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magazine

State of the Startup Nation

An exclusive Excubator
survey of Indian startup
founders for *ET Magazine*
reveals important
new trends

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New Tax Refund Scheme, Easy Credit to Boost Exports

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday announced a slew of measures to boost the economy, including a new scheme to refund taxes and duties on exports, easier export credit and additional funding for exporters under the revised priority sector lending norms.

The proposed Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP) scheme will come into force from January 1, 2020. It will incentivise exporters at an estimated cost of ₹50,000 crore and replace the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), which was challenged by the US last year for violating global trade rules. Sitharaman said RoDTEP will "more than adequately incentivise exporters than all the existing schemes put together".

Director General of Foreign Trade Alok Chaturvedi said the scheme would be taken to the cabinet soon and the rates would be worked out sector by sector.

The minister also said there would be a fully automated electronic refund route for input tax credits in GST for quick refunds. This would be implemented by the month-end.

She also announced revised priority sector lending (PSL) norms for exporters which would release an additional funding of ₹36,000-68,000 crore to them. Export finance will be actively monitored by an inter-ministerial working group in the commerce department.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

PRIORITY PUSH

- ₹50,000 cr RoDTEP from Jan 1
- Electronic module to expedite tax refunds
- ₹1,700 cr dole to increase insurance cover by banks lending working capital
- Additional ₹36,000-68,000 cr in priority sector lending
- FTA Utilisation Mission to identify tariff concessions
- Annual mega shopping fests for handicraft, yoga, tourism, textiles and leather
- On-board handicrafts artisans directly on ecomm portals

This is the latest set of measures after the government announced mergers of public sector banks, opened up foreign direct investment in contract manufacturing and eased norms for overseas investors in single brand retail and coal mining. Sitharaman had in August announced the rollback of enhanced surcharge on foreign portfolio investors and the lifting of angel tax on startups, among others.

India's economic growth had plunged to a 25-quarter low of 5% in April-June. India's exports growth contracted in August as global trade tensions and sluggish demand brought shipments down by 6.05%.

Terming the new measures as "decisive", Director General of CII Chandrajit Banerjee said: "Urgent measures were needed to support exports, which have been declining in the current year. The new scheme to compensate exporters for all duties is going to help considerably."

The Export Credit Guarantee Corporation will expand the scope of export credit insurance scheme at a cost of ₹1,700 crore annually to enable reduction in overall cost of export credit, especially to MSMEs.

Sitharaman also announced that a Free Trade Agreement Utilisation Mission would be set up to help exporters optimally use the concessional tariffs under trade pacts that India has signed with several countries. Besides, annual mega shopping festivals along the line of the Dubai Shopping Festival will be organised at four places in the country. The focus will be on handicraft, yoga, tourism, textiles and leather.

—Our Bureau/New Delhi

Special Window to Aid Middle and Affordable Housing

The government has announced steps to boost the housing sector, including a ₹20,000 crore fund, which will provide last-mile funding for projects that are not in bankruptcy court or have been tagged as bad debt. It also eased overseas debt norms.

"The government will contribute ₹10,000 crore and roughly the same amount will be provided by outside investors," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Saturday, unveiling the measures. "This window will help in completion of affordable and middle-income housing projects that are stuck due to lack of last-mile funds."

This special window will benefit about 3-3.5 lakh dwelling units across the country.

LENDING A HAND

Govt to set up a special window for last-mile housing finance

₹20,000 cr fund to be set up soon

Fund for non-NCLT & non-NPA projects

Overseas debt norms for housing to be eased

ly in the national capital region.

This fund, she said, will be set up as a category-II alternate investment fund. National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, Life Insurance Corporation, and sovereign wealth funds could invest in the proposed fund. The fund would be managed by professionals, she added.

Housing finance companies will be allowed to borrow funds abroad at relaxed rules, while interest rate on housing building advance will be lowered. "External commercial borrowing guidelines will be relaxed to facilitate financing of homebuyers...", she said. Lower interest rate on building advance will benefit lakhs of government servants who make up for a major component of demand for houses.

Sitharaman said she would be meeting heads of public sector banks on September 19 to review transmission of interest rate cut to borrowers and credit offtake. Asked about the fall in the nominal GDP rate to 8%, below the budget estimate of 11%, and whether the government would be reworking fiscal maths, she said the government was conscious of this and would "reconcile" when it made an assessment. But, she added, it was a one-quarter blip.

—Our Bureau/New Delhi

FM Clueless in Dealing with Slowdown: Congress

New Delhi: The Congress Saturday alleged that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was "clueless" in dealing with the economic slowdown and termed the latest steps announced by her to boost the economy as "cosmetic" and "piecemeal".

The Congress' attack came after Sitharaman announced an over ₹70,000 crore package for exports and real estate sectors. "I can only say that the finance minister is clueless as to how to deal with the gravity of the crisis," Congress spokesperson Anand Sharma said.

—PTI/New Delhi

Big Relief but Need More Measures, Says Real Estate Sector

The real estate industry has cheered the measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to provide relief to the housing sector, which will also help home buyers who have not been able to take delivery because of stalled projects.

The latest measures are expected to boost much-needed liquidity, sentiment and demand creation. However, industry experts are of the view that more measures are needed for a major revival.

The government has announced a special window to provide last-mile financing, through a ₹20,000 crore fund, for affordable and middle-income housing projects that are not non-performing assets (NPA), not under the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and are net worth positive. This special window will be managed and operated by professionals in the private sector.

According to the government's own estimate, around 3.5 lakh housing units will benefit from this measure. The government has stated that the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund and Life Insurance Corporation will invest in this new housing fund. Some private sector participation is also expected.

Niranjan Hiranandani, president, National Real Estate Development Council, said: "The fund, similar to a 'stress fund', to help bail out incomplete projects will ensure that many affordable and middle-income projects that are stuck because of last-

mile funding requirements are completed—subject to not being under NCLT or NPA."

However, he also expressed concern with the problem of stalled projects—for example, in the National Capital Region—under NCLT and NPA that is unlikely to be solved.

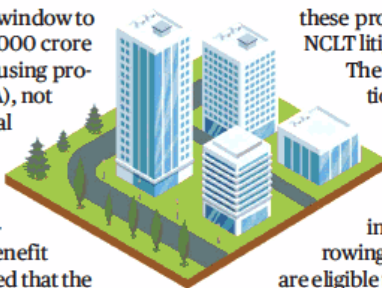
This special window of last-mile financing will offer several developers an opportunity to complete their stalled projects, which were in dire need of capital, and thus provide relief to lakhs of home buyers across the country. This will also save these projects from falling under NPA or going into NCLT litigation.

The government has supported demand creation in a significant manner by lowering interest rate on house building advances offered to government employees.

The finance minister has also announced relaxation in guidelines of raising funds through external commercial borrowings to facilitate financing for home buyers who are eligible under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

Alok Saraf, associate partner at Grant Thornton Advisory, said: "ECB relaxation will definitely enable developers to attract foreign debt investors with low cost of capital, although we will have to wait and watch for the eligibility criteria. The government also has to come out with more concrete steps on demand creation as the inventory holding has increased significantly across all key micro markets."

—Kailash Babar/Mumbai



Shah for Common Language, says Hindi Can Unite Country

Union Home Minister Amit Shah Saturday pitched for a common language for the country and said as Hindi was spoken the most, it can unite the whole country.

The home minister also asked everyone to use their native languages as much as possible, but said efforts would be made to expand Hindi's reach to various parts of the country. "India has many languages and every language has its importance. But it is absolutely necessary that the entire country should have one language that becomes India's identity globally," he said in a series of tweets in Hindi.

Shah said today, if any language can unite the country, it is Hindi as that is spoken the most. "I want to appeal to people to promote their native languages but also use Hindi to make the dream of Bapu (Mahatma Gandhi) and Sardar (Vallabhbhai) Patel of one language come true," he tweeted.

Later, speaking at a Hindi Divas function, Shah said while diversity in languages was the strength of India, a national language was needed so that foreign languages and cultures do not overpower the country's own.

Shah, however, asserted that the growth of Hindi would never be at the cost of any other language and made it clear that Hindi was the language of co-existence.

"Next year we will hold the Hindi Divas functions in different parts of the country. I appeal to every parents to speak to their children in their own language and also with the co-workers," he said.

He said when the country would face the next general election in 2024, Hindi would have achieved a monumental status. "When I first took charge of the Home Ministry, in the first 10



Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP Working President JP Nadda at the party's nationwide Seva Saptah at AIIMS in New Delhi on Saturday —ANI

days, not a single file has come to me with Hindi noting. Now, 60% files which come to me have Hindi notings."

DMK chief MK Stalin demanded Shah take back the statement and said such a remark "poses a danger to the national unity."

The Congress said the threat to the country was not with languages but with BJP's ideology. "Linguistic diversity has been India's biggest strength. Hindi, due to its openness and diversity, has adopted words from several languages and has enriched itself. India is already united. Your ideology poses a threat to it, not the languages," the Congress tweeted from its official Twitter handle.

—PTI/New Delhi

Names of all NRC Applicants Published Online

Guwahati: A complete National Register of Citizens (NRC) list comprising names of all the included and excluded 3.30 crore applicants according to the draft NRC and supplementary list of inclusions and exclusions (final NRC) were published online Saturday. The list will be available only online and has been published in English and Assamese. The exclusion certificates required for filing appeals in the Foreigners' Tribunals are, however, yet to be issued, sources in the office of the NRC state coordinator said here. The final National Register of Citizens (NRC), which was published on August 31 consisted only of supplementary lists. The time period for issuing exclusion certificates would be announced soon, he said. —PTI

Osama bin Laden's Son Killed in Anti-Terror Ops: US

Washington: Hamza bin Laden, a son of slain al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and himself a notable figure in the militant group, was killed in a US counter-terrorism operation, the White House said Saturday. A White House statement said the operation took place in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. "The loss of Hamza bin Laden not only deprives al-Qa'ida of important leadership skills and the symbolic connection to his father, but undermines important operational activities of the group," the statement said. A US official told Reuters Hamza had been killed months ago near the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The State Department designated Hamza a global terrorist in 2017. —Reuters

GST Panel against Rate Cut for Automobiles, says Kerala FM

New Delhi: The fitment committee of the GST Council has advised against reducing tax on automobiles, Kerala Finance Minister Thomas Isaac has said.

Isaac, a member of the GST Council, told journalists here he had reliable information the committee was not in favour of cutting rates. The fitment committee's report would come up for discussion at the GST Council meeting scheduled to be held in Goa on September 20. It is learnt that the government is in favour of a ratecut to boost the economy but is unwilling to shoulder the revenue shortfall by itself.

The minister said Kerala was against reducing GST rates as states could not afford to lose revenue when the economy was anyway slowing down. The states would

be financially squeezed as they have limited borrowing capacity. Instead, he said, the Centre could remove the cess component but pay the states by borrowing from the market. It could reintroduce the cess a couple of years later to repay the loan, the Kerala FM added.

The cess on the auto sector is 1-22% on the 28% slab. It is used to compensate states for the revenue shortfall for five years since the GST rollout. The GST Council was reportedly considering reworking the tax structure by merging the 12% and 18% slabs and raising the lowest rate to 8% from 5%. The fitment committee at a meeting last week discussed revenue implications of a change in rate structure.

—Our Bureau



Kerala Finance Minister Thomas Isaac

Centre Should Take CMs' Views on Changing Finance Panel's Terms of Reference: Manmohan

New Delhi: Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Saturday the Centre should have taken suggestions from chief ministers before amending the terms of reference for the 15th Finance Commission. He further stated that unilateralism was not good for the cooperative federalism and federal policy.

In July, the government had changed the terms of reference for the commission and mandated the panel to give suggestions for

allocation of non-lapsable funds for defence and internal security.

"The best course would have been for the central government that if it wants to tailor the terms of reference, it should be backed by a chief ministers' conference under the auspices of NITI Aayog. Otherwise, there would be a strong feeling that the government is trying to rob the states of due resource allotment," he said.

—ANI/New Delhi

ELITE GROOMS

Pune based Businessman, 31, 5ft 10", Brahmin/Deshastha. BBA. Parents are Entrepreneurs. Family is financially well off. Looking for an amiable and well educated match from any community in India. Contact: 7092101233

Mumbai based Orthopedic Surgeon, 32, 5ft 11", Khatri. MS in Orthopedics. Father is an Orthopedic Surgeon and Mother is an Entrepreneur. Family is financially well off. Looking for a suitable well educated match from any community in India. Contact: 7092101233

Mumbai based Doctor, 32, 5ft 3", Agarwal. MS in General Surgery. Father is retired. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for an amiable and well educated match. Contact: 9311451516

USA based Software Engineer, 31, 5ft 9", Kayastha. Father is a working Professional. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for an amiable and well educated match from the same community in USA. Contact: 9324433072

London based Management Professional, 31, 6ft 1", Arora. Masters in Engineering/Economics and Management in UK. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for an amiable and well educated match. Contact: 9310065725

ELITE BRIDES

Mumbai based Senior Vice President, 36, 5ft 4", Brahmin. Graduate from a premier Institute. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from any community in India. Contact: 7092101233

Gurgaon based Entrepreneur, Khatri, 29, 5ft 3", Masters in Marketing and Strategy from a premier Institute in UK. Father is a working Professional. Family is financially well off with a net worth in Crores. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match from any community in India/Abroad. Contact: 9310065725

Delhi based Graduate, 30, 5ft 3", Kayastha, MBA in International Trade from a reputed Institute. Father is a Managing Director. Family is financially well off. Looking for a compatible and well educated match. Contact: 7448745111

Kolkata based Architect, 31, 5ft 2", Agarwal. Masters in Architecture from a premier Institute in UK. Father is a Businessman. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match in India. Contact: 9884838219

Bangalore based Management Professional, 28, 5ft 4", Jain-Shwetambar. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for a suitable well educated match from the same community in India/Abroad. Contact: 9374875367



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Corridors of Anxiety

The recent resignations of four IAS officers have turned the spotlight on the reasons causing disgruntlement among bureaucrats in the elite service

:: Shantanu Nandan Sharma

The years around 2000 saw India reaping higher rewards of the economic liberalisation it had set off a decade ago. An expanding India Inc required capable managers. This led to a flurry of resignations of officers of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS). Most were middle-level bureaucrats aspiring to fast-track their careers and earn more. So they quit the safety of a government job to join corporate India.

The salary structure of government officers have improved a lot since then, leading to a drastic reduction in IAS officials resigning to join companies. But the recent resignations of a few IAS officers, albeit for various reasons, have again turned the spotlight on the much preferred branch of the bureaucracy.

Take the example of Subhash Chandra Garg, 58, who sought early retirement after the government in July transferred him

from the post of finance secretary to the relatively low-profile ministry of power. Then came three more resignations of IAS officers in quick successions, all within a month and a half. Kannan Gopinathan, 33 – who was serving as the secretary of power, urban development and town & country planning in the Union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli – resigned from government service over the clampdown in Kashmir. S Sasikanth Senthil, 40 – deputy commissioner of Dakshina Kannada district – resigned alleging “fundamental building blocks of diverse democracy are being compromised”. Then came the resignation of Kashish Mittal, 30 – who was additional principal secretary to NITI Aayog vice-chairman – because he was unhappy at being transferred to Arunachal Pradesh.

The resignations of four of the 5,205 serving IAS officers wouldn't have been news in Delhi's corridors of power but for a growing sense of anxiety among the IAS cadre, considered the elite among the two dozen-odd central services. And the reason for the concern has nothing to do with Kashmir Valley or democracy.

Half a dozen bureaucrats *ET Magazine* spoke to said they were unhappy that the role of IAS officers was diminishing at the Centre. There is no guarantee now of an IAS officer becoming a Union joint secretary even after she gets empanelled, they say. Empanelment is a process of short-listing civil servants so that they can be made joint secretary, additional secretary or secretary. Earlier, IAS officers had a



What Troubles IAS Officers

Non-IAS officers have begun to corner a sizeable chunk of posts in senior bureaucracy

Several states are reluctant to send their officers to Centre on deputation

Authorised Strength of IAS Officers
6,699

IAS Officers in Service
5,205
As on Jan 2019
Source: DOPT

Officers Who Quit in 2 Months



Kannan Gopinathan, 33
Reason for resignation:
Clampdown in Kashmir



S Sasikanth Senthil, 40
Reason for resignation:
“Democracy being compromised”



Kashish Mittal, 30
Reason for resignation:
Unhappy at being posted to Arunachal



Subhash Chandra Garg, 58
Reason for resignation:
Removal as finance secretary

greater chance of being selected for these posts. But now, the Centre is looking for officials from other services as well.

The first shift away from reliance on IAS officers was noticed in mid-2016 when the Modi government appointed a large number of non-IAS officers

– income tax, railways, forest officers, etc – as joint secretaries in one go. Other services have had a long-standing grudge that the government always gave preferential treatment to the IAS cadre. Then came a blow from states such as West Bengal and Chhattisgarh, which blocked IAS officials from their cadre from joining the central government services on deputation. “You can imagine the frustration of an IAS officer if she is to retire without even

getting one posting outside the state. What is the point of then calling the IAS an all-India service?” asks one officer.

If that wasn't enough, career IAS offi-

cial, particularly the younger and mid-level ones, consider the recent government move allowing lateral entry of nine private sector executives as joint secretaries as an early sign of the IAS getting marginalised. Their concern is what will happen if non-IAS and lateral entrants eventually capture a sizeable number of berths in the higher bureaucratic echelons, such as additional secretaries and secretaries, which are now dominated by IAS officials.

The worry is not entirely unfounded. In the past few years, IAS has lost at least two key traditional posts – as heads of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Vigilance Commission. Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer Sanjay Kumar Mishra was made chief of the ED and Indian Police Service officer Sharad Kumar was made the interim chief vigilance commissioner. The government had also appointed a former IRS official, Sushil Chandra, as Election Commissioner in February. Going by conventions, all three election commissioners are usually IAS officials.

The IAS is still a much favoured career path, says former cabinet secretary KM Chandrasekhar. “Resignations from the IAS to join politics or civil society or the corporate sector have happened in the past too.” He points to the mushrooming of IAS coaching centres in Kerala, where he currently resides, to argue why the IAS has not lost its sheen.

Every year, about a million graduates register for the civil services examination and the top preference of almost everyone is the IAS. After all, the clout of the premier administrative arm in the bureaucracy is widely known.

“The first change you feel after leaving the IAS is that you lack the authority that had come with the post,” says OP Agarwal, who resigned from IAS in 2007 and is now CEO of World Resources Institute India. Agarwal was a joint secretary in the urban development ministry when he quit and later joined the World Bank's headquarters in New York as a specialist in urban transport systems. “No one comes to you anymore once you leave IAS. Instead, you struggle to get into government offices. But there are positives too. You no longer need permission to attend a seminar abroad!” he adds.

The grass is not necessarily greener on the other side. ■

shantanu.sharma@timesgroup.com

“Resignations of IAS officers to join politics, civil society or the corporate sector have happened in the past too. There is still tremendous interest in civil services. Look at the training academies that have sprouted all over Kerala. They are all flourishing”

KM Chandrasekhar,
former cabinet secretary



“The first change you feel after resigning from the IAS is the lack of authority. No one comes to you anymore. You struggle to get into government offices. But there are positives too. You no longer require permissions to attend seminars abroad!”

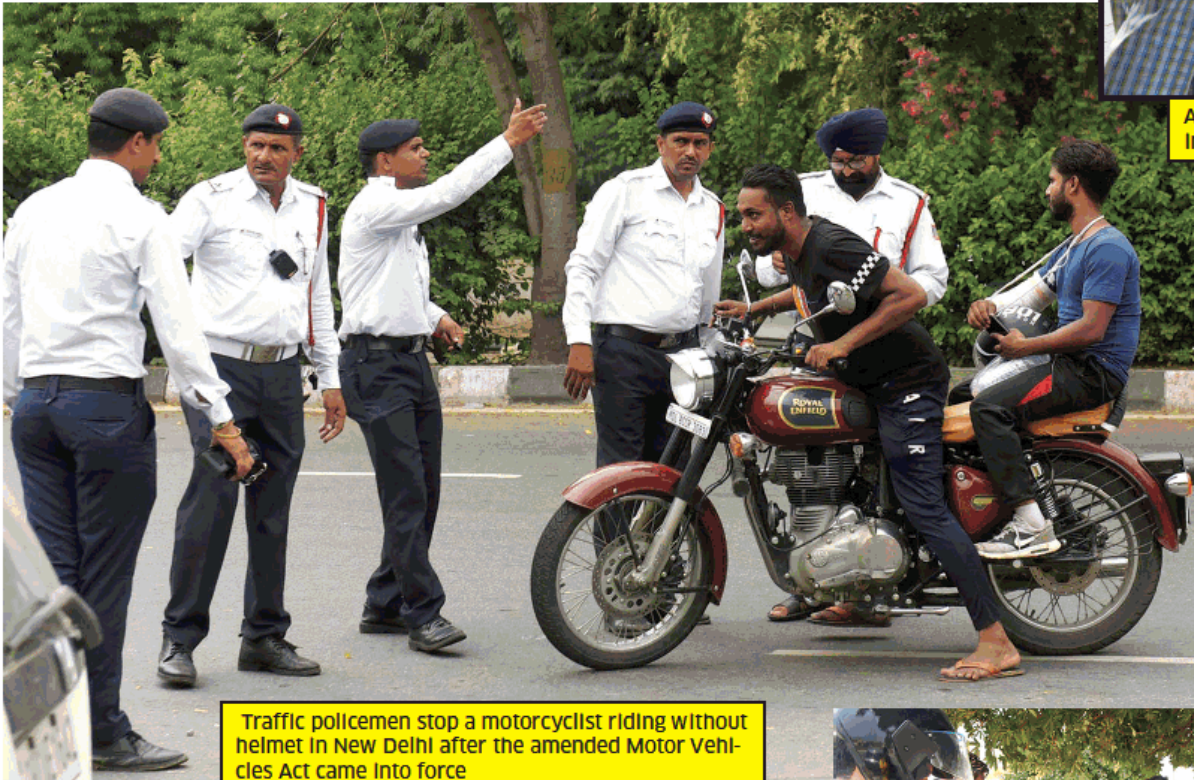
OP Agarwal, CEO of WRI India, who resigned from IAS in 2007

Fines are Fine

States are being irresponsible by opposing the penalties in the amended Motor Vehicles Act



A cop gives challan to a traffic violator in Jaipur



Traffic policemen stop a motorcyclist riding without helmet in New Delhi after the amended Motor Vehicles Act came into force

by Madhav Pal

The story about a Delhi resident surrendering his vehicle when his fine was ₹23,000 is making headlines. But no one is talking about his five, very serious traffic violations – driving without licence, registration certificate, helmet, insurance and a Pollution Under Control certificate. In another country, this person would have been in jail. Meanwhile, in India, it seems to be an acceptable practice to drive without licence, proper paperwork or a seatbelt/helmet. No wonder India is the road fatality capital of the world.

India had close to 150,000 road traffic fatalities in 2017. A quick review of data suggests the trends have continued in 2018 and 2019. India accounted for only 2% of the world's motor vehicles but ac-

counted for over 12% of its traffic-related fatalities. Typically, 150,000 fatalities mean three times as many serious injuries from road traffic incidents. Unfortunately, the majority of people involved in road traffic incidents are young people in productive age groups. 72% of victims are between the ages of 18 and 45 years; and 87% are between 18 to 60 years of age. Estimates suggest the incidents cost the country 3% of its GDP.

Among the vehicle categories involved in road accidents, two-wheelers, which are the most preferred and affordable mode of personal transport, accounted for the highest share in total road incidents (33.9%) and fatalities (29.8%) in 2017. Light vehicles, comprising cars, jeeps and taxis, come second



People buying helmets to avoid fine

with a share of 24.5% in total accidents and 21.1% in total fatalities. Driving with necessary training and wearing seatbelts and helmets can reduce these deaths.

On September 1, the new Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, came into effect for this very reason. The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, was amended to provide for road safety. The amendment introduced several new provisions for compensation of road victims, compulsory insurance, good Samaritans, recall of vehicles, national transport policy, road safety board, taxi aggregators and offences and penalties.

Offences and penalties have been the only amendment in the news for the past two weeks since the law came into effect. There is not much discussion on some of the positives emerging from the amended law. Pedestrians are a key part of our transport systems. In all our cities, more than 30% people walk to work. It's even higher in rural areas. This results in a lot of fatalities and injuries: 14% of total road fatalities are of

pedestrians. In urban areas, more than 50% of fatalities are of pedestrians. The new law talks about providing infrastructure for pedestrians. The amendment protects pedestrians from irresponsible riders and drivers who take their vehicles on the road without adequate training and under the influence.

Also, the new penalty for driving without licence has been increased 10 times to ₹5,000, and for drunk driving to ₹10,000. Still, these fines are much lower than those in some countries in the West and Southeast Asia. In many countries, these offences lead to imprisonment and disqualification from further driving.

States with non-BJP governments like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha and West Bengal want to put the law on hold. BJP-ruled Gujarat is talking about slashing fines by as much as 90% and others like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Haryana are threatening to follow suit. It is extremely unfortunate that state governments are giving into populist pressures.

One of the sentiments that may be driving people's opposition to the law is the inefficient use of public money. There is a lack of trust: people wonder what will happen to the money collected as fines and penalties. One way to overcome this challenge and build trust will be to ring-fence the funds collected from traffic offences. State governments could be transparent about the money collected and how it is used. These funds could be dedicated to improving public transport systems. These could also be used to provide subsidies to state road transport corporations and to PWD for retrofitting highway infrastructure for safety after road traffic inspections, etc.

In conclusion, I would like to ask the state governments to stay the course and not fall for populist sentiments. Road traffic fatality is on the rise. It is impacting the most productive age group of our society. State governments should keep the fines. They should also devise strategies to win public confidence and ensure that the Motor Vehicles Amendment Act gets implemented with a goal to reduce road traffic fatalities by 50% or more. ■

The writer is director, Sustainable Cities, World Resources Institute India



People wait for their turn to get pollution under control certificates after the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act rolled out nationwide

State OF THE Startup Nation

An Excubator survey for *ET Magazine* of Indian startup founders reveals important new trends



:: Malini Goyal

Even in the fast-paced disruptive world of startups, a few things are hard to change. Gender bias, for one.

Sairee Chahal, founder of Sheroes, a community platform for women, is at times at the receiving end of it. Often it comes in the form of “innocent” remarks and “friendly suggestions”. “You started this alone?” she often gets asked, with thinly veiled scepticism.

Just the other day, an executive from the venture capital industry suggested to her: “You should have a male cofounder. It is easier.” Her sense of dismay over the incident comes through in her voice as she spoke, over the phone, to me. “It felt stupid. I am not a spring chicken. This is my second startup. I have been an entrepreneur half my working life. There is so much resistance to solo female founders,” she says.

So why did she start alone? I repeat the loaded question not because she’s a woman but because starting up alone is tough and lonely, for men and women. MakeMyrip founder Deep Kalra recently told me that if there is one thing he would change about his entrepreneurial journey, it would be to have a cofounder. Chahal knows well the hardships of a solo founder. But she says she had little option. “I didn’t know where to find them.” A small-town Punjabi girl from a middle-class family, she had few networks in Delhi from her growing-up days. Nor did she form deep bonds during her corporate stint – a challenge that women often face – to scan for a cofounder. “Startups are tough. It is even tougher for women entrepreneurs who have to battle many tides,” she says.

Chahal confirms what a survey of Indian entrepreneurs by Excubator, a startup incubator and consultancy firm, for *ET Magazine*, reveals. India’s startups remain a man’s world. They might be flush with funds and buzzing with bright ideas and disruptive technologies, but traditional gender biases and challenges remain in play here. The online survey was done in August and received valid responses from 299 entrepreneurs. Women comprised just 14% of total respondents.

It is a good time to pause and understand Indian entrepreneurs. Once on the fringes, starting up has become mainstream. Entrepreneurs are the new heroes of India’s middle class. After two decades of boom-bust cycles, the ecosystem is both deep and rich, with 1,400 new startups created in 2018, (from a high of 3,560 new startups in 2016, it

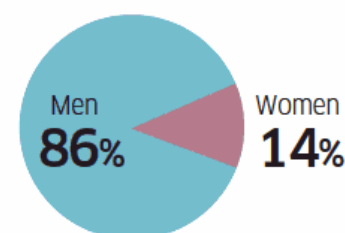


“Number of startups has declined. But founders today come with more experience and have better and more differentiated ideas”

Rajan Anandan
MD, Sequoia Capital India

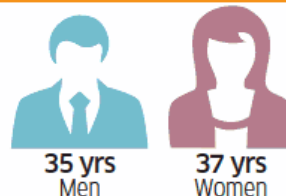
Gender Divide

Men continue to dominate the startup landscape, with women entrepreneurs at just 14% of the respondents



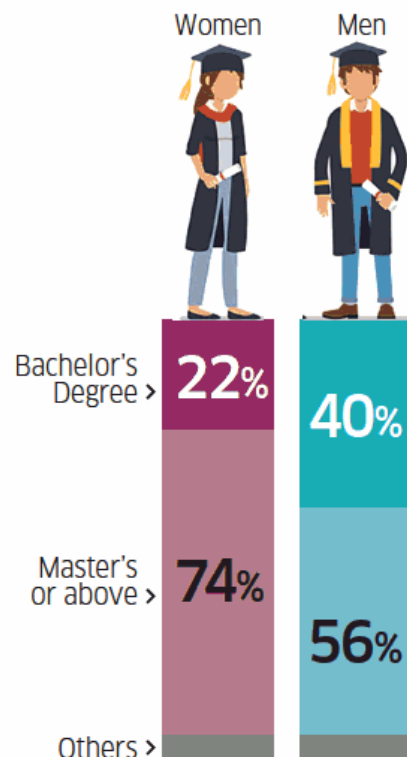
Men tend to start up much earlier, at around 29 years, than women who seem to be more cautious and start up late, at about 36 years

Median Age of Founders



Academic Background

58% of all respondents have a master's degree or above



The notion of entrepreneurs being college dropouts doesn't add up. Also, female founders are better educated than male founders

A survey by Excubator for *ET Magazine* was done online in August, with 299 startup founders from across the country responding to a detailed questionnaire. The results are based on the survey.



“Contrary to popular perception, Indian founders aren’t young, fresh college graduates. Their median age is 35-plus”

Guhesh Ramanathan, founder, Excubator

dipped in 2018, due to the onset of a funding squeeze). The funding landscape too has substantially matured with most global VC firms including those from the East (like China, Japan and Korea) setting up shop in India. In 2018, according to Venture Intelligence, VCs in India invested \$8.5 billion in Indian startups. Also, amid all-round pessimism in the Indian economy, startups and their founders are a beacon of hope. Amid dreary headlines of bankruptcies, credit defaults and incarcerated promoters, new entrepreneurs, their surging ambitions and funding boom offer a much-needed respite.

The survey attempts to understand Indian entrepreneurs, mostly of tech-led startups. Who are they? Where do they come from? What is their gender, demographic and psychographic profile? What drives their pursuits? What are their biggest challenges? “The survey busts a few myths and endorses some visible trends,” says Guhesh Ramanathan, founder, Excubator.

First, the macro view. Bengaluru is unquestionably India’s startup capital, with 37% of founders who responded to the survey coming from there. NCR is at the second spot – 16%. About 71% of respondents are from Tier-1 cities (Bengaluru, Mumbai and NCR). Like FreeCharge’s Kunal Shah and Myntra’s Mukesh Bansal, who have now started new ventures, 34% of survey respondents are serial entrepreneurs.

Contrary to popular perception, “they aren’t young, fresh college graduates,” says Ramanathan. The median age for starting up is high – 35 years for men and 37 for women. They are well educated, too – 39% have a bachelor’s degree and 53% have a master’s degree/diploma. About 4% have a PhD; the same as school graduates.

Their experience is fairly spread out, from 0 to 30-plus years. About 37% are solo founders but the most popular configuration is two cofounders for a company, at 47%. A vast majority has been set up over the last decade, with almost half in the last five years. About 26% of them have managed to raise funding. Raising funding seems to be their biggest challenge (59%), followed by finding and retaining talent (40%), government and regulatory issues (31%) and finding customers (30%).

Entrepreneurs are also maturing in their mindset. What are the yardsticks these entrepreneurs use to benchmark their success? For about 58% it is generating profit, while for 42% it is the number of people they employ and for 20% it is fund-raising.

Signalling Indian startups’ rising global ambitions, a high 66% say their focus is both Indian and global markets; 30% are focused only on India while a small but significant 4% are focused only on global markets.

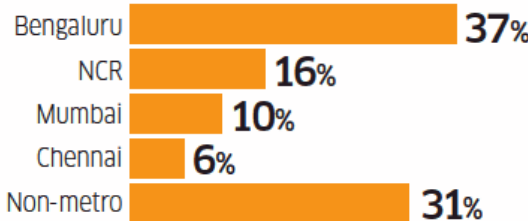
Mature and More Evolved
Seasoned startup watchers echo what the survey reveals. The first thing that Saurabh Srivastava, founder of Indian Angel Network, notices is the maturity of Indian entrepreneurs and their ideas. “In 2010, we would get 200 startups annually and struggle to find even one or two to invest in. Last year, we vetted 10,000 and invested in 25-odd. The quality of ideas has improved substantially,” he says. Arun Natarajan, founder, Venture Intelligence, says he sees more experienced – and hence older – entrepreneurs. “With age and experience, they have a better feel of the problems and hence go after business models that are sounder,” he says.

The biggest thing that serial entrepreneur and investor K Ganesh notices is the surging aspirations and scale of ambitions of today’s entrepreneurs. Sanjay Nath, managing partner, Blume Ventures, too, finds today’s entrepreneurs a lot bolder. “They think global from day one. They are attempting to do things at a much grander scale. Flipkart’s exit and the kind of money people made give confidence to many,” he says. Oyo and its aggressive global expansion plans are now a Harvard case study. They could become bigger than Marriott, he says.

Successful exits have spawned a growing breed of serial entrepreneurs. “They come with a lot of experience. If you are doing anything for the second or third time, it is obvious you are going to be better and faster,” says Rajan Anandan, managing director, Sequoia Capital India. Just look at the way Kunal Shah’s Cred and Udaan, founded by former Flipkart employees, are scaling up. The latter, founded in 2016, is already a unicorn (valued at more than \$1 billion). “While the number of new startups is coming down, the quality of founders is going up. We are getting more nuanced and differentiated ideas,” he says. This also has to do with the maturing of the funding ecosystem – in quality, quantity

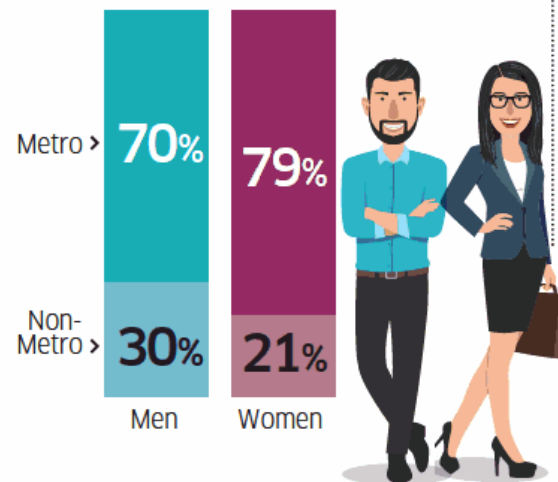
City Spread

71% of founders who responded come from tier-1 cities, with Bengaluru in the lead



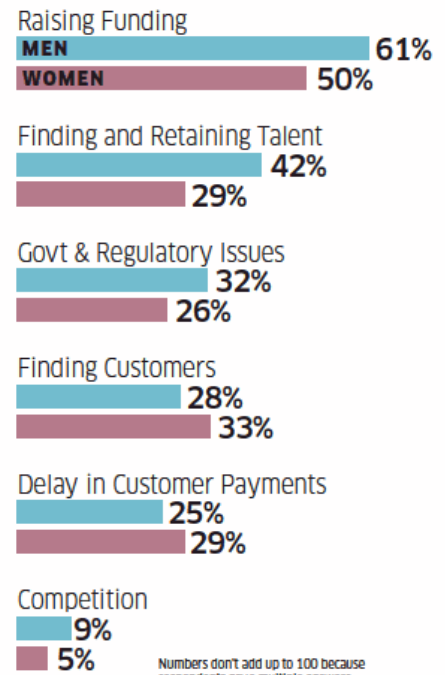
Metro vs Non-metro: Gender Split

Fewer women entrepreneurs come from smaller cities



Biggest Hurdles

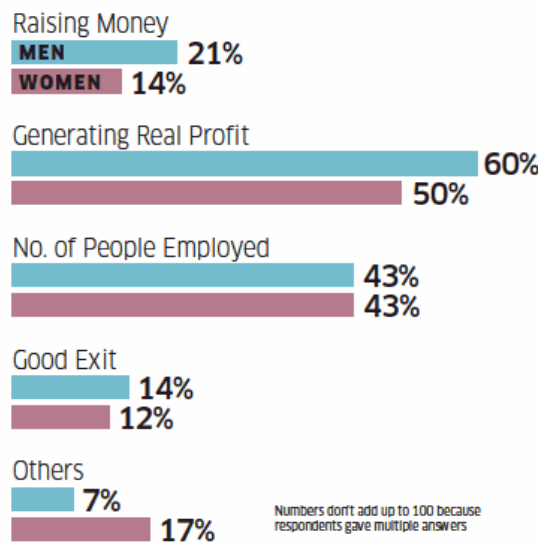
Funding remains the biggest challenge for startups



There is a gender divide in the second biggest hurdle faced by entrepreneurs. While for men it is finding and retaining talent, for women it is finding customers. Also, government and regulatory issues rank much higher than competition

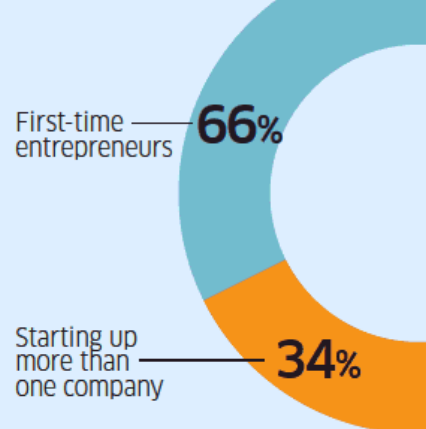
Yardsticks of Success

Funding and valuation froth seems to have settled down a bit. Respondents say generating real profit is the biggest yardstick to judge their success



Serial Entrepreneurs

Startup ecosystem in India is maturing. 34% of respondents are serial entrepreneurs



37% of male respondents are serial entrepreneurs whereas just 14% of women respondents are serial entrepreneurs



“With 300 million ‘Bharat’ consumers emerging as a critical segment, I expect a higher percentage of future founders to come from tier-2 cities”

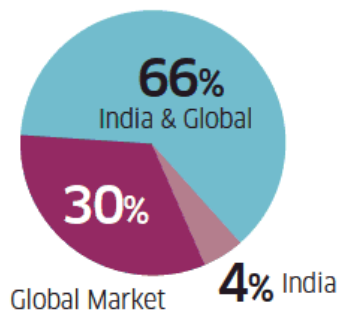
K Ganesh,
serial entrepreneur and
angel investor

Why Startup

Some of the catchphrases founders have used to explain why they started up are: **bored, passion, freedom, building something of my own, create value, wealth, prestige, impact, money, solve problems, opportunities, create jobs**

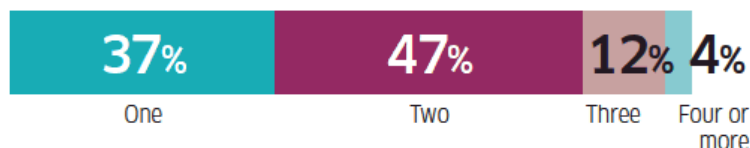
Startup's Focus Market

A majority of Indian founders are thinking global from Day 1 and are targeting both India and global markets



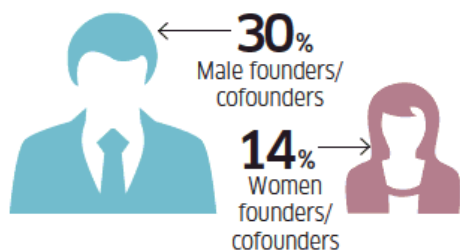
Number of Co-founders

Two cofounders for a company seem to be the most popular configuration



Gender Bias in Funding

Overall, just 26% entrepreneurs have managed to get funding. Women founders face funding bias



While

37%

of startups headed by solo male founders got funded, only 5% of startups by solo female founders could



"Today's founders are bolder, think global from day one and have aggressive international plans"

Sanjay Nath, managing partner, Blume Ventures

and spread.

The biggest manifestation of all this, almost everyone agrees, is that Indian entrepreneurs today are thinking very hard about their ideas and the problems they are solving. They are less likely to chase the flavour of the season and have a more original and evolved approach to building their startups.

"Today's founders have a very different DNA. Many have studied or worked overseas. They have a global view and have a very healthy global network," says Nath. Consequently, in their mind and ambitions, they compete as equals with peers from Silicon Valley as they often think brand and build the latest tech products for global markets. A growing breed of B-to-B and SaaS (software as a service) entrepreneurs like Girish Mathrubootham of Freshworks, Ankur Kothari of Automation Anywhere and Umesh Sachdev of Uniphore are proof.

Diverse Flavours

A few things haven't changed. For example, 70% of entrepreneurs come from the top three cities. But things are likely to get better. "So far, horizontal ecommerce like Flipkart and Amazon were focused on the 50 million English-speaking urban consumers. The next wave of startups (think Meesho and Bul-



"It's getting better but women founders haven't yet gone mainstream. They face a lot of hurdles. Investor world is still dominated by men"

Salree Chahal, founder, Sheroes

bul) will focus on Bharat, the 300 million consumers who may not be English-speaking but are literate and tech-savvy. This will attract a lot of entrepreneurs from smaller towns and cities," says Ganesh.

A boost from a better ecosystem should help, too. Razorpay cofounder Shashank Kumar started in 2014 in Jaipur. Within nine months, they moved to Bengaluru where talent, funding and ecosystem were more vibrant. He sees a change, though. "The Rajasthan government has taken a lot of initiatives to nurture the startup ecosystem there," he says.

With Jio and the growth in digitisation, consumers in tier-2 and tier-3 cities are already becoming tech-savvy. "Over time, you will see these entrepreneurs from small towns starting to leverage technology for business, too," says Ganesh.

Gender bias in the startup world is disappointing. It may have something to do with having few women in the investor world. Not only are there fewer women founders (14%) but they also face significant odds and must prepare better. According to the survey, female founders are older (median age 37 years as against men's 35 years) and better qualified (74% of female founders have a master's degree as against 56% among male founders). To understand gender bias, two other survey data points are important to note. Funding probability of women-led startups halves (at 14%) as against those led by men (30%). It gets worse if the startup is led by a solo founder—just 5% of startups led by solo female founder like Chahal get funded as against 31% of startups run by solo male founder.

"Women's mobility is constrained. With the shifting focus to Bharat, I have a very strong feeling the women's numbers will rise," says Ganesh.

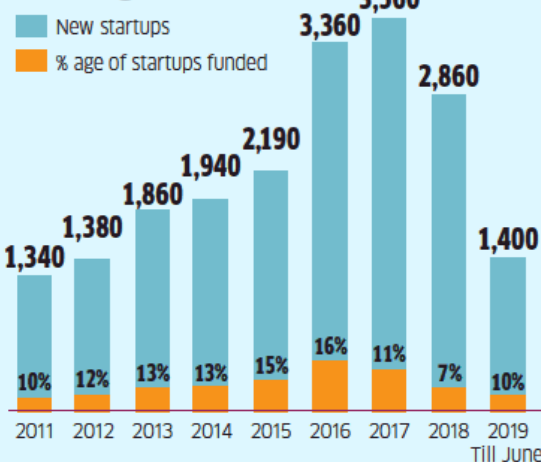
Perhaps the startup world will then manage to disrupt this age-old imbalance in the corporate world. ■

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Startup Landscape

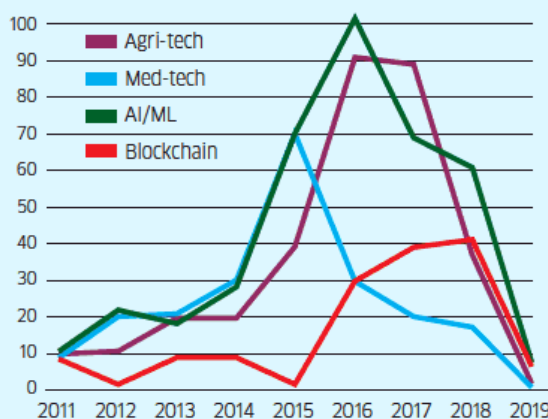
An analysis of 20,000 startups that Excubator tracks in India

Funding Status



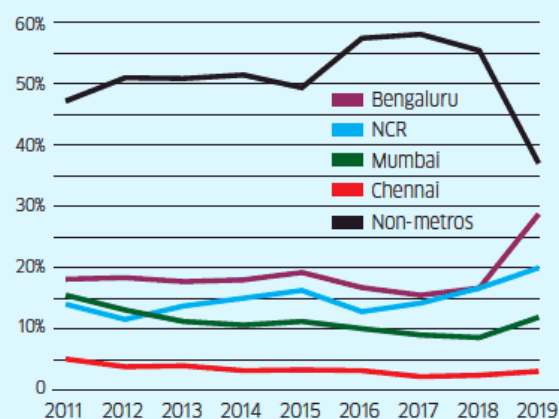
Bouncing back after the big funding drought

Hype Cycles



Med-tech cycle peaked in 2015, AI/ML in 2016, agri-tech in 2017 and blockchain in 2018

Growth in New Startups



Non-metro startups are seeing a sharp dip; those in Bengaluru and NCR growing well

“Important to Check Virality of Malicious Content”

Nicholas Clegg, vice-president of global affairs & communications at Facebook, wants to see the social media giant play an active role in formulating new rules of the internet lest future generations regret decisions taken today – around privacy, data, open internet and more. In an interview with **Shelley Singh**, the former deputy PM of UK discusses challenges facing Facebook, working with regulators, Brexit and other issues. Edited excerpts:

When it comes to Facebook, there is an issue of perception. Whatever you do is looked upon with suspicion. How do you address that?

With time and hard work. Once people develop misgivings about any company or any individual, there are no shortcut answers. You have to take them seriously and work hard to correct any mistakes – rebuild trust bit by bit, day by day. That is exactly what we are doing. We have deployed 30,000 people to moderate content and have developed sophisticated machine learning systems. Over 99% of terror-related material is now removed before anyone reports it to us.

The Cambridge Analytica issue did considerable damage to Facebook's reputation. This requires a multi-year process of reform and change. We have gone through a huge change in every aspect of the company's operations – how we hold data, how we keep people safe, how we protect the platform from malicious interference, how we work with governments to deal with criminality or terrorism.

One of the changes planned was the oversight board to moderate content which Mark Zuckerberg proposed in 2018. What is the status of that?

We will be publishing the charter of the board in a week or two. It will explain the mandate of the board, principles and values. Mark wants the board to be independent. Its decisions will be binding on Facebook and it will pre-eminently value free expression.

Facebook and its family of apps have more than 2.5 billion users globally. No other social media company has that kind of scale. What do you have to say about the noises around breaking up Facebook?

We don't tell the 2.5 billion people what to do with our products. There are different ways of sending messages, videos and photos. There is a lot of choice. Success is not equal to monopoly. Facebook is popular because people like to use our services. Being popular is not bad.

We don't think there is any evidence that our presence is diminishing the market. I think it is quite right when companies are subject to scrutiny when they be-

come very successful, very big. Success is not equal to monopoly. There are a lot of things we couldn't do if you split the company. For instance, going after criminals and bad people by identifying bad behaviour. Instagram and Facebook share infrastructure that keeps people safe. Penalising successful companies will send extraordinary signals to corporate America.

How do you view data nationalism?

The defining features of internet are that it is borderless, fluid, open, ingenious, innovative and mutating all the time. Seeking to treat data like a birthday cake – take your slice and you keep it on your plate – runs directly counter to the genesis of the internet. If India does it today, Pakistan will do it tomorrow, then Russia, Turkey, Vietnam, Singapore. And before you know it, you have eroded the very genius of the internet. It doesn't actually provide you with a solution to the problem you are seeking to address.

WhatsApp and Facebook have been hauled up by the Indian government for content. Payments business has been delayed. Do you find it frustrating working in India?

No. We value scrutiny, accountability, de-

bate and discussion, even if it takes longer. We would much rather take time to get things right and do so in consultation with governments in India and elsewhere.

Moving away from Facebook, what a mess Brexit has been. How do you see it playing out?

Just a mess? That is a big understatement. I think it is always going to be difficult in any country to impose a future on a whole generation of young people who want exactly the opposite. Over 80% of young people want to stay in the European Union and they are being told they can't have a future that they have to inhabit. I find that very sad and disappointing.

It is unusual for a deputy PM to work for a company. Why did you opt for it?

Because I didn't want to do what normally people in my position would do. You go to the House of Lords, pontificate, sit on a few boards, write a couple of books no one will read. I am only 52. I have huge amount of energy. I didn't want to live a life of semi-retirement. I wanted to do something very new and very different. I am completely fascinated by this clash, this tension between society and technology, and I want to play a role in it. In 20-30 years, we will

look back at these years and realise these were the years when the rules of the internet were set. That is why things like data localisation are so important. You get the rules wrong in the beginning, we will all regret the decisions taken.

There is a debate on whether the content on WhatsApp is genuine or not. How can that change? Do people tend to trust the printed word than digital content?

I would be careful not to over romanticise the past. I spent 20 years in public life where, on a daily basis, British newspapers just printed rubbish and just rubbish. And we all knew that and the readers knew that. People always distrust politicians more than anyone else and the next category of people they distrust are the journalists.

I don't think that the time where everything that was printed was always trusted ever existed. Free press is loud, diverse thing where people say things about each other. In a free country, people are free to say nonsense – that has always been the case. What is new is stuff goes viral and we have a unique responsibility that sets us apart: fact-check programme, automated systems, community standards we apply and so on. The most important thing is we try and identify malicious, misleading content and remove it. We constantly try to strengthen our systems to check virality.

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Nicholas Clegg, 52

V-P of global affairs & communications, Facebook

“In 20-30 years when we look back, we will realise these were the years when the rules of the internet were set. You get the rules wrong in the beginning, we will all regret the decisions taken”



Compassionate CAPITALISTS

Woke millennials, fourth-generation promoters and changes in the ethos of capitalism worldwide are nudging companies onto a more virtuous path

by Sruthiljith KK & Mallini Goyal

On May 27, billionaire banker Uday Kotak, one of India's most respected business executives, tweeted the image of a water dispenser at one of his offices. It featured a stylish retro Kilner glass jar (for bonus fun fact, see the end of this article) with "Yorkshire Glassware, established 1898" embossed on it, alongside a stack of paper cups. He wrote: "4.3 lakh plastic bottles saved per annum. Glass water jars and disposable paper cups in meeting rooms at Kotak Mahindra Bank Mumbai offices. Working to make it national. Environment is precious."

When architect Mani Rastogi met Infosys founder and then chairman NR Narayana Murthy in 2014 for discussions about the tech giant's new campus in Nagpur, he says he got a one-line brief: "Create the world's most sustainable office building." When it comes up, the building, which will have a working population of 20,000, will be net zero in energy, water and waste-to-landfill (meaning its

net consumption from electricity grid or outside water supply will be zero, and it will send no waste to a landfill).

When Indian Hotels Company (Taj Hotels) decided in 2018 to phase out plastic straws at its hotels and TajSATS aviation catering unit, it resulted in the elimination of 2 million straws in a year. It now uses biodegradable straws, bamboo straws and in its new property in the Andamans, papaya stems.

These instances illustrate a heartening and accelerating trend among Indian corporations – a move to be thoughtful about their impact on the planet and the people around them, including employees, customers, partners and communities. What appears to be emerging is a more conscious, compassionate version of the bare-knuckled capitalism of the 1980s and 1990s, when chief executives mostly talked business and money – profits, market share, interest rates. Now they are far likelier to share a Greta Thunberg clip on social media or laud a progressive Supreme Court

verdict ending discrimination.

The change might be too little, and some scepticism around image-building might even be warranted, but we now have to entertain the possibility that the Indian corporation is turning woke. At the very least, parts of corporate India are displaying a

Godrej

Godrej Consumer Products has trained more than 2,20,000 women under its Salon-I programme, helping them earn a livelihood



Godrej is working with 1,500 farmer households in drought-prone Beed in Maharashtra to develop integrated watersheds over 3,000 hectares



Godrej Properties has trained 45,000 construction workers, improving their earning potential through upskilling

wokeness that's far ahead of the wider society it is based in.

The phenomenon we discuss in this article is distinct from philanthropy and corporate social responsibility programmes of companies. The conscious corporation is tweaking its business operations, premises, hiring and policies to do good and be better. While many legacy Indian business groups can rightly claim a long history of efforts to be conscious, now the traction and pressure around the idea are such that all manner of companies – startups to multinationals, cement companies to phone makers – are acting, and telling the world about it.

"All companies are now under pressure to be more thoughtful and conscious of environmental and sustainability issues," says Gita Piramal, business historian and senior fellow at the University of Oxford. "Among traditional family business groups, the fourth generation, in many cases, appears to show a greater awareness than the second and third generations. Among the first generation, I would say there were both types of entrepreneurs." Indian entrepreneurship, she says, came into the fore from around the 1850s as the industrial revolution reached us through colonialism. Calcutta, Madras and Bombay became aggressive entrepôts, and as banians (intermediaries) to the colonists, this generation was able

"Enterprises must work towards benefits of all stakeholders, and not just shareholders. They cannot maximise profit at any cost. That is very unhealthy. As a corporation, we have a responsibility to take care of our environment and worry about our carbon footprint"

Anu Aga, chairman, Thermax Group

Mahindra & Mahindra



16 million trees have been planted across India through Mahindra projects, the company says



10 Mahindra plants are certified as zero waste-to-landfill. The Igatpuri plant was the first in India to be certified as such

to build large capital resources. In business history, she says, the Godrej family comes readily to mind as being at the forefront of environmental issues. "For the second and third generations, however, wealth creation was the priority as India stumbled along with GDP growth of around 3%. The fourth generation, often youngsters returning to India after studying or working overseas, appears to be far more aware of environmental, sustainability and related issues."

An example could be found in one of India's top industrial houses. In a 2008 interview, Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man then, as now, told *The New York Times* that his teenage daughter Isha Ambani didn't like the plastics business in his portfolio. "It pollutes a lot," he quoted her as saying. She is now active in business, having been a board member at Jio, the group's multibillion-dollar telecom bet, since 2014, presumably bringing an environmentally conscious ethos to business.

Young customers and employees preferring brands and companies that adhere to certain values is another nudge. Unilever, the FMCG major with a long history in India, has embraced progressive values wholeheartedly in its operations as well as messaging.

"We believe that today's consumers, especially millennials, are highly woke and want to contribute in their own way to the environment as well as address societal issues. They are demanding brands that deliver more than just the functional benefit, and have a higher purpose that resonates with them. This is supported by research that indicates that millennials want to work for companies that have a purpose beyond their products and profits," says Anuradha Razdan, executive director-HR, Hindustan Unilever.

Concerns around climate change and the uptick in extreme weather events are another factor that are nudging corporations onto a virtuous path.

Examples abound. Here is a selection from across industries.

Phone maker OnePlus has tied up with WWF India to mark 1,500 days of its mobile operating system OxygenOS. For every tweet with the hashtag OxygenOS, it will plant a tree.

Online shopping giant Amazon has committed to eliminating the use of single-use plastic in their packaging by June 2020, a deadline they might have to advance as India is banning all single-use plastic by October.

Foodtech startup Zomato announced paternity leave of 26 weeks, explaining that lack of universal paid parental leave was one of the reasons why the number of women executives falls in higher organisational ranks. Drug maker Novartis followed suit.

Fashion brand H&M has committed to sus-

tainably sourcing all the cotton it uses by 2020.

The Lemon Tree hotel chain is famous for hiring people with disabilities (PwD) and integrating them into all aspects of operations. Fast food chain KFC, Aegis BPO and Landmark Group also work on consciously hiring PwDs.

Efforts at automaker Mahindra have meant it now uses 63% less energy to produce a vehicle compared with eight years ago (a tractor takes 33% less energy now to produce). The group saved 58 million kWh of energy through 700 energy efficiency projects implemented in the last five years. That's enough to power 67,000 average US homes for a month.

Bath fittings maker Jaquar recycles 4,221 tonnes of brass and 8 tonnes of chrome annually, as well as 5 lakh litres of water every day. They have been making their showers and faucets with water-saving technology.

HUL has made major strides in energy, water and waste. It managed to reduce water usage (cubic metre per tonne of production) by 55% in 2018, compared with a decade ago. Total waste generated in its factories reduced by 58% in the same period. HUL incorporates social causes in the advertising campaigns of its mass consumer products as well.

In December 2018, Godrej Consumer Products introduced a gender affirmation policy for employees who wish to undergo gender transition. Staff can claim reimbursements for non-cosmetic surgeries and hormone replacement therapy.

These initiatives are apart from the impressive work being done by philanthropic foundations of groups and individuals such as Reliance, Bharti, Azim Premji, Shiv Nadar, the Birlas and others. Then there's also the work funded by corporate social responsibility. Law mandates that companies must spend at least



HUL

HUL works with 8,000 small-holder farmers who cultivate tomatoes sustainably for its Kissan ketchup

In 2018, HUL reduced CO2 emissions per tonne of production by 59%, compared with 2008, thanks in a large part to biomass fuels. (In pic) A biomass plant at HUL's Nashik agro-waste boiler house



Taj Hotels



Taj's property in the Andamans uses papaya stems as straws

Many Taj properties are operating their own RO plants and replacing plastic bottles with glass bottles



2% of their average net profits during the preceding three years on CSR activities.

Rastogi, founding partner of the award-winning architect firm Morphogenesis, says companies have become very conscious of the environmental impact of their buildings. "Today, the 'going green' agenda is an integral part of most companies' initiatives.... Some of our projects across India, such as the corporate offices of ITC, Zydus, Infosys, Wipro and RP-SG, are all conceptualised as green buildings on the drawing board. The key has been to do away with myths of sustainability and instead adopt the right approach within the Indian context."

Good Job

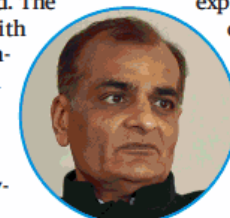
What's going on? Why's everyone suddenly so intent on doing good and being seen as doing good?

Some of this is inspired by the evolution of capitalism itself globally. In the US, after the financial crash of 2008 imposed hardship on the general public, companies have sought to project a softer side, talking up progressive causes, going against the grain of the popular ideas of economist Milton Friedman, who said the social responsibility of companies was to make profits.

Business Roundtable, the influential grouping of CEOs of America's largest companies, recently cast aside its statement of corporate purpose formalised in 1997. It said: "The paramount duty of management and of boards of directors is to the corporation's stockholders."

Its new statement, formalised in August, is long and dwells purposefully on themes such as "value for customers", "diversity and inclusion", "protecting the environment", "dealing fairly and ethically with suppliers" and "supporting the communities in which we work". The first mention of shareholders comes in the penultimate paragraph and all it says is: "We are committed to transparency and effective engagement with shareholders"

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, where the leading figures of corporate India are regulars, these ideas have been debated for a while. The two thinkers at the forefront of this idea – that shared value delivers share-



"We are moving from the unbridled capitalism of the 1980s towards a more equitable model. The millennials are sensitive about equality and this will force businesses to reframe their value systems" Rashesh Shah, CEO, Edelweiss Group

holder value, or that business competitiveness and corporate social responsibility are closely linked – have been academics Michael E Porter and Mark R Kramer of Harvard University. The concept of "shared value" finds explicit mention in the communications of Godrej and Mahindra groups.

But it's not as if these ideas are new or alien to Indian business. In fact, in some ways, Indian business groups pioneered many of these ideas.

"I am a big admirer of Jamshetji Tata who said over a century ago that the community is not just another stakeholder but the very purpose of business," says Amit Chandra, MD of Bain Capital and a former non-executive director at Tata Sons. "The Tata group was accordingly designed with wealth creation as a means for the propagation of societal good in a compassionate way. India was, therefore, at the forefront of the philanthropic movement. The Tatas were not an exception and a few other families like the Godrej, Bajaj and the Birlas were deeply engaged in nation-building around the time of Independence. Over a century later, no one has epitomised this principle better than Azim Premji."

Jamshetji Tata's American contemporaries were robber baron capitalists. Progressive ideas around business and wealth were expressed and practised here long before estate tax gave momentum and definition to philanthropy in the US.

Considering Indian companies operate in some of the most polluted and unequal cities and towns in the world, all that has been done might just be a beginning. And many promoters have still, sadly, not made these matters a priority. "There is a great deal more to be done. The larger (promoter) community is still of those who just nod their heads to this and don't do enough," says Piramal.

Bonus fun fact: The founder of Kilner glass jars was the great-great-grandfather of the controversial British TV host Jeremy Clarkson, who got to see none of that wealth. ■

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Jack Ma, Alibaba

Last week, on his 55th birthday, Ma stepped down as executive chairman of Alibaba, the e-commerce giant he founded two decades back, to focus on philanthropy and education. His farewell was like a rock concert, attended by thousands of Alibaba employees.

Bill Gates, Microsoft

The tech company cofounder stepped down as CEO in 2000 when he was just 44, handing over the baton to his confidante Steve Ballmer. Fourteen years later, Gates also quit as chairman of the company's board, choosing to remain just an adviser. He is now solely involved in the running a foundation with his wife Melinda.

Mike Lazaridis, Research In Motion

In 2013, the cofounder of BlackBerry-maker Research In Motion retired as vice-chairman and director of the company he had cofounded in 1984. His quitting the company came as surprise since he had managed to turn it around. Lazaridis later started an investment fund.

Mark Pincus, Zynga

In 2014, founder of mobile social gaming company Zynga moved away from handling the day-to-day operations to just serve as non-executive chairman of the board. However, a year later, Pincus had to return to lead the company after then CEO Don Matrick left. A year later, he again stepped down as chief executive.

Start & Exit

It is not often that founders leave the companies they once started and scaled to new heights. Here are some instances where top entrepreneurs either moved away from running their companies or were forced to move aside

by Sourabh Gupta

Jack Dorsey, Twitter

In 2008, the board of the micro-blogging site, unhappy with Dorsey's management style, asked the cofounder to let someone else run the company while he remain the chairman. But in 2015, Dorsey, then 38, returned to action at Twitter and has been the CEO ever since.

Travis Kalanick, Uber

In 2017, eight years after he founded the ride-hailing company, Kalanick was forced to step down as CEO after a series of rows rocked Uber. The 43-year-old is now chief executive of City Storage Systems that redevelops distressed real estate.

Brendan Eich, Mozilla Corp

In 2014, Eich had to quit as chief executive officer of Mozilla Corporation, which he had cofounded in 2002, after facing backlash over his views against same-sex marriage.

Steve Jobs, Apple

In 1985, Jobs, the cofounder of the tech company, was ousted as CEO in a boardroom battle. He went on to start another company NeXT, which Apple bought in 1997, marking Jobs' return as CEO. Jobs died in 2011.

Source: BBC, Forbes, WSJ, CNN, LA Times, news agencies

TRACKING HYGIENE

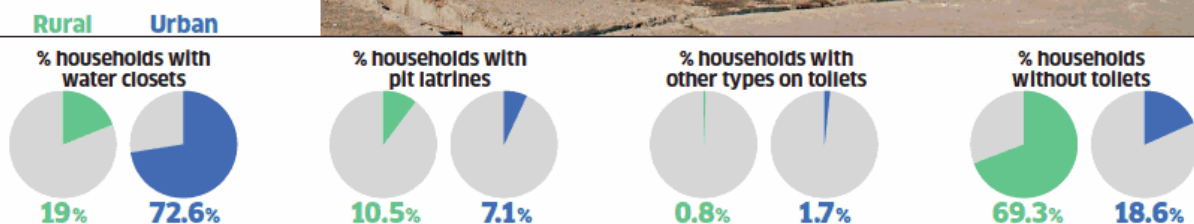
With the Swachh Bharat Mission completing five years on October 2, how far has rural and urban India come in increasing new toilet coverage and becoming open-defecation free? Here is a status check

:: Rukmini S



Eight Years Ago...

The 2011 Census showed that over half the country had no toilet and the share of households without toilets had decreased by just 10 percentage points in a high-growth decade (2001-2011)

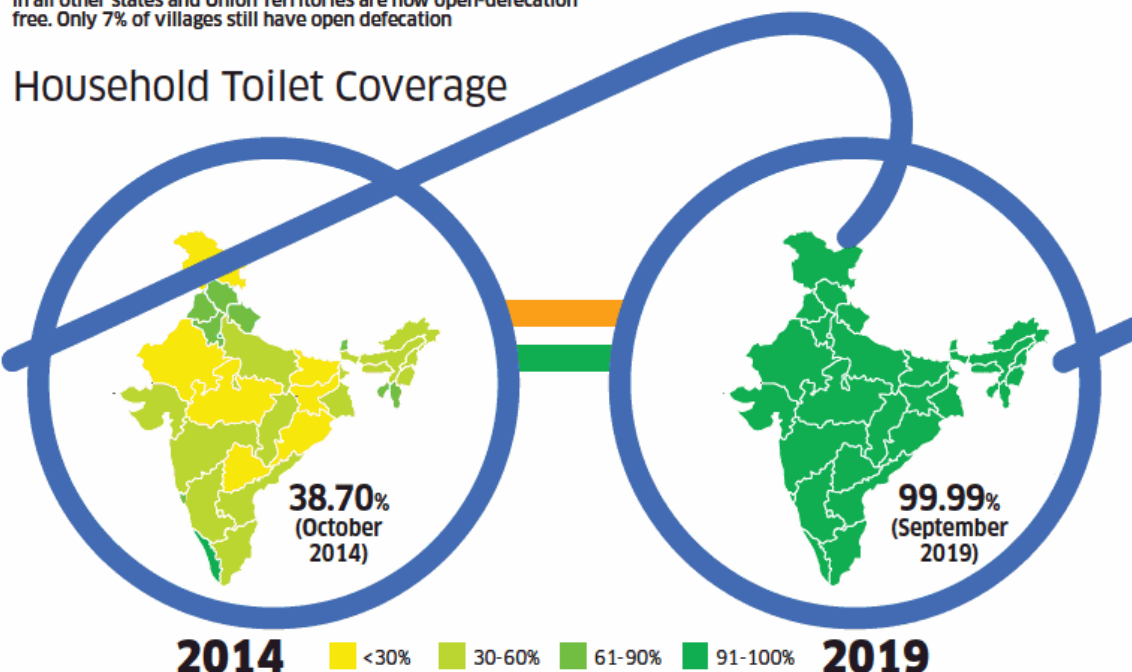


Source: Census 2011

More Toilets Than Ever

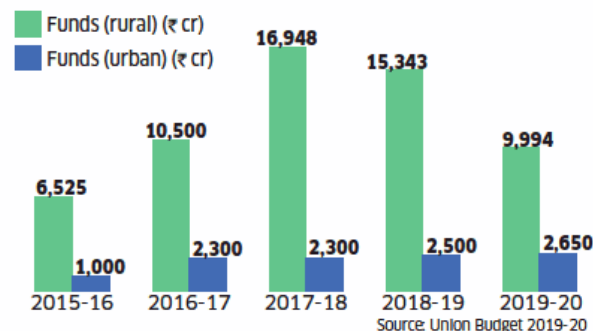
Except for Goa, every state has achieved complete individual household latrine (IHHL) coverage in rural areas, says the government. It also says that except for Bihar and Odisha, villages in all other states and Union Territories are now open-defecation free. Only 7% of villages still have open defecation

Household Toilet Coverage



Slowing Money Flow

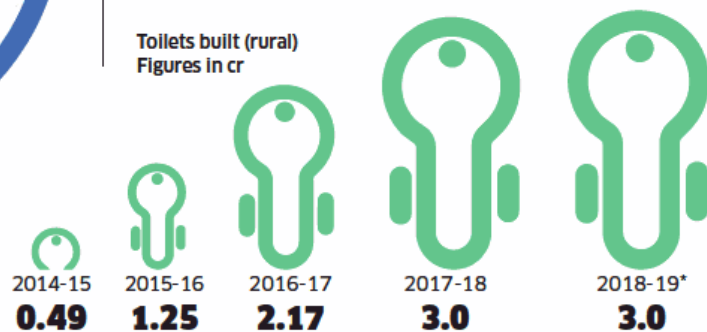
Funding for Swachh Bharat Mission grew substantially in its second and third years, but as the scheme has tapered down, there was a big cut in allocation in the most recent Union Budget



New Toilets Per Year

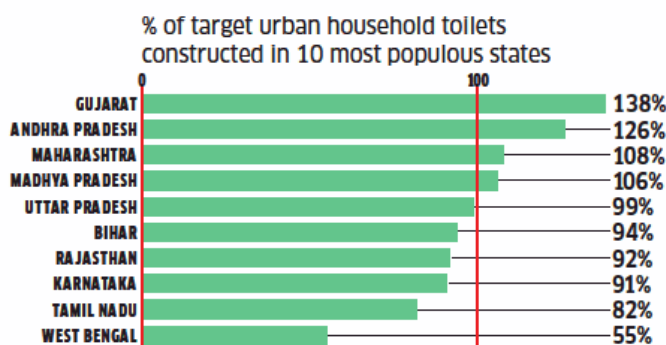
Swachh Bharat Mission has focussed heavily on toilet-building since 2014. But critics say not enough has been done to changing people's behaviour on toilet usage

Toilets built (rural)
 Figures in cr



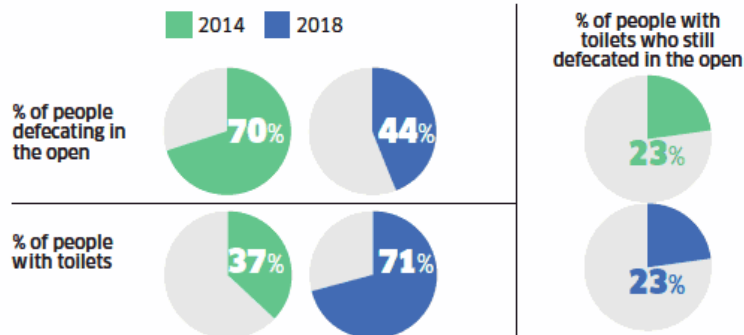
Cities Still Short of Toilets

As of June 2019, the government said it had met its community toilet target in urban areas but was short of its household toilet target. As many as 94 urban local bodies (of a total of 4,378) were not yet open-defecation free till June



Old Habits Persist

But are people actually using the new toilets? There is no official data. But when a team of economists revisited families in rural north India in 2014 and 2018, they found that fewer people defecated in the open but having a toilet and still defecating in the open was widespread.



The writer is a Chennai-based journalist

Source: Gupta et al (Research Institute for Compassionate Economics)



On the Edge

As SC's demolition deadline nears, residents of four apartment buildings near Kochi have dug in their heels, demanding a fair hearing



PHOTOS: INDULEKHA ARAVIND

by Indulekha Aravind | Kochi

Award-winning Malayalam film actor Soubin Shahir has done a variety of roles to perfection – from being Saji, the eldest of four squabbling brothers living on a backwater island in *Kumbalangi Nights* to Majeed, a struggling but passionate football manager in *Sudani from Nigeria*. Today, he is a home-owner facing eviction from his flat in an 18-storey high-rise overlooking the backwaters. Only this is real life and there is no director to yell “cut!” and end the nightmare for Shahir and a thousand others.

They are the aggrieved residents of four apartment complexes in Maradu near Kochi, some costing more than ₹1 crore,

which the Supreme Court has ordered must be demolished by September 20. The flats, it ruled, had come up in violation of Coastal Regulation Zone norms.

On September 9, Shahir and many others were on the steps of their building, Holy Faith H2O, holding a placard and protesting the court order and a notice by the municipality that they must move out in five days.

“If I am there, the media focuses on me and people start saying: ‘Oh, he is a film star; he can easily buy another flat’. It is very upsetting,” says the 35-year-old, who

has cancelled his shoots as he struggles to come to terms with the eviction order. “This is the first property I bought since I started earning, and that too on a bank loan. If I had any idea there was something wrong with it, would I’ve bought it?”

Others too are at sea. On the second floor of the same high-rise, Maya Prem

Contention Zone

The case revolves around which category of Coastal Regulation Zone the buildings come under

CRZ-II

Areas within municipality limits or other substantially built up urban areas. Buildings permitted on the landward side of existing authorised structures

CRZ-III

Areas relatively undisturbed, including coastal zones in rural areas. Here, the area up to 200 m from high tide line is earmarked as ‘no development zone’

Mohan, a 60-year-old widow who is staying in a three-bedroom apartment with her 90-year-old mother, says she bought the flat after selling another property to spend her twilight years in a safe dwelling. The SC judgement, she says, was like a bolt from the blue. “How do we move out in five days? Where will we go?”

The plight of the residents is the result of a SC verdict on September 6, which took the Kerala government to task for failing carry out its May 8 order to demolish the four buildings – Holy Faith H2O, Alfa Serene, Jain’s Coral Cove and Golden Kayaloram by builders Holy Faith, Alfa Ventures, Jain Housing and KP Varkey & VS Builders.

These are hardly the only projects found to have violated CRZ norms in Kerala. But the judgement has sent shockwaves through the state as this is the first demolition order on this scale. Last year, DLF’s 180-unit luxury flat project along the backwaters in Kochi was also found to have broken CRZ norms. But in DLF’s case, SC upheld a Kerala High Court verdict ordering the building’s regularisation after imposing a fine of ₹1 crore.

Legal Tangle

2007

- Maradu panchayat revokes 31 building permits over CRZ norm violations
- Builders move court, Kerala HC stays notice, construction continues
- A panchayat member files an affidavit, says Maradu in CRZ II; HC makes Coastal Zone Management Authority (CZMA) a party to the case

2016

- CZMA files plea in SC, says panchayat didn’t take its permission and constructed buildings in CRZ III

2019

- SC panel says buildings in CRZ III
- SC bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra says panchayat’s permission was “illegal”, orders demolition
- Flat owners appeal to another bench, demolition halted for 6 weeks
- Justice Mishra castigates residents for approaching another SC bench
- SC tells Kerala government to comply with demolition order by Sept 20

The SC judgement on the flats in Maradu has revived the debate between conservation and construction. Maradu was once a backwater island with mangroves and canals flowing into the Vembanad Lake. But due to its proximity to the city of Kochi, there has been large-scale urbanisation, including two five-star hotels, a super specialty hospital and several commercial establishments.

The present case dates back to 2007, when the vigilance arm of a local self-government department instructed the Maradu panchayat (now a municipality) to cancel 31 building permits under various infractions, including CRZ norm viola-

tions. The latest SC verdict came in a special leave petition filed by Kerala State Coastal Zone Management Authority (KSCZMA) three years ago, challenging a Kerala High Court verdict, against Maradu municipality for not taking its clearance while issuing permits and letting buildings come up too close to the backwaters in what it says is a CRZ III area.

However, the defendants’ contention all along has been that Maradu, being highly-urbanised and without a proper coastal zone map (as admitted by the state government in an older case) comes under CRZ II. “The panchayat submitted an affidavit in the high court acknowledging this is a CRZ II area. If there was any violation as KSCZMA alleges, why didn’t it say anything all these years when it was a party to the case instead of waiting till 2016?” says Mathew Kurian, a lawyer representing builder Alfa Ventures.

The flat-dwellers insist that till May 8, they had no idea that there were court cases over building permits.

At a hunger strike on Onam – a powerful symbol considering the highlight of the festival is an elaborate feast – homeowners reiterate they are being victimised. “We have not illegally occupied the land. We have never broken the law but overnight, we became criminals,” Saira Banu, a resident of Golden Kayaloram says in an impassioned speech at the sit-in. “We sold our old flat and bought this for our retirement. We are still repaying our loan. You know what government employees earn.” Banu used to be a senior official in the state fisheries department.

Ajai Peter, a resident of Alfa Serene, says he and his wife had given up their US Green Card to return to Kochi. “I had said: Let’s not live in another country as second-class citizens. But now I feel betrayed in my own country.”

The Maradu municipality says it sympathises with the residents, but has no choice other than to carry out the Supreme Court order.

Bobban Nedumparambil, the municipality’s vice-chairman, says the high court, while giving the builders interim relief in 2007, had given the panchayat officials the right to issue a “stop-memo” order to cease work. “But they did not. What does that tell you about whether there was collusion?”

CR Neelakantan, a well-known environmentalist in Kerala, says that in Maradu, CRZ norms were consistently breached. While he says he is never a votary of any eviction, he points out the current case reflects a common feeling in Kerala that if one is powerful, any violation can be justified. “The violators are the builders and the officers who colluded with them. They must pay. The flat owners must be compensated.”

As the deadline for demolition draws closer, all political parties in the state have come out in support of the homeowners. On September 11, offering a dim ray of hope, the Supreme Court admitted a curative petition by the flat-owners of Golden Kayaloram.

The residents, meanwhile, are digging in their heels. “We have done nothing wrong. We will not move out,” says Saira Banu, echoing the sentiment of hundreds of other residents, like Shahir. ■

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“If I am there, the media focuses on me and people start saying: ‘Oh, he is a film star; he can easily buy another flat’. It is very upsetting”

Soubin Shahir, flat owner at Holy Faith H2O

:: Shelley Singh

Buy fish through a chat window – that is the USP of Parthaa Kundu's venture. Delhi-based Kundu, the founder of Fishappy, home-delivers fish from selected vendors. Customers can see videos of live fish, select what they want and type in their orders – all on WhatsApp's platform for business.

Kundu, 47, started Fishappy in 2015 and promoted his business through word of mouth, a website and pamphlets in newspapers. He signed up for WhatsApp Business in June 2019. "The business exploded, as users were already familiar with WhatsApp. Now 97% of the business comes via the app," says Kundu, who was in the luxury travel industry before becoming an entrepreneur. He sources fish from select vendors in Delhi and sells to 500-550 customers a month in the Delhi-NCR region now, from around 300 customers 18 months back.

Many small businesses like Kundu's around the country are finding that the business platform of the popular chat app might be the most fitting tech platform for their scale and nature. Small businesses struggle to be discovered on larger ecommerce platforms. And their scale does not permit them to invest in digital marketing and drive traffic to their own website or Facebook page. They find WhatsApp Business to be an acceptable substitute for a website or app and love that anyone can manage the backend. There is no need for dedicated customer service staff, as you can answer queries on the go. This helps improve customer satisfaction as users get instant replies.

Abhijit Bose, head of WhatsApp India, says the app enables end-to-end communication cycle between small businesses and customers. "What started as a P2P (peer-to-peer) service has enabled users to connect the same way in P2B (peer-to-business) conversations."

About one million small businesses in India have already signed up on the platform. Globally, that number stands at 5 million.

The two major drawbacks, however, are the absence of payments and features designed to support businesses of a relatively small scale. This means once a small business scales, the owner would have to find a more appropriate platform for their size. Once the platform throws opens payments, which the company says will happen within a few months, it could see rapid adoption by more small businesses.

"We can make business owners' life easier and it also help in increasing their sales," says Bose. "I think that will end up digitising them more as they get more comfortable. Another distinguishing factor is our scale and we are able to touch tier-2 and -3 cities because various sectors use WhatsApp. For example, agriculture is a huge sector where a lot of businesses run on WhatsApp for different needs."

Parthaa Kundu

Founder, Fishappy

BASED IN: Delhi

BUSINESS: Source fresh fish from vendors & sell to customers in Delhi-NCR

STARTED BUSINESS IN: Mid-2015

JOINED WHATSAPP BUSINESS: June 2019

PLAN: Scale up to 1,000 customers from 500 now; start selling curry paste via another app, HappyCurry

BIZ CHAT BUZZ

Whatsapp Business has become a popular tool for micro enterprises. Lack of a payment option and scale-related issues are dampners, though

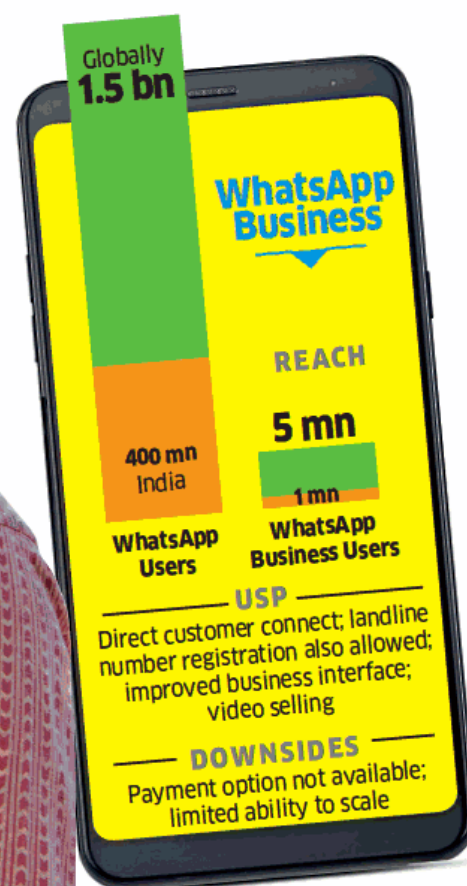
Businesses can download the app for free and create a profile of their offerings. But they have to register a separate phone number for business use as the number used for WhatsApp cannot be used for the business platform. It also allows a business to register using a landline number, unlike in the mother app. Businesses can easily sort and automate messages. The flip side is that businesses would have to use online or offline campaigns to promote their presence on the messaging app. However, despite not supporting payments at the moment, the app has the potential for businesses to convert interest into a sale.

Indu Wary, the founder of saree and accessory seller Asomkriti, discovered this in 2018. Bengaluru-based Wary, 32, a former product manager with an IT company, started the venture in 2017 to sell products such as mekhela chadar (traditional sarees from Assam), kurtis, jewellery and stoles sourced directly from 55 weavers in Assam. Though she was selling through Asomkriti's website, she soon realised that people often add items to cart but don't make an actual purchase. Ecommerce sites were overcrowded with large sellers. So Wary signed up on WhatsApp Business in mid-2018. "Things changed almost immediately, as people trusted the app. Our conversion from interest to sales increased to 60%." The start-up sells 600 products a month now and does business worth ₹5.5-6 lakh.

The app has a green check mark on verified profiles, making it easier for people to know if the business is genuine or not.

Ahmedabad-based Lightspeed Mobility, which makes battery-operated cycles, is another venture that has been able to close more online sales because of WhatsApp Business. The company, founded by Rahul Rupawala, 33, in 2017 has 15 dealers in tier-1 cities but relies on online sales in smaller cities. "WhatsApp is crucial to talk to our customers. It helps us do personalised customer service," says Rupawala. Lightspeed handles 250-300 queries a day over WhatsApp and sells 100 cycles – costing

The two major drawbacks however, are the absence of payments and features designed to support businesses of a relatively small scale



ASHWANI NAGPAL

“Payment Service will Come by the End of the Year”

In a video call with **Shelley Singh**, the head of WhatsApp India, **Abhijit Bose**, discusses the relevance of WhatsApp Business and how it is different from other ecommerce sites. Edited excerpts of the interview:

What is the relevance of the app for small businesses?

WhatsApp's mission is to connect people and entities in a very secure, private and personalised way. What started as a P2P service now enables users to connect the same way in a P2B conversation. 62% of small & medium businesses in India have told us that WhatsApp Business helps them increase sales and is essential for running their business.

But doesn't the lack of a payments option come in the way of the business app?

We hope to offer the service by the end of the year. Our goal is to enable end-to-end communication cycle between small businesses and customers. Payment is just one more step in how businesses interact with users. We look at it more from how to enable small business to complete their transaction more seamlessly, become more efficient, increase their sales. And, of course, payment allows that last leg to be completed



in a seamless way. Lot of the communication is already happening on WhatsApp. Unfortunately, when it comes to sales, they have to collect the payment in some other way and that causes friction. We believe we can make business owners' life easier and it will help in increasing sales.

WhatsApp Business is free but why did you make the business API application a paid service?

Business API is a different product. It is a paid service for medium and large businesses that communicate with customers all over the world. These companies operate at a larger scale by responding to millions of requests a day and also by keeping communications simple, secure, and reliable. It is a service that is currently open to a select few. We enable it for the right use-case for the right size of business. An API version is not something that your typical small store owner would be able to support. Companies like MakeMyTrip are able to use it because of the sheer scale of operations. So there are different needs that each of our products are addressing.

What is your growth outlook for 12-24 months?

That is hard to say. In a way, growth of WhatsApp is related to the digital growth in the country. The difference between now versus early years is that the local WhatsApp team is focused on improving engagements and use in many more sectors. This is a more proactive approach. We will invest to address the needs of different sectors – particularly small businesses – and to increase financial inclusion.

Indu Wary, founder, Asomkriti

BASED IN: Bengaluru

BUSINESS: Source products from 55 weavers in Assam and sell them via WhatsApp Business

STARTED BUSINESS IN: June 2017

JOINED WHATSAPP BUSINESS: Mid-2018

PLAN: Increase number of weavers from 55 to 300



DEEPAK C. PANWAR

₹31,000-57,000 – a month now.

Not just products, startups are also offering services over WhatsApp Business. For Mumbai-headquartered Hey Deedee, an all-women courier service, the platform is the linchpin for seamless operations in 10 cities. The 900-women team of Hey Deedee, which delivers couriers for e-commerce companies such as Amazon, starts its day by checking updates (number of couriers, pick up points, etc) on the app. The crew then plans the deliveries and a territory head in each city coordinates with the field teams. “We do all product deliveries except food,” says Revathi Roy, managing director & CEO. “Conversations with field staff happen over the business app and they update us over it in case of any issue. I have pan-India visibility of the business on the app.”

The app has reached the financial space, too. ScripBox, a Bengaluru-based fintech company, uses WhatsApp Business to educate users on loans, mutual funds and other such products. It is also looking at collecting know-your-customer documents through the app. Manu Prasad, chief marketing officer, ScripBox, says, “Usage of internet is moving to mobiles. WhatsApp is attractive because of its popularity.”

Chandigarh-based Feetport uses the app to verify customer details for some banks. The startup also uses the app to manage field teams of clients, including Indraprastha Gas Limited and Jaquar bath fittings.

A common theme among all these startups is that they have a small team – LightSpeed has 20, Feetport 18, Fishappy has four and Asomkriti has seven.

The company has a separate solution for larger businesses as well, but is currently open only to a select few. Such entities pay for the service, get an API (application programming interface) and can customise the app. For instance, users booking tickets on the websites of MakeMyTrip or PVR Cinemas can opt to receive booking notifications on WhatsApp. Users can get tickets or a QR

Revathi Roy, MD & CEO, Hey Deedee

BASED IN: Mumbai

BUSINESS: Logistics entity employing only women for e-commerce firms across 10 cities; business app used for training, updates, shipment status, relay information on any issue

STARTED BUSINESS IN: 2017

JOINED WHATSAPP BUSINESS: Mid-2018

PLAN: Scale up to 5,000 women employees by mid-2020 from 900 now



NITIN SONAMANE

code on the phone and also get access to a seat map to select their plane seats or book in-flight meals. MakeMyTrip.com's Chief Product Officer Anshuman Bapna says, “Majority of India is on WhatsApp already and it helps us easily contact people who have opted to use this method. The biggest use-case is customer support.”

Bose says, “An API (application programming interface) version is not something that your typical store owner would be able to support. But it can help companies that operate at a larger scale and responds to millions of request a day.”

Kotak Bank, OYO and BookMyShow are some of the other companies that have signed up for this service.

Parikshit Dar, co-founder & director of BookMyShow, says, “The app helps us create a personal connection with our customers via instant communication updates.” The app is like a default communication platform for BookMyShow.

However, one complaint most small businesses have is that WhatsApp Business does not have a payment option.

Ankur Pahwa, partner, EY, says, “One big challenge is payments. WeChat's success (in China) came with payments. Else it would have just been a platform for discovery, lead generation and there would be gaps between discovery and conversion.”

A payment service will be added to the app by the year-end, says WhatsApp India's Bose. Until then, people like Fishappy's Kundu will have to rely on other platforms, credit cards or cash-on-delivery to collect money. That is not yet a problem for Kundu as he handles 500-550 orders a month. “If it scales to 1,000 orders or more a month, WhatsApp Business will continue to be an important part, but I might need other touchpoints as well.” Or he would have to shift to the paid service.

For now, the messaging app fills a void for entrepreneurs who find e-commerce marketplaces too big for comfort. ■

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“Recycling is Not Really an Answer; Packaging Must be Biodegradable”

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people to rid their homes and workplaces of single-use plastic by October 2, **Rhea Mazumdar Singhal** had reasons to smile. The 37-year-old is the founder of Ecoware, a biodegradable food packaging company based out of Greater Noida. It makes plates, cups and bowls from agricultural waste such as sugarcane bagasse. The company produces over 1,500 tons of biodegradable material annually. It translates into 50 million products a year, which they sell to clients like IRCTC as well as restaurant chains like Haldiram and Subway. Companies like Bain and JP Morgan, meanwhile, use Ecoware products in their offices. Singhal spoke to **Varuni Khosla** about the green road ahead. Edited excerpts:

You started the company a decade ago. What are the challenges in this space in India?

When we were growing, there was no plastic ban, no Swachh Bharat Mission. We were going from company to company, asking them to try our products. When we started, our price differential with plastic was over 50%. That is now down to 15%. We are still 40% more expensive than Styrofoam products, though.

I remember I was driving through Mathura once and ordered a parantha, which was served on a Styrofoam plate, and it literally melted into the parantha. Still it was very difficult to convince people to use our products. Then we kind of changed the narrative – we went to schools and colleges and started talking more about how plastic products are bad for one's health.

Is the demand for your products growing?

This year we are looking at ₹15-20 crore in revenue. It is a good place to be in but we are severely constrained by capacity. Even if we have three or more factories, we won't be able to meet the massive demand in India, which comes even from places such as Mysuru, Ranchi, Hubballi and Bareilly.

How big is the market for biodegradable packaging in India right now?

It's difficult to determine the size of the market. Any place that produces food is a potential client for us – be it someone's home or a local thela that sells food. The problem is awareness. But the business we are in is such that demand exceeds supply by at least 3-4 times.

What was your initial investment?

We had our first facility in Dehradun with a capacity of about 200 tons. We have moved up to 1,500 tons now. We have gone from making 9,00,000 pieces in 2010 to over 50 million pieces in 2019. Our Noida facility cost about ₹16-17 crore, including land, building and machinery. In 2009, we put in about ₹2 crore. We broke even around 2016-17.

The inspiration for the project came from my father-in-law, Sunil Singhal, a chemical



We are working on reducing plastic waste in ecommerce packaging by using different types of biomass. This decomposes within 90 days. Our latest line is made from paddy straw, which is burnt to clear farm land and causes severe air pollution in cities like Delhi”

Rhea Mazumdar Singhal, 37

founder, Ecoware

THE COMPANY

Founded In 2009
Based In NCR

Makes biodegradable food packaging material out of bagasse, a sugarcane residue

REVENUE

FY19: ₹9.1 crore
FY18: ₹7.5 crore

THE CHALLENGE

Ecofriendly plates like Ecoware cost ₹3 per piece, while a plastic plate costs ₹2.50-2.70 and Styrofoam is around ₹1.50

engineer who works in the sugar industry. He runs a sugar refinery and there was a lot of bagasse, the fibrous residue of sugarcane, which was used in the boiler and as cattle feed. We then did research and found that we could make products out of it – that it was commercially viable.

What was your big break?

It came during the Commonwealth Games in 2010. They had specific requirements such as biodegradable material that was certified and we supplied such products to them.

What are you working on right now?

We are working on reducing plastic waste in ecommerce packaging by using different types of biomass. These can be put into a compost pit and will decompose within 90 days. Our latest line is made from paddy straw, which is burnt to clear farm land and causes severe air pollution in cities like Delhi.

India generates close to 26,000 tons of plastic every

day according to the Central Pollution Control Board. What is a matter of concern is that over 10,000 tons of this waste remains uncollected.

Where's your current business coming from?

Most of our business – about 60% – comes from QSR (quick service restaurants). We are exporting to nine countries now and that comes to about 20% of our sales. The rest goes to retail and e-commerce companies.

What about food aggregators?

They should do something about their environmentally unfriendly packaging. If the Indian Railways, which serves the largest number of meals a day, can move to environmentally friendly packaging, everyone should be able to. Recycling is not really an answer anymore; packaging needs to be biodegradable.

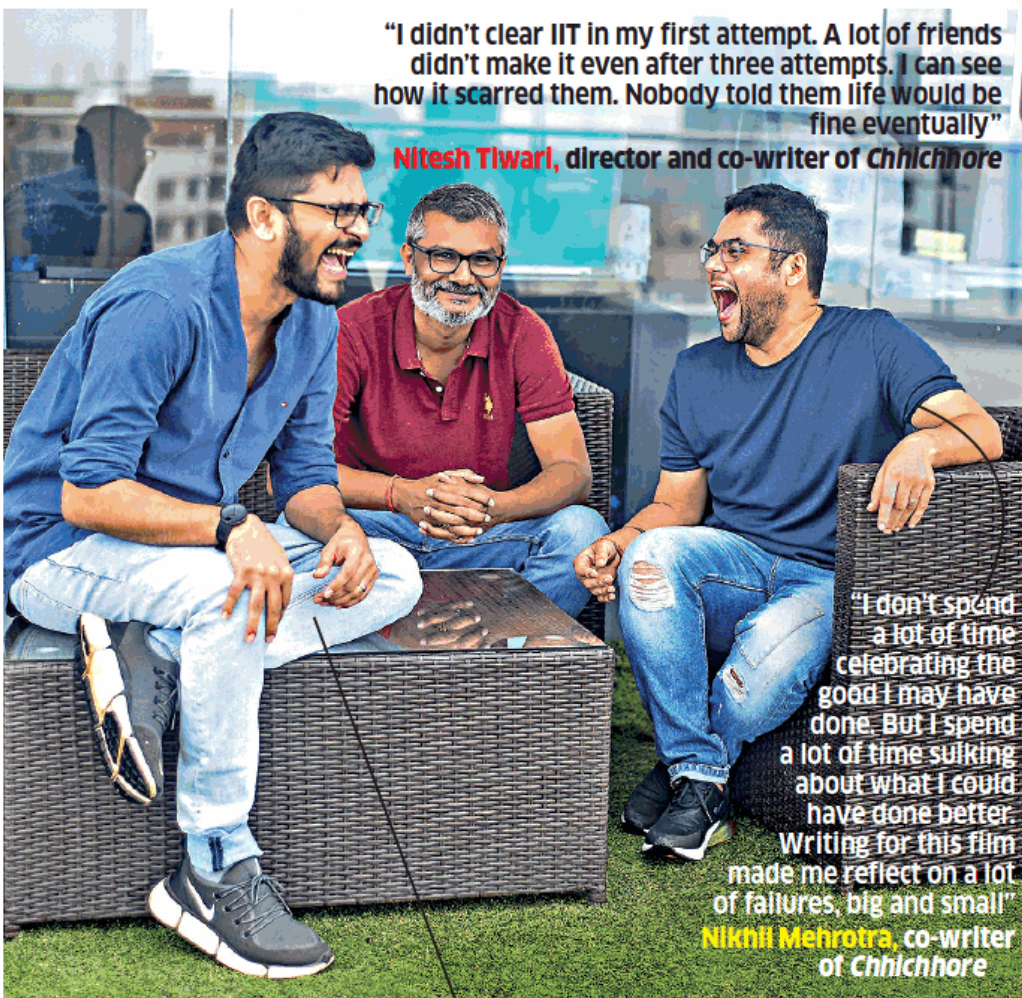
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ASHWANI NAGPAL

Class of Losers

The writers of *Chhichhore* have drawn from their own failures to create a narrative around how academic setbacks do not mean it is all over



"I didn't clear IIT in my first attempt. A lot of friends didn't make it even after three attempts. I can see how it scarred them. Nobody told them life would be fine eventually"

Nitesh Tiwari, director and co-writer of *Chhichhore*

"I don't spend a lot of time celebrating the good I may have done. But I spend a lot of time sulking about what I could have done better. Writing for this film made me reflect on a lot of failures, big and small"

Nikhil Mehrotra, co-writer of *Chhichhore*

.. Shephali Bhatt

In one of the rooms at movie production house Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment in Mumbai's Andheri suburb lies a whiteboard covered with black charts. The charts are carefully placed to hide the content on the board – a scene-wise breakup of the production company's latest feature film, *Chhichhore*.

Directed by Nitesh Tiwari – whose last box-office hit, *Dangal*, was a winner's biopic – this movie focuses on "losers", and it coincidentally hit the cinemas on the eve of Chandrayaan-2's failure. A sticker on the chart reads: "Haar week-aar hai. Par jeetne ki koshish na karna katayi week-aar nahin. (We can accept defeat. But we won't accept giving up on trying to win)."

The dialogue, that somehow doesn't feature in the final cut, sums up the overarching theme of the movie that celebrates the setbacks of a bunch of "losers" in an engineering college's boys hostel in 1992. While dealing with universal issues – parental pressure, the drawbacks of

"While discussing the kind of business this movie would do, someone said, 'shubh shubh bol'. It makes you realise that as a people, we don't want to discuss scenarios of failure at all"

Piyush Gupta, co-writer of *Chhichhore*

the modern education system and student suicides – *Chhichhore*'s storyline oscillates between 1992 and the present-day life of the characters.

Tiwari, 46, draws heavily from his own life to shape the plot and the characters. He did his engineering from IIT-Bombay between 1992 and 1996. He started grappling with the idea of being a loser in 1991, when he made his first attempt to clear IIT-JEE but failed. "I was one of the brightest students in my class then. Dealing with that failure was tough." While Tiwari passed the engineering entrance exam the next year, a lot of his friends couldn't despite

three consecutive attempts. "I can see how that episode scarred them, just because nobody told them then that eventually, life would be fine."

Ever since Tiwari got into filmmaking, he has wanted to tell the stories of his time at IIT but could not find an anchor to hold them together. Little did he know that his friends' scars will become that anchor. "After New Zealand's defeat in the Cricket World Cup finals this year, nobody



Real Life of the Reel

How *Chhichhore* was born

1991: Nitesh Tiwari, director and co-writer of movie, fails IIT-JEE entrance exam

1992: Tiwari clears IIT entrance exam in the second attempt. The flashback of the movie is, thus, set in 1992

2011: Tiwari narrates stories from his time at IIT to his colleagues at ad agency Leo Burnett

2012: Tiwari and co-writers Nikhil Mehrotra and Piyush Gupta brainstorm the idea of *Chhichhore* while working at Leo Burnett

2014-2016: The three work on other film-writing projects like *Bhoothnath Returns* and *Dangal*, with others

2017: Tiwari, Mehrotra and Gupta resume work on *Chhichhore*'s script after keeping it on the back-burner for years

2018: The trio finish the screenplay; shooting begins around September

called them the losers. We wanted to evoke the same feeling, which people so easily get in sports, in the field of education," he says. The former ad professional credits *Chhichhore* co-writers – Nikhil Mehrotra and Piyush Gupta – for helping him find the central theme of the movie.

The writers go back a long way, much like the characters in the movie in the present day. Besides collaborating on three film-writing projects, including *Dangal* and *Bhoothnath Returns*, they have worked together on several brands during their stint with ad agency Leo Burnett in Mumbai. They conceived the idea for the film in 2012. But it was only in 2017 that the three got together to channelise their failures to finish the story and screenplay of *Chhichhore*.

If it was the first failed attempt at cracking IIT that had burnt Tiwari, it was failure in academics in school and college that had stung Mehrotra and Gupta. Writing *Chhichhore* became an exercise in self-realisation for them. It dawned upon Mehrotra, 35, that he doesn't spend time celebrating the good he may have done. "But I spend a lot of time sulking about what I could have done better." Mehrotra is the main writer on Dharma Productions' next movie, *Gunjan Saxena – The Kargil Girl*, based on the life of the eponymous woman combat aviator. For Gupta, 34, it helped him understand invisible pressures parents use to push their children – phrases like "I'll get you, say, a computer or mobile if you get good grades".

Even as the writers try to vindicate the movie's characters of their "losers" tag, they battle with the fear of being labelled as one themselves. "The fear of being a loser manifests in different ways. We have written films with Nitesh (Tiwari) sir, for instance. But if I am going to write one alone and I can't, I may feel like a loser," says Gupta.

Looking inwards, they found how deep-seated the fear of failure is among people. "While discussing the kind of business this movie would do, someone said, 'shubh shubh bol'. It makes you realise that as a people, we don't want to discuss scenarios of failure at all," Gupta adds.

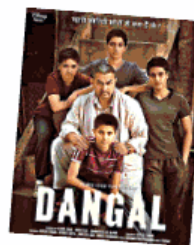
Nevertheless, *Chhichhore* is inching closer to the ₹100 crore mark at the box office, say trade analysts. No mean feat for a film that was made with an estimated ₹70 crore and doesn't have big stars. The writing has been critically acclaimed for keeping the narrative entertaining while delving into serious issues. But the appreciation has come with some heavy criticism of the writers' limited and one-note representation of women characters.

Tiwari says it has become a fad to write about these things of late. "What do I do as a creator? Should I stick to the reality of the world I have observed or worry about people who might find it objectionable? It is a story of a boys' hostel," he adds. Gupta admits they could have enhanced the female character. "But then, those calls are taken on the basis of how fast the

plot is moving. To sprinkle a few women characters in the story to address representation would be cheating with my job as a writer."

Tiwari says his loyalties lie with his audience. Someone posted on his Facebook timeline that for 16 years they were hurting because they couldn't get into IIT. This movie became their balm. "The film doesn't propagate that failure won't hurt," Mehrotra adds. "But if one man says he had been living with this hurt for 16 years, maybe the next time he has a setback, he will be able to overcome it in a year. And maybe that is where the victory is."

shephali.bhatt@timesgroup.com



Why is Our Food Called Ethnic?

While cuisines from the US and northern Europe thrive in privileged entitlement, those from the rest of the world are labelled “ethnic”, languishing in the nuances that deem them strange, unequal, dirty, cheap and worse



ANIRBAN BORA

:: Suvir Saran

When I arrived in New York City in 1993, Manhattan was a very different place from what it is today.

The taxi drivers were Russian, Greek, some even Irish. But this was rapidly changing. More and more frequently, I encountered Haitian, Dominican, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi drivers. With this demographic change, there was a burgeoning of restaurants that catered to the culinary preferences of these men – and also some women – on the move.

The changing nationalities of taxi drivers is a fascinating barometer of immigration waves that hit a city. Especially in American cities, taxi drivers mimic the story of immigration to the nation as a whole. They come from someplace and belong to some race. No human can claim to be race-less and without an ethnic identity, however mixed it might be.

It is this identity that we have as humans that makes each one of us fall into some loose grouping of people, however flawed such a criterion might be. “Everyone’s a little bit racist,” so the song goes, and so even in the most ecu-

In American cities, taxi drivers mimic the story of immigration to the nation as a whole



menical of minds and times, people are divided into isms. It is the most natural thing to have happened. It is hard to keep it from happening.

The word “ethnic” is associated with traits exhibited by a group of people with a common ancestry and culture. It speaks of kindred spirits. It creates, rather loosely, large swaths of people familial in ways that might not even make sense to themselves. It sorts people into groups whose members have racial, cultural, linguistic, tribal, national, or religious features in common. It divides neighbourhoods. It divides people – now matter where they come from.

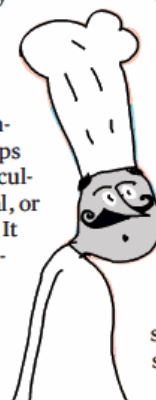
The chauvinism that comes with the word is nothing new. The American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, “These are ancient ethnic revels, / Of a faith long since forsaken.” With those words, he assigned “ethnic” to that world which was not converted to Christianity.

The Othering

This colonising mindset might be nothing respected or celebrated today, at least in places of public domain, but it has a deeply rooted influence on our way of thinking and our way of living. Colonists may have long left many a shore, but their prejudices, their opinions of those they colonised and their dehumanising attitudes towards those they oppressed live and thrive yet today.

Longfellow is long gone, but the word “ethnic” continues to define nationalism, jingoism and superiorism ever more freely and with nary a care to its egregious, divisive history and discordant essence. How can civil societies be so uncivil as to use a word that stereotypes and divides? How can super-patriotic citizens of a nation get away with the use of a word with a stealth history of dangerous profiling to further their agendas?

Take, for example, the United





States, where a majority of citizens are people of a racial and cultural makeup entirely different from the natives. Yet, in the US, "ethnic" has been used with derision to label those people who are something other than northern European. In

In the United States, the word "ethnic" has been used with derision to label those people who are something other than northern European

Longfellow's time, the word was used to single out the Jewish populace and thus came with baggage similar to what it carries today when it is used to marginalise newer waves of immigrants coming across borders. Post-World War II, the Jewish and Christian immigrants of northern European descent – as well as those considered Caucasian by the mere colour of their skin, with no distinction given to racial origins or geography – have lived happily for the most part as a majority, having had their status magically changed to "native", while those immigrants who arrived with darker skin, speaking another language and from places other than northern Europe, have been deemed "ethnic". Did each of those northern European immigrants somehow arrive from some extraterrestrial planet with no existing culture, no language, no race of their own?

Eating Away

In NYC and most of the US even today, non-northern European foods are termed "ethnic". This epithet is a kiss of death, a poison ivy that looks beautiful but stings viscerally and damns for life. Food is something we have to indulge in to survive – all of us. Each of us has our comfort food. Then there is "gourmet food", the "aspirational cuisines", the "fine cuisines", the "classy cuisines", the "expensive cuisines", the "fancy" ones, the "premium" ones. Ethnic food falls into none of these categories.

It was in the mid-1990s that my friend Ed Schoenfeld, the acclaimed Chinese restaurateur and owner of Red Farm, NYC, took the *New York Times* food critic Ruth Reichl and I to Pings in Queens for what he promised would be the best Chinese meal in town. It was a given that the restaurant wouldn't get two stars. Just the

fact that we would leave Manhattan meant the loss of one of those rarefied stars. And then there was the "ethnic" element. The food was, after all, Chinese. Nothing was said, nothing was overt, but the word hung in the air. Ruth couldn't have been more

gracious, more in awe, more inclusive, more forward in her thinking and appreciation, in her celebration and in her review. Pings got one star, the first serious review for an "ethnic restaurant" in a borough. It also made Queens look good at a time when it was even more marginalised than it is now as a not-so-gentle part of the city.

Two and a half decades have passed since I first became aware of the restaurant scene in New York and started paying attention to the word "ethnic" and its baggage. The word has only gotten dirtier and more muddled in jingoism. I am still most often introduced as an "ethnic chef," my cookbooks characterised as "ethnic cookbooks", my food called "ethnic food". This, when I have been one of the lucky few who have achieved a lot in the world of *culinaria*. How dare I complain? I have no reason to – I am a lucky exception.

But even I, in my day-to-day life, when I am not the lucky "ethnic boy" whose "ethnic food" gets rave reviews in newspapers and magazines, quickly become the other. Called slurs that are too dirty and hateful to mention, even shaken up physically, and profiled at airports in cities where I go to be feted on local television and to speak at forums. My success in certain circles can't alter the established mindset. My legend is too small to impact the nation as a whole, my story too insignificant to change the thinking of the majority towards the "ethnic" other.

At the Culinary Institute of America, where I chair the Asian Studies Center, every care is being taken to educate a



"Conti Cuisine" is what the food of northern Europe is called at institutes of culinary education across India. More emphasis is given to this cuisine than the incredible cuisines of the regions of India

new cadre of chefs and operators to think of cuisine as a world of diverse flavours, and not in the archaic chauvinistic manner. They are making every effort to lose the term "ethnic cuisine" and instead talk about "world cuisine". In fact, the cuisines of the non-northern European nations are getting a lot of play in their corridors and in their thought leadership conferences. Sometimes I feel bad for the old guard when I see them on the sidelines, feeling as neglected as we "ethnic" types once did.

What I have not yet seen is a bold and daring change in most culinary institutes elsewhere – including in nations that were once colonised and marginalised – where native food ways and culinary traditions are given any place of pride in education or even in societal acceptance. The colonised, now free, are colonising their own landscape through a post-colonised mindscape. "Conti Cuisine" is what the food of northern Europe is called at institutes of culinary education across India. More emphasis is given to this cuisine – a bastardised version of the original – than to the incredible cuisines of the regions of India. The mindset that perpetuates it, the colonisers' superiority, is in many ways even more flawed than that of the colonisers themselves. Until the nations of the

world that are not part of the northern European geography wake up to take pride in their own cultures and cuisines and start collecting, celebrating and sharing recipes from their own nations, the world that is beyond their shores will certainly find them other, lesser and poorer in more ways than one. We all ought to celebrate a world of flavours, not just a region of flavours.

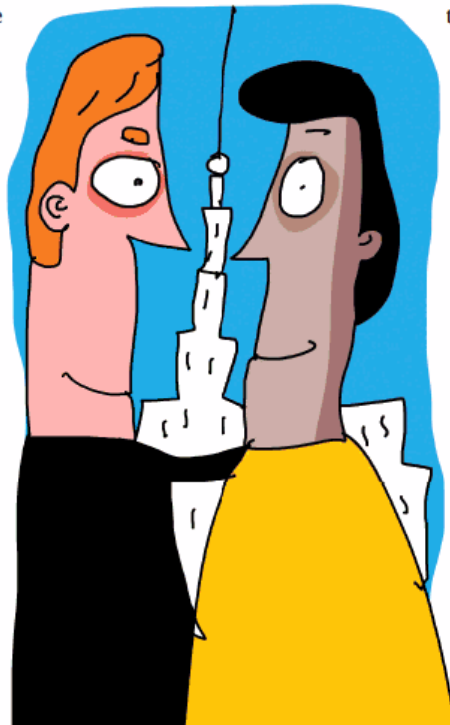
Is it possible to use the word "ethnic" to simply connect us to a race and geography, and let go of its use in a deeper cultural context? Is it not preferable to have the food of the people of France be called French and that of the people of India be called Indian, and of the people of China, Chinese, and so on? Why should cuisines from the US,

France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Spain and other nations big and small that we consider part of northern Europe thrive in privileged entitlement and be considered "high end", even if not called as such, while the cuisines of the rest of the world are labelled "ethnic" and as a result languish in the hidden nuances that deem them strange, unequal, dirty, cheap, other and worse?

We must all rise, as civilised people, and make this world that "one world, one people, one global village" that we all hoped we could become with the dawning of the internet age.

Is that too much to ask? Am I speaking of utopia? Does "ethnic food" – the food most often associated with deeply, deliciously comforting flavours eaten by the majority of the world, food that is often rooted in spiritual, seasonal and local context – not have any chance of being given the respect that is afforded to the foods that had the good luck of arriving with the colonists? ■

Delhi-based Saran is a chef and author



:: Faizal Khan

Take a look at the number of Indian films that went to the Cannes, Venice and Berlin film festivals, respectively, this year: 0, 1, 3.

1, 1, 1. These are the number of Indian movies that showed at Cannes, Venice and Berlin last year.

0, 0, 1. These are the number of Indian movies that showed at Cannes, Venice and Berlin, respectively, in 2017. It must be added that no Indian film has made it to the hallowed main competition section of these big three festivals in a very long time.

Now consider these numbers for '19, '18 and '17: 4, 6 and 5. These are the number of Indian films at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), a happy playing ground for Indian cinema. While TIFF is not a competitive festival, it is a prelude to the Oscar season – and often Oscar success.

4 to Reckon With

Indian films in TIFF's official selection

Jallikattu

Lijo Jose Pellissery

The film is a series of spectacular portraits painting the savagery of man

"Jallikattu is about the disappearing space between man and beast"



"Women filmmakers represent the best of Indian filmmaking"

Cameron Bailey, Artistic director, TIFF

A bull ran through TIFF's official selection this year, which has movies like American director Todd Phillips' *Joker* – placing the *Batman* villain in the backdrop of the Occupy Wall Street movement – and Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit*, a takedown of fascism in the story of a German boy and his imaginary best friend, Adolf Hitler. The bull belongs to the Malayalam filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery whose *Jallikattu* is one of the four Indian films at Toronto.

A couple of years ago, Pellissery knew he had a film in hand when he finished reading a short story about a bull breaking free from a butcher's block. "Maoist", the story by Malayalam writer S Hareesh, had a profound impact on the filmmaker, who had by then completed *Angamaly Diaries* (2017). Yet, there was one element that worried Pellissery: "I didn't know how to handle the animal."

When *Jallikattu* premiered at TIFF, it



Bombay Rose

Gitanjali Rao
It is an animated feature film painted frame by frame



The Sky Is Pink

← Shonali Bose

It is the only Asian movie in the prestigious Gala section

"The badge of honour of a TIFF selection is important for an Indian filmmaker"



Moothon

Geetu Mohandas
It handles LGBTQ theme with a rare sensitivity

was evident that Pellissery had mastered the mind of the bull. The film is a series of spectacular portraits painting the savagery of man. "It is about the disappearing space between man and beast," says Pellissery, whose last film *Ee.Ma.Yau* was highly acclaimed. He turns *Jallikattu* into a visceral exploration of lynching and the violent streak in our society.

Three of the four Indian movies at TIFF are directed by women. *The Sky Is Pink* by

Shonali Bose is the only Asian movie in the prestigious Gala Presentations. "The badge of honour of a TIFF selection is important for an Indian filmmaker," says Bose, whose *Margarita with a Straw* won the Best Asian Film NETPAC Award in Toronto in 2014. "When my first film *Amu* premiered at Berlin in 2005, Cameron Bailey (TIFF's artistic director) was in the audience and brought it to Toronto," she recalls. Bailey, who scouts for films in India every year, also discovered Assamese filmmaker Rima Das, premiering her feature film, *Village Rockstars*, at TIFF in 2017. After its Toronto success, it went on to win the National Award for Best Film and became India's official entry to the Oscars.

About women directors dominating Indian cinema at TIFF this year, Bailey says, "It is not by design; they represent the best of Indian filmmaking."

"There is a welcome home for Indian filmmakers at TIFF," he says. It all began in 1994 when the fest, initially called Festival of Festivals, was renamed TIFF. That year there were 26 Indian films in the official selection, including a focus on

Mani Ratnam. In 2012, it screened 10 films on Mumbai, including Anand Gandhi's *Ship of Theseus*, in its now-defunct *City to City* programme.

TIFF functions on a not-for-profit platform and dispenses with the snootiness of the big three, opening the festival to the public and instituting an audience prize called the People's Choice Award.

Of Toronto's population of nearly 3 million, more than half a million are South Asians. "There is a strong community of people in Toronto who have close ties to India," says Bailey. "The audience here is informed by Indian cinema, enthusiastic about Indian cinema and is always looking forward to new films from India. It is a relationship built over the years."

The Toronto audience this year was treated to a rare animated feature film, *Bombay Rose*, by Gitanjali Rao, and *Moothon* (The Elder One) by Geetu Mohandas. Painted frame by frame in a Mumbai animation studio, *Bombay Rose* mixes the nostalgia for Hindi cinema of the last century with the dreams of Mumbai's fringe dwellers. It weaves

cats, Konkani songs, Bhojpuri conversations, Adam Levine's lyrics and even a *Lincoln* in the *Bardo*-style gathering of ghosts in a cemetery.

Moothon is an outstanding film, challenging gender and relationships, as it journeys from the calm of Lakshadweep to the clamour of Mumbai. "I wanted a remote place for my film," says Mohandas, whose debut feature, *Liar's Dice*, was a competition entry to the Sundance festival in 2013 before becoming India's official entry to the Oscars.

Could one of the four be travelling further to the Academy Awards on the other side of the border? ■

The writer is a freelance journalist

A Piece of Time

A startup in India is planning to launch watches made using parts of a fighter jet. A look at some timepieces that carry a piece of history

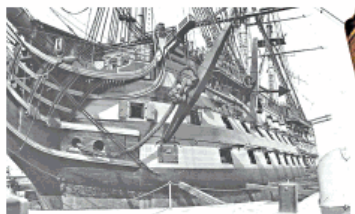
MACH 1 (MIG-21)

Bangalore Watch Company will launch 21 pieces of mechanical watches that will have parts made from the fuselage of a decommissioned MIG-21, the first supersonic fighter jet of the Indian Air Force. The MACH 1 collection will cost ₹48,930-52,430, according to the company's website.



The Inversion Principle (AK-47s)

The Inversion Principle by Fonderie 47 is made partly using repurposed AK-47s. The company claims to have destroyed thousands of assault rifles in central Africa to make the watches, jewellery and pens. Engraved on each watch is the serial number of the gun it was made from. In 2014, the Inversion Principle was launched as a limited edition of 20 pieces, each costing \$195,000.



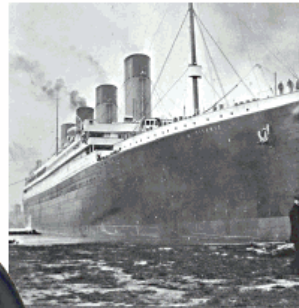
The Bremont Victory (HMS Victory)

The Bremont Victory uses oak timber and copper from the HMS Victory, the 1765 battleship that was Lord Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Before the limited edition watch was launched in 2012, all 40 rose gold watches were sold out. Each costs \$30,000. The 250 steel versions were sold for \$18,500 each.



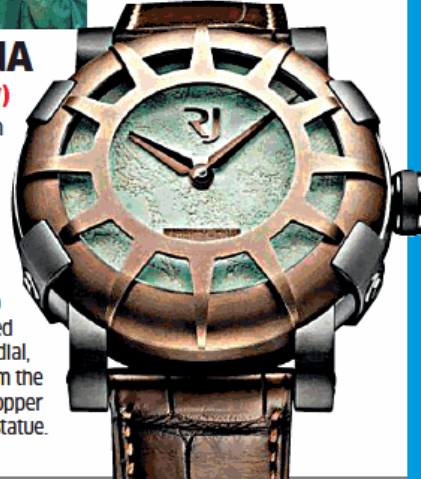
Liberty-DNA (Statue of Liberty)

Romain Jerome did it again with metal from the Statue of Liberty. For the Liberty-DNA collection, it collaborated with the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation as well as Gold Leaf Corporation to make 125 pieces, each priced at \$14,900. The watch's dial, which has the metal from the statue, has an oxidised copper look of the statue.



Titanic-DNA (Titanic)

Geneva watchmaker Romain Jerome purchased a piece of the hull of the Titanic, the oceanliner that sank in 1912, to make the Titanic-DNA collection. The watch has an alloy using the slab from the wreck that was retrieved in 1991. The black dial face is made of lacquer paint that includes coal recovered from the debris field of the wreck site. Jerome made 2,012 watches – costing between \$7,800 and \$173,100 – to coincide with the centenary anniversary of the Titanic's sinking in 2012.



THIS WEEK, THAT YEAR

Sept 15-21

Sept 15, 2008

Wall Street brokerage firm Lehman Brothers files for bankruptcy due to the subprime mortgage crisis. It was the largest bankruptcy filing in history.

Sept 16, 1908

William C Durant sets up General Motors Corporation in Flint, Michigan.



Sept 18, 1998

The US Department of Commerce sets up Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers to maintaining domain name system on the internet. In 2009, it becomes a non-profit organisation.



Sept 19, 1912

New Zealand becomes the first country in the world to grant national voting rights to women.

Sept 20, 1946

The first International Film Festival is held at Cannes. It was organised as an alternative to the Venice film festival.



Sept 21, 1949

Chinese Communist leaders proclaim People's Republic of China and Mao Zedong announces that the new government will be under the leadership of the Communist Party of China.

TEXT: RAM MOHAN

SOURCE: FORBES, ESQUIRE, WATCHTIME.COM, TIMELESSLUXWATCHES.COM, WATCH COMPANIES

SOURCE: ONTHISDAY.COM, HISTORY.COM, TIMEANDDATE.COM

WEEKLY VECTOR

Betting on Gold

Central banks ranked by largest gold holdings as of September 2019 (tonnes)



USA
8,134



GERMANY
3,367



ITALY
2,452



FRANCE
2,436



RUSSIA
2,219



CHINA
1,937



SWITZERLAND
1,040



JAPAN
765

Source: World Gold Council, US Global Investors

Let's Talk About...



Oh yes, let's go there, shall we?
 But, first we should talk about it.

Do you know about the new cruise ship called Celebrity Flora? It is a custom-built superyacht to sustainably explore the Galapagos.

First we should talk about HMS Beagle – the first ship that reached Galapagos with naturalist Charles Darwin on board. That was on this day (September 15) in 1835.

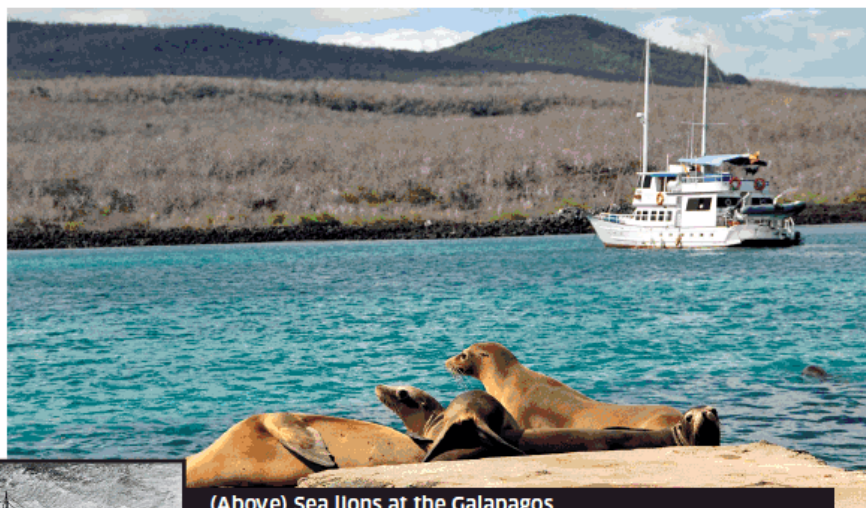
Darwin was on board that?

Yes. And the unique flora and fauna of the archipelago influenced his work, possibly leading to his theory of evolution and natural selection.

Is the uniqueness because Galapagos is located in the middle of the Pacific, 1,000 km off the

Galapagos Islands

PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS BEYOND HEADLINES



(Above) Sea lions at the Galapagos.
 (Left) A sketch of HMS Beagle



Ecuador coast?

Possibly. It's called a living museum and showcase of evolution. Also because it's at the confluence of three ocean

currents, and add to that volcanic activity – there are 21 volcanoes in the island. Out of them, 13 are active.

Intriguing. So what unique life forms does one see there?

Here's a short list – marine iguanas, flightless cormorants, giant tortoises, huge cacti, endemic trees and subspecies of mockingbirds

and finches. Some marine animals are known to swim alongside divers. You should read *The Voyage of the Beagle* by Darwin.

I wasn't thinking books. I was thinking something a bit more immersive.

You had mentioned a sustainable cruise ship.

Yes. Celebrity Flora uses anchorless technology to protect the sea floor. It also converts sea water to fresh water and is more energy efficient than other cruisers.

Sounds exciting. Shall we book?

Text: Suman Layak

GET | LISTEN | DO | BROWSE | WATCH

Xech Grow Station

Smart Desktop Accessory

Get it for: ₹2,379

Does your office desk look boring? Plants can help liven the space up – but you should get a live plant instead of those fake ones that can be spotted from three cubicles away. Xech's Grow Station is a multi-purpose office desk (or home, if you prefer) accessory that serves as an eye-safe LED lamp, fan, pen stand and grow station for your own little plant.

It comes complete with seeding foam, fertiliser, seeds and instructions to get you started on the germination process. It needs a power supply though one is not supplied – you can just connect any phone charger using the supplied micro USB cable. Touch sensitive buttons on the unit control the lighting (on/off plus brightness),

a separate UV LED (tuned for plant growth) and a tiny fan. What is more, there is a full size USB port around the back so that you can plug your phone in to charge as well.

The tiny plastic planter is removable so you can place it outside for a while if needed. It also has a little window that shows you the level of water inside. Keep it hydrated, provide the light it needs and you'll start seeing germination within a week. The whole idea behind the Grow Station is to have an efficient, all-in-one desk accessory, provide some oxygen, airflow and intelligent cultivation. Also makes for a great corporate gift. It is available to purchase on the company's own website (www.xech.com).

— Hitesh Raj Bhagat



Hit The Light

Get it for: Free, for iOS and Android



They say that smashing things up relieves stress. But hang on, not the stuff around you.

There could be a "breakroom" in your city designed for just this where you pay to smash things up. But if not, you could always play a game like Hit The Light. You'll be presented with neon lights in different designs. Your job is to smash them to bits by flinging something from your arsenal. It is pretty satisfying! There are some really convincing sound effects, so be sure to use headphones for full effect. As for your tools, you have metal balls, guns, ninja shrikes and bombs. You can play for free but the game is ad supported – you'll see full screen video ads after each level. You can remove ads with a one-time purchase of ₹249.

— Hitesh Raj Bhagat

PLAY

Fimo - Analog Camera

Get it for: Free, for iOS



Did you also grow up in the time of analog photography? Different film rolls often had different properties in terms of colour, exposure, sharpness and feel. Most smartphone cameras, on the other hand, take very similar photos. And there are many apps that can simulate the look of film too. But this new app Fimo is an instant favourite because of a few reasons. First, the retro camera interface brings back a lot of memories. Second, you can change between many types of film. There is a nice animation, where you open the camera door and swap out film rolls. Third, each film has a distinct look, complete with the day/date imprint. And finally, each photo you capture is saved in high resolution without any watermark. You can fool your friends into thinking you're shooting with an analog film camera.

— Hitesh Raj Bhagat

DOWNLOAD

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etmagazine@timesgroup.com