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magazine



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Revised Circular to Improve Credit Culture: RBI Guv

Pune: RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Saturday said revised guidelines to deal with stressed assets will sustain improvement in credit culture as it provides for additional provisioning, a strong disincentive for delay in starting resolution proceedings.

After the Supreme Court nullified the RBI circular of February 12, 2018, for resolution of stressed assets, the central bank issued a revised 'Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets' on Friday. Speaking at National Institute of Bank Management convocation, Das said the new guidelines provide a system of "strong disincentives" in the form of additional provisioning for delay in initiation of resolution or insolvency proceedings.

The new framework makes inter-creditor agreements mandatory and provides for a majority decision to prevail, he said. "It is expected that the revised prudential framework for resolution of stressed assets will sustain the improvements in credit culture that have been ushered in by the efforts of the Government and the Reserve Bank so far, and that, it will go a long way in promoting a strong and resilient financial system in India," Das said. — PTI

Govt may 'Revisit' Framework for Rating Agencies

New Delhi: The government is re-looking at the framework for credit rating agencies, corporate affairs secretary Injeti Srinivas said on Saturday. "We are looking at revisiting the framework of credit rating agencies. There are some areas where if there is neglect or improper conduct, that can be detected." He also said that amid instances of frauds at companies, chartered accountants are facing the "most heat today" as strong auditing standards are in place. — Our Bureau & PTI

Parties, Pollsters Couldn't Gauge People's Mood: PM

Having won a massive mandate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said political parties and pundits failed to gauge the public mood ahead of the Lok Sabha election and thanked the electorate for reposing confidence in the BJP.

In his first public engagement after leading the BJP to a grand victory in the general election, Modi said he made Kerala his first stop after the win despite having no MP from the state since it was as dear to him as his constituency Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

Terming the just-concluded Lok Sabha election a "festival of democracy," Modi lauded and thanked the electorate of Kerala for their contribution to it.

The country has seen that "people are God" in elections, he said at the 'Abhinandan Sabha' organised by the BJP's Kerala unit. Earlier, he offered prayers at the Sri Krishna Temple in Guruvayur.

"Political parties and political pundits could not gauge people's mood. Nor did those involved in conducting (poll) surveys. But people gave a strong mandate to the BJP," he said and thanked the voters for choosing his party.

The recent polls proved that people rejected "negativity" and accepted positivity, he said.



PM Narendra Modi at the Sri Krishna Temple in Guruvayur in Kerala on Saturday

"The 2019 Lok Sabha elections marked a victory for positivity and a resounding rejection of negativity. With this spirit, let us all work together to build a new India," Modi said.

The PM's statement assumes significance in the wake of Congress chief Rahul Gandhi accusing him and the BJP of spreading "hatred and intolerance" in the country.

On making Kerala his first stop post the Lok Sabha polls win, Modi said some would have even wondered why he chose the southern state despite the BJP "not opening its account" from here in parliament.

"I come to Kerala with a deep sense of gratitude to the people," the Prime Minister said, adding: "Yes, our party did not win a seat here but I will serve the state with great vigour and deepen the bond with its wonderful citizens."

—PTI/Guruvayur

Maldives Confers Highest Honour on PM Modi

Male: Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred with the Maldives' highest honour — Rule of Nishan Izzuddeen — on Saturday during his two-day state visit to the country. The award was presented to Modi by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

Earlier, PM Modi and President Solih held delegation-level talks as the two countries signed six agree-

ments to strengthen bilateral cooperation in defence and maritime security.

PM Modi also addressed the Maldivian parliament, where he said state sponsorship of terrorism was the biggest threat to the world today. "It's unfortunate that people still make mistake of distinguishing between 'good and bad' terrorists," he said. —PTI

Onus on Pak for Peace with India: US Official

Washington: Amidst new peace overtures from the Imran Khan government after the re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the White House has made it clear to Pakistan that the onus for sustained peace in South Asia was on it by putting the terror groups out of business.

Khan has written a second letter to PM Modi after his re-election, saying that Pakistan wants talks with India to resolve all differences, including on the Kashmir issue. However, India has rejected Pakistan's offer of talks.

"What the United States is really looking for in Pakistan are arrests and prosecutions and not allowing these groups to operate and move around freely, acquire weapons, cross into India, carry out attacks," a senior White House official told PTI this week.

The US is looking for sustained and irreversible steps that shut down their operations, asserted the official who spoke on condition of anonymity. —PTI

Monsoon Hits Kerala After Week's Delay

New Delhi: After a delay of a week, monsoon hit the Kerala coast on Saturday, marking the official commencement of the four-month rainfall season in the country. "Monsoon has made an onset over Kerala today (June 8),"



said India Meteorological Department's director general-designate Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

Several parts of Kerala have started receiving a good amount of rainfall.

The northern plains, central India and parts of south India have been recording temperatures over 45 degrees Celsius. Mercury has soared to over 50 degrees in parts of Rajasthan. —PTI

Uber Chief Khosrowshahi Tightens Grip with Departure of Top Executives

San Francisco: Uber chief Dara Khosrowshahi put out word on Friday that he is tightening his grip on the wheel at the ride-share firm in the wake of a bumpy stock market debut.

The company's chief operating officer Barney Harford and head of marketing Rebecca Messina will leave in a leadership shake-up that will result in Uber's shared rides and food delivery platforms reporting directly to Khosrowshahi, according to a copy of an internal



email provided to AFP. Khosrowshahi credited the maturing of operations at the San Francisco-based company and the completion of its initial public offering last month with enabling him to make the management moves.

"I now have the ability to be even more involved in the day-to-day operations of our biggest businesses, the core platform of Rides and Eats, and have decided they should report directly to me," Khosrowshahi said in his mes-

sage to employees. "This will allow me to be more hands on and help our leaders problem-solve in real time, while also ensuring that we make our platform vision a reality."

He cited a need for a clear and consistent "narrative" at Uber when it comes to how the company is seen by consumers, partners, policymakers and the press as a factor in his decision to consolidate the marketing, communications and policy teams. —Agencies

HANDS OFF

Indira rejuvenated her political fortunes by splitting the Congress. But is Rahul made of the same stuff as his grandmother?



:: Arati R Jerath

The Congress is in a curious place. Its president Rahul Gandhi has quit. He walked out of a working committee meeting in a huff on May 25, refused to reconsider his resignation despite pleas and tears (even the usually inscrutable former finance minister P Chidambaram started crying) and has been incommunicado since.

Two weeks have passed. A new president has not been appointed. No one in the party knows who's in charge. Meanwhile, state units all over the country are imploding and the Congress is in serious danger of losing at least three of its governments – in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka – as factionalism and infighting spiral out of control.

Strangely, Rahul doesn't seem to care. Despite a pep talk to newly elected Congress MPs at the first meeting of the parliamentary party where he vowed to fight the BJP everyday with 52 members in the Lok Sabha, he has shown no inclination to douse the flames raging in his backyard.

It's almost as if he's decided to let them consume the party, reduce it to cinders and then, maybe then, he will step in hoping to make it rise again like a phoenix from the ashes.

Since no one has access to him, one can only guess what's going through his mind. It's possible he's turned to his grandmother Indira Gandhi for inspiration. She split the Congress twice, once after it lost elections in six major states, including UP, in 1967 despite winning the general election that year but with a vastly reduced margin and the second time after she was swept out of power in 1977 in an election in which she herself was defeated in her fiefdom of Rae Bareilly.

The splits were deliberate and strategic. Each time, she offloaded members of the old guard and other deadwood and injected new blood in the form of younger people with fresh ideas. It worked like a charm. She led her faction of the Congress to spectacular victories in 1971 and 1980, leaving behind a legacy which her family has been living off ever since.

The chasm between the old (the Sonia Congress) and the young (the Rahul Congress) is wide open now. It is interesting that after Rahul's tongue-lashing, younger leaders are also speaking up

As his party lurches from crisis to crisis, Rahul may well have decided to take a leaf out of his grandmother's book. Certainly, his unexpected attack on senior leaders Kamal Nath, Ashok Gehlot and Chidambaram on that stormy May 25 meeting for virtually blackmailing the party into giving their sons tickets to contest the Lok Sabha election suggests that he wants the old guard out.

The chasm between the old (the Sonia Congress) and the young (the Rahul Congress) is wide open now. It is interesting that after Rahul's tongue-lashing, younger leaders, who have been chafing at the bit because of dominating seniors, are also speaking up. This may cost the Congress their governments but Sachin Pilot in Rajasthan and Jyotiraditya Scindia in Madhya Pradesh seem to have decided not to hold themselves back any longer. Through their supporters, both are rocking the boat hard in a determined bid to oust the elders. Rahul is taking no notice and even Sonia Gandhi seems to have decided to sit back and let the situation play itself out.

Historically, Indira rejuvenated her political fortunes by splitting the Congress. But is Rahul made of the same stuff as his grandmother? Indira was a master politician who readily hit the streets with cleverly choreographed outreach events. She crafted slogans and political planks that reflected her times and, consequently, proved to be a hit with voters. Indira instinctively understood her times and tailored her politics accordingly

with the help of a team of shrewd political aides.

Times are much tougher for Rahul. In Narendra Modi, he is up against a leader who is as formidable and sharp as his grandmother was. Rahul has not displayed great political acumen so far, either in terms of coming up with a narrative to suit his era or in choosing advisors with grassroots experience. His aides come with foreign degrees and an NGO approach. Nice guys but poor politicians.

And then there is the important issue of organisational strength. Despite the splits, Indira retained the better part of the Congress organisation which was still robust and rooted. Rahul's Congress has virtually disappeared from key states like UP, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

There are pockets where it is still alive and kicking, like in Karnataka where the party swept the local elections that were held just days after it received a drubbing in the Lok Sabha polls. The contrasting verdicts suggest that voters opted for Modi's strong decisive leadership at the Centre but the Congress is still the preferred choice in the state.

If Rahul hopes to follow in Indira's footsteps, he has to have a strategy, look decisive and act. A split is quite different from disintegration. Rahul has an existential crisis on his hands. There's not much left of the Congress today. And the way things are going, it may simply vanish in the blink of an eye. ■

The writer is a political commentator

ELITE GROOMS

Mumbai based Businessman, 27, 6ft 4", Brahmin. Father is an Industrialist. Family is financially well off. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from the same community in India/Abroad. Contact: 8939677764

Gurgaon based Management Professional, 29, 6ft, Brahmin. Graduate from a premier Institute. Father is a Director and Mother is a Teacher. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match. Contact: 8882654550

Delhi based Doctor, 28, 6ft 2", Baniya/Agarwal. Parents are Doctors. Family is financially well off. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from any community in India/Abroad. Contact: 9310065725

Pune based Banking Professional, 28, 6ft 2", Brahmin. MS from a premier Institute. Father is a Doctor and Mother is a working Professional. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match in India/Abroad. Contact: 9883624342

UK based General Surgeon, 31, 5ft 8", Brahmin. MS from UK. Father is an Orthopaedic Surgeon. Family is financially well off. Looking for a compatible Doctor match from the same or similar community in India/Abroad. Contact: 9380054846

Anand based Entrepreneur, 26, 5ft 10", Vaishnav/Agarwal. Masters in Marketing. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match in India/Abroad. Contact: 9376015658

ELITE BRIDES

Mumbai based Entrepreneur, 29, 5ft 4", 27, 5ft 3", Vaishnav. Father is an Investment Banker. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from the same community in India. Contact: 9699517535

Mumbai based Chartered Accountant, 26, 5ft 6", Jain/Shwetamber. M.Sc in Economics. Father is a well known Industrialist. Family is financially well off. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match in India/Abroad. Contact: 9310065725

Delhi based Manager, 30, 5ft 2", Kayastha. Father is a Managing Director. Family is financially well off. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from any community in New Delhi. Contact: 8595028109

Kolkata based Doctor, 32, 5ft 2", Sunni. MBBS/ Diploma in Gynaecology and Obstetrics. Father is retired. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match in India/Abroad. Contact: 9883624342

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BATTLEGROUND KIRANA

India's ubiquitous kirana stores are finding themselves in great demand as a slew of companies across payments, ecommerce and supply-chain tech vie for their loyalty and customers

:: Rahul Sachitanand

There is an air of familiarity around Prabhu Stores, a small grocer on the fringes of Malleswaram, a Bengaluru neighbourhood. It is nearly 5 pm on a Friday evening and as the evening rush hour begins to build, Nagesh Prabhu, whose family has owned the store for the better part of five decades, is getting set for business.

Along with his wife, Prabhu operates the store from early in the morning to late evening, providing for small purchases of regular customers, ranging from one-off items such as a bar of soap to extensive monthly grocery lists. Over time, Prabhu Stores has become something of a landmark, with locals happy to point you in its direction. Until 12 months ago, the store, which is around 100 square feet and stocks under 1,000 items, typified the mom-and-pop store that's ubiquitous around India. The interiors were dim and disorganised, billing was ad-hoc and most transactions were in cash. The Prabhus, who live right next to their store, take turns minding the till. The business wasn't exactly booming, but just like the old neighbourhood, coasting along happily.

Over the past year, the store has undergone a transformation, rendering it nearly unrecognisable for long-time customers. Even as the Prabhus have tried to keep pace with change (they visited German retailer Metro Cash and Carry's India store the day it opened its first India store in Bengaluru, 18 years ago, and source from there regularly), it is the more recent actions that have turned heads. First, in mid-2019, Prabhu decided to sign up with Metro for its

point of sale, or PoS, machine to hand out digital bills and better manage the inventory.

This also helped piece together a list of some 800 customers to whom he could push special offers. Later, the store itself was overhauled and remodelled, bringing in fresh design and pleasing lighting, effectively opening up the store, making it more accessible to customers and store help alike. (Another unintended consequence: newly installed cameras detected a helper was pilfering groceries.) "The store has completely transformed in the past 12 months, but we have retained old customers and brought in new ones," says Prabhu. With the addition of a range of digital payment options and the slow adoption of apps to manage suppliers, certain change is in the air.

There are an estimated 12 million small retailers such as Prabhu Stores, meeting customer needs in every nook and cranny of the country. They are now the focus of two transformational forces – one that seeks to modernise such stores, using technology to bestow the efficiencies and tactics of modern retail, and another that seeks to make them the pulsating nerve centres of a coming ecom-

merce and digital payments revolution focussed on smaller cities and beyond, by hooking them up to virtual hubs of demand, supply and transactions.

Fintech companies such as Paytm, PhonePe and Google Pay are all jostling to become the payments bridge between the store and the customer. While store owners pay some of these companies a fee to receive payments, they also get commissions as volumes grow, opening up a new avenue for earnings. Companies such as Reliance, Metro and Amazon have offered glimpses of plans to make the kirana store a big part of their groceries and daily needs ecommerce play and also as delivery hubs and pick-up points for other goods. They have made a beginning by helping such stores better manage their inventory, refurbish the premises with cheap credit and gain more business.

Catching the Corner Store

Away from the visible consumer-facing side of the business, a range of supply chain tech upgrades are underway, with everyone from Udaan to Ninjacart looking to get a kirana owner's attention. Then, a bunch of startups in catalogue management and inventory, including the likes of Store King and Snapbizz, are helping kirana owners sort their stock and better understand their business.

While tech companies get a chance to wire up a new set of customers (and hope to grow in parallel with them), consumer goods firms, including Hindustan Unilever and Future Group, are hoping to benefit from accessing tonnes of customer purchase data.

"Kirana stores are fast evolving with the adoption of technology to serve changing shopper aspirations and needs. HUL is experimenting with different business models in collaboration with retail partners," an HUL representative said. Historically, companies have struggled to prise business out of India's small retailers. Boggled down by limited funds (mostly focused on meeting working capital needs), they have struggled to modernise their businesses.

However, over the past two or three years, a range of businesses, ranging from fledgling ventures such as Perpule, a provider of self-check-out technology, to global retail bellwether Walmart, wants a piece of this action. "We believe kiranas' success is our business ... We understand their needs and know the existential dilemma they are facing in the current competitive environment," says Arvind Mediratta, MD & CEO, Metro Cash & Carry India.

Metro provides a PoS solution (available on monthly instal-

ments) to small retailers, enabling kiranas to track their inventory, sales and revenue; they can refer to the dashboard wherein they can track slow- and fast-moving items like any modern retailer. They can run special promotions for high-value consumers and even send text messages and emails for promotions to

their customers. They can also print GST-compliant invoices. Metro is also offering interest-free credit solutions for traders & kiranas, helping them optimise their working capital. Metro has also extended the reach of its 27 stores with a new offering whereby small store owners can order products on the fly from visiting sales staff.

Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani signalled the ambitious plans for his group at the firm's annual general meeting last year. "We shall create this (technology platform) by integrating and synergising the power of Reliance Retail's physical marketplace with the fabu-

lous strengths of Jio's digital infrastructure and services... The 35 crore and growing customer footfalls at Reliance Retail stores... The 21.5 crore and growing Jio connectivity customers... The targeted 5 crore Jio Giga-Homes; and all the 3 crore small merchants and shopkeepers all over India who provide

The Kirana Pie

12 mn kirana stores across India

90% retail market is unorganised

\$700 bn Current size of India's retail market

\$1 tn Projected size of market by 2020

350-400 mn Retail consumers likely to be digitally influenced by 2020

Source: Assocham and MRRS India



Then & Now

Eezy Kart, HSR Layout, Bengaluru

Then 100 sq ft store, sold 250 stock keeping units (SKU) daily, accepted cards for payment

Now 1,000 sq ft, 7,000 SKUs, multiple digital wallets for payments, apps to connect with suppliers, piloting own wallet



What's new:
20-30% incremental business after digitisation
65% store earnings from digital payments

“Technology has completely changed the customer-facing operations and backend function for my business”
Srihari Srinivasan, proprietor

Prabhu Stores, Malleswaram, Bengaluru

Then Small second-generation family business

Now Modernised by Metro Cash & Carry, has a digital point of sale (PoS), flat screen to flash offers, multiple digital payment options



What's new:
Streamlined operations
Closer tracking of inventory
20% additional business

“The store has transformed in the past 12 months. We have retained our old customers and brought in new ones”
Nagesh Prabhu, proprietor

Five Change-makers

the last-mile physical market connectivity,” he announced.

Reliance’s focus on small retailers is part of its broader strategy that encompasses its retail, telecom and diverse tech interests. For example, it has piloted its mPoS solution across Gujarat and will soon try it in other states, too, before a national rollout. The firm wants to reach five million retailers by 2025.

India’s richest man can expect some stiff competition in the race to woo India’s small retailers. The world’s largest retailer, Walmart, thinks it has the secret sauce to crack the market. The retail giant is offering small retailers a combination of store modernisation and its own PoS offering, to woo mom-and-pop stores keen for a tech upgrade. “With our knowledge of the country, retail expertise and because of our decade-long work with kiranas, we are in a unique position to understand their pain points.” Krish Iyer, chief executive, Walmart India, told ET in May this year.

In HSR Layout, on Bengaluru’s eastern periphery, Srihari Srinivasan is keeping his options open. Over the past six years, his store Eezy Kart has grown ten-fold in size from a 100 sq ft outlet. Along the way, he has also used a combination of customer feedback and technology to tweak what he sells – Uncle Chipps was a smash hit with his customers as were Dove’s products for men – even as he has added multiple digital payment options and apps to manage his supply chain.

If Bengaluru is arguably India’s startup capital, then HSR is emerging as the laboratory for retail innovations. Retailers tend to offer more payment options, easier home delivery (on WhatsApp) and are more open to trial new products.

“Technology has completely changed both the customer-facing operations and the back-end function of my business,” says Srinivasan, proprietor of Eezy Kart, on a slow Friday afternoon. He is supervising a fresh consignment of 15-litre mineral water bottles that has just arrived, as he waits for business to pick up. Today, two-thirds of his transactions take place digitally and supplies are sourced using a combination of apps, including Amazon, Ninjacart and Udaan.

Despite this, he’s cautious

Reliance Industries

Core business: **Retail, telecom and oil & gas**

Plan: **Low-cost PoS solutions to small retailers (target is 5 million)**

Progress: **1,200 PoS being set up in stores in Gujarat**

Purpose: **Dominate Indian retail, counter Walmart, Amazon & Metro**



“We shall create this (technology platform) by integrating and synergising the power of Reliance Retail’s physical marketplace with the fabulous strengths of Jio’s digital infrastructure and services..”

Mukesh Ambani, chairman (in his AGM speech on July 5, 2018)

Metro Cash & Carry

Core business: **B2B retail**

Plan: **Modernise small retail stores, digitise PoS to track sales**

Progress: **Working with 500 kirana stores**

Purpose: **German retail giant plans 50 stores in India by 2020**



“We understand the needs of kiranas and know the existential dilemma they are facing in the current environment”

Arvind Mediratta, CEO

BharatPe

Core business: **Digital payments & lending**

Plan: **Start with free payments for small retailers, monetise base by offering loans**

Progress: **Working with 800,000 retailers in 13 cities**

Purpose: **Provide a range of fintech solutions for small businesses**

“We expect 3-4 times growth in all our metrics in 12 months as digitisation wave rises”

Ashneer Grover, CEO



PhonePe

Core business: **Digital payments**

Plan: **App for retailers to manage inventory**

Progress: **Working with 5 mn small businesses**

Purpose: **Push digital payments into semi-urban areas**

“We plan to work with 7 million small businesses by the end of the year and retailers are a key target as they become tech-savvy”

Yuvraj Singh Shekhawat, head-offline business growth



about the sweeping plans of the likes of Reliance. “I want to be able to have the choice – and give my customers the choice – of what products to have on my shelves,” he says. “Reliance private labels, Jio mobile and an mPoS also from them narrow these choices.”

Having these options suits companies such as PhonePe just fine. The payment solution of the Flipkart-owned company, which is inching towards becoming India’s next unicorn (a company valued at a billion dollars or more), is used by over five million small businesses of all hues, with small retailers leading the way. “We plan to work with seven million small businesses by the end of the year and retailers are a key target as they become tech-savvy and push for more incremental business from new-age tech solutions,” says Yuvraj Singh Shekhawat, head, offline business growth, PhonePe. Beyond digital payments, PhonePe now offers a platform for small retailers to manage their entire digital identity.

In February 2019, payments startup BharatPe announced it had bagged \$17 million in its Series A (first institutional round) funding, led by Sequoia Capital and Beenext, reportedly the largest amount raised at this juncture. This money will come in handy for the fast-growing firm. It already has signed up 800,000 small retailers for its business and thousands more are in the queue. CEO Ashneer Grover says business is on a tear – BharatPe signed up barely 70,000 of them as of December 2018. “We expect 3-4 times growth in all our metrics in the next 12 months as this digitisation wave grows,” he says. Rather than just add more businesses to its roster, he wants the company to do more with them – graduate from low-margin (or no-margin) payments to becoming a lender of small amounts of capital to retailers, before an NBFC application is processed and hopefully approved.

India’s kirana stores are suddenly finding themselves in great demand. ■

rahul.sachitanand@timesgroup.com



A Stitch in Time

From a crisis that rocked its credibility, Welspun India is emerging largely unharmed, focusing on diversification, customer concerns and innovation

:: Suman Layak

Welspun India global CEO Dipali Goenka remembers August 19, 2016, vividly. That was the day that felt like the rug had been pulled from under the feet of her company.

She had arrived in Mumbai a day earlier, after a round of client meetings in New York. While she was in the air, unbeknownst to her, US big box retailer Target had announced it was snapping all ties with Welspun India Limited (WIL) because they found the company was supplying substandard material in the guise of premium Egyptian cotton towels and bed linen. Target accounted for about 10% of WIL's nearly billion dollar textiles revenues at the time.

Goenka boarded a flight right back to New York that day, and went on a whirlwind tour of the company's customers such as JC Penny, Costco and Walmart in the US and Tesco and Sainsbury in Europe, promising recalls, refunds and indemnities to protect against legal action by end-customers.

In a week, by 26 August, the WIL scrip was down 50%, at ₹49.

WIL owned up on its errors, that it could not prove the provenance or origin of all its material, instead of falling back on the justification that theirs was standard industry-wide practice. The company was buying material at three stages – cotton, yarn and fabric – and this allowed discrepancies to set in. It moved away from the practice for single-origin cotton products (Egyptian and Turkish).

WIL now buys its Egyptian cotton from a single vendor in that country, moving rest of the processes of producing yarn and fabric fully in-house, ending outsourcing. Over the next year or so, WIL also rolled out a patented system for tracking its cotton textiles products to their origins, involving multiple audits by consultants. It also tied up with Oritain, a company that specialises in tracing cotton back to the tract of land on which it is grown.

The hurricane that swept WIL off its feet in 2016 has yet not completely blown over, but it is beginning to find its feet. The company lost around 9% of its gross sales in 2017-18 over 2016-17 and also lost its growth momentum. It had provisioned ₹500 crore for recalls and refunds back in 2016-17. While it recovered the lost ground on revenue front in 2018-19 with a robust 8% growth in sales, in the last quarter (January-March 2019), sales growth slowed

down to a mere 3% (y-o-y), with growth in profits before depreciation, interest and tax margin at a wafer-thin 1.8%.

In this quarter, WIL decided to settle class-action law-

"My biggest learning was if you are a leader in the space, you must also lead the change and show the path ahead for the industry"

Dipali Goenka

Global CEO, Welspun India



NITIN SONAWANE

TL;DR

- WIL underwent a crisis when Target accused it of supplying Egyptian cotton products containing other material in 2016

- As WIL scrip tanked, it assured customers of its intent to set things right

- The company also worked on new areas and diversified to de-risk the business

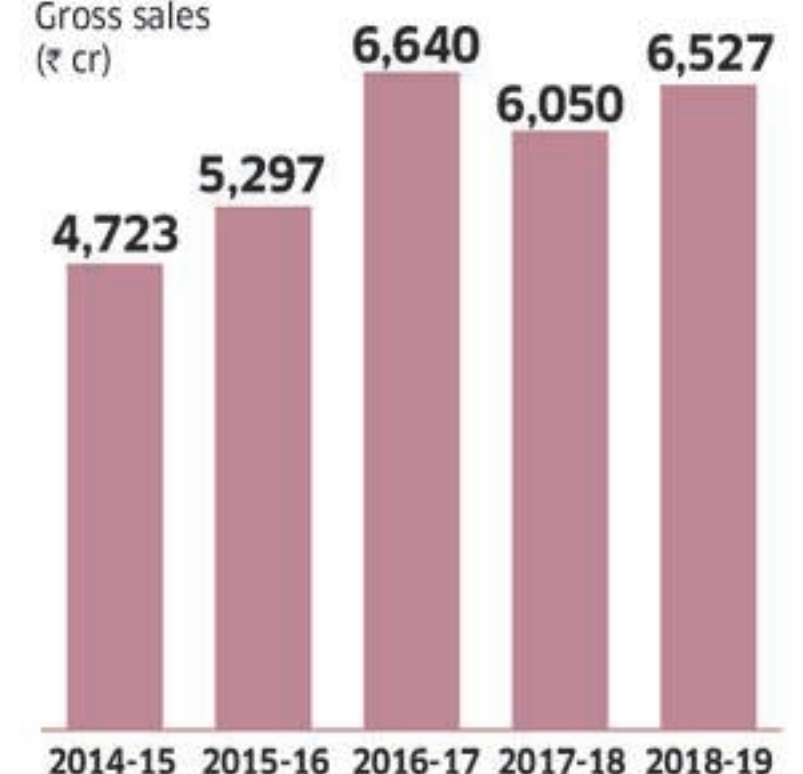
An August Unravelling

Welspun India's share price tumbled after August 2016 and has not yet recovered



Brakes on Growth

Gross sales (₹ cr)



BABUDOM 2.0

With former civil servants independently heading five key ministries of the new Modi Sarkar, the PM's trust in bureaucrats is only growing



Ministries Under Former Bureaucrats

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar,

Cabinet Minister

Earlier: IFS officer, ambassador to US and China, foreign secretary

Ministry of External Affairs

RK Singh,

MoS (Independent)

Earlier: IAS officer, Union home secretary

Ministry of Power

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy

Hardeep Singh Puri,

MoS (Independent)

Earlier: IFS officer, former Indian envoy to UN

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs

Ministry of Civil Aviation

:: Shantanu Nandan Sharma

If the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in the hill station of Mussoorie is where civil servants begin their tryst with bureaucracy, some storied post-scripts are being written on Raisina Hill in Delhi. These mark a transition – from an officer to a minister, from a babu to a neta. It involves two steps these days: gaining, crucially, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trust, and paying ₹5, at an appropriate time, for a membership in the Bharatiya Janata Party.

At the swearing-in ceremony of the Council of Ministers last week, Modi surprised everyone when former foreign secretary, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, was asked to take oath as cabinet minister ahead of party veterans such as Prakash Javadekar, Piyush Goyal and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi. The retired Indian Foreign Service officer of 1977 batch now helms the External Affairs Ministry.

Jaishankar's senior in the IFS and former Indian envoy to the United Nations, Hardeep Singh Puri, has lost his maiden electoral battle from Punjab's Amritsar Lok Sabha constituency. But that did not stop Modi from appointing him in charge of two key ministries – Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Also, former Union home secretary and IAS officer, RK Singh, is once again given independent charge of two ministries – Ministry of Power and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

Then, in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal is given two deputies – Puri and Som Parkash, a former IAS officer of the Punjab cadre. In another first,

Ajit Doval, former director of Intelligence Bureau, has been given the rank of a Union cabinet minister in his second stint as National Security Adviser.

With former civil servants helming five Union ministries and acting as deputies in four in Modi 2.0, a suspicion

has been confirmed: PM Modi's trust in bureaucrats is only growing.

It is well known that even when Modi was Gujarat chief minister (2001-14), he trusted a handful of bureaucrats to fast-track policy implementation. It is a model that he continued after assuming charge as prime minister in May 2014. Soon after, he invited batches of Union secretaries, additional secretaries and joint secretaries for regular pep talks to the lawns of his residence complex Panchavati on 7 Lok Kalyan Marg, apart from initiating structural meetings among small groups of secretaries. This underlined his belief that a good bureaucrat can deliver more than a typical neta. A hallmark of Modi Sarkar 1.0 was the empowerment of bureaucrats to break ministerial silos and speed up decision-making.

In September 2017, Modi moved forward on it, bestowing key ministries on four former bureaucrats – Singh, Puri, KJ Alphonso and Satya Pal Singh – ignoring the aspirations of many a party veteran. Politically, Modi could afford to do that, as his party had just won two-thirds majority in the electorally significant state of Uttar Pradesh, pushing potential dissenters to the background.

Today, Modi with a 303-seat mandate, is applying the same formula with an even greater vigour and placing key ministries under former bureaucrats who have had no background in saffron politics. There's, though, a reason behind each selection.

While Jaishankar is expected to chart a new path to engage India economically and diplomatically with the rest

Ministries Where MoS is an Ex-Bureaucrat



Ministry: **Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**

MoS: RK Singh, former IAS officer



Ministry: **Commerce**

MoS: Hardeep Singh Puri, former IFS officer & Som Parkash, former IAS officer



Ministries: **Parliamentary Affairs & Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises**

MoS: Arjun Ram Meghwal, former IAS officer



“As IAS Officer, You Work in a Limited Way... Politics Gives a Wider Canvas”

Aparajita Sarangi, 49

1994 batch Odisha cadre IAS officer (Took voluntary retirement)

Party: **BJP**

Constituency: **Bhubaneswar, Odisha**

As an IAS officer (for 25 years) I was lucky to get the best of postings, both at the Centre and in my state, Odisha. As joint secretary in the Union Ministry of Rural Development, I was given the important task of handling the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act).

But, as an IAS officer, you can work only in a limited way. Politics gives a much wider canvas. Your horizon gets bigger.

So I decided to quit my job last year, when I had 11 years of service left.

I looked at various options. The Congress was a total no. The BJD (Biju Janata Dal) is a regional power, but it's dying a natural death. The BJP was, therefore, the obvious choice. Two things in the party attracted me. First, the strong leadership of PM Modi and, second, its development-oriented approach.

I was given a tough seat to contest from. The ruling BJD had won Bhubaneswar for the last 20 years. It's also the capital city, which means the ruling party had major influence there. My job was to break that. This time, the BJD gave ticket to a new candidate (a former IPS officer). But people trusted me, and I won the seat.

On whether civil servants become better ministers, let me say that it's easier for civil servants-turned-politicians to handle ministries, as they know the government system inside out. I don't want to give a blanket statement, saying all former civil servants will become good ministers. But yes, the expectations from former civil servants will always be more.

(Sarangi defeated her nearest rival, BJD's Arup Mohan Patnaik, by a margin of 23,839 votes)

As told to Shantanu Nandan Sharma



“Winning Election is More Difficult than Getting Selected for IAS”

MGVK Bhanu, 60

1985 batch Assam cadre IAS (Retired)

Party: **Congress**

Constituency: **Tezpur, Assam**

It will be wrong to say that someone will be a better minister simply because one had a background in civil services. Yes, civil servants have an advantage as they know how the government functions and how to implement policies. But seasoned politicians have a better understanding of what people want. They know the pulse of the people better.

An IAS officer has a direct contact with people when she is a deputy commissioner (or district magistrate). But that's a short part of your career, at best five years.

After that, you lose touch with them. As a senior officer, you don't go to the block level. So, you lose your connect.

If you compare an IAS officer and a full-time politician fighting an election, I would say, politics is much harder. I won't hesitate to say that winning an election is more difficult than getting selected as an IAS officer through a written examination followed by an interview.

I joined politics (after retirement) because I wanted to continue my work in the area of development. This is my second innings. But I won't advise young IAS officers to join the political bandwagon just because someone has become a minister. The IAS too gives a big opportunity to work for people. So, young officers must not just quit the service.

Politics is not an easy path. Only those who are sincere and highly committed to work at the grassroots on a sustained basis must venture into it.

(Bhanu, originally hailing from Andhra Pradesh, lost to BJP's Pallab Lochan Das by a margin of 2,42,841 votes)

As told to Shantanu Nandan Sharma

of the world, the continuity of RK Singh as minister of power is to prioritise affordable power supply, 24x7, among others.

But why was Puri made MoS in commerce, in addition to the two ministries he heads? The former diplomat is expected to bring to the table his expertise in trade negotiations at a time when more and more developed nations are going by politically expedient nationalistic sentiments, increasing trade restrictions.

So, can a former bureaucrat necessarily do a better job than a politician? BJP's new MP from Odisha, Aparajita Sarangi, says former bureaucrats have an advantage “as they know the government system inside out”. “But I don't want to give a blanket statement saying all former civil servants will become good ministers. Yes, the expectations from former civil servants will always be high,” adds Sarangi, who joined the ruling party last year after resigning from the Indian Administrative Service, 11 years ahead of her retirement.

Another IAS officer-turned-politician MGVK Bhanu told *ET Magazine* that civil servants have an initial advantage because they know sarkari processes inside out. “But seasoned politicians always have a better understanding of what people want. They know the pulse of the people better,” says the 60-year-old, who unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha poll from Tezpur in Assam on a Congress ticket. He has a word of advice for young officers: do not quit the IAS simply because some bureaucrat has become a minister. “Winning election is more difficult than getting selected for IAS,” he adds.

Bhanu has a point. While he managed a respectable 4.4 lakh votes, some former IAS officers suffered a humiliating defeat in the recent Lok Sabha polls. For example, former Union secretary and anti-corruption crusader, Vijay Shankar Pandey, got only 2,056 votes (0.19% of the total votes polled) in UP's Faizabad constituency. Pandey fought on a Lok Gathbandhan Party ticket.

Last year, a young IAS officer from Chhattisgarh, OP Choudhary, left the elite service when he had 23 more years to go and joined the BJP to fight, arguably, the most difficult seat of the state, Kharsia, where the party had never won before. Choudhary lost in the assembly elections, and was sub-

sequently denied a Lok Sabha ticket too.

In the past, a handful of career bureaucrats – IAS officers Yashwant Sinha and Ajit Jogi, IFS officers Meira Kumar, Natwar Singh and Mani Shankar Aiyar, and IRS officer Arvind Kejriwal –

have won elections and made a mark in politics. Former prime minister Manmohan Singh was also an industry and finance secretary though he was not from the IAS. He contested the Lok Sabha poll only once, from South Delhi in 1999, but lost.

The general tendency among bureaucrats is to hold on to power, without being jolted by the ups and downs of electoral or party politics. This has resulted in the emergence of super-babus at the Centre and in states, dominating the agenda of the day and often overshadowing senior ministers. For example, the influence of IAS officer V Karthikeyan Pandian on Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, or of former Central Secretariat Service officer and incumbent principal secretary Gautam Sanyal on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is exceptional.

The classic case of a bureaucrat dictating politics and policy has been that of Shashank Shekhar Singh, a pilot-turned-civil servant, who became a super minister when Mayawati was Uttar Pradesh chief minister between 2007 and 2012. After a landslide victory, Mayawati created a controversial post – the cabinet secretary – for Singh. He was also given the rank of a cabinet minister. Understandably, senior officers of the day did not take it kindly, saying the post itself was unconstitutional as it would render the coveted position of chief secretary, always held by an IAS officer, redundant. At that time, there were rumours in the corridors of power that Singh, as pilot, must have staged a mid-air turbulence and then a safe landing to earn Mayawati's goodwill.

That must have been just tattle tale but it points to something real: it is not easy for most bureaucrats to accept one among them as their political boss.

That is why an invisible challenge for Jaishankar, Puri, RK Singh, among others, could well emanate from within the babudom.

Of the many curveballs the bureaucrat-turned-neta has to face, the trickiest is in taking the old turf of bureaucracy along. ■

shantanu.sharma@timesgroup.com

Prominent Ex-Civil Servants Who Won Lok Sabha Polls...



Satya Pal Singh, former IPS officer (Baghpat, UP; BJP)



Brijendra Singh, former IAS officer (Hisar, Haryana; BJP)



Aparajita Sarangi, former IAS officer (Bhubaneswar, Odisha; BJP)

... And Lost



Hardeep Singh Puri, former IFS officer (Amritsar, Punjab; BJP)



KJ Alphon, former IAS officer (Ernakulam, Kerala; BJP)



Arup Mohan Patnaik, former IPS officer and retired commissioner of Mumbai Police (Bhubaneswar, Odisha; BJD)



Prakash Mishra, former IPS officer and ex-DG, CRPF (Cuttack, Odisha; BJP)



MGVK Bhanu, former IAS officer (Tezpur, Assam; Congress)



Vijay Shankar Pandey, former IAS officer (Faizabad, UP; Lok Gathbandhan Party)



Namonarayan Meena, former IPS officer (Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan; Congress)



Preeta Harit, former IRS officer (Agra, UP; Congress)



Metta Ramarao, former IRS officer (Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh; Janasena Party)



Malyadri Sriram, former IRS officer (Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh; TDP)

STUCK WITH PLASTIC



Bans haven't worked, usage has exploded and now 25 states face a monthly fine of ₹1 cr for not yet figuring out how to dispose plastic waste

:: Indulekha Aravind

The Bommasandra-Jigani link road near Bengaluru's Electronic City is dotted with sleek, glass-fronted offices of pharmaceutical, manufacturing and technology companies.

But swerve into one of the smaller roads and you will be faced with an all-too familiar sight: an unofficial landfill spread out over an acre and rising several metres high, its base strewn with recently-discarded plastic cups, polybags, wrappers, packaging material and other detritus of our daily lives.

This plastic pile, like other similar piles lying by our roadsides or accumulating in empty lots or choking up water bodies, seems to be thumbing its nose at India's ambitious intent to phase out single-use plastic like straws and cups by 2022, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World Environment Day a year ago.

Recently, this gap between intent and reality was underlined all over again. The National Green Tribunal rapped 25 states and union territories for not following its orders on submitting a plan by April 30, 2019, on how they would comply with the Plastic Waste Management Rules of 2016. Except for Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal and Puducherry, all the other states face the prospect of having to pay ₹1 crore for each month of delay. "We will submit a compiled report on the lack of action plans and the NGT will then issue its order," says SK Nigam, the former additional director of Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) responsible for moving court against the errant states.

More Plastic Per Person

Like much of the world, India is struggling to dispose its growing quantities of plastic waste given how ubiquitous it has become – from our tooth-

Waste Side Story*

India generates **25,940 tonnes*** of plastic waste every day

This is close to the weight of **9,000 Asian elephants**



86 Boeing 747 jets



Of this, **10,376 tonnes a day** is uncollected plastic

1/6th of plastic waste generated by 60 cities

Half of this comes from **Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai & Kolkata**

*Source: Central Pollution Control Board

Fate of non-recycled plastic

400 years
Time it takes for a plastic bottle to decompose

6.3 bn tonnes
Plastic waste that has accumulated globally

12 bn tonnes
Likely amount of plastic in landfills by 2050

79% of plastic in landfills and natural environment

Source: Study in Science Advances

TL;DR

● India's per capita plastic consumption might seem low but its plastic waste is growing

● While disposable plastic is banned in many states, execution has been lax so far

● Unless there is a turnaround, India unlikely to achieve target of phasing out single-use plastic by 2022

brushes to debit cards. India generates close to 26,000 tonnes of plastic a day, according to a CPCB estimate from 2012. Worse, a little over 10,000 tonnes a day of plastic waste remains uncollected. Uncollected plastic waste eventually ends up in the natural environment – in our seas and oceans or piling up on our lands. By 2050, the amount of plastic in seas and oceans across the world will weigh more than the fishes, says a headline-grabbing estimate by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

At less than 11 kg, India's per capita plastic consumption is nearly a tenth of the US, at 109 kg.

"But India's systems and processes are such that we cannot afford to let our guard down. Also, countries should not be competing about this, saying we are not consuming so much, give us some leeway to consume more [plastic]," says Wilma Rodrigues, founder and CEO of Saahas Zero Waste, a waste management social enterprise based in Bengaluru.

And our plastic consumption is increasing.

The plastic processing industry is estimated to grow to 22 million tonnes (MT) a year by 2020 from 13.4 MT in 2015 and nearly half of this is single-use plastic, according to a Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry study.

State of Bans

So far, 22 states & UTs have banned plastic bags, with mixed results

➤ **1998**
Sikkim becomes first state to ban plastic bags

➤ **2000**
Goa & Mumbai ban plastic bags of less than 20 microns

➤ **2009**
Himachal Pradesh bans plastic shopping bags

➤ **2016**
Karnataka imposes complete ban on single-use plastic

➤ **2017**
Delhi bans all forms of disposable plastic

➤ **2018**
Maharashtra bans plastic bags and disposal products made of plastic & thermocol

Telangana bans single-use plastic & plastic items of less than 50 microns

Odisha bans single-use plastic & plastic bags in 6 cities

Bihar bans plastic carry bags in cities

➤ **2019**
Tamil Nadu bans disposable plastic
Goa plans legislation to ban single-use plastic from Sept

Assam considering complete ban of plastic bags



The 2016 Plastic Waste Management Rules were an attempt to improve legislation, and state that every local body has to be responsible for setting up infrastructure for segregation, collection, processing and disposal of plastic waste. Additionally, the rules, amended in 2018, introduced the concept of extended producer responsibility, according to which the producers (manufacturers, importers and those using plastic in packaging) as well as brand owners would be held responsible for collecting the waste their products generate. A new national framework on plastic waste management is in the works, which will have more stringent targets on extended producer responsibility for brand owners and producers, and norms on traceability of plastic waste. It will also introduce third-party audits as part of the monitoring mechanism.

Online Delivery Problem

Apart from the plastic we consume through traditional retail, the popularity of online retail and food delivery apps, though restricted to big cities, is contributing to the rise in plastic waste, say waste management experts.

"There is no data on this yet but the kind of packaging generated with every food order is huge, considering these apps allow you to even order a single gulab jamun," says Swati Singh Sambyal, programme manager of municipal solid waste at Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a New Delhi-based think tank.

India's biggest online delivery startups Swiggy and Zomato are each reportedly delivering about 28 million orders a month. But the companies declined to reveal how much packaging they are currently using. Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal, in a September 2018 blog, estimated that orders through food delivery aggregators was adding up to "22,000 tonnes of plastic waste created every month in India". Back then, his company was delivering 16.5 million orders a month.

While there are no updated and accurate numbers on the quantity of plastic waste generated through online food delivery, the grim situation in China might serve as a warning.

When online food orders in China jumped to 4.6 billion in the first half of 2017, total plastic waste also rose to 1.5 million tonnes (MT) in 2017 from 0.2 MT in 2015, according to researchers at Shenzhen University and University of Michigan.

E-commerce companies too have come under fire for excess use of plastic packaging. "Online companies should be held responsible for the plastic waste they generate. Otherwise, it will just keep adding to the gargantuan problem of plastic disposal," says Sambyal of CSE.

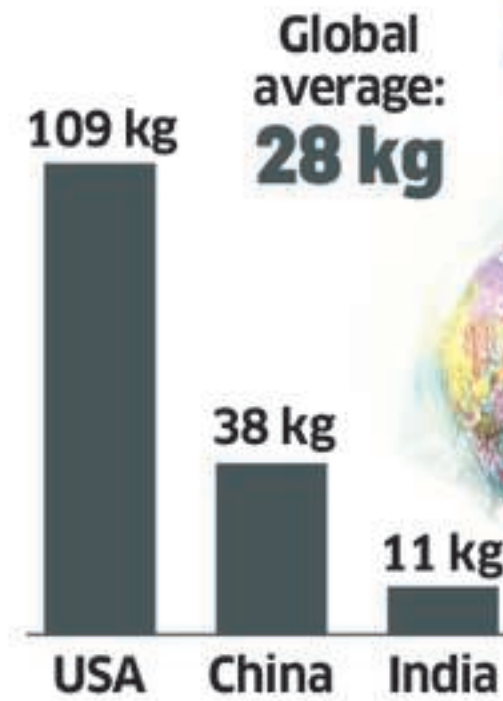
The internet companies, on their part, say they are working towards reducing plastic packaging.

Last week, Amazon India said it was expanding packaging-free shipment to nine cities, under which orders would be shipped without additional packaging. "Air inside the Amazon boxes reduced by 30% across Amazon India's fulfilment centres in 2018. Also, we no longer place invoices in plastic pouches for 95% of Amazon India's order deliveries," says an Amazon India spokesperson. As a result, the use of plastic and corrugated boxes has fallen by 15% each, the company said.

Flipkart's chief corporate affairs officer Rajneesh Kumar told *ET Magazine* that the company

Plastic Love

Per capita plastic usage



Per capita plastic consumption may rise to

20 kg by 2022

Annual plastic consumption may reach

20 mn tonnes by 2020

80% of plastic produced used in packaging sector

Source: TERI



Going by the Book

As per Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2018:

Producers & brand owners responsible for collecting waste generated by their products

Non-recyclable multi-layered plastic (like chips packets) to be phased out in 2 years



Local bodies to set up infrastructure for segregation, collection & disposal of plastic waste

Institutional generators of plastic waste to segregate & store and pay for waste management



had launched several steps to reduce plastic use, including leveraging tech to optimise the type and volume of packaging and introducing the "no package shipping" for certain deliveries.

Swiggy is also in the process of rolling out a feature for users to opt out of receiving disposable plastic cutlery along with their orders, said a company spokesperson. This is apart from a marketplace it introduced for the restaurants on its platform to access eco-friendly packaging options, though the company did not reveal how many restaurants were using this option.

Nigam says these internet companies will also come within the purview of the extended producer responsibility norms of Plastic Waste Management Rules. But like the case is with all our legislation on plastic, the effectiveness will depend on execution and monitoring.

The mixed results of plastic bans introduced by different states over the years are a good example. Sikkim was a pioneer in banning plastic bags as far back as 1998. Others followed, and so far, around 22 states and UTs have bans in place, says Nigam. "But merely announcing a ban will not solve the problem of plastic disposal. It has to be regulated at all points, strictly enforced and monitored."

Due to ineffective monitoring, "everybody flouts the rules so the ban does not serve the purpose," says Rodrigues of Saahas.

In Maharashtra, for example, the ban on single-

use disposable plastic was strictly enforced initially. But now it's back to square one.

CSE's Sambyal lists another challenge. "When you are banning plastic, you are not taking into account the entire scenario that has to change with it. All the different stakeholders need to work together." So instead of closing down plastic manufacturing and trading units and rendering lakhs

jobless, they should have been nudged to produce alternatives, she says.

Plastic users should be provided with feasible alternatives, which are not costly and made aware of these options. Industry should also be pushed to work on R&D to work on packaging alternatives, provided with time to work on this and given targets to phase out different types of plastic, says Sambyal. Rather than a sudden blanket ban, she suggests phasing out single-use plastic according to whether these are high priority items that need to be replaced immediately and for which alternatives are available, and those that require more time to be phased out.

The forthcoming norms on extended producer responsibilities, if stringent in execution, hold out hope for India's attempts at reducing plastic waste, provided all stakeholders, including consumers, step up. Otherwise, as Rodrigues points out, we need to be ready to live in a world where there is plastic in our food, our water and our bodies. ■

"Are we ready to live with plastic in our food, in our water, in our bodies? Because that's what we are heading towards"

Wilma Rodrigues,
founder, Saahas Zero Waste



GOALCHASERS

A primer on the ongoing FIFA Women's World Cup in France
 :: Perna Katiyar

The Basics

WHEN JUNE 7-JULY 7

WHERE France, with matches in Lyon, Paris, Nice, Montpellier, Rennes, Le Havre, Valenciennes, Reims and Grenoble

TEAMS (with FIFA rankings)
 France (4), South Korea (14), Norway (12), Nigeria (38), Germany (2), China (16), Spain (13), South Africa (49), Australia (6), Italy (15), Brazil (10), Jamaica (53), England (3), Scotland (20), Argentina (37), Japan (7), Canada (5), Cameroon (46), New Zealand (19), the Netherlands (8), the US (1), Thailand (34), Chile (29) and Sweden (9)

Tournament Trivia

- This is Scotland's first World Cup and they will take on England on June 9
- Reigning champion US will defend title against Thailand on June 11
- It is the first Women's World Cup to use video assistant referee system
- Tournament is a qualifier for European teams for 2020 Tokyo Olympics

Motto & Mascot

The official slogan is 'Dare to Shine' or 'Le moment de briller' in French



The event's mascot Ette is a young chicken with passion for football. She is the daughter of Footix, the mascot of 1998 FIFA World Cup in France

It's Popular

- Tickets for opening match, semi-finals and final sold out in 2 days
- In 2015, 764 mn TV viewers watched the tournament held in Canada
- Also, 86 million had watched the matches online or on mobiles

Back & Forth

- Chile, Jamaica, Scotland and South Africa making Women's World Cup debut
- US are seeking their fourth title and are ranked number one in the world
- Hosts France looking to capture its first cup trophy on home soil
- Germany can tie the US with three titles if they are able to stave off competition

Footballers to Spot

SPAIN
 Alexia Putellas (attacker)

GERMANY
 Dzenifer Marozsan (captain)

NORWAY
 Caroline Graham Hansen (winger) & Kristine Minde (midfielder)

SCOTLAND
 Kim Little, Erin Cuthbert & Caroline Weir (attackers)

JAPAN
 Saki Kumagai (defender)

THE NETHERLANDS
 Vivianne Miedema (forward)

BRAZIL
 Marta Vieira da Silva (forward)

ENGLAND
 Steph Houghton (defender)
 Toni Duggan & Fran Kirby (attackers)

US
 Alex Morgan (forward and FIFA champion)
 Megan Rapinoe and Carli Lloyd (midfielders)

AUSTRALIA
 Sam Kerr (captain and forward)

FIFA Women's World Cup

YEAR	Host	Winner
1991	China	US
1995	Sweden	Norway
1999	The US	US
2003	The US	Germany
2007	China	Germany
2011	Germany	Japan
2015	Canada	US
2019	France	



Opening match: France Vs South Korea



Companies Need to Keep a Strong Compliance Profile for H-1B Visas



Indian IT companies are facing unprecedented US visa woes. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has been increasingly denying or issuing requests for evidence (RFEs) for H-1B, the lottery-based work visas, and for L-1, the visas used by companies outside US to transfer senior managers to the US. It is thus no surprise that **Austin T. Fragomen, Jr.**, chairman and founder of New York-based immigration law firm Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP, is spending more time with his Indian clients these days. His firm, with 40 overseas offices, is recognised as the world's largest to focus only on immigration law.

Fragomen, 75, who started his long career in immigration law in 1951, has served as staff counsel to the House of Representatives subcommittee on immigration, citizenship and international law. He has also testified before House and Senate subcommittees to share his expertise on various immigration topics, including H-1B and L visas.

Fragomen, who was in Bengaluru to address talent and mobility heads of various tech companies, spoke to **Ishani Duttgupta** about the challenges faced by Indian companies and professionals due to the Donald Trump Administration's "Buy American and Hire American" policy. Edited excerpts:

The rising number of denials of work permit visas and more RFEs under the 'Buy American and Hire American' policy has had an adverse impact on Indian IT companies. How difficult has the situation been for the last few quarters?

We first noticed growing pressure on Indian IT companies four-five years ago. But it hadn't reached the level that it was actually impacting business. Back then, if you had a certain number of denials, a typical remedy was to file more applications and it was fairly easy to manage. But ever since the Trump Administration established the 'Buy American, Hire American' policy, the impact has been greater. While visa denial rates are higher for everyone, they have particularly hurt Indian companies that do offsite placements under the general category of H-1B. There is also a proposed legislation around the 50:50 rule, which can further limit the number of skilled workers from India.

What type of Indian company has been affected the most?

Larger, established companies, which include In-

dian companies and Indian subsidiaries of US companies, have higher approval rates than smaller companies. Things have become tough for smaller companies, which place workers on client sites. They are facing more vigorous enforcement action. While it doesn't cost anything to receive denials, RFEs, which have become common, require a lot of case work and can require companies to pay double the fees to lawyers. RFEs have become prevalent in all industries, including IT, consulting and financial services.

In this scenario, what should Indian companies be most concerned about?

The US government is now far more aggressive and sophisticated in the area of investigation and compliance. Government agencies are interacting more with each other than in the past and companies need to see this as a significant risk area and maintain a strong compliance profile when getting their people to the US.

In terms of logistics, companies that file thousands of H-1B visa applications face a higher risk from enforcement standpoint, especially when they have not made investments in comprehensive risk management systems. Often, there are huge teams managing the movement of people and [it] may become difficult for the top management to control. Things like submitting a false invitation letter from a client or a false statement with an application can happen at lower levels and become huge risks for the companies, if investigated. The process needs to be managed more carefully.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement had set up a fake university to expose immigration fraud, leading to the arrest of many Indian students. Do you think students from other countries are also facing the heat?

The government is focusing on students because they are such an important part of the flow into professional immigration to the US. In fact, the overall view is that overseas students, especially those in the STEM fields [science, technology, engineering and mathematics], should have a favourable position in the skilled immigration process and that is why the US administration seems to be sending the aggressive message that they will come after this segment too on compliance.

What about Indian professionals in green card queues?

The long wait for permanent residence or green cards by professionals on work permit visas has a negative impact on the lives of many Indian families in the US. For companies, too, it is difficult to move people around or even promote them to senior roles since that would mean restarting their green card petitions all over again. Most top IT companies in the US are making green card reforms their top agenda when lobbying with the government. Most of them support elimination of country-based caps, which result in inequity in wait time for some of their employees, such as those from India.

Recently, a US IT firm sued the government over H-1B denial. Are Indian IT firms too likely to seek legal recourse?

IT companies usually hang back when it comes to getting into a policy conversation with the US government. That happens more at government-to-government discussions. However, if a company is impacted enough, it should go to court in the US, which is the only proven recourse to visa issues. It is not easy to interact with the US administration while the Congress is not likely to implement any legislative change on immigration at this point. However, businesses across the board are reluctant to sue since it is expensive and may take a lot of time. Besides they fear retaliation, especially if they have government contracts.

Will USCIS' asking for social media information of visa applicants impact Indians?

Our experience in handling visa applications is that extreme vetting measures are infrequent and quite unusual. So social media is rarely checked. It is more commonly encountered in Arab countries but not extensively even there. ■

ishani.duttgupta@timesgroup.com

Our experience in handling visas is that extreme vetting measures are infrequent and quite unusual. Social media is rarely checked

World Needs Generic Drugs but Their Quality Must be Guaranteed

The role of the generic drug industry in providing affordable medicines is indisputable. But while branded drug makers have been accused of price gouging and corruption, generic drugs manufacturers have come under fire for poor quality of drugs, falsification of data and sub-par manufacturing practices. One of the most high-profile cases was that of Ranbaxy, ordered to pay a record \$500 million penalty in the US. In her new book *Bottle of Lies: The Inside Story of the Generic Drug Boom*, New York-based investigative journalist **Katherine Eban** highlights malpractices among generic drug makers in India and China, which dominate the segment, the shortcomings of regulators in checking these and the threat this ultimately poses to patients. In an email interview with **Indulekha Aravind**, Eban discusses her findings and how regulators and countries need to step up to protect patients. Edited excerpts:

ished formulation, should be on the dispensing label. For that to happen, we need new laws. And it is critical that governments move beyond a regulatory honour system, relying on pre-announced inspections and company-generated data. Governments need to conduct unannounced inspections and randomly test the quality of drugs in an ongoing surveillance system. Finally, the world's regulators need to come together and help hammer out international laws that clearly define acceptable standards for drug quality and enforce strict penalties for negligence or deliberate deception.

Former FDA head Scott Gottlieb recently tweeted that he has 'extreme confidence' in generic drugs. Have there been improvements in the sector in the last few years?

I would like to agree with his statement. But I don't. Currently, the FDA is giving overseas generic drug plants weeks, if not months, of advance notice that investigators are coming. Those same plants are arranging local travel and hotel accommodations for FDA investigators, providing luxury cars and upgraded hotel rooms. The result is what one of my sources called 'regulatory tourism'. In some instances where the FDA's own investigators have found strong evidence of fraud, FDA officials have downgraded recommended penalties against the plants. Some FDA investigators and regulators I interviewed specified that they would not take low-cost generics from many of the plants in India and China that they inspected.

Your book emphasises the risks to the health of the American consumer. What's at stake for Indian patients?

Unfortunately, the picture is far worse for the Indian consumer. Generic drug companies routinely make drugs of lower quality for less regulated markets. The practice is so widespread that it goes by different names: dual-track, multi-tier or row A/row B production. The companies send their worst (and most cheaply made) drugs to markets with less vigilant regulators, who are unlikely to detect the poor quality. One of those markets is India. The glut of substandard generics in developing markets has a profound public health impact, not just on patients who take them, but on everyone. Increasingly, researchers believe that while substandard drugs do not contain enough active ingredients to effectively cure sick patients, they can contain enough to kill off the weakest microbes while leaving the strongest intact. These surviving microbes go on to reproduce, fuelling a growing epidemic of drug resistance worldwide.

Are better oversight by regulators and stricter enforcement of regulations at the heart of a solution?

The world needs a unified system of drug regulation across markets that prioritises both low cost and high quality. The model for this is the aviation industry which, through a body of international laws, has stipulated basic safety provisions and strict consequences for failing to meet them. Basic tenets of drug safety must include unannounced inspections of drug plants in every market, as well as surveillance testing of drugs already in the market. Regulators need training, and must view themselves as working for patients, not companies. And patients need transparency, with clear information about who made their drugs and drug ingredients, and where they were manufactured. ■

indulekha.aravind@timesgroup.com

Your book is a damning indictment of generic drug manufacturers in India and China, with countless examples of fraud and corruption. In the course of your investigation, what was the most shocking revelation?

I reported on the generic drug industry for 10 years, five spent exclusively on *Bottle of Lies*. In all my reporting, two examples stick in my mind. One was of a plant in India that had perfect data showing that it was sterile. Microbial limits testing, bacterial endotoxin testing – all the samples had perfect results. Yet the samples didn't exist. They were testing nothing. The entire laboratory was a fake, which an FDA investigator uncovered during an unannounced inspection. This deception, to me, was really a shock. If they would fake their own sterility data, what wouldn't they fake? And then, there was an incident in which a Ranbaxy executive was on a conference call with the company's medical directors, and she raised concerns about the quality of the AIDS drugs Ranbaxy was making for Africa. One of the company's medical directors said on the call, 'Who cares. It's just blacks dying.' This, to me, was a chilling anecdote about a company that had come to value profits over human lives.

There are people quoted in your book saying they have stopped taking generic drugs, after they became aware of malpractices. But with prices of branded drugs soaring, what should be the ideal way forward?

The world needs generic drugs. They are indispensable. But their quality must be guaranteed. They are not a bargain if they don't work properly, as one of my sources likes to say. At the moment, unfortunately, patients must become detectives and figure out: What company is making their drugs? What is the regulatory track record of that company? Do switches in manufacturers create side effects or relapses? Ideally, the manufacturing country of origin, for both the active ingredients and fin-

Companies send their worst (and most cheaply made) drugs to markets with less vigilant regulators, who are unlikely to detect the poor quality. One of those markets is India



HIT NUMBERS

₹5-20 LAKH
 Current music production budgets for Indian web series
 Source: Music composers

2.5x
 Is what a web series music composer makes for doing music for a Bollywood film
 Source: Music composers

1-5%
 Share of the entire web series' production budget set aside for music at present
 Source: Production houses & OTT players

\$18-400
 Ticket prices for Game of Thrones Live Concert Experience in US this year, which will bring alive the show's music by Ramin Djawadi
 Source: gameofthronesconcert.com

680,243
 Streams on Spotify for *This is Us Score Suite* by musician Siddhartha Khosla
 Source: Spotify

Sound Trippin'

OTTs are giving rise to OSTs. Original soundtracks for web shows are going mainstream – and how

:: Shephali Bhatt

"Laakhon aaye lagaane ye thappa Tu bhi laakhon mein ek"
 (Millions come here to make their mark You, too, are one among them)



Song	Singer	Music	Lyrics	Show	Platform	YouTube views
Kaam 25	Divine	Phenom, Divine	Divine	Sacred Games	Netflix	19.9mn

Add one innocuous word and you can turn a pat on the back to a punch in the gut. Majaal, a Mumbai-based writer and actor, went for some clever wordplay while writing the above lines for the title track of the web series *Laakhon Mein Ek*, Season 1. Aired in October 2017 on Amazon Prime Video, the first season of the show follows the arc of a teenage boy struggling to find his feet in an IIT entrance coaching centre away from home. "Laakhon mein ek" is a popular idiom that means "one in a million", extraordinary. Majaal tinkers with it just so and turns it on its head into "another one among a million" or ordinary. The track has inched closer to a million views on YouTube over the past two years.



Song	Singer	Music	Lyrics	Show	Platform	YouTube views
Yeh Kya Hua	Shreya Ghoshal, Dev Negi	Rana Mazumdar	Amitabh Bhattacharya	Broken But Beautiful	ALTBalaji	8.8mn

TL;DR

- Non-film OSTs have gained popularity after the breakout of web series
- From Udit Narayan to Shreya Ghoshal, T-Series to Sony Music, industry bigwigs are associating with web series OSTs
- Despite low streaming revenues, the trend is giving indie artists their moment in the sun

Even though his brief was to pen earthy but hard-hitting poetry for the title track – here's a sample "Naachna tujhe hoga Basanti/ Ho chaahе pairon mein mochi/ Fir ujaale pe pad gaya taa-la/ Chaabi andhere mein khoj (You shall dance, Basanti/ Even if your ankle is twisted/ The light has been locked out/ Search for the key in the dark)" – the 35-year-old did not anticipate the response he got when the song was released. Some said it lifted their spirits. Others, like screenwriter Piyush Gupta of *Dangal* fame, declared on social media that they were playing the two-minute track on loop.

Besides words of adulation, the track's popularity got Majaal more work, too. Soon after, he wrote lyrics for *Bose: Dead/Alive*, which aired on ALTBalaji later that year. Comedian Biswa Kalyan Rath, creator of *Laakhon Mein Ek*, roped him in for the show's second season, too, which premiered in April this year. To Majaal, all this indicates that OTTs (over-the-top platforms) are making OSTs, or original soundtracks, more mainstream than tracks for Indian TV shows ever were.

Millions of viewers are tuning into OSTs of web series either via YouTube or through music streaming apps.

Kaam 25, an OST of Netflix Original *Sacred Games* (2018), has over 19 million views on YouTube. Rapper Divine, whose life inspired large parts of the Bollywood block-



Song	Singer	Music	Lyrics	Show	Platform	YouTube views
Song For Survival	Neel Adhikari, Mithila Palkar	Neel Adhikari	Neel Adhikari	Little Things	YouTube, Netflix	1.3mn

buster *Gully Boy*, has given the words and voice for this one. At 19.6 million views, Darshan Raval's *Yaara teri yaari* for Amazon Prime Video's *Four More Shots Please* is neck-and-neck with Divine's rap song. Meanwhile, *Yeh kya hua* of ALTBalaji's *Broken But Beautiful* (2018) has got 9 million views. The title track of Dice Media's *Little Things* (2016), starring Mithila Palkar and Dhruv Sehgal, is now nearing 1.5 million views.

OSTs for web shows are attracting industry bigwigs like Udit Narayan and Shreya Ghoshal, and major music labels like T-Series and Sony Music. Producers also prefer creating original music to buying rights to Bollywood music as those syndication deals cost ₹20-30 crore – content players are spending 1% of that amount in music production at present. Besides, OSTs are giving independent artists – whose era faded with the downfall of indie pop in India – their moment in the sun.

Game of OST
 While the trend is just catching on in India, it is widely established in the West. Today, Iranian-German composer Ramin Djawadi and Indian-American musician Siddhartha Khosla have gained popularity for the music they have composed for worldwide hit shows *Game of Thrones* (2011-19) and *This Is Us* (2016), respectively. Music streaming app Spotify tells *ET Magazine* that Djawadi's *Game of Thrones* soundtracks have fetched over 380 million streams since January 2016. "More than 250,000 listeners have created their



"Just as Jagjit Singh found a home for his ghazals in the title tracks of TV shows, singer-songwriters have found a place in web series"
 Neel Adhikari, music composer for *Little Things*, *Laakhon Mein Ek*, *Bose: Dead/Alive*, *What The Folks*

TARA LOUISE MCMANUS



Song	Singer	Music	Lyrics	Show	Platform	YouTube views
Aisi Hai Hawa	Udit Narayan	Vaibhav Bundhoo	Hussain Haidry & Vaibhav Bundhoo	Yeh Meri Family	TVFPlay, Netflix	1.1mn



that as soon as one show ended, the next one started," recalls Nair.

Show On a Song

On the web, too, one can always "skip the intro" and the end credits but there is the option to check the credits. Unlike Bollywood hits and Punjabi ditties, these OSTs have no elaborate marketing machinery behind them and no big budgets to boast. *The Little Things*' title track *Song for survival*, for instance, is a DIY video shot largely by Dice Media's parent company Pocket Aces' cofounder Ashwin Suresh. Featuring its music composer and lyricist Neel Adhikari and actor Mithila Palkar, the video also uses animation and visual representation of the lyrics to enhance the impact.

Most production houses and OTT platforms set aside 1-5% of their production budget for music. The show's popularity drives people to its music and not the other way around, says Suresh of Pocket Aces. It also keeps the memory of the show intact between two seasons, he adds.

Shruti Naik validates his argument. "If I've just watched a show and liked its tracks, I spend the weeks that follow listening to its OSTs, googling the artist and their music.



"If I've just watched a show and liked its tracks, I spend the weeks that follow listening to its OSTs. Almost 30-40% of my playlist has OST from my favourite shows"

Shruti Naik, flamenco guitarist, Vancouver

own *Game of Thrones*-themed playlists," the spokesperson adds. Djawadi has spun these soundtracks into a live concert format. The tickets for these concerts – held around the world since 2017 – are priced between \$18 and \$400.

Khosla is touted as "one of the busiest composers in TV showbiz" with several shows under his belt besides the tear-jerker *This Is Us*. He boasts 23,000-plus monthly listeners on Spotify. His most prominent soundtrack – *This Is Us Score Suite* – has been streamed over 680,000 times on the app.



Song	Singer	Music	Lyrics	Show	Platform	YouTube views
Laakhon Mein Ek	Mohan Kannan	Neel Adhikari	Majaal	Laakhon Mein Ek	Amazon Prime Video	896k



Telly Title Songs

The US is a mature market for OSTs. "The West had its golden age of TV in the late 1990s when shows like *The Sopranos* had great tracks. Meanwhile, most Indian TV shows used Bollywood songs as padding for the longest time," says Sameer Nair, CEO of Applause Entertainment, who has spent over two decades in the TV industry with Star TV and Balaji Telefilms, among others.

India, too, has a few popular OSTs of television series. "Back in the days of Doordarshan, many title songs were popular, despite the onslaught of film music, like songs from Govind Nihalani's *Tamas* and Shyam Benegal's *Bharat Ek Khoj*, both by Vanraj Bhatia, or the title song of *Subah*, composed by RD Burman.

Down South, when K Balachander made his first TV series called *Rail Sneham*, VS Narasimhan composed its popular tracks," says Karthik Srinivasan, a communications consultant who reviews music in Indic languages.

When Indian TV underwent the saas-bahu phase, it saw lyricist Nawab Arzoo try all combinations of "rishtey" (relationships), "aansu" (tears), and "kahaani" (story) to weave catchy title tracks for shows across Hindi entertainment channels.

Yet, there were hardly any cassettes, CDs, or LPs dedicated to tracks from TV shows.

The digital medium has solved that supply problem almost entirely. "At one point TV did away with all the credits to go break-less so

Almost 30-40% of my playlist has OSTs from my favourite shows," says Naik, 28, a flamenco guitarist based in Vancouver. While Naik's OST playlist mostly comprises of Djawadi's best from *Game of Thrones* and tracks from her favourite Korean dramas, streaming data for Indian web series' OSTs looks promising, too.

The 12-song album of *Kota Factory*, the latest web series from multi-channel network TVF, is played over 276,000 times on JioSaavn. TVF, an early

entrant in the web series game, has admittedly been late to the OST party. In 2018, it released a show set in Jaipur called *Yeh Meri Family*. "When its soundtrack fetched 5 lakh streams on JioSaavn in no time, we realised we should have done this sooner for our other web shows as well," says Vaibhav Bundhoo, creative director, TVF. Bundhoo's music for some of the older TVF series like *Permanent Roommates*, *Pitchers* and *Humorously Yours* had caught singer Udit Narayan's attention. Eventually, the 35-year-old convinced the veteran singer to lend his voice to *Yeh Meri Family*'s soundtrack *Aisi hai hawa*. "We are pushing the music better now," says Bundhoo.

ALTBalaji has amped up its game, too. Artists like Shreya Ghoshal and Papon have sung some of the OSTs. "We are utilising 47 OSTs from our shows for promotions as well as monetising across multiple platforms," says Sunil Lulla, Group CEO of Balaji Telefilms. MX Player (owned by the Times Group that also publishes *ET Magazine*) has decided to have an OST for every new show. "A business ecosystem, like the one for mainstream music, will have to be developed for web series music. We have to get to a point where critics do music reviews of web series. This will require a concerted push from OTT players, music streaming apps, and music labels," says Gautam Talwar, chief content officer, MX Player.

Major music labels have begun to take note already. Two of Hungama Play's OSTs from its web show *Bar Code* are available on T-Series's YouTube channel, says Siddhartha Roy, COO of Hungama Digital Media. So far, Sony Music has picked music distribution rights for at least five web shows across OTT platforms. "At 50 million views, the audio-video streaming numbers for *Four More Shots*' title track across platforms are as good as a regular Bollywood movie. The genre will have a slow start, but over a period of time, there won't be any difference between Bollywood music and web series music," says Jay Mehta, head of digital business at Sony Music India.

Artists are also bullish about this genre. "Just as Jagjit Singh found a home for his ghazals in the title tracks of TV shows, singer-songwriters have found a place in the web series zone," says Neel Adhikari. The 44-year-old has helmed music composition for web series like *Little Things*, *What The Folks*, *Laakhon Mein Ek*, *Bose* and *Zero Kms*. At one point, he was getting offers every day. "I had to refuse many," he says. While there's plenty of room for creative satisfaction, the earnings are not as gratifying. Streaming revenues are low, royalty contracts too complicated and often include archaic clauses. Dub Sharma, who enthralled the audience with his musical chops in *Gully Boy*, is trying to decode the royalty collection process so he can simplify it for his community of musicians. "This process shouldn't be complicated," says the 30-year-old. Sharma recently gave the distribution rights to one of his old tracks called *Roshay* to Amazon Prime's *Made In Heaven*. "OTT players don't have the rights to shows for perpetuity," he says. "So, if your music continues to run on their platforms after a show's contract renewal, your payouts also go up."

All this chatter around royalty and payout is Greek to Nilotpal Bora. TVF spotted the 29-year-old Assamese artist on YouTube two years ago and roped him in for *Tripling*'s second season. His composition *Ishq ka haafiz* has been making waves ever since the series released on the platform and SonyLIV. Since then, Bora has been on music tours. "Web series are so big they've made my work bigger," he says. "It's not like Shah Rukh Khan tweeted my song, but still." ■

shephali.bhatt@timesgroup.com



Song	Singer	Music	Lyrics	Show	Platform	YouTube views
Ishq Ka Haafiz	Nilotpal Bora	Nilotpal Bora	Hussain Haidry	Tripling Season 2	TVFPlay, SonyLIV	631k



Farewell to Alms



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

The tussle between the devout and those seen as exploiting the pious during the month of Ramzan brings to fore India's inability to address begging and homelessness

:: Omkar Khandekar

With his clean shirt, skullcap and a well-trimmed beard, Safat Ali doesn't fit the stereotype of someone you would find among the destitutes outside a mosque. "I am no beggar," he says categorically. "I come here to pray every day. Afterwards, I quietly sit at the gate."

The devout give him alms anyway. Ali's polio-afflicted legs are all the signal they need.

Earlier this year, Ali had to leave his hometown Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh after unpaid debts ran his grocery store aground.

He could not find a job in Mumbai, so he moved to Pune. Ramzan was about to begin. During this month, a lot of the devout undertake zakat – an Islamic tradition that calls upon a person of means to donate 2.5% of his wealth and annual savings to the needy.

From the first week of May, Ali started making daily trips to Kausar Bagh mosque at Kondhwa, a Pune suburb with a sizeable Muslim population. Soon, he was earning enough to pay the rent of his slum dwelling near the railway station, look after his wife and two kids, who had accompanied him to the city, and also send a few thousand rupees to his parents back in Gorakhpur. Of what he will manage to save, Ali wants to invest in reviving his grocery store.

Like Ali, several people from across poorer

regions migrate to urban areas around Ramzan hoping to get a share of zakat. Their numbers are difficult to ascertain – there have been no studies conducted on such migration – but the trend is observed in many parts of the Muslim world.

The practice is frowned upon by many in the community, and fuels debate that must weigh tough ethical questions. All those who give alms aren't necessarily wealthy and deem it a religious duty. They want to be sure that the recipient of zakat or sadaqah (optional charity) isn't someone who's feigning need or otherwise exploiting the pious during their holy month. Community organisers in many parts are now mounting efforts to regulate the practice. But they run into the difficult task of determining who really is needy. Discussion groups on Islamic issues online witness debates on the issue during Ramzan.

Newspapers in Pakistan regularly report of beggars "capturing" roads and markets in cities

such as Islamabad and Rawalpindi ahead of Ramzan. Intelligence agencies in Bangladesh estimated last year that the number of beggars in Dhaka had doubled to nearly 90,000 during

the holy month. Domestic and international migration is rampant in oil-rich countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE during this time. The UAE government passed a stringent anti-begging law in 2018 and launched a crackdown against offenders. Of the 243 arrested, 60% were found to have entered the country on visit visas.

"Begging is believed to be a crime in Islam. But Islam also says that if someone comes to you in need, don't turn him away," said Syed Zafar Mahmood, a former civil servant and founder of Zakat Foundation of India. "Charity done during Ramzan is believed to fetch higher rewards. So this trend [of economic migration of beggars], which is already a

pan-India phenomenon, takes its toll during this time," he said, adding that he did not sup-

From May, Ali started making daily trips to Kausar Bagh mosque in Pune. Soon, he was earning enough to pay the rent of his slum dwelling, look after his wife and two kids and also send a few thousand rupees to his parents in Gorakhpur



Involvement of criminal syndicates in begging is widely believed to be prevalent, but little evidence has been found to support this

port the detention of those found begging, nevertheless.

The 2011 census in India found 3.7 lakh beggars across India. The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act 1959, followed across India, criminalises begging and makes it punishable by imprisonment up to 10 years.

However, many are known to migrate to the affluent parts of India such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru and Hyderabad around Ramzan. Surveys and statistics are hard to come by, but activists and community leaders say that the number of destitutes around mosques and areas with a predominantly Muslim population visibly spike during this time. Similar trend is seen during other festivals like Diwali, Baisakhi and the New Year's Eve. Religious affiliation doesn't come in the way – neither for the givers, nor for the seekers.

For most, it seems like an act of desperation.

Gyarsi, a 70-year-old from New Delhi, came to Pune a couple of days after the month of Ramzan started. "My sister-in-law told me that she had made ₹20,000 during this time last year," she said. Her son, part of a wedding brass band, barely earned enough to keep their family of six afloat. Besides, Gyarsi is blind in one eye, which, her sister-in-law pointed out, would help her case. "But there are too many seekers this year. Hatte-katte log bhi hai (Some of them are physically able). I'm starting to regret coming here."

Begging usually stems from severe poverty, unemployment and rising costs of living. While hearing a PIL to decriminalise begging, the Delhi High Court also held the inadequate state support responsible: "You or we will not beg even if we are offered a crore of rupees. It is out of sheer necessity that someone puts out a hand to beg for food. How is begging an offence in a country where you (government) are not able to provide for food or jobs?"

Yet, little has been done by way of institutional redress over the years. Most often, beggars are rounded up and imprisoned. Only days before Ramzan this year, the district magistrate of Srinagar directed immediate arrest of persons soliciting alms in public places. In Pune, a group of NGOs banded together to rally the community against giving alms to the beggars. Their aim: to eliminate the "professionals" seeking to profit off religious philanthropy.

Sayed Ahmed of Pune-based Raabta Foundation, who is leading this campaign, recalled how it all started with an encounter he had with a beggar outside a mosque in his neighbourhood last year.

"This man was claiming to have come from Aligarh to seek treatment for his sick mother. By the time the prayer had just ended and people dispersed, he had collected around ₹9,000. I went up to him and asked: 'What kind of sickness is this that a hospital in Aligarh can't cure?'" The

man had no answer. On probing some more, says Ahmed, he felt it was a con.

"These are the people who start off as desperate and then it becomes a habit," says Ahmed. Giving in, he adds, not only encourages them, it also enables the criminal syndicates among them.

The involvement of criminal syndicates in begging is widely believed to be prevalent, but little evidence has been found to support this. In 2016, Delhi Police concluded after a two-month-long investigation at the direction of the Arvind Kejriwal government that there was no organised begging mafia in Delhi.

Ahmed's campaign involves on-street picketing, mosque-



Asha Jogdand, arrested in a raid outside Kausar Bagh mosque, worked as a domestic help before paralysis forced her to take to the streets



to-mosque visits, promoting awareness via social media, and coordination with the police to "raid" begging hot-spots. After it was launched last year, the campaign saw a total of 120 beggars arrested by the Kondhwa police in 2018. This year, 19 more were arrested in six raids conducted over the month of Ramzan.

"It has become a business," says Anil Patil, senior inspector at Kondhwa police station. "A lot of people fake disabilities and make up to ₹1-2 lakh a month." Patil estimates that up to 80 new beggars had migrated to Kondhwa over Ramzan. But arresting them is only a deterrent, not a solution, he agrees. After all, each of the 19 arrested this year were released after posting a bail of ₹5,000.

Asha Jogdand, a native of Jalna in Maharashtra, was among the 25-odd people arrested in one such raid outside Kausar Bagh mosque last year. She worked as a domestic help for several years in Pune before paralysis in her left hand forced her to take to the streets. After her detention at Yervada prison, she was taken to the courts but not given any legal counsel. "They had me wait outside the courtroom and then said the bail had been fixed at ₹10,000," she says. The bail norm is ₹5,000, so it's possible that an unscrupulous official fleeced her. A few weeks later, she was back at her usual spot.

"I come here by bus whenever I need to buy oil, atta or rice," she says. In the recently concluded month of Ramzan, she made up to ₹400 a day. "My husband is a drunk, my son only gives me ₹1,200 a month. But I still have to look after them, no?" she asks.

Mohammed Tarique, coordinator of Koshish, a Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Field Action Project on Homelessness and Destitution, says only a small number of beggars are part of organised rackets. "Unfortunately, when we talk of organised begging, our focus is on the victim, not the person making him do it." Often, their relationship is not as exploitative as shown in the movies. "I've spoken to hundreds of people who have said that I only have this one person [the tout] in my life."

Over the years, Koshish has helped rehabilitate hundreds of beggars by giving them jobs. "If people have enough support, nobody wants to beg," says Tarique. "Usually, a certain degree of degradation has taken place to make them do that. It just requires very sustained engagement to get them out of it."

At the ongoing anti-begging campaign in Pune, there have been few attempts at counselling or rehabilitation. Sayed Ahmed claims he intends to address this in the coming months by reaching out to more NGOs. But first, he said, the citizens need to be made aware.

In the last week of May, he invited me to one of his picketing events at the Kausar Bagh mosque in Kondhwa. As the sun blazed upon us, around a dozen volunteers from the local NGOs stood on the street flanking the mosque, placards in hand, warning onlookers about the evils of begging

– and paying. Inspector Patil, who had also been invited to lend the police's backing, recorded a video message expressing solidarity with the anti-begging drive. His constables then warned the beggars and shooed them off. A few mosque-goers came up to congratulate them.

"You are doing an absolutely right thing," said one. "It's become a habit for them. You sit and get easy money."

"I saw a man with a bag full of money," said another. "Imagine, he earns in a day more than working people like us."

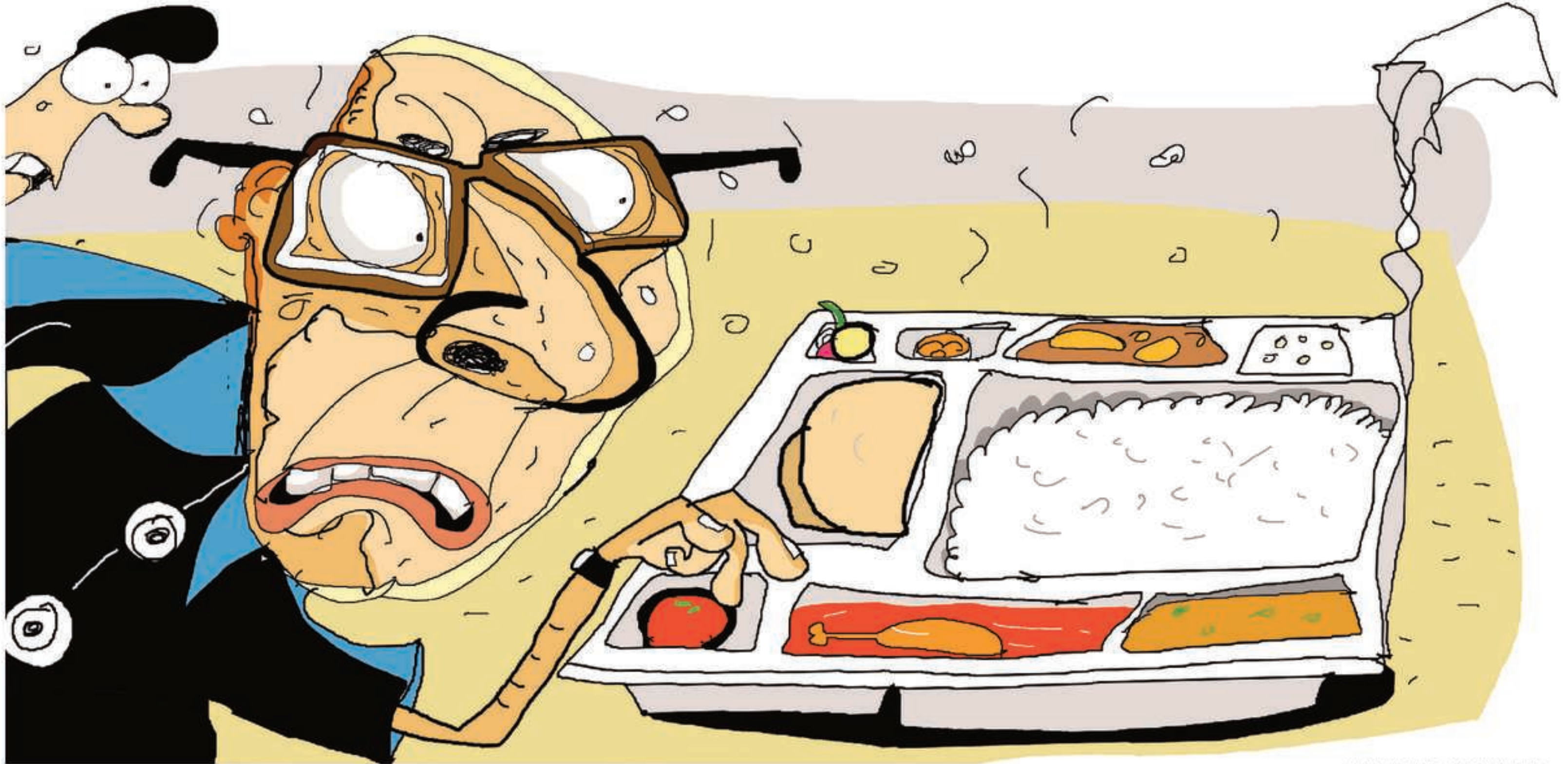
The police, activists, concerned citizens and onlookers tut-tutted together. Then they got on their bikes, cars, taxis and went away.

I found Safat Ali a few metres away from his usual spot near the gates afterwards. I asked him what he thought of the campaign. "I'm no beggar," he reiterated, visibly agitated, "But I have a family to feed. What choice do I have?" ■

The writer is a freelance journalist

The Tragedy That is the North Indian Thali

While the thali with its two-boondi raita and four-mattar gravy amounts to culinary monstrosity, the snacks of Delhi – from the irredeemable mediocrity of bread pakora to the unfathomable fusion of mayonnaise and momo – are deadly



ILLUSTRATIONS: ANIRBAN BORA

:: Palash Krishna Mehrotra

I am not much of a gallivanter. I'm not blessed with vast reserves of Bengali wanderlust. I have recurring dreams of being sucked into a tourist trap, never to emerge again.

There are reasons for this: trains have dirty loos, airport staff confiscate my precious Chinese plastic lighter and Cake matches (the Chinese don't do matchboxes in India), while competitive Indian traffic takes the pleasure out of road trips. Besides, I'm in the habit of leaving behind chargers, Moleskines and underwear in hotel rooms. If I travel frequently I'd be spending the rest of my days constantly replenishing my dwindling stock of Fruit of the Loom.

I do travel sometimes. On the rare occasion I do, I don't feel like returning home. This has nothing to do with the seductiveness of travel – once I've tasted the forbidden fruit, I yearn for more. Or, maybe it does. Every time I'm in Arunachal Pradesh or Tamil Nadu or Kerala or Goa, the food tastes so different that I dread returning to formulaic North Indian fare. I sink into a blue funk. The North Indian thali (NIT), especially, is a culinary tragedy of monumen-

Why this obsession with phoney mattar paneer? Why not serve okra, aubergine and gourds? Why only one kind of dal when we have a variety to choose from? Who decided on the gulab jamun as the piece de resistance? What past wrongs has the motichoor laddoo committed to be no-platformed?

tal proportions.

Let us for a moment put this thali under an electron microscope. What do we see? A bowl of watery raita, with maybe two or three tiny boondi balls submerged in it. A bowl of mattar-paneer, which adds up to exactly one piece of paneer, and four or five green peas, floating in reddish spicy water. There's boiled rice and four chapattis; a "salad" consisting of two pieces of cucumber and a fraying sliver of onion and, if you're lucky, a flaccid green chilly; in savouries, there's pickle, which, for some reason, is always "mixed pickle". The icing on the cake is a solitary dark brown gulab ja-

mun, as hard as a marble. The bowl of dal makhani is the only preparation with some taste in the circle of deceit that is the NIT. Curiously, the dal in an NIT is always brown, never yellow.

Who, one wonders, invented this measly monstrosity? It's become some kind of classic that no one wants to mess with. Unlike Coca-Cola, the formula is there for all to see. The NIT has three variants: standard, deluxe and executive, apart from the basic choice of veg (no real vegetables, as already explained) and non-veg (a spindly chicken leg). Not much separates the men from the boys here, the chapatti being re-

placed by the naan, the raita might have thicker consistency in the executive version, the deluxe buyer gets an additional undulating papad.

The NIT is what we eat if you are not cooking at home and are on a budget. It's not that cheap either, costing a minimum of ₹150 per plate. The NIT is consumed on trains, in hostels and offices, PGs and bachelor pads, and brightly lit outlets where one side is sectioned off for Indian sweets. The besan laddoo and the cham-cham taunt the NIT-eater from their perch atop shiny glass counters.

The NIT is always served in a plastic tray with shallow (one-third of the little finger being maximum accepted depth in the trade) compartments built into the tray. If you have it home-delivered, it will come encased in transparent plastic film; peeling off the layer is the hardest part. It's not uncommon to lose the odd pea in

NIT is always served in a plastic tray with shallow (one-third of the little finger being maximum accepted depth in the trade) compartments





Apart from Bihari sattu and litti chokha, North Indian street food hasn't really engaged with the idea of different foods for different times of day. One eats also parantha for breakfast, lunch and dinner, come hail or dust storm



the process, the raita drains out and the bloody pickle oil leaks in a slow drip.

The lack of variety and the stinginess of the thali service provider raise important questions for nation-building. An army marches on its stomach. Why this obsession with phoney mattar paneer? Why not serve okra, aubergine and gourds? Why only one kind of dal when we have a variety to choose from, from dhuli masoor to khadi moong to black-eyed beans? Who decided on the gulab jamun as the piece de resistance? What past wrongs has the motichoor laddoo committed to be no-platformed? Why is the needle stuck on this edible record?

Compare the NIT to what's on the plate in a Naga thali or the Andhra Bhavan (Delhi) thali, even the Sagar Ratna thali, and you will know what plunges me into the depths of gutty depression.

The Snacks Come Out

Let's turn our attention to the snacks in the North Indian hole. They make one want to dig a hole and disappear into it. The North Indian "snake" is deadly.

I can just about handle the samosa. In St Stephen's we called it "hot Sam", as in "Let's go grab a hot Sam, man." Sam always obliged. The samosa has travelled. Once, as a student at Oxford, I was served a lamb samosa as the main course for dinner in the college dining hall. I protested: "But

this is a baby snack, where's my sumptuous beef roast?"

The bread pakora (BP) is what Aatish Taseer would call "an unteachable mediocrity". I've given the bread pakora many chances, but this sordid concoction of white bread and besan (chickpea flour), deep-fried in oil, is consummately unredeemable.

Apart from Bihari sattu and litti chokha (which you only get in Bihar or the interiors of Uttar Pradesh), North Indian street food hasn't really engaged with the idea of different foods for different times of day. One eats also parantha for breakfast, lunch and dinner, come hail or dust storm.

In Delhi's Greater Kailash, the bread pakora man under the Guru Nanak Market tree is much sought-after. On winter mornings (as well as mid-mornings, afternoons and evenings), a small working-class crowd gathers; people chat as the oil in the

The bread pakora (BP) is what Aatish Taseer would call "an unteachable mediocrity". I've given it many chances, but this sordid concoction of white bread and besan, deep-fried in oil, is consummately unredeemable



wok heats to a boil. There is much jostling as the first BP of the day emerges to loud cheers. The scene repeats itself in the summer. The BP is an all-weather anytime everyman staple. But, no matter how hard you make a BP multi-task, it has its intrinsic limitations.

While Mumbai has batata vada and pav bhaji as daily stocks of the trade, and New York the hot dog, Delhi is saved from gastronomic embarrassment by the chhole-bhatura/kulcha combo. Even here the helpings of chickpeas are, well, pea-sized, forcing the budget consumer to eat the oversized bhaturas with the complimentary nimbu pickle or watery green chutney, a certified health hazard. There are rumours that the inviting deep-green colour of the chutney is not pudina but the result of adding Holi chemicals. Under normal circumstances, one shouldn't have to reach for one's bottle of Pudina Hara after consuming pudina chutney.

To these, Delhi has added the exotic dumpling. The momo man has found a space for himself next to the BP proprietor.

c) Repetition

Tired of their own lack of ideas, Delhi sweet/ snack shops now offer inauthentic food from elsewhere in the country and the world: yellowing khaman dhokla, rocky idlis with besan chutney (instead of coconut) and lumpy upma. Or there's the Punjabi variant of "chowmin" and "veg hakka", which is again severely lacking in vegetables. The veg burger is beyond contempt.

To return to the NIT, its tragedy is repeated in the vegetarian menus of restaurants. The Hindu nationalist would prefer it if we went shudh shakahari, which also aligns with what the vegan millennials proscribe. Except that the vegetarian has little choice in an ostensibly vegetarian country. Again, a staggering

The momo has, for some reason, established itself as an evening snack. Momos come in two variants, cabbage and cat. The outer skin of the DDA basement market momo is thicker than a politician's



The BP man is not too bothered about his profits being eaten into as the momo has, for some reason, established itself as an evening snack. The BP retires gracefully after 8 pm, leaving the field clear for the momo. Momos come in two variants, cabbage and cat. The outer skin of the DDA basement market momo is thicker than a politician's.

The green chutney is replaced with an American import: mayonnaise. Delhiites love their momos with mayonnaise. After buying a quarter of IMFL, the Delhiite stops at the momo man's hissing gas stove and demands extra mayonnaise. The white mayoneej is meant to be mixed with red chilly paste, forming a kind of Ganga-Jamuna primal liquid, taking fusion food to heights never previously scaled.

Readers will object that I'm ignoring the rajma-chawal. Not for a moment. My problem with the rajma-chawal is that it is mostly all chawal with a teaspoon of rajma gravy. Where are the kidney beans?

The problem with north Indian street food can whittled down to three salient points:

- a) Lack of variety/ ideas
- b) The stinginess of portions

lack of creativity prevents variety from getting its rightful place on the table. Across North Indian restaurants, vegetarian means paneer unless one takes into account the de-racinated tandoori broccoli. Paneer is also the point where the saffronista and the vegan part ways.

Ruskin Bond, in his new memoir, *The Beauty of All My Days*, recalls his time as a struggling writer, eating in "small restaurants and dhabas": "These random meals did, of course, play havoc with my digestion, and a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts or soda-mint tablets was always on my table."

I dream to see the day when one can get an affordable hygienic meal that also fills one up, a meal that doesn't cut corners. The daily "value meal" on Swiggy and Zomato tries to do so but fails miserably when it comes to fulfilling one's hunger quotient.

The AAP in Delhi had promised state-run canteens serving wholesome food to the janta. It's a gap in the market. We are still waiting for the AAP thali. It could mark the beginning of a revolution in the world of the NIT. ■

The writer is the editor of House Spirit: Drinking in India

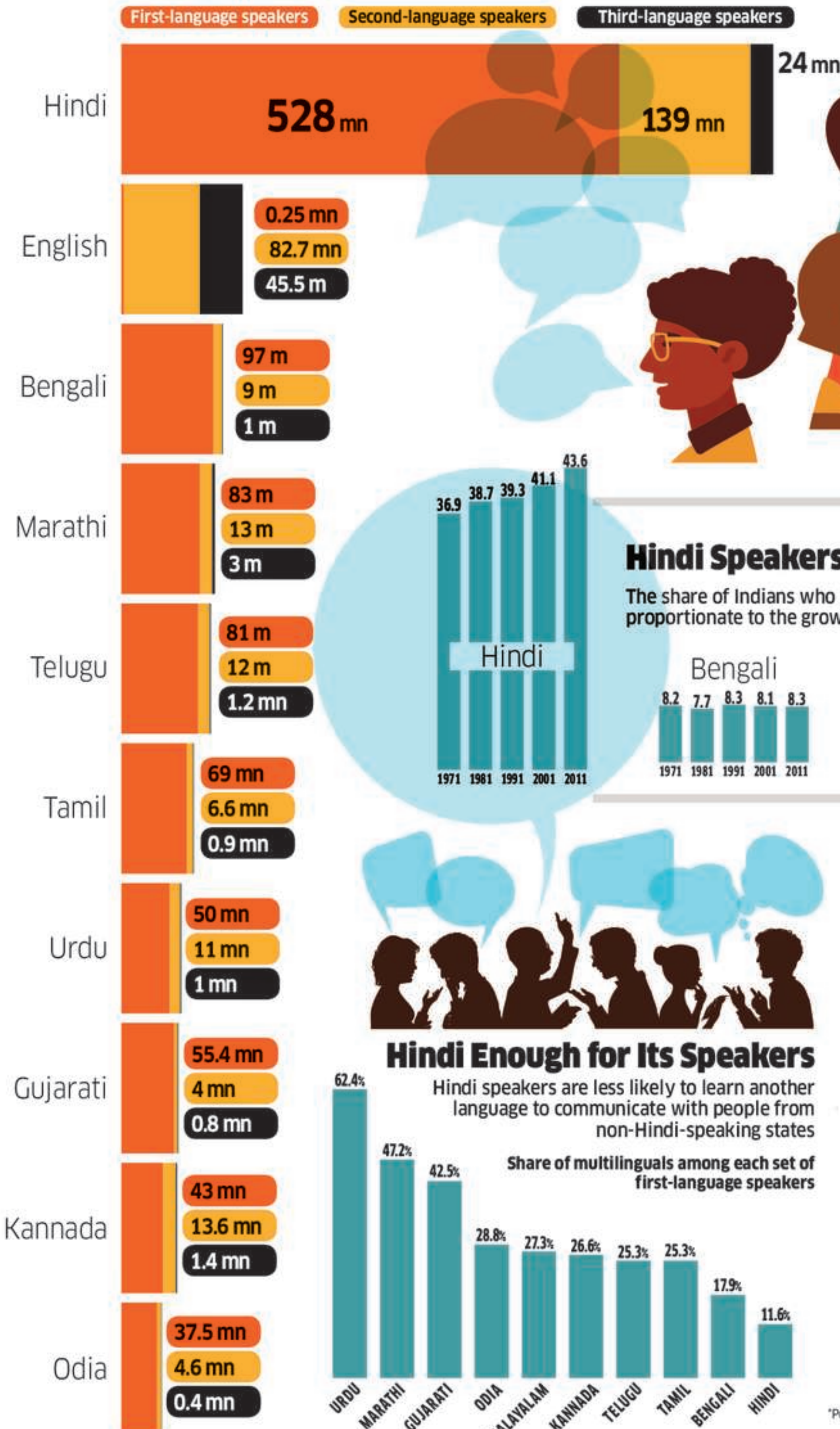
Hindi Raj & Other Patterns

The draft National Education Policy 2019, before it was revised, had set off a wave of protests in south India over the perceived imposition of Hindi as third language in schools. But what do the numbers actually say about India's linguistic diversity?

:: Rukmini S

Top 10 Spoken Languages

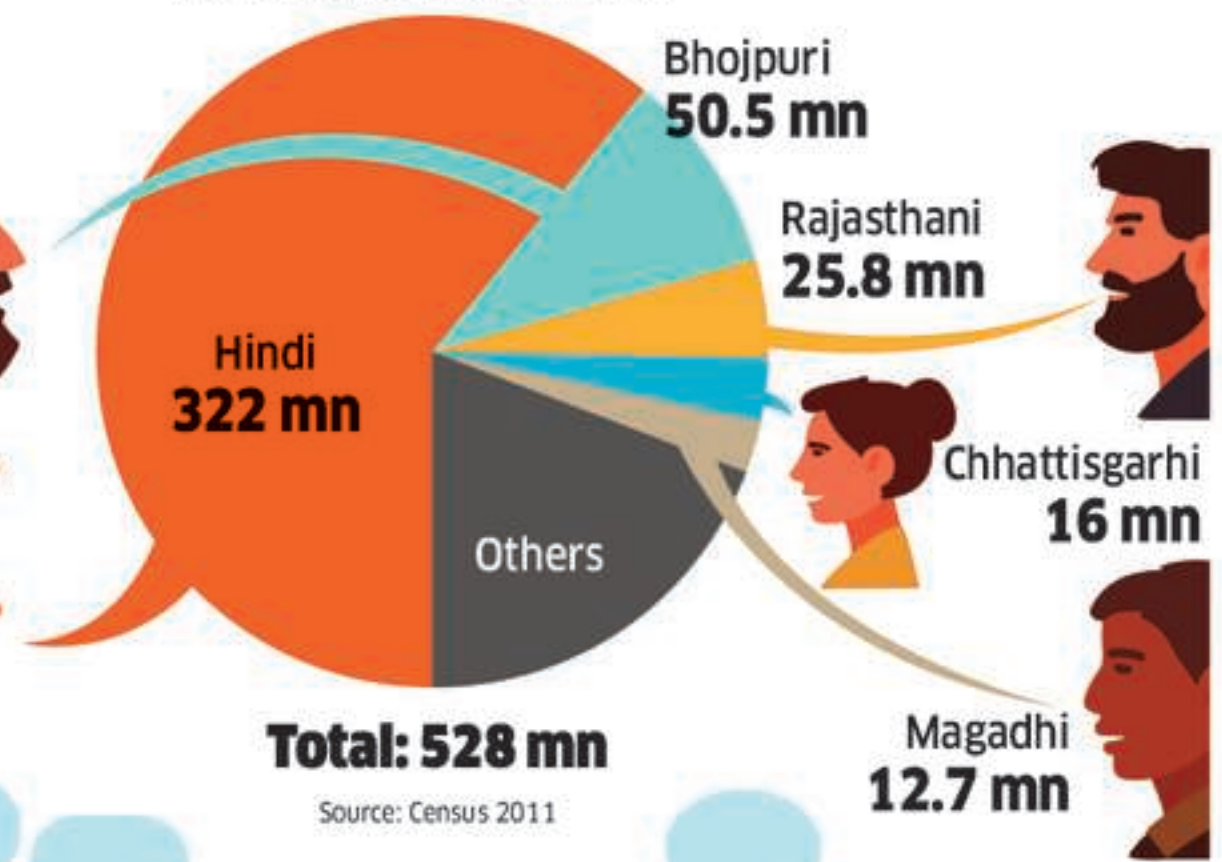
Hindi is India's most widely spoken language, with nearly 700 million speakers



Under the Hindi Umbrella

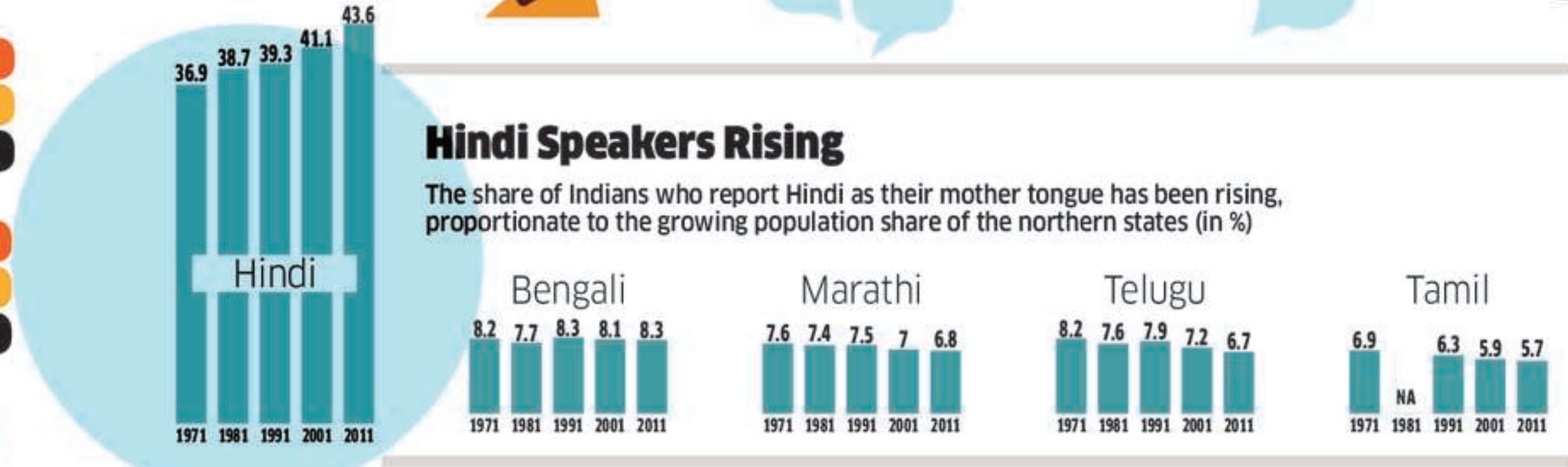
"Hindi" is an umbrella term for over 55 languages counted as dialects, many with their own literature and art, and some with over 10 million speakers

Top 5 languages under "Hindi"



Hindi Speakers Rising

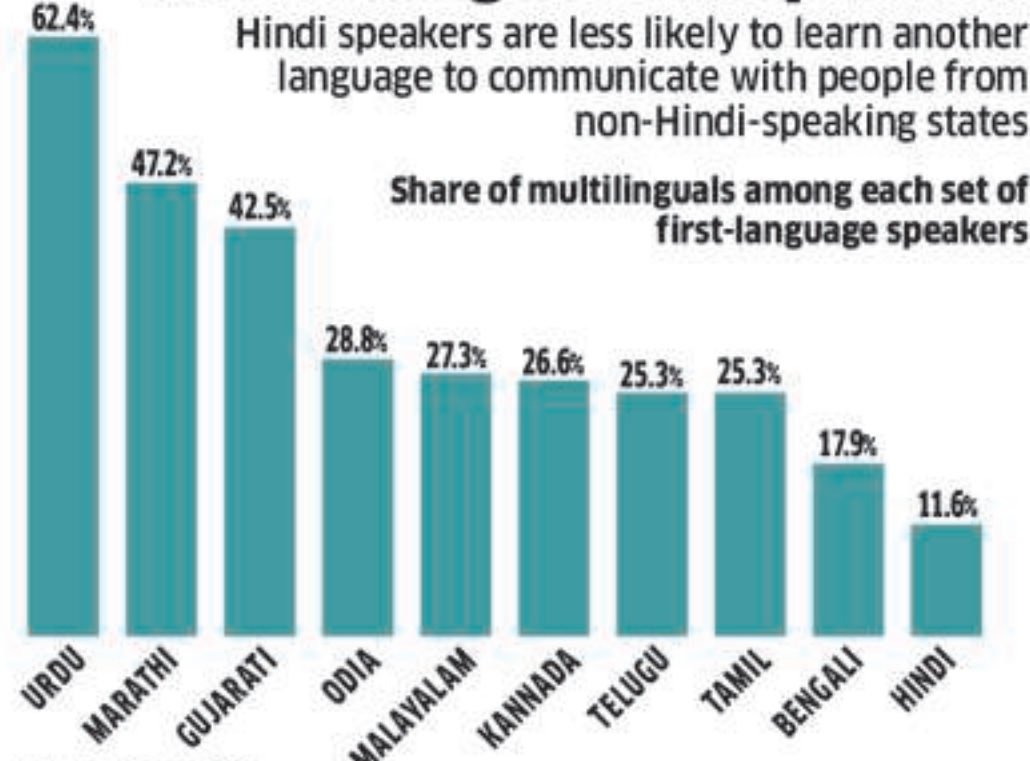
The share of Indians who report Hindi as their mother tongue has been rising, proportionate to the growing population share of the northern states (in %)



Hindi Enough for Its Speakers

Hindi speakers are less likely to learn another language to communicate with people from non-Hindi-speaking states

Share of multilinguals among each set of first-language speakers



A Non-Hindi Tamil Nadu

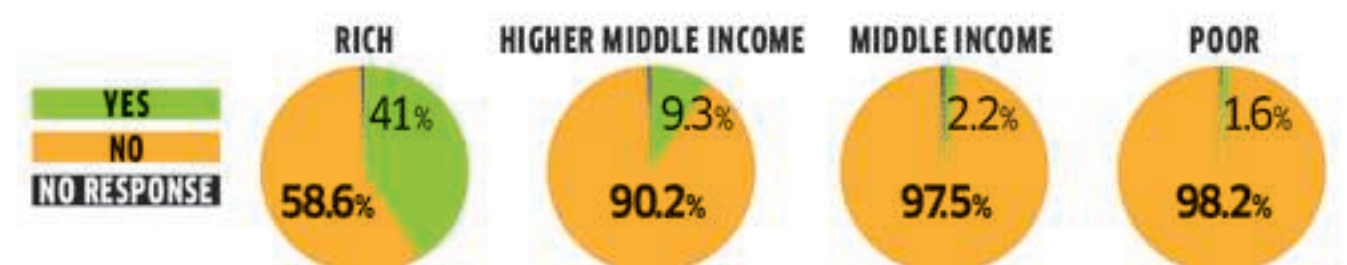
Hindi enthusiasts, who think the language has become a bridge across the South, are wrong. Take Tamil Nadu, the epicentre of anti-Hindi protests. Hindi is a marginal force in this state



English Still a Privilege

There is no denying, however, that English has not yet become the bridge language of the working class. It is still very much an elite privilege

Responses to the question: Do you speak English?



*Poor = bottom 20%, middle income = 20th to 80th percentile, higher middle income = 80th to 99th percentile, rich = top 1%
 Source: Lok Foundation/ Oxford University/ CMIE survey
 The writer is a Chennai-based journalist

Memories of a Meltdown



Chernobyl has become the highest rated television series on IMDb. The horrifying story of the 1986 nuclear plant accident in the erstwhile USSR has been told before as well – in films, documentaries and books. Take a look

Bell of Chernobyl → 1987

Coming soon after the disaster, this Russian documentary presents different accounts of the disaster and its fallout on local communities in Pripyet where the plant was located.

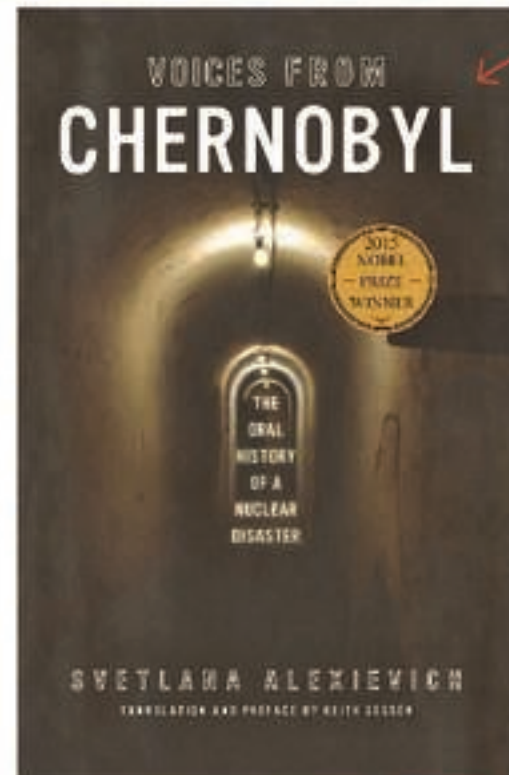


Land of Oblivion 2011

The Ukrainian film is about a couple who get married hours after the reactor explodes. It explores what happens to them over the next 10 years.

Motylki (Inseparable) 2013

The Russian mini-series is a love story between a young man and a woman against the backdrop of the nuclear plant disaster.



Voices from Chernobyl by Svetlana Alexievich 1997

This book records the accounts of hundreds of people who witnessed and lived through the world's biggest nuclear disaster.

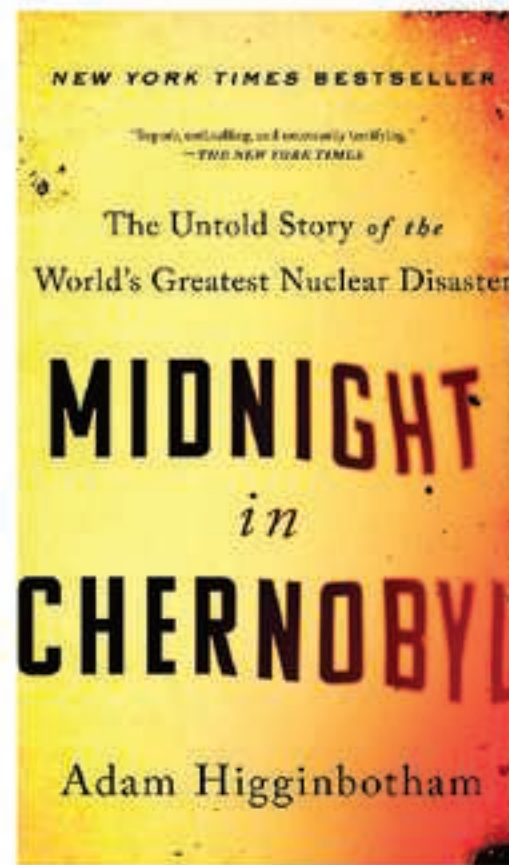
Chernobyl: Zone of Exclusion 2014

This alternative-history TV series is about five friends who end up in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone to catch a thief. The show was partly shot in Pripyat.



Innocent Saturday 2011

In this Russian film tells the story of the disaster from the point of view of Communist party official who tries to flee Pripyat with his friends without telling others about the dangers of the blast.



Midnight in Chernobyl by Adam Higginbotham 2019

This book investigates propaganda, secrecy and myth that were used to hide the true story of what happened at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986.

THIS WEEK, THAT YEAR

June 09-14



June 9, 1997
The 99-year lease signed in 1898 between the **UK and China's Qing Dynasty** on the new

territories of Hong Kong expires, and on July 1, the colony of Hong Kong reverts to Chinese sovereignty.

June 10, 1935
Stockbroker Bill Wilson and surgeon **Robert Smith** start Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship in Ohio, US, putting together a 12-Step recovery programme to help members stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.



June 11, 2009
Swine flu or **H1N1 influenza strain virus**, passed onto humans from infected pigs, is declared a global pandemic by World Health Organization

June 12, 2018

After a year of exchanging threats, North Korean leader **Kim Jong-un** and US President **Donald Trump** hold a summit meeting in Singapore.



June 13, 1971
The New York Times starts publishing the

Pentagon Papers, the US government's top secret documents on **Vietnam War** copied by whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg. The daily is soon stopped from publishing the stories by a court order.

June 14, 1951

The first commercial electronic computer – **UNIVAC I** – is delivered to US Census Bureau. Next year, the computer, designed by J Presper Eckert & John Mauchly, predicts the outcome of the presidential election.



SOURCE: IMDB, ROTTENTOMATOES.COM, SCREENDAILY.COM, AMAZON.IN

SOURCE: ONTHISDAY.COM

WEEKLY VECTOR

Glued to the Television

Average daily TV viewing time across the world in 2018



WORLD
2.55
hours



NORTH AMERICA
4.02
hours



EUROPE
3.45
hours



SOUTH AMERICA
3.4
hours



ASIA
2.28
hours

Source: Eurodata TV Worldwide 'One TV Year in the World' report

Let's Talk About...



Prince, the pop icon?

Yes, him.

But he has been dead for a while now.

Passed away in April 2016. Now a new album has just been released.

But how? Unknown songs?

Not unknown. It's a collection of Prince's own rendering of songs that he wrote for other singers. It's called *Originals*.

He wrote for others too?

He wrote for a lot of singers, it seems. He even did one for Sinead O'Connor and one for the 1980s girl band The Bangles.

Generous, what do you say?

Absolutely! And he used multiple pseudonyms.

Well he had to, right?

There might have been contractual issues.

Prince

PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS BEYOND HEADLINES



So what were his pseudonyms?

He wrote *Manic Monday* for The Bangles as Christopher. He also wrote the song *You're my love* for Kenny Rogers, and he used the name Joey Coco for this one. He used these names for other songs too.

Why were all these never released?

Apparently, all this and more were locked up in a vault that had to be drilled open after Prince passed away. No one knew the combination for opening it.

So it is available for everyone?

It was released for streaming on Friday, June 7. That would have been

Prince's 61st birthday.

Aha, and what about the album itself?

Most likely, it will be going on sale from June 21.

Okay, make sure you pick one up for me.

Err, why can't you get one yourself?

Now, now, it's far easier than writing a song for me. Would you rather do that?

I will stick to buying the album.

Text: Suman Layak

GET | LISTEN | DO | BROWSE | WATCH

Boat Aavante

Soundbar with Subwoofer **Get it for: ₹8,999**

Budget headphone and speaker brand Boat is turning its attention to the home audio segment with a new soundbar called Aavante. Aavante comes bundled with a wired subwoofer to give you 2.1 channel output.

Unlike most soundbars, Aavante has a unique angled front, which makes it stand out. The sleek design goes well with most surroundings. The overall length of the bar is about the same as a 40-42-inch TV, so make sure you have enough space for it. The entirety of the front is covered with a stylish speaker grille with a small digital display in the middle (connectivity status and volume level only). Control buttons are on the right while connectivity is on the back. We liked that they have included multiple connectivity options: optical, aux, HDMI, Bluetooth and a USB port for direct media playback too. You can connect it to multiple devices (TV, smartphone, USB drive)

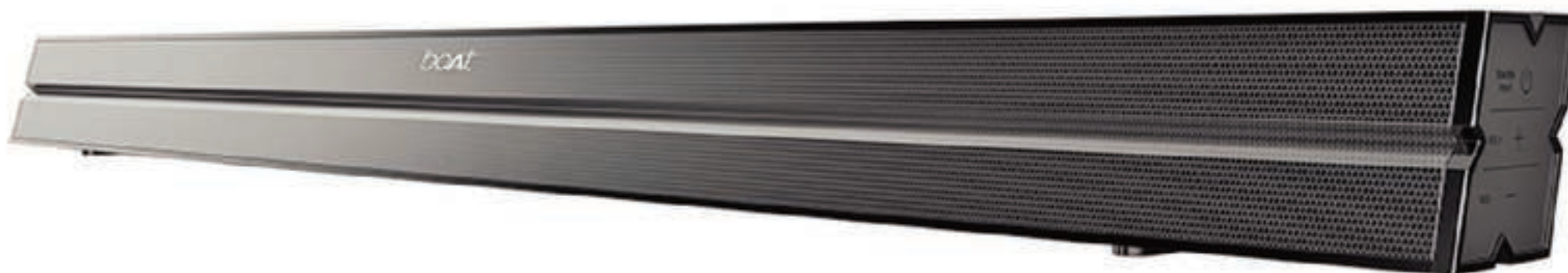


simultaneously and switch between them using the remote. We did not, however, like the remote control. It does not match the premium looks and feel of Aavante.

We used the soundbar with optical audio and Bluetooth. Boat says Aavante delivers 120 W RMS output and it did impress us with loud output. For both video and audio, the soundbar delivers excellent clarity while the subwoofer adds a good amount of bass. Since it is a down-firing subwoofer, we found the bass levels adequate at the default setting for most purposes. For bass-heavy dance music, you can set the bass to level 3 or select a different pre-set from the remote. A 3-D audio mode gives you a faux surround effect, which works reasonably well. It does have a quirk though. Each time you switch it on, it starts playing at volume level 15, which is too loud. It should either remember the previous

ly set volume or have an option to set the default volume to a lower level. Overall, the audio quality is top notch at this price.

— Karan Bajaj



The Pads Game

Get it for: Free, for iOS



Inspired by a 1950s board game, the Pads Game requires you to match colours and shapes before you run out of space on the board. There are some elements of Tetris, a retro feel and music inspired by the jazz of Glenn Miller. (Search for *Ciro Manna* – the developer's name – if you cannot find it on the App Store in the first go).

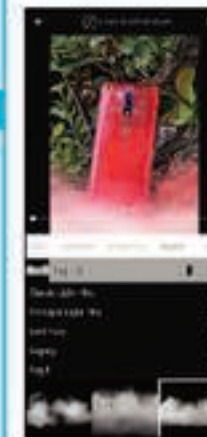
You are presented with a bunch of square pads, each with a different shape and colour. Your job is to rotate the pads and find out how they fit together. Once you find two pads that can merge (like a jigsaw), you drag and drop to merge colours. Tap a full pad to remove it from the board – that is how you score points. Every once in a while, a special Pad comes along that helps you wipe out multiple pads on the board. You will also see full-screen video ads from time to time but you can usually dismiss them in a few seconds. Try it out for a fun way to exercise the brain cells.

—Hitesh Raj Bhagat

PLAY

Lens Distortions

Get it for: Free, for Android & iOS



The best effects are the ones no one knows you added." That is how Lens Distortions pitches this new app. It is not a photo-editing suite – it only exists to add things like lens flares,

distortion and light effects to existing photos. To be fair, you need to start with a good photo in the first place. Then you can import it into the app and add various effects. Play around a little and you can end up with some beautiful results. All the filters we tried look realistic and they are really easy to apply and manipulate in layers. They give you five filters free in 10 different styles (so a total of 50 filters). Even in the free version, there is no watermark or restriction on how to save your photo. To access the full suite of effects, it will cost you ₹240 per month.

—Hitesh Raj Bhagat

DOWNLOAD

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