mega project—including construction of a new, triangular parliament building opposite the current one, and office buildings for all ministries along the Rajpath in lieu of the North and South Block—has created a furore since the Modi government set the ball rolling in September last year.

With the Central Vista Committee—a special advisory group for the project—giving clearance to the new Parliament building on April 23, it seems that the government has no time to lose, even in the face of a severe financial meltdown caused by the outbreak. Though urban planners and activists have raised concerns over the environmental impact of the project, the Union environment ministry's obliging green nod has helped the government in clearing another hurdle.

Kanchi Kohli, senior researcher at Centre for Policy

Research, says that the government needs to take another look at the project in the face of the current economic and humanitarian crisis. "We don't need a lockdown period to discuss matters of grave public concern through video conferencing when actually the public has no say in it. The concerned ministries could have kept the matter

Despite concerns over the Central Vista project's environmental impact, it got a green nod.

for later or have a considered view of it,” says Kohli.

The timing of the colossal project—which includes a new Parliament, central secretariat and new dwellings for the prime minister and the vice president, has fueled concerns among the Opposition, historians, architects and civil right activists. The project’s opacity, environmental and historical implications have also come under severe criticism.

Though details are still sketchy, the Centre claims that the central vista lacks amenities and services and most of the buildings have outlived their structural lives. “When Parliament was built, there was no concept of air conditioners and other facilities. So these buildings need to be upgraded and need conservation,” says a senior official with the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban affairs.

HISTORIANS and conservationists stress on the old principle—that in the battle between heritage and modernity, the heritage nature of the structures should be kept intact. Historian and convener of INTACH, Swapna Liddle, says that rather than converting the heritage buildings into museums—as is the current plan—they should be restored. “According to Delhi building bylaws and the master plan, the central vista is a notified heritage area. So, an assessment should be conducted before making any changes,” says Liddle.

The government’s haste over the project was questioned by many when the urban affairs ministry issued a notification on March 20 in this regard. It sought to amend the land use of five plots for the re-vamping project, as recommended by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

Opposition Congress launched a scathing attack on the extravagance and the distorted priority of the government in these trying times. Its spokesperson Sanjay Jha says that the entire exercise is adapted to suit the BJP’s game plan of creating a new symbolism of Indianness and to destroy open public places. “The economy has gone belly-up and India’s GDP is likely to be in negative territory this fiscal year. Why aren’t new buildings built in a less inhabited area and prime real estate released in Lutyens Delhi? This project should be scrapped forthwith,” he says.

However, the senior urban affairs ministry official tells *Outlook* that fears of conservationists and historians are unfounded: the heritage buildings will not be tampered with. “No heritage buildings would be compromised or destroyed. Even the heritage part of the national archives is not being touched. On the contrary, structures would be more enhanced,” she says.

Historians also say that the arguments to do away with colonial heritage are uncalled for. “The buildings shouldn’t be discredited as colonial heritage. It’s built with the Indian tax payers’ money and our people’s effort. It’s an important part of our heritage,” says Liddle. The thousands of stone-cutters, masons and labourers who toiled for two decades might agree. ■ —Preetha Nair

A ministry official says all fears are unfounded: heritage buildings will not be tampered with.

SRM AP faculty designs a cost-effective shield against Coronavirus at the minimum rate of Rs. 20 each



Dr. Panchagunula Jayaprakash designs an improved alternative to N95 masks

Dr. Panchagunula Jayaprakash, Assistant Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, has designed a FACE SHIELD embedded with 3D printing technology. During this pandemic that has led to an unprecedented global crisis, this face protection devised to protect users from the Novel Coronavirus, is made available at the minimum rate of Rs. 20 per Face Shield. This face mask alleviates the limitations of the regular masks currently used by doctors, policemen, and journalists.

The regular masks barely cover the nose and mouth, whereas the Face Shield will be able to protect the eyes, mouth, nose, and ears so that one cannot get infected by the virus. Some of the medical and police personnel who use the N95 masks suffer from facial irritation, making the Face Shield a comfortable and more effective alternative for all government officials on Covid duty. “While manufacturing the Face Shield, 3D printing technology is used for designing a headband, upon which a 100 micron thick transparent plastic sheet is attached to ensure superior protection against the virus. It prevents air, dust, and liquids that are contaminated to come in contact with people. Also, there are no probable side effects on using the mask. If the government approves of its marketing, the face mask can be distributed among the public to prevent the widespread of Novel Coronavirus,” says Dr. Jayaprakash.

The management of SRM AP, Andhra Pradesh applauds Dr. Jayaprakash on designing the mask after relentlessly working on it for several days. Prof. Narayana Rao, Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University, has written to Adimulapu Suresh, Minister of Education, Andhra Pradesh, and Alla kalikrishna Srinivas, Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Minister for Health, Family welfare and Medical Education, Andhra Pradesh, highlighting the importance of the facial cover and the many ways it can be regarded as a boon to the society as a whole. He said that the Face Shield would be beneficial to millions of students who would be attending regular classes once the educational institutions reopen.



PTI

'Liberal capitalism is bust'. But what next?



Purushottam Agrawal and Ritwik Agrawal

“The modern world-system, as a historical system, has entered into a terminal crisis and is unlikely to exist in 50 years. However, since its outcome is uncertain, we do not know whether the resulting system (or systems) will be better or worse than the one in which we are living, but we do know that the period of transition will be a terrible time of trouble.”

SO predicted the social scientist Immanuel Wallerstein in his 1999 book, *The End of the World As We Know It*. Two decades on, we contemplate such a possibility with the post-COVID world: it will surely not just be life as usual. Pandemics have more than once changed the course of history. No less than *The Wall Street Journal* proclaimed on April 26, “Coronavirus means the era of big government is... back.” The question is: in which direction will the present pandemic, and our response to it, take us? Better or worse?

We are used to thinking of epidemics as mainly affecting the poor and the marginalised. In the last hundred years, their geographical footprint has been outside the ‘first world’ and consequently, these crises did not ring the alarm bells quite as loudly. Ebola, an epidemic with frighteningly

higher mortality rates, is a case in point. Who could imagine, in that ancient period we can now call BC, i.e. before corona, the crown prince of the UK undergoing treatment for a viral infection—and his prime minister, an ardent believer in ‘herd’ immunity, finding himself in the ICU? The most powerful man on earth, the President of the US, too has been tested twice for a viral infection, and the spouse of the Canadian PM has undergone treatment.

Ordinary people had also seen, in recent times, healthcare mutate from state responsibility to big business. This nexus of healthcare and insurance in the US is what Elisabeth Rosenthal’s 2017 book described in its title, aptly, as *An American Sickness*. Regrettably, this is the model India has adopted: healthcare not as every citizen’s right, but as a commodity in the market. The government will at best subsidise this commodity for you. That is the essence of the much-touted Ayushman scheme. Not surprisingly, people who suffer from co-morbidities (e.g. diabetes or respiratory problems) are being excluded from insurance payments. Such is the rationale, unquestioned till now, of the era of “small government” that the *WSJ* thinks is ending. It

Imagining a better world without disrupting neoliberal power structures and ideology is just succumbing to *maya*

is natural that a larger and more proactive role of the welfare state is being envisaged.

But the state of healthcare financing does not tell the whole story. Due to its rapid spread, COVID-19 has overwhelmed even the good public health systems in Europe, and total or partial lockdowns have emerged as the only viable option in many countries. Economies are under severe strain; workers, peasants, artisans and small traders are the worst sufferers. COVID-19 has been described as a 'great leveller' since it has infected some rich and powerful people. However, the level playing field it creates ends at equal opportunities to catch the infection; the system's cruel skew manifests itself as surely as a viral symptom. The privileged get respectfully airlifted, while migrant labour is forced to march home across vast distances, braving police brutalities.

"At least 16,780,000 Americans have lost their jobs. It took 21 days." This was the screaming headline in the business section of *New York Times* on Good Friday, April 10. Many millions more have filed for unemployment benefits, and the numbers are rapidly rising. Massive bailouts have been extended to big business, while the average American victim must make do with the princely sum of \$1,200, which does not cover even a month's rent in many US cities. We do not have exact figures for India, but reading off CMIE data, Yogendra Yadav estimates that "about 12 crore Indians have lost employment. One-third of the country's 25 crore households could be facing a livelihood crisis" (*The Print*, April 8.) The revival of large-scale abject poverty is a distinct possibility in India. Not even the inadequate universal income support of the US levels is anywhere in sight. The common people have been left at the mercy of their own small savings, some private charity and some commendably proactive state governments (e.g. Kerala and Chhattisgarh).

Let us not forget, for months governments around the world downplayed the risk and went on with business as



usual. Narendra Modi hosted his 'good friend' Donald Trump in a massive public rally in Ahmedabad in late February. Reports suggest US intelligence had warned the President about a rapidly spreading viral infection in China's Wuhan region as far back as November. The WHO called COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, but on March 13 the Indian government was sanguinely tweeting that there was no health emergency! This 'deny, deny, deny' strategy, common to all the narcissistic cult figures currently leading the US, UK, Brazil, China and India, is symptomatic of the dangers ahead. As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, the shortage of essential life-saving devices like ventilators exposes the cruelty of the present system; tens of thousands of deaths were strictly not inevitable.

What next? What kind of systemic change would the world need in the AC (after corona) era? In order to move towards a system better than the present one, we need to break free from intellectual infirmity and moral confusion. For instance, popular historian Yuval Noah Harari (in *Financial Times*, March 19) raises valid issues like the possibility of 'under the skin surveillance by the State' and the need for global solidarity to fight this. But, solidarity of, and against, what? Is surveillance-obsession confined to the

State only? Is the State the only creator of hegemonic common sense and manufactured consent? Is not the private, 'non-state' media in India primarily responsible for the demonisation of Muslims during the COVID-19 catastrophe? Why not ask how and why the welfare state has been steadily and systematically eroded—and for whose benefit? Did the mantra of privatisation, which Mark Fisher and others have provocatively called 'capitalist realism'—the idea that all problems, solutions and analyses must stay frozen in a framework of neoliberal capitalism—become a panacea spontaneously or due to systematic propaganda?

WORDS like 'system', 'capital', 'multinationals' and 'public health policies' are conspicuous by their absence in Harari's essay. To imagine a better world after corona without disrupting or even interrogating the power structures and ideology of neoliberal world order is just succumbing to *maya*, i.e. a pleasant illusion of 'inner revolution in the soul' minus a change in the outer, objective world. Early modern poets like Kabir better realised the true nature of *maya*, and correctly insisted on interrogative interaction between the human self and the social system.

It is not just the State. Large corporations are no less keen on (and competent with) surveillance. American author Dave Eggers's 2013 novel *The Circle* presents a horrifying picture of a corporate ethos obsessed with total control and awash in Orwellian manipulation of language. In the novel, an infotech giant called The Circle propagates total 'transparency' and 'sharing'—each moment of your life must be 'shared' with the community (a euphemism for corporate bosses). The motto is projected as a moral imperative: 'Privacy is theft'.

How can such control fantasies be prevented from running amok? It's a world that is now a soft target for 'under the skin surveillance', presented as a foil against deadly infection. That is what enables and spurs, for instance, the mind manipulation by private media leading to demonisation of communities—presenting them anew as sources of infection. How can that be resisted? And how can healthcare be assured as a right, not as commodity?

Reflecting on the situation in the UK, political philosopher John Gray talks of the "rapid reinvention of (the) British state on a scale not seen before" (*The New Statesman*, April 1). In a pandemic that has brought home the realisation that neoliberal capitalism is bust; it is the structure of the State, not only in the UK, but everywhere,



TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

Unless monopolies are regulated and wealth redistributed, the 'after corona' world order will be dystopic.

that must be 'reinvented'. Framing the experience of the current pandemic in the perspective of historical memory, we must realise the limits of the present world order and draw the right lessons. Gandhi identified self-restraint and compassion as the defining characteristics of Ahimsa.

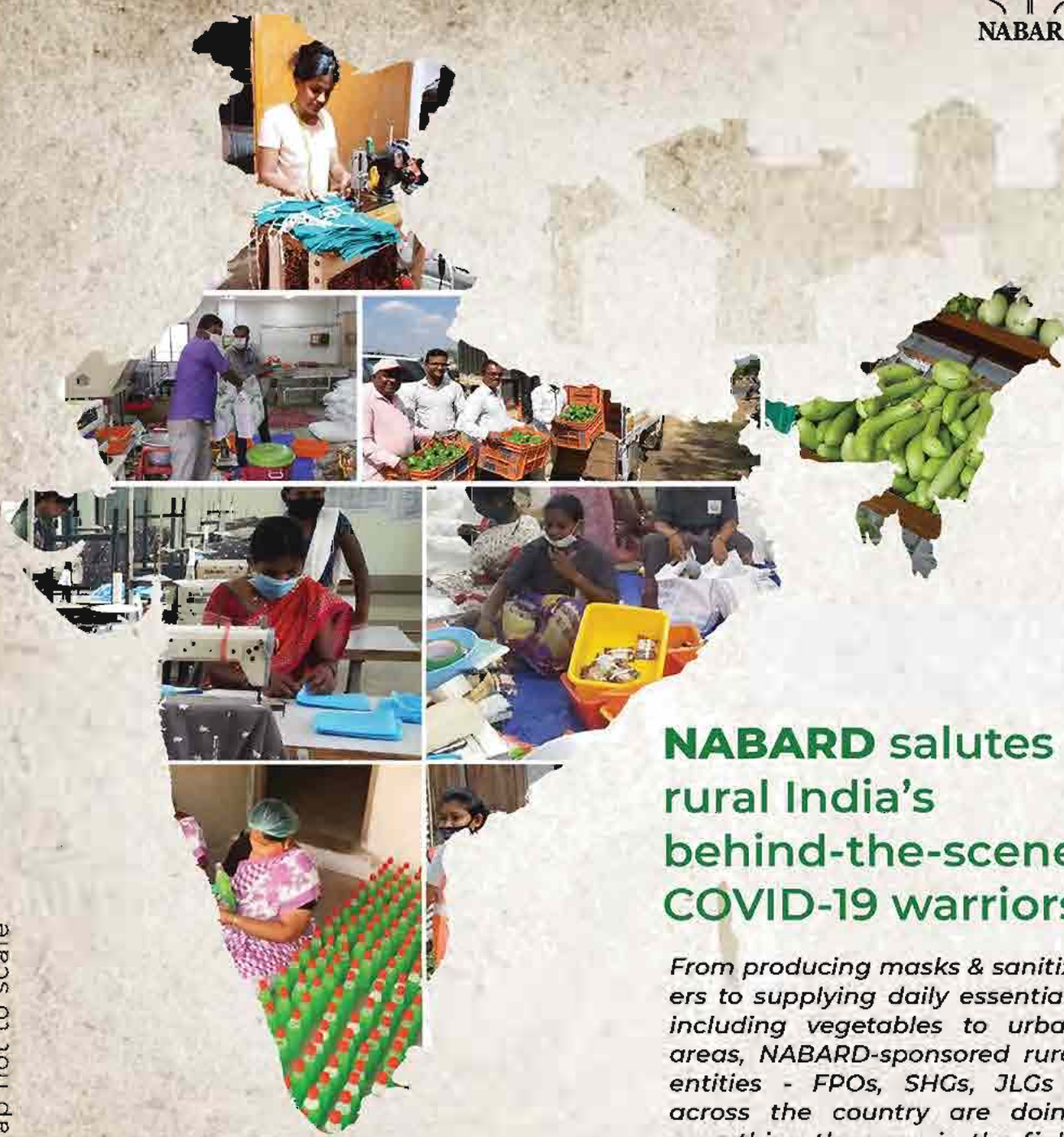
Translated into the imagination of a system, this points us towards a just redistribution of resources and an environmentally sensitive idea of development. It also implies a

State that follows the judicious middle path

of *samyak*, moving away from the superstition of privatisation being a panacea for all ills of governance. The regulation of monopolies and the prevention of concentration of wealth in a few hands is the sine qua non of winning back democracy from corporatocracy. If this is not done with some urgency, we must brace ourselves for the frightening prospect of a dystopic 'after corona' world order characterised by hyperbolic cults of heroes and unprecedented mass surveillance. [□](#)

PURUSHOTTAM AGRAWAL IS A DELHI-BASED WRITER AND COMMENTATOR.
RITWIK AGRAWAL IS A DOCTORAL RESEARCHER AND INSTRUCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI.
(VIEWS ARE PERSONAL)

Map not to scale



NABARD salutes rural India's behind-the-scene COVID-19 warriors

From producing masks & sanitizers to supplying daily essentials including vegetables to urban areas, NABARD-sponsored rural entities - FPOs, SHGs, JLGs - across the country are doing everything they can in the fight against coronavirus.

STAY HOME, STAY SAFE

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LEAGUE INTERRUPTED

Soumitra Bose

Whoever once said emphatically that “It’s just not cricket”, a big shout-out for speaking too soon. She had not even seen the Indian Premier League (IPL), that crazy crossover between *Mad Max* and *Terminator*, with the glamour and lucre of a Las Vegas casino thrown in. The gentleman’s game invented by the stiff upper-lipped British to be played between lunch and afternoon tea is...well, no longer the pastime



CHENNAI EXPRESS Fans of Chennai Super Kings recreate M.S. Dhoni's face in the grandstands during an IPL match.

of lazy afternoons in the English countryside. Cricket is now a board game, played as much by corporate honchos in pinstripe suits in five-star hotels as much by tattooed gladiators with rippling muscles and hairdos in front of delirious spectators in modern-day Roman amphitheatres. Even Kerry Packer's revolutionary day-night cricket league that introduced coloured clothing looks like kid's play now. Yes, IPL is no cricket. But fans say it's even better. Those who run the league say everyone's a winner. And no one seems to have enough of this money-minting, glamour-fuelled event that defies cricket's very grammar and language.

And that is not exactly a pretty scenario for the world of cricket. Just a domestic T20 tournament run by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is becoming bigger than the sport itself, threatening its very foundations and opening up new fault lines

in cricketverse. The temporary halt to IPL 2020 due to the global coronavirus pandemic has put the premier T20 event on a potential clash-path with the International Cricket Council (ICC) T20 World Cup which is due later this year; in the original scheme of things, the World Cup was to follow IPL. For all practical purposes, a global event outweighs any domestic tourney. But not IPL. And certainly not the BCCI. The IPL's sheer financial might is threatening to reschedule the World Cup and leave the ICC's calendar in complete disarray. With the sporting world staring at an uncertain future, BCCI could even ride its cricket riches to gain tacit control of the international cricket ecosystem, specifically the big boards in financial distress.

Money Matters

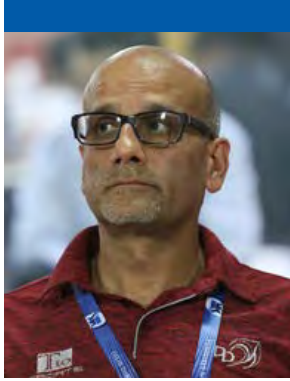
If it had gone as per script, this would have been the sixth of the eight-week tournament. The IPL is the only T20 domestic tournament in the world that wins world-wide favour because boards get a 20 per cent share of an overseas player's fee to ensure availability and appearance. By rough esti-

Rs **47,500** crore
Brand value of IPL

Rs **5,000** crore
BCCI's estimated loss if
2020 IPL is not held

Rs **104** crore
Paid by eight teams for
29 international players
in 2020

Rs **15.5** crore
Record sum paid by KKR
for Aussie speedster
Pat Cummins



Hemant Dua
Ex-CEO, Delhi Capitals

BCCI, like most other major sporting organisations, was caught off guard. Who could imagine that a virus would bring live sport across the world to a halt. Insurance against pandemic was not a necessity and, as a result, the league and teams all will lose heavily if IPL is a no-go this year, which is becoming a likelihood day-by-day. The losses could be north of Rs 100 crore for teams (combination of ticket sales, sponsorship and broadcast revenue share.) But it's not all doom and gloom. The product will have to reinvent itself and a possible scenario could be a no-spectator event... which could be beamed to houses across the world!



mates, IPL pays Rs 40 crore (\$5.3 million) to these boards every season. For the financially weaker boards like West Indies and South Africa, this is decent money. For example, the Australian Cricket Board will get 20 per cent of the record Rs 15.5 crore, the fee that Kolkata Knight Riders has budgeted for Aussie speedster Pat Cummins. Just to put the IPL big bucks in context, Cummins was Australia's highest paid cricketer last season and earned AUS \$1.5 million (approximately Rs 7.3 crore). And that's the reason why international cricketers want to play IPL. This year, 13 Aussie cricketers were richer by Rs 57.25 crore, an average spend of Rs 4.4 crore per player. England (seven players for Rs 17.75 crore) and West Indies (four players for Rs 17.25 crore) were the other major gainers.

No wonder players get rather dizzy at the very mention of IPL. "Let me confess something. IPL is where I get the most goose bumps when I am playing cricket. I get that in the CPL (Caribbean Premier League) as well, but when it comes to playing in the IPL, especially at Eden Gardens, there is no comparison to that crowd," big-hitting West Indies star Andre Russell was quoted as saying recently.

In spite of the lockdown and uncer-

tainty over resumption of competitive sports, the BCCI is clearly not ready to sacrifice its cash cow to a pandemic that has already jammed brakes on the Formula One season, shown the world's top soccer leagues a red card, served a historic shock to All England Club that hosts the Wimbledon and robbed thousands of athletes a chance of winning an Olympic medal at the Games in Tokyo this summer.

IPL is now among the top five leagues in the world in terms of broadcast rights fee per match. The financial implication of not having an IPL is huge for both BCCI and the eight franchises. Even by modest estimates, BCCI stands to lose Rs 3,065 crore from broadcasters STAR, about Rs 440 crore of title sponsorship from Vivo and another Rs 200-odd crores from associate sponsors. After deducting cost (roughly Rs 500 crore) for staging the IPL, that mainly covers TV production cost, the BCCI shares 50 per cent of its revenue with the franchises. Thus, teams get approximately around Rs 200 crore each though they have to return 20 per cent of their total revenue to the BCCI.

Chess Board

Unlike most other cricket boards, BCCI's financial health is in very good shape. Since 1997, after Jagmohan



A league of their own—Rohit Sharma with his wife and daughter after a match; and cheerleaders get ready for their routine

Dalmiya became the first Indian president of the ICC, the world body saw an exponential growth in riches. Dalmiya intelligently navigated the alleys of power with his keen business acumen and ability to keep the 'white' boards happy. Once the idea of selling television rights to private broadcasters was approved by the BCCI, much to Doordarshan's chagrin, major tobacco, cola, automobile and electronic brands made a beeline to associate themselves with Indian and world cricket. Cricket was never going to be the same again. Money started making the game dance.

The birth of IPL in 2008 only made things rosier for BCCI. It needed the vision of another businessman, Lalit Modi, to take Indian cricket to an entirely different level. Cricket and Bollywood came together to catch the attention of a new breed of sport lovers for whom the purity of the game was irrelevant. As top and unknown players started hitting jackpots, IPL grew in stature, shattering doubts about its durability and commercial

sustenance. Reports of match-fixing and betting scandals barely scratched the behemoth called IPL.

What was shrewd tactics by Dalmiya probably translated into arrogance when N. Srinivasan became ICC's first chairman in June 2014. As the most powerful man in world cricket, Srinivasan floated a 'big three' model that would eventually give India, Australia and England the lion's share of ICC's revenue. India wanted a whopping US\$ 570 million over an eight-year cycle (2015-23) but Srinivasan's plans failed to see light of day. It was because of the IPL that Srinivasan came to grief. His son-in-law Gurunath Meiyappan, a team owner of Srinivasan's Chennai Super Kings, was indicted in the 2013 IPL betting and match-fixing case and the Supreme Court ordered Srinivasan to stay away from cricket. After a 14-month stint, Srinivasan was removed by BCCI from ICC.

His successor Shashank Manohar immediately consigned the Big Three model to the backburner and India, reckoned as a bully, were comprehensively beaten (13 votes to 1) after a revenue model based on equality, transparency and growth was gleefully accepted. In April 2017, based on forecasted revenues and cost, BCCI was to



Sanjay Kailash

Ex-revenue head,
ESPN-STAR Sports

The audience is the only measurement in entertainment and advertising money will always follow eyeballs.

After nearly a year of being starved of cricket, the Indian cricket fans will get to see their favourite players in action in the IPL (if it is held). It will witness unprecedented viewership. October-November is the time when ad spends are the maximum. IPL has the opportunity to be the best media vehicle across TV and digital, as it could deliver the biggest-ever audience to date.



Dhruv Chitgopekar
COO, Kwan

The loss right now is largely material loss. We can't lose human relationships that come from flexibility, open communication and empathy. Six billion people are in the same boat. How we conduct ourselves during this time will shape the nature of relationships once the crisis is over.

Honesty, respect between clients will give birth to a new world of content and entertainment where the nature of expectations and how we engage will be very different.



receive \$293 million, England \$143 million and Australia \$132 million over eight years. BCCI, of course renegotiated the deal under the Supreme Court-appointed Committee of Administrators and pushed its share up to \$405 million, about 28.3 per cent of ICC's revenue.

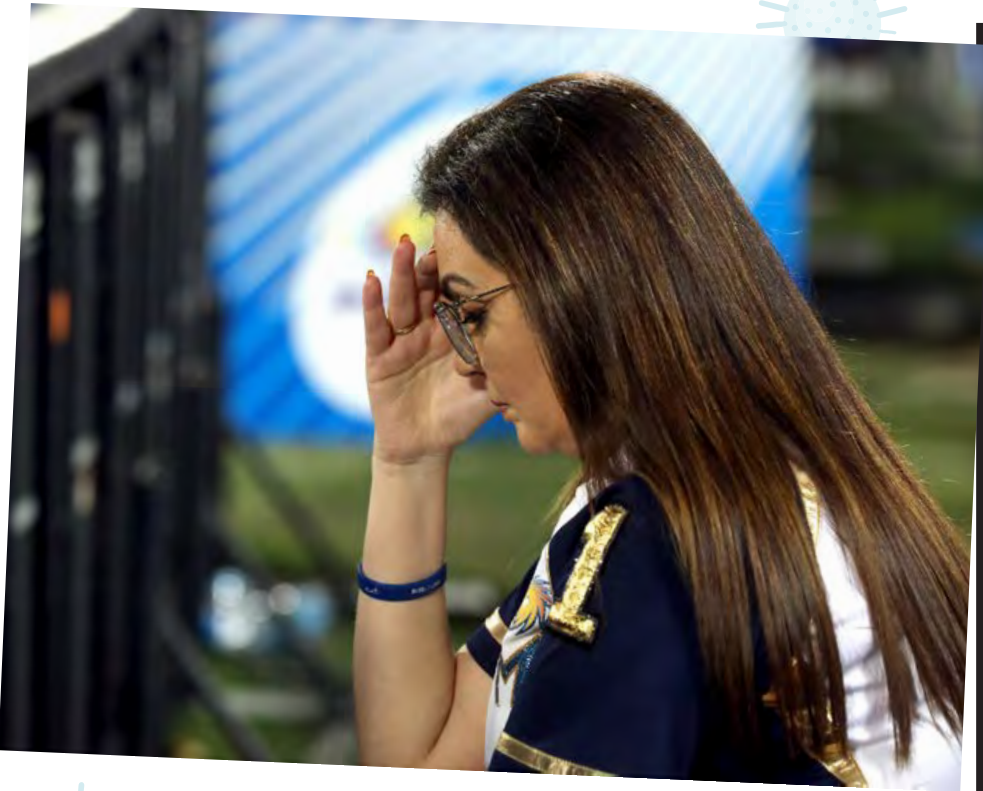
ICC's snub in 2017 clearly hurt BCCI's pride. India have never seen Manohar as an ally and the new BCCI regime under Sourav Ganguly and Jay Shah would surely like to see the back of Manohar once the Nagpur lawyer's second two-year stint officially comes to an end in June this year. While Manohar can still seek a third term and remain a thorn in India's flesh, BCCI sniffs a great opportunity in this crisis period to demonstrate its power behind the scenes and in the long run, muscle in Srinivasan's 2014 Big Three model of revenue sharing.

"To grow cricket, India had to be in the leadership role. There was no big three or small three model but what we proposed was a division of revenue that was no different from the International Olympic Committee's where the US gets a higher percentage. A larger market contributes to more revenue and for a country of 1.3 billion (India) and some other country getting the same

share was not justified," says former IPL chief operating officer Sundar Raman, who was also the author of the big three document (see interview).

Insiders say the president-secretary combination of Ganguly and Shah has already started talking to the powerful cricket boards and influential 'white' ICC members. While India should easily win the trust of its Asian allies like Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, to convince Pakistan to cancel the Asia Cup in September and make room for the IPL will be a major challenge. If the ICC does decide to postpone the October-November World T20 in Australia, to February next year, then BCCI will have a lot of bandwidth to organise a full IPL. The government, which collects 33 per cent of IPL's revenue as tax, may not be averse to giving BCCI the nod. The ICC is still not sure if Australia can guarantee the safety of 15 overseas nations in the wake of the pandemic. A decision on World T20 is expected in July.

While the BCCI waits for the government to lift the lockdown and allow for public hosting of sports, hectic backroom parleys are already on to find solution to rejig the international calendar in a bid to offset the major financial losses. England and Australia



The cup and the tension—Nita Ambani of Mumbai Indians before her team won the 2019 edition of the league by a single run

have already announced that they are in financial distress and the future is not looking good. Both major Test playing nations are counting on India to bail them out.


White Man's Burden

Cricket Australia, which has already suffered a \$20 million hit and is staring at a loss of “hundreds of millions of dollars” if it is unable to host the T20 World Cup, wants India to play an additional fifth Test when Virat Kohli's men travel Down Under in November-January 2021. In a first, all five Tests could be played at the Adelaide Oval and behind closed doors. According to reports, Cricket Australia's cash investments worth about \$270 million in 2016 crashed to \$97 million in March this year. Despite signing a landmark broadcast deal worth \$1.2 billion in 2018, CA has executed savage 80 per cent salary cuts and stand down orders on its staff till at least the end of the financial year.

Cricket in England is suffering more than it did during the two World Wars.

According to the ECB, an entire season without cricket will affect the board in excess of \$372 million. The English board is pumping in \$75.5 million to save the Counties from sinking. And on April 30, the ECB postponed its ambitious and innovative “The Hundred” programme until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 100-ball competition was to begin on July 17 and end August 15. Players involved were set to earn as much as \$156,000 (about Rs 1.18 crore) each. The tournament will now be launched in the English summer when the Indians come to play a Test series.

With BCCI keen to re-establish its control on world cricket, lot of compromises and adjustments are clearly in the offing. As long as the IPL doesn't suffer, India will be game to run an extra yard to comfort its global partners and demonstrate its supremacy in world cricket both on and off the field.

Tailpiece: Is cricket a dirty game? In a sport where players rub spit and sweat on a ball and pass it around, how safe is the game in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic? Can players keep safe distance on the field? What about high fives and the Dab dance? Will cricket be the same again? 



Joy Bhattacharya,
Ex-team director,
Kolkata Knight Riders

The problem will be more to do with players' match fitness.

Especially senior players. If the IPL happens, most players will go in with zero match practice. Usually the IPL happens at the end of the season and players may be tired but not lacking in match practice or fitness unless they have been injured. They will now go in cold to the tournament and that is never easy.

As the first Chief Operating Officer of the Indian Premier League, Sundar Raman, just like the controversial Lalit Modi, is a name synonymous with the biggest and most glamorous T20 cricket league in the world. Until he stepped down in November 2015, Sundar was considered the brain behind IPL and his ability to exploit mileage in terms of revenue and branding made him indispensable to the Indian cricket ecosystem. His proximity to former BCCI and ICC president N. Srinivasan took him to the corridors of power in world cricket but after his name cropped up during the Supreme Court-mandated investigation into the 2013 IPL match-fixing and betting scandal, Sundar's image started to tarnish. Once he quit Indian cricket, Sundar, a science student with a post-graduate degree in advertising and communication, was roped in to head the ambitious sports initiatives of Reliance Industries. The 49-year-old, who currently works as an independent advisor and administrator, spoke to Outlook exclusively on a subject close to his heart. Excerpts:

The coronavirus pandemic has sent IPL into a tailspin. Unexpected as it was, can you fathom its impact on cricket?

I would look at it from three lenses. One, cricket as a sport and what it has done to the practitioners of the



'IPL brings joy to fans, it has only made Team India bigger'

craft; two, the economic side and third, the fans. The recreational sport side is affected significantly because England is shut and the summer season there is looking very bad. The Indian season of opportunities is also substantially effected—for a whole bunch of youngsters who have plied their trade, learnt a lot and made a living out of this tournament.

The economic impact on the game is going to enormous. Cricket by and large is dependent on India and that too at a very big level. With the Indian season getting affected, the sport economy or cricket economy in India is substantively lowered. If there is no IPL then you're talking about close to Rs 600 crore of sponsorship money from the central level plus another Rs 400 to 500 crore from a team level. That's about Rs 1,100 crore which is not going into the system. Plus, the broadcast rights fees of over Rs 3,000 crore and ticket revenues of about Rs 200 to 300 crore. That's approximately a direct Rs 5000-crore hole in the sporting industry which largely relies on cricket and I'm not even counting the fact that the three games versus South Africa were cancelled. So cricket economy will shrink and Indian sport economy will degrow if IPL doesn't happen this year.

STAR TV paid BCCI an astronomical Rs 16,347 crore for exclusive media

You mentioned fans and there is talk of playing in front of empty stands. Tournaments like IPL are an opportunity to engage with a growing fan base. Since it was coming at the back of a Women's T20 World Cup in Australia, a lot more fans could have been added back. Now there will be a gap in the fan following.

rights of IPL for five years (2018–22). How big a loss will it be for them?

If STAR planned to raise Rs 3,000 crore of revenue, they will not be able to get that money if there is no IPL this year. There is top-line revenue and then there is profitability. But how do you define loss? There are a lot of allied benefits that come with IPL. STAR will see if IPL is bringing in additional value beyond (just revenue) like driving Hotstar subscription, bringing in audience or helping launch newer programmes. Yes, it will affect STAR from a profitability point of view but more from a growth perspective.

An IPL or a World T20, which is more important from the revenue point of view?

ICC tournaments are not like an IPL. If India is cricket's biggest market then everyone will want an IPL. The economics of IPL and ICC are very different. If there is a window available and the conditions are safe, I will have an IPL (over a World T20) for various reasons. First and most importantly, ICC tournaments are cyclic and you have a larger window to accommodate them. So, if you can't conduct a World T20 this year, you can always conduct it next year or in 2022. So there is no loss in revenue. It's just deferment of revenue. But if IPL isn't held this year, it's a straight loss of revenue.

Sport at this point in time needs to protect against loss of revenue; deferment of revenue is still fine. Secondly, more players stand to gain financially and there is a reasonable amount of money going around (in IPL) and thirdly, a World T20 can't be

played inside an empty stadium because the host country depends a lot on gate revenue. IPL, technically, can still be played with no spectators. It is largely a TV sport. And finally for a World Cup, you want the teams to come fully prepared. When the world is shut how can teams prepare for a World Cup just months away? ICC has to show prudence.

How does not having an IPL impact the teams, especially the big ones like Chennai Super Kings or Mumbai Indians?

It affects less from a financial standpoint but more from a continuity angle. The joy that IPL brings to the fans is lost. The entire build-up starting from the player's auction sets up the fans beautifully. In terms of revenue, the loss for a team is minimal because you are not spending anything majorly.

In terms of brand loyalty, which is bigger—following the Indian cricket team or following your IPL team?

Following India is always bigger and there is no question about that. The advantage of an IPL is that India wins every day. In a World Cup, an Indian fan will follow the four or five matches the team plays because that's the nature and stature of the tournament. But a cricket fan perhaps derives more joy in watching a match between KKR and Kings XI game than a Bangladesh vs New Zealand match. What IPL has done is that it has made Team India and cricket bigger. It hasn't competed but has been complimentary. IPL has brought more fans into the sport. 



INTERVIEW

DRDO Joins Hands In The War Against COVID-19

the premier Defence Research Organisation in the country (DRDO) is playing a major role in the preparedness against pandemic, COVID-19. DRDO shows the world how a R&D organisation can make a difference in a national emergency.

AK Singh, Director, General Life Sciences, Defence Research and Development Organisation

What are the challenges that a pandemic can bring before the country? What role a defence-based R&D organisation play?

This pandemic has posed a Bio-Psychosocial challenge to this country that has few parallels in the modern history. Further, though the virus has created havoc globally, each nation needs to think and execute a 'Local Action Plan' because of differing conditions.

I am of the opinion that challenges can essentially be classified in four categories: One Social: i.e. Fear of uncertain future, isolation for long periods, dislocated families and also that world had never experienced such a pandemic since 1918. Two: Medical/health where understanding the pathology and transmission mode is proving to be a challenge, diagnosis and prognostication is also a challenge, no treatment is available and over and above there is raging debate on need and quality of ventilators and diagnostic kits. Three: Economic challenges as Macroeconomic of the country will need recalibration, Micro-economics of a large number of households are destroyed. Now the question is to see if it will be followed by boom and opportunity for self-reliance? It is very hard to say. Fourth challenge in front of us is Structural/political where, with this pandemic world political order may be different. New alliance may emerge.

This pandemic is a major challenge to all emergency preparedness agencies across the globe. R&D agencies are going to play a major role amidst this scenario. DRDO being one such major Government agency geared up to help the nation in preparing essential items required for COVID-19 frontline workers in times of need as working for Defence has made us learn the art of doing things on war footing.

In a such short time, DRDO has focussed on supply solutions of critical and deficient medical equipment and brought out over 46 products. How was it achieved in a short span of time?

I understand that there is difference between a Science and Technology-driven organization and other kinds of technology-based organizations. The life science labs at DRDO together with hard core strategic laboratories turned into biomedical laboratories to fulfil the emergent requirements DRDO not only produced Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) kits, disinfectants i.e. sanitizers, but also provided biomedical equipment and Services which were used for PPE testing.

Our scientists deserve appreciation. They took risks of all kind to bring things to table at the shortest possible time. The toughest part was procurement of raw materials and subsystems. The complete

Lockdown gave us opportunity to innovate but the same posed us a lot of challenges.

Our pre-existing network with industry, academia and governmental agencies was able to sustain the pressure exerted by industry lockdown and lack of transport options.

Working in a defence establishment had taught us how a war is won. War is won by coordination at different levels: between the Wings of Forces, between Defence sector and Government and between Government and people.

Are you happy with what you have done till now? Is there anything new can expect in a short time?

This country is facing a huge challenge. As I see it, DRDO and indeed all R&D agencies may have to do a rethink. I would like the agencies and academic institutes to come together and feed on each other new and innovative ideas.

Our scientists are doing the best they can. For some of us, the word 'Stay at Home' has no meaning. We work round the clock. I salute my team of scientists who are braving the situation. Essentially our future endeavours will follow the same four areas: PPEs, Disinfectants, Biomedical devices and Services. Our focus is now on scaling up and reaching the society directly, with more and for more. We are inspired by Mahatma

Gandhi who said, “When I work, I have the man in street as my object. Unless he benefits, the work remains incomplete.”

N95, N99 masks, ventilators and body suits are in short supply all over the world. DRDO is ready with masks and ventilators. Is that true?

Yes, that is true.

The solutions need to reflect the problem. Initially, we focussed on getting together what should have been available but was not because of Lockdown. While this process on, our developmental teams got activated and used the raw material available for small innovations that were better or were import substitutes. The third layer were the research teams that did conceptual research and came up with products that did not even exist before.

This three-pronged strategy was evident in the products you mentioned.

We got made the conventional masks to serve the targeted people in a matter of days. In parallel, we innovated on N-99 masks and that were out in a couple of weeks. Research is a continuous process and the next batch will be better, more breathable, more cost-effective and probably reusable.

Similarly, lakhs of conventional PPEs were ordered through the existing networks. To cater to the masses, fabrics like Parachute material were innovated for PPE and are under production. In the third phase, we are expanding the concept to PPE-1 & PPE-2 and to enhance reusability of the disposable ones.

What is the advice from DRDO to the medical community and the common people involved in the war against COVID-19?

This is a new kind of war that has no parallel in the history of the New India. We have fought 3 wars and won. But they were short wars of a few weeks’ duration. The current pandemic is more like WW2. It will stretch for years. Medical and health workers are the foot soldiers and artillery of this new war. Medical authorities are convinced that COVID-19 is here to stay. There may be waves of epidemic and in between the virus will be endemic. It all depends upon whether the virus keep on changing its antigenic character or not and how long the immunity against the disease lasts.

My expectations from the medical community is same as other ministries.

We should have a cheap, effective vaccine as soon as possible which our biotechnology companies are able to mass produce. We should focus on better, cheaper and more reliable diagnostic measures. There are lot of differentiated thinking on what the virus does to human body and how to treat our routine and serious cases. These issues are not yet settled. Finally, we have been given a wrap on our knuckles that we should have indigenization of everything. Our experience with ventilators has been excellent. If we can produce high end technologies in large numbers in a short time, we can very well do this with relatively low-end technologies like PPEs and masks. Plastics have been and will be used in a mammoth quantity. What do we do with this waste is something we do not know as of now.

As far as Indian community is concerned, they have been exemplary and a role model for the rest of the world in this difficult time. This was for the first time that the society and community stood up as ONE and David is seen to defeat the Goliath. There were no ifs and buts or incessant arguments and dissensions. The common man was able to shrug off the typical ‘chalta hai’ attitude and did what the government asked them to do. We paid a heavy price but did not breakdown before this pandemic.

A word of caution for all of us is that COVID-19 shall not leave us hurriedly. Our ‘Soldiers in White’ are fighting this challenging and prolonged war in the hospitals and in the street. We must give them the respect they deserve as our saviours. They have a difficult job to do which may cause inconvenience to us for time being. We must realize they are putting their lives in danger while we are just being asked to stay at home. I share the same sentiments for our police, paramilitary and even the home guards and all Corona workers and saviours.

I also must also congratulate the media. They have set up exemplary standards for themselves. They indeed proved themselves to be the fifth column of democracy.

What is the interface between DRDO and the industry?

DRDO’s approach from the beginning has been different from many other national research agencies. As a policy DRDO reaches out to the industry for scaling up

research products. This flexible approach helped us to give 46 products in three months.

Working together for years generates an element of trust. As you can understand, in such times as COVID, one has no time for technical and administrative negotiations and large-scale testing and remodelling. People have to work in coordination and develop confidence in each other. The system will not work if the subsystems do not work in tandem. It was gratifying to note that there were no products which we visualized, not delivered on time though multiple partners were involved. Yes, scale up remains a big challenge. Whether it is PPEs or equipment, the country needs everything in crores. Again ventilators are a living example. This country had about 17000 ventilators before COVID-19. It is been three months in the pandemic, we are expecting 50000 more, all indigenous, barring 1000.

COVID-19 has and will give a big impetus to Make-in-India and skill development schemes of hon’ble PM. Indian industry is responding in an unbelievable way in making masks, PPE, kits and other devices needed to combat the enemy.

Has DRDO performed the role expected of it in the current COVID-19 crisis?

This is for you to judge.

As far as I am concerned, technically there are only a few labs in DRDO which are directly responsible to deal with Biological threats and they are performing well.

As an R&D organization no one expected us to come up with innovations we did in the short span of time and when the entire system was locked down. No one expected our labs that had nothing to do with Biology to come up with solutions. No one expected us to scale up the masks and PPEs to millions in quantity. Traditionally, DRDO has gone the TOT way. This pandemic has finally taught us to be our own vendors.

There will be a new awareness in the public about what DRDO does when our products reach the ‘last man in the street’ and the remotest district. There will be a better understating in government agencies how soon DRDO can stand and deliver, and in what quantities.

I look forward to the media to carry forward this message far and wide. ■

In the cricketing universe, IPL put India in the...

Centre of the World



OVER the past two decades, India's ranking in world cricket moved up dramatically, both on and off the field. Mind you, this is not coincidental—these two developments are closely linked. A leisurely game associated with the English countryside became India's favourite sport which on most days easily tops Bollywood blockbusters for television rating points. An important element of this transformation is the commercialisation of the sport. From a genteel, noble and aristocratic sport, cricket today has transformed into a more indigenised game—a noisy, brazen and vivid commercial extravaganza catering to its biggest audience.

But don't let the so-called purists fool you with the view that this takes away from the charm of cricket. It is not cricket's quaint legacy of the Raj, but this sound and fury that has made cricket

commercially successful and India the centre of world cricket.

Commerce made its entry into the sport in the seventies. Many will remember the first three cricket World Cups between 1975 and 1983 as the Prudential Cup, with the eponymous insurance firm being the sole sponsor of all one day International matches hosted by the ICC. The Benson & Hedges trophy in Australia was among the most sought-after tournaments in the eighties. But it was not until 1996 when the first World Cup was co-hosted by India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka that the old Anglo-Australian axis that ruled World cricket was shaken.

Liberalisation and globalisation are trends that have impacted all sectors and to expect cricket to stay immune is a facile assumption. In fact, the key is to ride these trends and propagate the sport, making it commercially more attractive and using the resultant value to make it better, more exciting and make it global. Cricket boards have become rich by auctioning rights to television companies, who then make money selling commercial spots to advertisers, happy to reach large captive audiences. Television coverage, in turn, makes cricketers celebrities and enhances their commercial worth. The coverage also expands the audience by beaming the game to small towns and villages and

From a genteel, and aristocratic sport, cricket is now a noisy, brazen and vivid commercial extravaganza.



broadens crickets social base thus creating a global market.

But one may argue, whether all this commercialisation really helps the sport? The answer is an unequivocal yes. More money attracts better talent to the sport; also takes care of retired sportsmen—who unlike other professionals have limited playing years. The money pays for better stadia and quality infrastructure. In the last few years most Indian cricket venues have been upgraded and today India boasts of some of the finest cricketing venues in the world. The recently completed Motera stadium in Ahmedabad can seat 110,000 spectators, displacing the MCG as the world's largest cricket arena. Gwalior and UP's Faizabad will soon have state-of-the-art international cricket venues.

The world's finest players gravitate to India—like they once did to the English counties—to play in tournaments like the IPL, giving Indian youngsters exposure to the best. Money flows into grassroots cricket and better facilities for first class cricketers, who now at least have reasonable dressing rooms and quality practice facilities. Lastly, all this wealth helps cricket hire professional administrators who can effectively package and sell the sport to global TV networks and sponsors. Rahul Johri, CEO of the BCCI-headed Discovery Channel in India; Sunder Raman former COO of the IPL was a senior media executive with WPP's Group M. In fact, Indian sport administration talent is now global—the Chief Executive of the ICC, Manu Sawhney, honed his skills as head of ESPN India and the trading arm of cigarette major, ITC. All because cricket can afford to pay top dollar salaries matching the best in the corporate world. Now contrast this with the folks who run other sports in India, and one can understand why these sports struggle to get the basics right.

The sponsors of Indian cricket whose logos have appeared on the shirts, reflect the categories that have been the primary anchors of cricket in India. From 1993-2002, ITC was the lead sponsor who started off with Wills and then with pressure against tobacco sponsorship, rebranded to ITC Hotels. This post-liberalisation period, was when consumer brands took the lead, so besides ITC, soft drink majors Pepsi and Coke, and Hero Honda joined the



Indian cricket bandwagon.

In 2002, Sahara outbid ITC to become Indian crickets' anchor sponsor and stayed on until 2013. This period coincided with the telecom boom, and mobile service providers Airtel, Vodafone, Reliance Communications and white goods maker LG, were the key sponsors. Through this period, Pepsi, Hero Motors, LG and Reliance remained the anchor sponsors of all ICC tournaments.

The last seven years have seen the sponsorship switch from Star TV (2014-17), Oppo mobile phone (2017-2019) and Byju's online education, reflecting the changing market landscape dominated by mobile handsets and new online and ecommerce players like PayTM, flush with VC funding.

The real shift though, came with the IPL in 2008 that truly transformed the

sport and extended its appeal beyond the traditional male dominated fan base. IPL's three-hour evening format with glamorous anchors, for the first time got in the prime time audience, involving the whole family; for the sheer entertainment and fast-paced action: big-hitting, cheer leaders et al. The in-stadium experience also transformed, with corporate boxes, team merchandise, MC's, contests for spectators and interactivity making for a wholesome evening experience.

The bigger impact of the IPL, though, was on Indian cricket in general. It brought India at the centre of the global marketplace for cricket with world-class talent keen to play in India, getting young Indian cricketers the ex-

perience of a life time—to play aside the world's best. Moreover the IPL was great for talent discovery, pitting Indian talent with the best, and made superstars—and millionaires—of cricketers of all hues, even those who had not donned India colours. Not, by any stretch of imagination, a bad thing.

The much-criticised commercialisation of cricket is actually the cornerstone of India's on-field cricket dominance. This has democratised and upgraded the sport, taken it to the grassroots, helped discover talent beyond Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore, upgraded training facilities and made cricket a desirable profession for many. ■

(Views are personal)

The biggest impact of IPL was on Indian cricket. It put India at the centre of the global market.

The Men Who Pause

Lives matter more than holding a T20 tournament. IPL has to wait out the pandemic even if it means huge financial losses.



In any crisis, sport is always considered a unifying factor. Something that helps take your mind off the worrying reality. As Nelson Mandela

said, “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. Sport can create hope where there was only despair.”

Unfortunately, the current pandemic has shackled this powerful tool. As the world continues to reel under the coronavirus crisis, economists are debating whether the fallout of COVID-19 will be bigger than the 2008 financial crisis or the Great Depression of the 1930s, or something far worse. Never has the world gone into a lockdown where nearly 75 per cent of the population is indoors. The economic and financial ramifications of the shutdown of global sports leagues are equally bad as livelihoods of millions directly or indirectly depend on these sporting leagues.

All major sporting leagues or events are either suspended indefinitely or postponed. Olympics 2020 and UEFA EURO 2020, the two major sporting events this calendar year, are postponed while Wimbledon has been cancelled for the first time since World War II. All major football leagues across Europe and events by National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL) in the US are suspended indefinitely.

The Indian Premier League (IPL), one of the most keenly-awaited sports events in India, has also felt the heat of the pandemic. The government of India and various state governments have mandatorily banned public gatherings in view of public health and safety concerns. As a result, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided to postpone the 2020 season, and the threat of full cancellation is quite real.

Since inception, the IPL has seen spec-

tacular growth and has given fabulous return on investment to all its stakeholders. The growing value of the IPL ecosystem, which we estimated at approximately US\$ 6.8 billion (Rs 47,500 crore) after the 2019 edition of IPL, is a testament to its success, especially considering the short-term nature of the league when pitted against global leagues which are played almost throughout the year. This success has trickled down to impact the lives of the people associated with the event.

No one predicted that IPL would become such a huge hit when it was first conceptualised in 2007. No other sporting league in the world has seen such remarkable growth in such a short duration. Even global money-spinning leagues struggled to stay afloat during their formative years. A prime example is the now-popular NBA. During its formative years in the 1950s, the tournament was a major flop with very low viewership interests. The tournament struggled to stay afloat till the 1970s, and only some tweaks in the rules of the

game ensured that the tournament gained acceptance from audiences. Currently, the NBA is one of the most watched leagues in the world.

All global sporting leagues, including IPL (and the franchisees), depend heavily on three sources of revenue—television broadcasting rights fees, sponsorship fees and matchday revenues. The keenness of various broadcasters to fight for IPL broadcast rights in 2017, which Star India eventually won for a whopping US\$ 2.55 billion for five years, was a validation of how big the IPL has become and underscored the fact that the IPL is the

Never has the world gone into a lockdown where nearly 75% of the population is indoors.



prized asset in cricket. In 2016, Duff & Phelps had predicted the broadcast rights to be renewed at close to US\$ 2.5 billion, and we were spot-on in our assessment. Currently, the IPL is in the august presence of the global sporting leagues, when you compare the average per match broadcast rights fee in IPL and global leagues such as the English Premier League (EPL), NBA and NFL.

The price of IPL broadcast rights has seen an increasing trend since the IPL's inception in 2008. On an annual fee basis, the compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) works out to 18.9 per cent.

The IPL also continues to see high sponsorship fees, underscoring the keenness of various brands to be associated with the IPL. The IPL title sponsorship fee has grown a massive 800 per cent since its inception (when DLF became the title sponsor), to its current partnership with VIVO. As per GroupM, the IPL as a whole made US\$ one billion in sponsorship money in 2017, compared to the US\$ 892 million made by Major League Baseball. This is quite an achievement considering that the IPL season is shorter than the MLB season and given that sports is a major part of the US culture and economy whereas the economics of sports is just beginning to take root in India.

On the other hand, matchday revenues account for a relatively small proportion of overall IPL revenues. On an average, IPL franchisees' earnings from matchday revenues (including ticket prices, merchandising, and food and beverages) account for less than 25 per cent of their overall revenues, as they rely heavily on the central pool revenue that they receive from BCCI along with their team sponsorship revenues.

With the force majeure clauses kicking in, the monetary losses suffered by broadcasters, organisers, team owners and players across the global sporting leagues due to COVID-19 are huge. EPL side, Burnley Football Club announced a revenue shortfall of GBP 50 million if the season does not finish, while the larger EPL clubs are looking at a revenue shortfall of around GBP 100 million to GBP 150 million. Footballers across Europe have been asked to take a salary cut ranging from 20 per cent to 70 per cent. Some Premier League clubs, including Liverpool, initially declared they will use the British government's fur-



lough scheme to fund the wages of non-playing staff and only relented after a huge backlash from their supporters. Even across the Atlantic, in the US, the NBA and MLB want their players to take a substantial salary cut.

Similarly, the IPL, the franchisees and the players, too, will suffer financially in case the season gets cancelled this year.

No other sporting league in the world has seen such remarkable growth in such a short duration.

Players may not get their salaries; sponsors and broadcasters may not pay BCCI; and, of course, the advertisers will not pay the broadcasters. Duff & Phelps undertook a study last month to analyse the initial impact of COVID-19 on the value of the IPL ecosystem, which was estimated in our IPL Brand Valuation Report 2019. Based on the scenarios we considered, the IPL ecosystem/brand value was estimated to be impacted by nearly US\$ one billion just due to cancellation and without capturing the impact of the economic slowdown that might follow.

Depending on the extent of post-COVID-19 slowdown, most sponsorship contracts may

get re-negotiated next year, as the spending power of the advertisers and sponsors is likely to be impacted by the economic slowdown. As was seen during the Great Depression, the IPL teams may also look to reduce their ticket prices next year as spectators' spending power might also have been impacted due to pay reduction and job losses.

The pandemic's economic challenges are unprecedented. While most of the past economic shocks were largely restricted to certain geographies and economies in a not-so-globalised world, this one is different in all aspects, putting the entire world in uncharted territory. While economies of most countries are impacted, neither India nor the sporting world is insulated from the negative impact of this pandemic. This makes the IPL vulnerable like any other asset class in these testing and challenging times. As it has been time and again reiterated by leaders across the world, the moral and ethical obligation right now is to save as many lives as possible and just pray for a vaccine to eradicate this pandemic at the earliest, so that normalcy can be restored to all walks of life. The sports industry just like any other industry must use this time to ensure it has the right strategies and tactics in place to emerge as a winner post lockdown. ■

(Views are personal)

Gangnam Style

IPL is home to cricket's enfants terribles. It's a compliment to their exceptional and, even unorthodox, skills



Flying Kiwi
Brendon McCullum set the tone for IPL with a scintillating knock of 178 for KKR in the inaugural edition of 2008.

IT has been rather quiet at Christchurch. As New Zealand steadily recover from the onslaught of coronavirus, my mind obviously is on the Indian Premier League. We would have been approaching the business end of the IPL very soon if things went as planned but these are difficult times and protecting lives is more important. It's strange not to be in the midst of the greatest Twenty20 tournament of the world. Locked at home, I am watching a lot of memorable and old matches on the cricket channel here. If my 11-year-old son Ryan is any yardstick, he seems to have taken a liking for T20 cricket and especially, IPL. He doesn't enjoy the long-format of the game. This probably explains

why Test cricket is in serious danger.

One innings that father and son have seen multiple times on the telly is Brendon McCullum's blazing 178 for Kolkata Knight Riders against Royal Challengers Bangalore at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in the opening match of IPL 2008. IPL could not have asked for a better start and, in terms of quality and competition, the tournament has only grown from strength to strength as a global brand.

'Baz' is back to cricket after a long gap. This time as KKR coach. He has always been an aggressive cricketer and it is no surprise that he is straightaway debuting as a head coach of a franchise whose fans can be extremely demanding. I have seen McCullum as a teammate and captain. His attacking mentality makes a tremendous impact on the team. He can soak in pressure and KKR will profit if the players can follow him well.

I hear that IPL may happen later this year. It could be the first cricket tournament once the authorities allow sport to resume.

The biggest positive that IPL has seen is innovation of skills....IPL is the perfect laboratory.

I strongly feel the T20 World Cup scheduled in Australia in October-November can be moved to February 2021.

While I am no one to say this, I reckon there will be serious logistic issues if Australia try to accommodate 15 overseas teams that have faced various degrees of the pandemic's fury. IPL will be a good event for players to comeback to mainstream cricket and then prepare for international competitions where they compete for their countries.

While IPL is important for the Indian sport economy, there is a greater need to host the tournament this year keeping the future of the franchises in mind. We are going to have the mega auction early next year and the shopping list will depend on how players shape up and perform this season. It is imperative to have some cricket before a decision can be made. All teams do a lot of homework and given the fact that a bigger pool will be available means research has to be perfect when it will come to player retention. A lot of senior players will be under focus because franchises like Mumbai Indians usually love to build a squad for at least two to three years. The most successful teams like Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai have had continuity in terms of team composition and choice of players.

Mumbai and Chennai have almost always invested heavily on veteran players like Dwayne Bravo, Shane Watson, Harbhajan Singh and M.S. Dhoni. It's a bit of compromise but that's something deliberate. Mumbai, too, have a clutch of 30-plus players. Outstanding among them have been Lasith Malinga and Kieron Pollard, two of the coolest ones. It is wrong to say that IPL is a young man's tournament. Malinga, who was going for 19 runs per over in most of the matches, produced a sensational spell to win Mumbai the title last year. Invariably the turning points in many IPL humdingers have been scripted by veteran stars. The Dhonis, Watsons, Pollards and Harbhajans, with more than 100 matches each, know what it is to win under pressure. Talent can never supplant experience.




Disco Dancers IPL is all about about style and substance and the players know it.

Modern sport does not consider the age factor anymore. Look at the NBA or the Major League Baseball in the United States. Players are competing very well in their late thirties and even mid-forties. Professionalism in sport has a new meaning. Veteran players take great care of their bodies and in IPL too, a Malinga or Dhoni can play as long as they feel good about their mind and body.

IPL will be a good event for players to comeback to cricket and prepare for international competitions.

A fine mix of the world's best T20 players makes IPL unique. I am the head coach of Sydney Sixers but the Big Bash League is not quite like the IPL. The presence of every Indian international cricketer gives IPL the edge over other T20 league of the world. Every IPL match is like an event. The passion of the fans, the overall excitement makes it surreal. It's a great learning experience too. My five years at Mumbai have been wonderful. I not only get to handle such talented youngsters like Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah but to interact with great cricketing minds like Mahela Jayawardene and Pollard is so enriching. Of course, I like curries and Mumbai is my second home.

IPL has come a long way ever since I made my debut as a player for KKR in 2010. Whether you liked them or not, after-match parties and fashion shows were a must then. Not anymore. Over the years, cricket has become the focus. There is far more diligence and seriousness, sometimes a bit too much. The biggest positive that IPL has seen is innovation of skills. Today, as coach I am happy to see bowlers experimenting with new deliveries or batsmen practising different strokes. Every day, we are looking for new ideas to be a step or two ahead of the opposition. IPL is the perfect laboratory.

It's because of IPL that India is a superpower in world cricket and in every format possible. Today, India have the ability to win overseas and that's largely because they have a great pace attack and great athleticism when it comes to fielding. Add their tremendous batting, India is the model team of the world. How can you then not have an IPL? 

(As told to Soumitra Bose)

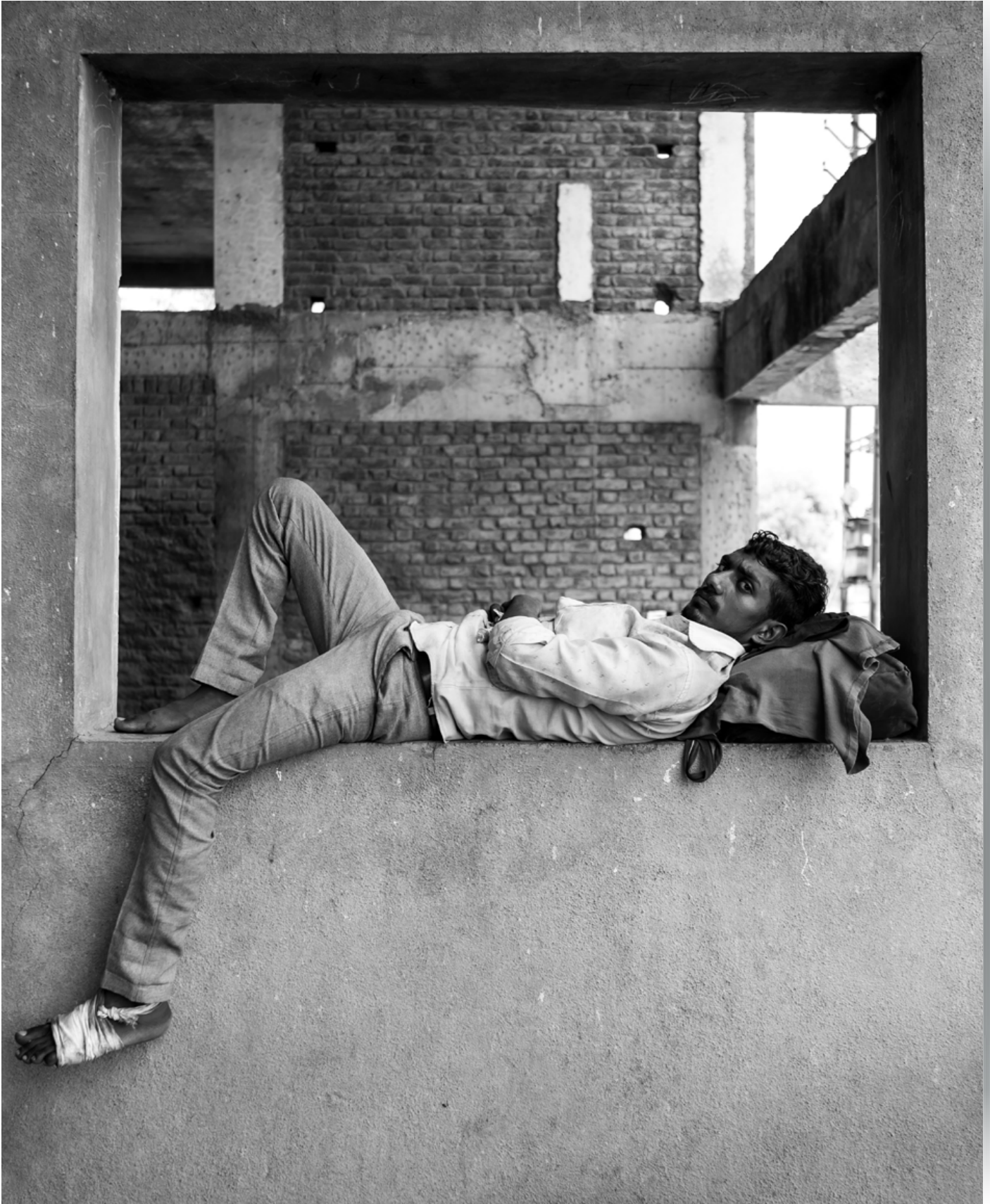


Ahead Is **Home**, Behind Is **Hunger**

Photo-essay by
Apoorva Salkade

As millions in our cities locked themselves in, life for those who built our homes, our roads, or did our dirty chores has moved outdoors. You can't see them from your balconies or through windows—the curtains are drawn anyway to block the harsh May sun. They too stay away from the day's heat. It is at night the Gates of Hell open. Group upon group of terrified, starving, exhausted people leave the cities they built, carrying with them precious items packed into sacks. Cellphones to reach out to relatives at home in villages they were born, hundreds of miles away. Some clothes, biscuit packets, bread. They flee on foot, bicycles, hitch a







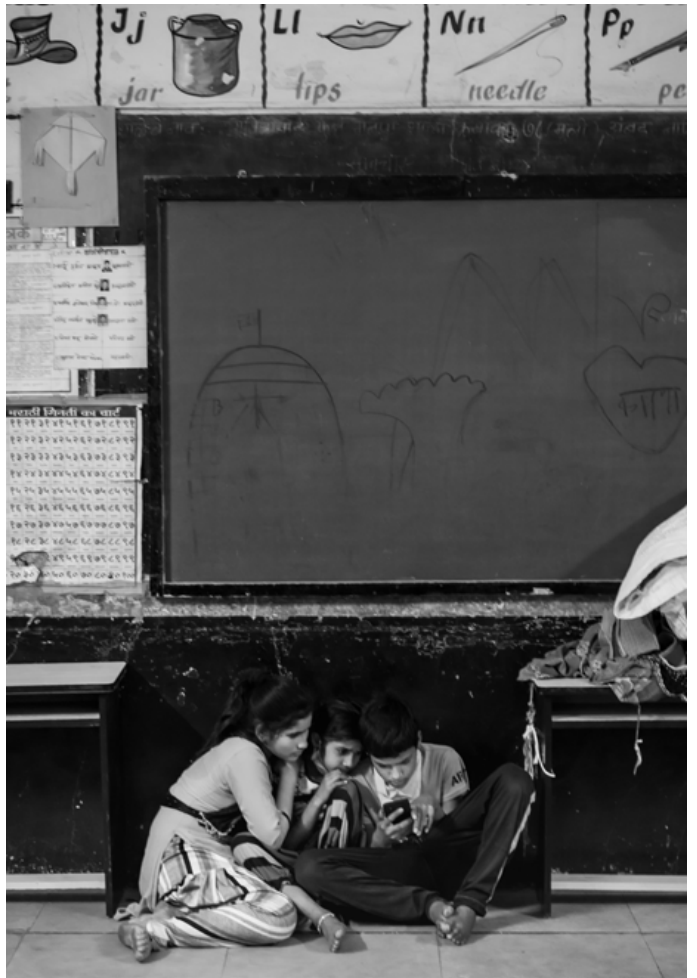
ride on goods-laden trucks...And much before the break of dawn, with stars filling the sky, they stop—hungry, thirsty and tired—to rest under the shade of a tree or a school converted into a shelter for migrants. “Stick around. It’s nice to have you here,” a man implores, unwrapping a gauge of rag to reveal a blistered foot, in one such home for the homeless in Nashik. “The first few days, I didn’t leave my house out of fear. Then the food and money ran out. I felt impotent when I went out looking for handouts. It created a moral conflict. I have never begged. I think this is the result of bad karma.” He pulls out a ball of soiled newspaper from his bag. Soaked chickpeas, his dinner. He puts some in his mouth. He used to come home





knackered every night from back-breaking work at construction sites or in clattering factories—someone paid at the end of a day’s labour had little choice about his job site. These have gone silent in the nationwide stay-home order to stop a contagion from spreading. A modest, self-effacing man, he could not have cared less. But the strict restrictions imposed on the population have stifled life. Soon, with no money to buy food or pay the rent, he joined the thousands of migrant workers filing out of the cities. He has heard that the government and “some rich people” were giving money to the poor. Also, special trains were ferrying people home. He thought of waiting his turn for a train. “But the drawbacks clearly outweigh the benefits,” he says. As the night unfolded, time pressed on

WIDER
COVID-19
ANGLE





him. “We’re alive for a reason,” he philosophises. “*Yeh rasta khatam nahin hota*, Sir.” Clinging to thinning hopes, and working himself into a trance, he hobbles out of the room and into a landscape that defies easy explanation, an expanse of road filled with meaning.

All along I was trailing them on a bike, shooting from a distance, afraid that any one of them could be a coronavirus carrier. Yet, I desperately wanted to capture their plight, tell their story. We are all hypocrites but the difference is what level you want to be.

Healthy eating

with

Rujuta Diwekar ▶

India's leading nutritionist

The author of
**"Don't Lose Your
Mind Lose Your Weight"**
and many others

In conversation with

Lachmi Deb Roy

Assistant Editor, Outlook magazine



&

You Tube

LIVE

Live Audience Q & A

• JOIN US ON •

May 15, Friday. 6:00 pm



'My book is about the need for education in the Indian Muslim community'

Actor-turned-producer Sanjay Khan's second book *Assalamualaikum Watan* dwells on Islam's history in India's multicultural society, the role Muslims have played in nation-building and the issues they face. In the book, Khan emphatically declares that he "considers himself an Indian first and then a person of the faith". In a conversation with Lachmi Deb Roy, he talks about the book and what he is doing during the lockdown.

What is *Assalamualaikum Watan* about?

→ Muslims in India number around 200 million. They contribute significantly to the cultural vitality and vibrancy of India. This number represents the second-largest mass of Muslims in any nation in the world. As Indian Muslims, we should feel tremendous pride, a sense of empowerment and responsibility

because we contribute to the achievements of Muslims in the world. The age-old saying is 'safety in numbers', but there is also 'inspiration in numbers'. Our social responsibilities should serve as the spark for the guiding light that Indian Muslims can provide. Through the power of education, I would like all Muslims to illuminate their path and contribute to the exchequer by joining the mainstream as involved citizens. This vast human resource can certainly propel the country's economic growth.

How is your second book different from your first?

→ They are poles apart. *Assalamualaikum Watan* deals with the need for education in the Indian Muslim community, while my autobiography *The Best Mistakes Of My Life* is just my story.

You have had a successful career as an actor. How does it feel to be a writer?

→ God's greatest gift to mankind is the art of writing. I



LATEST TRÉSOR MODELS READY-TO-WEAR



OMEGA LAUNCHES THE MOST RECENT EDITIONS OF THE DIAMOND-EDGED DE VILLE

Fans of OMEGA's slender and stylish Trésor collection now have even greater choice, thanks to the introduction of the latest colours and materials, including the brand's unique new alloy inspired by shining moonlight.

Slim yet big on style, the 36 and 39mm models, cased in stainless steel or 18K Moonshine™ gold, continue OMEGA's fine tradition of women's watchmaking.

Eye-catching dials include domed 18K Moonshine™ gold with an embossed silk-like pattern, and white mother-of-pearl. On the steel models, all hands are rhodium plated, while the gold editions feature diamond polished hands in matching 18K Moonshine™ gold or 18K Sedna™ gold. The latest Trésor collection also offers a choice of leather straps in fantastic colours such as rhodium and green, as well as a brand new 36mm rose model with a nude strap.

Each model retains the classic elements of the

Trésor, including the 38 single-cut diamonds following the curves of the case and the additional diamond on the crown, placed within the OMEGA flower in red liquid ceramic.

As expected with the Trésor, each caseback with polished, mirror effect features the sought-after collection's famous "Her Time" pattern. Powering all watches is OMEGA's Calibre 4061.

Devotees of the classic De Ville can also expect OMEGA's 5-year warranty.

AS EXPECTED WITH THE TRÉSOR, EACH CASEBACK WITH POLISHED, MIRROR EFFECT FEATURES THE SOUGHT-AFTER COLLECTION'S FAMOUS "HER TIME"



feel fortunate to have authored two books.

What are your favourite films?

→ My favourite film is Raj Kapoor's *Awara*, David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*. Among recent films, I liked Aamir Khan's *Dangal*.

What do you like about world cinema?

The professional finesse, technical excellence, remarkable performances and extraordinary scripts. James Cameron's *Avatar* is one of my favourite films.

Which directors do you like?


→ David Lean, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott and James Cameron.



Any plans of returning to acting?

→ In the past couple of years, I have been offered quite a few roles, but I am waiting for roles that excite me. In the meantime, I have just finished writing the script of a major biopic that I will direct and produce.

What are you doing during the lockdown?

→ I am keeping myself busy by reading, exercising and talking to friends and relatives. I am trying to reach out to the people working with me and those who are in need. I love watching Hollywood classics. I am also studying new technologies in filmmaking. I listen to Mohammed Rafi, who sang a total of 48 numbers for my films, and Lata Mangeshkar. 

'I have a girl gang I am quite attached to, just like in *Four More Shots Please!*'

Four More Shots Please!, a show about four women in Mumbai grappling with life, love and jobs, and finding comfort in friendships, is back with another season. **Maanvi Gagroo**, who essays the character Siddhi, talks to **Lachmi Deb Roy** about her role, female friendships and life during a pandemic.

How has Siddhi evolved in the second season?

→ In the first season, the audience was introduced to the characters and their lives. Season 2 delves further into that. In the first, Siddhi was shy, underconfident and the baby of the group. In the second, she sort of comes into her own. While she's still a little clueless, she at least begins to take charge of her life and is willing to try new things. She tries her hand at different things, but fails until she stumbles upon stand-up comedy. Somewhere, on the stage, talking about

her life, she finds her true calling.

In terms of working on her confidence, it was easy since essentially, I am a confident person. I just had to channel that. Also, as an actor, you feel more confident when the material at hand is something you inherently trust. Devika Bhagat and Ishita Moitra, the writers of the show, have lived with Siddhi much longer than I have and I completely trust their vision.

Which Siddhi do you relate to more—the one from Season 1 or Season 2?

→ I don't quite relate to either of the two, but if I had to choose, the Siddhi of Season 2 is probably more relatable for me. She's spunky, sassy and Siddhi. I had a lot of fun playing her. I think I am funny and I really enjoyed Siddhi's witty comebacks.


Do you also have a gang of close girlfriends?

→ I do have a girl gang that I am extremely attached to. We have been friends from school and share everything. And what's interesting is that much like in the show, we are also in different phases of our lives. Yet, we stay connected and are just as close. They are the first people I text or call every time there is news to share, good or bad.

Do you share the same relationship with your co-stars Sayani Gupta, Kirti Kulhari and Bani J outside the sets too?

→ Yes, our relationship over the two seasons has evolved. While there was an understanding that the four of us have to come across as friends on-screen, in the first season, we had to actively work on that, whereas in Season 2, it came much more naturally. We hang out outside the set, during takes and breaks in the shooting schedule. So the four of us are good friends off-screen too.

How is lockdown treating you?

→ I am a complete homebody, so I have no problems finding things to keep myself occupied. The first thing I did was to get my house in order. I cleaned my room; that was long pending. I fixed my bookshelves and now I plan to sort out my jewellery and other accessories. However, keeping fit has been a bit of a challenge. I am doing yoga and some basic functional exercises at home, but am just not able to do any cardio. I stay on the third floor, so I have started going up and down the stairs to squeeze in some physical activity. I have watched a lot of films and shows during this time, such as *Succession*, *Guilty* and *Icarus*. 





CHUNI GOSWAMI (1938-2020)

In God's **Playing Eleven**

A football legend, a cricketing star. Yet the charismatic Chuni Goswami was more than the sum.

Subhash Bhowmick

FOR me, Chuni Goswami will always be the most charismatic Indian footballer to have ever played the game. He wasn't only a genius on the football pitch; this fabulously talented athlete was gifted at any sport he played. Apart from wizardry on the football field, his cricketing calibre was well-known. His abilities at tennis were immaculate too; more time and effort could have won him a spot in India's Davis Cup team. I had once seen him play hockey for Mohun Bagan alongside hockey legend Inamur Rahman. Chuni-da made it look like hockey was his primary sport. All this, and oh, how he stamped every field of sport with his immeasurable charisma and glamorous bearing!

I watched Chuni-da humiliate defenders during his long, trophy-laden and illustrious career. Football typically divides opinions, but when it came to naming just one Indian footballer, he was everyone's favourite choice.

He started his career as a teenager at 16 with Mohun Bagan. During his time there he baffled opposing teams with his extraordinary dribbling and thrilled fans with amazing ball control and spectacular goals.

Chuni-da was slight of frame but had amazing balance and devastating speed; he would have defenders tackling thin air, then would embarrass them further by letting them catch up and then beating them for pace again.

Chuni-da retired from football very early, at 27, and took this tough decision with consummate ease. When asked why he retired so early, his reply was that "he who knows when to stop is the best orator".

His achievements as captain of the Indian national football team is unparalleled. His team won gold at the 1962 Asian games and silver at the Asia and Merdeka Cup. He decided to focus on cricket later. Chuni-da started his cricketing career representing Bengal in the Ranji Trophy.

I must narrate a story emblematic of Chuni-da's greatness as a sportsman. In a Ranji match between Bengal and Bihar, the former were four wickets down for a mere 40-odd runs. Gopal Bose, Ambar Roy, Prokash Poddar and Shyamsundar Mitra were back in the pavilion. Out came Chuni-da to bat. The rest was history. I heard it from Daljit Singh, then wicketkeeper of Bihar and later a BCCI curator. Once the match ended, Daljit asked Gopal Bose and Subrata Guha over a bottle of beer: "Arrey is Chuni-da crazy? All through his innings he kept on murmuring to himself 'Chuni you're a tiger, you have to save the team, you cannot lose your wicket!'" Chuni-da's scintillating century that day helped Bengal win. It was Chuni-da who had instilled the killer ins-



↑
Chuni Goswami with Subhash Bhowmick (above). Chuni-da with Pele (previous page) in Calcutta, 2015

tinct as well as the need for physical fitness in Bengal cricket.

Such was Chuni-da's athletic ability that Sir Garfield Sobers had mentioned his electrifying speed in his autobiography, describing a catch he had taken to dismiss Wesley Hall in the match between the visiting West Indies and a combined Central-East Zone team under Hanumant Singh in Indore in 1967. Chuni-da had sprinted 70 yards to take a diving, one-handed, spectacular catch. The mighty West Indies had suffered an innings defeat; Chuni-da had taken eight wickets in both innings with his medium pace. Years later, when a journalist told Chuni-da of what Sobers had written, he shrugged, then commented with that inimitable cheeky smile: "I think Gary didn't have any idea of how great I am!"

Chuni-da last stepped on to a football pitch in 1994 on the request of Santosh Mohan Dev in Silchar for a charity match, where he helped me score a goal and scored a goal from my assist. I feel blessed to have been the person from whose pass he scored his final goal.

Chuni-da lifted the social status of footballers. As Tata Football Academy's first director, he not only taught the nuances of the game but table manners and etiquette as well. This helped the boys grow as ambassadors of the country when they went abroad on tours.

There was solemnity after Chuni-da left us, but not the funereal kind. This wasn't due to COVID-19 restrictions, but on Chuni-da's express instructions. He didn't want his last image to be one where he lay still, viewed by crowds. Chuni-da was his flamboyant self till the end. So long Chuni-da, rest in peace! India was blessed to have you! 📌

(The author is a coach and a former footballer who represented India)



Before The Fall, A Giant

Brilliant pundit and polemicist of genius, the man Nehru relied on most was also a master manipulator with a talent for antagonising others. The arrogant, riddlesome Krishna Menon's life gets the full treatment by Jairam Ramesh.

Manoj Joshi

IN the Indian public consciousness, it is difficult to divorce V.K. Krishna Menon, then defence minister, from the dark days of 1962, when the Indian Army suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). But, as this biography brings out, he was much more—an agitator, pamphleteer, propagandist, editor and lawyer who single-handedly raised the flag of India's freedom in London in the years 1924-1947.

Krishna Menon may not have faced jail like his contemporaries, but living and agitating for Indian Independence in a foreign land without a regular income was not easy. In that sense, the book brings out the fascinating world of the freedom struggle from the angle of an agitator living and working in the capital of the metropolitan colonial power.

The big watershed in Krishna Menon's life was 1936, when he became close to Jawaharlal Nehru. He began as his publishing agent. But slowly, he became his man in London, liaising India's freedom struggle with a cross-section of the British intellectual class ranging from economist and politician Harold Laski to the great philosopher, essayist and politi-

MENON WAS, NEXT TO NEHRU, THE MOST RECOGNISABLE INDIAN IN THE WORLD IN THE '50S, WAS ON THE COVER OF TIME, A FRIEND OF FILM STARS AND A POTENTIAL SUCCESSOR TO THE PM. ALL THAT CAME CRASHING DOWN IN 1962.

cal activist Bertrand Russell and with politicians like Clement Attlee, Stafford Cripps, Nye Bevin, Ernest Bevin and Lord Mountbatten. This is where Krishna Menon developed key relationships with people who were to play such a significant role in post-Independence India from London—Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Feroze Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, P.N. Haksar and, above all, Pandit Nehru. Indeed, Francine Frankel, director, Center for the Advanced Study of India assesses that by the time of Independence, “Nehru had incurred a considerable personal and political debt to Menon”.


This propelled him to high offices in the first decade of freedom—high commissioner to the UK till 1952, member of the Indian delegation to the United Nations till 1961 and minister of defence from 1957-1962.

One problem with Ramesh's account is that it is just too long. It is not as though a man as important as Krishna Menon lacked a complete biography. The book could have avoided using long quotes and along with some editing it could have been shorter by as much as one-third, and thus perhaps more readable.

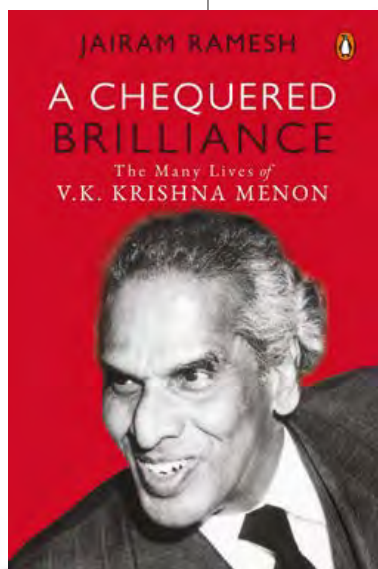
That said, Ramesh has given us a rounded view of Menon's clearly flawed personality wherein he “demonstrated an uncanny knack of turning even friends and well-wishers into critics and enemies”. His brilliance was often overshadowed by his excesses. Nehru was not unfamiliar with them, yet he remained his mentor till the very end. The correspondence and the relationship that Ramesh recreates makes it clear that Menon, in addition to his other considerable talents, had become adept at emotional manipulation too.

Nehru's attitude towards Menon was summed up in an incident described in the memoirs of K.P.S. Menon, the former foreign secretary who told the PM that Krishna Menon was “insufferable”. Panditji's response was that “there were some men of great ability who suffered from a sense of frustration, that this frustration showed itself in various ways, and that if such men were entrusted with responsibility, they could be of great use to the country....”

Ramesh's book brings out just how bright the Menon star shone in the firmament. He was, next to Nehru, the most recognisable Indian in the world in the 1950s, a cross section of the Bollywood stars were his friends, he was on the Time magazine cover and being spoken off as a potential successor to Nehru.

But that star came crashing down in October-November 1962, when China defeated India in a short border war. It is easy to argue that his flaws were responsible for India's dismal 1962 showing. The reality is that the disaster at Se La or the rout in Bomdi La was wholly the army's responsibility and not of Menon's making. Neither was he the only guilty party in playing favourites in the military; the army itself was riven with factions. But someone had to shoulder the blame—either Nehru or Menon, and it was obvious who would do so. 

A CHEQUERED BRILLIANCE: The many lives of V.K. Krishna Menon | Jairam Ramesh | Penguin/Viking | 725 pages | Rs 999



The Insider Who Needs A Pedestal

As the top Indian diplomat in the British Indian government and then as a confidant to top leaders like Nehru and Patel, V.P. Menon did more to determine the contours of the Indian republic than most prominent Indians. Consigned to relative obscurity, this scholarly biography aims to correct the oversight.

Manoj Joshi

AS compared to V.K. Krishna Menon, who has several biographies, Vappala Pangunni Menon, his contemporary, did not have any till Narayani Basu took up the challenge of throwing light on a man who played a pivotal role in the shaping of the Indian nation as we know it today. Unlike Krishna Menon, 'VP' was born in a poor household, received no formal education, yet became known for his ability to master the arcana of government and make himself indispensable to India's colonial masters and then, the founding fathers of the new republic that succeeded them.

That Basu is the great-granddaughter of Menon should not distract. The book is no hagiography. It is a scholarly account of a subject who has remained hidden too long. Anyone who is familiar with modern Indian history would not but have read V.P. Menon's seminal *Integration of the Indian States* and *The Transfer of Power* but these books have not revealed much about the man who played a key role in both the events.

His was an extraordinary his-



BASU WEAVES IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT IN THE BIOGRAPHY, RELATING TO THE MANNER IN WHICH THE VICEREGAL GOVERNMENT DEALT WITH THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF IMPERIAL POLICY AS IT BEGAN TO CONFRONT THE RISING TIDE OF NATIONALISM.

tory—running away from home to do manual labour in the Kolar goldfields, a brief stint selling towels in the streets of Bombay, to a temporary job in the home department of the government of India by the age of 21.

Much of this story has been recalled through the archives and family recollections. Indubitably, there are many gaps in it which Basu has filled with considerable success. She has effectively trawled the Vappala family's correspondence and recollections as well as British archives to come up with a memorable tribute to her great-grandfather. One thing the account does bring out is that not only was the short, stocky self-educated Malayali extremely gifted, he was very lucky too.

But this is a warts-and-all account of a man of extraordinary abilities who had huge failings too, especially when it came to his children and first wife, who left him and simply dropped off the pages of history.

Since much of Menon's work during the years preceding Independence was to be at the core of the British Indian bureaucracy in Shimla and New Delhi, the book has effectively woven an important aspect of the independence movement into the account.

This principally relates to the manner in which the viceregal government dealt with the national movement and the twists and turns of British imperial policy as it began to confront the rising tide of the nationalist movement under the command of Mahatma Gandhi.

V.P. MENON: The unsung architect of modern India | NARAYANI BASU | Simon & Schuster | 440 pages | Rs 799

In recounting the times in which V.P. Menon lived and worked, Basu has emerged as a skilled story-teller, using a succession of short chapters to take us through the vicissitudes of the national movement and imperial policy. The process helps provide flesh to the book whose protagonist only begins to play a

significant role in the 1940s.

The period between the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s was when V.P. Menon married, had children, lived through the disintegration of his marriage and saw the entry into his life the widow of his erstwhile mentor in Shimla. Despite Basu's best efforts, this turbulent period remains in the shadows, no doubt just as its subject, V.P. Menon, would have preferred it.

As Independence approached, Menon's mastery of the back-room—honed over years of back-breaking work on a raft of British plans and proposals relating to the shape that India could take—gained significant importance. So, too, did his relationships with the top leaders of the national movement, primarily Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru. It was this relationship, especially with Sardar Patel, whom he helped in inducing the princely states to accede to India, that played a decisive role in the immediate aftermath of Independence in giving physical shape to the Indian republic as we know it now. As Basu's account will tell you, nothing was foreordained in this, and the outcome could have been starkly different had it not been for V.P. Menon.

There is one important problem with the book. Just why the publishers—prominent ones, too—put out an important biography minus an index is baffling. Navigating names and places is an important aspect of biographies and an index is an invaluable tool for the purpose. **D**

(The reviewer is distinguished fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi)



Delightful Confinement

They are very young, and at 25 apiece, Zayn Malik and Gigi Hadid are expecting their first child. She has a classical moon-shaped face, with blonde tresses, and as a supermodel has honed that arch-look on catwalks across the world. He, a wildly popular singer with clean, boyish good looks has hands laden with tattoos. They both like shiny black boots. It's a match, you'll agree, made in a new Camelot. Gigi's sister, supermodel Bella, who, says science, has the most perfect female face on the planet, is staying with the couple at present. But that's beside the point.



Oh, Be Pretty

- Does Priyanka Chopra miss
- that moment when she
- started her career at the top
- of the world, in the perfect
- Y2K moment when the win-
- ner's crown rested so gladly
- on her magnificent head?
- She might have timed the
- elaborate 'make-up session'
- with niece Krishna with this
- year's postponed Met Gala—
- what you see is the crowning
- moment—but that expres-
- sion is replete with memo-
- ries—hers and ours. If these
- endlessly stretched out days
- has a wistful effect on you,
- why would PeeCeeJo be
- immune? As an aside, that
- bathrobe-ish denim dress of
- hers deserves to be a hit.



Coffee With Her

Coffee, yoga, filmy dance, Kathak, meditation and plentiful hot showers—activities as wholesome as these help actress Sonnalli Seygall (*Pyaar Ka Punchnama*) beat the blues during these idle times. Follow her health tips, girls, and see where it gets you—toned athletic limbs worthy of an Olympic pole vaulter, all ready for an audition for a Hollywood superhero movie. Doff that hat, though.



Stole Of Honour

A building block in stark black or a podium? Considering Serena Williams's stature as tennis's most dominant female player in the past two decades, we'll plump for it to signify a pedestal worthy of her 23 Slam titles. See her decisive half-stride, the confident, distant look and the chutzpah in pairing a white swimsuit with a double-breasted jacket and sleekly lethal stilettos. But does a photoshoot for a NY-based shoe brand express 'hope and optimism'? That's a lob that missed its mark, but in trying times we'll endeavour to extract some comfort from this.

RISHI KAPOOR

Diary



Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri worked with Rishi Kapoor on his autobiography *Khullam Khulla*

First Cut

Grumpy. As far as first impressions go, there was only one way to describe the man—grumpy. This was sometime in 2006, at the launch of Madhu Jain's book *The Kapoors*. While others from the family, like Shashi Kapoor, posed happily for pictures and even engaged in some inconsequential conversation, Rishi Kapoor was... well, grumpy and forbidding.

Cut to 2011—my next meeting with Rishi Kapoor. This was courtesy my friend and author Suresh Kohli who had facilitated the publication of K.A. Abbas's novelisation of the scripts of *Mera Naam Joker* and *Bobby*. Rishi Kapoor had agreed to release the books at a bookstore event. And this time, the star was mellower. He seemed amused that two of his favourite films could be published as novels. That's when the seed of his autobiography was sown.

Exposition and Development

Mid-October 2016. After five long years, the draft of the autobiography finally arrived with the deadline of a January 2017 launch at all major lit fests. Over the next three months, I would get a glimpse of the man behind the grump. Given his very committed involvement in what was clearly a passion project, I was spending more time with him in Mumbai than with my family. At one point, he told me, "Shantanu, it's not funny, I am seeing more of you than I am seeing Neetu." The autobiography meant the world to Rishi Kapoor—I could make that out all through those months, in his almost childlike involvement, his sudden phone calls to check if an anecdote had been included, his worry if it was a story worth telling.

From being flagged down by traffic cops for jumping a signal to snacking from a roadside vendor to lunch at his favourite



south Indian eatery in Bangalore—for me, the story of the making of the book was as enjoyable as the book itself. Not so much for being in proximity to an iconic star, but for the love and affection he showered as a human being. Imagine travelling with Rishi Kapoor and Neetu Singh after dinner at their favourite Chinese restaurant. *Hum hain rahi pyaar ke* playing on FM 92.7, Rishi Kapoor humming along. The song sequence jump-cuts to high drama as the driver jumps a red light. But Neetu only needs to roll down the window on her side. Before I know it, the star couple are outside, busy posing for selfies with the Mumbai traffic police.

Where's The Jhalmuri?

Even without Rishi Kapoor around, the famous Kali Ghat temple in Calcutta is a chaos of apocalyptic proportions, even though the authorities have cordoned off the area. An elderly priest at the temple reminds him of Raj Kapoor's visit to the temple during the release of *Mera Naam Joker* and *Bobby*, with Rishi in tow for the latter! I have my first and only darshan of the goddess. And on the way back, it takes all the effort of Calcutta police to ensure that his SUV doesn't topple over with the jos-

RISHI KAPOOR

Diary



ting crowds that have gathered by now. Unfazed by it all, his first question after getting into the car: ‘Now, where do I get some *jhalmuri*?’

Mera Naam Foodie

If there’s Rishi Kapoor, can food be far behind? These months during the making of the book and the various events were marked by sampling the best local non-vegetarian cuisine (often with the restaurant band belting out his songs in the background). In fact, on each of my visits to their home, the food was a major attraction. It also provided me a glimpse of the legendary Kapoor hospitality. Not only was the food different and delectable each time, Rishi would personally call me the day before my arrival to check on what I would prefer to have. As they became aware of my sweet tooth, not one meal passed without some mouth-watering dessert. No wonder by the time the book came out, I was a few kilos overweight.

Bade Dilwala


My first impression of Rishi Kapoor wasn’t the last. Sure, he could still be grumpy. I had to be just 10 minutes late for a meeting and he would be ready with the choicest of expletives. That was just the way he was. But once you had his confidence, behind that exterior was an immensely lovable man, full of beans, who enjoyed his work as much as he did his tittle at eight in the evening and did not mince words.

One of the great joys of working on the book was the honesty he brought to it. He was as candid about buying an award, tea with a dreaded don in Sharjah, wearing the wrong pants for a cult song and other personal follies, as he was about his views on his son’s debut film as an actor. He wasn’t

someone who suffered fools gladly. He could also be endearingly self-deprecating about the first phase of his career as a star—“I had little to do but change jerseys and ‘play’ the guitar.” Of course, he was proud of the effort he had put into those star-making roles, of what it took to convey all those emotions in a song. Time and again, he would demonstrate how every nerve and sinew on the face had to be worked upon to act in a song—and how he had imparted that lesson to Ranbir too.

But there wasn’t a doubt that *Do Dooni Char*, *Agneepath*, *D-Day* and *Kapoor and Sons* had done his confidence a world of good. He was as forthcoming about how he had almost said no to *Agneepath* (he could not bring himself to visualise the audience accepting Rishi Kapoor as Rauf Lala) as he was proud of the hours it took him to get into his make-up for *Kapoor and Sons*. I realised that in 2006, he probably wasn’t in a good personal place and that reflected in the way he came across. In the ten years hence, his success as one of the finest actors had given him equanimity and mellowed him.

Fadeout

In the two years since the book published, we met on and off every time I went to Mumbai. Our discussions would often hover around the possibility of Neetu Singh doing a memoir about her life with the Kapoor khandaan. That was something he was very keen on. He was always his gracious self and responded to every message or call. Even when he had to go off to the US for his treatment. At no point during these years—and these were tough years with the death of his mother and sister, the fire at and eventual sale of RK Studios—did he seem anything but his gregarious self. That’s what makes this even more difficult to reconcile to. It is impossible to think of Rishi Kapoor in the past tense. It is inconceivable that I am actually writing this. 



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