

DOUBLE JEOPARDY
COVID REINFECTION

JAYALALITHAA'S LEGACY
THE BATTLE FOR POES GARDEN

A PROXY WAR
GOVERNORS VS CMs

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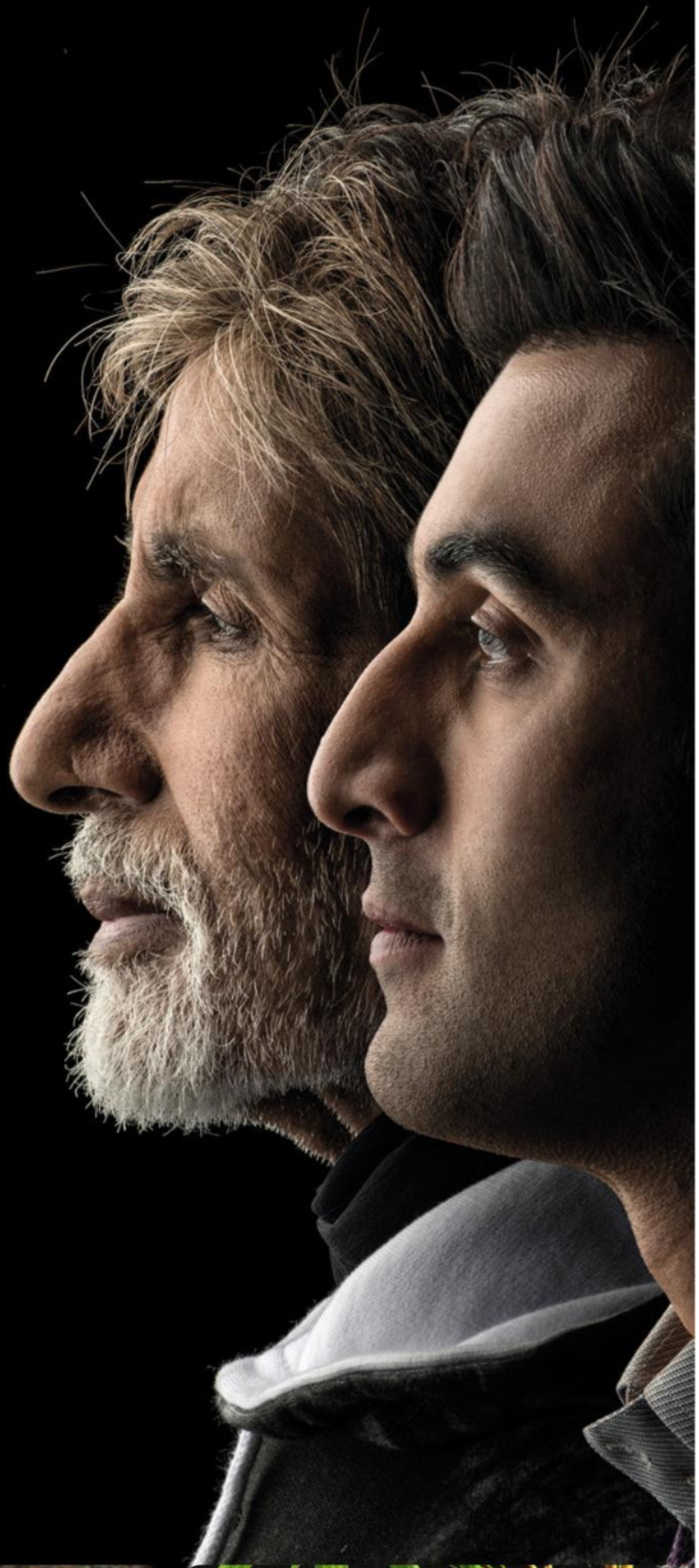
ECONOMY

HOPE & DESPAIR

**SIX MONTHS INTO THE LOCKDOWN, EVEN AS LARGE SWATHES
OF THE ECONOMY STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL, SOME SECTORS
ARE UPBEAT. HERE IS WHY AND WHAT LIES AHEAD**

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Exactly six months ago, India imposed one of the world's harshest lockdowns to arrest the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The measure did temporarily stall the growth of the novel coronavirus but triggered an economic crisis that has spread as rapidly as the virus itself. Two business quarters later, we are not just the second-worst-affected country in the world with 5.6 million cases and 90,000 deaths but also the worst hit among the G20 economies. The International Monetary Fund has estimated that India's growth for the entire fiscal year will be -4.5 per cent. 2020 is clearly annus horribilis, a year unlike any we've seen in recent history, with its impact being felt across sectors. Three significant drivers of growth—domestic consumption, government expenditure and private investment—have taken a beating.

In order to understand the magnitude of the problem and the state of the economy, we decided to investigate all its major sectors. Our mission was to find out whether each of these sectors perhaps required specific measures. We took a dipstick survey of the economy to find out how badly various sectors have been hit by this unprecedented economic emergency. Our cover story, 'Hope and Despair', put together by Executive Editor M.G. Arun, examines 17 sectors that keep the wheels of the economy going: manufacturing, e-commerce, real estate, automotive, retail, fast-moving consumer goods, education, aviation, toys, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, transportation & logistics, gems & jewellery, footwear, textiles & apparel, travel & tourism and entertainment. Our correspondents across the country profiled and analysed each of these sectors to determine where they stood on our stress meter: from severe to moderate to no stress.

They discovered that the services sector, which employs 31 per cent of the country's workforce and contributes 55 per cent to the Gross Value Added, is in the doldrums. Businesses like hospitality and aviation, which rely on business travellers and tourists flying around the country and staying in hotels, were hit the hardest. The revenue of Indian domestic airlines reduced from Rs 25,517 crore in April-June 2019 to Rs 3,651 crore in April-June 2020. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) estimates that the hotel industry will suffer a revenue loss of Rs 1.4 lakh crore because of the lack of events, room reservations and restricted travel.

Others, like the Rs 6.3 lakh crore gems & jewellery business, which employs 4.8 million people and contributes 3.1 per cent to the GDP, are reporting half their usual turnover because of the paralysis in the retail sector and the decline in consumption. Behind these stories is a picture of an economy in deep distress, scarred by job losses, salary cuts and lost livelihoods.

The Rs 8.8 lakh crore real estate sector, which constitutes 4.33 per cent of the GDP, and was battling high inventory and low demand well before Covid-19, has seen a 49 per cent dip in sales in the first half of this year over the preceding six months in the country's top seven cities. This has placed the sector under severe stress. The Rs 8.7 lakh crore automobile sector witnessed a never-before-seen event this April: a month of zero sales. Industry associations predict a de-growth of 25-40 per cent. However, there is hope that pent-up demand and the preference for private over public transport will see a quick revival in a sector that employs 19.1 million people and contributes 4.28 per cent to the GDP.

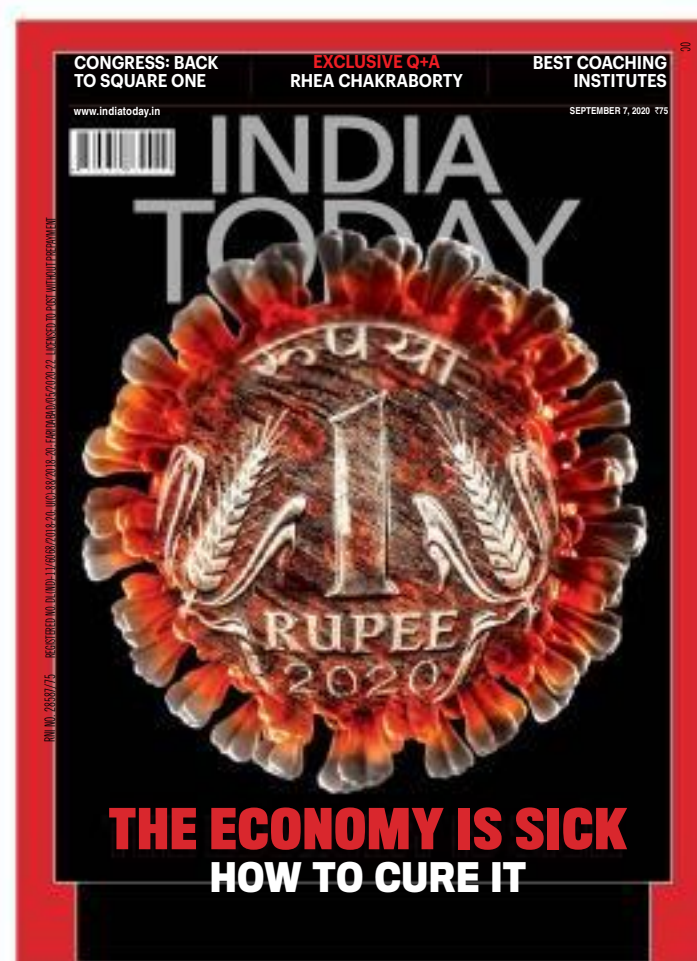
In this prevailing scenario of gloom, a few bright spots have appeared. These are sectors that have thrived during the lockdown and the social distancing rules of the pandemic. E-learning, for instance, blossomed because educational institutions were shut. The pandemic has transformed India into

the second-largest market for e-learning after the U.S. The sector is expected to cross Rs 14,479 crore in revenue by 2021, with around 9.5 million users. E-commerce boomed because people were afraid to go out and shop. It is now poised to grow more than three times to reach Rs 7.4 lakh crore in the next four years. The healthcare market is predicted to increase three-fold to Rs 8.6 lakh crore by 2022.

But these rays of hope are few and far between. A pall of uncertainty hangs over the economy as it sporadically limps back to normalcy. In a reflection of how much opinions vary, economists and businessmen are predicting a whole alphabet soup of recovery models: V for a sharp recovery, L denoting prolonged

stagnation, U signifying gradual recovery, W indicating a roller coaster recovery and K a recovery in which some sectors will rise while others will fall. Let me add one of my own: Z. My prediction is that the economy will zig-zag as corona infections rise and partial lockdowns are enforced until the spread of the virus is controlled. The fact that government policies seem to be formulated in a piecemeal fashion means there will be no consistency in the growth pattern. Eventually, it will rise rapidly.

What we need is a V-shaped recovery. The severe damage corona has inflicted on the economy means that we have a tremendous amount of catching up to do. What shape the recovery will take will depend a lot on government policies, the pace and nature of reform and the level of government intervention.



Our Sept. 7, 2020 cover

(Aroon Purie)

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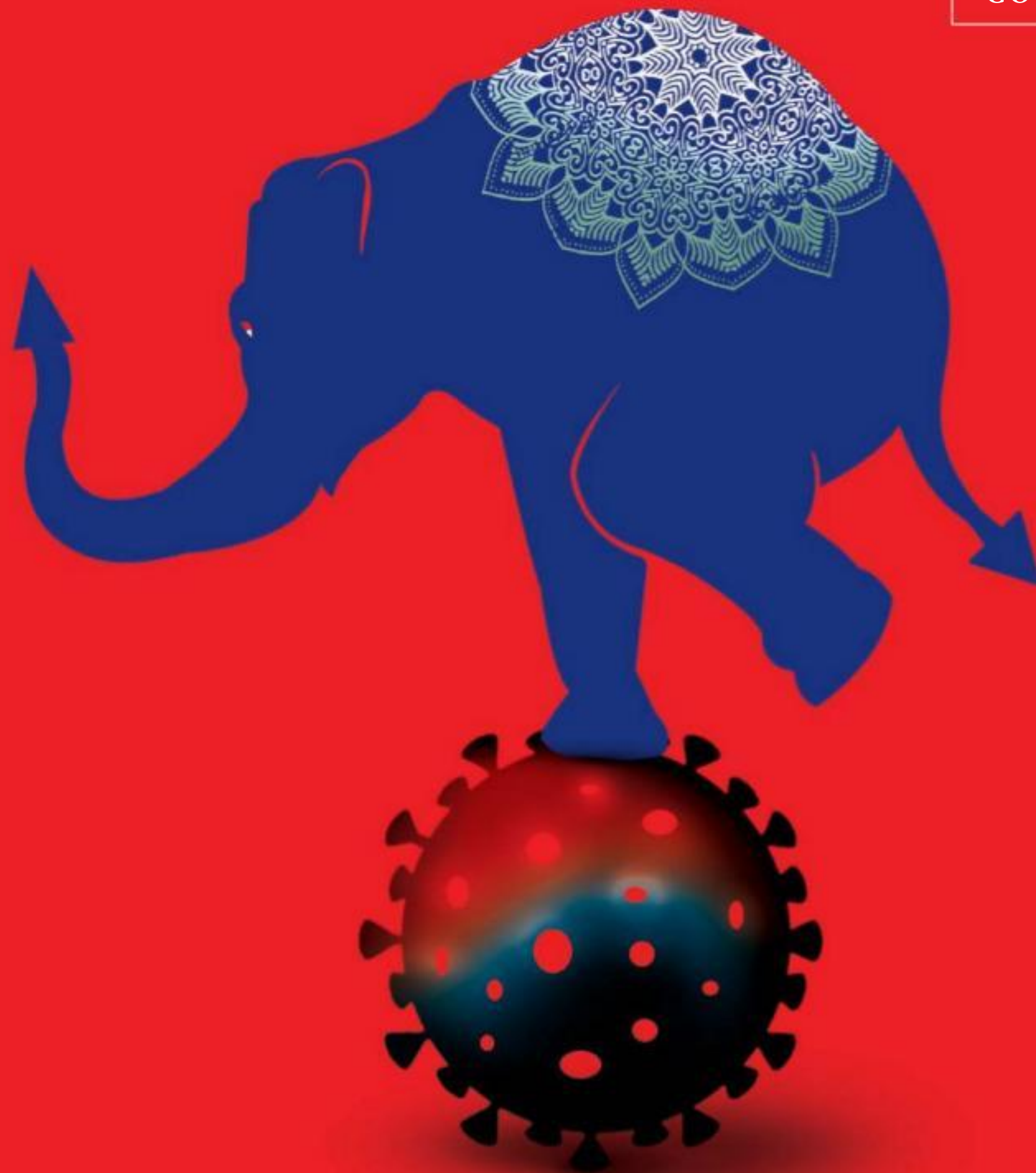
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< **'SAVE DEMOCRACY'**
Opposition MPs protest
passage of farm bills, Sept. 23

DEMOCRACY

Short-circuiting Parliament

By Kaushik Deka

On September 20, Parliament passed two contentious farm bills—Farmers' Produce Trade & Commerce (Promotion & Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers' (Empowerment & Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance & Farm Services Bill. The Rajya Sabha cleared both by voice vote; the Lok Sabha had passed them three days earlier. While farmers and Opposition parties protested the 'anti-farmer' provisions in the bills, the unseemly haste on display in rushing the bills through Parliament, without further reference, discussion or debate, have raised unsettling questions on this government's commitment to upholding parliamentary democracy.

The business advisory committee of the Rajya Sabha had set aside four hours to debate and pass the bills. Besides seven

amendments to the bills, including one to send them to a select committee, the opposition leaders had also moved two statutory resolutions to get the bills disapproved. The debate continued beyond 1 pm, when the House was scheduled to be adjourned in keeping with Covid-19 protocol. Opposition leaders demanded the House be adjourned as per schedule and the bills taken up the next day, but the government insisted on continuing the proceedings. "When the House has to extend its sitting beyond the scheduled time, the sense of the House is taken by the chairperson," says P.D.T. Achary, former secretary general of the Lok Sabha. "If there is no consensus on an extended sitting, the chair normally adjourns the House for the next day."

The government, in its defence, cites a technicality. "There is no rule," says a

close associate of deputy chairman Harivansh, "that once the bills are moved for debate, voting can be left halfway." Angry opposition leaders thronged the well of the house, tore up the rule-book, broke mikes and even manhandled a marshal, following which the House was adjourned. When the House met again, the chaos continued and the bills were passed by voice vote.

Eight members were suspended for a week. In protest, Congress and other parties boycotted the House. Congress MP K.C. Venugopal alleged that BJP MP Bhupender Yadav had whispered something in Harivansh's ear, after which the bills were rushed through. Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien said that Rajya Sabha TV's telecast of the episode was censored so that people could not see how the bills were rammed through.

Government sources, however, allege that Opposition leaders deliberately created pandemonium to stall the bills. “The deputy chairman announced more than a dozen times that he would allow voting by division if the unruly leaders returned to their seats,” says Yadav. “If they were sure of victory, they should have remained seated and allowed division [of the vote]. When they did not listen, voice vote was the only way. There is no time to waste in a pandemic. There have been multiple instances in the past when bills have been passed by voice vote.”

During a voice vote, the chairman poses a question to the house and then asks members to respond with either an ‘aye’ (yes) or ‘no’. The result is decided on a rough measure of which side is louder. In a voice vote, no record is kept of how many MPs are present. Division, on the other hand, records how each MP has voted on a motion. This ensures no MP can surreptitiously cast his or her vote contrary to their public stand. O’Brien claimed that had there been a division, the government would have lost the vote, as it did not have the support even of its allies. Harsimrat Kaur, leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal, among the BJP’s oldest allies, resigned from the Modi cabinet in protest.

Article 100 of the Constitution mandates that all questions in a sitting of the House be determined through a vote by a majority of the members present. There is no mention of ‘voice vote’, yet it’s a preferred mode of making decisions in Parliament, perhaps under the presumption that since the government has a majority in the House, anything it tables is likely to be passed. But, when a member demands a vote, says Achary, “under no circumstances can the chair ignore the demand and declare the motion passed through voice vote.”

However, the mode of voting is not the only way the BJP government has bypassed the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, where it has weak numbers (86 of 243 members) unlike in the Lok Sabha where it has a brute majority (303 of 540 members). One such practice has been to stamp a bill as “money bill”. Certain bills regulating financial

matters listed under Article 110 of the Constitution can be enacted as “money bills”. Once the Lok Sabha Speaker certifies a bill as such, it does not require the assent of the Rajya Sabha to be enacted. This provision was most deviously invoked in 2016, when the Aadhaar Bill was labelled a money bill. Though the Supreme Court, in a split verdict, upheld the constitutionality of the process, many experts have argued that the provisions of the bill were far too expansive and far-reaching to be characterised as a money bill. The dissenting Supreme Court judge even called the abuse of the money bill route to pass the Aadhaar Act a “fraud on the Constitution”.

The BJP government also courted controversy when it used the money bill

WHILE THE PRECEDING TWO LOK SABHAS DEBATED 60% AND 71% BILLS PASSED, THE 16TH HAS SCRUTINISED ONLY 26% BILLS

route to amend campaign finance laws and retrospectively validate foreign donations already declared illegal by the Delhi High Court. In 2017, the then finance minister Arun Jaitley introduced 30 pages of amendments to the Finance Bill, less than 48 hours before the legislation was taken up for scrutiny. At least 25 of the 40 amendments introduced in the Finance Act, 2017, were unrelated to government revenue and taxation. Among the many disputed provisions was one to permit unlimited and anonymous corporate donations to political parties through the controversial electoral bonds.

However, the NDA government is not alone in using the money bill route. Data research agency IndiaSpend found that 21 per cent more money bills were passed than ordinary bills between May 2004 and September 2018. The Congress-led UPA was in power between 2004 and 2014.

Another recent instance of parliamentary chicanery was in view when

Union home minister Amit Shah moved the bill to abrogate Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in the Rajya Sabha first. Had it been moved in the Lok Sabha first, it would have alerted the opposition parties, particularly the Congress, to prepare a counter-strategy and mobilise other parties to oppose the bill in the Rajya Sabha, where a united opposition can still block a bill. By introducing it in the upper house without circulating advance copies of the bill, the government was able to catch the opposition off-guard in a House where it did not have a brute majority. Under the rules, after a bill is introduced in the Rajya Sabha, a motion to consider it can be moved only after supplying copies of the bill to Rajya Sabha members at least two days before the date of discussion. However, under the same rule, the Rajya Sabha chairman can also waive this provision. Shah took advantage of this waiver to take up the J&K Bill for discussion on the same day that it was introduced, leaving the opposition camp stunned and divided.

Another criticism against the Modi government is that in the interests of so-called productivity in Parliament, it compromises on the quality of legislation and circumvents parliamentary committees, which might insist on closer scrutiny. According to PRS Legislative Research, while the 14th and 15th Lok Sabha (from 2004 to 2014) had scrutinised 60 per cent and 71 per cent bills, the 16th Lok Sabha scrutinised only 26 per cent of the total bills passed in Parliament. Experts on parliamentary procedures assert that the measure of a legislative institution is not just the amount of work it does but also how it does it. “Making laws is a two-step responsibility,” says Chaksu Roy, head of legislative and civic engagement, PRS Legislative Research. “It requires comprehensive scrutiny by parliamentary committees. This allows Parliament to get into the details of the proposed law and also get valuable public and expert opinion on it. Then comes the debate in Parliament. The MPs layer the debate with context and politics. Jumping these steps or rushing through them could result in the laws not achieving their intended purpose and, in some cases, defeating their public purpose.” ■

FRIENDS TO FRENEMIES?

When Jyotiraditya Scindia left the Congress for the BJP earlier this year, his friend and Congress leader Sachin Pilot termed his defection as merely “unfortunate”. Scindia, in turn, tweeted in support of Pilot’s rebellion of the past few months, accusing the Congress of ignoring talent. Pilot’s revolt against Ashok Gehlot’s government in Rajasthan ended a bit tamely, though. He will now be campaigning for the Congress in the upcoming byelections in Madhya Pradesh to bring in Gurjar votes—Pilot’s community and one that makes up a substantial voter base in at least half of the 28 seats going to poll. The buzz now is that Pilot and Scindia could soon be butting heads since the Gwalior-Chambal region is also where Scindia is fighting a do-or-die political battle. A friendly match here might be asking for too much.



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

PRESENT, YOGIJI!



ANI

In the coming days, it is not just students who will be marking their attendance in Uttar Pradesh schools. Class teachers and principals in the 159,000 state government-run primary schools will also have their attendance monitored by the education department via control rooms to be created soon at the state and district levels. Teachers had earlier resisted initiatives to register biometric attendance on the pretext that they didn’t have Android phones. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s government plans to spend Rs 150 crore to distribute computer tablets among teachers and principals to rob them of any such excuse.

With History on His Side

Veteran BJP leader Eknath Khadse has announced plans to pen a Marathi book to be titled ‘Nana Fadnavis’ Conspiracy’. The book is his barely veiled attack on the 18th century statesman’s namesake—Devendra Fadnavis. Khadse has accused the former Maharashtra CM of having a hand in the corruption charges levelled against him in 2016 that led to him resigning as revenue minister. His aim, claims Khadse, is to clear his name. He also ‘advised’ Fadnavis, now the BJP’s Bihar election in-charge, to not mess with ticket distribution as he did in Maharashtra. Clearly nothing is forgiven or forgotten.



ANI



WOMEN ABOARD

The Indian Navy removed a glass ceiling when it recently detailed two women aviators to be posted onboard its warships. **Riti Singh** and **Kumudini Tyagi**, both sub lieutenants, will now be part of the ship’s crew—embarked with medium-role helicopters when a warship sails out during deployments. Women officers had last served onboard warships during a short-lived experiment over 20 years ago. The navy will need to now revisit those protocols, including designating spaces onboard warships to make its women officers comfortable.

GUEST COLUMN



LT GEN. D.S. HOODA (RETD)



LT GEN. RAKESH SHARMA (RETD)

HOW TO BREAK THE IMPASSE

The gridlock in eastern Ladakh is total, and the border crisis between India and China seems to have hit a cul-de-sac. In analysing the current situation, four critical issues merit attention. To begin with, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has not vacated its areas of intrusions in eastern Ladakh despite the protracted parleys. There is intransigence in the PLA's attitude, as evident in the latest round of talks held after the foreign ministers had arrived at a consensus to "quickly disengage". In the absence of any breakthrough in the negotiations, the PLA will make their positions permanent, thereby completing the unilateral alteration to the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Then, there is a clear failure of the existing agreements, protocols and confidence-building measures. A weakening of the agreements was visible in the past few years, with recurring brawls between soldiers of the two sides. It is now unlikely that either side can depend on these agreements to bring peace and tranquility along the border.

There have also been several transgressions in the past four months, a brutal clash that led to the death of CO 16 Bihar and 19 soldiers, and firing along the LAC. This has led to severe erosion of trust, especially among the rank and file of the Indian Army, and rules of engagement have been adopted that permit the carrying and use of weapons in defence of territory. In the last week of August, heights astride the Spanggur Gap were occupied by Indian Army troops. This has apparently caused consternation in the PLA, and troops are now face to face in this area. Though our soldiers have exercised tremendous fire

control, escalation is always a possibility.

Most worrying is the large induction of military forces in eastern Ladakh from both sides, and the underlying threat of conventional war. It is apparent that neither China nor India want war and will do their best to avoid it. However, mutual suspicion, a lack of progress in the talks and the jockeying for superior tactical positions could spark a local incident that

To credibly remove the threat of war, the first step is de-escalation, or the demobilisation of forces (on both sides) to levels that minimise the likelihood of even a limited conventional war

could spiral out of control. There is also the associated issue of logistics management during the forthcoming winter. The Indian Army is well experienced in super/ high altitudes and has its warfighting plans ready, but supporting additional troops that have been inducted is a massive effort that is currently under way. For the PLA, the challenges would be more significant as winter in Ladakh in relative discomfort may be a first for many soldiers.

A crucial question facing both countries is how to move forward to break the current deadlock. Our current approach to resolving the standoff is based on a process of disengagement and a return to status quo ante,

followed by de-escalation in which additional forces inducted return to their permanent locations. As the situation eases, new confidence-building measures will be concluded to maintain and enhance peace and tranquility. This seems entirely logical, except that the very first action of disengagement remains stalled, impeding the overall process. To find a way around the impasse, both countries could perhaps look at a different approach to our diplomatic and military negotiations. We suggest a five-step approach, three to resolve the current crisis and two for a long-term resolution:

- First, we must build on the common understanding in both India and China that a war (even a limited one) is to be avoided. To credibly remove the threat of war, the first step is to commence de-escalation, which is the demobilisation of forces to levels that minimise the likelihood of even a limited conventional war. Keeping in view the difficulties of sustaining large forces through the winter, we feel that this proposal could find favour in both countries. Obviously, we must be conscious that Ladakh has serious infrastructural issues in winter, and to reposition forces in a crisis could be problematic. The issue of the level of reserves to be retained for the winter will need concerted deliberation by both sides. Still, a significant number of troops could be mutually demobilised to their permanent locations. Such a first step would put to rest the likelihood of the situation spiralling out of control towards war, and incentivise further negotiations.

- Second, after the agreement on demobilisation, both sides must begin talks on confidence-building measures



aimed at reducing the trust deficit and peaceful management of areas that are considered 'disputed' along the LAC. There could be many models, and we are suggesting one such model. There should be a common listing of areas prone to skirmishes due to differing perceptions of the LAC, like Pangong Tso North Bank, Depsang, Demchok and Chumar in Ladakh, and similar areas in the central and eastern sectors. In such areas, patrolling patterns could be mutually accepted. These could range from a complete moratorium on patrolling to a specified schedule of patrolling up to respective LACs, with due intimation to the other side on the hotline to avoid clashes. Verifiable processes must be put in place to ensure that there is no breach in protocol, like using electronic equipment, cameras, observation posts, etc. Such an arrangement exists at the Karakoram Pass

patrolled by both sides, and that has cameras to monitor any infringement.

- Third, the disengagement process that follows will be based on the principles of confidence-building measures agreed to by both sides. As they are specifically focused on 'disputed' areas like Pangong Tso and Depsang, troops would relocate. Since the relocation is on mutually accepted protocols, both sides can claim victory when the disengagement occurs. These protocols, binding all along the LAC, would also prevent future flash-points from occurring.

- The remaining steps look at long-term resolution by addressing the delineation of the LAC and a final settlement of the border dispute. It is apparent that the previous three decades of concerted efforts, even to find a method to commence delineation, have had limited success. An undefined LAC carries the risk of escalation and a breakdown of

confidence-building measures. In case China remains adamant, we must create public opinion, in India and globally, and unilaterally commence the process of marking the LAC on our public maps, starting with areas where there are no differences in perception of the two sides. This could put some pressure on China not to continuously shift the goal post on the LAC.

- Finally, it is well understood that the boundary settlement is a complex issue and will require some give and take by both sides. China has settled its borders with most countries on this principle, as has India in its boundary agreement with Bangladesh. This issue will require mobilising national and political consensus.

There could be some differences of opinion on the process that has been suggested. By starting with de-escalation, India could be easing the pressure that has been put on China. After the demobilisation of forces, the PLA could stall the subsequent steps and continue to hold on to their current positions. Considering the recent Chinese actions and the high mistrust levels, it would be difficult to dismiss this viewpoint completely. However, our firm stance on the LAC transgressions is not based only on its military posture.

India has already stated that it is ready for a long haul along the border. The Indian military forces are well geared and prepared for escalation to conventional war. The government has also taken economic and diplomatic steps to pressure China and clearly conveyed that the current crisis will impact bilateral relations. However, an extended period in which thousands of soldiers remain deployed along the LAC raises the risk of escalation to a state that neither country wants. Perhaps a new approach to negotiations could help both countries avoid unintended consequences. ■

Lt Gen. Hooda (retd) is former Northern Army Commander and **Lt Gen. Sharma (retd)** is former Commander, XIV Corps, in Leh

THE POLITICS OF MSP

AGRICULTURE

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

Three highly contentious farm bills made their way through the Rajya Sabha between September 20 and 22, amid vociferous political opposition and farmer protests in the country. Two of these bills—the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers’ (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill—were passed by voice vote on Sunday, September 20, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill on September 22, when the Opposition parties had decided to boycott proceedings in Parliament.

In an apparent attempt to stem the tide of farmer protests across the country, especially in the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted his reassurances just hours after the first two bills were cleared by the Rajya Sabha. Defending the “historic new

✓ PUBLIC FURY

Farmers on the outskirts of Amritsar burn effigies to protest the agriculture reforms

NARINDER NANU/GETTY IMAGES



laws”, the tweets, composed in Punjabi, sought to reassure farmers that they needn’t fear any dilution in the MSP (minimum support price) mechanism nor any slackening of government procurement of their produce.

In effect, the new laws open up the agriculture sector to private sector players, allowing anyone with a PAN card to buy produce directly from farmers. Earlier, these purchases were possible only through APMC (Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee) *mandis*. The old regime, for all its imperfections, was a sort of insurance mechanism for the farmer. It served as a safety net in two ways—assured procurement by the government and a floor price (MSP) for his crop. The protesting farmers say the new laws, in creating an alternative to APMCs, in the name of giving them options, are in fact laying the foundations of a procurement dispensation that will ultimately bypass APMCs and abolish the current procurement and MSP protections.

The Centre insists that it has no such plan and that private agricultural markets will complement the APMC system, not replace it. On September 21, the cabinet committee on economic affairs approved MSP hikes for six rabi crops, just 45 days before the sowing season was to begin. Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar also assured the Lok Sabha that agencies like the FCI (Food Corporation of India) and NAFED would continue to procure stocks from *mandis* at MSP prices.

Farmer groups point out that the new laws do not require prices for sales to private parties to be linked to MSP. Without this protection, critics of the new laws point out, farmers with smaller landholdings will be vulnerable in price negotiations with corporates. This is a problem: in Punjab and Haryana, around 72 per cent and 67 per cent of farmers have less than 5 acres of land. The issue has drawn together unlikely allies—even RSS affiliates like the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) are protesting the new law. “We want

MSPs to be [part of] the law. We are not against reforms, but farmers must get fair payment for their produce,” says Badri Narayan Chaudhary of the BKS.

The protests have already drawn political blood. Two days before Parliament’s monsoon session began, agitations by Punjab farmers forced BJP ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to publicly oppose the bills. Just days later, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, the SAD’s Union cabinet minister and wife of party chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, resigned her post in protest. Sources say BJP leaders hope to resume conversations with farmer groups after the harvest and marketing season for the rabi crop begins in early October.

The Big Picture

For several years now, there have been attempts at state and central levels to increase private sector participation in

IF CROP PRICES ARE NOT LINKED TO MSP FOR SALES TO PRIVATE PARTIES, SMALL FARMERS WILL LOSE BARGAINING POWER, IT IS FEARED

agriculture. The Centre has been pushing states to adopt the model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Marketing Act, 2017 and the model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Contract Farming Act, 2018, which allow private capital within the APMC set-up. Apart from these, 18 states, including Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, have in recent months allowed corporates to set up private *mandis*.

There is also an international perspective. For several years, India has been in negotiations with the WTO (World Trade Organization) for an Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), which forms the basis of many free

trade deals. Western nations have long demanded that India limit agriculture subsidies for an AoA. In 2015, negotiators arrived at a ‘peace clause’, under which MSPs are classified as ‘amber’ issues, which western nations say distort free trade. (It allows MSPs upto 10 per cent of GDP.) Western subsidy models—direct income support, crop insurance and input subsidies—are ‘green’ under AoA agreements.

Since India already provides income and input subsidies—Rs 6,000 per farmer per year, with a mechanism being worked out for direct power and fertiliser subsidy transfers—some say the new law, by not explicitly benchmarking private sale prices to MSP, shows the Centre is preparing the ground to abolish MSP. They say it reveals the long-term trajectory the Centre envisages for these agri-reforms—do away with MSP to allow free international trade. They also point out that this is broadly in line with the recommendations of the Shanta Kumar committee (a review committee for agri-reforms, set up by PM Modi) report in 2015, which suggested restructuring the FCI and rationalising food and fertiliser subsidies.

Agriculture economist Tajamul Haque says, “Some of the concerns of farmer groups are very genuine and must be resolved. Some can still be addressed while framing the rules.” One way or another, farmer groups say the safety net of an MSP mechanism is critical. Without the government setting floor prices for crops, small farmers, who have neither bargaining power nor expertise for price discovery, will be at the mercy of corporates. Agriculture minister Tomar demurs, and insists the private markets will only complement the existing APMC structure: “We are giving options to farmers—no one is compelling them [to choose one or the other]. If a farmer thinks the APMC mechanism is good, he can opt for that; if he wants to sell his produce to a private company, he should be free to do so.” ■

THE SEASON OF SAFETY Crew members clad in PPE gear disinfect and sanitise the sets of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* season 12



TELEVISION

SHOOTING BLUES

With many testing positive for Covid, and elderly actors and crew in the mix, the resumption of work in the entertainment industry has been marked with a shiver of fear

By **Suhani Singh**

Actress Ashalata Wabgaonkar, 79, was shooting Sony Marathi's mythological daily *Aai Majhi Kalubai* in Satara, Maharashtra, when she tested positive for Covid along with 20-plus members on the show. While most were home quarantined, Ashalata was admitted to a private hospital. A week later, on September 22, she succumbed to the virus. A dance group called in from Mumbai for a song sequence to be featured in the show is reported to have passed on the virus to the crew. The actress's demise was a worrying reminder of the dangers the elderly face as they resume work in an atmosphere where even adhering to recommended precautions is proving to be an inadequate shield against the virus.

In July, the Indian Motion Pictures Producers' Association (IMPPA) had filed a petition in the Bombay High Court challenging the Maharashtra government's standard operating procedure barring actors and technicians above the age of 65 to work on sets. "There are so many federation

workers above 65 dependent on films for their livelihood. What else can they do?" says T.P. Aggarwal, IMPPA president. "Nobody is forcing them to work, but one can't stop them from working either." Aggarwal and actor Pramod Pandey, both 70, won the case after judges S.J. Kathawala and Riyaz Chagla asked the government counsel, advocate Purnima Kantharia, if there was a provision stopping those above 65 from working in any other field, to which Kantharia responded that there wasn't. Ashalata's death, says Aggarwal, reiterates the need for added precautions. "You can't say that she died because she was working."

IMPPA's action has enabled many, like Amitabh Bachchan, to return to work. The veteran Bollywood actor, who had tested positive for Covid in July, started shooting again on September 7, roughly a month after he was discharged from Nanavati Hospital, where three members of his family—son Abhishek, daughter-in-law Aishwarya and granddaughter Aaradhya—were also treated. The

77-year-old actor has taken to social media to document his experience of shooting the 12th season of the popular game show, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. “There is a loss of camaraderie. No one speaks unless it is work-related. It’s like a laboratory where some rather deep scientific experiments abound,” wrote Bachchan on his blog. Nevertheless, the show, as they say, must go on. After nearly four months of losses during lockdown, television channels are banking on their flagship properties to cut their losses. For instance, Disney Star is reported to have sold 90 per cent of its TV ad inventory for the ongoing *Indian Premier League*. In the case of *KBC*, the game show’s last season had earned Sony revenues worth around Rs 150 crore. This season, it has two key sponsors in addition to seven associate ones.

The new season, which will air on Sony from September 28, is being shot without an audience. Contestants have to undergo two Covid tests—one before leaving their hometown and another in Mumbai—and quarantine before they are allowed on the *KBC* set in Film City. And even then, there will be no shaking of hands, hugging or clicking selfies with Bachchan, which, for many contestants, in the old order, was the rich icing on the cake. The actor has devised an elbow bump to greet the person who makes it to the ‘hot seat’. Director Arun Sheshkumar says that the lack of physical contact won’t come at the cost of the quiz show’s emotional appeal. Apart from these measures, access to Bachchan’s vanity van is restricted. Briefings take place in a room with glass partitions or via messages relayed on earpieces. “We are all aware that it can come back and are not being negligent,” says Sheshkumar. “But, for Mr Bachchan, age is just a number. He keeps joking he is the golden boy who beat the virus. [For] the energy he carries, hats off to him.”

These safety measures are not restricted to just the sets of *KBC*. Sanitisation tunnels at all entry points, pedal sanitisers, temperature and oxygen level checks are now routine practice on (almost) all Sony shoots.

Sometimes, though, no amount of protocol is enough. The set of Director’s Kut Productions *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai*, one of the longest-running dramas on TV, is sanitised thrice a day and actors, who have their own make-up rooms and designated chairs, are served *kaadha* and warm lemon juice once a day. And yet around eight people working on the show, including senior actor Swati Chitnis, 61, who plays Daadi, a key character, tested positive on August 23, nearly two months after shoot resumed on June 28. “I was asymptomatic and self-isolated at home, but the doctor said to be careful because with Covid one can take a turn for the worse suddenly,” says Chitnis. Since resuming shoot on September

7, Chitnis says she is exhausted after 10-hour shifts and doing her own housework and cooking. “I have to be careful and am taking all the care I can. I do my own make-up, carry my own tiffin and don’t remove my mask even during rehearsal,” she says. “I remind actors to not take Covid lightly.”

Apart from Ashalata and Chitnis, many TV actors have tested positive since TV shoots resumed in late June and early July. Himani Shivpuri (*Happu Ki Ultan Paltan* on &TV), Rajeshwari Sachdev (*Shaadi Mubarak* on Star Plus) and Sanjay Gagnani (*Kundali Bhagya* on Zee TV) are some of the others to have contracted the virus after resuming work. In an interview to a leading daily, Shivpuri, 60, said, “In this profession, as you grow older, the work lessens. We don’t even get pension. So we need to work.” The crew of *India’s Best Dancer*, too, had a scare after Malaika Arora, a judge on the show, tested positive a day after her boyfriend-

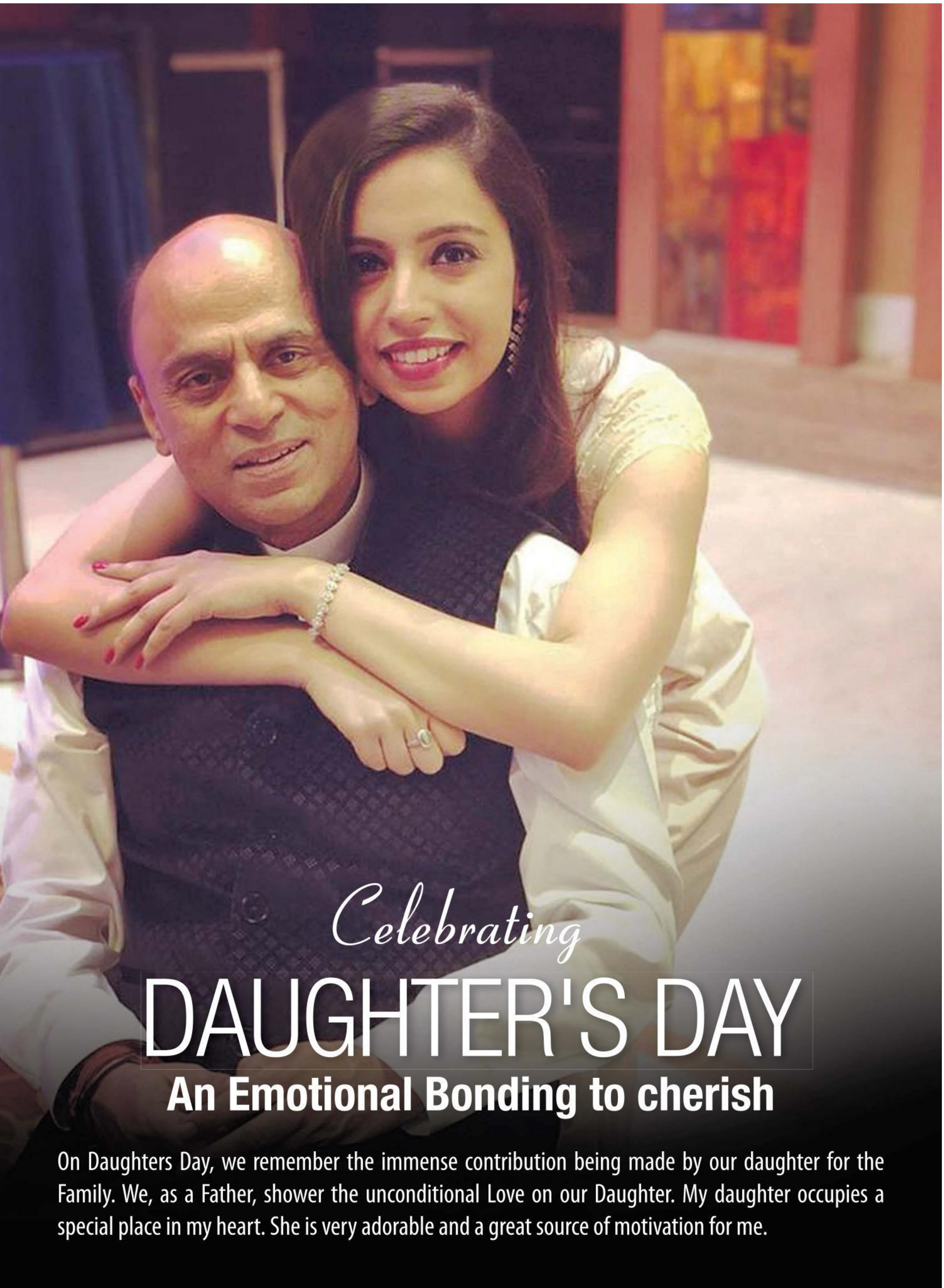
actor Arjun Kapoor did as well. These incidents led some shows to halt their shoots for a few days as a precautionary measure.

Even as the daily shows work with the knowledge that the virus is omnipresent, Colors is going ahead with season 14 of its popular reality show *Bigg Boss*, which will see 14 contestants locked in a house for four months starting October 3. The Salman Khan-hosted Hindi edition follows the ongoing Telugu one, now in its fourth season, hosted by star Nagarjuna, and the most-watched show on Telugu TV currently. Produced by Endemol Shine India, the finale of Hindi *Bigg Boss*’ season 13 was the most watched episode, garnering 10.5 million impressions, according to the Broadcast Audience Research Council BARC. Colors has five sponsors for the new season of *Bigg Boss*, which not only generates high ratings but also social media chatter.

Consider this: a 10-second ad slot for a weekend episode last season, hosted by Khan, went for an estimated Rs 3.5-4 lakh. Viacom18, which owns Colors, expects to match last year’s ad sales revenue. The show has already sold 90 per cent of its ad inventory this year at last year’s price. They intend to sell the remaining at a premium towards the end of the season. The show earned revenues worth Rs 150 crore last year and the makers are confident of matching that figure this year too. The makers of the Hindi *Bigg Boss* have already quarantined the contestants in a hotel, where they will stay for 15 days before they enter the house constructed in Film City. Already insulated from the world outside, the housemates will be tested regularly during their stay. Some of the 300 crew members of *Bigg Boss* have already started living close to the set to avoid commuting and will be working in shifts to limit exposure. Clearly, this year, *Bigg Boss* will not only have to monitor housemates for their behaviour but also for any Covid symptoms. ■

90
PER CENT
of its TV ad inventory
sold by Disney Star
for IPL 2020

₹3.5-4
LAKH
Cost of a 10-second
ad slot for a weekend
episode of Bigg Boss
season 13



Celebrating
DAUGHTER'S DAY
An Emotional Bonding to cherish

On Daughters Day, we remember the immense contribution being made by our daughter for the Family. We, as a Father, shower the unconditional Love on our Daughter. My daughter occupies a special place in my heart. She is very adorable and a great source of motivation for me.

— Happy Daughter's Day

Daughters occupy a special place in the heart of their Father. They are adorable and great source of motivation for their father.

On the very auspicious National Daughters Day, as a doting Father, we reminisce about showering the unconditional love on our beautiful, witty, creative, caring and sometimes demanding daughters.

It is an occasion to honour and acknowledge the significant contributions being made by every daughter for their Family as well as giving them the respect and promise of care they deserve.

It is giving me lot of satisfaction and happiness in saying few good words about my affectionate daughter Ms. Aradhana Galgotia who has become a pillar of strength for the Galgotia University. With her farsightedness and indomitable spirit, she is all set to bring the transformational changes in our Academic Institution of high repute.

In a short span of time, she has successfully positioned herself as a change-maker and thought leader in the education domain. Aradhana's Long stint with an Internationally renowned University from UK has given her Global perspective on the Higher education and she is optimistic about bringing the revolutionary changes in the Indian Education system.

We get immense pride in her excellent academic credentials and Long-term vision of bringing the systemic changes in the

current Indian Education system wherein major emphasis should be given on the Holistic teaching and Learning system.

International Education System had greatly inspired her to transform the education system from Theory-based to Practice-based Learning and implementing their best practices in the Galgotia University. She has been a voracious reader and extremely passionate about the acquisition of knowledge from the multifarious sources.

Aradhana is a true Humanitarian who is committed towards the noble cause of social upliftment and empowerment of the destitute Women.

Aradhana has been instrumental in recognizing some of our core strengths as an Institution which include Holistic and Coordinated approach towards the attainment of Unified Goals & Objectives. Her key findings are going to benefit us in synergising the efforts in a best possible way.

In my opinion, Our Core Strengths are the Holistic and Coordinated approach towards the attainment of Unified Goals & Objectives for the Esteemed Academic Institution.

As a Harbinger of change for the Galgotia University, she is giving adequate thrust upon building the practical skills and encouraging people to reinvent new methods and processes for maximizing the productivity.

Under her dynamic and inspiring leadership, our committed and passionate employees are making relentless efforts for achieving the academic excellence, interpersonal relationships and Leadership development.

Since her formative years, Aradhana had made persistent & disciplined efforts for improving her Physical & Mental Fitness as well as building the overall personality. She emphasises a lot upon the Self-Learning. Her thirst and quest for the knowledge is truly commendable.

She is an avid reader. She regularly writes reviews on books which are being published in the leading magazines and newspapers from the country.

Currently she is in the process of writing my Biography.

One of her admirable quality is the strict adherence to the time management.

She is pragmatic in her approach and firm believer in taking holistic and inclusive view of the impending situation before arriving at the conclusion. Her overall personality is a perfect blend of Intellectual and Emotional Quotient.

She has become a great asset for our Academic institution and I am very optimistic that she would be making lot of value addition with her out of box thinking and global outlook in the near future.

🌀 Whenever I go back to the down memory lane and start reminiscing the moment, when I took her in my lap after she was born, I express my gratitude to the almighty for his kindness on bestowing me with a very precious gift which brought good fortune and great success in my life. 🌀

— **Says Suneel Galgotia- Chancellor**
Galgotias University



HOPE AMID DESPAIR

While large swathes of the economy have been savaged by the pandemic and struggle for survival, some have seen opportunity in the crisis, and latched on to it. An aerial survey of the destruction—and the survivors

BY M.G. ARUN —

W

WHEN A COUNTRY WITH AN ECONOMY AS LARGE AS INDIA'S—Rs 203 LAKH CRORE—goes into one of the world's most stringent lockdowns, as it did six months ago, a deep negative impact is only to be expected. Exactly how deep was revealed by the numbers the Central Statistics Office released on August 31. The Indian economy contracted a massive 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of FY21—among the worst in the world's large economies. A majority of the sectors that contribute the most to the country's wealth and employ millions of people are mired in a financial crisis they are unlikely to recover from this fiscal. Manufacturing, which has a 16 per cent share in GDP, is lagging due to weak demand. This has resulted in a drop in investments and low credit offtake even as banks are flush with funds. The services sector, which

employs 31 per cent of the country's workforce and contributes 55 per cent to Gross Value Added, has been the worst hit. The travel, hospitality and retail sectors have suffered what experts call 'demand destruction', or the permanent loss of demand owing to the postponement of travel plans, dining out or buying aspirational goods.

There are a few sectors, however, that have managed to find opportunity in the crisis. The pandemic and the lockdown, for instance, have benefitted sectors such as pharmaceuticals, e-commerce and ed-tech. Others are riding the trough either by reinventing themselves and leveraging technology, or by building scalable and sustainable businesses in the booming virtual space.

BATTERED BY COVID-19

The Indian economy had already been in slowdown mode for four consecutive quarters when Covid-19 struck and a nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24. The closure of factories and loss of daily wages first led to an exodus of migrants, and then a labour shortage when lockdown restrictions were relaxed. Social distancing norms further hurt production. Simultaneously, deep salary cuts across the board and millions of lost jobs have forced a slump in consumption and, therefore, weak demand. This has resulted in a lag in manufacturing.

MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), which number 63.3 million as per government estimates and employ over 150 million people, are also in



THE PLAGUE UPON US

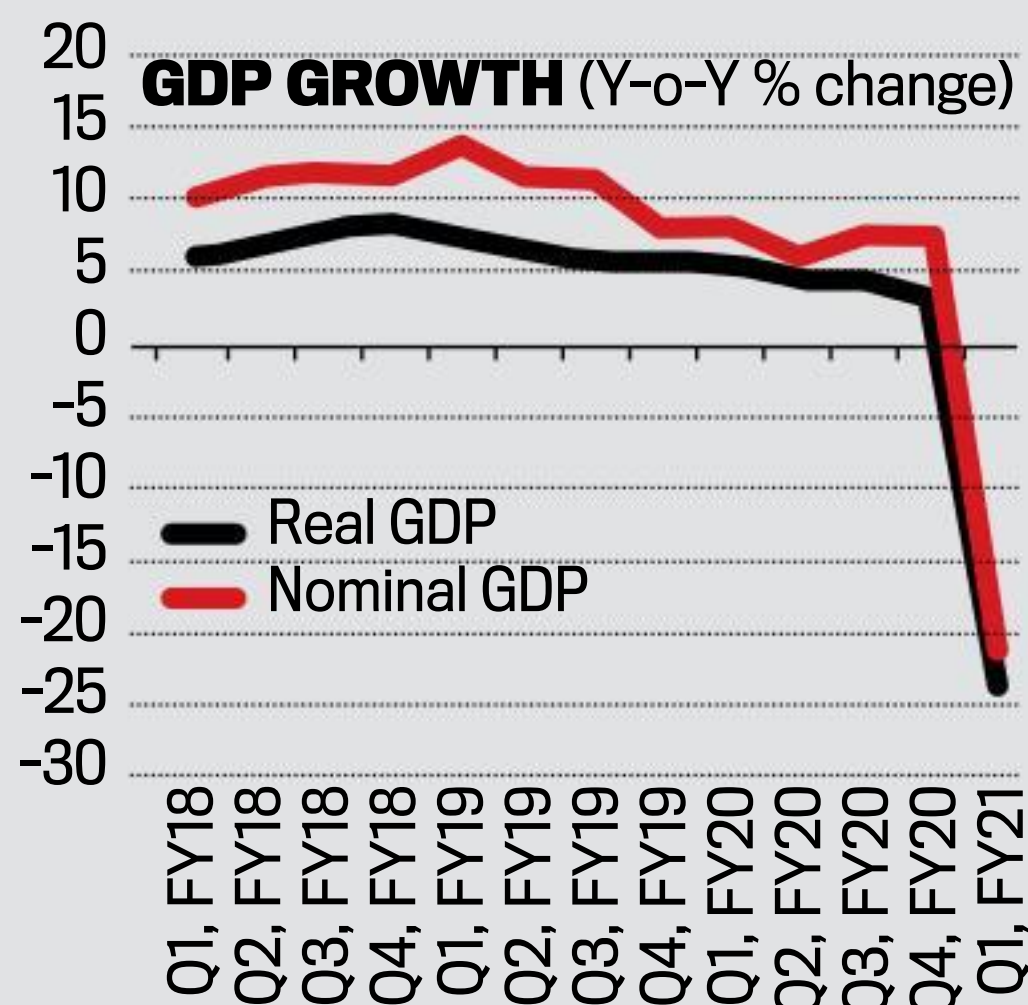
THE PANDEMIC AND THE LOCKDOWN HAVE DEALT A CRUSHING BLOW TO THE ECONOMY, AS NEARLY ALL INDICATORS BEAR WITNESS



GDP

THE ABYSS

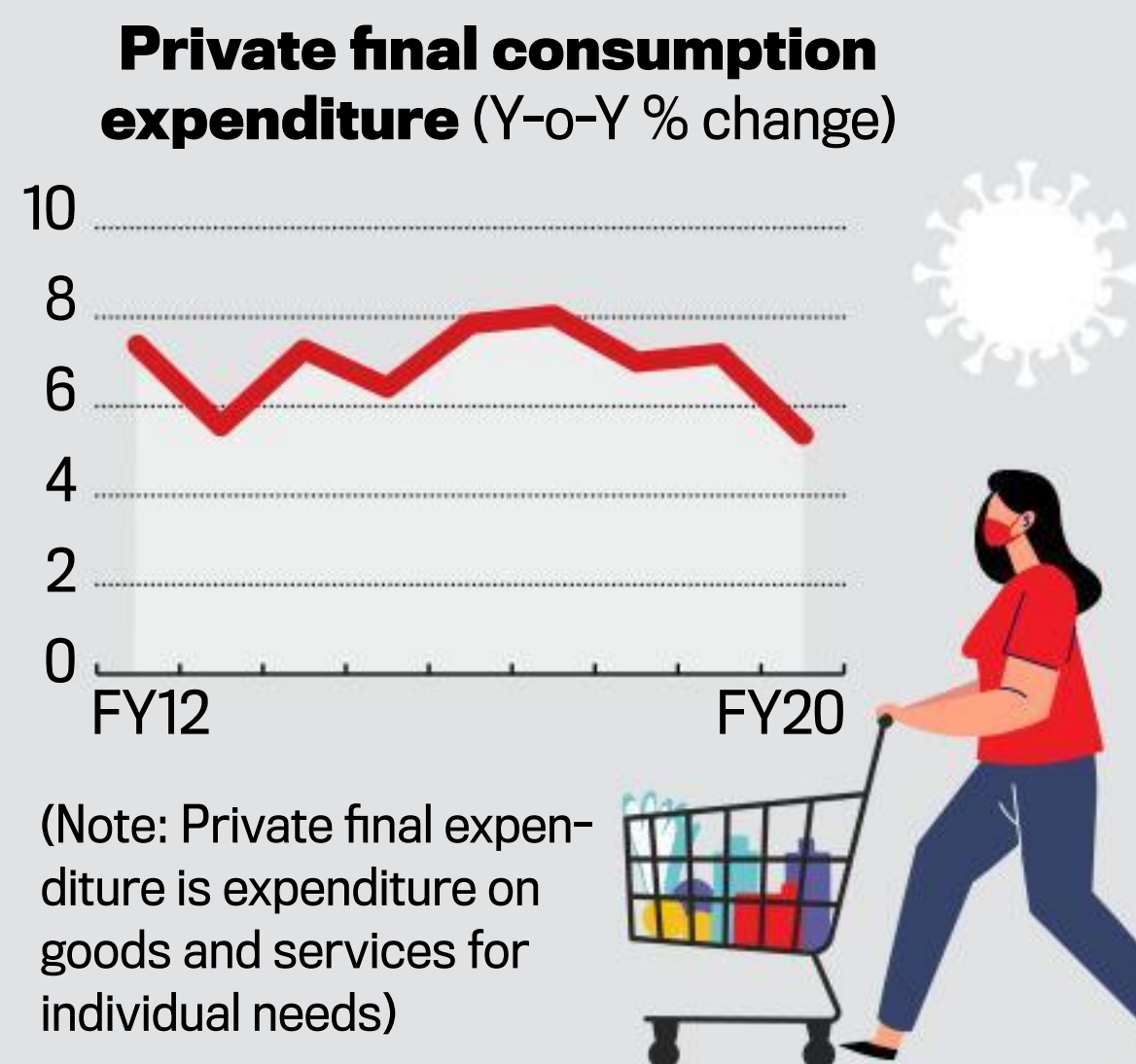
With Q1 growth contracting sharply, the next two quarters are also likely to be in negative zone



CONSUMPTION

NO APPETITE

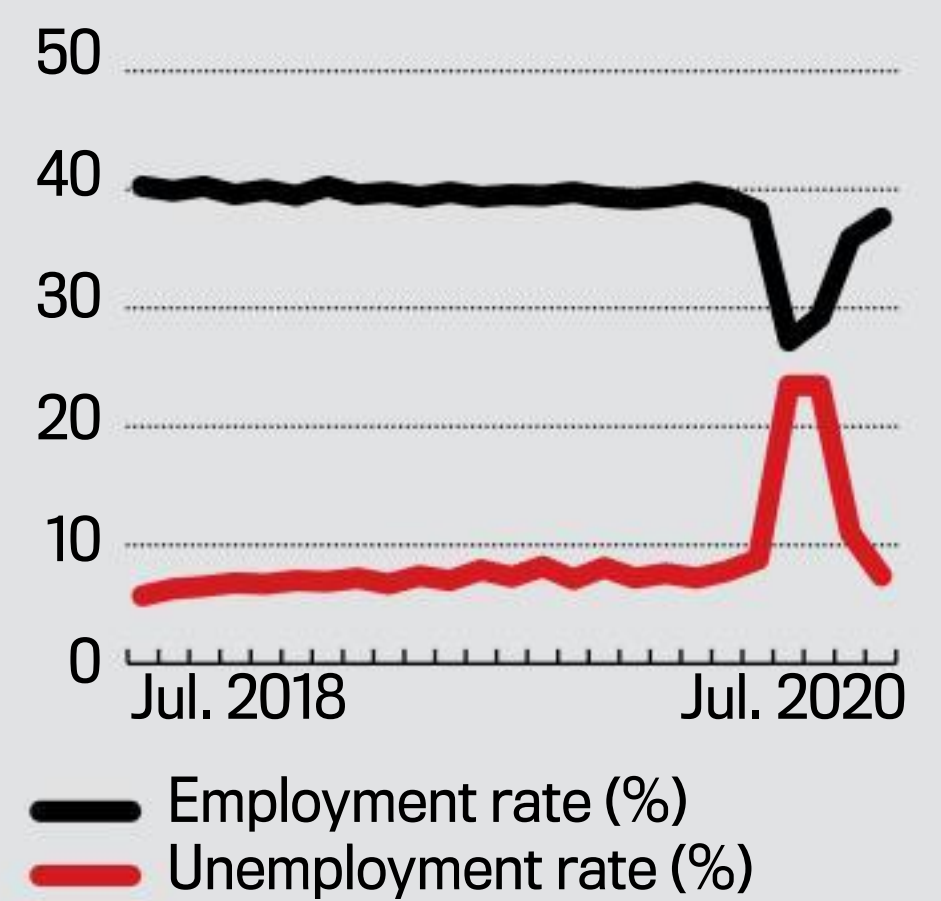
With so many jobs lost and incomes down, demand has been on a downswing



JOBS

WORKING CRISIS

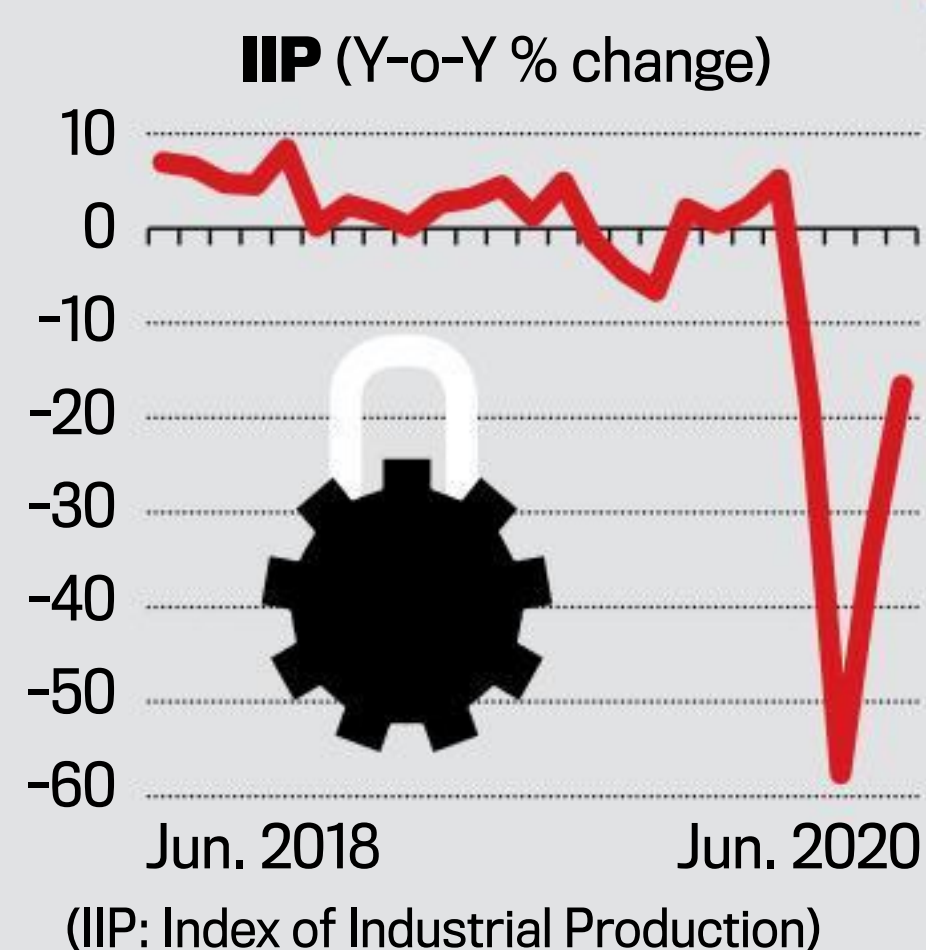
An estimated 21 million salaried jobs were lost during the lockdown



IIP

IN THE DUMPS

Industrial production too suffered because of the lockdown and poor demand



PMI

HEADING SOUTH

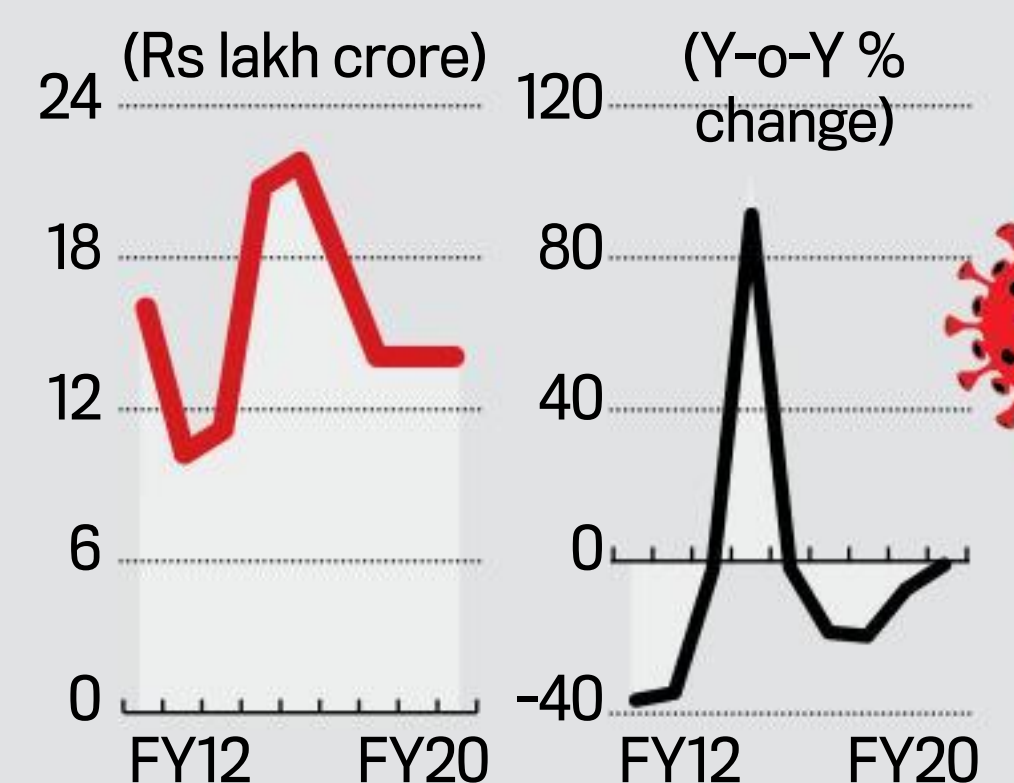
Both in services and manufacturing, the index foretells a negative outlook



NEW INVESTMENT

AT A STANDSTILL

With sluggish demand, the appetite for investments has also seen a downswing



Source: BT Research/ CMIE

dire straits, either scaling down operations or winding up altogether. Despite the government announcing a Rs 20 lakh crore relief package, of which Rs 3 lakh crore is earmarked for collateral-free, government-backed loans to MSMEs, it has been of little help. MSMEs have been seeking direct fiscal support, waiver of fixed charges and extension of loan moratoriums, not more debt. It's a Catch-22 anyway, as banks fear lending to 'risky' businesses, subjecting borrowers to more stringent oversight.

Overall sales are yet to pick up in automobiles even as dealerships reopen and auto-makers lure customers with festive discounts and sops. Sales of apparel, consumer

goods and most electronic items too remain sluggish.

Already battered by demonetisation, RERA (Real Estate Regulatory Authority) compliance and the crisis in non-banking finance companies, the real estate sector is still in limbo. The pandemic has also crippled aviation, as both domestic and international operations remained frozen during the lockdown, bleeding airlines.

...AND GAINING FROM IT

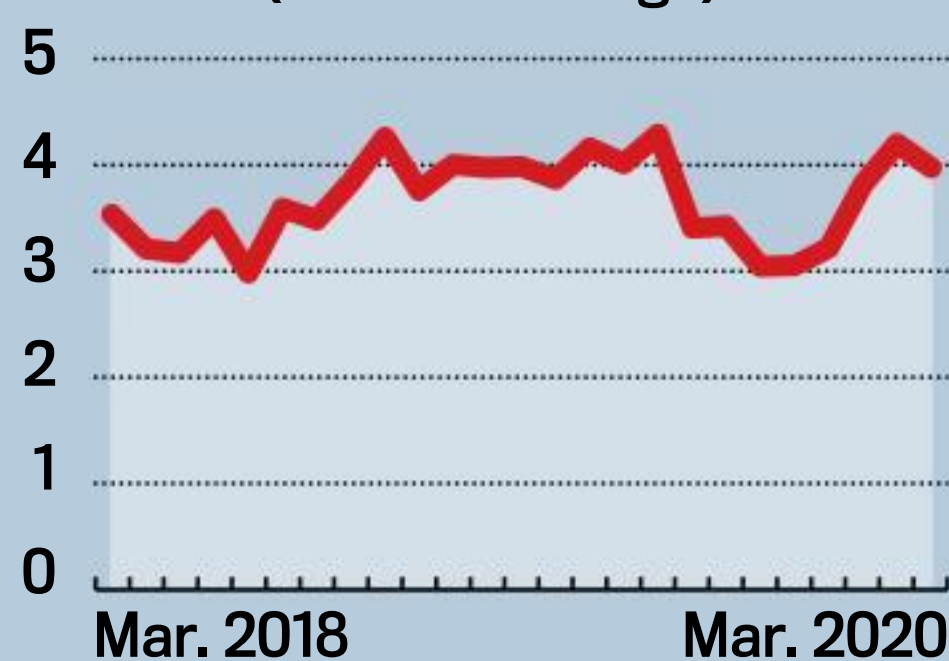
However, even amid this pan-industry gloom, a few sectors have bucked the trend. E-commerce is one such. It has grown to a \$30 billion business and is poised to

RURAL RELIEF

A HEALTHY FARM ECONOMY
DISPELS SOME OF THE GLOOM

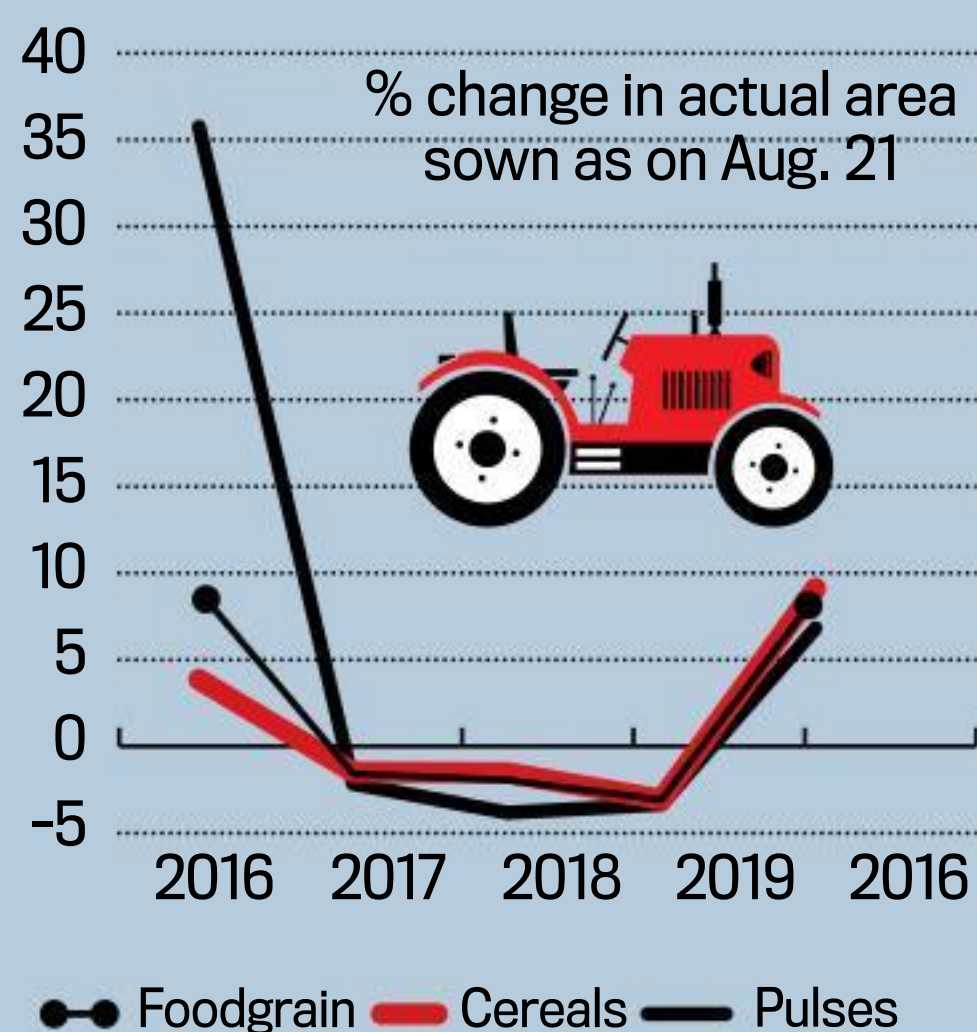
RURAL WAGES

A PICK-UP

Rural wages have held steady
after a good rabi harvestSimple average wage rate
for all rural occupations
(Y-o-Y % change)

KHARIF SOWING

PLOUGHING HOPE

The increase in area sown signals
continuing good farm output

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

While lack of labour and demand have taken a toll on manufacturing, services and retail, sectors such as pharma, e-commerce and ed-tech have done well

touch \$100 billion in the next four years. Despite the easing of the lockdown, many have become accustomed to shopping from the comfort of their homes. It helps them avoid crowds and avail doorstep delivery. FMCG players have also done well as sales of personal hygiene products such as soaps, cleaning liquids and sanitisers have boomed, and good harvests and better wages have helped spur demand in rural India. After an initial slump, the prospects for small car and two-wheeler sales look better, as those with means prefer private over public modes of transport.

Similarly, the lockdown has served as a boon in the virtual education space. Educational technology start-ups have seen a steep surge in demand for content. Even the distressed hospitality sector is showing a few encouraging trends. While occupancy rates in most city hotels remain at 15-20 per cent, staycation properties and weekend hotels are clocking almost 85 per cent occupancy on weekends and 65 per cent on weekdays, as per industry estimates.

As health becomes top priority, opportunities have grown for the healthcare segment. A host of Indian companies have embarked on the quest for a vaccine for Covid-19. There is also a boom in diagnostic chains that offer Covid tests, and in businesses that manufacture PPE and hygiene and sanitation products.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has hastened the process of automation. Factory shop floors, retail showrooms, e-commerce sites and the hospitality industry are all quickly adopting Internet-of-Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven solutions to reduce dependence on manpower and enhance efficiencies and competitiveness. However, this is true only of companies with adequate cash reserves; others are facing a severe cash crunch and struggling to get basic operations back on track.

AN ECONOMIC ANTIDOTE

The government's Rs 20 lakh crore revival package in May included several measures the RBI had taken to infuse

more liquidity into the banking system. It was followed by the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, which encouraged local production of goods in different areas, including defence, and reducing dependence on imports. However, as the crisis in several sectors illustrates, these measures have been inadequate to support struggling businesses. Both industry and economists have been urging the government to loosen its purse strings, and increase its fiscal deficit target from the current 3 per cent to 4 per cent. The government needs to provide an income boost to needy households through cash support and extend funds to vulnerable businesses. Industry is clamouring for extension of the loan moratorium and waiver of the interest component, a matter currently being heard by the Supreme Court. It has also proposed the timely implementation of employment-generating projects such as the National Infrastructure Pipeline and the setting up of new manufacturing projects, especially for electronics and smartphones.

The other sector demanding the government's urgent attention is banking. Covid-19 has foregrounded vulnerabilities in a sector that had been fighting gargantuan bad loans on the one hand and slackening credit offtake on the other. This month, the Centre decided to infuse Rs 20,000 crore worth of capital in public sector banks for the current financial year. But, as Uday Kotak, vice-chairman & MD of Kotak Mahindra Bank, estimates, banks will need at least Rs 2-3 lakh crore to meet the crisis.

The crisis has never looked so bad in living memory, and to make matters worse, the end is not yet in sight. Maybe there will be a vaccine by the end of the year, and maybe that will rekindle hope, and ignite a recovery. Maybe. Meanwhile, at the end of six months of a seemingly endless battle against the pandemic, as entrepreneurs bootstrap and businesses reinvent to stay afloat, INDIA TODAY did a quick aerial review of Indian businesses to see how they were faring. Please turn over to tune into the findings. ■



**SECTOR
SIZE**
₹2.2
lakh crore

**NO.
EMPLOYED**
1.2
million

**CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP**
1%

STRESS METER



No stress

■ No stress ■ Moderate ■ Severe

ONLINE BONANZA

With the lockdowns paralysing traditional retail, e-commerce took off. Experts expect the sector to grow to \$100 billion by 2024

BY M.G. ARUN

A

ALTHOUGH COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns disrupted retail supply chains, e-commerce has thrived in the past six months. This trend looks set to continue: Despite the recent easing of lockdown rules, many shoppers still seem to prefer buying online, possibly to avoid crowds during the ongoing pandemic. E-commerce majors from BigBasket and Grofers to Fresh-ToHome, Amazon and Flipkart have been seizing the moment to improve their home delivery systems and

reach. And with Reliance Retail entering the fray with online stores and its JioMart app, the e-commerce battle is set to intensify.

Indian retail has seen momentous changes over the past 10 years, with the overall sector achieving a size of \$915 billion (Rs 67 lakh crore) in 2019. E-commerce, which accounted for less than \$1 billion (Rs 7,350 crore) in 2010, has grown to more than \$30 billion (Rs 2.2 lakh crore) in 2019 thanks to increased internet access and smartphone adoption. It is expected to cross \$100 billion (Rs 7.3 lakh crore) by 2024.

A research note by Alvarez & Marsal India and the CII-Institute of Logistics says that the increasing online sales of fresh groceries, along with the growing number of prepared-food delivery companies could propel category growth by five times in the next five years. Although many malls have opened, most still have strict social distancing norms in place, a big turn-off for shoppers. Moreover, restaurants and food outlets within malls are still closed in most cities, leaving many with no option but to order online. Even so, online sales still make up just about 1.6 per cent of India's overall retail sector. E-tailers say they are looking forward to the upcoming festive season, luring customers with special discounts and offers. ■



CASE STUDY

JIGAR MEHTA, 42

Co-founder, HoneyTwigs, Delhi

When Jigar Mehta launched HoneyTwigs in 2015, the idea was to sell honey, sourced from Himachal Pradesh and Bihar and processed at his factory in Delhi, via three avenues—retail sales, institutional sales (to hotels and restaurants) and gifting. Before Covid-19 struck, his company relied on the first two. However, the lockdown crushed institutional sales, with many restaurants and hotels still shut.

“Covid has shown people the need for healthier lifestyles, which benefits entrepreneurs like us”

RAJWANT RAWAT



A SWEET TIME
HoneyTwigs co-founder Jigar Mehta

Luckily for Mehta, sales spiked overall during the pandemic, as honey is widely considered an excellent immunity booster. He says the lockdowns also led many to turn to cooking and baking as hobbies, which also drove sales. Selling across online avenues, including Amazon and Flipkart, he says his sales have risen 25 to 30 per cent in volume in the past few months. Although the summer is traditionally not the best time for honey sellers, he says his products—which include multiflora honey, litchi honey and flavoured honey—did well. In May, at the peak of the lockdown, demand levels even led him to introduce 1 kg jars. Mehta employs 12 workers at his factory and has a sales team of six. He says that although he had to put his sales team on temporary leave, he is now rehiring as shops reopen.



Manufacturing

Clogged Wheels

Putting this sector back on its feet will require broad incentives from the government for MSMEs

SECTOR SIZE

₹32.5

lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

120

million

CONTRIBUTION TO GDP

16%

STRESS METER



Severe

THE LOCKDOWN HAD BROUGHT THE manufacturing sector to a grinding halt. The government did broaden the scope of 'essential services' to allow certain manufacturing units to reopen, but they struggled due to disruptions in the supply chain and manpower shortage caused by the flight of migrant labour. With cash flows drying up, most firms had a tough time paying salaries and meeting operational expenses, such as mounting power bills. The six-month moratorium on repayment of loans by the RBI came as a temporary relief.

When GDP numbers for the first quarter of the fiscal were announced, the data for manufacturing was abysmally poor. The industrial sector, as a whole, saw de-growth of 38 per cent as against a 4.2 per cent growth in the

same quarter in the previous fiscal. Manufacturing contracted 39.3 per cent during the quarter, with MSMEs hit the worst. As cash flows dried up and clients refused to clear dues, MSMEs failed to restart operations. Large manufacturers faced the brunt too. Showroom sales of passenger vehicles declined by 7.1 per cent year on year, to 178,513 units in August from 192,189 units. In April, production at JSW Steel, one of India's largest integrated steel manufacturers, was 60 per cent lower year on year.

Industry associations have called for greater governmental support for MSMEs, such as power charge waivers and direct benefit transfers for employees in the unorganised and small-scale sectors. They want incentives for retail buyers to spend more, which in turn will create demand and boost manufacturing. ■

JOGINDER BANSAL, 41
Owner, Swastik Industries, Mumbai

For Joginder Bansal, whose manufacturing unit produces engineering goods, the past six months have been a nightmare. Business dried up in April and May, and just when production began to resume slowly, half of his 25-strong migrant workforce left for their native places. "Locally sourced labour is way more expensive and less productive," says Bansal. His other problem is that most of his clients, especially those from the automotive sector, are no longer in a position to place orders like before. With mounting overheads—salaries and a power bill of Rs 75,000—Bansal fears that his business, which has an annual turnover of Rs 1 crore, is in peril.

MILIND SHELTE





SECTOR SIZE

₹8.8
lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

52
million
(direct+indirect)

CONTRIBUTION TO GDP

4.3%

STRESS METER



Severe

Shaky Grounds

Pandemic-related lockdowns have dealt a body blow to the long-suffering real estate sector

BY M.G. ARUN

MANDAR DEODHAR



TOUGH TIMES
Anand Patil at one of his under-construction sites in Navi Mumbai

THE REAL ESTATE SECTOR had been struggling well before the arrival of Covid-19. The pandemic has magnified the pain. Realty consultant Anarock says the supply of new homes declined by 56 per cent in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period last year and that the April-June quarter saw new launches decline by 98 per cent over the same period last year. Real estate players say the lockdowns massively disrupted business, with enquiries coming to a virtual halt in this period and construction on hold as well.

They add that though matters improved July onward, they are still only receiving about half the enquiries they were before the pandemic set in.

Home sales in the top seven cities—the National Capital Region, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Pune, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru—fell to 57,940 units in the first half of calendar year 2020, a dip of 49 per cent compared to the second half of 2019. Experts highlight the many stresses the sector has seen in recent years—demonetisation, the liquidity crisis before and after the IL&FS and Dewan Housing Finance debacles, the overall economic slowdown and now the Covid-19 lockdowns. The sector has also had to adjust to new compliance requirements under the RERA (Real Estate Regulatory Authority) and the GST (Goods and Services Tax). There have also been complaints that banks are shying away from lending, dampening sentiment among both buyers and developers in this sector. Though there are no quick fixes, experts say policymakers should boost demand for homes through incentives and ensure that reductions in interest rates are transmitted effectively to buyers. ■

CASE STUDY

ANAND PATIL, 46

Owner, Vaastu Realty, Navi Mumbai

In end-March, as the first Covid-19 lockdown was imposed, real estate firms across the country saw their businesses come to an abrupt halt. There were no enquiries from customers and construction activity itself was forced to a grinding stop. Patil, whose firm has five ongoing projects in Ulwe, Dronagiri and Vichumbe in Navi Mumbai, employs 17 people directly with construction workers hired as necessary depending on the size of a particular project. He says that at any time, he has between 25 and 100 workers employed at his various sites.

Patil maintained his permanent staff through the lockdown and also ensured that he had about 100 workers staying on at his sites, providing them with food during this period. He says that while demand is now slowly returning, the number of enquiries he receives from customers is still only about half of what it was before the lockdowns.

“Buyers are now looking only for ready-made homes—they fear that builders won’t complete new projects”

SECTOR
SIZE₹8.7
lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

19.1
million
(direct+indirect)CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP

4.2%

STRESS
METER

CAR CRASH

While some sales numbers are improving, industry bodies predict a contraction of 25-40 per cent this year

BY SHWWETA PUNJ

CASE STUDY

VINKESH GULATI, 49

Director, United Automobiles, Allahabad/ Faridabad

Vinkesh Gulati, president of FADA (Federation of Automobile Dealers' Associations), has two dealerships—one in Allahabad and another in Faridabad. He says that he saw an uptick in demand in June, July and August, with sales as good as last year's. He says this was primarily a result of rural demand and demand for personal mobility solutions as a result of the loss of public transport during the pandemic.

Now, with Covid-19 spreading into rural areas, Gulati is not optimistic. He had expected to sell 200 vehicles this year, but says he now expects it will be closer to 100. He is hopeful of higher demand in the coming months: "The festive season is a big [purchase] trigger for rural India. We will be offering better discounts and extended warranties to revive demand," he says. He adds that he is working with 25 per cent less manpower because some workers who returned to their homes during the lockdown have yet to return, but says his hiring capacity will depend on economic conditions.

"We are beginning to see green shoots, especially in two-wheelers and passenger vehicles. But the 3 per cent and 14 per cent growth (respectively) in August should be seen in the backdrop of pent-up and festival-season demand"

—RAJESH MENON,

Director-general, Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers

THE AUTO SECTOR has witnessed an epic pile-up in recent years. In FY20, it saw a de-growth of 18 per cent because of a poor economy and consumers awaiting an imminent switchover to new BS-VI

emission norms. The lockdown, however, caused a never-before event—in April, with businesses across the country closed, the sector reported zero sales.

Coming out of the lockdown, almost all manufacturers reported an 80-90 per cent drop in domestic sales in May. However, the pace of decline slowed in June—Maruti Suzuki reported a 3.8 per cent jump in sales in June over May, with Hyundai also reporting an increase in

sales in that time. (Between them, the two have more than 70 per cent of the market.) In two-wheelers, the revival has been much sharper, especially for entry level motorcycles in rural and semi-urban India. Overall, the two-wheeler and passenger vehicle segments saw growth of 3 per cent and 14 per cent in August 2020. (This good news is tempered by the fact that the base figures from August 2019 were very low themselves.) Analysts say it is too early to tell whether this is a genuine revival or a combination of pent-up and festival demand. While manufacturers hope for higher sales, industry association SIAM (Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers) projects a de-growth this year of 25-40 per cent. ■

YASIR IQBAL



RIISING DEMAND?
Vinkesh Gulati at his dealership in Faridabad

The Missing Buyer

With customer footfall at historically low levels, the retail sector has seen a sharp contraction

BY M.G. ARUN

MANEESH AGNIHOTRI



DISAPPEARED DEMAND Rajesh Gupta at his electronics store in Lucknow

THE RETAIL SECTOR has borne the brunt of the lockdown. From local kiranawalas to those in shopping malls, retailers had an especially tough time in the early days of the lockdown. Though some economic activity resumed when shops selling essential goods were allowed to reopen, these were placed under strict restrictions—such as being allowed to open only on alternate days or only for a few hours each day—which came as quite a dampener to sales. The disruptions in the transport of goods also led to a shortage of products at many places, with high prices as a result. Even today, shopping malls see drastically lower levels of customer footfall, owing to strict social distancing norms and a fear of the virus among the general public.

Weekend curfews and partial lockdowns continue to hurt the retail sector, which does over 45 per cent of its weekly business on weekends, according to a survey released by the Retailers' Association of India (RAI) in August. July saw a 63 per cent de-growth in sectoral business year-on-year (Y-o-Y), after registering an estimated 67 per cent y-o-y de-growth in June. Segments such as apparel, sports goods and beauty and wellness products have been severely impacted. RAI says consumers have restricted purchases to essentials. Some retailers have also had to shut shop after rental negotiations with landlords did not work out, it said. For a speedy revival of the sector, it recommends GST (Goods and Services Tax) waivers and tax incentives, extensions of credit limits for small retailers and a lowering of the operational restrictions imposed in various states. ■

“The pandemic has hit my business hard. I have not sold even 200 items in the past three months”

CASE STUDY

RAJESH KUMAR GUPTA, 41
Owner, Rajesh Electronics, Lucknow

Rajesh Electronics, a store in the popular Naka Hindola electronics market in Lucknow, is silent. Rajesh Kumar Gupta, the owner, says that before March, he would sell at least 200 items every month, earning a net profit of about Rs 1 lakh per month, touching Rs 5 lakh during festival seasons. The pandemic has brought business to a standstill. “Although some markets have reopened, customers are absent. Sales of TVs and refrigerators have come down by 70 per cent,” he says. Before the lockdown, he had eight employees at his shop—that number has reduced to only three. Rajesh's profit has also dropped, to only Rs 20,000–25,000. He says that due to the difficulty in fulfilling his family's needs, he is now planning to close his store and open a repair workshop for electronic equipment.

—By Ashish Misra


COVER STORY
HOPE & DESPAIR
Retail

SECTOR SIZE

₹70

lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

40-60

million

CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP

34.5%

STRESS METER



Severe


**SECTOR
SIZE**
₹7.6
lakh crore

**NO.
EMPLOYED**
3
million

**CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP**
3.7%
STRESS METER


A BRIGHT SPOT

The FMCG sector escaped the worst of the lockdown restrictions—but growth is flat, at best

BY SHWWETA PUNJ

IF THERE IS anything that people have been buying during the pandemic, it is food and cleaning supplies. Though Covid-19 lockdowns shut down production across sectors, the manufacturing of essential items soon restarted, a category into which a big chunk of FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) products fall. However, there were also serious production challenges, with myriad restrictions across geographies. Most FMCG companies have resumed normal operations since June, benefitting from pent-up and rural demand as well as from lower raw material prices. However, though the sector may be doing better than others, it will still not grow as per expectations for this year.

According to data analytics firm Nielsen, India's FMCG sector is expected to witness flat growth in 2020 because of the severe and extended lockdowns, the restrictions on manufacturing, store closures and social distancing norms still in place. In January, the firm had predicted 9-10 per cent sectoral growth, which was slashed to nearly half (5-6 per cent) in April. That estimate has now been further revised down to -1 to 1 per cent growth for the branded FMCG industry this year.

Moving forward, health and hygiene products have emerged as key consumer needs in the post-Covid world. The industry has also benefited from demand from the rural sector, which accounts for 36-37 per cent of total FMCG sales. In fact, the recovery and demand in rural India has prodded FMCG players to expand their rural footprint—strengthening distribution networks and developing product packaging tailored for rural areas. Several companies reported better growth in Tier 2,3 and 4 cities and semi-urban areas during the lockdown. The pandemic has also altered consumer shopping behaviour, with a higher propensity for online shopping. ■

CASE STUDY

MOHIT MALHOTRA, 50

Chief Executive Officer,
Dabur India

Dabur reported steady growth through FY 2019-20. Executives say that until February 2020, Dabur was on track to deliver around 6 per cent growth in revenue and 14 per cent growth in net profit. However, the pandemic and the nationwide lockdown in March impacted revenues and profitability severely. The company ended the financial year with a 2 per cent growth in revenue from operations and a 5.8 per cent growth in net profit. Dabur says it is adapting to changed demand patterns, for instance by revamping its portfolio to increase production of ayurvedic immunity boosters.

“We have enhanced our risk-taking, encouraging our employees to become more entrepreneurial. To support this, it is important to trust people and to accept that some failures will happen”



**STEADY
PROGRESS**

Dabur chief
executive
officer Mohit
Malhotra

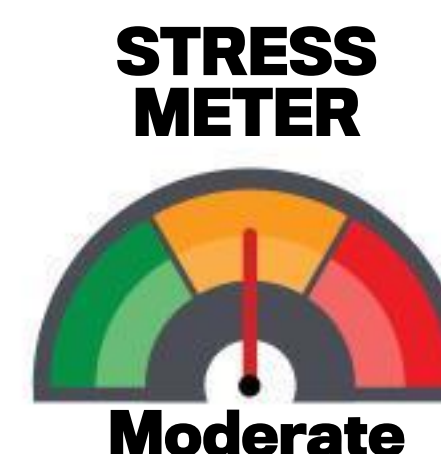
REUBEN SINGH



**SECTOR
SIZE**
₹6.7
lakh crore (in 2018)

**NO.
EMPLOYED**
N.A.

**CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP**
3.3%



Learning Curve

While private schools and institutes struggle to stay afloat, online edu-tech apps are flourishing

BY KAUSHIK DEKA AND SHELLY ANAND

THE COVID-19 LOCK-DOWN resulted in an unprecedented crisis in the education sector. A report by non-profit Central Square Foundation (CSF) found that 87 per cent private schools across India faced a revenue crunch during the lockdown because of non-collection of fees. Some of them later shut down too. State governments had decreed that schools cannot charge fees till the lockdown is in effect. About 120 million students attend private schools and the sector contributes about Rs 1.75 lakh crore to the Indian economy, says the CSF report.

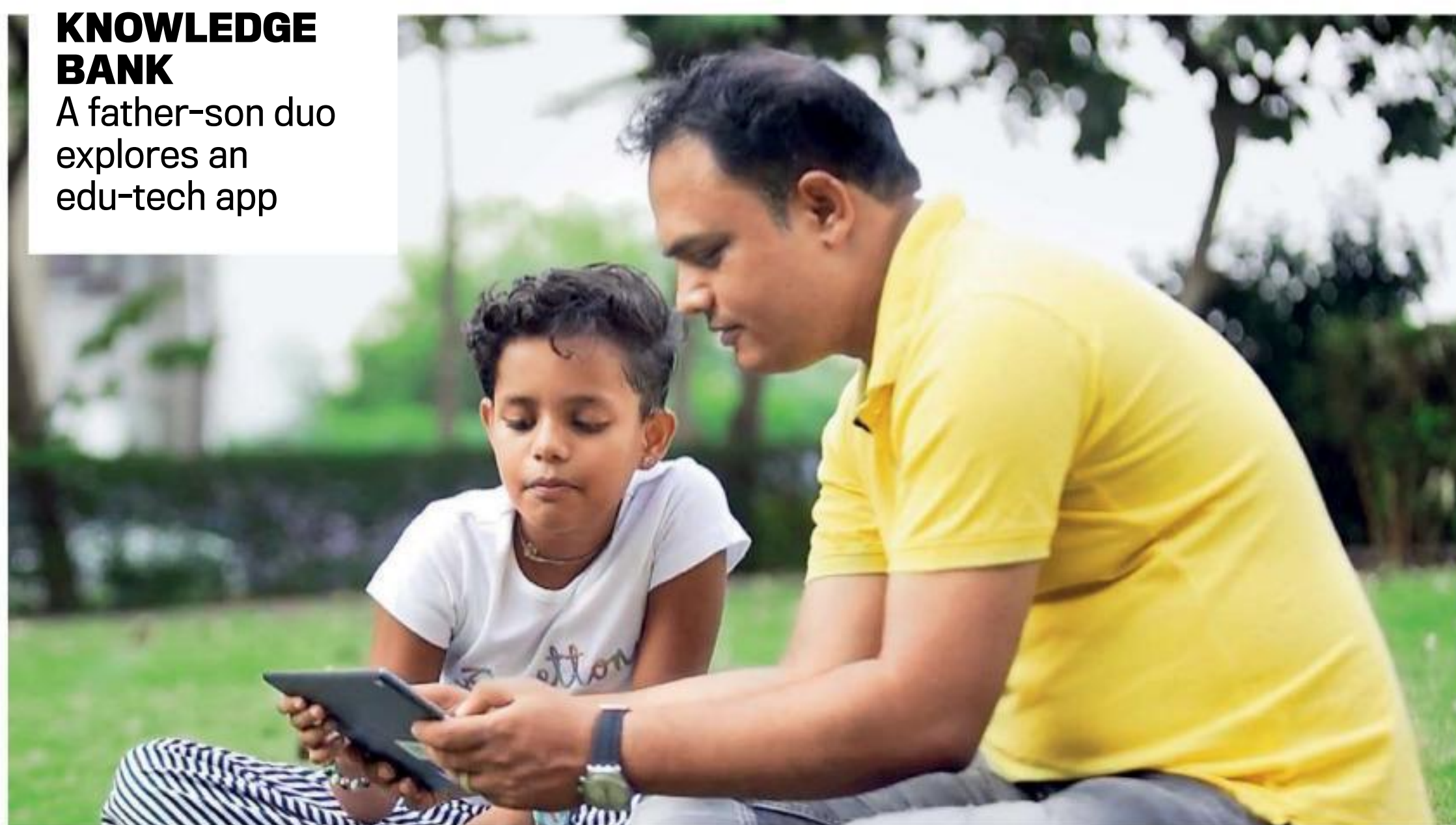
In the higher education sector, most private institutes have switched to digital mode and have withstood significant financial stress. However, many offline coaching centres are facing closure, with a huge dent in revenues. A lot of them started digital classrooms but were

not very successful. At the same time, the crisis has opened opportunities in the virtual world. As regular classes shut down, educational institutions enhanced their digital capabilities. The pandemic has also created a huge opportunity for educational technology start-ups which saw a massive surge in demand. One of India's leading edu-tech apps, Byju's, is now among the world's top 10 in number of downloads.

India, with the world's largest population in the 5-24 age bracket (about 500 million), is already the second-largest market for e-learning after the US. According to the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), the e-learning sector will touch Rs 14,479 crore in revenues by 2021 with around 9.5 million users. Venture capital in the ed-tech space rose to Rs 5,873 crore in the first six months of 2020, up from Rs 798 crore in the corresponding period the year before. ■

KNOWLEDGE BANK

A father-son duo explores an edu-tech app



CASE STUDY

DIVYA GOKULNATH, 32
Co-founder, Byju's



Founded in 2011, Byju's is today the go-to learning app for students in India.

It has a strong team behind its K-10, JEE, NEET and UPSC prep offerings. During the pandemic, they launched several initiatives to help students and also made content on the app free for all. Learning programmes for history, civics and geography were launched in major regional languages. Byju's Classes, a complete after-school learning solution provider, was launched across the country. Divya Gokulnath, co-founder of Byju's, says, "We were listed on both UNESCO's curated list of credible educational applications as well as CBSE's list of online mediums for students."

Since the lockdown, they have seen over 20 million new students join the platform. "The average time spent here has increased from 71 minutes per day to 100 minutes. Earlier, students used to come 2-3 days a week but now they are using the platform on a daily basis," adds Gokulnath. The company plans to hire around 8,000 people overall across business, content and product development over the next 12 months. They remain committed to their long-term vision of making students 'fall in love with learning'.

"Our three pilots of growth will be introducing more subjects, adding more grades and coming out in more Indian languages"

INDIA
TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

JUST A TAP AWAY



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SECTOR SIZE
₹2.57
lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED
1.34
million

CONTRIBUTION TO GDP
1.2%

STRESS METER

Severe

BROKEN WINGS

The post-pandemic revival of this key industry is critical for India's overall economic growth

BY SANDEEP UNNITHAN

THE AIR TRANSPORT SECTOR has been the toast of India's aviation industry, with four straight years of double-digit passenger growth, averaging 12.9 per cent. In January 2019, a 20-year air passenger forecast by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) suggested that India would overtake the UK to become the third largest market by 2025. The study hadn't factored in a black swan event. As Covid spread across the world, nations were forced to shut down their airspace and ground passenger aircraft.

Civil aviation has been among the hardest hit by the pandemic, with global losses this year pegged at over Rs 6.17 lakh crore. The lockdown in India knocked the bottom out of the sector. Indigo and Spicejet, the two top commercial airlines with 60 per cent and 13 per cent market shares, posted losses of Rs 2,844 crore and Rs 593 crore, respectively, for the April-June quarter. They had reported profits of Rs 1,203 crore and Rs 262 crore in the same quarter the year before. The revenue of Indian domestic airlines reduced from Rs 25,517 crore in April-June 2019 to Rs 3,651 crore in the same period this year.

While scheduled international flights are yet to resume, the drop in domestic air travel demand has been steep—82 per cent year on year in July. Credit ratings agency Fitch noted the uptick in domestic passenger volumes since end-May as slow, with traffic increasing by only 6 per cent in July from the previous month. Volume growth is predicted to remain in single digits over the next few months as the pandemic rages on and people avoid non-essential travel.

The civil aviation sector's revival is key to restarting the economy. For instance, foreign tourist arrivals help Indian businesses trade their goods and services around the world. The 2019 IATA report says foreign tourist spending in the local economy supports around 4.3 million additional jobs. Directly and indirectly, the air transport industry is estimated to have supported a \$10.4 billion (Rs 76,649 crore) gross value

GROUND

Jungbir Singh at the cargo terminal, Delhi international airport



“International airline movements are currently just a small fraction of what is required to keep our heads above water”

added contribution to India's GDP, says the report.

Airline operators are seeking a slew of measures to pull the industry out of the crisis, such as bringing aviation turbine fuel (ATF) under GST, entirely removing the 11 per cent excise duty on ATF and fixing ATF prices on a fortnightly rather than a monthly basis. They also want deferment of tax and other statutory dues for six months, an interest-free line of credit worth at least Rs 11,000 crore for the aviation sector and deferring repayment of loans to banks and financial institutions by six months. ■

CASE STUDY

JUNGBIR SINGH, 50

Director, Celebi Airport Services
India, New Delhi

From nearly 400 international flights daily, Celebi Airport Services saw its flight handlings at Indian airports come down to just 10 during the lockdown. The



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

Turkish firm had entered India's civil aviation market a decade ago and expanded to cover ground handling at seven international airports. As the pandemic halted flights, working capital inflow from airlines dried up. Celebi had to pay its 8,000-odd staff for four months and maintain its aircraft handling equipment. A lifeline came in the form of outstanding payments from airlines. But with scheduled flights yet to start, things remain uncertain. The silver lining is that air cargo—another vertical of the firm—continued through the lockdown. Celebi has cut down on expenses and is exploring ways to get the cargo business to support the passenger business.



Toys

Toy Story 2020

The pandemic has been a wake-up call for the import-dependent industry

BY SHWWETA PUNJ

NEARLY 90 PER CENT OF TOYS IN INDIA are imported and are mostly from China. With increased curbs on imports and a shortage of factory workers, manufacturers say they are running out of stock. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his *Mann Ki Baat* address on August 30, made special mention of the sector, saying: "India should work towards becoming self-reliant in the production of toys."

According to Global market research firm IMARC, the size of India's toy market is around Rs 10,000 crore. Of this, the organised toy industry is estimated to be around Rs 3,500-4,500 crore. Homegrown toys constitute only 12-13 per cent of this and nearly 88 per cent belongs to international brands like Mattel and Fischer Price. According to a 2017 report on India's toys sector, commissioned by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, 2,162 people were employed in 90

manufacturing units in India in 2013-14. There is a massive potential for job creation in the sector. Karnataka has announced a toys cluster, claiming it will generate 40,000 jobs. Till now, though, most of the toys coming to India were being manufactured in Guangdong, China. The backlash against China in the form of increased import duties has hurt the industry considerably. In-store sales of toys across categories have declined with online sales of construction toys and board games faring only slightly better.

Juzer Gabajiwala, a member of the All India Toy Manufacturers' Association and owner of Peacock Toys, says that in his factory in Vapi, Gujarat, inconsistent power is an issue. "We need a lot of infrastructure support from the government," he says. The budget this year increased import duties on toys from 20 to 60 per cent and mandated that all toys manufactured in India be certified by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). While the BIS requirement has been deferred for now, the road ahead for the sector remains arduous. ■

SECTOR SIZE
₹12,863
crore
(10 per cent organised; 90 per cent unorganised)

NO. EMPLOYED
NA

CONTRIBUTION TO GDP
0.06%

STRESS METER

Severe



AMIT SUNDRA, 49

Director, Ram Chander & Sons, Delhi

Amit Sundra's toy shop in Connaught Place in Delhi is an institution. Around since 1935, Ram Chander & Sons, says Sundra, has never witnessed a time like this when hours go by without a single customer walking in. After months of sliding sales, Sundra is exploring other avenues for driving sales and marketing. Though things have picked up since the lockdown was lifted, Sundra is sending out personalised messages and offers on WhatsApp to his regulars. "Every sale counts. There is no time to become lax," says Sundra. Nearly 60 per cent of his sales now happen online. He is hopeful about the rest of the year, but, overall, 2020 is a year best forgotten, he says.

A ROSY OUTLOOK

While reports put India's healthcare sector on steady ground, some short-term obstacles do need attention

BY SONALI ACHARJEE

EVEN BEFORE COVID BROKE OUT, the healthcare sector in India was on its way to success and reports for 2020 were already positive for the industry. The sector was expected to generate 40 million jobs this year, the pharmaceutical sector was expected to supply over 50 per cent of the world's vaccines demands, telemedicine and medical insurance were also predicted to flourish.

Despite Covid negatively impacting medical tourism and non-Covid healthcare services, a report last week by the India Brand Equity Foundation painted a similar rosy picture for the sector. The

healthcare market is expected to increase three-fold to Rs 8.6 lakh crore by 2022. The private sector still accounts for 74 per cent of the country's expenditure and the report predicted that investment will rise for both hard (hospitals) and soft (research) infrastructure. The hospital industry is estimated to touch Rs 27.4 lakh crore by 2022, up from Rs 11.8 lakh crore in 2017. Gross direct premium income underwritten by health insurance grew 17.16 per cent year-on-year to Rs 51,637.84 crore in FY20 and the medical devices market is expected to cross Rs 81,331.2 crore by 2022. The report did, however, highlight concerns of manpower—India will require 2.07

million more doctors by 2030 to meet the WHO minimum of doctor to population ratio of 1:1,000. To meet the demand and potential for services, staffing shortages need to be resolved.

Despite a growing emphasis on building a strong healthcare sector in India, many short-term obstacles remain. "Covid has been an opportunity and a challenge for hospitals, labs, manufacturers and insurance providers," says Dr Naresh Trehan, director and founder, Medanta Hospitals, Gurugram. Not only did the virus endanger the physical and mental health of healthcare personnel but also tested the limits of the sector in terms of self-sufficiency, manpower and governance. In the years ahead, many in healthcare predict more self-reliance in terms of medical devices, research, diagnosis facilities, protective gear and equipment. "Those who adapted to seize opportunities presented by the pandemic will reap the dividends in the years ahead," adds Dr Trehan. ■

COVER STORY
HOPE & DESPAIR
Healthcare

SECTOR SIZE
₹19.6 lakh crore



Pharmaceuticals

On the Frontlines

India's pharma industry has led the pandemic fightback

BY M.G. ARUN

THE PHARMA INDUSTRY, it is often said, is recession-proof. In this season of Covid-19, they are on the frontlines of the battle, with a host of Indian companies such as Zydus Cadila, Bharat Biotech, Aurobindo Pharma, Serum

SECTOR SIZE
₹4 lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED
2.7 million

CONTRIBUTION TO GDP
2%

STRESS METER
No stress

Institute, Biological E and Gennova Biopharmaceuticals, engaged in the quest for a vaccine. These vaccines are in various stages of development or clinical trials.

India has already made big strides in pharmaceuticals on the world stage, cornering 20 per cent share of the global generics market by volume. It already meets 62 per cent of the global demand for vaccines. In the early days of the pandemic, disruption in API (active pharmaceutical ingredients) imports

from China affected pharma production in India. While pharma manufacturing was exempted from the lockdown, the lack of labour led to production shutdowns. Factory shipments also stood affected. India later banned the export of critical APIs, essential medicines, specific medical devices, sanitisers and ventilators to ensure sufficient domestic supply. Indian pharma companies have the opportunity of emerging as an alternative low-cost option for drug supplies to the world,

NO.
EMPLOYED
40
million

CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP
9.6%

STRESS METER

No stress



CASE STUDY

DR AROKIASWAMY VELUMANI, 62

Founder & managing
director, Thyrocare
Technologies, Navi Mumbai

Founded in 1996, Thyrocare Technologies is a chain of diagnostic and preventive care laboratories, based in Navi Mumbai. The company has 1,122 outlets and collection centres across India and abroad. When Covid broke out, the company decided to make use of its pre-existing PCR machines and trained manpower to steadily add to its Covid testing capacity. From 200 tests a day in April, they are now capable of conducting 20,000 tests per day. "Our growth has almost doubled this year," says Dr Arokiaswamy Velumani. While Covid

hit all other lab services badly in the initial days of the lockdown, around 90 per cent of their demand has been restored as of this month. They have added 20 per cent new jobs in the past six months, the median age of the new hires being 25. Their greatest hurdle has been to protect the staff and, despite best efforts, many have been infected. "My philosophy for the future is 'lage raho' (keep at it). This is the time to embrace opportunity, innovate and persevere because the importance of quality diagnosis is only just starting to be felt. The scope to grow and add to lab infrastructure in the country is tremendous right now," he adds.

"Only a few months ago, half the world's population did not know what a PCR test was. Now it is part of common parlance"

if the industry, with some help from the government, enhances capacities and production of APIs and bulk drugs. India has nearly 2,000 WHO-approved pharma production units and 253 European Directorate of Quality Medicines (EDQM)-approved plants. India's API industry is the third largest in the world, contributing 57 per cent of APIs to WHO's prequalified list.

The pharmaceutical industry has for long been demanding a single-window clearance facility for faster approvals as well as speedier reimbursement of levies such as GST. Its other important demand is the creation of a critical inventory of APIs and formulations, to meet emergency needs. ■



CASE STUDY

DR SHARVIL PATEL, 42

MD, Zydus Cadila
Employees: 25,000 worldwide

Zydus has been at the forefront of the Covid-19 battle, scaling up production of Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and

Dexamethasone and launching the life-saving drug Remdac, which it claims is the most economical brand of Remdesivir available for the treatment of the virus. The company started its vaccine development programme even before the infection spread to India, says Dr Sharvil Patel, MD. ZyCoV-D is currently in Phase II clinical trials. In collaboration with ICMR, the company also manufactured and supplied Covid Kavach Elisa diagnostic kits. Zydus is hoping to manufacture 100 million doses of ZyCoV-D to start with, at the Zydus Vaccine Technology Centre in Ahmedabad. "The ability to innovate and execute our plans has been our core strength. This shaped our response to the pandemic too," says Patel.

COVER STORY
HOPE &
DESPAIR
Transport/
Logistics



SECTOR
SIZE

₹11.7
lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

22
million

CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP

5.8%

STRESS METER



Severe

IN THE SLOW LANE

The lockdown put this industry completely out of gear. While freight movement by road has restarted, recovery is a long way off

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

W

HEN INDIA BEGAN TO FEEL THE ECONOMIC pinch of the lockdown, among the first things the Centre decided

to get moving was the logistics sector. Soon, trucks were back on the highways to ferry essential items, medicines and health equipment. But with state borders sealed, even truckers carrying essential supplies had to endure long waits. Forty days into the lockdown, market analysis firms projected that the country's transport and logistics sector might suffer a 15-20 per cent contraction.

In the first four months of the fiscal,

the railways' earnings from freight fell by 26.4 per cent to Rs 31,275 crore as against the corresponding period in 2019-20. This was largely due to a sharp drop in the demand for coal and cement, items that move primarily on trains. Top railways officials, however, say that since the Unlock phase began, freight movement has become faster, benefitting from additional track availability due to the restrictions on passenger trains.

However, truck operators struggled to revive their businesses even after inter-state movement opened up, largely due to shortage of drivers, who had migrated back to their native places, and low availability of return load. While long-distance freight movement by road has restarted, it is facing tough competition from the railways.

CASE STUDY

SANJEEV DIWAN, 47

Owner, Chandigarh-Indore
Roadlines, Chandigarh

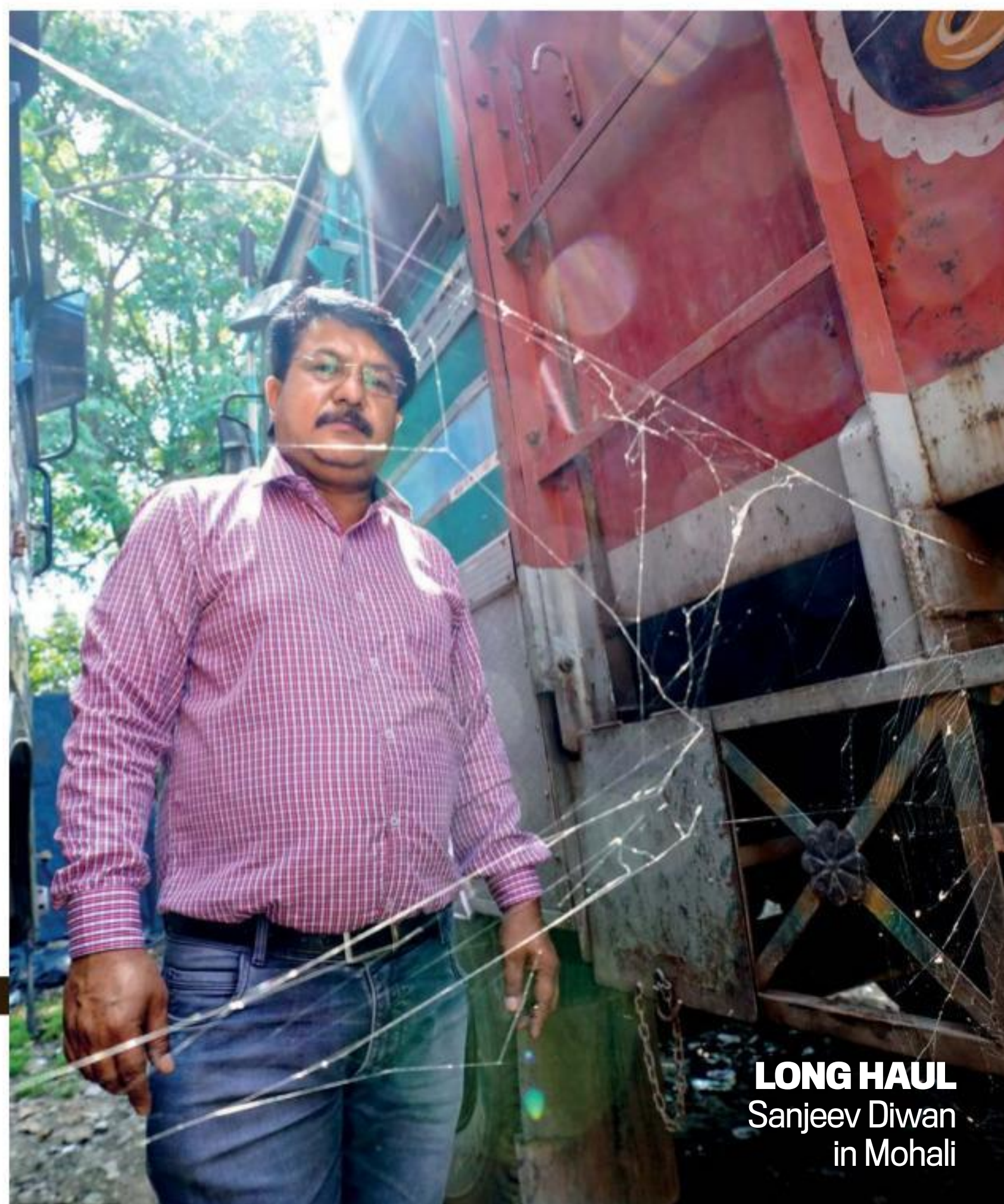
With a fleet of 50 trucks, Sanjeev Diwan's firm is one of the prominent long-distance freight carriers in and around Chandigarh. Diwan primarily deals in the transportation of agricultural commodities, pharmaceutical products and industrial goods in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.

Given the scale of operations, Diwan had his hands full managing his truck drivers

during the lockdown as many of them were stuck on the highways. He tried to ensure that they did not run out of money for food and other essentials and had temporary accommodation.

"Business had almost dried up in the first three months of the lockdown, but we had to continue paying salaries to the drivers and other staff as you cannot afford to lose them. They are not only loyal but a trained workforce," says Diwan. He says that while business has started trickling in from July, it's far

SANDEEP SAHDEV



LONG HAUL
Sanjeev Diwan
in Mohali



**Gems &
jewellery**

Faded Sparkle

Exports down, the sector looks to the wedding season for reprieve

BY ROHIT PARIHAR

THE GEMS AND JEWELLERY SECTOR, WHICH accounts for 15 per cent of India's merchandise exports and employs 4.8 million people, is in dire straits. At Rs 0.45 lakh crore, gross exports in April-August 2020 slumped to almost half of the Rs 0.80 lakh crore figure in the corresponding period in 2019, says the Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC).

"Gems and jewellery exports in 2019-20 were worth Rs 2.1 lakh crore. This fiscal, exports are likely to be 20-25 per cent down," says Colin Shah, chairman, GJEPC. Retail sales have fallen to about 20 per cent of the pre-Covid levels. Fashion jewellery and items under Rs 1 lakh have somewhat kept domestic trade afloat. Sanjay Kala, president, Jewellers' Association-Jaipur, says the wedding season from mid-October is expected to bring reprieve.

To revive the sector and boost exports, traders want incentives under the Centre's Merchandise Exports Incentive Scheme (MEIS) to be extended beyond December 31, 2020. They say the conditions set by the government for paying 50 per cent of three months' wages to unemployed workers through the ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation) route should be relaxed. This includes covering more jobless workers by doing away with the salary cap of Rs 15,000. ■

SECTOR SIZE

₹6.3
lakh crore

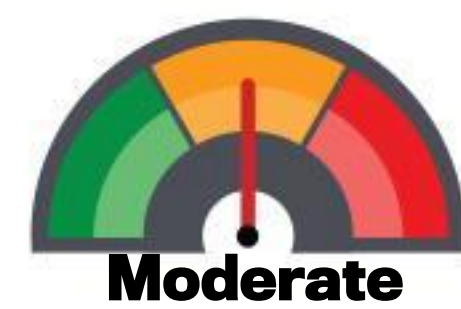
NO. EMPLOYED

4.8
million

**CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP**

3.1%

STRESS METER



SURVIVING ODDS

Tarang Arora at his production unit



PURUSHOTTAM DIWAKAR

TARANG ARORA, 36

Creative director and partner, Amrapali Jewels Group, Jaipur

As India went into Covid lockdown, a third of the 1,500-odd skilled workers at Tarang Arora's jewellery design studio left for their hometowns. Yet Arora succeeded in meeting 70 per cent of his production targets by relying on state-of-the-art machinery. With only a fraction of his products meant for domestic retail, he focused on clients who had booked bulk orders. For instance, Australian jewellery designer Samantha Lowe stayed put in Jaipur during the lockdown and got jewellery for her brand Valere manufactured from Arora.

Arora is introducing more automation into his unit to achieve more output with fewer resources. "I am also exploiting online marketing and sales to the hilt and, despite staff shortage, looking to meeting my commitments to clients," he says.

Tarang adds that the government can help jewellery-makers by facilitating domestic production of high-quality jewellery production tools that China has near-monopoly on.

"Freight movement is directly linked to the fortunes of our economy. Things are slowly falling in place but uncertainty prevails in the market"

from normalcy. "Business at the moment is half of what it used to be before the Covid pandemic. But these are not normal times. We are reducing our running cost and trying to innovate to keep things going," says Diwan. ■

COVER STORY
HOPE & DESPAIR
Footwear & Leather Industry



SECTOR
SIZE

₹1.3
lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

4.42
million

CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP

0.6%

STRESS METER



Moderate

India has an opening in the export market, many countries are now looking to replace the Chinese goods in their shopping kart

BOOT-STRAPP

The first quarter was a washout, but leather goods exports are looking up. Can India scale up in time to take advantage?

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

THE FOOTWEAR AND LEATHER INDUSTRY is slowly coming to terms with the almost wiped out first quarter of this fiscal. The segment is expected to shrink by 8-10 per cent in comparison to business done last year. Still, most manufacturers consider the

pandemic to be a temporary disruption. The big players are altering their business model—going slow on brick-and-mortar stores and focusing more on the e-commerce side.

The government recently set up a Development Council for Footwear and Leather Industry to support the sector. Most of the players who do contract manufacturing are bootstrapped at this hour; 50 per cent of their stock is still lying in the warehouses. Worse, the demand for formal shoes where margins are higher is minimal, as many people are working from home.

On the upside, exports are looking up. The exports market for leather goods, worth \$5.1 billion a year, had taken a 56 per cent hit between April and July this year. But with economies opening up, not only has demand picked up (just 17 per cent down y-on-y in August) but many countries are now looking to replace the Chinese in their shopping kart. India has an opening, but scaling up will not be easy. India produces 2.6 million pairs of footwear now, not even enough to satisfy domestic consumption (2.7 million pairs).

“First, a shift in business will happen, then new investments will come,” insists Aqeel Ahmad Panaruna, chairman of the Council for Leather Exports. In the past two months, export orders have started coming in. But to win over global markets, Indian players need collaborations with global vendors and, in some cases, even raw and processed material. Meanwhile, Taiwanese shoe manufacturing major Phau Chen, which does contract manufacturing of sport shoes for the big brands, is working out modalities with the Telangana government to set up a factory in the state. The manufacturers see this as an opportunity to build a world-class ecosystem in India. ■



CASE STUDY

HARKIRAT SINGH, 53

MD, Aero Clubs (Woodland, Woods footwear)

The Woodland brand, like most of its peers, saw sales wiped out in the first three months of the fiscal. It hit hard as the company has 600 exclusive stores and presence in another 5,500 multi-brand outlets.

The company closed FY20 with a turnover of Rs 1,300 crore, posting

a growth of Rs 50 crore over the previous year. Roughly, 60 per cent revenues came from footwear. The setback was greater as Woodland positions itself in the outdoor category, and with Covid and the lockdown, regaining customer confidence has not been easy. Sales are gradually

RAJWANT RAWAT



Textiles

Left in Tatters

SECTOR SIZE

₹4.7
lakh crore

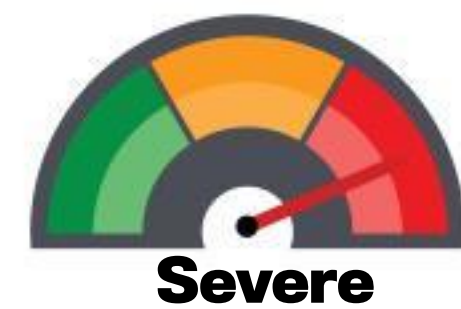
NO. EMPLOYED

105
million

CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP

2.3%

STRESS METER



A contraction in demand has pushed textile units to the brink. The sector desperately needs incentives to boost exports

BY SHWWETA PUNJ

THE TEXTILES SECTOR IS INDIA'S SECOND-LARGEST EMPLOYER after agriculture, but

infrastructural bottlenecks and productivity challenges have hampered its growth even as countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Cambodia have moved in to corner the global market. Covid has inflicted more hardship on the sector. The exodus of migrant labour severely compromised production capacity of textile units to meet overseas demands.

Domestic demand, too, crashed, except in segments like lounge wear and essentials. According to ratings agency ICRA, the downturn will contract demand by 25-35 per cent across the yarn, fabric and apparel segments in FY21 when compared to the previous fiscal. Demand growth in the second half of FY21 will depend on the discretionary

spending of consumers and measures announced by the government to incentivise exports.

Kumar Duraisamy, an exporter from Tiruppur, one of the country's largest textile hubs, says there is little demand for casual wear or fancy clothing. The anti-China sentiment in parts of the world due to the pandemic, which domestic textile manufacturers had hoped would divert big global orders to India, has subsided. Indian manufacturers and exporters are now working towards cutting costs. Duraisamy, whose firm Eastern Global Clothing has suffered a 20-30 per cent decline in sales, is consolidating his three factories into one.

Textile unit owners say the government should consider wage support for workers who have lost their jobs, speed up GST refunds, facilitate loans at lower interest rates and incentivise the use of technology to enhance factory output. ■

picking up, but the intermittent lockdowns in several places are still creating uncertainty.

"We are making conscious efforts to integrate digital e-commerce with our brick-and-mortar stores," Harkirat told INDIA TODAY. He is also using the disruption to source technically superior fabrics. "We use Polartec for both shoes and apparel; it allows sweat to precipitate but doesn't allow water to seep inside," he says.

YASIR IQBAL



SHARADD GUPTA, 55
CEO, Valeno Inc., New Delhi

Sharadd Gupta exemplifies what the lockdown has done to textile entrepreneurs. Gupta's factory, which employs 200 workers, in Haryana's Faridabad used to produce knitted garments, 90 per cent of which would be

"I have scaled down my business considerably. At the moment, I have no plans to set up my manufacturing unit again"

exported. The Covid crisis forced him to shut down his unit and outsource orders. The lockdown and the unease of doing business, he says, have exhausted his working capital even as GST refunds remain held up with the government, and banks are not willing to lend. Gupta's order-book is at 20-30 per cent of what it was a few years ago and he is staring at a bleak future.



SECTOR SIZE

₹18.3
lakh crore

NO. EMPLOYED

39.8
million

**CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP**

9%

STRESS METER

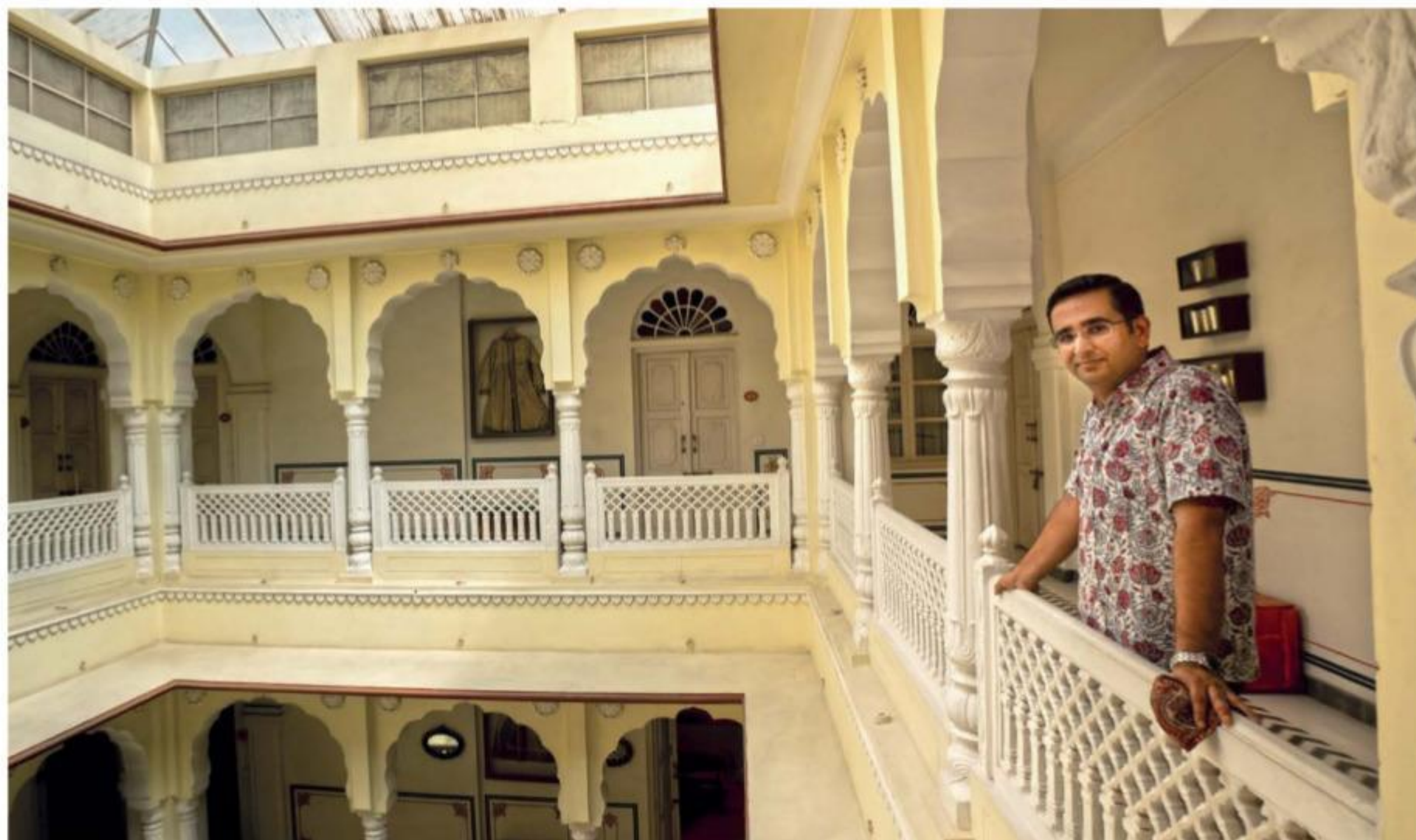


Severe

Deserted Portals

The tourism sector has to rethink its business model to cater to tourists in a post-pandemic world

BY SHWWETA PUNJ & CHUMKI BHARADWAJ



SANDEEP SAHDEV

THE DISRUPTION IN THE TOURISM SECTOR has perhaps been one of the sharpest. Typically, tourism is among the first sectors to be affected and the last to recover in a health crisis. India receives about 11 million foreign tourists—which is low, considering the country’s size and scale. Dubai, for instance, gets 16 million a year. In the first few months of the pandemic, hotels across segments registered zero occupancy.

Research by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has found that currently hotels are seeing an 80-85 per cent erosion in revenue. When the lockdown was announced on March 24, occupancies fell to 7 per cent against 75 per cent a year ago. The CII-Hotelivate research states that the hospitality industry, including branded and unbranded hotels, will incur revenue losses worth Rs 1.4 lakh crore, but the branded ones could witness better recovery in terms of occupancy. Kapil Chopra, founder and CEO of Postcard Hotels, says the experiential traveller and properties catering to the segment are likely to recover faster than the business hotel category since the post-Covid world will entail less travel and more virtual meetings.

Some states have structured tourism-centric packages. Kerala, for instance, has announced a Rs 455 crore package for the sector, while Tamil Nadu has said that the state’s fiscal condition does not permit a package specific to the sector. Vikram Kapur, additional chief secretary, tourism, culture, religious endowments department, Tamil Nadu, says the revival of the sector is dependent on the revival of demand and a stimulus by the Centre. ■

CASE STUDY

JAIDEEP SINGH CHANDAIL, 38
Owner, Ramgarh Heritage, Haryana

Chandail closed down his Ramgarh Heritage, A WelcomHeritage Hotel, almost immediately after the lockdown was announced. All the bookings for April had to be refunded. Six months on, the property remains closed and Chandail has had to dip into his personal savings for the upkeep of the property. “Covid has wiped out business for half a year as of now,” says Chandail, adding that “hospitality will change completely in the way guests perceive hotels and how hotels will adapt to the new trends of service delivery. He has had to invest in sanitisation SOPs in accordance with the norms set by the Welcome Group, which includes getting cold fogging and baggage spraying machines, and machines to peel and chop vegetables. He is hopeful of opening in October but with limited staff and services. They have had to let go of 30 people from the total staff strength of 40.

**“Covid’s
impact will
continue for at
least another
18 months,
depending
on the cure/
vaccine”**

SECTOR
SIZE
9,527
Single screens &
multiplexes
NO.
EMPLOYED
2
million
CONTRIBUTION
TO GDP
N.A.
STRESS
METER

A SLOW DEATH

The pandemic has dealt a fatal blow to the single-screen theatres that were already doddering

BY SUHANI SINGH

CASE STUDY

SHARAD DOSHI, 62

Partner, Central Plaza
theatre, Mumbai

Mumbai's Central Plaza theatre, an 84-year-old institution, finally ceased operations on August 8. The decision came after owners were unable to meet the maintenance fees and staff salaries and had no relief from state on property taxes and water and electricity bills. Around 80 employees were let go. "How much can you dig into your own pocket?" says Sharad Doshi, owner. Also vice-president of the Cinema Owners and Exhibitors' Association of India, Doshi now faces another conundrum. As per the Mumbai Development Control and Promotion Regulations of 2018, if a cinema closes, the new business in its place must accommodate a theatre and retain at least 33 per cent of seats from the old layout. "Neither do they want to help us nor do they want us to go away," says Doshi. "Despite repeated requests to the state government, nothing has happened."

"The Maharashtra govt is responsible for the demise of the single-screen industry in the state"



END OF THE LINE The Central Plaza theatre in Mumbai closes down

MANDAR DEODHAR

SINGLE-SCREEN THEATRES were struggling even before Covid appeared on the scene. As per the FICCI-EY report on India's Media and Entertainment sector published in March, the revenue of single-screen theatres—down from 6,651 to 6,327 in numbers—fell from Rs 6,000 crore in 2018 to Rs 5,300 crore in 2019.

"The decline was fuelled by the continuing shutdown of single screens, primarily in the Hindi heartland, as films continued to be created for upper class/ multiplex audiences," it noted. The subsequent lockdown has come as the climactic punch. With cinemas still shut, members of the film industry have taken to tweeting with hashtags like #SupportMovieTheatres #SaveCinemaSaveJobs.

Multiplexes aren't faring any better. PVR Cinemas has terminated service contracts with the housekeeping and security agencies and reduced salaries of its 6,300 workforce. "It's a tough situation. We have received no support—whether in the form of loans from banks, subsidies or help to take care

of our staff salaries," says Gautam Dutta, CEO, PVR Cinemas. "We don't see why the exhibition sector is not being allowed to open when metros and restaurants have been." Multiplexes, says Dutta, contribute 70 to 75 per cent to a film's theatrical revenue. The cinema exhibition industry is estimated to have lost Rs 9,000 crore since March 14 when cinemas were ordered to close. Livelihoods of around 2 million people—in single screen and multiplexes combined—is at stake with a sizeable section employed contractually. The Cinema Owners and Exhibitors' Association of India has suggested that nearly half of India's single-screen theatres will have to shut shop if cinemas aren't allowed to reopen soon. The closure projects a bleak outlook for the film industry where theatres accounted for Rs 11,500 crore of revenue in 2019, much higher than digital (Rs 2,210 crore) and TV satellite (Rs 1,900 crore) rights.

More worrying for theatre owners is the surge in the subscription of OTT platforms and producers forsaking theatrical releases for digital premieres. Moreover, now the dwindling number of single screens will make the big-screen experience even more of a luxury than it already is in the cities. ■



THE NATION
MISSION KARMAYOGI

REFORMING BABUDOM

MISSION KARMAYOGI, PM MODI'S MOST AMBITIOUS
PROGRAMME YET TO REFORM THE BUREAUCRACY, AIMS
TO TRANSFORM IT INTO A FUTURE-READY SERVICE

BY UDAY MAHURKAR

THE GUIDED PATH

PM Modi with officer trainees of the 92nd foundation course, at the LBSNAA institute, October 26, 2017



ernment Online Training) software that will work initially in tandem with regular on-site courses and in the next three years evolve into an independent training module. Though still in the works, it was used as a pilot project in the past four months to train 1.2 million health workers to tackle the Covid crisis. Next month, a batch of officer-trainees attending the LBSNAA course will be subjected to the ‘flipped class model’ used in business schools. In this, trainees will read the theoretical construct of the course material online, so that class-time can be used more for interactive case studies and problem-solving models.

To fast-track the development of iGOT, the Union department of personnel and training (DoPT), the nodal agency for the programme, will soon be setting up a special purpose vehicle (SPV), a company under Section 8 of the Companies Act directly owned by the government. It will be the key driver of iGOT, which it will own and operate on the government’s behalf. With Rs 510 crore being set aside for the development of Mission Karmayogi in the next five years, the SPV will engage the best software experts and companies to evolve iGOT into a world-class training, assessment and certification ecosystem, apart from providing the government with data analysis on governance.

The focus, as DoPT secretary C. Chandramouli says, is on iGOT to be equipped with the tools to train government officials in all aspects of their work. It will also operate at several levels. So for those joining a particular post, the software will provide what is known as

“With Mission Karmayogi, the PM has helped create an institutional architecture for long-term improvement in public service and the bureaucracy”

P.K. MISHRA
Principal secy to PM



It all began when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) to address officers drawn from the various administrative services in October 2017. The officers, including from the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, had gathered there for a foundation-level training course, but PM Modi came away with the distinct impression that there was a need for radical reform in the way they were being trained. Among the things that stuck out for him was the current emphasis on rules and regulations rather than people-centric governance and the need for meeting national targets and goals.

Another bugbear was the multiple training institutes—361 including the LBSNAA—that lacked both a common national vision and international exposure about best governance practices. Modi reportedly told his aides, “Our civil servants need a complete change in outlook. We need a transformational programme that changes their vision and brings out latent energies in the service of the nation.”

And when Modi says something, it usually gets done. So now, three years later, the prime minister has unveiled Mission Karmayogi, a Union government initiative to transform the way the country’s civil servants are trained and selected for departments or assignments. It will first be implemented for all 4.6 million central government employees, from peons, clerks and junior-level officers to the bureaucrats in the 37 key civil services. Subsequently, with the consent of the state governments, the mission intends to bring the 20 million employees of the state governments and Union territories under its umbrella.

The pivot of this Karmayogi transformation is the iGOT (Integrated Gov-

FRAC—the framework of rules, activities and competencies needed for the task. Each ministry has been asked to come up with FRAC content for their various courses through crowdsourcing method after which it will be curated.

The iGOT will also offer basic courses in functional software like Microsoft Word and Excel for officials who are digitally challenged. There will be a range of online courses in behavioural learning and management techniques, as well as curated content from the best management schools, including Harvard and the London School of Economics. The iGOT will also hold online exams with the results going into the officer's service record, to be later used for performance evaluation. Chandramouli says, "So not only will there be a guided path of learning but also a desirable path where an employee can do specialised courses. It will be a mammoth edutech initiative that in size will probably be unmatched in the world."

The iGOT will be democratic in that it will be accessible to all levels of employees and not just to the higher echelons of the civil service. It will also be user-friendly, designed so that a government servant can access it any time and through multiple gadgets, be it smartphones, PCs or tablets (which in turn could render the physical training institute concept obsolete). The software will also analyse user experience, learning levels, application of learning to work and eventually help assess annual performance as part of a Personnel Management System. These will be used by the government to determine postings and promotions. Impressed by the Indian government's vision for the software, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates recently wrote to the PM saying that "iGOT has the potential to become a global exemplar for how technology can be leveraged for the training needs of officials".

A big advantage Karmayogi brings is training modules for specific roles which will help officers adapt faster to

NEW ROLES TO PLAY

President Ram Nath Kovind with state civil service officers at their IAS induction ceremony, Aug. 2017



new responsibilities. For example, if an officer is transferred from, say, the labour department to health, iGOT will help him define his exact role in the new posting. Says principal secretary to the PM, P.K. Mishra, who played a key role in iGOT's conception, "With Mission Karmayogi, the PM has helped create an institutional architecture for long-term improvement in public service. The programme has broken the knowledge hierarchy in the bureaucracy, mandated an annual capacity-building plan and created a state-of-the-art digital training platform."

With Karmayogi, diverse services like the IAS, IPS, IRTS and others will also have the same vision for national programmes like the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (ABA), ease of doing business and national targets like India becoming a five trillion dollar economy. For example, the training programme for police personnel will make them aware how crucial they are as guardians of security in the success

of a national programme like ABA. Says cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba, "When private companies decide to invest, one main criterion is security in the area where they are setting up the company. Tourism too grows in safe areas. The police personnel will now know how important their role is in nation-building as a whole. Each service will now have a vision in terms

"Each service will now have a vision in terms of its national role and work priorities. For example, the police will know how important their role is in nation-building"

RAJIV GAUBA
Cabinet secretary





MISSION KARMAYOGI INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE



PM'S HR COUNCIL

Apex body to provide strategic direction to capacity-building reforms



CAPACITY-BUILDING COMMISSION

Will harmonise training standards, create shared faculty and resources and supervise the central training institutions



CABINET SECRETARIAT COORDINATION UNIT

Will monitor progress and execution and oversee plans



SPECIAL PURPOSE VEHICLE (SPV)

Will own and operate the online platform—iGOT Karmayogi. The platform will be self-sustaining, operationalising a robust content ecosystem as well as managing governance data analysis



WHAT IS THE iGOT- KARMAYOGI?

➤ The Karmayogi programme will be delivered through an Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) Karmayogi platform

➤ iGOT-Karmayogi will allow all government servants, from assistant secretary to secretary level, to undergo continuous training, depending on their domain areas

➤ Courses from international universities will be available on the platform for all levels of officers to study at any time

➤ The platform is expected to evolve into a vibrant and world-class marketplace for content where carefully curated and vetted digital e-learning material will be available

➤ Besides capacity-building, service matters like confirmation after probation period, deployment, work assignment and notification of vacancies etc. will eventually be integrated with the competency framework

of its national role and work priorities. At present, it's simply not there.”

In addition to the software, the government has also gone about streamlining the training processes at the institutes. When the services were formed, a 90-day foundation-level course for UPSC-passing officers was compulsory at the LBSNAA. With the passage of time, only six of the 37 services (including the IAS, IPS and IFS) now deem this course compulsory. Others have made it optional. Marks secured by officers in the foundation course were not considered for intra-service and inter-service seniority except in these six services. Now, the course has been made compulsory for all the services. This will ensure that inter-state seniority is decided fairly. Chandramouli says, “Capacity-building is now the new term for training. The institutes that train personnel will no more be dumping grounds for posting of unwanted officers. Like in the army, the cream of the civil services will now be

pressed into service at these institutes to train personnel under Karmayogi.”

The prime minister himself will oversee the working of Karmayogi in a four-tier structure. At the top, he will be assisted by a human resources council, an apex body to provide strategic direction to Karmayogi which will have select Union ministers and chief ministers, thought leaders drawn from eminent national/ global academicians, and industry and civil service leaders. Below this will be the Capacity Building Commission (CBC), which will create learning resources, define annual capacity-building plans, carry out functional supervision of central training institutions and set norms for common mid-career training programmes. It will also analyse the learning-related data from iGOT to assess the performance of civil servants. Next will be the Cabinet Secretariat Coordination unit for coordination purposes. Below that would be the SPV, the nodal government agency for

the development of iGOT. K. Srinivas, establishment officer, cabinet secretariat, says, “The supervisory architecture at the highest level, including the PM, will ensure vastly improved efficiency and transparent practices while curbing red-tapism and corruption.”

Since he took over as prime minister in 2014, Modi has brought several major reforms, including dismantling the transfer posting raj and instituting a 360-degree inquiry for selection of officers in the empanelment process. The government has also permitted lateral entry in joint secretary-level positions for specialists. Mission Karmayogi is by far his most ambitious programme to reform the bureaucracy. But one will have to wait for the actual results to proclaim it a success. Plus, the Modi government has to find new ways to address the issue of a bloated bureaucracy and corruption. It will take plenty of dismantling of the steel frame to make the bureaucracy perform at optimal levels. ■

SPECIAL REPORT

GOVERNORS

A WAR OF ATTRITION

Partisan governors and their increasingly fraught relationship with the chief ministers are now a regular feature in opposition-ruled states. It is time the gubernatorial role and the criteria of selection are clearly defined

BY AMARNATH K. MENON



He has been called a ‘cipher’, ‘a purely functional euphemism’, but that is how the office of the governor was envisaged in the Indian Constitution: a titular role with discretionary (and not real) powers. Among the elected representatives of the state, he was to be a nominee of the Union government, the only qualification being that he be a citizen of India and over 35 years of age. What the Constitution-makers hoped for was a non-political, non-partisan incumbent in the role.

The ‘non-partisan’ part was always suspect, but in the past few years, governors have overtly come out as agents of the party in power at the Centre, using their discretionary powers to aid and abet the fall or formation of favourable governments, or locking horns with chief ministers from the opposition

parties and hampering the functioning of the state. A litany of brazen battles across the states, openly factional positions on matters of national importance and controversies involving the excesses of governors are ever more frequent now.

Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has, of late, taken the lead in this. His run-ins with the chief minister, Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress, are now worthy of a *jatra* tale of its own. In the latest of his comments, on September 19, Dhankhar said the state had become the “home of illegal bomb-making” and the administration has to answer for the “alarming decline” in law and order. This came after the NIA (National Investigation Agency) said it had arrested nine alleged “Al Qaeda module terrorists” from



DHANKHAR BEATS

Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar with CM Mamata in a more convivial time

Bengal and Kerala (seven of them are barely literate daily wage labourers; all of them are from Murshidabad district). Dhankhar has also not shirked from wearing his politics on his sleeve. On August 5, the day of the *bhumi puja* for the Ram temple in Ayodhya, he tweeted: ‘At 6.30 PM today at Raj Bhawan ‘*ghee ke diye jala kar*’ will celebrate historic day—‘Ram Mandir Bhoomi Pujan’... Long wait over—thanks to historic judicial verdict.’ He did not stop at that, taking a dig at the chief minister: ‘Appeasement Silence Stance @MamataOfficial resonates’.

Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are other glaring examples. Here, the governors were seen playing a supporting role in the attempts to overthrow legitimately elected governments. In July, Rajasthan governor

Kalraj Mishra declined Congress chief minister Ashok Gehlot’s request to convene the assembly so that he could prove his majority on the floor of the House after his erstwhile deputy, Sachin Pilot, raised the banner of revolt. “Here, a chief minister wanted to face the legislature at the first opportunity, and the governor was declining, imposing several checks...we complied because we wanted to avoid a confrontation,” says Gehlot. In his defence, the governor said that he hadn’t been given “a specific reason for convening the session at short notice”.

Earlier, in March, a variant of this drama played out in MP, when Jyotiraditya Scindia left the Congress along with 22 MLAs. Here, governor Lalji Tandon (who has since passed away), asked then chief minister Kamal

CONSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF A GOVERNOR

➤ There shall be a Governor for each state (Article 153). The executive power of the state shall be vested in the governor and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with the Constitution of India (Art. 154)

➤ A person to be eligible for appointment as governor should be citizen of India and completed 35 years of age (Art. 157)

➤ The governor shall not be a member of the legislature or Parliament; shall not hold any office of profit, shall be entitled to emoluments and allowances (Art. 158)

➤ There shall be a council of ministers with the chief minister at the head to aid and advise the governor in the exercise of his functions except in so far as he is by or under the Constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion (Art. 163)

➤ The Governor shall, from time to time, summon and prorogue the House and dissolve the Legislative Assembly (Art. 174)

ANI

Nath in writing to prove his majority on the floor of the house at the earliest. Nath refused, writing back to say he would do so at the right time. Eventually, the BJP went to the Supreme Court which upheld the governor's order. Knowing he had lost, Nath tendered his resignation, paving the way for Shivraj Singh Chouhan's return as chief minister. In both cases, it was the BJP that stood to gain in toppling an elected government.

The governor-chief minister battlelines are clearly drawn in Maharashtra as well. When Uddhav approached B.S. Koshiyari for a nomination to the legislative council, it was already April, with just a month left for the May 20 deadline before which he had to get himself elected. When the governor turned down the nomination idea, Thackeray had to appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene. Koshiyari then came around and wrote to the Election Commission, clearing Thackeray's path to get elected with just a week to go for the deadline. Koshiyari played by the book in this instance, but his role was dubious at best earlier in this drama, when he swore in the BJP's Devendra Fadnavis as chief minister in an early morning ceremony even as the Shiv Sena, NCP and the Congress were working out the finer points of an alliance. Then, he had been called out for the blatant hypocrisy of the move. Almost a year later, on September 11, Koshiyari commented on the issue after releasing a coffee table book on his one year in the Raj Bhavan. "It took place in the 'Ram prahar' (early morning hours). If someone is sworn in then, why criticise it?" he asked.

Likewise, in May 2018, Karnataka governor and ex-Gujarat assembly speaker Vajubhai R. Vala decided to swear in the BJP's B.S. Yeddyurappa as chief minister even though the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) claimed a majority based on the poll outcome. Vala further broke convention when he chose someone from the BJP rather than the seniormost MLA as the pro-tem speaker to swear in the MLAs. The ensuing horse-trading was insufficient to buy out enough MLAs, and the Congress-JD(S) went on to form the government then. It's a different matter that it was toppled a few months later.

The Supreme Court has, on a number of occasions, ruled that a party's majority has to be proved on the floor of the house, and not in Raj Bhawans. Yet, governors retain the discretion and it is this instrument of power that has been used to invite BJP-led or supported groups to form governments even when they do not have a majority.

The events after the Manipur assembly election in February 2017 are a perfect example. Governor Najma Heptullah ignored the claims of the Congress, the largest party with 28 seats, to form the government. Instead, she invited the BJP, which had just 21 seats. The latter soon cobbled together an alliance to reach the majority mark of 31 in the 60-seat house.

A similar charade played out in March 2017 when Goa governor Mridula Sinha called the BJP-led coalition led by Manohar Parrikar to form the government instead of the Congress, the single-largest party with 17 seats in the 40-member house. And again, the BJP managed to stitch up a 'coalition' with

Photographs: ANI



ARIJIT SEN/ GETTY IMAGES

smaller parties to cross the 21-seat mark for a majority.

All these actions were in direct contravention of the well-laid-out principle in the landmark *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India* judgment of March 1994. Among other things, the apex court ruling specified that in the event of a hung house and the absence of a pre-poll alliance, the single largest party should be called to form the government and prove its majority on the floor of the house.

The very reason Article 158 of the Constitution specified that the governor shall not be a member of the legislature or Parliament or hold any office of profit was to preclude vested interests, whether political or business. However, it's not as though governors appointed during the



GUBERNATORIAL MISDEMEANOURS

A few instances where the role of state governors has come under a cloud

- **July 2020:** Rajasthan governor Kalraj Mishra creates hurdles in summoning the assembly for Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot to prove his majority
- **March 2020:** The late Madhya Pradesh governor, Lalji Tandon, gives Congress chief minister Kamal Nath little time to prove his majority in the House after Jyotiraditya Scindia moves to the BJP with 22 MLAs
- **November 2019:** In an early morning operation, Maharashtra governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari swears in the BJP's Devendra Fadnavis as CM even as the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress are working out the details of an alliance
- **June 2018:** Karnataka governor Vajubhai Vala swears in the BJP's B.S. Yeddyurappa as chief minister when the Congress-JD(S) had staked a claim with a majority
- **March 2017:** Goa governor Mridula Sinha calls a BJP-led coalition to form government under the late Manohar Parrikar, when the Congress was the largest party in the 40-member house
- **February 2017:** Manipur governor Najma Heptullah ignores the Congress claim as the single-largest party and invites the BJP to form government. The latter had seven seats less than the Congress in the 60-member House
- **July 2016:** The Supreme Court declares unconstitutional Arunachal Pradesh governor Jyotiprasad Rajkhowa's decision to advance assembly session so that the BJP can form government with a breakaway Congress faction. Subsequently, Rajkhowa is sacked
- **March 2016:** Uttarakhand governor K.K. Paul dismisses Congress government of Harish Rawat at the behest of the BJP, which claims the support of nine dissident Congress MLAs, leading to president's rule. SC strikes down decision



A CHIEF MINISTER WANTED TO FACE THE LEGISLATURE AT THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY, AND THE GOVERNOR WAS DECLINING, IMPOSING SEVERAL CHECKS...

—Ashok Gehlot, Rajasthan CM

Congress regime have been impartial. The classic instance is Andhra Pradesh governor Ram Lal ousting N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government in 1984. The ensuing 'Save Democracy' campaign saw him being replaced by N.D. Tiwari and NTR being reinstated. The BJP, then a vociferous part of the campaign, is now going the same way—using state governors to serve its larger interests.

Ex-bureaucrat Jyotiprasad Rajkhowa was the first governor (Arunachal Pradesh) to be appointed by the Modi government, on May 12, 2015. He also became the first to be sacked by it. The governor had advanced the assembly session without consulting the council of ministers to enable the Kalikho Pul-led Congress breakaway faction to form the government with BJP support. In a searing indictment, on July 13, 2016, the Supreme Court not just restored the Congress government in the state, but declared that Rajkhowa's decision violated Article 163

of the Constitution. The governor, it ruled, “must remain aloof from any disagreement, discord, disharmony, discontent or dissension within individual political parties”.

However, these are but minor setbacks for the BJP. Just three months earlier, in March 2016, Uttarakhand governor K.K. Paul had dismissed the Harish Rawat government at the behest of the BJP which claimed the support of nine rebel Congress MLAs, ultimately paving the way for President’s rule. To the BJP’s embarrassment, the courts overturned the decision clearing the way for the return of the Rawat government. “In a parliamentary democracy, the governor is expected to act on the aid and advice of the council of ministers, not in isolation,” says constitutional expert and Supreme Court lawyer K.T.S. Tulsi. Similar conflicts have arisen between lieutenant governors and chief ministers, whether it is Anil Bajjal versus Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi, or Kiran Bedi and V. Narayanaswamy in Puducherry.

Of course, there are also refreshing exceptions. Camaraderie has been a hallmark of governor-CM relations in Chhattisgarh since the state was created in 2000. Incumbent Anusuiya Uikey is a former Congress leader who switched to the BJP and enjoys a good rapport with Congress chief minister Bhupesh Baghel. She sent him a rakhi this year; Baghel, too, sent her gifts in return. Shekhar Dutt, a former Chhattisgarh governor (2010-14), concurs. “It is not as if there is an inherent conflict of interest between the governor and the chief minister. I, for one, did not have a single issue with the CM (Raman Singh from the BJP) even though the governments at the state and Centre were headed by opposing political parties,” he says.

A chief minister’s tact and guile are equally critical here. Such was the bonhomie between Telangana CM K. Chandrashekar Rao and governor E.S.L. Narasimhan that when the latter demitted office in Hyderabad, Rao sent him to Bengaluru on a chartered flight. However, KCR has been a rare visitor to the Raj Bhawan after Tamilisai Soundararajan, the ex-Tamil Nadu BJP president, took over.

At the 48th conference of governors in October 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind had spoken about how states and governors should collaborate to give cooperative federalism a new dimension. A five-member committee of governors he constituted—comprising Narasimhan, Banwarilal Purohit of Tamil Nadu, Ram Naik of Uttar Pradesh, Tathagata Roy of Tripura and Acharya Devvrat of Himachal Pradesh (all of whom, except for Purohit, have since moved on)—submitted a report, ‘Rajyapal, Vikas ke Rajdoot: Catalytic Role of Governors as Agents for Change in Society’, which outlined a few best practices that Raj Bhawans could adopt. Little, however, has come of it.

Earlier assessments of the role of governors, too, have remained mere reference points of convenience. The Bhagwan

Sahay-led panel of governors set up in 1971 listed out the responsibilities and recommended that a special wing be set up in the President’s secretariat to ascertain facts and circumstances relating to each situation requiring action by a governor. The 1988 Sarkaria Committee also specified criteria for the selection of governors—they should be eminent in some walk of life, be from outside the state, be neutral and not intimately connected with local politics, and be someone who has not taken too great a part in politics, particularly in the recent past. Most importantly, it said that nominees of the ruling party should not be appointed and that the state chief minister should be consulted before a candidate is finalised.

The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, also known as the Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah Commission (2002), reiterated what the Sarkaria Commission said in many ways as did the M.M. Punchhi Commission report (2010). It cited the Supreme Court verdict in *Rameshwar Prasad and others vs. Union of India* (2006): “When his [the governor’s] credibility is at stake on the basis of allegations that he was not performing his constitutional obligations or functions in the correct way, it is a sad reflection

on the person chosen to be the executive head of a particular state.”

Over the years, saving the governor’s office from acts of constitutional subversion has become a challenge. What needs to be done for governors to act as independent arbiters and to check excesses? Or, do we need the governor’s office at all? Constitutional experts point out that the federal structure of India being what it is, an independent mechanism is essential to check any overreach. “One plausible option is formulating a transparent procedure by way of a constitutional amendment or a statute enacted by Parliament for selection of governors and a fixed tenure like that of other constitutional bodies such as the CAG, CEC or CVC,” says

Tulsi. “Holding office now is at the pleasure of the president, which in effect is the pleasure of the Union government. But without the governor, it will also be immensely difficult to solve the problems arising out of unstable state governments or a hung assembly. It is, therefore, a necessary evil.”

Few experts favour the abolition of the office itself. “The governor is the only direct link between the Centre and the states. What is required is that they follow the strictures of the Constitution and not the diktats of the political party in power at the Centre,” says Subhash C. Kashyap, constitutional expert and former secretary-general of the Lok Sabha. Until this happens, and politically neutral governors are chosen and their roles specified, electoral democracy will continue to register blips. ■

—with Rohit Parihar, Romita Datta, Kaushik Deka, Kiran D. Tare, Rahul Noronha and Amitabh Srivastava

THE SARKARIA PANEL SUGGESTIONS INCLUDED GOVERNORS NOT BEING NOMINEES OF THE RULING PARTY AND CONSULTING THE STATE CMs ON THE CANDIDATES



देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

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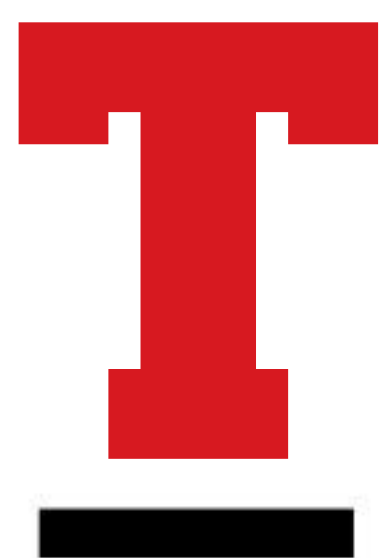


THE BIG STORY
JAYALALITHAA'S ASSETS

FRACTURED LEGACY

THE RULING AIADMK AND JAYALALITHAA'S
ESTRANGED HEIRS **BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF THE
LATE CM'S ICONIC RESIDENCE, VEDA NILAYAM**

By Amarnath K. Menon



he puratchi thalaivi (revolutionary leader), J. Jayalalithaa, passed away in December 2016, barely seven months after her party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), won the assembly election for the second time in a row in Tamil Nadu.

The party and the state went through much turmoil after her death, including Jaya's friend and confidante V.K. Sasikala's emergence as a successor, her (some say convenient) incarceration in a decades-old disproportionate assets case, the coming together of the break-away faction led by O. Panneerselvam and the official Edappadi K. Palaniswami group (some say BJP-engineered), and the latter's ascent to the chief minister's chair. But through it all, one thing was clear—'Amma', as Jayalalithaa was fondly called, still cast a long shadow even after her death. As another assembly election (April 2021) draws near, the AIADMK is again invoking her name. Seeking a third consecutive term in power, the party, now led by Chief Minister Palaniswami, is banking on its governance record, the slew of Amma welfare schemes and "her legacy" to carry them through.

And what better shrine to showcase her legacy than her office-cum-home of almost half a century, Veda Nilayam, at Poes Garden in Chennai. The state government has now enacted a law to take over Veda

Nilayam, an address almost synonymous with Jayalalithaa for the people of Tamil Nadu, and convert it into a memorial for the AIADMK icon.

Through a series of deft moves, in the past five months, the government, claiming due process, passed an ordinance to seize control of the house, took stock of its contents, assumed its ownership invoking land and revenue laws, and completed the steamrolling exercise by adopting appropriate legislation in the state assembly on September 16. All through this, the state ignored the claims of Jayalalithaa's heirs J. Deepa and J. Deepak, the children of her brother J. Jayakumar.

The duo has been locked in a legal battle with the state since their estranged aunt's death. For over a decade when she was alive, they had no contact, unable to breach the Sasikala-led cabal that ringed the AIADMK matriarch. Both have bounced back, though—Deepak performed her last rites and has positioned himself as the legal heir to the legendary riches while Deepa has declared herself Amma's political legatee.

Their challenge, as well as the AIADMK's, is complicated by the fact that Amma did not leave a will. Also looming large, at that time, was the Supreme Court verdict in the disproportionate assets case against her. When the court did pass the verdict, on February 14, 2017, barely 10 weeks after her death, the judges indicted her (posthumously) and three other co-accused, including Sasikala, of hatching one criminal conspiracy



PEACE OFFERING
Palaniswami (left) and Panneerselvam pay tribute to Amma after the factions merged in Aug. 2017

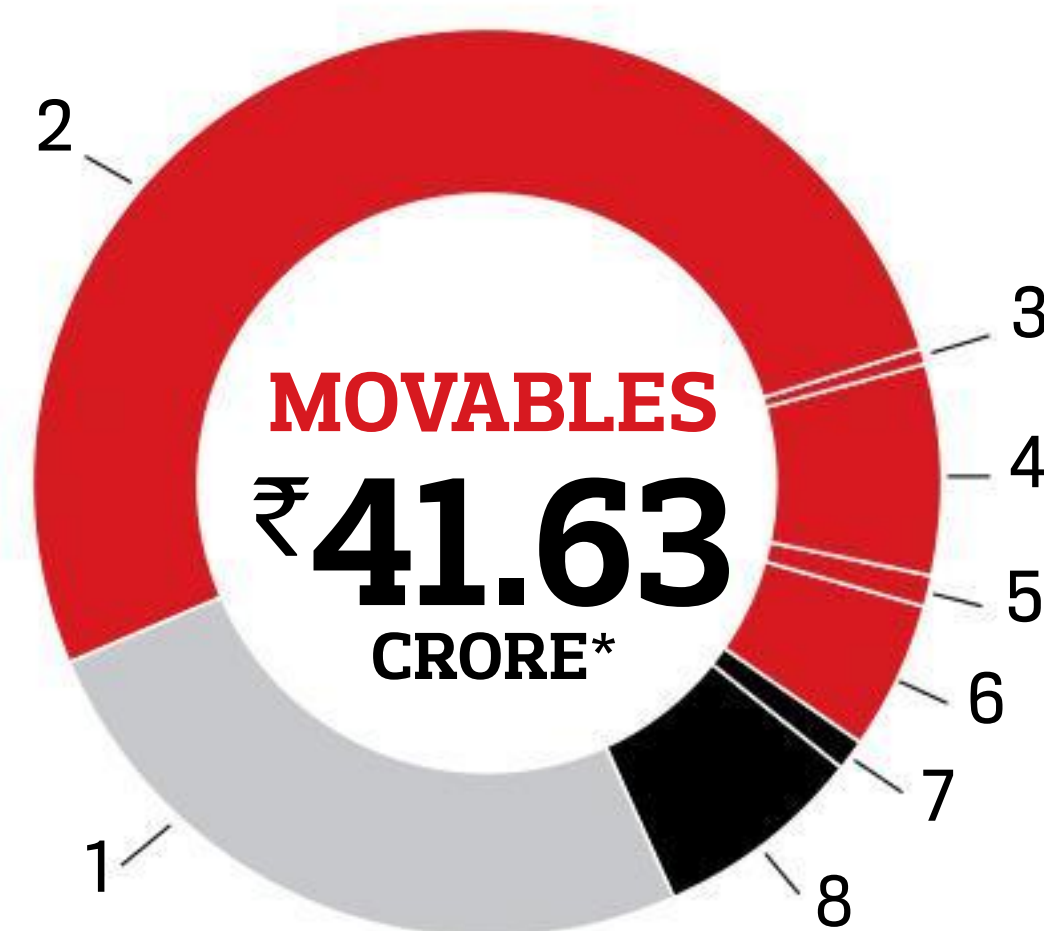
JAISON G

after another to launder their ill-gotten wealth. This included the purchase of a huge number of properties using “masked fronts”. The apex court indicted Jayalalithaa as the mastermind for misusing public office, and for “feigning ignorance” about the crimes. The court sent Sasikala to jail for four years.

Deepak and Deepa, meanwhile, were denied legal heir certificates. With that, the battle for the legacy shifted to the courts. In 2018, Deepak petitioned the Madras High Court for grant of Letters of Administration in the absence of a will. After the court had

The apex court had indicted Jayalalithaa posthumously as the master-mind behind the misuse of public office

AMMA'S ASSETS



1	Fixed deposits in 10 banks	₹10.63 crore
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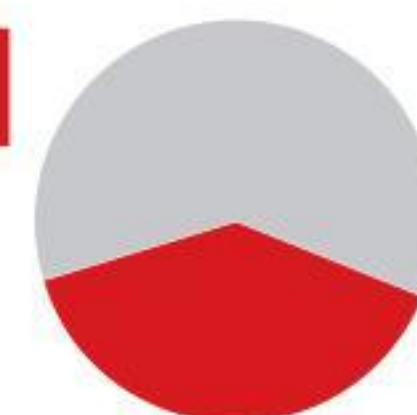
Investments in firms as a partner

2	Shri Jaya Publications	₹21.5 crore
3	Sasi Enterprises	₹20.12 lakhs
4	Kodanad Estate	₹3.13 crore
5	Royal Valley Floritech Exports	₹40.41 lakhs
6	Green T Estate	₹2.2 crore
7	Cars and other vehicles (9)	₹42.25 lakh
8	Silver articles (1,250 kgs)	₹3.12 crore

+gold jewellery: **21.28** kgs seized by the police and lying with the Karnataka government treasury

IMMOVABLES

₹72.09
CRORE



● **Residential ₹44** crore
Veda Nilayam, Poes Garden, Chennai

● **Commercial ₹28.13** crore

- ✓ 79 Poes Garden, Chennai
- ✓ 8-3-1099, building in Srinagar Colony, Hyderabad
- ✓ GH-18, ground floor flat is now a tea shop in Parsn Manere Welfare Society, Chennai
- ✓ 213-B, 1,500 sq. ft dilapidated building on St Mary's Road, Mandaveli, Chennai

The values, estimated and declared by J. Jayalalithaa, are as on April 25, 2016, some seven months before her death

* She excluded current market value of the gold and jewellery as it was not with her

THE BIG STORY JAYALALITHAA'S ASSETS

recorded evidence and before arguments were to begin, two AIADMK activists, K. Pugazhenthhi and P. Janakiram, as office-bearers of the party forum Amma Peravai, petitioned the Madras High Court stating that the entire property of Jayalalithaa, with a current worth estimated at Rs 913.41 crore, should be managed by the state government. Challenging it and arguing that the inheritance is theirs, Deepak's estimate of the net value of the assets, as told to court, was far less, at Rs 188.48 crore.

Finally, on May 27 this year, a two-judge bench rejected the AIADMK claim. In their order, the justices declared Deepak and Deepa as the legal heirs. They also made a few suggestions, including that Veda Nilayam be made the official residence-cum-office of the chief minister after converting a portion of the property into a memorial. It also suggested that the state provide security cover to the siblings (at their cost), as there may be a security threat to them. The judges even suggested that the government acquire Veda Nilayam after hearing out the heirs.

The AIADMK government, though, has paid no heed to the verdict. In a parallel move, it took possession of the house and refused access to the heirs. The siblings have challenged the government's actions in court which, after hearing the arguments, reserved its order. Meanwhile, even with a writ petition pending, the state government went through with the acquisition proceedings, taking the ordinance route to seize possession. The ordinance, strangely, states that there are no legal heirs. The writ petition filed by Deepa and Deepak challenging the acquisition is yet to be listed before the division bench. They contend that there is no public purpose as contemplated in the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.

The government, after renaming Veda Nilayam as the Puratchi Thalaivi J. Jayalalithaa Memorial, is hoping for a grand opening ahead of the assembly election, though curating its contents is a daunting challenge. The AIADMK

MATERIAL FOR A MEMORIAL

For about five decades, J. Jayalalithaa lived and worked from her home 'Veda Nilayam' in Chennai's Poes Garden. Over the years, the structure evolved into a 21,662 sq. ft three-storeyed edifice on a 24,000 sq. ft plot. The Tamil Nadu government wants to make it a public memorial. The authorities have done an inventory of the valuables in the sealed house. The articles include:



GOLD

4.372

kgs

(14 items)



SILVER

601.424

kgs

(867 items)



SILVER ITEMS

162

(small utensils)



TELEVISIONS

11



BOOKS

8,376



REFRIGERATORS

10



FURNITURE

556

pieces



**AIR-
CONDITIONERS**

38



In the absence of a will, the Madras HC has ruled in favour of Deepa and Deepak, Jaya's legal heirs



TWO IS COMPANY
File picture of the late Jayalalithaa on the campaign trail. Sasikala is seen following her

plan is to showcase how she lived and worked for the welfare of the people in an extraordinary epoch of Dravidian rule in the state. “The government wants to draw the popular imagination to the idea of Jayalalithaa’s house as a memorial before they demit office. This will also prevent Deepa or Sasikala getting hold of the property using direct/ indirect influence,” says Prof. Ramu Manivannan, head, department of political science and public administration, Madras University. The AIADMK is also hoping the ‘memorial’ and the invoking of Amma’s legacy will bring electoral gains. The siblings will not be an issue as far as the political legacy goes. Deepa, despite her ambitions, is a minor player and Deepak has declared a disinterest in politics. Analysts say their concern is limited to inheriting Jaya’s riches.

For the party, the challenge will most likely come from Sasikala, who could be released from jail in January 2021. Analysts feel that she will be cautious in staking a claim to the Jayalalithaa legacy in order to survive politically and protect her financial empire. “She is aware that the people will call her out if she moves too soon to claim the legacy. Tamil Nadu still sees her as the reason for Jayalalithaa’s troubles, her turbulent life and tragic death,” says Manivannan. Sasikala’s new home, almost similar in size to Veda Nilayam and just a stone’s throw away from it in Poes Garden, is among the 65 benami properties owned by her on which income tax (IT)

₹300
CRORE
Value of Sasikala’s benami properties on which IT dept has sent attachment notices. Assets worth Rs 1,500 cr. were seized in 2019

authorities have slapped attachment notices since early September. The house was bought in the name of Sri Hari Chandana Estates Pvt. Ltd, a company owned by a relative of hers. The combined value of the 65 properties is over Rs 300 crore. Last year, IT authorities had attached assets worth Rs 1,500 crore allegedly bought by her after demonetisation in November 2016. It included a mall in Chennai and a resort in Puducherry.

Sasikala and the ‘Mannargudi mafia’ still have considerable influence, both inside the Palaniswami-led government and the Panneerselvam-led party. “This delicate balance will be disturbed if Sasikala tries to take control. If the differences between them turn serious, she can play the role of a monkey mediating between two warring cats,” says Manivannan. Both the CM and his deputy are conscious they will have to show a united front, and then rope in electoral allies, to have any hope of keeping the rival Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) out of power.

Another break-up deterrent will be the fear of losing the coveted ‘Two Leaves’ party symbol. “After party founder M.G. Ramachandran passed away, the factional elections of 1989 showed how the AIADMK cadre and traditional voters get easily upset without the ‘Two Leaves’ symbol,” explains analyst N. Sathiya Moorthy. “A showdown within the AIADMK could lead to the Election Commission freezing the symbol and the courts taking their time to settle the dispute...which may even be after the assembly election.” Given the mounting odds, both Palaniswami and Panneerselvam are likely to decide that prudence is the way forward. ■

ASSEMBLY POLL

BIHAR

THE PASWAN FACTOR

THE YOUNG PASWAN SCION IS SEEKING TO CARVE A SPACE FOR HIMSELF IN REGIONAL POLITICS, AND IS UNWILLING TO CONCEDE THE LJP'S SHARE OF SEATS TO NITISH AND THE JD(U)

BY AMITABH SRIVASTAVA

Three days after BJP president J.P. Nadda met Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar in Patna on September 12, apparently to work out a seat-sharing arrangement, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) chief Chirag Paswan also reached out to Nadda for a “late night meeting” in New Delhi. No one knows what transpired, but Chirag is believed to have asked the BJP chief that LJP be allowed to contest the 42 seats it did in 2015 as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). With Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s Janata Dal (United) returning to the NDA fold in 2017, Chirag wants to ensure his party is not short-changed to accommodate the JD(U) in the upcoming election to the 243-member Bihar assembly.

Again, on September 20—just two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while inaugurating a slew of railway projects in Bihar on September 18, endorsed Nitish Kumar by saying, “*Nitishji jaisa sahyogi ho to kya kuchh sambhav nahin hai* (with Nitish by your side, nothing is impossible)—Chirag wrote a letter to LJP workers, saying Bihar was being run according to the ‘Saat Nishchay’ programme the JD(U) evolved as part of the *mahagathbandhan* with Lalu Prasad Yadav’s Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress in 2015. And that Chirag was working on a ‘Bihar First, Bihari First’ model of development for the state. It was an emotional appeal to the cadre at a time when his father Ram Vilas Paswan, the tallest Dalit leader in the state, was in intensive care in a Delhi hospital, though reportedly for a “routine health check-up”.

Clearly, the younger Paswan is looking to leave a mark in the assembly election in his state. A two-time

MP from Jamui, the 38-year-old has now shifted focus to his home state, and is seeking to position himself as Bihar’s most prominent youth leader in opposition to the RJD’s Tejashwi Yadav. He has also started attacking the Nitish Kumar government in the state—and his pitch has lately acquired a more strident edge, forcing the JD(U) to respond in kind. Beginning February, he launched his Bihar First, Bihari First yatra, before it was cut short by the coronavirus pandemic.

But does Paswan junior have it in him to break out of his illustrious father’s shadow and become a significant leader in his own right? So far, he owes his rise in politics to his father and the backing of the Paswan community, which constitutes 4.5 per cent of the state’s electorate. And while the LJP may have six members in the Lok Sabha and his father may be a Union cabinet minister, the party has only two MLAs in Bihar. In bargaining for his share, is Chirag punching above his weight?

MAN IN A HURRY

Bollywood, not politics, was Chirag’s chosen career to begin with. A computer science graduate from Bundelkhand University, he debuted in the 2011 film, *Miley Naa Miley Hum*. When it sank without a trace, Chirag turned to politics. Father Ram Vilas credits Chirag’s political acumen for his party’s decision to join the Narendra Modi camp in 2014, resulting in the LJP posting its biggest Lok Sabha win in 2014, after a nil score in 2009. Chirag himself won the Lok Sabha election in 2014 and 2019.

However, unlike his father, eligible bachelor Chirag is unwilling to rest content with his limited achievement. He is more ambitious than his father, who despite winning his first state assembly election in 1969, long



‘I’M HERE TOO’

Chirag Paswan has decided to stand up and be counted



SONU KISHAN

before Lalu or Nitish, could never present himself as a chief ministerial candidate. What he did instead was to rely on his astonishing ability to read the political tea leaves and serve as Union minister under six prime ministers. His conciliatory approach ensured that he had excellent ties across camps, enabling him to seamlessly switch sides and be welcomed both by the NDA and the UPA (United Progressive Alliance).

Chirag, on the other hand, is more confrontational. This reflects in the belligerence he has infused in the LJP cadre. He is also ready to fight for his due rather than quietly accept what is given to him. This explains why he is standing his ground on the number of seats for his party in the coming poll. But desire is one thing, just deserts quite another. The question everyone is asking is: does Chirag merit what he is demanding?

THE LJP SCORECARD

When it comes to its record in assembly elections, the LJP has hardly anything to boast about. In 2010, the party contested 75 seats in alliance with the RJD, but won only three. Despite bagging 6.7 per cent of the votes, it lost its security deposit in 26 seats, more than a third of the seats it had contested.

Five years later, in 2015, the LJP allied with the BJP and contested 42 seats. Again, it managed to win just two seats, while its vote share plummeted to 4.8 per cent. Of the 38 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes, the LJP failed to win even one, while the RJD bagged 14, the JD(U) 10 and the

SWINGING FORTUNES OF THE LJP

The party came into existence in 2000 when its founder Ram Vilas Paswan broke away from Nitish Kumar's JD(U)

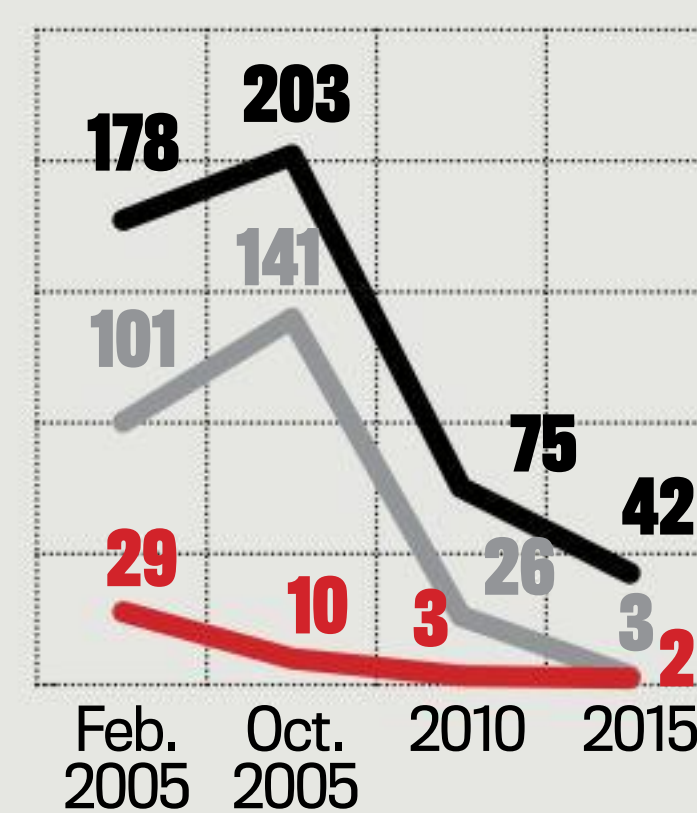
➤ In the Feb. 2005 polls, the party won 29 seats but Paswan Sr, a minister in the UPA-1 cabinet, refused to extend support to anyone, leading to dissolution of the assembly. In fresh polls, the LJP managed to win just 10 seats

➤ Ever since the hung verdict of 2005, the Bihar electorate has voted decisively in favour of one of two personalities—Nitish in the state polls, Narendra Modi in the general election

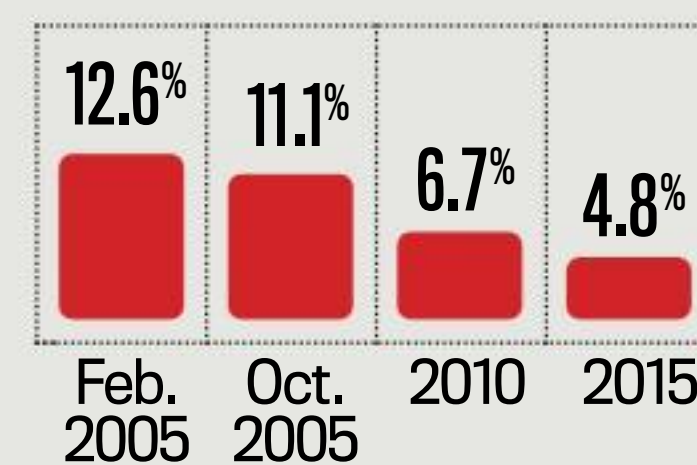
➤ Thus the LJP fares poorly when it contests against Nitish in the state polls but does well in the Lok Sabha election, riding piggyback on PM Narendra Modi's popularity

ASSEMBLY POLLS

Total seats **243**



LJP vote share

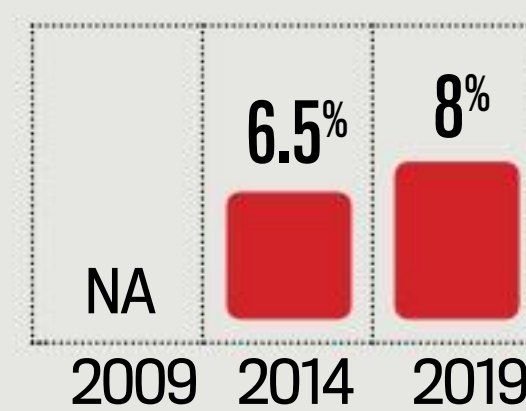


LOK SABHA POLLS

Total seats **40**



LJP vote share



Congress and BJP five each.

The last time the party had any significant showing in assembly elections was in February 2005, when it contested 178 seats and won 29, bagging 12.6 per cent votes. However, Paswan Sr, then a minister in the UPA-1 government, refused to extend support to anyone, forcing a dissolution of the assembly. When fresh elections were held in October that year, the LJP tally was down to 10.

No wonder, then, that the party likes to foreground its Lok Sabha performance—six seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha and a repeat performance in 2019, which sounds far more creditable.

As a senior JD(U) leader explains, “Since February 2005, when the election left the state with a hung verdict, the Bihar electorate has delivered decisive verdicts

in both assembly and Lok Sabha polls. Without exception, they have backed two strong personalities—Nitish Kumar for the assembly election and Narendra Modi for the Lok Sabha poll.” The LJP’s Lok Sabha successes have come riding piggyback on the Modi wave. The party did not win a single Lok Sabha seat in 2009, when it was in alliance with Lalu. As for assembly polls, the LJP never won because it was always in camps opposed to Nitish, the one personality who has dominated the electoral narrative in the state since 2005. “Had they been with Nitish, their electoral fate would have been different in assembly polls too,” says the JD(U) leader.

THE DALIT EQUATION IN BIHAR

How significant is the Paswan vote in Bihar? Is it enough for Chirag to be taken seriously? The Scheduled Castes account for nearly 16 per cent of Bihar’s electorate, more than the Yadavs, the state’s single-largest caste group, who command a 14 per cent share. However, as Birendra Yadav, author of *Rajniti ki Jaati*, an authoritative work on caste and electoral politics in Bihar, points out, the 22 sub-castes that make up the SC category in the state do not cast their vote as a single bloc. Though Ram Vilas Paswan is considered the tallest Dalit leader in the state, his influence is limited to his own Paswan community. The Ravidas community, like the Paswans, constitutes 4.5 per cent of the electorate, but its electoral preference is different. The remaining 7 per cent of the vote is distributed between the other castes, including the Musahars, who back former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi.

Not just that, Nitish has cultivated a significant EBC (extremely backward class) and Mahadalit base over the years. He carved the EBCs out of the Mandal block Lalu initially commanded and the Mahadalits out of the Dalit block Ram Vilas Paswan once dominated. He constituted a Mahadalit Commission in 2007 to initiate schemes for housing, work, food, education and financial assistance. Though only 18 Dalit castes were included initially under the Mahadalit umbrella, Nitish later extended it to all 22 castes—including the Paswans—making them eligible for the welfare measures under the various schemes. The efforts have paid off. The JD(U) now counts the 30 per cent EBC and 16 per cent Mahadalit vote as the nucleus of its strength. With Chirag throwing his weight around, the JD(U) has been quick to rope in Dalit leader Manjhi and his Hindustani Awam Morcha party.

Nor are there any serious takers for Chirag’s claim that his party has prepared a list of candidates for 143 seats, indicating its intent to go solo. Though the seat-sharing deal is still in limbo, a senior JD(U) source says it may yet accept the suggestion to contest only half the seats. “However,” he adds, “the BJP will have to accommodate the LJP against its own share of seats, while the JD(U) will take care of Manjhi and his team.”

A HIDDEN BJP HAND?

While Bihar has an NDA government in place and the BJP’s Sushil Modi is the deputy chief minister, it is Nitish whom Chirag has singled out for attack. He has only praise for the BJP



ELECTORAL EMBRACE Nitish with Musahar leader Jitan Ram Manjhi of the Hindustani Awam Morcha

BIHAR’S DALIT PIE

- Scheduled Caste voters account for nearly **16 per cent of the electorate** in Bihar. Thirty-eight of Bihar’s 243 assembly seats are reserved for SCs
- There are **22 sub-castes under the SC category**, but since all of them vote differently, they are not a powerful voting bloc as the Yadavs are with their 14 per cent
- While a majority of the **4.5 per cent Paswans support the LJP, other SC groups have divided loyalties**. This explains why the LJP failed to win a single SC reserved seat in Bihar in 2015, while the RJD bagged 14, the JD(U) 10 and the Congress and BJP five each.
- Nitish has over the years carved an EBC following out of Lalu’s Mandal bloc and the Mahadalits out of Ram Vilas Paswan’s sphere of influence. His social welfare schemes for these marginalised sections have earned him a loyal following, making him the most popular non-Dalit leader for Dalit groups
- As Chirag Paswan continues to throw his weight around, the JD(U) has been quick to rope in Hindustani Awam Morcha leader and former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi
- The RJD has weaned away SC leader Shyam Razak from the JD(U)

and asserts that he will abide by whatever the party decides. Though no JD(U) leader is willing to come on record, many see a hidden BJP hand in Chirag’s frequent outbursts against Nitish. No BJP leader—either at the Centre or in the state—has come forward to defend Nitish against Chirag’s attacks. This has lent credence to the belief in political circles that a section of the BJP is encouraging Chirag to prevent the JD(U) from becoming the dominant partner in the alliance. “This makes things obvious,” says a JD(U) leader, on condition of anonymity. “There has to be a section in the BJP backing Chirag’s tirade, driven not just by his demand for a bigger piece of the seat-sharing pie but also to discredit the Nitish government.”

A seat-sharing arrangement among the constituents of the NDA in the state is likely to be announced by the first week of October. And chances are that despite all the sound and fury in the days past, political exigency will dictate that the LJP and JD(U) contest under the NDA umbrella. It’s another matter that even when they do, there’ll be no love lost between the two in Bihar. ■

THE SECOND WAVE

With cases of Covid reinfections surfacing in the country, is India's low case fatality rate (CFR) really any cause for comfort?

BY SONALI ACHARJEE



POTENT TESTS
A medic collects a sample for Covid-19 testing in Daryaganj, Delhi

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



was only a month since Apoorva Gupta, 37, had returned to her job at a public sector bank in Delhi, having recovered from a bout of Covid-19. Given the fact that she is diabetic, her illness had caused much panic among friends and family. She had been hospitalised for five days in early August after her oxygen count fell to 86 one night. But she had recovered on oxygen support and didn't need intubation. "I returned home after I tested negative and took 10 days off from work to recover my strength," says Gupta. But in the last week of August, after attending office for two days, she suddenly reported

symptoms of fever and a dry cough again.

It was all remarkably similar, but lower in intensity to what she had experienced when she was Covid positive. "I didn't even think of doing a Covid test again, but the doctor advised me to do one after a few days." The result was positive. "I had to be isolated again, which was very difficult. But this time, the fever and cough went away in just three days. The stress reduced then," she explains. Two weeks later, she tested negative.

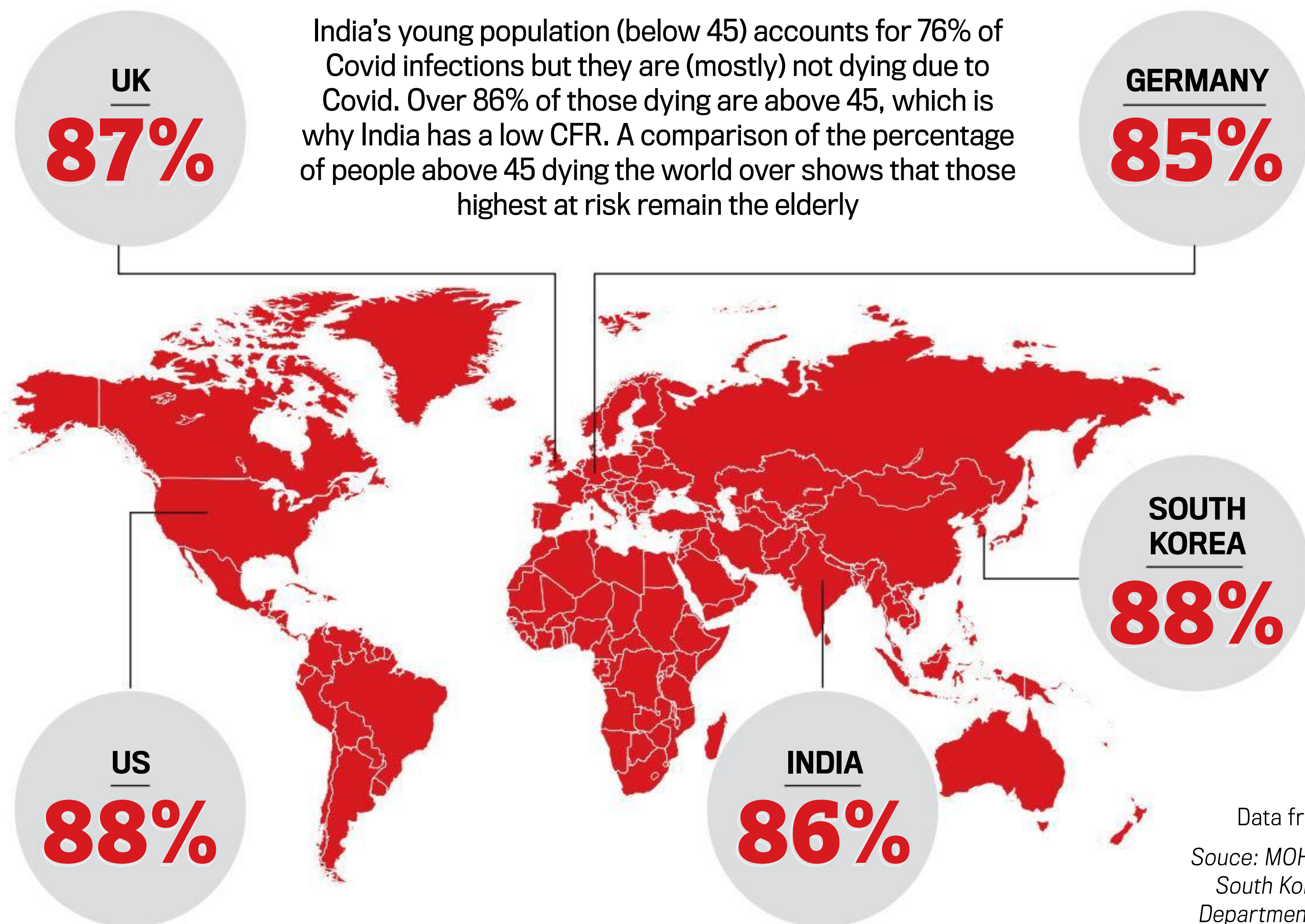
Interestingly, doctors have diagnosed Gupta as a case not of 'Covid reinfection' but of Covid 'reactivation'. In some cases, the

virus might still remain in the blood but the load may be too small to be detected in a, RT-PCR test. Eventually, it might just replicate enough to resurface in a second round of infection. The only way to know for sure if it is a reinfection or reactivation is to test for the genetic sequencing of the virus in the bloodstream. This is what scientists at the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) have studied, and

have already found clear genetic differences between viral samples in the blood of six people in the country who have been reinfected—two healthcare workers from Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS), Greater Noida, and four healthcare workers at two Mumbai hospitals. Worryingly, one of the strands sequenced seems to be resistant to the antibodies formed during the first round of infection.

IS OUR DEATH RATE REALLY THE LOWEST IN THE WORLD?

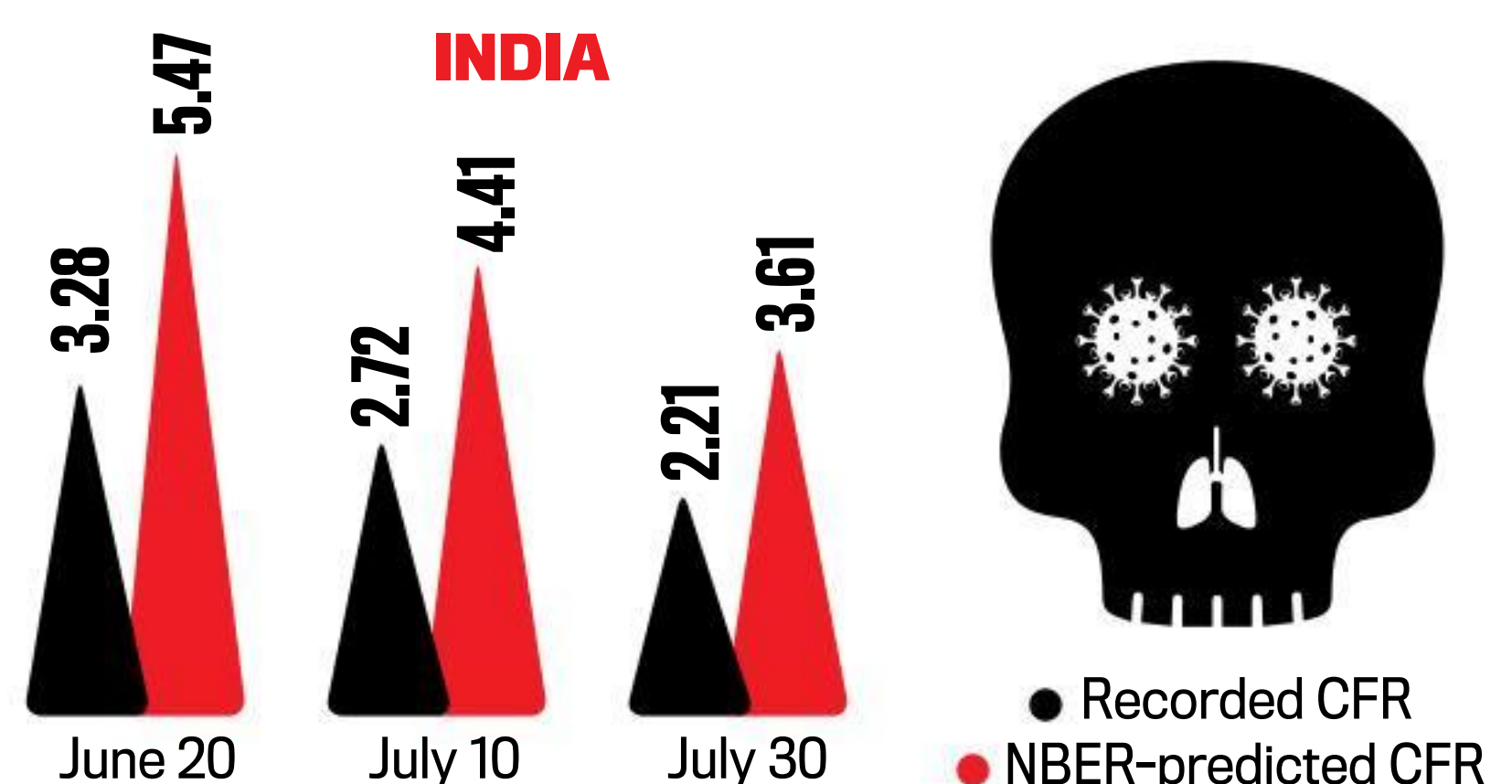
India's CFR* has certainly improved over time—from 3.1% on April 30 to our present 1.6%. However, comparisons to the global average of 3% have brought many refutations



THE 'TIME LAG' CONUNDRUM

A recent study by the US-based National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) says India's CFR continues to be low because of a 10-14 day difference between the date of a Covid infection being recorded and the date of the recorded death. NBER predictions show a higher CFR on various dates against what was actually recorded in India

*CFR: case fatality rate



SAY AAAH
A mobile Covid-19 rapid
testing van in Delhi



RAJWANT RAWAT

BLAST FROM THE PAST

A **reinfection** is where the virus enters the body a second time and infects the person. This is different from **reactivation**, where the virus remains in an inactive state in the body and later becomes active again

First proven case of a Covid reinfection was recorded **on August 24 in Hong Kong**

Six healthcare workers reinfected so far in India, two from GIMS, Greater Noida, and four from two Mumbai hospitals

91% of recovered cases have detectable antibodies against the virus that can last up to 3 months

“We have studied six samples so far but found differences in the two rounds of infections. We have to understand the causes of reinfection—either the antibodies formed aren’t lasting long enough or there is an antibody-resistant strain of Covid now,” says Dr Anurag Agarwal, director, IGIB, Delhi.

In most cases (91 per cent recoveries), a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* claims, there are sufficient antibodies to prevent an immediate reinfection in the next three months. But an antibody-resistant strain would change this premise entirely. There are also concerns about the severity of infection the second time around. Till date, only one recorded case—a Covid reinfection in Nevada, US—reported symptoms to be more severe the second time. “If there is antibody resistance developing, then it could hold negative implications for a vaccine,” says Dr Rakesh Mishra, director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad.

Reactivations of Covid, on the other

hand, are far less a cause for concern. “The RT-PCR test is very reliable, but a lot of variables do influence the results—the samples and viral load being two of them. If the samples are contaminated or the viral load is too less, then the result might be negative. That is why two tests should be conducted to determine if a person is Covid-free or not,” explains Dr Shaheed Jamil, virologist and director of the Wellcome Trust, a research charity in London. Doctors, too, feel that a minor case of Covid resurfacing is no cause for alarm so long as quarantine protocols are observed. “A second Covid infection, even without symptoms, should be viewed as a Covid asymptomatic case. These patients could transmit the virus. Even if the virus isn’t harmful to them, it would be present in their body fluids. Sharing utensils or interacting without a mask should be off-limits,” says Dr B.L. Sherwal, director of the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital in Delhi. Asymptomatic carriers continue to be a subject of much debate but vari-

ous studies estimate the risk to others at between 10 to 20 per cent. Unfortunately, a large number of asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic cases and a low case fatality rate (CFR) and a high recovery rate, continue to drive many to ignore rules of Covid prevention. “If you go to any market today, you’ll find half the people not wearing their masks properly. The prevailing opinion is that Covid will not kill you, it is not dangerous,” says Dr K.K. Aggarwal, chairman of the Indian Medical Association. This is far from the truth. Masks, most studies say, can reduce chances of Covid by 80 to 95 per cent.

THE GROWING MYTH OF LOW CFR

There is no doubt that India’s CFR has reduced since the time the pandemic began. From 3 per cent in May, it is down to 1.6 per cent, as on September 22. However, a recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in the US highlights some interesting points. Using mathematical models and age-specific CFRs from different countries, the study refutes the claim that India’s death rate is the lowest in the world. It says India’s young population (below 50) has had over 70 per cent of Covid infections while 77 per cent of the deaths are above the age of 50. The young are more likely to survive a Covid attack which skews the CFR since it is derived based on the total number of infections in a population. In fact, the latest data from the ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW) on September 2 shows that more than 90 per cent of those who died were above the age of 40. State-specific data from Maharashtra also validates these numbers. Thus, while India’s overall CFR might be lower than the world average because of a young population and a large number of cases, its CFR specific to those age groups at a high risk from Covid is the same as the global average (the 60-plus crowd still account for maximum number of deaths).

The NBER analysed this further, comparing the CFR of various age groups from other countries to India’s own case distribution. On various dates, it showed that India’s actual CFR was higher than the predicted CFR (see *Is our death rate really the lowest...*). “I would say that we are at par with what is happening in the world—more or less people are not dying. But those above 60 and with high comorbidities remain at risk. The CFR of these vulnerable groups is not any lower,” says Dr Aggarwal.

Questions have also been raised about the number of deaths reported on given dates. Since the time between when a case is recorded as ‘infected’ and when it is recorded as ‘dead’ differs, there have been assertions that by recording less cases over some dates and more on others, an illusion of a low CFR is being created. The NBER study found that

“We are at par with the world in number of Covid deaths. The CFR of vulnerable groups—those above 60 and with high comorbidities—is not any lower”

Dr K.K. Aggarwal, Chairman, IMA

India’s lagged CFR for 10 days and 14 days to be significantly higher than its actual CFR on those dates (*see box*). It also showed that the higher CFR was above that of various other countries, including China, South Korea and Spain. Italy, with a high proportion of elderly people, continues to have a higher CFR than India even after taking into account a lag. But comparison of age-specific Covid infections and Covid deaths show that not only are the total number of infections in Italy half of that of India but a majority of infections are those who are at maximum risk from Covid (above 60). “Everybody seems to want a reason to believe things are getting better...but is the virus less severe now and is it killing less people? In reality, it is still the same virus. It is highly infectious and it can cause harm, even death, among those who are highest at risk,” says Dr Mishra.

COMFORT AND CAUTION

The real cause for comfort, however, is India’s recovery rate among those who are not vulnerable. Even though this too is influenced by the number of positive cases and age distribution, our present figure of 76 per cent as on September 22 highlights that the progression of Covid has been no different here than anywhere else. Those under 40 and with no comorbidities have seen almost 100 per cent recovery rates. We might not have done better in saving lives but we certainly haven’t done worse either. As for reinfections or reactivations, being cautious is key. “It isn’t that one cannot resume activities but it has to be done with responsibility. The pandemic might have become ‘accepted’ in some ways given the length of time but we are not in a post-Covid era yet,” says Dr Om Shrivastava, infectious disease specialist at Mumbai’s Jaslok Hospital.

Warnings against complacency remain for good reason. “Nothing has changed,” says Dr Rajesh Chawla, pulmonologist and critical care specialist at Apollo Hospital in Delhi. “Covid testing and isolation of positive cases is the best bet we have to protect the vulnerable. The disease remains dangerous for patients across age groups and health status, and one must mitigate risks of transmission as far as possible,” he adds. This is particularly important for the 104 million (Census 2011) elderly living in the country. Neither the CFR nor the recovery rate for this group holds much promise. Reinfection, in particular, experts say, would be deadly for those who fall in this demographic. “The first round would leave their bodies weakened. They would need time to recover fully,” says Dr Sherwal. And even after having recovered, with Covid leaving many patients with permanently weakened lungs, nobody can guarantee that a second infection will not be terminal for those who are vulnerable. ■

NO VACCINE
FOR HATE
PG 62

Q&A WITH
KONKANA
SENSHARMA PG 64

LEISURE

Arundhati Nag,
founder of
Bengaluru's
Ranga Shankara
theatre

THEATRE

NOW PLAYING ONLINE

Theatre companies, which once fiercely clung to their physical spaces, are learning to embrace digital platforms

Of all the performing arts, it is perhaps theatre that needs a live audience the most. With Covid-19 showing no signs of abating, theatre, the world over, is having to embrace the camera to reach out to its audiences. In the six months since lockdowns began, digital has pervaded all aspects of our lives—and theatre is no exception. In Indian theatre, though, groups and organisers are negotiating between performing live online or opting for recording.

Aadyam has opted for the latter for the sixth edition of its festival. “It will be very difficult to get audiences to watch theatre till there is some semblance of assurance that they will not catch Covid,” says actress Shernaz Patel, also artistic director of Aadyam. “One person coughs and everyone will be paranoid.” What is performed is also likely to see a change. “Everyone will want things that are life-affirming,” says Patel. “I don’t see many people wanting to go for anything dark or depressing at this point of time.” It’s why Aadyam plans to record three of its earlier plays—Purva Naresh’s musical *Bandish 20-20,000 Hz* (2017), the Rajat Kapoor-directed adaptation of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, titled *I Don’t Like It, As You Like It* (2016) and Akash Khurana-directed adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (2015)—so as to spend less time in rehearsals. The plays will be recorded in October in Mumbai with a multi-camera set-up. Actors, though, will perform scenes in segments and not as continuous sequences, as has been the case with London’s National Theatre Live.

Mumbai’s QTP successfully attempted the live stream format by doing eight performances of *Every Brilliant Thing*—a one-man show about mental health wherein actor Vivek Madan uses the audience to tell the story—in July and August. Quasar

Thakore Padamsee, director of QTP, says “if there was ever a time for this subject, it is now”. Seventy people joined via Zoom to watch Bengaluru-based Madan and stayed back for a post-performance chat with a mental health professional. But Padamsee wouldn’t call the performance “theatre”, for that, to him, is “an interaction between the actor and the audience in the same physical space”. The communal viewing experience may be lacking, but it will do for now since it still affords artists an audience.

Finding an audience has been made easier with platforms such as BookMyShow and Insider.in. In the past five months, BookMyShow has hosted 800 virtual theatre offerings—from full-fledged plays, dramatised readings and monologues, to poetry recitations and workshops with experts, including some new productions, like *Pretty Boman* and *Chahal Pehal*, which had audiences logging in from cities beyond the four metros. Initially free, the portal later began charging a fee. The strategy has paid off since theatre-related programming is among the top three paid categories on BookMyShow “with ticket sales growing more than 300 per cent in less than three months as of August”, says Albert Almeida, COO, live entertainment, BookMyShow. It’s why he believes that plays streamed digitally will endure even after auditoriums reopen. “It will help grow the reach of quality theatre and arts content, bring artists closer to their audiences, allowing them the opportunity to experiment with newer formats and build a possible new and steady revenue stream,” adds Almeida.

It remains a challenge to convince viewers, already spoiled for choice with a gamut of films and series at their disposal, to pick plays for entertainment. “It’s really frustrating to figure out how to reach out to people and make them buy a ticket which, in turn, supports the community at large,”

THEATRE

Curtain Raisers The theatre companies to follow for regular digital



◀ **The Company Theatre**
Atul Kumar rang in September 21, the day the Maharashtra government allowed open-air performances, with a site-specific piece, *Where Does All this Wood Come From*, staged at the company’s five-acre residency in Kamshet. Describing the production—which, at one point, has actors taking a boat ride in a lake and lying on beds looking at the sky—as a “visceral experience”, Kumar will also shoot it for a streaming experience.





Vivek Madan, (top) during a Zoom performance of *Every Brilliant Thing*; and Boman Irani as seen in his online offering, *Pretty Boman*

says Patel, who was creative producer of *One on One—Unlocked*, a series of monologues which streamed on Insider in August. “We need to figure out how to reach an audience beyond the theatre community. Right now, all the stuff is consumed by us.”

For some, like acclaimed actress Arundhati Nag, founder of Ranga Shankara theatre in Bengaluru, the physical space is sacrosanct and cannot be replaced by virtual. From September 3, Ranga Shankara began

welcoming a limited audience—35-40 people—to watch a dance rehearsal or a short play, attend a poetry reading or a talk by a psychiatrist at its open-air foyer every weekend. Part of the ‘RS Connect series’, the free events are the institution’s way of giving people “the opportunity to look at the creation of art”, which otherwise has been ignored.

That’s not to say Nag is dismissive of digital. “We have been resisting digital all our lives because we have always believed the real thing is the real thing. But this was the last bastion that had to fall,” she says. Ranga Shankara, she says, didn’t have video recordings of a quality which could be uploaded online during the lockdown and that the institution’s programming team is now busier than ever recording plays with the aim of streaming at least one a month October onwards. It is also putting together the 16th edition of the annual Ranga Shankara festival, the first one to be held digitally.

Another fixture taking a similar path is ‘Thespo’, the annual youth theatre festival organised by QTP.

The absence of a physical event means that in its 22nd year, it is accepting applications from theatre groups across the world which have been recorded on different social media applications. “I had no idea that there was an app named Twitch until young members informed me,” says Padamsee. The digital wave may be cresting right now, but Padamsee knows that theatre practitioners will be the first to rush to work whenever cultural spaces open. “Our turnaround time vis-à-vis films is shorter and the commerce is simpler too,” he says. “Also, we are notorious huggers. Hello, goodbye, happy or sad, we hug.” Covid may not allow theatrewallahs to hug with ease but it won’t stop them from making sure that the show goes on. ■

—Suhani Singh

entertainment



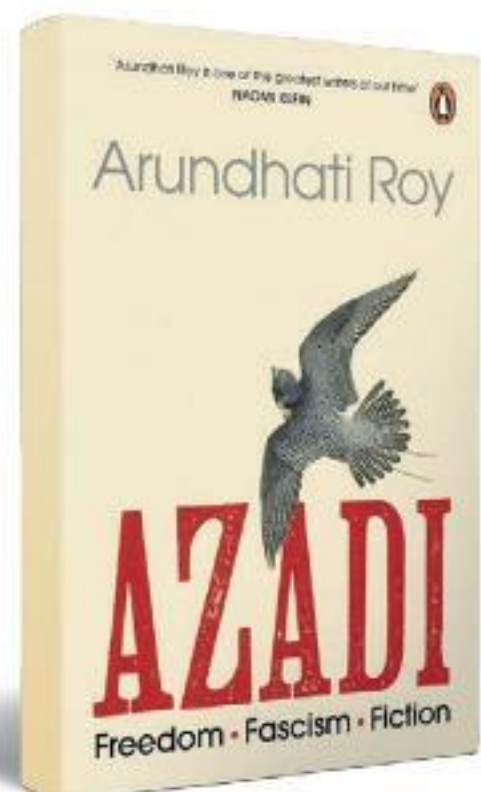
◀ Akvarious

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, the group has, so far, hosted 83 digital events, including three full-length productions, and presented short performances, talks, discussions and live performances of monologues on its Instagram handle.

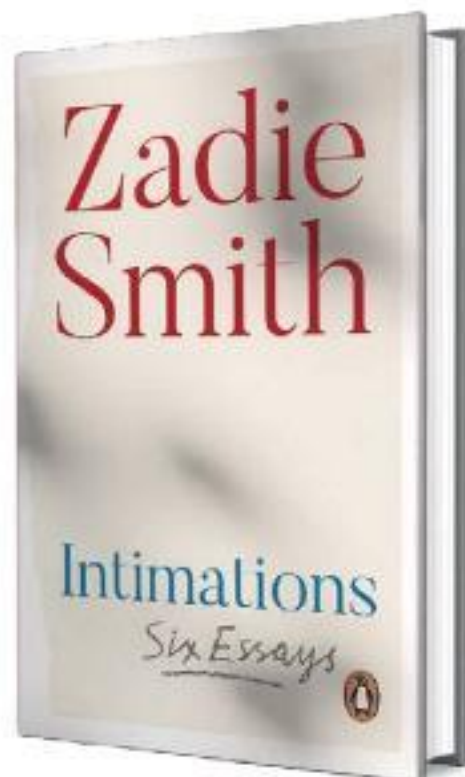


◀ Studio Tamaasha

After Covid led to the closure of its space in Mumbai, the studio moved its programming online, organising Urdu readings and writing podcasts (on Insider.in).



AZADI
Freedom. Fascism. Fiction
Arundhati Roy
PENGUIN
₹499; 256 pages



INTIMATIONS
by Zadie Smith
PENGUIN
₹299;
96 pages

NO VACCINE FOR HATE

STYLISTS AND
POLEMICISTS, **ARUNDHATI
ROY AND ZADIE SMITH** FACE
THE APOCALYPSE IN
DISTINCTIVE REGISTERS



adie Smith and Arundhati Roy, both galactic-level celebrities in the world of letters, have released slim essay collections that reflect, in part, on this season of plague. Most of Roy's essays in the pointedly titled *Azadi* predate the pandemic, written over the last two years "that in India", as she writes in the 'Introduction', "have felt like two hundred". Smith's essays are entirely of the moment, bagatelles that cumulatively are of a density and substance that the brevity and airy elegance of each individual component belies.

For both, at the heart of the writerly enterprise is control, the demiurgical ability to impose your will on chaos, to shape the world contained within covers. For Roy, "endlessly complicated" freedom offered by the novel "is not the same as being loose, baggy, or random". In 'Peonies', which opens Smith's equally pointedly titled *Intimations*, she writes that "submission to nature was to be my realm, but I wanted no part of that". She is writing about the lot of women, to always be subject to their bodies, to not be allowed, unlike men, to transcend the elemental. Her resistance to being dictated to by nature, "at the hot core of it", she recognises, "was an obsession with control, common among my people (writers)".

Writers, Smith observes, take the "shapeless bewilderment" of experience and wrest order from it. "Writing," she notes, "is all resistance." In Smith's case, this resistance is most evident in her refusal to concede the middle ground she so eloquently occupies to any interloper from the extremities. In 'Intimations', the final entry in Smith's list, a device that even in her able hands is grating, she gives thanks for her good fortune, the running together of historical and personal circumstances that account for her admirably ecumenical intelligence. But her cultivated ponderousness can seem like so much rearranging of the deckchairs as the Titanic hurtles towards icy oblivion. Her showy even-handedness makes the reader long for some evidence of dishevelment, for even fleeting discontent to ruffle her immaculate calm.

Roy, on the other hand, is never above the fray. It is her most enduring and admirable trait. In 'Intimations of an Ending', she writes that there "was a time when dissent was India's best export". But now "a shadow world is creeping up on us in broad daylight". As is her wont, Roy uses a broadsword rather than a scalpel to lay waste to her enemies—here, the RSS and Narendra Modi. "We can only hope that, someday soon," Roy writes, "the streets in India will throng with people who realise that unless they make their move, the end is close." The streets were thronged, until the pandemic gave the world's governments the excuse to clear the streets, to forbid, even ban, assembly. Roy's 'The Pandemic is a Portal', written in April, offers us the possibility of a future without "dragging the carcasses of our prejudice... behind us". But there may be no vaccine for hate. Smith writes that she once imagined racism might be defeated by knowledge if spread widely enough, "that we might finally reach some kind of herd immunity." But, she admits, "I don't think that anymore."

It is a rare doleful note that Smith strikes. What, Roy asks, "is this thing that has happened to us?" For all the howls of protest (sadly, mostly from Roy's own compatriots), it is to Roy that many of us will continue to look for answers. Or, rather, the right questions. ■

As is her wont, Arundhati Roy uses a broadsword rather than a scalpel to lay waste to her enemies



—Shougat Dasgupta

BOOKS

The Real Heroines

NISHA SUSAN'S STORIES MAY DRAW YOU OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE, BUT THE CHARACTERS ARE ALL TOO REAL



THE WOMEN WHO FORGOT TO INVENT FACEBOOK AND OTHER STORIES

by **Nisha Susan**

CONTEXT

₹499; 225 pages

Like all collections of short stories, Nisha Susan's *The Women Who Forgot to Invent Facebook and Other Stories* is a mixed bag. Some of the 12 tales, such as the title story, make you raise your eyebrows and not in a good way. Seriously. Must strong, confident women really be brats to prove they are strong and confident?

Some stories make you chuckle, as they are intended to. Some are excellent cures for insomnia, as they probably were not intended to be. And some resonate so deeply with you that you know, years later, they will return in your memory and send you to your bookshelves to seek and read them again.

The best example of the last kind is 'Workout of the Day'—a superb, if unsubtle (to women at least) tale of an allegedly modern man's conscious feminism and unconscious misogyny. The character behind the story's narration would be deeply shocked if you were to accuse him of an abiding dislike and distrust of women—why, he's

so anti-rape that he wants rapists to be castrated (he's going to write an op-ed about that), and he is so sympathetic to his sister-in-law, a woman who can't seem to catch a break, that he willingly allows her son to stay with him and his wife while she's treated for cancer. But it is the way he behaves with the women and men in his workplace that gives him away every time.

Susan is an outspoken feminist (and may she speak louder for longer), so chances are you will read this book because you expect the stories to be of a feminist bent. Certainly, that's what they are—if you understand that feminism actually means personism; the right of women to just 'be' without being judged for it.

So as much as the *women* in the title story may annoy you, the fact is that some people are brats and that's just how they are. And as much as the protagonist of 'How Andrew Wylie Broke My Heart' induces sleep better than any medication, she is as real in her longing for a different life as is her friend in her jealousy. ■

—Kushalrani Gulab

NISHA SUSAN'S book is a mixed bag. Some of her stories might induce sleep, while others might resonate deeply with the feminist in you

‘Meaty parts don’t come often’

Konkana Sensharma on her new film *Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare* and the struggle to find satisfying work in Bollywood

Q. You tweeted that you’re “grateful to get a good role after so long”. Is it hard to find satisfying parts?

Tell me, why haven’t you seen me in more roles?

I have done some wonderful work, but meaty parts like *Dolly* don’t come often. I’m grateful that Alankrita Shrivastava and Ekta Kapoor are making and backing this kind of cinema. When you make something that doesn’t follow mainstream conventions, you mostly don’t get money.

Q. You describe yourself as a “reckless retweeter”. Your feed reflects your politics and that you’re not afraid of that.

I used to be more reckless. Nowadays I think twice about saying things because I find the current atmosphere in the country to be one with little tolerance for differing opinions. Many are scared to say what they feel. So I do feel nervous. But I wouldn’t respect myself if I didn’t say a few things here and there.

Q. Did you get any reading done during the Covid-imposed break?

I read Tara Westover’s *Educated* and Tayari Jones’ *An American Marriage*. I lost my father last year, so reading Joan Didion’s *Year of Magical Thinking* was a wonderful experience in grief. I am looking forward to starting the new Elena Ferrante. But I also used the lockdown to embrace my curly hair, practise parallel parking and do a little bit of cooking. I also adopted a rescue indie puppy.

Q. You directed *A Death in the Gunj* (2016). Any plans to write or direct another film?

I am not putting pressure on myself to make another film anytime soon. I have been trying to write something but it has been challenging in the lockdown. I hope I get some good roles meanwhile.

—with Suhani Singh



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ROGER FEDERER 2009



GARBIÑE MUGURUZA 2016

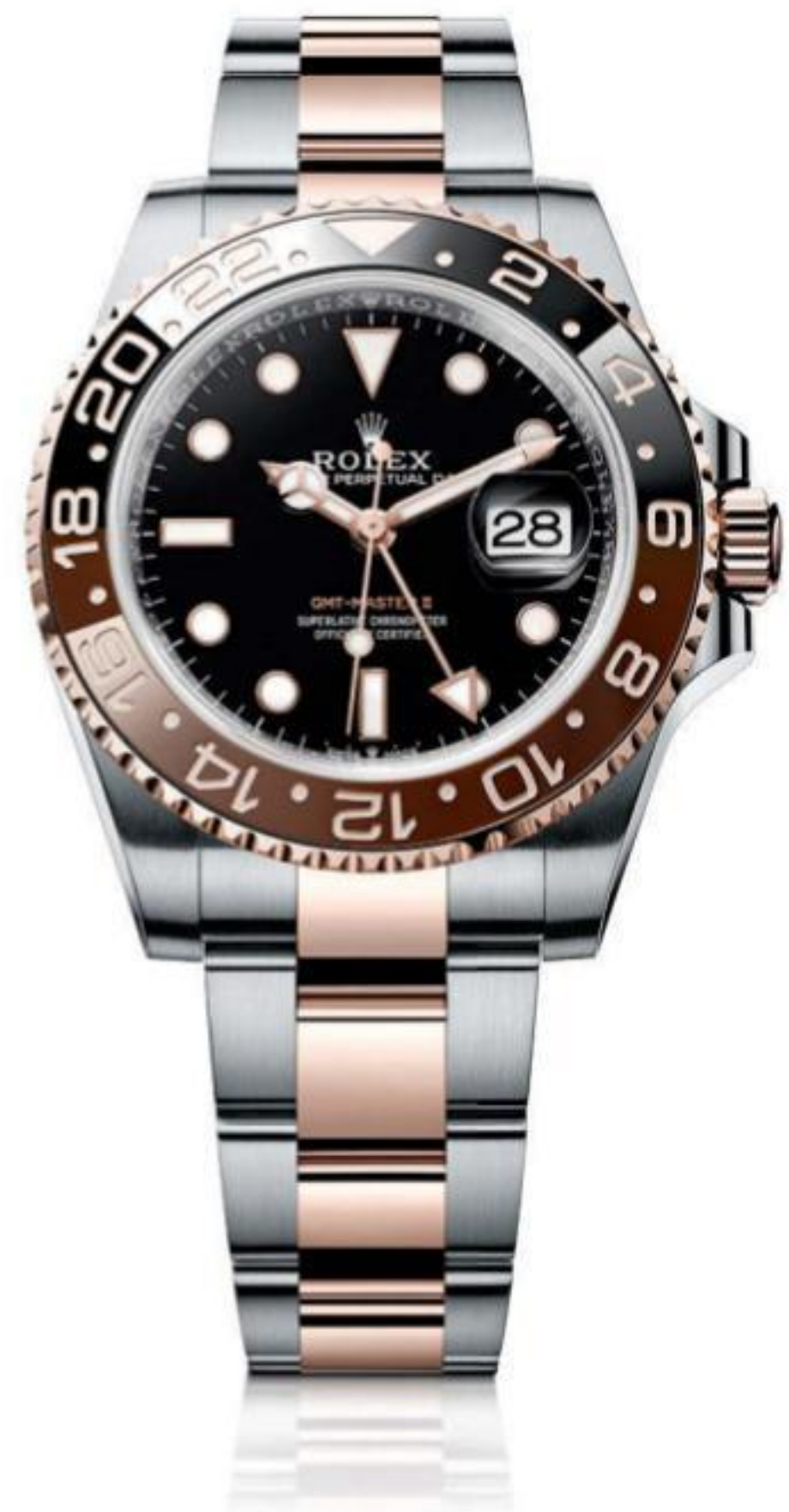


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