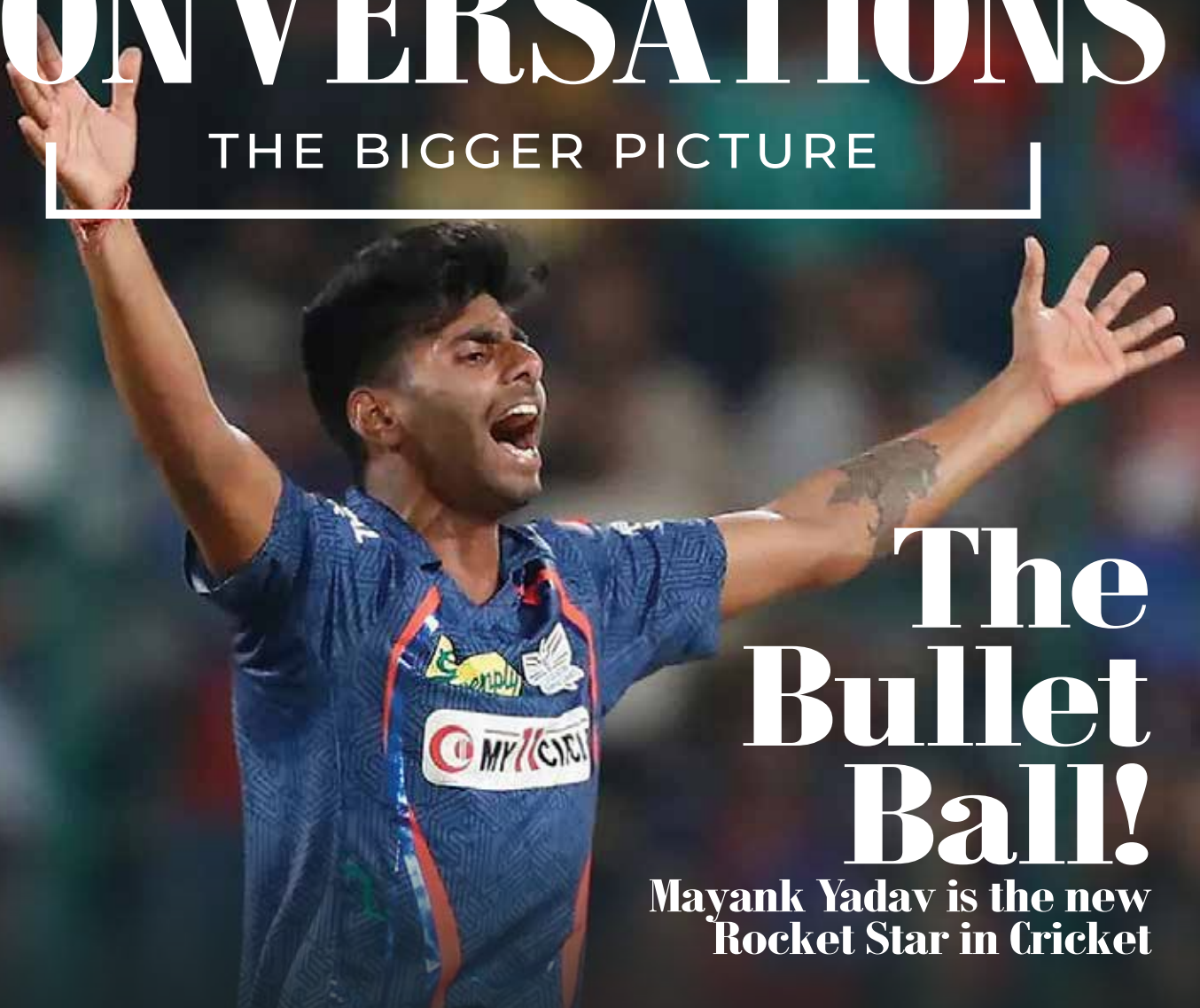


DESTINATION INDIA

CONVERSATIONS

THE BIGGER PICTURE



The Bullet Ball!

Mayank Yadav is the new Rocket Star in Cricket

Defence

Agni 5: The Big Game Changer. A MIRValous Achievement



Governance

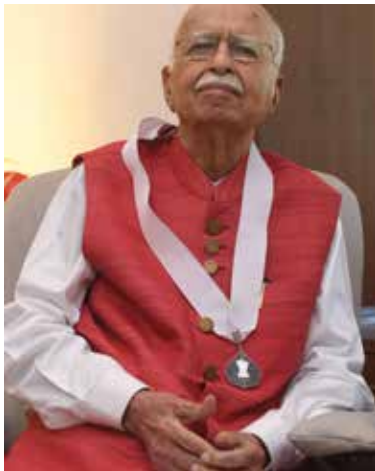
Najeeb Jung on Arvind Kejriwal



India Today

Digital Public Infrastructure for the Use and Benefit of All: Modi and Gates in Conversation

BHARAT RATNA FOR L K ADVANI



The President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu recently presented the nation's highest honour, Bharat Ratna, to BJP's seniormost leader, L. K. Advani at his residence in New Delhi. The formal ceremony was attended by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and the leader's family members. He was unable to attend the formal ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan on account of his advanced age. A fitting tribute to the legendary leader who has occupied some of the most prestigious positions in our national life.



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Every other day is propping up a new winner. On his own day, either unplayable or unbeatable, such is the depth of talent on display. You dare not discount any of the 100 odd players in the fray. It is the big festival of cricket, a celebration of India's most passionate pursuit, other than discussing politics, that is, cricket over rides all else. Parallels with politics are easy as players switch sides as do politicians. Each season brings its own loyalties, very often in sharp positioning with an earlier avatar.

Cricket is pure entertainment, much fun and lucrative for all. It is also serious business, as the results can make or mar, for this season, or even for good. There are winners and losers, too. So, with the first fortnight into this season, one sees numerous new faces and names not heard of before; IPL is another factory that nurtures and produces talent, fosters a rare sense of competition among players who are also friends, who may have played in the another team last season, who might be together in the next!

Politics is a career for most of them in the fray, besides a sprinkling of industrialists, film stars, sportsmen, and others. But mostly it is career politicians, also and equally going for a jump up in their careers. It is the unfolding of the great Indian political stock exchange, as one news channel calls it. We have learnt the world over that individuals count, leadership counts, political parties count; the future of nations hinges upon its leadership. The political run up has just begun, with almost two more months to go. It matters to the nation, as to who wins, and what policies are pursued, as it matters globally as well, considering the attention that India has attracted in recent years.

India's interaction with the global community has reached a never before level. In town was Bill Gates, in an exclusive engagement with PM Modi; the production of Agni 5 is a game changer for India's defence; a former and senior diplomat reviews the successful conduct of our foreign policy in the last decade.

Navin Berry
Editor

VOICES



Recalling the late Parrikar's bow before the MCC in 2012

In May 2012, an unprecedented situation arose in Goa where a by-election was to take place. The MCC had come into operation when the EC received a representation alleging that the chief minister was planning to induct a probable candidate into the Council of Ministers prior to the election to an assembly constituency scheduled for June 2, 2012. The complaint was that this would disturb the level playing field as the voters would be swayed in favour of the new minister.

I sent a message to the then chief minister, Manohar Parrikar, to consider deferring the induction.

The chief minister became agitated and called me to say that he had a constitutional right to constitute or expand his Council of Ministers at a time of his choosing. I clarified that he indeed had the full constitutional right to do so, yet I reiterated that it was just an 'advice'. It was to the credit of Parrikar that not only did he accept the advice and defer the inclusion of the minister, but also remarked that he 'bows to the moral authority of the Model Code of Conduct, which should take precedence over his constitutional right'.

This response was indeed statesmanlike. It is this spirit that strengthens the delicate constitutional arrangement between various authorities and parliamentary democracy, and which has put the Indian elections on the world map.

— Former CEC S. Y. Quraishi, writing in *The Indian Express*



Sadhguru after brain surgery for internal bleeding, shares recovery with humour!

Isha Foundation founder Sadhguru underwent brain surgery at a hospital in the city on March 17 after excessive bleeding within the skull. Post surgery, he was successfully removed from ventilator and has shown steady recovery, said doctors. They added that Sadhguru would resume his daily routine "very soon". According to a press statement, Sadhguru had been suffering from severe headaches for the last four weeks. Despite the severity of the pain, he continued his daily schedule. He even conducted a Maha Shivaratri event at the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore on March 8. When the headache worsened, he consulted Dr Vinit Suri, senior consultant neurologist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, over phone.

Dr Suri told TOI he suspected subdural haematoma and advised an urgent MRI of the brain. The report revealed "massive bleeding" in the skull, which can be due to head injury or can also happen spontaneously without any known trauma. In this case there was no trauma.

On March 17, he was admitted to hospital, and a decision was taken to operate on him urgently. The surgery lasted for three hours. In a post-surgery video uploaded on social media on Wednesday evening, Sadhguru joked, "The neurosurgeons cut my skull and tried to find something but found nothing. It's totally empty so they patched it up. So here I am in Delhi, with a patched-up skull but no brain damage."

Sadhguru has since been discharged and back on his routine.



Towards a Majoritarian Push?

However, if the BJP manages to win a two-thirds majority, then its domestic politics may veer decisively towards a majoritarian agenda. That can then begin to impinge on India's outreach to the Islamic world, the West and neighbours. The next eight months are extremely critical for the world, because some forth-coming election results can exacerbate existing schisms. Mr Putin's victory is merely the opening over, to use a cricketing metaphor. The bounce and spin of the pitch remains unknown.

— Ambassador K C Singh in *The Asian Age*. The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh

VOICES



Shabaash! Thank God for the Capricious Royals

On to some more salacious and sizzling breaking news: At the time of writing, Kate Middleton was still missing. People asked me: “Are you her *chaachi*? Why do you care where she is; No, dearies, I am not the *chaachi* of the future Queen of England, but I am madly interested in the story of her disappearance, now that a fresh angle has been introduced and one more conspiracy theory added. I’m spilling the tea like any other neighbourhood aunty with no other *kaam dhandha*: If indeed the 40-year-old Sarah Rose Hanbury, mother of three (official title: Marchioness of Cholmondeley- -and no, it’s not in Tamil Nadu, but Norfolk), the rumoured mistress of Prince William, is indeed pregnant with his child, will the offspring be officially ‘next in line’ for the throne - provided, of course, that the throne continues to exist???

Just asking for a friend.
Thank God for the capricious royals -- life would be so dull without their daily dalliances!

– Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe; Twitter handle @DeShobhaa



Nepal names Pokhara tourism capital, to urge China to operate more flights

Signalling that Nepal will seek China’s help in development, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamla Dahal Sunday said he would urge China to treat the Pokhara International Airport as a “grant project” from its side and operate regular commercial flights to

and from China. Prime Minister Prachanda made the announcement at Pokhara while declaring it the “tourism capital of Nepal”.

The Pokhara international airport built by China was declared ready for commercial operation in January 2022, but remained unused ever since, as the governments of Nepal and China have conflicted over whether it was a project under the Belt and Road Initiative or not, with Nepal sticking to the latter status.

The announcement coincided with Nepal’s final preparation to secure Chinese aid to build the Nepal-China Industrial Friendship Park in nearly 4,000 acres, with the possibility of it extending to 6,600 acres in east Nepal’s Jhapa along north Bengal border.

The park and a 327-MegaWatt upper Marsyangdi hydroenergy project are likely to be formalised at Kathmandu’s Investment summit on April 29-30, Pradhyunna Upadhyaya, spokesperson of the Nepal Investment Board told The Indian Express.



Can changing looks change your soul?

Karan Johar’s barbed remarks set netizens speculating. Controversies and Karan Johar go hand-in-hand. The filmmaker, known for his blunt comments and making stars spill the beans on their private life on his show, has shared a cryptic post on social media about people undergoing surgery to enhance their looks.

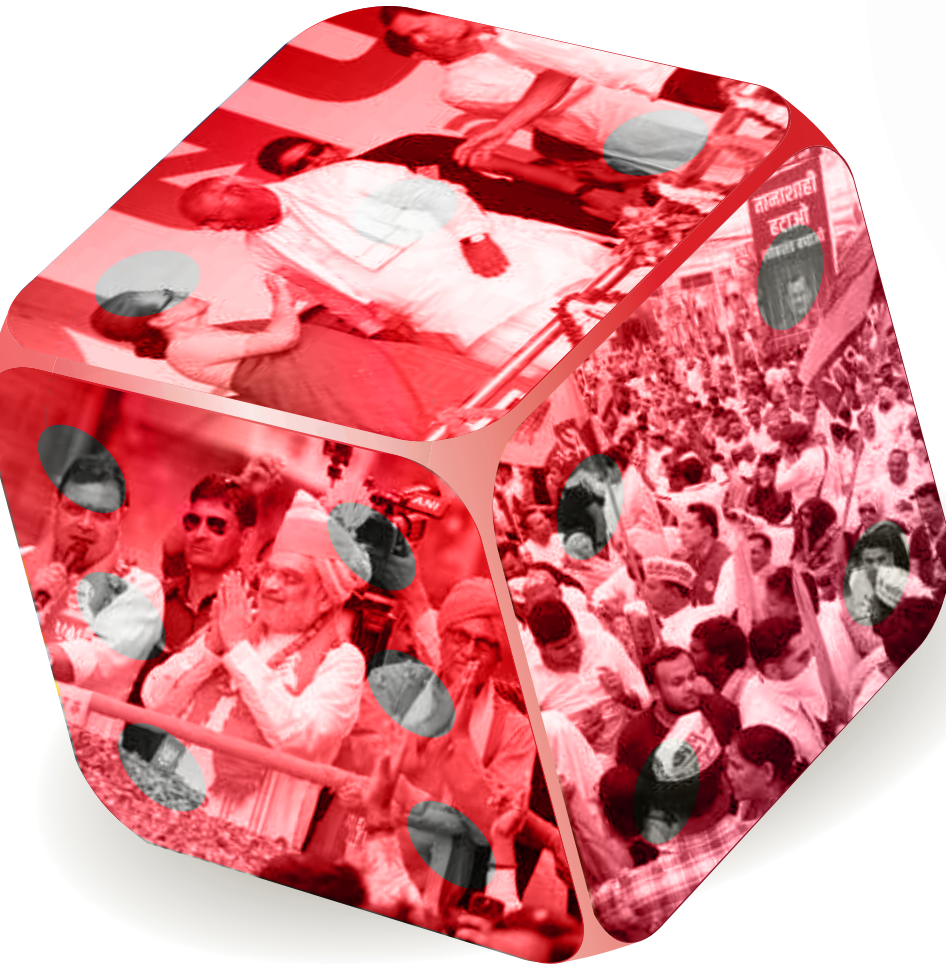
He wrote that “fillers cannot give fulfilment, neither can make-up defy age. A nose job won’t help you smell better and botox only makes you look bee stung. You may try to change your looks by going under the knife, but that won’t help you change your soul”.

Everyone is now wondering who his comments are directed at. One cannot help but review everyone in his circle who has gone under the knife to enhance their look.

– The Delhi Age

The Shifting Sands of Politics

Run Up to 'D' Day this June 2024



The Countdown has Begun, and the Dice is Rolling. In the shifting sands, as the dust brings its haze, clarity of outcome remains fudgy, at best.

The arrest of Kejriwal and freezing of Congress accounts

First is the arrest of Kejriwal! Is he corrupt, or not? Was his arrest warranted or not? Having evaded the ED warrants to appear for nine times, did he think he was the proverbial cat, with nine lives? Why arrest him not the first, nor the second, only after nine times. Was the decision delayed, to arrest him closer to the election time? The government has arrested him only after he has evaded notice nine times, not permissible under our 'checks and balances' understanding of our constitution. Is he being singled out? Yes, possibly, but he was also another Mr. Clean?

Similarly, consider the case of the Income tax department freezing the Congress accounts followed by the notice of arrears. Was this, too, timed for closer to the elections? The Congress can be crying hoarse, but the fact is that they have a notice served upon them. Call it unfair, but not illegal.

by NAVIN BERRY

The Dice is Rolling! What number will it settle upon? Is it really going to be 370? It could be more, or less! Only the Heavens know, or in a more practical sense, only the average voter knows. Which is not you and me! We, sitting in our urban cocoons, are not the average voter, that we all know. Any poll, any survey is not likely to tell us the end result. Just look back at 2019. It seemed to be going close but in the slog overs, all the remaining results came in favour of the ruling BJP, and the PM returned from Kedarnath from his prayers, more than answered.

This time, with 2024 elections towering upon us, in the last few weeks, if all was understood to be known, some new factors have emerged and what impact will these have, is difficult to tell.





Any poll, any survey is not likely to tell us the end result. Just look back at 2019. It seemed to be going close but in the slog overs, all the remaining results came in favour of the ruling BJP, and the PM returned from Kedarnath from his prayers, more than answered.

New issues emerging, new areas of concern; will these create only more confusion in the minds of the voter? If we thought we had sorted out our answers to all the known issues, new ones are emerging closer to the 'D' day. Clouding further the average mind.

So, will the real issues get sidetracked? Instead of trying to win, would the opposition be left to fight with their backs against the wall? Instead of attacking, are they being reduced to defending their turf? If you look at the media, this is all what it is about: Kejriwal, Congress accounts and notices, and some such. The bigger issues facing the nation do not appear to be in the frontline.

The 'Conscience' weighs heavier in times like these

What is the other major news these days? It is how netas are crossing the floor! With such impunity and such bravado, like it was a hero come back, like it was a call of duty that could not be denied, like it was a last-minute call of conscience to serve the nation. No doubts in the mind, no explanation required, it is just a sudden decision, to serve the nation best. Not individuals only, even political parties en masse. Some have been high profile, some surprising as well. Each is finding his feet in the quicksand. The matter has become so routine that it is not even worrying anyone anymore. Some will get voted for themselves, some as the new party candidate which they have joined, as they believe the party has the



edge, with 'a single magical name', that will get them elected. The "Modi ki Guarantee" does give that assurance, in large parts of the country! Switching allegiance has become so routine, that there are friends, of many years, in politics and I cannot recall which party they are in at present. But then does it matter, you might ask?

Is the average citizen insulated from the Political Game?

That is another point of view. Worth mentioning here. How many lives are really impacted by the politics of the day? There are knowledgeable people who believe the economy is on a roll, on the back of an aspirational middle class that wants to better their lives, has become more intensely competitive and simply wants to work. Increasingly, they are taking up enterprise, not just taking jobs. So long as they are allowed



to do their thing, growing their class, they are happy unto themselves. Who rules the country matters less, so long as we are a nation on the move, moving up the global pecking order, and proud to be an Indian. They will vote, exercise their franchise, but it does not 'really' matter to them in their daily lives, as to who rules. Life goes on. The bureaucracy is the same. With such criss-crossing of leadership, political parties are becoming more or less the same. But are they the same, and how much?

Erosion of Democracy: The Big Boiling Issue!

What more of these present times? Charges and counter charges that the spirit of democracy is being eroded. What was surprising was that an international agency like the UN took notice and hoped that all will be fair and clean in our run up! After two statements from the Germans and another from the US! In spite of objections from the MEA, these

Consider the case of the Income tax department freezing the Congress accounts followed by the notice of arrears. Was this, too, timed for closer to the elections? The Congress can be crying hoarse, but the fact is that they have a notice served upon them. Call it unfair, but not illegal.

bodies have not stopped. Neither has the government in arguing this is our internal affair, and does not warrant such interference.

Professor Ashutosh Varshney, Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and Social Sciences, Brown University, considered an international authority on constitutional studies, has raised an alarm on the role of the natural watchdogs in any functional democracy – the Election Commission and the Supreme Court. He said in an interview with Karan Thapar that much depends upon the role of these two bodies, how much they will intervene and ensure the rule of law, and ensure a fair and transparent play of contests in politics. These are early days yet, with almost two months to go before the results are out; in between, both these bodies will have their hands full, with petitions, PILs, claims and counter-claims.

Our two planks should be Development and Defence

Had we bargained for such fiercely contested elections? Is this the emerging order of the day? Looking across the globe, it does seem so. Look at the maturest democracy in action, the United States, where the hot contestant Donald Trump has said if he loses, chaos will reign. Imagine, this is being said in the US? Is there such a trend globally towards majoritarianism? Can India buck the trend? There are voices who will question why we should? Was

democracy not the rule of the majority?

Can we at this juncture, when we are ready to roll as an emerging global player, can we afford so many discordant voices? Can we lose sight of our need to develop and grow? Is there any consensus that we can arrive at? In so many matters, I dare say, there may not be so many disagreements. It is the few areas like oft repeated allegations and concerns: the 'indiscriminate and selective use of government agencies' that the opposition is protesting. But the government would say, it is the independent agencies that are doing their job, there is no law that says they should rest awhile because elections are on hand! So, the differences continue to fester. One wishes, some of these differences can be narrowed down! Our two planks should be development and defence, nothing else should matter! Development that is inclusive and comprehensive; defence that ensures safety and security of our people.

A Happy Family in which we are All Indians

It is the shifting sands in politics. Getting mired so deep, that any calculations would be futile. Every day brings news of fresh adjustments. How will these trickle down to actual votes? Which party will effectively communicate its mandate to its own committed voters? How much will deep fake and blatant use of AI to mis-communicate work? More and more, social media skills have become an important tool to engage as well as disengage, to inform as well as misinform. Who has the funds to spend? All this costs money and literally tonnes of it. Is there a downside to too much advertising? Is there an optimum that a voter can stomach and is that any extra brings fatigue?

In terms of maths, numbers are not coming easy, as yet. Some alliances will cost votes, others will win votes. What will be the net result. How much the winners of 2019 in the states retain their share and win again in 2024? How much does individual bias play a part when we forecast this election? Who has the pulse of the nation with him? But honestly, how much does it matter how many numbers come one's way? So long as you are on the winning side.

In all this game, truth has become the first casualty. Is there a growing unemployment? Is the farmer restive? Have we managed to pull out more people out of the poverty line? Government schemes have been plenty, innovative and meaningful. Schemes like DBT, push for UTI, and more. But how much have they impacted lives, in terms of numbers across the hinterland? Meanwhile, GST figures have shown a most robust buoyancy, reflecting more commerce, trade and business.

The answers are not too far off, just another 60 days to go, before a new government gets elected. One can only hope that once this phase is over, we will settle down to accepting the results, as they come, find



What is the other major news these days? It is how netas are crossing the floor! Not individuals only, even political parties en masse. Some have been high profile, some surprising as well. Each is finding his feet in the quicksand.

meaningful silence, understand and accept that not everything is politics, there are national concerns that override politics, and put the emphasis back to where it should be: development and inclusive growth in our society. A happy family in which all are Indians, above all else. **Di**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Navin Berry, Editor, Destination India, over five decades has edited publications like CityScan, India

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

Digital Public Infrastructure for the Use and Benefit of All: *Modi and Gates in Conversation*



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's engaging conversation with Bill Gates covered a range of important subjects. We bring you excerpts of the interview with a focus on India's digital revolution, advent and use of AI and data protection and benefits thereof. They touch upon the relevance of taking into account a country's Green GDP in evaluating success and uniting a country as vast as our in the face of a global pandemic.

MODI: We had extensive discussions before the G20 summit and you've likely noted, the summit's proceedings took various turns. I believe we have now aligned with G20's core purposes and objectives bringing them into the mainstream, I hope your first-hand experience echoes this sentiment.

BILL GATES: The G20 was more inclusive. And so, it was fantastic to see that India in hosting it really raised things like digital innovation and how this south, south collaboration can be far more than just the dialogue with the north that can actually be system that improves health. And, our foundation is so excited about the positive results that you've achieved here in India that we'll be a partner in trying to take that into many other countries.

MODI: You are right. During the G20 summit in Indonesia, representatives from around the world expressed their curiosity about the digital revolution we have spearheaded. I explained to them our foundational

approach is that we have democratized technology to prevent monopoly. It is by the people and for the people and we have committed to ensure that emerging talents from within the community can continuously contribute and enhance its value to foster trust in technology among people.

BILL GATES: In areas like digital government. India's not only adapting technology, but it's actually leading the way. What are some of the things you're excited about?

MODI: Health, agriculture and education. India has built 2 lakh Ayushman Arogya mandir health centres in villages. These are linked directly through modern technology



with the best hospitals. Initially the patients wondered how can they be accurately diagnosed without a doctor physically examining them but later they understood with the right technological instruments even a doctor sitting hundreds of kilometers away can indeed diagnose them correctly. So, people's confidence is increasing. This is the power of digital platforms. And secondly, education, I want to provide the best education to children. I want to use technology to bring quality education and fill in the gaps. Additionally, we are working towards aligning content with children's interest in visuals, storytelling and we are creating that kind of content. Even in agriculture we are bringing a big revolution where I want to change the mindset.

BILL GATES: In one of the themes, I think India brings to technology is that it should be available for everyone actually, lifting up those who need it the most.

MODI: When I used to hear about digital divide in the world, I used to think that I will not let anything like this happen in my country. And digital public infrastructure is a big requirement in itself. Today I want to extend this digital facility to all our villages. So, I think that is a very big target group. Women are more open to adopting new technology in India. I have launched a program – Namo Drone Didi, empowering 15,000 women led self-help groups with drones and this has two goals. Firstly, I would like to make 3 crore women 'lakhpati' Didi in Indian villages. So, I want to make that psychological change and make a big impact. Secondly, I don't want women to be limited in the same age-old tasks and hand them technology instead. I need to modernize agriculture and make it scientific. It is running very successfully.

I spoke with many people from African countries, I told them that I am ready to help you in this because it gives equal opportunity to everyone and its main point is to democratize. Even during Covid, we had the CoWin app to book your slot and also get your certificate within seconds. It was open source; anyone could use it. In my experience, digital technology has significantly benefitted our country. India will be the leader in the 4th industrial revolution through digital advancements.

GATES: I think the key point is that the digital infrastructure keeps getting richer. A lot of people know about the identity system and the digital payment systems, and that the government, by taking virtually all the government payment programmes now and digitizing those, that alone saved a lot of money. And it created access on a more equal basis. But now as you're moving into the different areas, advice for farmers registering their land, tutoring for kids and the health records, connecting all of those, that's kind of a second phase. And we're just at the beginning now, the third phase where these advances in artificial intelligence will come on top of that and make the value even better.

MODI: You are right, AI is very important. Let me share an exciting



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Narendra Modi



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Bill Gates



“Labeling AI merely as a magic tool, it will lead to great injustice. If I am relying on AI due to laziness, that is wrong too. Instead, we should compete with AI and challenge it and strive to surpass its capabilities.”

Narendra Modi

“You know, I started my trip here in Hyderabad which was a nice occasion because Microsoft is celebrating 25 years in the country. And that’s been such a fantastic experience. So, I was definitely challenging the team there.”

Bill Gates

and challenge it and strive to surpass its capabilities.

GATES: It’s early days in AI and I think everyone who uses it in the same day, you’re surprised at how good it is. And you’re also surprised at how bad it is. It’ll do things you think are hard and then it’ll fail to do somethings you think are easy. You know, I started my trip here in Hyderabad which was a nice occasion because Microsoft is celebrating 25 years in the country. And that’s been such a fantastic experience. So, I was definitely challenging the team there. Hey, we have to make the accuracy better. And for now, it’s like a copilot. It helps suggest things. But the final we still have to review that even though it may make us a bit more creative and a bit more productive. You know, it seems like AI’s a huge opportunity. But there’s some challenges that come with that. How do you think India will approach that?

MODI: Addressing the challenge AI presents, I’ve observed that without proper training there is a significant risk of misuse of such powerful technology. I’ve engaged with leading minds in AI, I suggested that we should start with clear watermark on AI generated content to prevent misinformation. This isn’t to devalue AI creations but to recognize them for what they are. Deepfake, in a vast democratic country like India, the misuse can initially deceive people leading to possible uproar. It is

use of AI. During G20, we leveraged AI extensively. Our G20 campus featured AI-based solutions for language interpretation. We equipped all chauffeurs with a mobile app enabling seamless communication with guests. It had a built-in translation for all languages.

Now, I am using my NAMO app and its very useful.

GATES: I would love to hear your view on how India sees AI?

MODI: Labeling AI merely as a magic tool, it will lead to great injustice. If I am relying on AI due to laziness, that is wrong too. Instead, we should compete with AI

critical to acknowledge that deepfake content is AI-generated and mention its source. We need to establish some do’s and don’ts.

GATES: In the AI world, data is so important, and yet people have concerns, privacy concerns. How do we strike the balance there?

MODI: Data security remains a paramount concern and while India has a legal framework in place, public awareness is equally crucial. For instance, in our country, I have initiated storing all university certificates on the cloud to reduce cost and fulfill various needs efficiently. Today, aim is to improve the ease of living of our citizens.

GATES: Data definitely is going to be very exciting that we’ll be able to preserve privacy and still learn a lot from the data. Like, which crop should you plant if we get all the data from the farmers without their names so we don’t invade their privacy, but giving better farmer advice or seeing here in India, the top 10% of teachers are so good and saying, okay, what are they doing? And how do we spread that to the other people? Or even if there’s some new nutrition approach, sometimes it works and sometimes not. And so, because you have the medical record, the ability to kind of track and say, this is working very well, or this isn’t you know, we can be a lot smarter without threatening individual privacy.

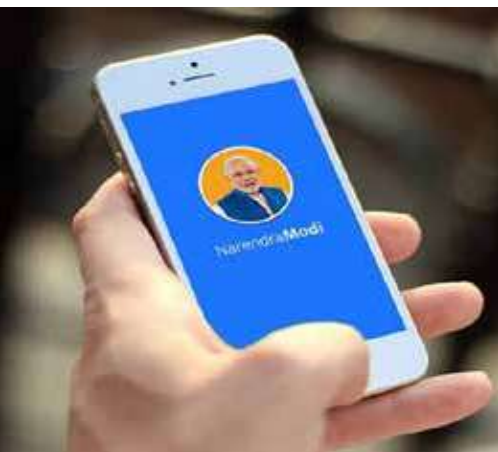
MODI: There are two critical perspectives to consider. Firstly, we need to educate the general population on the importance of contributing quality data, and the need for both precision and clarity. Secondly, data owners must be informed about the intention behind data requests. The priority should be given for research and they too should provide clear assurances regarding the use of data affirming that it serves a global benefit and promotes the welfare of the general public.

GATES: I think it’s interesting that some of these digital systems create efficiency by getting rid of the middleman. And that’s super beneficial.

MODI: I often express a desire to lead a government that particularly for the middle class becomes virtually invisible from their daily lives, eliminating any unnecessary governmental intervention. For those in poverty, who genuinely require government assistance, it should be readily available in abundance.

GATES: In 2015, one of the great things we did together was you came to Paris for that mission innovation. That was fantastic.

MODI: Our perspectives on climate change align closely, and your contributions have been notable proactive. During that period,



“AI is very important. Let me share an exciting use of AI. During G20, we leveraged AI extensively. Our G20 campus featured AI-based solutions for language interpretation. It had a built-in translation for all languages. Now, I am using my NAMO app and it's very useful.”

Narendra Modi



Obama, you and I and the President of France met and discussed our strategy. Regrettably, our efforts did not progress significantly. However, post G20, the atmosphere has fostered a collective resolve towards climate responsibility. A foundation we laid together with your involvement being instrumental, I'm optimistic that these efforts will flourish.

India has fast tracked use of renewable energy: solar energy, wind energy, we are eager to accelerate in the nuclear sector. Similarly, our ambitions extend to making significant progress in green hydrogen. Green hydrogen boat will run from Kashi to Ayodhya to support the clean Gange movement.

GATES: Well, India brings to climate change a rich history of caring about the environment. How do you see connecting those?

MODI: Reuse – recycle are second nature to India. The jacket I am wearing is crafted from recycled materials, using scraps of cloth and recycled plastic to create this fabric.

GATES: The innovation both here in India and the world is coming along are the goals that we set. You know, staying below 1.5 degrees, we probably will miss that. Even two degrees isn't going to be so easy. And the thing you and I really emphasized in Paris is the need for innovation. If the green approach can be made as cheap or cheaper than the old approach, then the adoption will be very good. If it's more expensive, it's not clear who's going to be willing to pay for that. Should the rich countries pay for that. It's not fair to tell India to slow down, building basic infrastructure just because the West had those emissions.

MODI: I believe we should adopt a two-pronged strategy. First is innovation and the goal should be to evaluate environment friendly and climate friendly innovations. To this end, India has established a corpus fund of Rs 1 lakh crore in this budget. Inviting the younger generations to contribute innovative ideas, offering interest free loans for 50 years to support these innovations. There is another important thing we need to focus on is our lifestyle. That's why I started Mission Life. It urges people to take action towards environmental protection and conservation. We need to make our life choices and measure progress in ways that are friendly to the climate.

GATES: I've been interested in your discussions about Green GDP. Tell us more.

MODI: I believe that the world should develop the concept of Green GDP to measure. For example, how much of our GDP is a Green GDP or out of overall employment, what's the ratio of green jobs out there. We need to change terminology globally.

GATES: Now getting consumers involved in this, where they prefer the product that's the clean product. When they're buying a car when, when they're buying any product and changing their food consumption, even

if they don't go all the way to be a vegetarian they can eat less beef and more chicken or less chicken and more fish. You know, they can moderate quite a bit. And we know that also has some health benefit as well.

MODI: Not only that. I believe even in vegetarian diets improvement is needed. Such as including millets. It can grow on barren land, with minimum water and no requirement of fertilizer and it's a superfood. It is also increasing the income of the small farmers.

GATES: Well, during the pandemic, it was fantastic that the vaccines got invented and India made a lot of those. Sadly, in many countries, the fear of vaccination and even rumours about vaccines became a big problem. And you had actually very little of that here in India. So, I'm curious, how did you manage the communication and why do you think it came out better here?

MODI: It's a great question. Firstly, I emphasized that our fight against the virus involves everyone. This is not virus vs government; it is life vs virus. Secondly, I began to communicate openly with the nation from day one. I publicly followed all Covid-19 protocols to gain people's trust. I made clarion calls to clap, light a 'diya' despite some ridicule, it was crucial for me to unite everyone in this fight. Once the intent was set of protecting themselves and others around, it turned into a mass movement. In democracy, collaboration and education drive progress and take people along with you. And this played a significant role in the success of our vaccination campaign where people did not resist. In the future, we aim to encourage vaccination for all girls to prevent cervical cancer and put funds towards local research as well. **DI**

There was more to this conversation, which we are editing for reasons of space. Read more on the Youtube channel of PM Narendra Modi.

Najeeb Jung on Arvind Kejriwal

In conversation with Karan Thapar



This piece reflects a conversation between media and TV personality Karan Thapar and Dr. Najeeb Jung, former civil servant, former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia and the former Lt Governor of Delhi. Reproduced here with permission of Najeeb Jung.

KARAN THAPAR: First, the late-night dramatic arrest of the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. So let me ask you a simple question to start with. How do you respond to his arrest late last night?

NAJEEB JUNG: Well, Karan, actually, looking back over the last 2/3, weeks this was anticipated. I was personally astonished that the ED had been delaying so much because Mr. Kejriwal was avoiding the summons. And I for one am clear in my mind that any person, whatever position he or she may have, cannot avoid summons of an investigating agency. So, this action was inevitable. Let me be clear, I am here not commenting on the charges against him at all.

KARAN THAPAR: In other words, you're saying he got nine summons, he ignored all nine. He refused to go. And you are surprised he wasn't arrested earlier?

NAJEEB JUNG: Yes. I was very surprised at this delay by the ED. If there is clear evidence against anyone, be it the Chief Minister of

Delhi, then action could have been taken. However, I also think it was the arrest of Ms. Kavitha which really gave them the basic information because I think they want to confront her with him to tie up the loose ends, if any.

KARAN THAPAR: Let's come to that. Arvind Kejriwal has been arrested on reported charges of corruption and money laundering. And as you said, it's reported that K. Kavitha has allegedly told the Enforcement Director that she received the bribe to be of a hundred crores. Does that sound like the Chief Minister you knew from 2014 until December, 2016?

NAJEEB JUNG: Personally, I think Arvind Kejriwal has always been a clean man in his personal life. I do not think that he was ever personally dishonest, but it's been what eight years since I resigned. Things may have changed. There may be political compulsions, I really don't know, but the man I knew was certainly not dishonest, not personally dishonest. He had many other aberrations in his personality, but this was not one of them.

KARAN THAPAR: Now, Aatishi who is effectively the deputy Chief minister, has said that Kejriwal will not resign and continue to function as chief minister, even from Tihar jail. As a former lieutenant governor, how do you first of all respond to that? And secondly, can the Chief Minister of Delhi function from a jail?

NAJEEB JUNG: I find this a joke. She can't be serious. I don't know if this is even constitutionally possible, but practically speaking, it's absolutely impossible for any chief minister to function from jail. Numerous files are going to him for approvals etc. There are secretaries going to him. There are cabinet meetings to be held, and above all, there are citizens of Delhi that need to see their Chief Minister. So, you can't have special arrangements in jail for X, Y, Z. There is no precedent of this kind, I think anywhere in the world. So, if Mr. Kejriwal wants to be treated specially, he's creating a constitutional crisis. I don't know the game. Does he want President's rule? If he doesn't resign, does he want to be dismissed by

the LG? And frankly speaking I don't think it's constitutionally possible or morally ethical and I do not think it is practical at all.

KARAN THAPAR: In other words, you are saying that this claim that he will function from jail as chief minister is bravado, and you are also saying it runs the risk of President's rule being declared and Mr. Kejriwal being dismissed by the governor?

NAJEEB JUNG: Yes. I think the statement is quite nonsensical. I think they're aware of the risks, and perhaps this is election time. They may be prepared to take the risk. The party comes out heroically, Arvind stays in jail, and they take all the advantages of him being a martyr.

KARAN THAPAR: Now, Mr. Jung, you had your own run-ins with Kejriwal during the period when you were the LG of Delhi and he was chief minister of the city, but those run-ins were over what I would call extension of authority, not corruption, not any form of illegality. So, let me ask, what was your opinion of Arvind Kejriwal as chief minister during the period when he worked under you?

NAJEEB JUNG: Arvind was Chief Minister twice in my period. The first time for 49 days, and the other being from 2015 to end of 2016. It was a period when he was exercising unnecessary muscle. I think that he had much to learn. There was great excitement in his party and him, and they were refusing, and I use the word refusing to abide by constitutional laws and the way the rules are to be followed. I had to tell him several times that what cannot be done cannot be done. But more than that I think he was heading for trouble because of the way he treated his civil servants. The home secretary was abused, the secretary GAD was locked out of his room, a lady chief secretary was called corrupt in a public meeting.

And even DANICS officers of the Delhi Secretariat went on a one day strike. That is pretty unprecedented in the country. So, it was all excitement. It was a sense of new found power. It was, I think, a level of immaturity. But he seems to have outgrown that. You said my run-ins were on constitutional matters. Yes. We had to form, as you remember, the Shunglu Committee where some 4,000 files were sent to Mr. Shunglu, the former CAG. And he found, I think my memory is not very good; some 400-odd files where he saw the Constitution had not been followed. That left us in a very piquant situation on how to remedy actions that had been taken because actually the rules and constitution had not been followed and actions taken on incorrect orders.

KARAN THAPAR: But you're saying that in those early years, the first year and a half of his chief ministership, he was often immature, you use that word yourself?

NAJEEB JUNG: Yes. He was extremely excitable, and he could have done with a higher level of maturity.



“Personally, I think Arvind Kejriwal has always been a clean man in his personal life. I do not think that he was ever personally dishonest, but it's been what eight years since I resigned. Things may have changed. There may be political compulsions, I really don't know, but the man I knew was certainly not dishonest. He had many other aberrations in his personality, but this was not one of them.”

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KARAN THAPAR: Now, if you had been the Lt. Governor of Delhi today, would you have given permission for Kejriwal, a sitting Chief Minister, to be investigated and ultimately arrested for alleged corruption and money laundering? Or might you have thought twice authorized before doing so?

NAJEEB JUNG: I don't know the level of charges really. I don't know the level of his involvement. I don't even know if legally the Enforcement Directorate is expected to take permission from the Lt. Governor. But I do know that in the present circumstances this morning, I would have asked the Chief Sec-





retary to go seek permission from the Enforcement Director and meet the Chief Minister and ask him to put in his papers.

KARAN THAPAR: You would've sent the Chief Secretary as a special emissary to meet the Chief Minister this morning in Tihar jail and ask him specifically to put in his papers. In other words, you would've sent a polite request saying, enough is enough now, you must resign.

NAJEEB JUNG: Actually, it is the duty of the Chief Secretary to do so. There's no need for the Lieutenant Governor to be advising him. The Chief Secretary should be well aware of the rules. He should know he is the Secretary to the Cabinet, and he should know that the Cabinet cannot function from jail.

KARAN THAPAR: Okay. Are you concerned about the functioning and efficacy of the Delhi government whilst Arvind Kejriwal is in jail? And I'm talking about both situations, either that implausible situation where he continues to function as Chief Minister from jail, or a situation where he resigns and someone replaces him. In either event, whilst Arvind Kejriwal is in jail, are you concerned about the functioning and efficacy of the Dehi government? And I ask because most people would say that he's both the government and the party in himself. How will either fare without him?

NAJEEB JUNG: Yes, I think that the government would be very hard pressed to be effective. They are having seminal problems with the civil service who as it is, don't cooperate with them. And with Arvind missing from, shall I say, the battlefield, the party will suffer. Governance would certainly suffer. I think it is extremely implausible that he will, he will continue as Chief Minister. Aatishi is a very bright person. She is from St. Stephens College, is a Rhodes Scholar. She speaks the right language, but I don't think that the party cadres would really follow either her, or Saurabh Bhardhwaj, or for that matter, Mr. Bharti.

KARAN THAPAR: But you're also saying that with Arvind Kejriwal in jail for the foreseeable future, and we have no idea how long he'll stay there. You are beginning to see the Delhi administration under the AAP government slowly, steadily unravelling.

NAJEEB JUNG: Yes. Actually, what would happen is that the Lt Governor would play a much more important role or much more active role, shall I say?

KARAN THAPAR: Finally, as a former Lt. Governor, are you able to assess what will be the impact of last night's dramatic arrest on Kejriwal's popularity in Delhi?

NAJEEB JUNG: It's a very difficult question to really answer. Kejriwal is an exceptionally clever political animal. When he resigned after 49 days there was one year of President's rule but he came back with 67 seats, and he repeated that with 63 seats in the next five years. So, my own assessment, if you were to ask me, is that it would be politically beneficial for

“By the way, if he is released and comes out, this episode will be forgotten by the 25th of May when Delhi goes to polls. So, martyrdom beckons and if he stays in jail, then Arvind is capable of projecting a new Kejriwal, the Kejriwal that we had seen in the India Against Corruption movement, a man with a Gandhian image, shall we say.”

Najeeb Jung

him to stay in jail and fight the election from there. That gets him the sympathy, that makes him a martyr. To go to the Supreme Court or to the High Court today, and for the bail to be rejected doesn't seem so nice. By the way, if he is released and comes out, this episode will be forgotten by the 25th of May when Delhi goes to polls. So, martyrdom beckons and if he stays in jail, then Arvind is capable of projecting a new Kejriwal, the Kejriwal that we had seen in the India Against Corruption movement, a man with a Gandhian image, shall we say.

KARAN THAPAR: In other words, you're saying to get the full benefit of being jail, to get the full benefit of the sympathy that would arouse in people, he needs to be in jail, right? Till voting happens in Delhi, which is not till the 25th of May.

NAJEEB JUNG: Yes, I think if the Supreme Court or the High Court denies him bail, then he is in it for a long time.

KARAN THAPAR: And that can be of benefit to him politically, even if personally it might be extremely discomfoting.

NAJEEB JUNG: It'll be beneficial. I think in the immediate election. it'll be extremely difficult for him to manage jail life, if he is there for 7, 8, 10 months. I don't think his health is very good. And jail can be extremely tough. **DI**



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3 Important Reforms Sanjeev Sanyal Wishes to See for India in Viksit Bharat



Sanjeev Sanyal in conversation with ET Now, reproduced here with his permission.

I read your early thoughts on it. So, we wanted to expand upon this because just a few weeks back ET Now was hosting ET Now Global Business Summit. Prime Minister told us right there that he has been working on the next generation reforms for our country, quietly and silently for almost one and a half years, taking feedback from citizens, thousands of them, and very meticulously working internally with all the members on policy.

So, I just wanted to expand upon this thought. We have seen countries, citizens, as well as the stock markets, everybody being a beneficiary for a lot of reform policy work, which has been done so far. Going forward, what are the areas where you think the government will actually progress upon? We've seen a lot of work happen in infrastructure, power, and many other, to start with digital infra. What could be the new areas, the next generation reform, which is being spoken about in your view?

So, these are my views. You mentioned the Prime Minister, but what will be done in his vision document later on, that is not up to me to decide. I can tell you what are the things that I would imagine as important in the next few years. Well, first of all, I think the infrastructure build out has to continue. We, at the very early stages of this build, are building out the highways, the ports, et cetera now, but there are lots of other things. Water supply, garbage clearance, there's a lot of other infrastructure that needs to be built. We are also for the first-time seeing momentum return in private sector investment very strongly. And that has to be maintained now for years. So, this is something that we need to also curate.

This is a very special interaction we are having right here on ET Now with a gentleman who looks at macroeconomics, our own economy in the country, history very closely. And today we are going to talk about the trajectory of the economic growth India could take from here on. We are joined by Sanjeev Sanyal, who fills a very noted economist, a historian, and also member of Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council.

So, if you are thinking in terms of growth momentum, I have argued for many, many years that sustained growth is always driven by investment, not by consumption. So, we need to have a long consumption cycle and I think we are in a position to sustain this. Investment rate is already above 32% of GDP. And I think we could, we could slowly bring that up over the next decade or so to somewhat higher level. That will mean, of course, that savings rates will also go up. So, I would argue that, this is the real driver of growth rather than you know, other people have other models of growth consumption and so on. I'm a big believer in investment led growth. So that is one big area that we need to sustain.

The second big area of reform that I would argue we need to do, which relates to the administrative reform, and I have argued this also for many, many years, that we have a bureaucracy that was inherited from the British, then through the socialist period. Essentially what happened is that it was designed essentially for control rather than to deliver service. And in the last 30 years of reform, we have withdrawn this bureaucracy from various parts of the economy so that its ability to get in the way and be a hurdle in the

way of progress has been diminished. But that doesn't mean that we have improved the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy is still the same one, it is just that its ability to damage the economy is less. But we now need to flip it on its head and to build a bureaucracy that actually delivers services. And there's no point in arguing with an individual bureaucrat. The whole system is set up for control, not service delivery. So, I think we need to shift this so that we can focus much more on service delivery rather than controlling the bureaucracy.

And so that requires a different mindset, the way we set it up and so on. And so, there's a whole new area of work on administrative reform that needs to be done.

The third big area of reform, where the government actually has a limited role, it really has to be done by the judiciary, is to get the judicial system to work faster. We have an absurd situation where 50 million cases are stuck in the legal system. The old cliché about 'Tareeq pe Tareeq', that has to go. We need a modernized legal system. And I've argued for years that, if there's one area that needs to get reformed, the biggest gains will be from better enforcement of contracts, delivery of justice, and so on. So, these would be really three big areas that I would do.

There's of course, other reforms to be done, but I think the last big area of reform, which is not a specific reform, but actually a type of reform, which is process reforms. So, throughout the government there are large numbers of processes that can need to be revisited. There are departments that need to be shut down, which have outlived their utility and so on. So there has to be a big cleanup of the administrative system. In addition to the administrative reform that I was talking about. There has to be a process re-evaluation, a process re-engineering of the government itself. This is not true just of the government. Every institution in the country or every government in the world needs to do this from time



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to time. And we have, over the last decade or so, done quite a lot of it. Lots of old laws have been gotten rid of and so on. But what we now need to get on to do, doing this in a systematic way inside departments, you see, cannot it, it, you know, a lot of it has been top down driven, but really ministries need to own this and do it in a routine basis. And some of that is happening in some parts, not in others. So, I think we need a big sort of process reform agenda, which seeps into the whole government process so that we are continuously cleaning up processes, laws and so on. And that has to be done in an institutionalized way.



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Mr. Sanyal, there was a time when some of the economists were looking at India in a quite derogatory manner. And saying that we'll be lucky if we have 5% growth. And look at how the data has stacked up, especially in the last three, four quarters, the kind of the growth numbers we have achieved. To the extent that last week when we were speaking with RBI governor, he said that he'll not be surprised if our growth for the year lands up closer to 8%. So clearly, all the policy workers trickling down to numbers in terms of GDP growth. But up till now, bulk of the heavy lifting has been done from the government side, the PSUs, do you see early signs and do you see that if we have to attain longevity of growth, not only high growth, but prolonged high growth, then the private sector needs to come in. And are you seeing early signs of that coming now?

So, I don't know where this idea comes that the government in infrastructure spending is the only thing driving growth that is

absolutely not true. The government's spending on infrastructure simply couldn't generate 8% growth even if we wanted it to. So, this is actually not even true. It's been an important contributor, but in fact, private sector investment, household investment into things like building homes and things like that they have been actually the bigger important driver of growth. And for quite some time now, private sector has been investing. So, I don't know why this myth still persists that it's only government spending that is driving growth. It's not, if anything, as you know our fiscal deficit is coming down. So, the creditable part of this growth that we are now seeing is that there is a well developed investment dynamic in the economy as a whole.

But you're seeing that in all kinds of other areas, capital goods you're seeing that in a lot of investment services, activities of all kinds. And look at the boom in tourism, the boom in travel. So, there's a lot of other activities happening. But I think what is notable then is about this growth is the extent to which this is driven almost entirely domestically. Our exports haven't been a big driver of this growth as many of our export markets are in trouble domestically. So, to have achieved 8% or near 8% growth rates under these external circumstances, I would say is very creditable.

What I meant was not purely from the government side, but enabling the policy framework by which private sector also starts coming in. That's clearly happening. So, I wanted to get your thoughts on you know, the quality of growth that we are seeing. Do you see a higher band closer to 7% trending higher by the inputs coming together from the policy side, private sector, the way domestic economy is taking shape. Do you see that trending higher for a visible period of time? Do we have that kind of visibility?

So, when you're looking at quality of growth, that is not the way to think about it. The way to look at quality of growth is to look at the stability indicators. So are you generating high growth without generating inflation, without causing stress to the banking system, causing stress to your external accounts and so on and so forth. And as far as quality of growth is concerned, in all of those parameters, inflation is running at about 5%, which is within the band, we are accumulating foreign exchange reserves. Our current account on the external front is well behaved. Our banking system is well capitalized and profitable. So, none of those sectors are showing stress. So, in terms of quality of growth, that suggests that we are generating high growth without causing macroeconomic stresses.

Sure. Fair point. So just last word I wanted to talk to you about how this growth is actually happening in various parts of income strata. There is some early research done by SBI, which shows that actually income tax data is what they have looked at very closely,

that there is a lot of upliftment from poverty, lower middle classes coming towards middle class, middle classes moving higher. What is your observation around that? Because one section of the people also believe that it's very K-shaped recovery. Only the upper band is actually seeing high growth, lower part of the K is not. But this data, where do you stand on that debate?

So, you will remember that the people who are saying K-recovery are all the people, also the people who are predicting 5% growth at max, right? So, you should go and ask them about their maths because as you yourself pointed out, not just SBI, there are lots of other indicators we have got as far as you know, whether it is consumption band. We have got the Niti Aayog's multi-level data on poverty. All of them indicate that poverty is being removed at a very rapid pace. It's not disappeared, but the very extreme parts of it have now become very small. There's of course lots of poverty still in India, and there is still need to maintain this momentum over a longer period of time. But I think jobs are being created, unemployment rate as far as the latest PLFS is drifting downwards.

The game really is not whether the numbers are good now, whether or not we can compound it over time and to over 25 years, in fact if you want to be a developed country. So, I think the real issue is not whether we are generating good numbers now. That we are and I get into pointless debates with people who clearly have repeatedly not been able to give the correct prognosis of the economy, but to get into the argument about why and how we could keep this going for 25 years. And in that case, right at the beginning, we discussed the reforms we need to do. We need to get our administration right, we need to keep investing in our infrastructure, we need to get our judicial system cleaned up. There are a whole bunch of process reforms we need to do. Much of this will require many years to complete.

I would like to get your view on our 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 ambition. Every day we read in ET front page, some global MNC, big companies all over the world are wanting to come down, set up base, do partnerships, and basically expand business here in India. One is getting a sense that we have become an asset class on its own, in its own right and everybody wants to invest here. Either it's a stock market part or the actual you know, brick and mortar businesses and FDI coming in, how do you see India as an emerging destination for global capital and businesses to invest here and run the businesses for next 10, 20 years and become part of this growth story?

So, there's no doubt that India has now become a serious investment destination for foreign investors. Whether the portfolio or direct investment, whether it's companies or mutual funds or those invested into, for



“The third big area of reform, where the government actually has a limited role, it really has to be done by the judiciary, is to get the judicial system to work faster. We have an absurd situation where 50 million cases are stuck in the legal system. The old cliché about 'Tareeq pe Tareeq', that has to go. We need a modernized legal system. And I've argued for years that, if there's one area that needs to get reformed, the biggest gains will be from better enforcement of contracts, delivery of justice, and so on. So, these would be really three big areas that I would do.”

example, the various global bond indices or whatever. In all of these you will see India is there and its weightage is if anything rising. So, if that is a circumstance we should expect significant resources to come. You will remember if you keep hearing this India is losing to Vietnam or some other country, Bangladesh, et cetera, no investment is coming when clearly that is not the case. You could clearly see investment coming into the stock market, but also onto the ground and you can see a lot of this inflow happening in real time. I don't think too many people who are serious will debate that we are doing well. The real game is to sustain it over 25 years. **DI**



ABOUT

Sanjeev Sanyal is a member of Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. He has worked on several editions of the Economic Survey of the Ministry of Finance. He has authored several books, including 'Revolutionaries', that was recently released by Home Minister Amit Shah.

The Big Game Changer

Agni 5: A MIRValous Achievement



by MAJOR GENERAL V. K SINGH
(Retired)

Introduction

On 11 March 2024, India, for the first time, successfully tested an Agni-5 missile equipped with MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle) technology, from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast, joining a small group of countries with this capability. The launch of the MIRV-capable Agni-5 thus marked an important milestone in India's nuclear development programme.

While work began in 2008 to develop the Agni-5, it was only in April 2012 that the missile was first test launched. After seven test launches in December 2018 Agni-V commenced

The IGMDP is India's greatest success story. Agni missiles form the backbone of India's ground based long range strategic deterrent today. All the Agni series of missiles sing a song of credibility. The ranges of the missiles have been cleverly calibrated to enable them to reach potential targets. The missiles can be moved by road and rail enhancing their survivability. Longer range missiles can be safely tucked away in Central and Southern India. Canisterisation ensures minimum time lag between decision and launch.

user trials. As part of user trials, Agni-V was successfully launched on 27 October 2021. Later, on 15 December 2022, the first night trial of Agni-V was successfully carried out by Strategic Forces Command. The next challenge was to test the MIRV.

MIRV technology is the capability that allows multiple warheads to be loaded on a single missile and programmed to hit different targets, thereby greatly enhancing the missile's destructive potential. With a range of over 5000 Km, the missile can be fired in any direction.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the successful test and said, "Proud of our DRDO scientists for Mission Divyastra, the first flight test of indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with MIRV technology."

Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)

The Agni project(s) began under the IGMDP as a technology demonstrator for re-entry vehicle technology. Initially the missile used a solid fuel booster from the Indian Space Research Organisation's SLV-3 program. This was the precursor to the Agni 1.

Agni-1 soon became a successful single stage missile. Its diameter was 1m and its length was around 15m. Using fins for control it had a range of 700 km. Next came the Agni-2, a two-stage missile. The second stage used flex nozzles and thrust vectoring for control rather than fins like the first stage. The missile was 20m long with a diameter of 1m. The missile reached a range of 2,500 km.

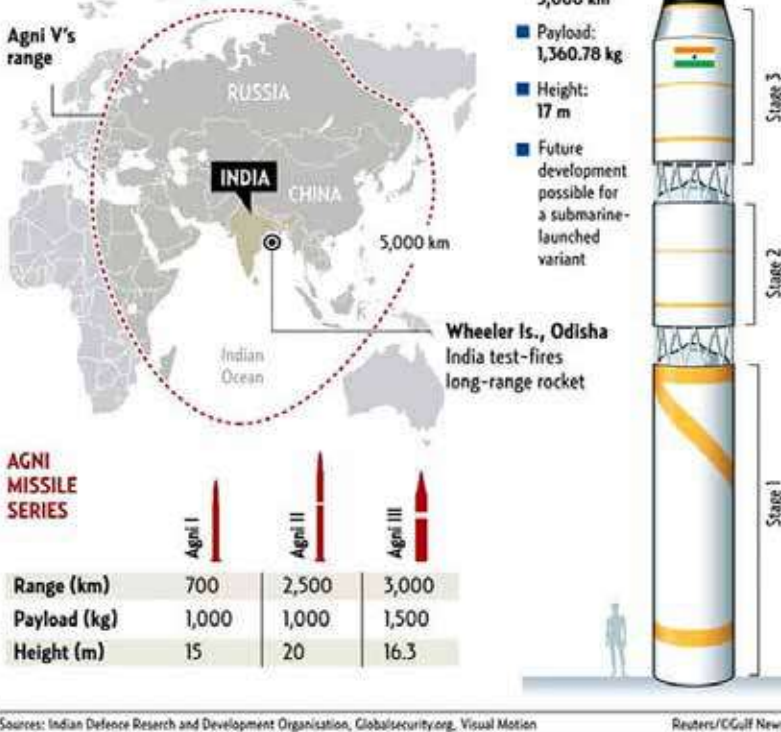
Agni-3 had two stages with a diameter of 2m. Its length was 16m. The missile used a light vented interstage so the second stage just fired for separation negating the use of separation motors. Agni-3 did not use any fins, instead relied on flex nozzles for control. Agni-3 covered a range of over 3,000 km.

The Agni-4, had a closed interstage and relied on flex nozzle thrust vectoring for control. The reported range was 4,000km.

Agni-Prime (Agni-P) is another variation to the Agni series. It is a two-stage missile that uses technology developed for India's longer ranged missiles like the Agni-4 and 5. It has a diameter of around 1.15m and a length of around 10.6m. The missile is canisterised, giving it better

India's Agni V missile

The nuclear warhead-enabled Agni V is the fifth in the series of medium and long-range missiles made in India in the past fifteen years



response capability. Agni-P boasts of enhanced accuracy being the first Indian missile with a Manoeuvrable Re-entry Vehicle, that also makes it harder to intercept by Anti-ballistic missile systems. It has a range of approximately 2,000 km.

Agni-5 is India's longest range ballistic missile. It has three stages. The first two stages are inherited from the Agni-3 and the third stage has a lower diameter in the front and broader diameter at the rear to make it more aerodynamic. The second and third stages are made from composites to reduce weight. The missile has a diameter of 2m, length of around 17m and range upwards of 5000 km. The 50 Ton missile is canisterised. It can carry 10-12 warheads weighing total of up to around 1,500 Kg as part of MIRV.

MIRV

MIRV technology, possessed by countries like the US, UK, Russia, France, and China, enables a single missile to carry several warheads, enhancing the missile's effectiveness. Agni-5, named Divyastra, has a reported range of more than 5,000 km. China considers the Agni-5 to be an ICBM. The warheads carried on the missile can be aimed at multiple targets several hundred km apart. The missile can carry decoy warheads too, that can help defeat the enemy's ballistic missile defence (BMD).

The Divyastra system is equipped with indigenous avionics systems and high-accuracy sensor packages, ensuring that the re-entry vehicles accurately reach their targets. The system uses a modified nose cone on a three-stage motor to accommodate multiple warheads, including micro-nukes, mini-nukes, and thermo-nuclear weapons.

The development of MIRV technology was not easy. It required the combination of large missiles, small warheads, accurate guidance, and a complex mechanism for releasing warheads sequentially during flight.

Multiple missiles armed with MIRVs could even make a comprehensive BMD system cost-prohibitive for the adversary. Given that China has BMD capabilities, MIRVs boosts the Agni-5's chances of hitting its targets successfully. Thus, Agni-5 as an effective BMD countermeasure, that enhances the Indian credibility as well as deterrence.

Development of MIRV's

As per 'The Centre for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation,' MIRVs were originally developed in the early 1960s to allow a single missile to carry multiple nuclear warheads, each capable of striking different targets independently, unlike traditional missiles. The inception of MIRV technology was done by the US with deploying a MIRVed Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) in 1970 and a MIRVed Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) in 1971. The Soviet Union quickly followed suit and by the end of 1970 had developed their own MIRV-enabled ICBM and SLBM technology. The US, UK, France, Russia, China, and India are among the nations that possess the MIRV technology. As per their report a Russian MIRVed missile under development may be able to carry up to 16 warheads, each in a separate re-entry vehicle. Warheads on MIRVed missiles can be released from the missile at different speeds and in different directions. Some MIRVed missiles can hit targets as far as 1,500 km apart.

Pakistan is also on the path to developing MIRV capabilities. In January 2017, it reportedly tested a MIRVed missile, the Ababeel which has a reported range of 2,200 kilometres. At that time, an official press release had stated: "The test flight was aimed at validating various design and technical parameters of the weapon system." On 18 October 2023, Pakistan again tested the Ababeel missile at the Sakhi Sarwar Range, with the Pakistani military's media wing stating that the test was "aimed at re-validating various design, technical parameters and performance evaluation of different sub-systems" of the missile. As per the International Institute of Strategic Studies, Ababeel is one of two nuclear-capable medium-range ballistic missiles that Pakistan is developing; Shaheen-III is the other. The main difference between the two is Ababeel's MIRV capability. Nothing visible from the test

MIRV technology makes an Agni-5 missile more difficult to intercept because its warheads might approach their intended targets along with multiple decoys. This can lead to a decision dilemma for the adversary's BMD sensors. Given that China has BMD capabilities, MIRVs boosts the Agni-5's chances of hitting its targets successfully.

indicated the success or failure of the missile's multiple-warhead capability, which was a key priority for Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division.

Writing in the ORF, Harish Pant stated that; "building MIRV-capable ballistic missiles is not easy. This is because they require some very demanding technical criteria, such as nuclear warhead miniaturisation, ensuring that the receptacle that carries the warhead or re-entry vehicle is of low weight or mass before its release from the Post Boost Vehicle (PBV), and also having the re-entry vehicles configured precisely to fit into the missile as well their separation from the PBV, which has to be manoeuvrable. Guidance and accuracy are a necessity as re-entry vehicles have to be spin stabilised during atmospheric re-entry."

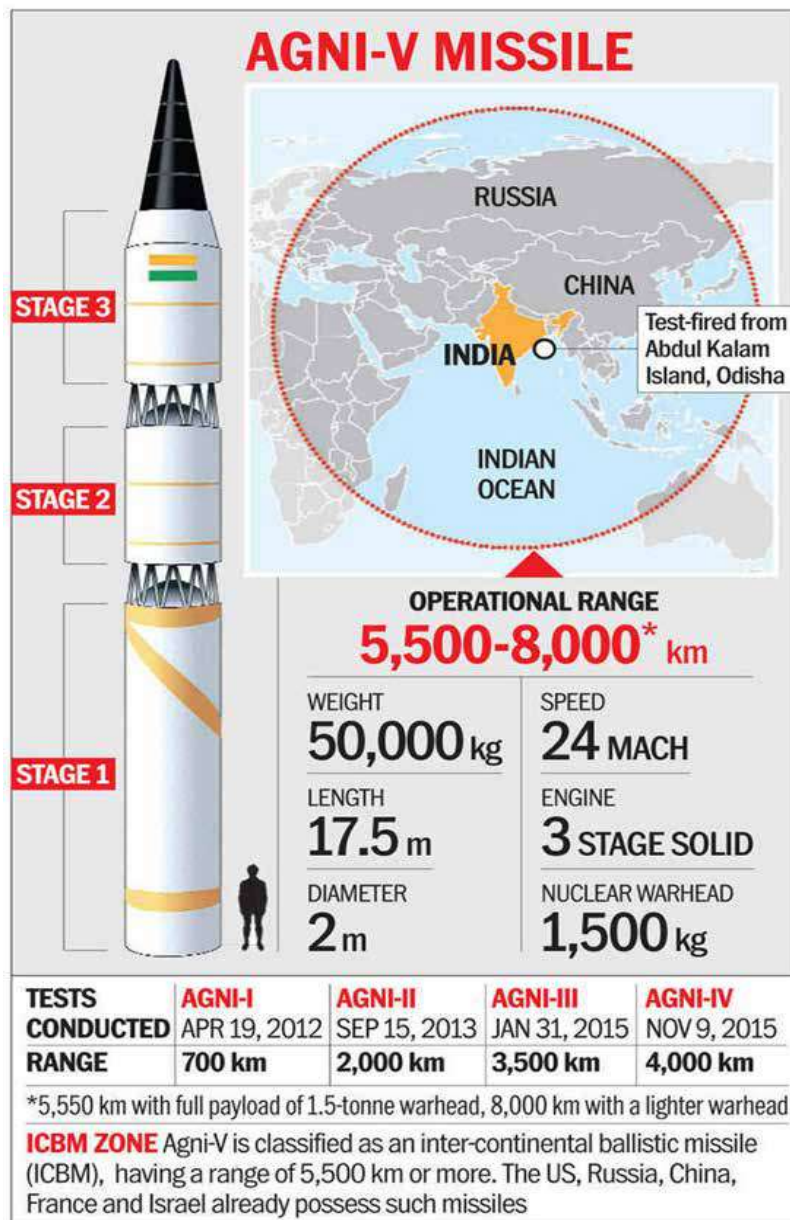
He further stated that "with the recent Agni-5 test, India has met these demanding technical requirements. In India's case, this MIRV development is more significant and impressive because it has come against considerable odds stacked against the country's missile and nuclear engineers."

The successful test of Agni-V is a testament of India's expertise in missile technology, showcasing its ability to develop and deploy sophisticated systems with high precision and accuracy.

Countering Ballistic Missile Defence

While Agni-5's ability to strike multiple targets simultaneously is a game changer, but what is also an important outcome is that MIRVs makes defending the intended targets more difficult for an adversary. While MIRVs may not have been initially designed to defeat BMD, but de-facto they are doing so. Debalina Ghoshal, author of 'Role of Ballistic and Cruise Missiles in International Security,' contends that the MIRVed missile can help penetrate the enemy's existing missile defense system, thus strengthening India's deterrence.

Though presently none of the operational BMD can effectively counter ICBMs, the US has deployed its Ground-based Midcourse



Defense (GMD) System, but its effectiveness against anything more than one or two ICBMs at a time is questionable. China is developing the Hongqi (HQ-19) ground-based ballistic missile interceptors, which have been tested, but their capacity to intercept Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles such as the Agni-5 remains doubtful.

MIRV technology makes an Agni-5 missile more difficult to intercept because its warheads might approach their intended targets along with multiple decoys. This can lead to a decision dilemma for the adversary's BMD sensors. **For example, the initial release of MIRVs could all be decoys, which would invite the enemy counter measures, while the armed warheads could be released subsequently, making them that much more effective. Or even vice versa, to deceive the enemy. Such could be the permutation combination, involving multiple missiles, wherein the first missile carries only decoys while the second a combination and a third with a completely armed payload.**

Multiple missiles armed with MIRVs could even make a comprehensive BMD system cost-prohibitive for the adversary. Given that China has BMD capabilities, MIRVs boosts the Agni-5's chances of hitting its targets successfully. Thus, Agni-5 as an effective BMD countermea-

sure, that enhances the Indian credibility as well as deterrence.

The Warhead

MIRVing becomes even more complex if they have both nuclear and conventional options. China's DF-26 and North Korea's Hwasong-10 are thought to have both nuclear and conventional warheads, though this has not been officially confirmed by the respective countries.

The question that needs to be asked is, whether putting conventional warheads on an expensive missile is worthwhile? The Agni-5 has a potential range advantage because it can target beyond the reach of India's current combat aircraft, including the Su-30MKI.

However conventional warheads on ballistic missiles do not pack much of explosive power, especially if they carry multiple warheads. This means that unless they have pinpoint accuracy, they will not be effective. Even with high accuracy, they are unlikely to be effective against hardened targets.

Further using such weapons creates difficulties for the defenders determining whether the incoming missile is armed with a nuclear or conventional warhead. If the same missile can be armed with both types of warheads, the defender might assume it is a nuclear attack, while in actuality, it may just be a warning shot to the adversary of what is yet to come. The adversary may respond with a nuclear strike without waiting to verify the warhead type. Hence there is a risk of inadvertent nuclear escalation.

Potential Benefits

MIRV's potentially lead to faster expansion of a country's nuclear arsenal. Theoretically, additional Agni-5 missiles with multiple warheads apiece would increase India's current nuclear warhead capability.

Dr V K Saraswat, former Director General of DRDO who was deeply involved with A-5 development called it a "force multiplier" and said it would increase the weapon's radius of influence. The Agni-5 MIRV, the landmark ballistic weapons system, takes India's strike/counter strike capability to the next level, giving it higher potency, better influence, and denser zone. It strengthens our promise of "massive retaliation."

China's current nuclear growth can lead to a huge imbalance as their pursuit of nuclear weapons to match the US could become a serious issue. This is particularly true for India when confronted with a "two-front" nuclear threat.

Further, having more warheads on fewer missiles is more efficient and cost effective. On the obverse of course, fewer missiles with more warheads also means fewer potential targets for an adversary to destroy and putting more warheads on individual missiles increases their vulnerability.

While the Agni-5 is a land-based system, development of Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) with MIRVs will add a great deal of complexities to the existing equations. Submarines can carry only a limited number of missiles. Further, nuclear-powered submarines that carry ballistic missiles are expensive and difficult to field in considerable numbers. Though, they have a higher chance of surviving an initial nuclear attack. Thus, developing this cutting-edge capability seems to be the next logical step.

As China continues to assert itself through advancements in missile technology, India's ability to develop and deploy advanced missile systems can be seen as a strategic response.

Conclusion

The recent test of India's Agni-5 missile and the presence of Chinese research vessels near the Indian coast to observe the test highlight the

In a nuclear war, much will happen in the realm of the unknown, because actual nuclear warfighting has never taken place. If and when that happens, you can expect nothing like what you ever imagined. To make this unknown, as known as possible, India needs to continue to work on its credibility, survivability, and resolve.

ongoing strategic dynamics in the region. As per Lieutenant General Kamal Davar (Retd) "India is well on its way to acquire strategic nuclear deterrence, a mission which it has been pursuing since the past 40 years or so under its IGMDP."

While the weapon system was reportedly tested at a lesser range, in future, Agni-5 will be able to match the threat from the Chinese Dong Feng missile, which is reported to have a range more than 8,000 km. As Pakistan is also developing its Ababeel missile India needs to constantly take the necessary steps to upgrade its platforms and warhead technologies.

The induction of missiles of various capabilities for its defence needs is an imperative for India, as it is flanked by two hostile nuclear neighbours in a deteriorating strategic environment. The force multiplier being, that they are 'Made in India' highlighting India's growing self-reliance in defence technology.

In a nuclear war, much will happen in the realm of the unknown, because actual nuclear warfighting has never taken place. If and when that happens, you can expect nothing like what you ever imagined. To make this unknown, as known as possible, India needs to continue to work on its credibility, survivability, and resolve. [D]



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maj Gen VK Singh, VSM was commissioned into The Scinde Horse in Dec 1983. The officer has commanded an Independent

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

The 'Queen' with Gut and a Heart!



She has climbed mountains, so to speak, done this, done that! Speaks her mind, she has one for sure, feels free to express and share it. Not one to be cowed down.

by SHASHANK SHEKHAR

Kangana Ranaut has always been a bit of an outlier. A small-town girl from Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, with no 'godfather' to speak of, she left for Mumbai to become a movie star at a fairly young age. Speak to any aspiring youngster, seeking fame and fortune in the Mumbai film industry, and they will tell you that it takes extraordinary luck or serious contacts to get a break – with no guarantee of success.

She found both fame and fortune, steadily rising to become a

While we may argue on whether or not her accusations hold water, there is no denying that she is one of the very few celebrities in the industry who speaks her mind, even at the cost of personal threats and damages.

certified A-lister, and regaled the audiences with exceptional performances in movies like *Gangster*, *Queen*, *Tanu Weds Manu*, and, much later, *Manikarnika*, among others. Her choice of roles and the audacity to lead movies in a largely male-dominated film industry, with considerable commercial success and critical acclaim, is a reflection of her grit and determination. Fierce, gloves-off, and always keen on speaking her mind on issues that land her in the public gaze, and of often in controversy, has created an aura around her, establishing her as an independent, strong-willed woman.

At a time when movie stars seldom speak on social, political, and industry-related issues, fearing retribution – case in point the recent debate around nepotism – her no-holds-barred attitude has won her admirers and detractors in equal measure. She did not shy away from accusing Karan Johar of being the “flagbearer of nepotism” on *Koffee With Karan*, leading to a serious debate on the contours of the subject, even igniting the boycott trend, relegating movies like *Sadak 2* to the dustbin.

While we may argue on whether or not her accusations hold water, there is no denying that she is one of the very few celebrities in the industry who speaks her mind, even at the cost of personal threats and damages. Remember the tragic and dubious death of Sushant Singh Rajput? She had called out the then-ruling party for making Mumbai unsafe, even comparing it with Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir (POK). “Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena leader, has given me an open threat and asked me not to come back to Mumbai after Aazadi graffitis in Mumbai



streets and now open threats, why Mumbai is feeling like Pakistan occupied Kashmir?" she had then tweeted. Political witch-hunting followed, and in a highly televised maneuver, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) first issued a legal notice for "illegal construction" in her house, and carried out a demolition drive. The then Shiv Sena goons called her names that are best left unsaid in this column, even attacked her house and damaged windowpanes. She knocked on the court's doors and the Bombay High Court ordered a stay on BMC's move, while the central government provided her Y-Plus category security, usually reserved for high-profile leaders and high-ranking security and establishment officials.

Since then, there had been murmurs of her joining politics, and her visit to the inauguration of the Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya on the 22nd of January added more fuel to the grapevine. The matter has now been settled, with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) declaring her their candidate from her hometown, Mandi, where she will most likely take on Pratibha Singh. She is no political lightweight and represents the Mandi constituency of Himachal Pradesh and is a member of the Indian National Congress (INC).

Even before the noise around her candidature could settle, Supriya Srinate's, Congress's spokesperson, distasteful comment on Kangana from her Twitter handle, which she later said was made by someone

“Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena leader, has given me an open threat and asked me not to come back to Mumbai after Aazadi graffitis in Mumbai streets and now open threats, why Mumbai is feeling like Pakistan occupied Kashmir?👊👊”

Kangana Ranaut

with access to her account, has the state's political landscape buzzing. The BJP has magnified the issue, making it a matter of *Rajya ki Beti ki Izzat*. But then, Kangana has never shied away from controversies – neither have controversies deterred her from seeking what she believes is hers. As we move towards the Lok Sabha elections where the BJP bats for a historic third term under PM Modi's leadership, and Congress from a complete wipeout, watch out for the Mandi Lok Sabha constituency! Win or lose – she will make it one of the most anticipated political battles of 2024, for she is a destiny's child. **Di**

Japan Honours for Amitabh Kant

An Event that Celebrates India-Japan Relations



An exclusive report by DI CONVERSATIONS

Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa, was conferred The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star, by the Government of Japan at an impressive and well attended event at their embassy in New Delhi.

The conferment was in recognition of a most successful year of G20 hosted by India, and for the success of the summit which witnessed a joint declaration, even including the mention of Ukraine, a success that was seen by many as a hurdle difficult to overcome. Kant was also singled by the Japanese Ambassador Suzuki, for his continued efforts to bridge economic and cultural ties between Japan and India.

As the chief guest for the evening, Minister Hardeep Puri, Cabinet Minister for Urban Development and Oil and Petroleum, recounted his long association with Kant, recalled his success as the poster boy for Indian tourism, from his days at Kerala Tourism to his days in the central Ministry of Tourism, where he created the Incredible India campaign. Counting the success of the G20 meetings, Puri recalled how it was PM Modi's idea to spread the impact of the G20 deliberations across the country. On a lighter note, Puri said he was of the belief that the best was yet to come in Kant's most successful career.

It would be in order to recall Kant's successes not only in tourism but much more. In his tenure at Niti Aayog, the idea of 120 aspirational districts across the country gave an unprecedented boost to what is local, making them vocal. He was instrumental in the 'Make in India' and 'Made in India' campaigns, inspired by the PM's vision for self-reliance and boosting manufacturing in India. The high point of this effort was the month long Make in India Expo in Hannover, which was inaugurated by PM Modi and the then German

Chancellor. He had also been tasked by the Ministry of Urban Development to head a committee to suggest ways and means to get the distressed realty sector from deep debt, and suggest how customers did not suffer at the hands of unscrupulous builders.

In his acceptance speech, Amitabh Kant said "this moment holds profound significance not just for me, but for the enduring bond between our two great nations – rooted in shared values, shared history, and mutual respect" and "as someone who admires Japan, its people, their language, their culture, their great refinement, their technology, their infrastructure, I am deeply humbled to receive your country's great civilian honour".

He paid handsome tributes to the people, the work culture and the profound gravity in their thought and action, in a stirring invocation to all that Japan represents.

Highlights of his speech are shared below, a praise of all things Japanese!

“I have come to deeply appreciate the profound influence Japan has had on me. From the bustling streets of Tokyo to the serene gardens of Kyoto to the modern architecture and the hearty street food of Osaka, each moment has been a lesson in cultural appreciation.

In Japan, everything is done with intention – from the precise artistry of Japanese cuisine, to the way the architecture reflects harmony with nature, to the custom of adorning ever-green trees with flowers to invite the Gods, every action, aesthetic, and arrangement is carefully considered and is purposeful.

In my time spent travelling there, I saw young children riding the train alone because they knew their part in a greater collective. Thousands of daily commuters walking in silence, respecting each person's right to peace, personal space, and privacy.

This deliberate approach to daily life



highlights the profound sense of respect and consideration that permeates Japanese society, a notion that deeply moved me as a civil servant.

Witnessing such a strong civic sense among the Japanese people served as a poignant reminder of the importance of community-thinking and collective responsibility in creating a society that belonged to everyone.

In Japan, riding the Shinkansen felt like flying – from the window, you can see a perfectly framed Mt. Fuji – at once making you feel proud of the sheer ingenuity of human capability, just as you realise our smallness compared to nature.

Whether through the meticulous attention to detail in tea ceremonies or the stoic discipline of the Samurai, I have looked to Japan for invaluable guidance throughout my life – especially when the path ahead of me was riddled with distractions and disturbances. I have strived, all of my career, to create a culture of work that meets at the confluence of efficiency and effectiveness, and there has been no better place to look for wisdom and inspiration than the philosophies of the Land of the Rising Sun.

In everything that Japan does, they embody a meticulous attention to detail – no error is too small to go unnoticed, no challenge is a wasted opportunity, and nothing is ever “good enough,” because there is always room to learn, change, and grow.

I first learnt of Kaizen when I visited the Toyota factory as a young officer. It was about empowering people and being transparent. It was about continuous improvement by creating a team atmosphere and making a job inviting, fulfilling, less tiring and safer. It was human centric.

That is why nothing flusters the Japanese. Their dedication to continuous improvement is evident in every aspect of their work – from the layout of production floors to the training of employees. I observed how

“I first learnt of Kaizen when I visited the Toyota factory as a young officer. It was about empowering people and being transparent. It was about continuous improvement by creating a team atmosphere and making a job inviting, fulfilling, less tiring and safer. It was human centric”

even the smallest details were meticulously analysed and optimised to enhance efficiency and quality. Workers were empowered to suggest improvements and participate in problem-solving initiatives, fostering a culture of engagement and ownership.

They were ready for anything, and when they weren't, they had a quiet confidence that they eventually would figure it out.

And Japan has always figured it out. Throughout its history, Japan has faced numerous challenges, from earthquakes to nuclear and natural disasters to economic upheavals, yet time and again, it has emerged stronger and more resilient than ever before.

Following the devastation of World War II, the Japanese people rebuilt their nation



from the ground up, transforming it into an economic powerhouse and a beacon of innovation and progress. I grew up on the Japanese brands – Sony, Sanyo, Nikon, Canon, Hitachi, Mitsubishi, Suzuki, Toyota and Honda.

After 2011, following an unthinkable earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, Japan faced one of its greatest challenges in recent history. The devastation was unprecedented, and the road to recovery seemed daunting. Yet, Japan refused to be defeated. The resilience displayed in the aftermath of such a catastrophe serves as a powerful reminder of the indomitable spirit of the Japanese people. It is a testament to their ability to rise from the ashes, stronger and more united than ever before.

And just as Japan never gave up on its people, the people never gave up on Japan. Professor Donald Keene who had taught for more than 50 years at Columbia announced his decision at the age of 90 to become a Japanese citizen and live his last days in Japan. He said, “If any civilisation has constantly suffered tragedies and always bounced back, it is Japan. I want to live with these people. I want to die with these people”.

It is through the Japanese people that I have learnt of all the wonderful ways in which Japan celebrates the beauty of nature, the strength of the human spirit, and the art of hearing what is unspoken. I learnt how to listen to the cherry blossoms. How to be punctual from the high-speed train – every second mattered. How to value patience and precision through the art of sushi-making, and find harmony in the delicate notes of the koto. I learned that sumo wrestling is as much about maintaining a centre of balance as it is about strength—size might get you through the door, but only strategy will help close the deal.

In so many ways, Japan has been my lifelong teacher. Like India, Japan is a force that shapes the future by drawing lessons from the past – carrying its rich cultural traditions while embracing cutting-edge

“Japan played a key and critical role during India's G20 presidency- a period during which it was chairing G7. This collaboration and partnership enabled us to get consensus on all key issues confronting the world. Japan played the most positive and constructive role.”

technologies of tomorrow.

Japan has created its own model of sustainable development: one that refuses to ape the West and carries its heritage and identity with pride.


The nation's commitment to excellence in science, technology, and innovation has propelled it to the forefront of global leadership. From pioneering advancements in robotics to ground-breaking research in renewable energy, Japan's contributions have had a profound impact on shaping the world we live in today.

Going forward, I believe collaborations between our great nations will hold the key to solving many of the world's most pressing challenges.

The relationship between Japan and India is one built on a foundation of mutual respect and admiration—a relationship that dates back centuries and continues to thrive in the modern era.

The close friendship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and now with Prime Minister Kishida is a testament to the deepening ties between our two nations—a friendship that I have had the privilege of witnessing first-hand during Prime Minister Modi's first visit to Japan.

Japan played a key and critical role during India's G20 presidency- a period during which it was chairing G7. This collaboration and partnership enabled us to get consensus on all key issues confronting the world. Japan played the most positive and constructive role.

Much like Ezra Vogel, whose 1979 classic 'Japan as Number One: Lessons for America' Japan has greatly influenced me, I am a firm believer in Japan. I am a great believer because of Japan's ability to manage tradition, technology and transformation successfully. Even the Japanese Golf set with which I play – HONMA, is a great blend of technology and transformation. It always makes you win and constantly improves your game: its technology is perfect. 



'Made in India' VFS Looks at India's Decade as Global Destination for Investments and Travel

Zubin Karkaria is the CEO of VFS Global, a company that pursues the idea that he personally germinated over twenty years ago. One of the true 'Made in India' stories, in the services sector, the idea that visas could be outsourced by governments, has now caught on the global attention. It is faster, more convenient, and cost saving. He was recently in the US, and spoke to PTI. Highlights are presented below.

India has a vibrant and diverse economy, a large young population and a rich cultural heritage which make it attractive for investors and visitors, according to the CEO of the world's largest visa outsourcing company, said Zubin Karkaria, founder and CEO of VFS Global.

India is undergoing a rapid economic and social transformation, he said. "This creates new opportunities for business, trade, tourism, and culture. I truly believe this is India's decade. In VFS global, we are very optimistic about the prospects of India as a global destination, as a source, both for inbound tourism and outbound travellers. India has a vibrant and diverse economy, a large young population, and a rich cultural heritage. These factors make India attractive, both for investors and visitors," he told PTI in a recent interview.

Known for creating a new industry of visa and passport outsourcing, VFS Global in just 22 years of its inception operates in 149 countries through 3,353 application centres. So far it has processed 278 million applications and 130 million biometrics enrolments.

Today, VFS Global is the trusted partner of 67 governments, including the Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), and 24 of the 27 Schengen countries.

"VFS Global is a truly Indian success story that has gone global. I mean truly global. I conceptualised and launched VFS Global in India, one of the first made-in-India unicorns to become a global leader in its field," Karkaria said.

"We remain committed to supporting India's growth story by providing seamless and tech-driven visa services to events, to secure cross-border mobility for people and trade. This is to and from India, thereby contributing to India's economic growth," he said in response to a question.


In the US recently for meetings, Karkaria, said there is a lot of excitement and interest by global CEOs in India. Karkaria previously served as CEO of Kuoni Travel Management Ltd, the 118-year-old Switzerland-headquartered former travel services provider.

"India has been a land of opportunities. It's expected that India will be the fastest-growing major economy in the next three years. I concur with our Prime Minister's vision and statement when he says that India will soon be the third-largest economy in the world," he said. "The government has also introduced several reforms to improve the ease of doing business, and the ease of living which are

Today, VFS Global is the trusted partner of 67 governments, including the Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), and 24 of the 27 Schengen countries.

very important. Two basic requirements. But it's very important for people who want to invest and live in India. This is attracting more investors," he asserted.

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the 'Chalo India' campaign to promote tourism and motivate people to travel to India, the CEO of VFS Global said meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions are a major growth driver for the travel sector and economy in India. India today offers many options across the economic spectrum for travellers with the investments that India has made in its infrastructure and in terms of connectivity around the world.

Super optimistic about India's future, he said: "I am committed to Prime Minister Modi's Viksit (developed) Bharat's vision, which is the government's action plan to transform the country into a developed nation by 2047." 

ABOUT VFS

VFS Global is majority-owned by funds managed by Blackstone, the world's leading alternative asset manager. The Swiss-based Kuoni and HUGENBLOM Foundation and EQT, a global investment organisation, headquartered in Stockholm/Sweden, hold minority stakes in VFS Global.

FTAs: India's Track Record

How Present Agreements May be Different?

Given the significant differences in developing countries' capacity to open markets fully, the WTO has not managed to move forward in many areas. With WTO making only incremental progress in many areas of negotiations, member countries interested in expanding their global footprint in many sectors have been negotiating bilateral and regional trade agreements.

BY T S VISHWANATH

Trade agreements are familiar to India. New Delhi has been a founding member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) since its inception. It was the founding member of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1947 and seriously contributed to the eight negotiating rounds covering goods, agriculture, and services.

The Declining Outcomes from WTO

After seven years of negotiations, the Uruguay Round of GATT, completed on December 15, 1993, resulted in an agreement among 117 countries (including India) to reduce trade barriers and create more comprehensive and enforceable global trade rules. The agreement coming out of this Round, the Final Act Embodying the Results of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, was signed in April 1994. This agreement also created the

The Look East Policy helped India build several trade agreements with the countries in the ASEAN and East Asia. It has a comprehensive agreement with the ASEAN and independent agreements with Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.



WTO, which came into being on January 1, 1995. The WTO implements the agreement, provides a forum for negotiating additional reductions of trade barriers and settling policy disputes, and enforces trade rules.

At the WTO, India has been at the forefront of negotiating a fair deal for developing countries and has been instrumental in creating several groupings that focussed on the “less than full reciprocity” clause to work in favour of the developing countries when seeking reciprocity in trade openings from the developed world. India continues to be a significant contributor to the current round of negotiations at the WTO. However, given the significant differences in developing countries' capacity to open markets fully, the WTO has not managed to move forward in many areas. With WTO making only incremental progress in many areas of negotiations, member countries interested in expanding their global footprint in many sectors have been negotiating bilateral and regional trade agreements.

The Push towards Bilateral and Plurilateral Agreements

Over the last two decades, there has been a spurt in bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements that have helped build strong value chains for sectors seeking global markets.

When India under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao began the economic liberalisation process in 1991, he started the “Look East Policy” that called for closer integration with the ASEAN and East Asian Countries. This move by Mr Rao was to help India move its focus from the traditional Western and neighbouring markets to the booming Southeast Asian markets to increase India's exports and identify products of interest for India to import to move up the value chain in manufacturing.

The Look East Policy was further strengthened under Prime Min-



ister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who helped India expand its outreach to the markets in the East.

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expanded India's Look East Policy and changed it to the "Act East policy". Given the rise of Beijing in the region and the new threats emerging in the Indo-Pacific, PM Modi gave a new thrust to intensify economic, strategic and diplomatic relations with countries that share common concerns with India on China's growing economic and military strength and its implications for the evolving regional order.

FTA utilisation by India has been small

The Look East Policy helped India build several trade agreements with the countries in the ASEAN and East Asia. India started negotiating free trade agreements with ASEAN countries by first inking an agreement with Singapore. The India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement was signed in 2007. Since then, New Delhi has negotiated several regional comprehensive trade agreements. It has a comprehensive agreement with the ASEAN and independent agreements with Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. It has also signed comprehensive agreements with South Korea and Japan.

However, several articles indicate that these agreements have yet to help India expand its export basket. Many experts feel that the gains from these agreements with India and the trade partners have been negligible.

In an article in the East Asia Forum, Rahul Nath Choudhury of EY argues that between 2017 and 2022, India's exports to its FTA partners increased by only over 30 per cent, while its imports increased by 82 per cent. India's FTA utilisation, he says, remains very low at around 25 per cent, while utilisation for developed countries typically sits between 70–80 per cent. This low utilisation highlights India's alarming failure to take

The three most recent FTAs that have been signed include the India-GCC agreement and the Early harvest of the India-Australia comprehensive agreement. India has also signed the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) that has an interesting aspect.

advantage of the benefits available through its bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. To battle this view that India's FTAs remain ineffective, the government decided to review the gains achieved by the FTAs in 2019.

Ability of Indian industry hampered by domestic constraints

However, given India's growing global influence and with the desire to enter diverse markets India has in the last few years started the process of engaging with several important partners in the West as well to sign comprehensive trade agreements. However, the progress of the FTAs have been painstakingly slow as Indian industry is still finding it difficult to compete due to several constraints in the domestic market.

Further given the push for an "Atmanirbhar Bharat" the government too is cautious to ensure that the FTAs do not lead to any disruption to the growing investment prospects in the country.

While India is engaging with several countries to sign a comprehensive FTA the two largest ones that are on the anvil are the India-UK comprehensive agreement and the India-EU comprehensive agreement. The India-UK trade agreement has been nearly fully completed and only a political will is now required on both sides to complete the agreement. The India-EU agreement, however, still has a long way to go before it nears completion.

The three most recent FTAs that have been signed include the India-GCC agreement and the Early harvest of the India-Australia comprehensive agreement. India has also signed the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) that has an interesting aspect.

Speaking at the launch of this agreement Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal said that "TEPA is a modern and ambitious Trade Agreement. India is signing FTA with four developed nations for the first time - an important economic bloc in Europe. For the



first time in the history of FTAs, the binding commitment of \$100 bn investment and one million direct jobs in the next 15 years has been given. The agreement will boost “Make in India” sentiments and provide opportunities to a young and talented workforce. The FTA will allow Indian exporters to access large European and global markets.”

The agreement comprises 14 chapters, with the main focus on market access related to goods, rules of origin, trade facilitation, trade remedies, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, investment promotion, market access on services, intellectual property rights, trade and sustainable development and other legal and horizontal provisions.

As the Minister said the comprehensive agreement for the first-time binds countries to making investments in India that will lead to employment. The taste of the pudding, however, will be in these countries actually bringing in these investments into the country.

Hopefully these announcements will not be similar to the earlier plans when FTAs were signed when India looked at expanding its export basket as also multiplying its exports exponentially to the new markets.

What Ails India’s Past Agreements

An important issue while discussing FTAs and India will be to see as to what ails India’s trade agreements.

First, India’s industry has never fully supported any trade opening. It has, over the years, always looked at protecting its market with high tariffs. Therefore, while the government engages with all sectors to try and build a win-win situation, the negotiators receive no serious feedback that will help them negotiate a trade deal that will help India become part of the global value chain.

Second, given India’s vast product list, building a customs duty regime that strictly kills the inverted duty structure regime is difficult. While considerable progress has been achieved in this area, it is still work in progress.

Third, industry in India has very little idea of how to provide any inputs for the rules of origin negotiations. Since most Indian sectors are not part of a global or regional value chain, they do not understand the exact nature of inputs to be provided. This leads to India using the follow back position of supporting general rules of origin over specific rules of origin. Rules of origin help finished goods build high value products while taking advantage of cheaper and advanced raw materials and intermediates.

Fourth, in the services sector, India’s main demand remains in the movement of professionals. Countries fail to understand that movement of professionals will not lead to migration of people from India to those countries. Given the lack of understanding among India’s major trade partners, New Delhi fails to make headway in the services negotiations.

India's comprehensive agreements continue to have low ambitions as trade partners like the EU keep changing their goal posts. The EU, it is understood would want to bring issues on climate, labour and investment into a trade agreement. Since the development levels of India differ from these countries, Indian negotiators find it difficult to find a common ground on issues.

Since this is an important ask for India, the negotiating flounder.

Finally, India’s comprehensive agreements continue to have low ambitions as trade partners like the EU keep changing their goal posts. The EU, it is understood would want to bring issues on climate, labour and investment into a trade agreement. Since the development levels of India differ from these countries, Indian negotiators find it difficult to find a common ground on issues.

However, despite the challenges faced India has remained very focussed on building trade agreements and has managed to create capacity in its negotiating teams as also in industry to build stronger FTAs. With the WTO losing steam it will be important for India to continue building these agreements to help Indian companies expand its global foot print. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Apollo Hospitals Unveils the 1st ZAP-X in South Asia, Revolutionizing Brain Tumour Care Treatment



Non-invasive, 30-Minute Sessions Offer Faster Recovery and Improved Patient Comfort, Zap-X brings precise targeting safety to transform patient outcomes. The ZAP-X Gyroscopic Radiosurgery Platform, a revolutionary advancement in brain tumour treatment, marking a significant milestone as the first in South Asia to introduce this ground-breaking technology. With ZAP-X, Apollo Hospitals continues its legacy of innovation and commitment to providing world-class healthcare solutions for patients in India and across the world. This transformative technology redefines precision with minimal radiation exposure, enabling new standards in effectiveness and patient comfort. Unlike conventional methods, ZAP-X utilizes a self-shielded, gyroscopic linear accelerator design, to direct radio-surgical beams from thousands of potential angles, accurately focusing radiation on the intended tumour or target.

Dr Prathap Chandra Reddy, Founder Chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group said at the launch: “For more than four decades, Apollo Hospitals has been at the forefront of healthcare, continuously challenging limits to provide exceptional care. Upholding this tradition, we have unveiled ZAP-X, an innovative technology designed for the treatment of brain tumours. Furthermore, as an outpatient procedure it allows for greater convenience and accessibility for patients. We commit to ensure that this technology is made available for every citizen of our country and for people across geographies, as this will be a boon for how brain tumours are approached and treated.”

Prof. John R. Adler, Founder and CEO, Zap Surgical and Professor of Neurosurgery, Stanford School of Medicine said, “Stereotactic radiosurgery is among the most important medical advancements of the past century. Eligible patients no longer must experience debilitating surgical resections, or potentially



With ZAP-X, Apollo Hospitals continues its legacy of innovation and commitment to providing world-class healthcare solutions for patients in India and across the world. This transformative technology redefines precision with minimal radiation exposure, enabling new standards in effectiveness and patient comfort.

lose cognitive capacity by undergoing whole-brain radiotherapy. Instead, with ZAP-X radiosurgery, patients can now be quickly treated in an outpatient setting and often return to normal activities the same day with no incisions, and no pain.” **DI**

Ten Years of PM Modi's Foreign Policy: India Grows in Stature and Influence



by ASHOK SAJJANHAR

Capsuling Ten Years

It is a little less than ten years since PM Narendra Modi took over as the head of the NDA ruled government in New Delhi in May, 2014. At that time, it was presumed that foreign policy would be his weakest suite in governance since he had no or little experience of dealing with foreign countries.

Ten years later however, foreign policy has emerged as one of PM Modi's biggest strengths. This is particularly commendable since India and the world have experienced challenges of a nature that the global community has not witnessed over several decades. Some of these include the Covid-19 pandemic which was a black swan event occurring after a gap of 100 years. Before the world could come to grips with the

It has been a most successful ten years, though not everything could have been predicted. Like the aggressive stance of China, the two wars that have attracted global attraction, and the new found belligerence among neighbours. But PM Modi has kept a balanced momentum, pursuing a multipolar diplomacy, walking the tight rope.

pandemic, it was struck in quick succession with two totally unanticipated conflicts viz., the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel Hamas confrontation. Some other unsettling developments during this period included the increasingly aggressive behavior of China in the East China Sea against Japan and Taiwan; in the South China Sea against several ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries, and against India and Bhutan on the undecided and disputed land boundary.

Notwithstanding these and several other challenges on the domestic and international fronts, PM Modi ably assisted first by the late External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj and presently by the current EAM, Dr S Jaishankar, and by virtue of his bold, visionary and firm leadership, raised the image and profile of India as a partner of choice, a voice of reason and a consensus builder in the world.

Neighbourhood First Policy

One of the first initiatives launched by PM Modi was the Neighbourhood First Policy when he invited Heads of State/Government of all SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Countries) and Mauritius, to his swearing in ceremony on 26th May, 2014. He invited leaders of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), Kyrgyzstan and Mauritius for



his second oath taking ceremony on 31st May, 2019.

Success of the Neighbourhood First Policy is evident from the fact that India's ties with its neighbours (barring Pakistan, China and more recently Maldives) are much stronger and deeper today than they were in 2014. PM Modi's first visit to Nepal in August, 2014 was the first bilateral travel by an Indian PM to Nepal in 17 years. Since his first visit in 2014, PM Modi has travelled four more times to Nepal viz. in November, 2014 for the SAARC Summit; twice in 2018, one on a bilateral visit and once for the BIMSTEC Summit; and the 4th in 2022 on a visit to Lumbini at the invitation of the Nepalese PM. The meeting of the Joint Economic Commission between the two countries in September, 2014 took place after a hiatus of 23 years. All these visits as well as interactions with Nepalese leaders on their visits to India have significantly enhanced understanding and cooperation between the two countries.

Success of the Neighbourhood First Policy is evident from the fact that India's ties with its neighbours (barring Pakistan, China and more recently Maldives) are much stronger and deeper today than they were in 2014. PM Modi's first visit to Nepal in August, 2014 was the first bilateral travel by an Indian PM to Nepal in 17 years.

Similarly, the unanimous ratification of the long-pending Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh (Indira-Mujib Accord) since 1975, sent a strong message that India is keen to strengthen its bilateral ties with Bangladesh, its important eastern neighbor. India-Bangladesh ties today are in their golden phase and have emerged as a model for warm and friendly neighborly relations, not only among

Foreign policy has emerged as one of PM Modi's biggest strengths. On the domestic and international fronts, PM Modi ably assisted first by the late External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj and presently by the current EAM, Dr S Jaishankar, and by virtue of his bold, visionary and firm leadership, raised the image and profile of India as a partner of choice, a voice of reason and a consensus builder in the world.

South Asian countries but around the world.

With Sri Lanka also, the first visit by PM Modi in March, 2015 was the first bilateral visit by an Indian PM after a long gap of 32 years. The decisive and emphatic political and economic support by India to Sri Lanka in its hour of existential crisis and need in 2022 by providing it support amounting to US\$4.50 billion in cash and kind, significantly enhanced confidence in bilateral partnership and took it to new heights.

Relations between India and Bhutan have always been close, warm and special. The historical, enduring bilateral friendship is rooted in mutual warmth and goodwill, reinforced by frequent high-level exchanges. There is a high level of trust between the leadership and people of the two countries. The recent visits of the Bhutanese PM to India from 14th-18th March, 2024 and by PM Modi to Bhutan on 22-23rd March further cemented the already robust bilateral ties. Bhutan PM's first visit to India after winning the elections in 2024 was particularly significant against the backdrop of Bhutan's economic challenges and its complex relationship with China.

Decline in ties with Pakistan, China and Maldives is not on account of any failure or missteps by India but due to actions taken by these countries for domestic, political or strategic reasons. India has responded firmly





One of the most significant successes of PM Modi's foreign policy is the deepening and broadening of India's ties with West Asia/Middle East. This is evident from the fact that several of these countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Palestine have decorated PM Modi with their highest national awards. In January, 2024, Minister for Women and Child Development and Minority Affairs Smriti Irani attended the third Haj and Umrah Conference in Madina. This would have been unthinkable a decade ago.

to terrorist attacks from Pakistan as well as incursions into Indian territory by China. The Muizzu-led Maldivian government came recently to power on the back of an "India Out" campaign but India's mature and statesmanlike response is contributing to bringing the relations on an even keel. The compulsions of geography and India's steadfast support to the people of Maldives should soon make Muizzu realize the futility and counter-productive results of his animosity towards India.



India and the Middle East

One of the most significant successes of PM Modi's foreign policy is the deepening and broadening of India's ties with West Asia/Middle East. Earlier these countries used to look at India through the religious prism of Islam promoted by Pakistan. This is no longer the case today. India has emerged as a significant political, economic and strategic partner of these countries. This is evident from the fact that several of these countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Palestine have decorated PM Modi with their highest national awards.

UAE had invited the then EAM Sushma Swaraj to Address the foreign ministers of OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) in 2019, over-riding the objections of Pakistan. More recently in January, 2024, Minister for Women and Child Development and Minority Affairs Smriti Irani attended the third Haj and Umrah Conference in Madina. This would have been unthinkable a decade ago. Moreover, no West Asian country took a stand against abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A by India. On the contrary, in the first significant foreign direct investment in J&K, UAE's committed to invest a total of ₹500 crores, including ₹250 crores for a mega-mall, and more to help set up IT towers in Jammu and Srinagar. Success of India's foreign policy in the region can be judged from the fact that India was able to get its 8 retired navy personnel who had been awarded death sentences for espionage, pardoned by the Emir of Qatar and set free to return to India in February, 2024.

Better Ties in the Far East and Success of Quad

India's Act East Policy has been remarkably successful in expanding and diversifying relations in economic, political, strategic, connectivity and cultural spheres with ASEAN countries as well as Japan, Australia, Republic of Korea, Pacific Island Nations and others.

The preceding ten years have witnessed a remarkable growth and strengthening of trust and confidence between India and USA. PM Modi has dealt with 3 US Presidents viz., Obama, Trump and Biden and relations have continued to soar in the tenures of all three Presidents. This has emerged as the most consequential, global relationship for India in political, strategic, economic, commercial, technology spheres. The two countries engage on 60 dialogue platforms including critical and emergent technologies, renewable energy, connectivity, education, health, agriculture, green hydrogen, defense, semiconductor chips and more. PM Modi was accorded the singular honor of being invited for a state visit by President Biden in June, 2023 and also to Address the Joint Session of the US Congress for the second time (The first time he addressed the US Congress was during Obama's term in 2016).



India and the US

PM Modi has also been an active participant in the revival of the QUAD in November, 2017 and its upgradation to summit level over the last 3 years. Some minor wrinkles like the alleged Indian plot against Guratwant Singh Pannun, unwarranted and uncalled for comments by the US State Department against Delhi CM Kejriwal's arrest, freezing of Congress accounts, India's CAA law have appeared in recent weeks but they do not have the potential to derails the rapidly expanding bilateral partnership. It would however be to the advantage of both countries if such unnecessary pinpricks were avoided.

India has firmly displayed its strategic autonomy by not only not criticizing Russia for its attack on Ukraine, notwithstanding the huge pressure from the west but also continued to import large quantities of oil and gas at concessional rates to provide affordable and reliable supply of energy to its people.

G20: The Success Story

Possibly the successful conduct, both logistically and substantively, of its G20 Presidency can be considered to be the pinnacle of PM Modi's achievements over the last decade in the realm of foreign policy. No one had anticipated that India would succeed in crafting a consensus Leaders' Declaration, given the widely divergent positions on the conflict in Ukraine, of the West on one side and Russia and China on the other. But India was able to achieve the unthinkable on the first day itself. Much of this success can be attributed to the leadership of PM Modi and the personal ties of respect and mutual benefit that he has been able to foster with most world leaders. The world came together to ensure a successful G20 Presidency for India. India emerged as a Voice of the Global South and a Vishwamitra (Friend of the World) by virtue of the remarkable success of its G20 Presidency.

Covid and the Vaccine Diplomacy

India's leadership in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of its health, economic and social impact has won it plaudits and respect from the world. That it was able to initiate far-reaching economic reforms and rapid digitization of its economy even during the pandemic has earned it kudos from the global community. In addition to its huge successes in dealing with the pandemic on its domestic front, India emerged as one of the few countries to share about 300 million vaccines with more than 100 countries, most of them on gratis basis. The world has realized that India's development and growth is good not only for its own people but the whole world, particularly the developing countries.

PM Modi and his foreign policy team led by EAM Dr S Jaishankar have acquitted themselves most creditably to deal with the wide-rang-



The world came together to ensure a successful G20 Presidency for India. India emerged as a Voice of the Global South and a Vishwamitra (Friend of the World) by virtue of the remarkable success of its G20 Presidency.

ing challenges that have arisen over the last 10 years. Today the world is in transition. The turmoil and turbulence presents challenges as well as opportunities to India to enhance its standing and emerge as a more consequential and effective global player in the years to come. Its conduct over the last 10 years gives both hope and confidence that that India will emerge stronger, more influential and authoritative player on the global scene.



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Should Outbound Travel Get a Similar Scheme like UDAN for Domestic?

Open Limited Period Offers as Part of Foreign Policy Initiatives?



A panel discussion on a recently released book, 'Aviation and Foreign Policy' by **Sanat Kaul** was held under the auspices of India International Centre, New Delhi. The session was chaired by **KN Shrivastava**, Director, India International Centre who is also a former Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, with Ambassador **Nalin Surie**, former Indian High Commissioner to United Kingdom, Ambassador to China and Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and the author Sanat Kaul. The discussion was moderated by **Navin Berry**, Editor, Destination India magazine.

aligning the Civil Aviation Policy with Foreign Policy and has suggested that those countries not connected in the region but desirable from a foreign policy angle, but not viable to commercial airlines, should be connected through a scheme similar in nature to the domestic subsidized scheme such as UDAN.

Aviation had a retarded Growth to Begin with

Sanat Kaul shared that the idea of writing such a book on establishing a relationship between the two policies came from Ambassador Nalin Surie which he took up reluctantly as there was no background or past work on it. Giving a background to Aviation in India he stated that India aviation had a retarded growth due to the monopoly of two public sector airlines with their sluggish management and government policy in not giving out sufficient air service rights due to their pressure. However, this got corrected but also went overboard with too many rights given to foreign airlines. This issue was pointed out by both by Comptroller and Auditor General in his report No

In his introductory remarks, K N Shrivastava said that the progress in Indian Civil Aviation has been outstanding with our airports now better than many European airports. he emphasised that this book is a must read for not only all those interested in the subject but others also as travellers. Sovereign rights over a country's air space were enshrined in the Chicago Convention of 1944 which has led to each country giving another country the right to fly over the other country for commercial flights which has been well brought out in the book. He cited the criticism by the author on restricted bilateral policy followed by India in early years but explained that this pent up demand led to privatisation of airlines and none of the airlines are now government owned or controlled. This has brought greater benefit in terms of growth of airlines, leading to a more competitive edge with foreign airlines. He said the book has come up with the innovative idea of



40 on Civil Aviation in the year 2016 and in Annual Economic Survey of the Finance Ministry in 2016-17. Because of these circumstances, two countries in the East and West of India i.e., Singapore and Dubai, came up as international hubs largely because of Indian traffic.

On the issue of relationship between Civil Aviation and Foreign Policy he referred to Ambassador Rajiv Sikri's book which has stated that in order to reinforce our foreign policy the need to have a better understanding and appreciation by the people of any two countries is needed in this day and age, and air connectivity is an ideal choice. Even earlier, Air India, then the monopoly airline for external travel, was nudged by the Foreign Ministry to go to some countries of importance to India, even though the route was not remunerative. However, when Air India lost its monopoly in 2004, it was not able to provide this service from its resources as it had to compete with other Indian carriers.

The question of better international connectivity from a foreign policy angle was again taken up by Prime Minister Vajpeyi in 2003 when he made an open offer to ASEAN countries to connect to 18 Indian major cities directly from their countries. A similar offer was issued to SAARC countries. However, only those countries which had strong airlines and had existing flights into India took advantage of these proposals. Therefore, the then Prime Minister's offer was unattractive mainly because it was without a full proposal, which looked into the financial needs of the airlines to operate these services. The airlines of other countries which did not have an existing service into India found it unviable as they did not have any significant traffic into India. This shows that airlines need more than landing rights, as the service must be viable.

Should there be a Closer Play between Aviation and Foreign Policy?

Then there is the issue of India Outbound traffic which is growing faster than the India inbound. This is a great asset which foreign policy makers should consider. If our outbound traffic is incentivized, into directions which are of importance to foreign policy objectives, then it could of great advantage. How to incentivize our outbound tourists to desired countries has been discussed in the book. Further, how to incentivise our airlines to go to unremunerative routes has been discussed in the book.

In this context, mention was made of how China has channelised its huge outbound traffic and how it uses the leverage of its outbound traffic to reward and reprimand countries. China has been quite successful in using its outbound to achieve its foreign policy goals.

Lastly, Kaul highlighted the Look East Policy has totally missed

The question of better international connectivity from a foreign policy angle was again taken up by Prime Minister Vajpeyi in 2003 when he made an open offer to ASEAN countries to connect to 18 Indian major cities directly from their countries. A similar offer was issued to SAARC countries. However, only those countries which had strong airlines and had existing flights into India took advantage of these proposals.



India Outbound traffic which is growing faster than the India inbound. This is a great asset which foreign policy makers should consider. If our outbound traffic is incentivized, into directions which are of importance to foreign policy objectives, then it could of great advantage. China has been quite successful in using its outbound to achieve its foreign policy goals. How to incentivize our outbound tourists to desired countries has been discussed in the book.

out the role which Andaman and Nicobar Islands can play in it, as strategically placed chain of islands in the Bay of Bengal. The general impression with foreigners is that India is a peninsular country far away from the straits of Malacca, which is unfortunate. With over 570 islands connecting Myanmar with Indonesia, it has a major stake in the Malacca Strait. With the last island of Great Nicobar Island barely 100 km from Sumatra tip, and near the western entrance of Malacca strait, it has a major role to play in the geo-politics of the region, provided India plays its cards properly.

The Look East Policy has totally missed out the role which Andaman and Nicobar Islands can play in it, as strategically placed chain of islands in the Bay of Bengal. With the last island of Great Nicobar Island barely 100 km from Sumatra tip, and near the western entrance of Malacca strait, it has a major role to play in the geo-politics of the region, provided India plays its cards properly.



Some Interaction is Already in Place: Nalin Surie

Ambassador Nalin Surie recalled how it was at his initiative that a reluctant author wrote this book but he is happy with the outcome. He stated that diplomacy is not about writing reports but much more in terms of providing inputs for trade and development. Air connectivity is crucial. He agreed that Prime Minister Vajpeyi proposal offering 18 destinations to ASEAN members countries was a very good initiative, among many other initiatives, but it was not acted upon. However, today in continuation of his efforts we have good highways, airports, a large basket of exportable goods. It's time to bring Civil Aviation Policy in sync with Foreign Policy, which indeed is already taking place. He referred to many suggestions in the book and stated that foreign policy extends to all aspects of the country like economy, culture, tourism and in all these, aviation plays a very important role. People to people contact, export of high value goods, and other activities require good connectivity. He mentioned that up to the late nineties we had very little to export and therefore, foreign policy could not push an 'empty drum'.

However, India is now a different place and foreign policy is much more integrated into the Indian system. He also confirmed that Indian foreign policy did utilise the services of then Air India as a monopoly airline to go to countries which served India's foreign policy interests. He gave the example of Air India going to Dar es Salaam and then to Harare in Africa on a nudge by the foreign ministry when the route was not viable, but it was a matter of pride for India to show its flag. This issue is as true today as it was then, especially when India is aspiring to be the third largest economy in the near future. As Indian outbound grows and Indian tourists visit different parts of the world, they would prefer to fly on their own airlines. However, with the growth in outbound travel by Indians, the airlines are opening new locations. He stated that government should be a facilitator and improve the bilateral agreements for a fair deal and even create hubs as has been discussed in the book.

China's Long Term Initiatives Have Worked well for them

On the issue of China which the author has dealt in detail, he stated that China had a long-term plan as they have in all sectors and implemented it. Initially they had a large number of airlines which they subsidised and later amalgamated them into a few. Connectivity was a crucial issue for them and they had a long-term strategy for it. They bought planes from Boeing and Airbus in large numbers collectively for its airlines, made them set up plants in China and now they have their own manufacturing facility for a commercial aircraft. They developed hubs for domestic as well as international traffic and implemented their plans meticulously. After consolidation of their airlines, they now fly to



every part of the world. Another aspect of the Chinese planning was that they decided in the eighties that they will go for an open economy for which they needed good connectivity. On this issue he felt, however, that we cannot go down the Chinese way and subsidise our airlines. India, on the other hand, is now doing well in civil aviation and we should continue the way we are. Our private airlines are doing well and our orders for new aircrafts are highest in the world. Ambassador Nalin Surie concluded that we should continue with the present policy which is doing well.

Moderator Navin Berry, making his interjections, said that that India cannot pursue open skies as a policy. There has to be a quid pro quo in what we give and what we receive. Usually, countries that declared open skies, did not have much sky of their own. Relating to the success of opening routes with countries, He recalled how India and the US had an open bilateral, where any number of airlines and flights was possible. Yet the India-US route was heavily serviced by third country airlines. 'Flying the flag', in his opinion, was a thought process that had lost its relevance in the emerging world of competitive marketplace where airlines had to see profits on routes, and governments were longer subsidizing air travel.

During the Q&A session, KN Shrivastava raised the issue of subsidy. He recalled how in his time as Secretary Civil Aviation he had tried to nudge airlines to go to Siam Reap in Cambodia which is the airport for Angkor Wat or to Ho Chin Min city in Vietnam or Chabahar in Iran. However, all the airlines which were private stated the route would not be viable. Sanat Kaul argued that while the Foreign Ministry funds roads, ports, hospitals, why a small portion from within its budget, could not be considered for subsidy to airlines to go on select unviable routes, based upon seat utilisation. Perhaps an initial subsidy for three years till such time the route would become viable? Nalin Surie opposed the subsidy issue and stated that our philosophy of development assistance is based on a country's desire for a project and this concept does not find a place in it. Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Group, added that we need flights into Africa especially to meet the Chinese influence. He also wanted a removal of the 20% tax on international travel.

On Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Ambassador Surie stated that while the strategic importance of these islands cannot be discounted, yet he was not in favour of promoting tourism in these islands or developing them into another Hong Kong. Lt Gen Arun Sahni stated that he agreed with the author on strategic importance of these islands and stated that a lot of work has already started for this purpose.

Deepak Dadlani, former chairman, Air Cargo Agents' Association



Connectivity was a crucial issue for China and they had a long-term strategy for it. They bought planes from Boeing and Airbus in large numbers collectively for its airlines, made them set up plants in China and now they have their own manufacturing facility for a commercial aircraft. They developed hubs for domestic as well as international traffic and implemented their plans meticulously.

of India, wanted greater emphasis on cargo by air which has a great future and requires very little additional expenditure. Nalin Surie agreed with this suggestion and said that this point was extremely important from a connectivity and trade point of view, especially with regard to high value, low volume, cargo.

In his concluding remarks, Shrivastava said that creating a fund for outbound on the lines of UDAN for a limited period should be considered and to that extent he is in agreement with the author. He stated that many of the routes which started under UDAN subsidy scheme have already become viable and not being subsidized. He again highlighted how it was a very important book, with rich content and ideas that required a larger debate. **Di**



ABOUT

Sanat Kaul is a retired civil servant who has worked as JS in the Ministry of Civil Aviation, has been India's representative

at ICAO, Montreal. Kaul has written extensively on civil aviation matters.

Understanding 10 years of PM Modi and India's Tryst with Tourism

Infrastructure First. Ensure ease in Travel. Tourism will Follow! A Holistic Approach and Understanding have Brought New Growth Opportunities for Indian Tourism, opening new destinations with new found access.



by NAVIN BERRY

As this government ends its second five-year stint in power, much can be said of its push for tourism. Not perhaps as how the industry would like to see it; it embraces the larger picture of which the contours are beginning to emerge. From the very start, PM Modi identified tourism as one of the 5-Ts of his government, well before 2014. Indeed, whether one agrees or not, to each his own. **Modi has been consistent with his belief that infrastructure first, ensure ease in travel, and tourism will follow.**

So, this story is now unfolding. **In the last several years, the push has been towards creating infrastructure that provides comfort and speed, both, with safety and surety in travel.** There is some that people may not agree with. Like the Bullet Train project, for instance. However, commuters will be able to make day trips between two big commercial capitals, Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The Statue of Unity is another; apart from its political messaging on the status of Sardar Patel, the fact is that we have a new tourism product, around which the state government has nurtured another five to six tourist attractions, making it a new tourist hub. A big statement in more recent times, is lifting of prohibition in Gift City, an unprecedented step for a state like Gujarat, where liquor bans have been a constant source of irritation and political discourse.

It is a truism that there can be no tourism without travel infrastructure. Apart from a few international airports like at Delhi and Mumbai, there was little to commend incoming visitors with global

From the very start, PM Modi identified tourism as one of the 5-Ts of his government, well before 2014. Indeed, whether one agrees or not, to each his own. Modi has been consistent with his belief that infrastructure first, ensure ease in travel, and tourism will follow.

standard facilities. But this has changed dramatically. Lucknow has a new terminal. Ayodhya has an airport, and some dozen new terminals have changed the course of Indian aviation. More airports have been opened across the hinterland; **witness the growth of airlines like Indigo, connecting cities like indeed it was essential air transport that it is, and not some fancy civil aviation in the clouds!**

His other **big concern was Swachh Bharat.** It is equally true that only clean and healthy environments can attract footfalls. That our track record in this endeavour has been far from impressive. Usable and clean toilets have always been a huge issue at our monuments. Has the Swachh Bharat campaign succeeded? It did, it is still around. It should have achieved more success; what it did not, must remain dependent upon local administrations and the people at large; can a small contribution from our industry help bridge the last mile? The industry, too matched the enthusiasm in the first push, and then it seems to have petered off. Can hospitality become a prime mover, within our immediate neighbourhood, give a fresh impetus, and put local bodies on alert in a positive and helpful way. **Going Swachh is the most important surety that our tourism stays!**

Strengthening India's culture and history, traditions and unique offerings to the world, has been his big contribution to our tourism, in



ded to the tourism product that had for long been left to fend for itself. It was almost in decay. If we are to grow our appeal as an inbound destination, it is most important to identify and develop the Brand India. He has given a pronounced direction to growing the Indian legacy, our heritage and tradition – remember Tradition was one of the original 5Ts when they were announced, in 2014.

The story took a negative connotation when during covid lockdown there was no relief for the tourism sector. Especially when some news channels kept repeatedly saying that we should expect some breakthrough announcements, for which the industry kept waiting with bated breath. Who was briefing whom, I cannot say, but the fact is there was never any move for extending relief towards specific sectors but to the entire industry, as a whole. Fortunately, for the industry that time has gone by, for all its misery, moving on to an era of unheard prosperity. It is our own domestic that has come to help, that same domestic who was not counted among its primary market, till a little while back.

Is there a sense that only relief and incentives amount to seriousness on the part of the government? That asking for 'more' and getting it, meant a well-intentioned government towards tourism? That we need to be recognized as serious economic activity, our other concern, and rightly so, also depends upon how seriously we position ourselves? That, as far as I can tell, is yet to happen. My personal understanding is that industry needs a totally refreshed statement on its impact on economy, jobs and inclusive outreach, to break new ground.

Politics apart, and that is not the concern of this publication, this government has an impressive score card on all things travel and tourism. In providing a strong edifice upon which we build our tourism, both domestic and inbound.

You might ask, what about inbound? What about promotions overseas? What about the replacements for all the international tourist offices that were closed down more than a year ago, without an alternative mechanism in place? Was that the right thing or not? On the one hand, we need not have closed the offices without an alternative in place. The other fact is also true: that our offices had become almost redundant, we did not have the requisite expertise to manage them, that they had become a waste of resource. Will PR agencies be an effective alternate? Going by our past record, I doubt it; we do not have the understanding/maturity to get effective and professional guidance without making uncalled for interventions.

A possible answer lies in creating a national level marketing

His other big concern was Swachh Bharat. Can hospitality become a prime mover? Going Swachh is the most important surety that our tourism stays!

organization, headed by a renowned and proven advertising professional. I will throw up a name like Piyush Pandey, for example. Or, Prasoon Joshi, as another.

Meanwhile, some effort needs to be put into place to assist specific inbound promotions, best being through IATO, the national body for inbound tour operators, which can assist their members with organizing promotions and road shows, with direct government interventions, in fact as an agency appointed by the government. We should not lose the season of 24/25; in fact, the summer of 2024 was ideal to start such activity, but then with elections on hand, with a model code of conduct in place, this may not be possible.

A major bane of Indian tourism has been the stagnation in Indian tourism products. These were either not being added, or refreshed, we had achieved a position of zero movement. All had come to a standstill. Modi has brought rejuvenation to our products across the country. His latest pronouncement of some 1500 crores, to provide last mile connectivity or ease in travel will go a long way in ensuring a better experience for tourists. Varanasi and Statue of Unity are two sterling examples. In fact, the re-birth of Ayodhya will create a new centre of tourism attraction; it has brought focus on religious tourism which had gone ignored or overlooked by the industry for decades, as not to their 'taste'; it spells a new awakening for us to look at.

But back to Modi's ten years in government and its trysts with tourism? Many definite pluses, without any specific minuses, as far as I can tell. There does not appear to be any going back on this impetus. It is only going forward in one way: up North, upwards, with a promising future. □

(These above remarks are without any political bias, as facts that we can all understand and see. Modi's politics and the national discourse on elections is not within the purview of this magazine).

IPL Season '24 Gets a Rousing Start with Bollywood Stars Rocking!



We capture some high moments in a photo-essay.

An exclusive report by
DI CONVERSATIONS

It was a high voltage inaugural. Ushering in the almost two-month long cricket festival. IPL's 17th edition kicked off with the expected fanfare and provided entertainment that got the audience hooked up; possibly, during the event, cricket itself may have got forgotten. Iconic and the most boisterous and equally loved Bollywood stars and music artistes joined hundreds of performers to launch this season. The scene was Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium, ahead of the opening game between CSK and RCB.

Bringing in Bollywood star power with an energetic and electrifying performance were Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff, giving fans a glimpse into their upcoming movie *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*. Akshay also enthralled audiences with popular renditions of his songs from movies like 'Bhool Bullaiya' and 'Desi Boyz'.

AR Rahman, the Grammy Award-winning music composer, popularly referred to as the 'Mozart of Madras', sang his signature songs such as 'Maa Tujhe Salaam'.

Popular Bollywood singers Sonu Nigam and Mohit Chauhan also joined the line-up of performers with their classics. Sonu Nigam also sang the national anthem.

An enormous replica of the Indian Premier League trophy was also an interesting eye-catching highlight, right in the middle of the public gaze.

Typical and representative of the fireworks that are to follow on the cricket ground, was this opening carnival, a much-broadcasted extravaganza that left the audiences enthralled. **DI**





IPL So Far!

by ASHWIN ZUTSHI

It's that time of the year again when cricket enthusiasts around the globe, not just in India, eagerly anticipate tuning in to cricket's most extravagant carnival - the Indian Premier League. This spectacular event brings together the brightest stars of cricket, both from India and overseas, converging on the grandest stage where rivals become teammates and teammates become rivals in electrifying matches amid the deafening roar of enthusiastic crowds. The IPL is synonymous with thrilling action-packed encounters, where fans are treated to a spectacle of their favourite players assuming different roles and representing various franchises. It is a platform where established stars showcase their skills alongside emerging talents from domestic circuits, making it a breeding ground for future cricketing sensations. Over the years, the IPL has witnessed the rise of Indian cricketing stalwarts like Jasprit Bumrah and the resurgence of international icons such as Shane Watson. These success stories serve as a testament to the league's ability to unearth and nurture talent, providing a platform for players to shine on the global stage. As we eagerly go through the upcoming season, cricket enthusiasts worldwide remain poised to act as scouts, keeping a keen eye on promising talents who could potentially make a significant impact. While the pool of talent is vast and diverse, we have identified a few names that stand out as potential game-changers this season. Whether they create a buzz for the right reasons or otherwise remains to be seen, but one thing is for certain - the IPL never fails to deliver excitement and drama, leaving fans on the edge of their seats.





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Once the season has started, there is no saying who will come up next? Every day brings a new name up on the scoreboard. And, that is the beauty of IPL!

This year, while quite a few new comers have risen, we bring just two names, for different reasons, to see what they have accomplished so far, and what can be expected of them as the season progresses. **DI**





Mayank Yadav

In the contemporary cricket landscape, particularly in its shorter formats, batters tend to dominate the spotlight. Yet, the emergence of an electrifying bowler has captivated the audience's attention this season. The spotlight has shone on the debut of Mayank Yadav, a lightning-fast bowler hailing from Delhi, who was acquired by Lucknow for his base price of 20L. Mayank's journey began when he caught the eye of Lucknow's assistant coach during a practice session for a Vijay Hazare Trophy game in 2021. Impressed, the assistant coach brought him to the attention of Gautam Gambhir, who was then serving as the franchise's director. Gambhir wasted no time in securing Mayank for the team.

Unfortunately, injuries sidelined Mayank, preventing him from making his IPL debut last season and participating in the Ranji Trophy. However, he has made a triumphant return, showcasing his fiery pace by registering the fastest IPL delivery at 155.8kph during his debut match against Punjab. His stellar performance, which included claiming three crucial wickets, earned him the title of Player of the Match. Mayank continued to dazzle in his second game against Bangalore, where he surpassed his own record by bowling at an astonishing 156.7kph. His consistent delivery speeds of over 150kph have not gone unnoticed, stirring whispers of fast-tracking him into the Indian team.

Praise from cricketing legends such as Brett Lee and Dale Steyn further underscores Mayank's potential. The question now lingers: could Mayank Yadav be the elusive fast bowler that India has long sought?


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Riyan Parag

Among the roster of cricketers who have borne the brunt of relentless criticism since their debut, few have weathered the storm as consistently as Rajasthan's Riyan Parag. From enduring a barrage of critiques for his string of lacklustre performances to facing scrutiny over his demeanour and public remarks, Parag has been a perennial target of trolls. Since his IPL debut in 2019, only Rahul Tewatia has surpassed Parag in appearances, clocking in at 55 games in the tournament among uncapped Indian players. However, the 'uncapped' label may soon be a thing of the past, according to Rajasthan's head coach, Kumara Sangakkara.

Parag's narrative took a notable turn with his standout performances in domestic cricket. He emerged as the highest run-scorer and six-hitter in the 50-over Deodhar Trophy last year, amassing two centuries and nearly another in just five innings. His explosive batting continued in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20s, where he amassed 510 runs at a blistering strike rate of 182.79, including a remarkable streak of seven consecutive fifty-plus scores. Recognizing his potential, the BCCI's National Cricket Academy extended an invitation to Parag, including him in a select pool of targeted players.

Recent developments suggest a newfound maturity in Parag's approach, particularly in his adjusted role at number four this season for Rajasthan. He has demonstrated a patient demeanour, meticulously setting up his innings before unleashing havoc in his last three outings. Notably, his aggregate score in his first two innings eclipsed his entire tally from IPL 2023, underscoring a resurgence in form. Moreover, he now finds himself in close proximity to Virat Kohli, the current Orange Cap holder. Could this signify a genuine fresh start for Riyan Parag?

There are a few others on the rising star brigade. The next few weeks are sure to unfold yet more stars. Watch for more action on the small screen, there is much action ahead. 

He has demonstrated a patient demeanour, meticulously setting up his innings before unleashing havoc in his last three outings.



IPL: Players to Watch out for

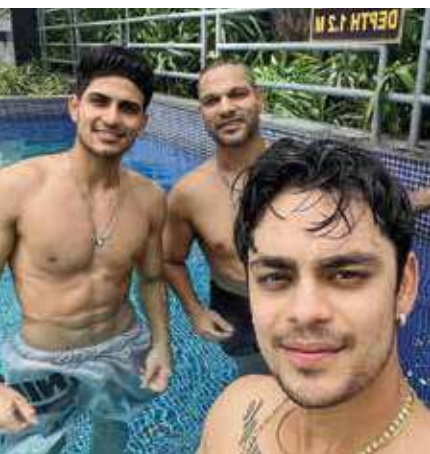


by ASHWIN ZUTSHI

Shubman Gill

India has long celebrated Shubman Gill's exceptional batting prowess, marked by his flawless technique, confidence, maturity, and insatiable hunger for runs across various formats. However, the upcoming IPL season promises to unveil a new facet of Gill's talent as he steps into the role of captaincy for the Gujarat franchise, following a contentious trade that saw their former captain, Hardik Pandya, move to Mumbai.

Gill, now 24, embarked on his IPL journey with the Kolkata Knight Riders in 2018, only to be released ahead of the 2022 auction. Subsequently, he was scooped up by Gujarat for INR 7 crore, alongside his former captain, Hardik Pandya. In the IPL 2022 season, Gill amassed 483 runs in 16 matches, playing a pivotal role in Gujarat's title triumph in their inaugural campaign. However, it was the subsequent year that witnessed Gill's true coming-of-age story, as he emerged as the team's top run-scorer with a staggering 890 runs in 17 innings. Notably, his stellar performance included three centuries, one of which surpassed Virender Sehwag's record for the highest score in an IPL playoff (129), contributing significantly to Gujarat's achievement of posting the highest total ever in an IPL playoff (233), against Mumbai. Despite their runner-up finish to Chennai Super Kings in the final, Gill's outstanding form earned him the IPL's coveted orange cap. Gill's remarkable feat inducted him into the elite company of Virat Kohli and Jos Buttler, who are the only other two players with more than two centuries in a single IPL. Gill's tally of 890 runs places him second on the list of highest season aggregates in IPL history, trailing only Kohli (973 in 2016) and Buttler (863 in 2022).



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Amassing over 700 runs, including two double centuries, in the recently concluded England-India Test series, he has rightfully earned the prestigious ICC Player of the Month award. Yashasvi Jaiswal's breathtaking display has captivated fans worldwide.

Gill's consistent accumulation of runs has drawn comparisons to Virat Kohli, often earning him praise as the next run-machine in Indian cricket. However, like Kohli, Gill is not immune to criticism, particularly during lean patches such as his recent struggles in the Test series against South Africa and England. Nevertheless, displaying the resilience and work ethic for which he is renowned, Gill addressed his shortcomings and responded emphatically, concluding the series against England with 342 runs at an impressive average of 48.85, the second-highest tally on either side. Gujarat Team Director Vikram Solanki believes that Gill has matured sufficiently to assume leadership responsibilities from the seasoned Pandya. With his penchant for dominating the big stage, Gill is poised to captivate audiences once again with his stellar performances in the upcoming IPL season.

Yashasvi Jaiswal

India's burgeoning cricket talent, Yashasvi Jaiswal, has been setting the cricket world alight with his remarkable performances in the recent Tests with England. Amassing over 700 runs, including two double centuries, in the recently concluded England-India Test series, he has rightfully earned the prestigious ICC Player of the Month award. Jaiswal's breathtaking display has captivated fans worldwide, and anticipation is high as he gears up to represent the Rajasthan franchise in the upcoming IPL. With a record-breaking spree underway, all eyes are poised to witness the fireworks expected from this dynamic Indian opener, who now holds the record for the most sixes (26) in a Test series.

Sameer Rizvi

Sameer Rizvi, the explosive talent from Meerut, has been making waves in the cricketing arena. Following his blistering century in the UP20 League, Rizvi emerged as the highest run-scorer for UP in the 23-24 Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy. His prowess did not go unnoticed, as the champion squad CSK secured him with a whopping bid of 8.40Cr, a testament to his potential. Riding on a wave of form, Rizvi recently notched a triple century against Saurashtra in



the ongoing U23 CK Nayudu Trophy, hinting at a promising future with CSK. It appears that CSK has unearthed yet another hidden gem in Rizvi, bolstering their lineup with his aggressive batting style.

Rishab Pant

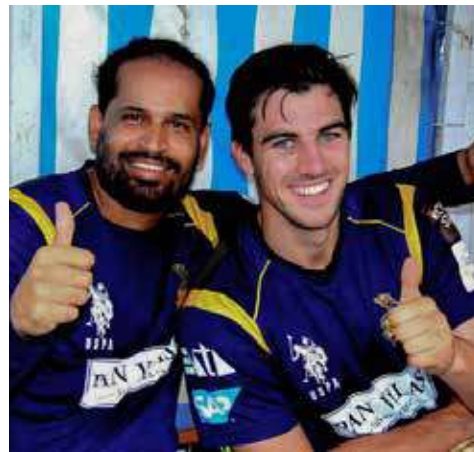
Following a harrowing accident in December 2022, India's star wicketkeeper-batsman, Rishab Pant, embarked on a journey of extensive rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy. After 14 months of arduous recovery, Pant has finally been declared fit to grace the field once again in the upcoming IPL. Fans eagerly anticipate Pant's return, especially as he reassumes his captaincy duties with the Delhi Capitals, a position that seemed difficult to fill during his absence. His comeback fills a crucial void in the team, and expectations are high for his leadership and explosive batting prowess to reignite the Capitals' campaign.



In a bid to turn their fortunes around, Hyderabad made a bold move in the IPL auction, breaking records with an unprecedented bid of 20.5Cr for Australian cricket stalwart Pat Cummins.

Pat Cummins

The Hyderabad camp has endured internal upheaval since the contentious removal of their former captain, David Warner, midway through the 2021 IPL season. Following a period of poor form, Warner found himself sidelined by the team management, leading to a strained relationship with the franchise he had led to victory in 2016, and accumulated over 4000 runs in eight seasons. Finally finding success a few weeks later at the T20 World Cup, where he earned the title of player of the series, Warner's departure left a palpable emotional impact on the team dynamics as he gave the following statement - "When you are dropped from the team you have loved the most for years without any real fault of yours and stripped of captaincy without being given a reason, it hurts.". Hyderabad's fortunes have plummeted since Warner's departure, marked by a revolving door of coaches and captains, and a lack of stability within the squad. The 2023 season saw them struggling to find a settled unit, evidenced by their fielding of 23 players - the joint-most for any team - with seven changes in opening combinations, reflecting a lack of cohesion at the top. In a bid to turn their fortunes around, Hyderabad made a bold move in the IPL auction, breaking records with an unprecedented bid of 20.5Cr for Australian cricket stalwart Pat Cummins. This record-breaking bid was soon eclipsed by Kolkata, who secured Cummins' teammate Mitchell Starc for 24.75Cr. Cummins, who had previously played for Kolkata between 2020-2022 before taking a break in the subsequent season to manage his international workload, now finds himself tasked with leading Hyderabad's resurgence. Assuming leadership duties from Aidan Markram, who has clinched consecutive titles in Cricket South Africa's T20 league - SA20, presents a formidable challenge for Cummins. Despite lacking previous experience as captain in top-flight T20 cricket, Cummins' successful stint as captain of Australia, which saw triumphs in the World Test Championship and the 2023 ODI World Cup, positions him as a seasoned leader with a wealth of experience and skill. Hyderabad's foreign contingent appears formi-



dable with a lineup boasting of World Cup hero Travis Head, T20 maestro Heinrich Klaasen and Australia's match-winner Cummins himself. With only four overseas spots available, It'll be interesting to see if ex-captain Markram even finds a place in the XI this time around. Fans are hopeful that their third captain in three seasons, Cummins can guide the team to IPL glory once again, reminiscent of their triumph in 2016.

Hardik Pandya

Undoubtedly, one of the most polarizing figures to watch in the upcoming season is Indian all-rounder Hardik Pandya, whose name has been embroiled in controversy for a myriad of reasons. It all began with a seismic shift when Mumbai Indians unexpectedly released Pandya during the 2022 mega auctions. Subsequently, he was snatched up by the Gujarat Titans, where he not only assumed the role of captain but also led the team to victory in their debut season, followed by a runner-up finish the next year. However, the cricketing world was rocked by the sensational transfer of Pandya from GT back to his former franchise, MI, amidst swirling rumors of an astronomical transfer fee, purportedly close to 100Cr. Reports suggest that Pandya could have pocketed up to 50% of this hefty sum in addition to his already substantial annual salary of 15Cr. This unexpected move sent shockwaves through both franchises' fan bases, especially considering Pandya's return to the team where he began his career, displacing the five-time title-winning captain and Indian cricket stalwart, Rohit Sharma. The decision also raised eyebrows regarding the potential leadership transition, with star bowler Jasprit Bumrah waiting in the wings for his turn at the helm. Bumrah's cryptic social media post following Pandya's captaincy announcement only added fuel to the speculation.

Compounding matters, Pandya has been sidelined with an ankle injury for nearly a year, causing him to miss all national team fixtures, including the ODI World Cup last year. Despite

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With his adeptness at changing gears in his batting and his capacity to absorb pressure effectively showcased, Jurel has firmly established himself as a formidable presence across formats. Rajasthan can undoubtedly count on him.

being declared fit, Pandya received special dispensation from the BCCI to bypass participation in the domestic Ranji Trophy, a privilege not extended to fellow players Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan, who were mandated to represent their respective states or face consequences. The BCCI cited Pandya's injury history as the rationale behind this exemption, further stoking controversy and debate surrounding the talented but embattled cricketer.

Dhruv Jurel

Dhruv Jurel made a promising debut in the IPL last year for Rajasthan, demonstrating his prowess through powerful hitting and remarkable composure. Followed by impressive performances for India A, he was fast tracked into the national Indian Test squad during the recent India-England series, primarily due to a string of injuries to senior players. In a memorable display of skill and temperament, Jurel rose to the occasion, playing a pivotal role in rescuing India from a precarious position following a collapse of the top order in the fourth test. Despite narrowly missing out on his maiden century by a mere 10 runs, he clinched the player of the match award as India won the game. With his adeptness at changing gears in his batting and his capacity to absorb pressure effectively showcased, Jurel has firmly established himself as a formidable presence across formats. Rajasthan can undoubtedly count on him as another potential match-winner in their lineup, further bolstering their prospects in the upcoming IPL season.



Suyash Sharma

Bought at a modest base price of 20 Lakhs, Suyash emerged as one of Kolkata's most valuable discoveries in the previous season of the IPL. In a stellar debut, the mystery leg-spinner claimed an impressive tally of 10 wickets in just 8 games, showcasing his exceptional talent on the grand stage. Notably, he etched his name in the record books by securing the sixth-best figures by an Indian player on their IPL debut and the second-best figures by a spinner. Such was the impact of his performance that teammates hailed him as a potential future star for the Indian cricket team.



Remarkably, Suyash stands out as one of the few players to make his IPL debut without prior experience in List-A, First-Class, or T20 cricket. Despite his relative youth at 20 years old, he has already demonstrated remarkable prowess and maturity on the field. Further cementing his credentials, Suyash recently made a resounding debut for Delhi in the Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy, delivering a career-best T20 bowling performance with figures of 5/13 from his allotted four overs and eventually picking up 18 wickets in seven matches to finish as the joint-second highest wicket taker in the tournament. Given Kolkata's storied history of nurturing exceptional spin bowlers, including the likes of Sunil Narine, the emergence of Suyash presents a tantalizing prospect for the franchise. With Varun Chakravarty's inconsistent form in recent times, Kolkata will likely turn to Suyash as the X-factor in their bowling arsenal, aiming to bolster their spin department and regain their dominance in the upcoming IPL season.

MS Dhoni

Following his leadership in guiding the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to a record-equalling fifth title last year, the venerable MS Dhoni shared a poignant sentiment post the final match, stating, "The easy thing would be to walk away from here, the harder thing would be to work hard for 9 months and try to play another IPL." In his commitment to return for another season, Dhoni views it as a gift to his fervent fanbase. Such is the adulation and mystique surrounding India's cricketing icon - MS Dhoni, renowned for extracting the best performances from both seasoned veterans and emerging talents. Consequently, he is hailed as the best IPL captain ever and a titan of the sport. At 42 years old, anticipation abounds as he prepares to lead the defending champions for what would be a record 15th season in the IPL. Yet, amidst the excitement, speculation looms: will this mark his final campaign? The perennial question of Dhoni's IPL retirement invariably seizes the spotlight each new season, as he continues to confound expectations by returning to the cricketing arena. While he may not face an abundance of deliveries, often emerging at the tail end of the batting order, MS Dhoni's appearances are eagerly anticipated by fans eager to witness his trademark magic unfold. Last season, amidst this reduced playing time, Dhoni orchestrated moments of brilliance that reverberated through the stands of their home ground, Chepauk. His entrance, accompanied by a popular film anthem, ignited a fervour among the crowd, reaching a crescendo when he dispatched England's fast bowler Mark Wood for consecutive sixes. It's doubtful that the tournament has witnessed a louder ovation for any player in its history. Despite grappling with a persistent knee injury throughout the season, Dhoni showcased his resilience, culminating in a striking performance with a formidable strike rate of 182.45 across 12 innings, including 10 towering sixes. This tenacity and flair for the dramatic not only delighted his legion of supporters but also left them yearning for more. As the new season beckons, fans eagerly anticipate the possibility of witnessing Dhoni recreate his enchanting displays once again. **DI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashwin Zutshi is a young avid writer and enthusiast on cricket, gadgets and auto world. He has done podcasts, curated extensive online content and writes occasionally.



India's super-rich vegetarians want more than paneer. So, high-end chefs now offer exotic mushrooms, creamy cheeses, hard- to-find veggies and more. Bless the bounty.

by VIR SANGHVI

India may have the world's highest proportion of vegetarians as a percentage of the population. And though all Indian vegetarians are not economically better off than Indian non-vegetarians, a remarkably high proportion of rich people in India are vegetarians. I reckon that the majority of Indian multi-millionaires and billionaires are vegetarians.

And yet, when we talk about restaurant food in India, very few fresh vegetables are involved. Paneer is a favourite. Gobi goes on kebab skewers. The cheapest vegetables in the market go into a Navratan korma.

But what about restaurants that serve other cuisines? How do they cope? Sometimes, they take the same route as north Indian restaurants: instead of chicken Manchurian, they make gobi Manchurian at Chinese restaurants. Or they take the Navratan korma approach. The cheapest vegetables are mashed up, deep fried, put in a thick gravy and served as Chinese food.

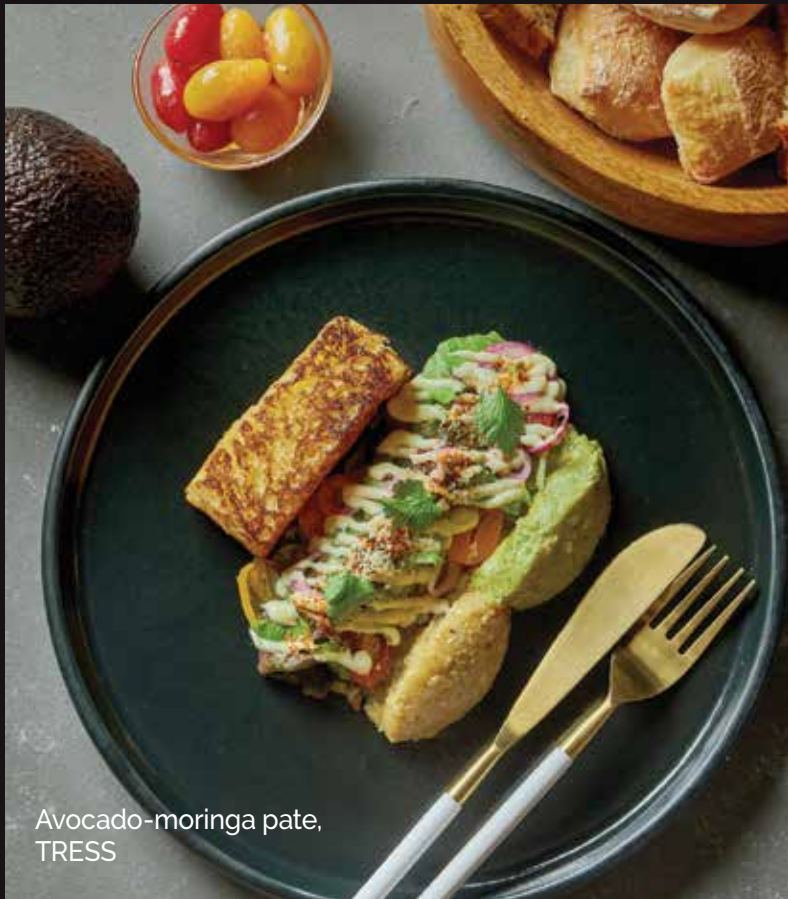
Going High-end Vegetarian with Vir Sanghvi



But as India gets richer, wealthy vegetarians do not want to feel like second-class diners eating sanitised versions of non-vegetarian dishes. They want an experience that rises above the meals offered to non-vegetarians or at the very least, one that is in the same league.

So, how can restaurants that serve European food cope? Usually, they go the so-called Italian route. Something like 95% of all Italian restaurants in India are pizzerias, with a basic pasta menu tagged on. But for others who have higher culinary aspirations, it can be more difficult.

Chefs have now identified certain ingredients that vegetarians will nearly always like. Cheese is one example. The trick is to avoid any cheese with character. Blue or smelly cheeses are out. Mild parmesigiano, cheddar and gruyère work as flavours or salad ingredients, as does mozzarella.



Avocado-moringa pate,
TRESS



Vegetarians have been suspicious of mushrooms. And even now, says Jatin Mallick, the chef-partner at Delhi's highly rated Tres, there is resistance to mushrooms from old-style vegetarians. But there is a new generation that likes, say, Portobello mushrooms.

But a new favourite has emerged over the last few years: Burrata. This is not a traditional cheese and was invented in the 1920s as a by-product of mozzarella-making. Now, it is a globally popular fresh cheese and has a creamy taste that Indians love and has no fermented cheese flavour.

It is not a cheese with a long shelf-life, so it has to be fresh. Fortunately, cheese makers all over India have worked out that there is more money in burrata than in, say, a ripe Camembert, so it is easily available and has become the favourite cheese for people who don't really like cheese.

A second vegetarian favourite is asparagus. But we are more in love with the idea of asparagus than with asparagus itself. Most Indian asparagus is usually too fibrous or too under-flavoured. But it is easy to import Thai or Chinese asparagus (via Thailand). This kind of asparagus is thin and best used in Oriental cuisines, where the sauces give it a flavour boost, and it remains extremely popular in the Indian market.

Fresh truffles (left) are expensive, but there is a growing market for them. It is easy to import Thai or Chinese asparagus (right) via Thailand. It is thin and best used in oriental cuisines where the sauces give it a flavour boost.





Varun Tuli

Chefs have now identified certain ingredients that vegetarians will nearly always like. Cheese is one example. The trick is to avoid any cheese with character. Blue or smelly cheeses are out.





In Europe, asparagus is a seasonal vegetable prized for its flavour. In England, the asparagus season lasts for only a few weeks (around May-June) and chefs go crazy finding new ways to make the most of the highly flavoured stalks. But the asparagus we eat outside of Europe may be Peruvian. Peru is now the second-largest asparagus grower (China is number one). Its production is not seasonal and it costs less than half of seasonal European asparagus. Peruvian asparagus can be thick, though it lacks the same deep flavour.

Put thick stalks of Peruvian asparagus on an Indian menu and vegetarians will head directly for it.

Traditionally, vegetarians have been suspicious of mushrooms. And even now, says Jatin Mallick, the chef-partner at Delhi's highly rated Tres, there is resistance to mushrooms from old-style vegetarians. But there is a new generation that likes, say, Portobello mushrooms. Mallick thinks that he will soon be able to put more on the menu.

Rich vegetarians all love one particular fungus, perhaps because they don't think of it as a mushroom, and that is the truffle.

Long before Aditi Dugar became famous as the owner of Mumbai's celebrated Masque restaurant, she founded Sage & Saffron, a boutique vegetarian catering operation that is a favourite of the rich. Dugar started putting truffles on her catering menus much before they became popular in India. They were a hit right from the start.

But fresh truffles are expensive. Mallick has guests who ask for truffle oil by the side when they order a meat dish and others who want bottled black truffles shaved over their food. Bottled truffles usually have no taste and truffle oil is a nasty synthetic petroleum-derived product that has never been near a real truffle and doesn't even taste of truffle. But its popularity grows in India by the day — not just with vegetarians but with non-vegetarians too.

Both Mallick and Dugar say that they have nothing against truffle oil ("It's just a flavoured oil," says Dugar) or its fans but of course, they much prefer real truffle.

And then there is the avocado craze, which I wrote about here five years ago. I won't repeat myself except to say that I suspect one reason why rich vegetarians love avocados is because they are buttery and creamy (i.e. they have a high fat content). The same impulse that leads people to like burrata is probably at work here.


Don't rich vegetarians like anything that is purely Indian?

Well, yes, they do. I spoke to Varun Tuli who (along with Ritu Dalmia) rules the upmarket wedding catering market. Varun says that the very rich have moved beyond asparagus and avocado. They want high quality Indian vegetables sourced from the best places. They want



the sweet little peas that grow in Jaipur during a brief season. They want the best rajma, sourced from particular districts. Just to say 'The rajma is from Jammu' is not enough any longer. They want ponk (a sort of millet that is popular with Gujaratis). If it is the season, then there has to be fresh choliya on the menu.

Varun sent me one set of wedding banquet menus (all vegetarian) and I was stunned by the range of dishes on offer. Says Aditi Dugar, "People now want heirloom vegetables and the finest versions of the flavours they grew up with."

So perhaps tastes are changing. And F Scott Fitzgerald was right. The rich are different from us. They have better vegetables. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vir Sanghvi is a senior journalist who has worked extensively with The Hindustan Times. He is a well-respected author and commentator, and a television presenter. He is well known for his contributions on food, both Indian and international. He has worked closely with India's hospitality industry, known as a foodie and guided many a leading chef. The above article first appeared in HT City; reproduced here with consent of the author.

The Evolution of an Indian Kitchen



Sarbjit, revered by peers, and representing Fabinteriors, is dedicated to advancing design with unwavering commitment. His innovative approach leaves a lasting impression on each project, showcased in prestigious hotels and celebrity residences, cementing his legacy as visionary designers.

by SARBJIT

Indian kitchens have woven a narrative of evolution from primitive amenities such as outdoor cooking on the floor with coal and wood-fired “Chulha” (a small clay oven) with the family gathered around to dine, to the contemporary era marked by cutting-edge gas and electrical appliances seamlessly integrated into standing counters within the luxury of air-conditioned interiors, where meals are enjoyed at dining tables.

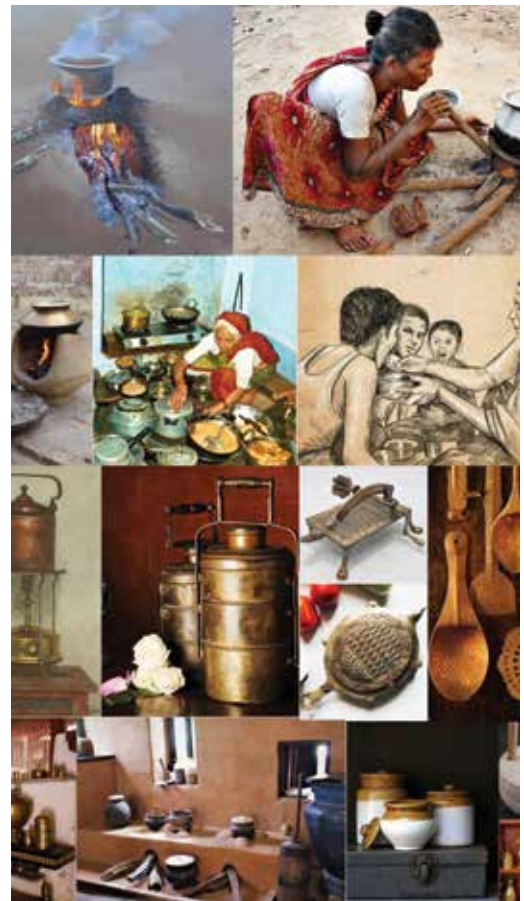
Kitchens in India have undergone a remarkable evolution, adapting to changing lifestyles across different stages. The journey spans from the traditional Clay Chulha to the one in Iron and clay, further to the contemporary era with gas, electrical hobs, and induction plates. Utensils have transformed from clay to materials like copper, aluminum, stainless steel, and cast iron, reflecting advancements in technology and culinary practices.

The spatial dynamics of kitchens have also witnessed significant changes from an Outhouse kitchen to an in-house facility. The transition from a naturally ventilated space to a high-tech indoor exhaust and ventilation system, and from occupying a larger cooking space to a compact work space integrated with cold storage, cooking, washing, and pre-prep appliances including compact and adequate storage spaces.

The cooking counters have witnessed a significant transformation, progressing from stone shelves to diverse materials such as concrete, wood, and laminated particle boards. Further advancements have taken







kitchens beyond traditional choices to incorporate sleek stainless steel and glass counters, complemented by luxurious marble, granite, and quartz countertops. These modern cooking spaces are enhanced with overhead storage and utility cabinets, featuring smooth, seamless, and easily maintainable surfaces.

The design of the kitchen, is comparatively, a more focused area by the lady of the house while planning and designing, which as per the Indian lifestyle has to serve a three time meal a day if not more. Including space for a service pantry/laundry, utility, and adequate storage, with a break out space for staff. The requirements of 'Vastu' is a common preference, for orienting the location of the kitchen in the southeast zone of the house with the cooking station preferably facing the east. In addition, there is an emphasis on incorporating adequate sunlight, natural ventilation, efficient lighting, and mechanical exhaust and ventilation, particularly above the HOB (Stove).

The dimension of the kitchen is planned and designed according to the number of family members and their socializing lifestyle. In the Indian context, the kitchen is generally larger in floor area compared to the Western kitchen due to the preference to prepare fresh food daily compared to depending on the prepacked food. With a changing lifestyle from living as a joint family to nuclear families staying in compact apartments, a self-help open kitchen and dining is a preference with minimal support of a helping hand to attend to the supporting household chores.

In anticipation of future requirements, the focus is shifting towards accommodating individuals in serviced apartments that feature a new generation of micro-efficient kitchenettes. As India experiences rapid economic growth and the younger generation plays a pivotal role in propelling the country forward, their lifestyles are intricately tied to the diverse opportunities and placements available across the nation.

Recognizing this trend, a significant portion of real estate developers have proactively embraced the construction of multistoried micro apartments. This forward-thinking approach anticipates the need for compact living spaces, featuring micro kitchens equipped with essential appliances. These kitchenettes are thoughtfully designed to include indispensable appliances such as induction plates, microwave ovens, sinks, fridges, and, in some instances, washing machines. This adaptation reflects a commitment to providing modern, convenient living solutions that align with the dynamic and fast-paced lifestyles of the emerging generation. Indeed, as we progress through time, the evolution of kitchen design becomes imperative to align with the distinct needs and preferences of the end user. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Established as Fab Interiors in 1976 by Sarbjit Singh in New Delhi, Fab's legacy spans over four decades and has

pioneered the Indian design industry.



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Arjun Sagar Gupta

Priyaanka Berry Idnani in conversation with Arjun Gupta, Founder, The Piano Man.

Arjun Gupta took up a challenge and a bit of a gamble nine years back opening a jazz music bar in New Delhi, which one could argue was not the most popular genre of music in the city. Today, his brand is well known, prospering with three venues across NCR and boasts of being a leading venue for collaborations and performances from prominent names across the music industry.

So, what inspired him and got him to take that leap? Revealing his entrepreneurial

Today, The Piano Man has an impressive choice of venues and both Saket and Gurgaon have a large seating capacity. The challenge of course is also to attract new audiences and diversify the offering as well.

outlook he shares, “because it was not a popular genre of music also means that there’s opportunity. I love jazz. I’ve been performing for over two decades. And I wanted to create a community for jazz lovers. I didn’t know how far we would go. I didn’t know what the scope or opportunity could result in. All I wanted to do was create a beautiful space where we could enjoy some great music. Today, we have people all the way from 12 years old till 80 years coming in on a daily basis. You have people of all ethnicities, all socio-economic classes, all backgrounds. And that’s the beauty of it. You want it to be for everybody. You want music to be accessible to everybody”.

The fact that Delhi was perhaps not well versed in jazz could be looked at both as a good thing and as a bad thing. “It’s a bad thing in the sense that a lot of effort has to be made in creating awareness. But the good thing is that there’s a lot of opportunity to create awareness. We can somewhat dictate how to introduce people to jazz in our spaces”.

Today, The Piano Man has an impressive choice of venues and both Saket and Gurgaon have a large seating capacity. The challenge of course is also to attract new audiences and diversify the offering as well. The basic proposition that The Piano Man began with was mostly jazz every day, with some blues, pop, R&B and soul.

Arjun shares the idea originally was “just come and experience it and you make a subjective decision on whether you like the music or not. We are not here to tell you the music is good or bad. And we are here to say, here is an opportunity to listen to something new and make a subjective decision yourself. I strongly believe that just the availability of exposure for audiences to experience something will automatically start creating an audience for it. Some people will come in and say, okay, maybe this is not for me. But then some people will come in and say, holy cow, what is that? That sounds beautiful. I want more of that”.

At any of his venues, there is unmistakable sense of design and individual character as belonging to The Piano Man. There is the additional sense of grandeur, as you walk in, you definitely hold back and take a minute to soak in the vibe and atmosphere at the two larger venues, in Saket and Gurugram.

Arjun elaborates on how he created an atmosphere that will make the audience appreciate the music a bit more. “From day one, I believe that it has to be holistic, even architecturally. Your visual and the envi-

Paddy Hanna Performance



ronment has to be conducive. A lot of factors come into play starting from architecture, the materials you choose to create the space, in the acoustic properties and the visual properties and the textural properties, the sound system and the presentation of the band. We internally have something called an 'artist first philosophy'. We have a couple of processes in place which essentially boil down to the artist being a priority for the team over the customer. The understanding is that if the artist is happy, then when the artist gets on stage, what they'll create is truly magic. And that energy will bleed to the audience".

In an effort to get the audience to truly hear the music and also show respect for the talent on stage, Arjun also introduced the concept of maintaining silence while the performance was on. However, with time this concept was relaxed to make it more conducive for service and overall revelry. "But being extremely strict about conversation in a place which is not actually a concert hall is also counterintuitive because people are like - hey man, we want to enjoy music our way. And if you're so sort of overbearingly particular about it, it ruins the experience as well. Though in the beginning that overcorrection was necessary. Largely what's happening now is a lot of moderation of conversations and noise happen internally within the audience because the expectation of the bar was set".

Today he still continues the 'silent song', "which is an experiential part of the evening where we shut down the bar, we stop service and we say now at least for one song, let's run like a concert hall and just see what the impact is. And then you'll find most evenings post the silent song, it's a different audience. Then you feel that emotional; you feel the music a lot more".

He also now faces the challenge of staying true to his first love of jazz and also getting in new audiences for his larger venues. "So, with three properties now, we are not focusing only on jazz. Jazz remains our prime focus but for the first time now, we are venturing into pretty much everything. Especially with the new property in Saket, because the capacity is also massive. Like we can accommodate several hundred people in the new place. It is also allowing us to invite artists now with more fame. We've got Sonam Kalra performing this Saturday. We have Advaita performing next Saturday. We also have Parikrama performing in April as well. 'Them Clones', an Indian rock band, was a big victory. We got them back on stage after seven years".

Arjun himself, deeply passionate about music, is also very much involved in nurturing and scouting for new talent. He runs a jam session. "I've been doing this for nine years now. From day one. Every Sunday, which is where a lot of young musicians want to get into jazz, come and I run the jam session personally. So, I'll work with them till wherever I can, I'll guide them. And after that these kids actually take



Tom Kha Soup



off! They are pretty amazing. Some of these kids are absolutely phenomenal. So that's one vertical of it. And then we also have artists reaching out to us; oftentimes, we say - hey, you're not ready for stage yet. And many of them will come back to us and say, you know, would you tell us why. And then we open up a dialogue saying I am not interacting with you as a venue owner - I am interacting with you as a professional musician, and here is my feedback on what you can work on.

To know more on upcoming events and to book your tickets log on to www.thepianoman.in. So, while you enjoy your music there is plenty of food and drinks on the menu to keep the taste buds happy as well! **DI**



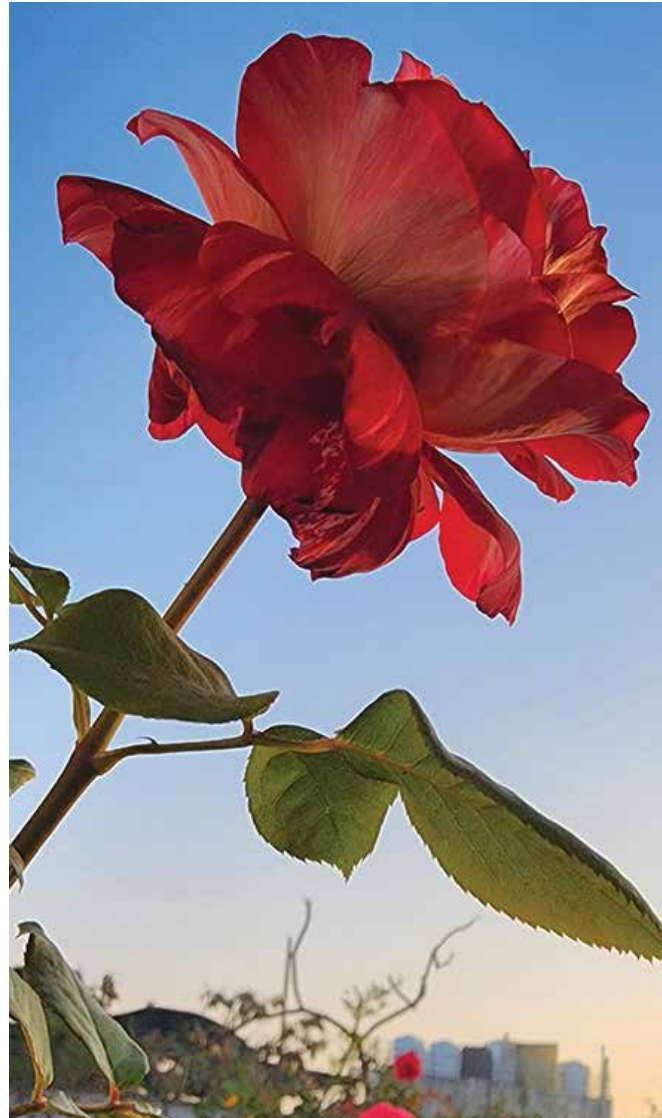
The Camera, My Second Love

Says Artist Sanjay Bhattacharyya



“In the year, 1985, I bought my first camera, an Asahi Pentax. Since I didn't have any idea regarding cameras, my friend Swapan Biswas, who was a professor in College of Art, Delhi, had gone along with me to buy it from Chandni Chowk. Swapan taught me the basic A,B,Cs of a camera. Initially I was clicking only family photographs and landscapes. AT that point of time I didn't know the potential of a camera. For many years, I was carrying my camera with me, without a mentionable shot. In 2006, I stopped the sale of a fake painting in a hotel, and thereafter, many art connoisseurs and big shots of Delhi, disturbed me by trying to prove me wrong. After that, I left Delhi along with my camera, and travelled from Jaisalmer to Cherrapunji. I was clicking and moving across many places, and clicked 4000 rolls. I became so enthusiastic that my camera died. When I came back to Delhi, another photographer friend wanted to see the things I had clicked. He scanned some of the negatives and saw those images on the computer. Initially he couldn't find any good image. The fourth or fifth roll onwards, he felt some of the images to be of some merit. He was surprised to see my efficiency and said, “Wherefrom you learnt the basics of a camera so well?”. I had no answer for that. Later, I developed a different character to my image-making through distorted reflections and shadows. I was bound to make a switch to mobile camera, due to my subjects not yielding to a conventional camera. Basically, I'm a painter, and it gives me much pleasure when certain top photographers of India appreciate and approve of my work, encouraging me. Now photography has become my second love, and I'm sure this love affair shall continue till the end of my journey.☹☹





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sanjay Bhattacharya is an eminent painter and photographer. His works can be seen in important public and private collections in India and overseas.

by DEVENDRA SINGH

In the tranquil embrace of the saal forest, where whispering leaves danced with the gentle breeze, two magnificent tigers, proud and regal, emerged from the lush greenery onto the open grassland, painting the serene morning with their majestic presence. As they prowled gracefully, their golden coats shimmered in the morning light, one couldn't help but marvel at the culmination of millions of years of evolution, finely honed by the relentless forces of mother nature. In their powerful strides and piercing gazes, lay the legacy of a formidable gene pool, shaped by the trials and triumphs of countless ancestors. As we stood in awe, witnessing this fleeting glimpse into the wild, we were reminded of the awe-inspiring beauty and resilience of the natural world. One couldn't help but feel humbled by the sheer magnificence of life's intricate tapestry, woven over millennia by.

Sighted at Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, in March 2024. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devendra Singh is a Photographer and Environmentalist. He was a civil servant by profession and a nature lover by birth having grown up

in lush green lands of Delhi. He now pursues photography as a full-time passion.

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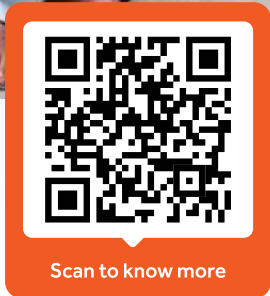
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