

10 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

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WHY KAPIL VISWANATHAN

The controversy over fee hike at JNU has raised questions over sustainable models of education in India, and given momentum to the public versus private university debate. As vice-chairman of Krea University, that aims to “help humanity prepare for an unpredictable world”, Kapil Viswanathan believes that the time has come for liberal arts

institutions that focus on ‘interwoven learning’ — combining traditional subjects with critical reasoning, data science. While he admits that the demand-supply gap in college education must be filled by public institutions, the Harvard University graduate also emphasises on the role of private colleges in preparing graduates for the future



“There are 35-40 mn students (in college)... The number needs to be more. Public institutions will have to fill the gap. Given the scale, there is only so much that private colleges can do

UMA VISHNU: How did someone with an MBA from Harvard Business School end up in education?

After my MBA, I started a business. I ran it for 10 years and exited in 2016. As I was getting close to the exit, I was thinking about what to do next. I didn't really feel very inspired to start another business. I wanted to do something more impactful, challenging. In March 2016, I decided to commit to this journey (Krea University). Since then, it has gathered a lot of momentum.

UMA VISHNU: So how did the team behind Krea, including former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan, come together?

It was an idea whose time had come. The first thing that dawned on me when I committed to the journey was that it was far too much for any one or a few people to take on. The conversation had to widen. So I started speaking to people. One thing led to another... Mr R Seshasayee and N Vaghal made a difference in the early days. In September 2016, Raghu (Raghuram Rajan) got fully committed and interested in it.

UMA VISHNU: Why did you decide on a liberal arts university? With the likes of Krea, Ashoka University and Ahmedabad University, are we witnessing a liberal arts era?

The world is changing and humanity is at an inflection point for a couple of very specific reasons. One is that humans and machines have co-existed in the physical form for hundreds of years, but we are now coming together at a cognitive level; boundaries between humans and machines are blurring. The question two-three decades ago was role technology was going to play in our lives. Now that has probably flipped over to what role we are going to play in a technology-driven world... From a human-environment standpoint also there is an inflection point. Humanity's progress has been driven by our desire to conquer the environment. Clearly we have gone, maybe, a little too far. And many of the predictions of the last 20-30 years are starting to come true. To make it more specific... When I was in business school, Google was going IPO and people were wondering how can a company like Google be worth the same as an iconic General Motors. Today, I think, it is worth seven times. A lot has changed now. Even somebody who was in kindergarten then is getting ready to go to college now. If this pace of change continues for the next 15-20 years... it's going to be orders of magnitude higher... how does one prepare for the life and careers of 10-15 years from now? Research tells us that somebody entering the workforce today will not just have to change their jobs but their careers five to six times before they are ready to retire. So we have to break away from thinking of college as preparation for the first job, and really think of education as a preparation for a life-long career and life itself because there is a lot to life beyond work. That is why we all came together to start Krea, to study and understand how the world is changing and to prepare learners for a world of the future.

HARISH DAMODARAN: You could have been one more funder for, say, Ashoka University. Why start something completely new?

We have 35-40 million students in college today, of whom you can imagine how many are really going to actually good universities. So there is a need for hundreds of thousands of institutions of this nature in the country... When we began to think about our research vision to understand how the world is changing, we started polling our governing council and academic council members about what are the five top problems that the world needs to understand and solve in the 21st century... Many of the typical things that you might expect showed up. The human-machine interface, quantum computing, machine intelligence and how it operates with human intelligence is one theme. The second one is around the environment, climate, water... South Asia is facing the largest water crisis it has ever faced in history. We also looked at topics such as demographics, because the population of the world is expected to age substantially. In smaller species like roundworms they have already expanded life spans by 6X. So a roundworm that lives for 15 days can now live up to 90 days with a small genetic modification. Now 6X in the human life span... I will let you do the math. So we are starting to direct our research across these four hubs — intelligence; environment; sapiens, where we look at migration, poverty; and hub of capital and markets.

The other aspect is ethics. In a world where machines are, let's say, driving a lot of economic activity, and in a world where inequality has largely been addressed through the use of machines for economic

‘The kind of questions they ask... The 17-year-old of today is nothing like the 17-yr-old of a few years ago’

Vice-Chairman and co-founder of Krea University Kapil Viswanathan talks about preparing learners for a world of the future, admits bridging gap between traditional and new education models is a challenge, and believes institutions must chase excellence, not rankings



Kapil Viswanathan with Senior Associate Editor Uma Vishnu in *The Indian Express* newsroom. Gajendra Yadav

productivity, what is human purpose? How are we going to spend our time? The 6X time that we are going to have... These are some topics that we starting to study.

HARISH DAMODARAN: Can an undergraduate mind handle the things that you are talking about?

We are definitely adding Master's and PhD programmes in the near future... However, I have been blown away by the kind of kids that I have been spending a little bit of time with. When I was 17, I certainly did not have this kind of perspective... The kind of questions that they come up with, the kind of discussions... It's just mind blowing... The 17-year-old of today is nothing like the 17-year-old of a few years ago.

UMA VISHNU: So what does an undergraduate at Krea typically do?

We have just completed the first trimester. Our students did three courses in the first trimester — creativity, reasoning, communication. This pattern is going to continue in the second and third trimesters in the first year. Our students are now studying data science. Next trimester, ethics will come in. From the second and third year onwards, they branch into specific majors. Even there we are trying to break the mould and not really thinking of even an economics major in the way it is currently thought of. Economics in the 21st century is very different from economics of say 40-50 years ago. Economics pre-2008 and post-2008 is completely different. Yet, I think, the traditional instruction in economics has not really changed that much in universities across the world.

UNNI RAJEN SHANKER: How is the university funded? How is the funding pattern different and what are the advantages of such a model?

We are a fully charitable, not-for-profit cause, both *de facto* and *de jure*. A lot of the initial funds have come through generous contributions from members of our governing council and companies in India etc. In order for any one donor not to have undue influence over the university, and to maintain good governance, we capped the contribution limit.

MONOJIT MAJUMDAR: For an institution like this to be sustainable, you need the faculty, among other things, to be consistently ahead of the curve. Is that a challenge?

If we see something as a challenge, it is that. To make a university you need faculty, and you need students. So far we have been

attracting the kind of faculty that we really want. These are folks who are not just highly qualified in the traditional sense, but they are also folks who are raring to break the mould. It's a combination of fresh young PhDs, almost millennial, and therefore in sync with what we are doing, and there are also people who have been in the system for years, who are frustrated with the system and are looking for an opportunity to do things differently.

We also have these research centres. One is J-PAL South Asia, which is Abhijit Banerjee's... Our sponsoring body, IFMR, has been doing his and Esther's (Dufo) work in India for the last 12 years. We have an initiative for gender that works on what works for women in the workplace in India, funded by the Gates Foundation.

NANDAGOPAL RAJAN: Your university has a very forward looking vision for education, but you have students who are coming from a very 'backward' system. How do you bridge the gap?

It is a challenge that we are facing. Actually, we all come from the same system. We have to constantly keep reminding ourselves that there is this trade-off between the practical and the ideal. On the one hand we are setting a very lofty ideal and we want to stick to it as closely as we can, and on the other hand we are dealing with these practical constraints. For example, in our math reasoning class this past trimester, a good chunk of the students, maybe a third of them, hadn't taken maths after Class 10. So we need to have bridge programmes. From next year, we could have foundation modules online which students could complete before they join us. That is one solution. But it's a real problem... Understanding and preparing for a world

of the future doesn't start when you are 17, it starts much early. Even the draft education policy focuses on early education.

KARISHMA MEHROTRA: You mentioned having faculty who were frustrated with the system. Do you see any sort of political clamping down on free academic research in the country?

I have only been in this realm for the past three years, and Krea has not encountered any such constraints. It's not something we are losing sleep over. I think being in south of India has its advantages.

NEETI NIGAM: Only 14 per cent of researchers are women. At the PhD level, the number falls drastically. How do you plan to address this?

India as a country has a long way to go in terms of gender equality and labour participation, as well as in various other aspects of gender equality. So research is one area where we would like to make a dent. We have this centre that we have set up in collaboration with the Gates Foundation last year where we are trying to study what would encourage or help women succeed more in the workplace. We are trying to take a more holistic approach.

SHALINI LANGER: Where do you stand on the Jawaharlal Nehru University fees controversy, protests on campus, and the debate over private versus public education?

I don't know what I can say on the JNU controversy. I am not involved with JNU. But students will be students always.

Public versus private... There are 35-40 million people studying in India, whereas the number needs to be two, three, four times that much. I think public institutions

will really have to fill that gap. Private institutions can play a role, but given the scale of the challenge in India... A private institution like ours, with our 240-acre campus, at steady state we could have about 10,000-12,000 students, as against the 30-40 million who are studying today... As a private institution, you can only do so much.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: With more and more private universities coming up, are we witnessing an economic divide in education?

In a country like India, higher education is itself segmented. The fact that one is going to college itself means that he or she is better off than most of the fellow citizens. I can't speak of private institutions as a category, but speaking for ourselves, we have a policy where a student gets admitted to Krea on merit. If they are able to establish their lack of means to pay the fees, then we will support them with scholarships and financial aid. It is intended to be entirely meritocratic and diverse.

UNNI RAJEN SHANKER: What is the possibility of universities such as Krea turning into elite bubbles?

The possibility certainly exists. But we are guarding against it very actively. We have an outreach team that goes out to schools that are not typically the schools from where students would automatically apply. There are dozens of examples and many such students have joined us.

HARISH DAMODARAN: If you look at the balance sheets of Harvard University, MIT, their fees don't even cover faculty salaries...

Without commenting specifically on India, there is a 'for profit' education world that exists. But if you are looking at the not-for-profit education world globally, even the top universities, with billions (of dollars) of endowments, do not break even on fees. Approximately, a third of the budget shortfall gets filled in by endowment contributions and interests from endowments. We would like to have a \$30 billion endowment and hopefully we will get there someday. But even at 12,000 (students), I think we will get to a point where we can sustain ourselves and we may not need further endowments to keep afloat. But if we were to invest aggressively in research like the way we are considering, raising philanthropic contributions is an ongoing structural function for any university, like the top universities of the world which do it despite their billions of dollars.

MALLICA JOSHI: In our policy we are moving from a grant-based system in public institutions to a loan-based system. How can public universities fit into the loan-based model, without burdening students who come from very diverse backgrounds?

The cost of delivering education is almost same, whether it is a private or public university. Public universities can have lower fees as they receive subsidies from the government. If those subsidies turn into loans, it's not going to change the cost of delivering education... Some of the better universities across India are calling upon their alumni very aggressively and that is certainly an untapped resource for public institutions. It's one way of filling the gap.

MALLICA JOSHI: Indian universities have not fared very well in international rankings. Why do you think that is the case?

My personal view is that there is an overemphasis on rankings. It is great that there are some universities in India that are getting into the Top 500. But looking at it from the national as well as institutional levels, I think the national imperatives for higher education are not entirely consistent with the imperatives of a ranking. You have to calibrate for the state that a country is in and its goals and objectives... For us, it is important to focus on innovation and look at a broad set of parameters for excellence and not just rankings...

MEHR GILL: While universities such as Krea and Ashoka focus on subjects such as critical reasoning etc, the students have to ultimately compete for jobs that seek traditional skills...

Is there a proven path for people with this skill set? No, because we are just sort of paving the road now... Placement processes will set in as the market starts to understand and accept (this model). There are pockets in the market that already understand and want this (model).

UMA VISHNU: How difficult is it to set up a private university in India?

A lot of things need to fall in place. You need a series of fortuitous incidents like we had. For example, the government of Andhra Pradesh had just introduced a new education Bill which was welcoming of private universities. That opened up the regulatory pathway for us, which is extremely important for granting degrees. Not all states have this. The second is land and resources. And the third is to get the right group of people coming together.



“If you are looking at not-for-profit education world globally, even the top universities, with billions of dollars of endowments, do not break even on fees. A third of the shortfall is filled in by endowment

11 SUNDAY STORY

Vashishtha's world

He was the maths genius who, in the '60s, streaked a path from Bihar to Berkeley. Sometime soon after, Vashishtha Narayan Singh slipped into mental illness, leaving behind a thesis, a few letters, some scribbles on the wall, and a million questions. After his death last month, UMA VISHNU travels to his home to find out what adds up and what doesn't

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ACARELESS sequence of numbers? A hidden matrix? A child's number game? They lay scribbled on the pink wall of his ancestral home, the way Vashishtha Narayan Singh had written them some day. Much like the man who had written them, the numbers spoke little.

But on November 14, when the 73-year-old died, the numbers came to life for the first time. Visitors walked into the windowless room by the courtyard, peered at the wall by his bed and tilted their heads this way and that to look at the digits — these and others. "What are they?" "Don't know. But has to be the work of a genius," they all agreed.

"Genius" hangs heavy over Basantpur, the small village of mostly brick homes in Bihar's Bhojpur district from where Singh started off on a remarkable journey in the 1960s, the kind few in these parts had made before him, or have since. The eldest of a police constable's five children, Singh, who was far ahead of his BSc First Year class at Patna Science College, held a PhD in mathematics by age 23 from the University of California, Berkeley.

It was, however, a journey that sputtered early, ending with Singh being diagnosed with schizophrenia, forcing him into a shell of his own, a world where few had access to and from where he rarely emerged.

This is where his story begins — also where Vashishtha Narayan Singh ceases to tell his story and those around him take over. In their version of things, he is at times John Nash, the American mathematician who won the Nobel for his work on game theory but who struggled with paranoid schizophrenia and whose life inspired the Oscar-winning *A Beautiful Mind*. At other times, he is the "NASA scientist" who fixed a glitch in the space agency's computers that had packed up "moments before" the launch of the Apollo human spaceflight mission in 1969. Mostly, he is all of this, "adbut insaan", "jaane-mane gamithagya" (well-known mathematician) and more.

But this is not a story of a 'gifted mind' or his 'achievements', but of what could have been.

Sitting on a small mound outside the family home in Basantpur, a gaggle of nephews interrupting constantly to offer their version of the man, Ayodhya Prasad Singh narrates his elder brother's magical journey. "He was different from all of us. I could only study up to Intermediate and my youngest brother did his graduation. *Bhai sahib toh alog hi the. Kya kahen unke baare mein* (He was different. What do I say about him)," says Ayodhya, 63, who retired as a subedar in the Army and with whose family Singh spent his last six years at a flat in Patna. "I was 10 years younger. So all through my childhood, he was in Natarhat."

After Class 6 at the village middle school, Singh had cracked the entrance exams for Natarhat, a residential school near Ranchi, in what was then unified Bihar, that has produced some of Bihar's most illustrious bureaucrats, academics and professionals — former DGP and two-time BJP MP V D Ram, former chief vigilance commissioner Pratyush Sinha and former chief secretary SK Sinha, among others.

Singh's friends at Natarhat remember him as the boy who spent most of his time studying. "Natarhat put a lot of emphasis on extra-curricular activities and sports. The students were divided into A, B, C and D teams, with those in A the most sporty and D filled with nerds. Vashishthaji was in Team D. I remember, during the hockey class, those in Team D would all be sitting, hockey sticks resting by them, discussing books, theorems and phi-

losophy," says Dr Ajay Kumar, Director of Urology at Patna's Paras Hospital, who was three years Singh's junior at Natarhat.

After higher secondary (10+1 in those days) at Natarhat in 1963, Singh joined Patna Science College for his BSc First Part. It's here that the story of Singh the mathematician takes shape, with minor variations in each telling.

In college, he is said to have often been too good for his maths teachers, once even telling one of them that there were other ways to solve a sum than how the teacher had just done. That 'defiance' led to Singh being dragged to then principal and mathematician Professor Nagendra Nath's room, who was so impressed that he got Singh to skip two years of BSc and sit straightaway for his BSc Final Year exam, which he cleared in 1964. The following year, Professor John L. Kelley of the University of California, who was visiting Professor Nath, heard of the teenager's talent and asked if he could take him to the US.

That's how the Bhojpur-speaking boy from Basantpur ended up on the Berkeley campus at age 19, where he did his MSc and later his PhD. This was the Berkeley of the Sixties, when the campus erupted in demonstrations that were part of the larger Free Speech Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War protests. There's little known of Singh's days in Berkeley or if any of the events on campus influenced him — despite emails sent by *The Sunday Express* to professors in the mathematics department at Berkeley, and to Singh's contemporaries, who had the same supervisor in Kelley, little was known about the man. Kelley himself died in 1999.

But in the letters Singh wrote there are glimpses of the man, the life he left behind and the one he had walked into.

In a letter to his friend Ram Prasad, at IIT Kharagpur, Singh says he was happy to read his letter in Hindi, "koi asuvidha nahin hui (it was no trouble)". He goes on to say that he is in his fourth year at Berkeley and making "good progress". The air mail dated October 31, 1968, with a John F Kennedy stamp, was sent from 301, Campbell Hall, which houses Berkeley's programmes in astronomy, astrophysics and experimental physics.

Coming from a family with limited means, Singh, in these letters, appears struck by the West's prosperity that opened doors to education. "Yahan ke madhyamvargiya parivar dhani hain. Zaroorat ki cheezein unke paas hain aur apne bachchon ki shiksha-diksha par dhyan dete hain (The middle class here is rich. They have everything they need and ensure their children are educated)," he says.

In another letter, dated February 10, 1968, this time to father Lal Bahadur Singh, Singh is the concerned elder brother, asking for his sister Sita Babbi's wedding plans to be put off. Upset that Sita's education was being discontinued — "badi galti (big mistake)", he calls it — he says the money kept aside for her marriage would have been better utilised on studies instead. "Aap Sita Babbi ko angrezi padhne ko kahiyen aur meri kitabon ko padkar ganit seekhne ko kahiyen (Please tell her to learn English, and to learn maths from my books)," he says, adding that he can even arrange for her to be brought to the US. Before he signs off, asking his father to take care of his health, Singh instructs his siblings to concentrate on their English and science.

Singh's nephew Mukesh, Ayodhya's elder son, says that following the letter, Sita's wedding was called off and she went on to do her graduation. She now lives in Patna.

There is no hint in any of his letters of a mind in turmoil. Yet, by some accounts, it was around this time that the mental illness

crept in. Some say it began soon after his PhD paper, others that it was after he returned to India in 1971, and still others blame his state of mind on his failed marriage. "He got married in 1973, to a girl from Chapra, but the relationship lasted two years. That left him in a shock from which he never quite recovered," says Ayodhya. The family says they did not keep in touch with her.

Back in India, Singh worked short stints in IIT-Kanpur, the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) in Kolkata and Mumbai's Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, but he could never hold these jobs.

CV Rao, who was on the ISI, Kolkata, faculty for decades starting the early 1970s, around the time Singh joined, remembers the quiet man in the mathematics department who rarely said anything beyond a "hello". "He came with a formidable reputation as this young, promising mathematician. He stayed on campus with his parents. But soon, his illness showed up and the family left. If I remember correctly, the ISI even got him admitted to Lumbini Park Mental Hospital," says Rao, who is now Adjunct Professor at the Chennai Mathematical Institute.

As a final-year M.Stat student on the ISI campus in 1972, Shashi Mohan Srivastava remembers Singh teaching him a course on topology. "But he was very unwell, not fit to teach. He had forgotten even the basic definitions of topology. Most of the time, he would tell my wife Haimanti Sarbadhikary, who was a research scholar then, to take the class," says Srivastava, who is now a visiting faculty at Kolkata's Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science.

As his condition worsened, Singh spent 11 years, from 1976 until his father's death in

1987, at the Central Institute of Psychiatry in Kanke, Ranchi.

In 1989, says Ayodhya, he decided to take Singh along when he was posted to Pune. The two were on a train, along with a niece, when, around 3.30 am, Ayodhya woke up to realise Singh wasn't around. "We later found he had got off at Gadarpur station, between Jabalpur and Itarsi. We searched for him everywhere, but couldn't find him," says Ayodhya.

Four years later, in 1993, two men from Basantpur who had gone shopping for their sister's wedding found Singh at Doriganj, Chapra. A friend of Singh's points to the "little-known coincidence" that Doriganj is close to where Singh's ex-wife comes from.

"Nobody knows how he got there, but there he was, picking something out of a garbage dump," says Ayodhya, who was then posted in Leh.

The news of the disheveled "mathematical genius", his clothes in tatters and with matted hair and beard, was splashed across newspapers. Politicians and the media lamented the neglect of "Bihar's son of the soil". Then chief minister Lalu Prasad got Singh admitted to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru on February 15, 1993, while then defence minister Mulayam Singh Yadav ensured Ayodhya got a posting in the city to be able to stay closer to his brother.

When he was next posted to Jalandhar, Ayodhya brought Singh to their village, where he spent the following six years.

It was around this time that some members of the Natarhat Old Boys Association (NOBA), a close-knit alumni group, got in touch with the family and suggested that they move Singh to Patna to ensure he received good medical care. As NOBA chipped in with financial aid, some of his old friends, seniors and juniors at Natarhat called on him, hoping their presence would light a spark in his mind.

Dr Birendra Kumar, Singh's batchmate and among those closest to him in his last few days, says, "After school, we went our separate ways — he enrolled for

his BSc and I for medicine. After I got to know of his condition, around September 2013, I visited him at his flat in Kulhariya complex, Patna. I asked him in Bhojpur, 'Vashishtha bhai, remember you were in Vikramshila and I in Takshashila'. Those were the names of our hostels in Natarhat. But he didn't respond. I sat there for an hour. After a while, when I again tried to remind him of our Natarhat days, he said, 'Haan, haan. Theek ba.'"

Kumar says he then promised himself that he would visit Singh more often. During these weekly visits, Singh spoke little, but more than he had ever spoken before, once even calling up Kumar.

Often, Kumar gave Singh what he cherished the most — a notebook and a pen. "There was nothing that made him happier," says Kumar. Other NOBA members, such as Professor Prabhat Ranjan, now Vice-Chancellor of D Y Patil International University in Pune, took it upon themselves to help Singh reclaim a bit of his past. His books were brought from the ancestral home and kept in three steel book shelves in his room. A study table was set up with his books, paper and pens near at hand.

There, says Ayodhya, Singh spent all his time writing. Nobody knew what he wrote, but he wrote — on walls, in foolscap notebooks, on the glossy pages of magazines, on his brother's back. The pen held between his swollen fingers, these were mostly un-

intelligible scrawls in a loopy handwriting — four lines on the Ramayana, a reference to food on another page, his signature on another. And then, the numbers. "Often at night, I would find him sleeping with the pen between his fingers. He would also wake up at night to read a book and, having read some pages, put it back neatly on the shelf," says Ayodhya.

He would also occasionally try his hand at the flute or the tabla — something that first-year students at Natarhat were mandatorily taught.

"I will live with a big regret. I can't help feeling that if we had intervened earlier, if all of us at NOBA, the government, the society had reached out to him earlier, he probably wouldn't have slipped away the way he did," says Kumar, who retired as Director, Health Services, Jharkhand government.

"He spoke little, hardly complained. He didn't recognise most of us, would simply call everyone 'babua'. But he was one of the calmest people I have known. *Na faltu bolna, kiya toh theek, nahin kiya toh bhi theek* (No needless talk, happy if you did something for him, and fine if you didn't). I wonder what was going on inside him, how he dealt with all that pain," says Ayodhya, his face wracked by grief.

At the ancestral home in Basantpur, the plastic chairs on the mound are pushed back and everybody is on their feet. Former Ara MP Meena Singh of the JD(U) is visiting, and the chairs are placed in the central courtyard for her. As neighbours and other family members stand around, Meena Singh speaks with practised pauses, mourning the death of "itne vidwan aadmi (such a knowledgeable man)".

The NASA reference comes up again. "Kehte hain NASA ke space programme ka jab computer fail ho gaya, toh Vashishthaji ne apna dimag lagaya, jo machine se bhi tez hai, aur use theek kar diya tha."

Those standing around the courtyard nod.

Mukesh, Ayodhya's elder son, who is observing a strict *vidhi* (mourning period), says the family has a few "demands" — a Bharat Ratna, "nothing less than that", for Singh; naming a Central university after him; and state-organised celebrations of Singh's birthday on April 2.

"*Chhumnami mein zindagi jee hai, ab kam se kam jaane ke bad log unhein yaad rakhen* (He lived a life of anonymity. At least in his death, people should remember him)," says Mukesh, a graduate, who in 2015 quit his job as nodal officer with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to "look after the family". Before she leaves, the ex-MP, enthused by the idea of celebrations to mark Singh's birthday, promises she will ensure their demands reach Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Dr Sachchidanand Singh, Assistant Professor at Patna Medical College Hospital's Psychiatry Department, recalls the day in 2016 Singh came to see him — past Gate No. 2, past the transformer, past the Devi Mandir, holding his flute and two books. "He had come with his brother. He was lost in his own world, kept muttering to himself, he was hearing voices in his head. He had something we call undifferentiated schizophrenia, a kind of psychosis with hallucination, delusion etc as symptoms. His condition improved significantly after treatment, but the life expectancy of such patients usually comes down by 10 years," the doctor says.

"His story can be compared to another great mathematician," the doctor adds. "Have you seen *A Beautiful Mind*? John Nash. Two brilliant minds, but two very different endings to their story." Christopher Plummer, who plays Nash's doctor Rosen in the movie, says: "You can't come up with a formula to change the way you experience the world." Had Singh come up with that formula? Was it 20 22 23? Or just a careless sequence of numbers?

Illustration: Suvajit Dey

Of Hilbert space and vectors

In 1969, Vashishtha Narayan Singh published his PhD paper '*Reproducing Kernels and Operators with a Cyclic Vector*'. An overview of the dissertation that was supervised by John L Kelley

DEBASHISH GOSWAMI

DR VASHISHTHA Narayan Singh's dissertation paper, the only one he published on that problem, is about the structure of a certain class of bounded linear operators on Hilbert spaces, which is in the sub-area called 'Operator Theory' of maths.

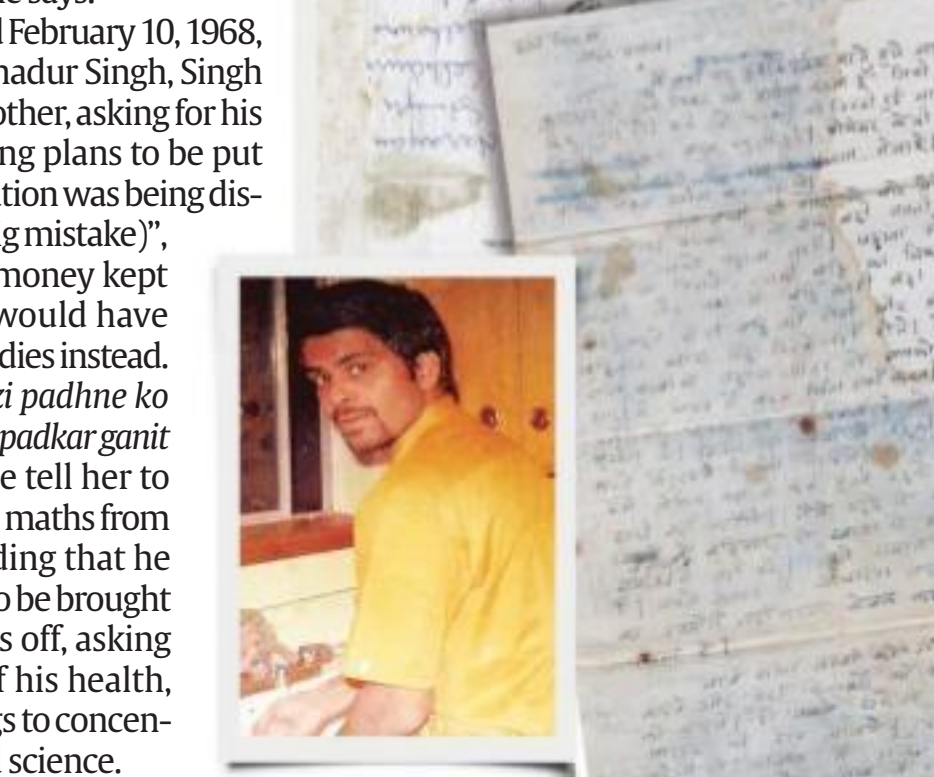
A Hilbert space is a (possibly infinite dimensional) mathematical structure (a set with some operations) whose elements (called vectors) can be added, dilated or scaled by some number and there are also notions of some kind of 'angles' and distance between such vectors, including a 'zero element' which does not change any other element by addition.

This is a generalisation of a two-dimensional plane or three-dimensional space. (Linear) Operators on such spaces can be roughly thought of as some kind of infinite matrices. Recall that a (finite) matrix is nothing but a rectangular array of numbers arising typically to solve simultaneous linear equations in more than one unknown variable. For example, given the price of 2 kg rice + 3 kg wheat and also 3 kg rice + 5 kg wheat, if we want to find the prices of rice and wheat per kg, we will need to write a 2 by 2 matrix and solve the corresponding equations. Operators on Hilbert spaces turn out to be very important in physics, specially in quantum mechanical models and many other areas of physical and social sciences.

The theory of operators is thus an important branch and Dr Singh's paper seems to study the structure of a (relatively simple) class of operators. It was a decent paper for a PhD student but it has only one citation, which means it did not really make any substantial breakthrough. It was published in a standard journal, the *Pacific Journal of Mathematics*.

I did like the writing style and clarity of arguments, which is quite commendable for a first paper by a very young student. It seems that the author did not continue the study of such operators afterwards. The work might have been of some relevance at that time, but the subject has advanced a lot since then and now the results obtained in that paper are unlikely to get much attention.

The writer is a professor at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata



(Clockwise from top) Former JD(U) MP Meena Singh at Vashishtha Narayan Singh's family home; letters he wrote from Berkeley to his friend, father; Singh at Berkeley

Thrice-born

It's an unusual alliance born of the most unusual of circumstances. As Sena, NCP and Congress form a government in Maharashtra, MAYURA JANWALKAR travels to two constituencies where the Sena was in direct contest with the two pre-poll allies to see how they are looking at it on the ground



Prashant Nadkar

SHRIVARDHAN MLA: NCP'S ADITI TATKARE

Taken aback, NCP bastion points out: Country is watching, Pawar holds the key

THE SLEEPY coastal town of Shrivardhan has spent the past few days glued to television sets, witnessing the political drama unfolding about 170 km away in Mumbai. The Assembly constituency nurtured by former NCP minister Sunil Tatkare watched incredulously as the party played the lead role in forging an alliance with arch rival Shiv Sena. Now, the word on the streets of this town in Raigad district, lined with hotels and home-stays leading to its spotless beach, is whether the unlikely allies are up for the challenges that lie ahead.

As locals express apprehension over the NCP joining hands with the Sena, the NCP's Shrivardhan City secretary, Naresh Pulekar, admits the decision could leave the voters feeling helpless. "More than the alliance with the Sena, people in Shrivardhan were upset when Ajit *dada* (Pawar) went with the BJP. But that has been remedied. We have a lot of Muslims in the Assembly constituency and voters started feeling like they have no one to look out for them. I think voters should have a say in which way their candidate goes," says Pulekar.

He adds that as a part of the alliance, he expects the Sena to change. Points out the 71-year-old retired primary schoolteacher, "The Shiv Sena has been a religion-oriented party but it is now allied with parties that have always been secular. So it will have to mellow its Hindutva."

However, even Pulekar's son Sachin, who runs a computer hardware store, believes the NCP will have a hard time convincing people about this. "My father can

sources minister. A local strongman, Tatkare is credited with development of the town, a push to its tourism industry and promotion of small businesses. This time, he contested the Lok Sabha polls and defeated the Sena's six-time MP and then Union Minister for Heavy Industries, Anant Geete.

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Next up for action is a basket of *surmai* (seer fish), topped by a large sting ray with blood-shot eyes. The jetty is stacked with fishing nets of at least ten varying weaves and thickness. The catch that the fisherfolk bring back after at least four days at sea, travels as far as markets in Indapur (50 km away) and Mandgaon (45 km away) after the auction.

An NCP supporter, Kashinath Chumkar, 54, a member of the Shrikrishna Machchimar Sahakari Sanstha, also believes the alliance will run on Pawar power. "Sharad Pawar is the boss. He is the one who will make this government run," he says, adding that they celebrated the swearing-in of Uddhav Thackeray as Chief Minister by bursting firecrackers.

Chandrakant Waghe, 61, the chairman of the fisherman's cooperative society, says that while the alliance took them by surprise, people can take comfort from the fact that a government is finally in place. "We hope work will continue as usual. Time will tell how the alliance fares," Waghe says.

The senior Pulekar says what happens with the Maha Vikas Aghadi would also have portents for the rest of the country. "It will have an impact on alliances across India that are looking to out the BJP," he says, adding that it is in keeping this tie-up together that real leadership would emerge.

Amit Chakravarty



(Clockwise from left) Party flags of the new allies flutter together at the swearing-in ceremony of Uddhav Thackeray as Chief Minister; NCP's Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena's Uddhav Thackeray, and Congress's Balasaheb Thorat at a meeting; fishermen with their catch of the day at the jetty in Shrivardhan

EXPLAINED

All eyes on the Maharashtra tie-up

THE SHIV Sena, NCP and Congress have survived a trial by fire to form the government in Maharashtra. However, a bigger test lies ahead for the three parties, which hold conflicting ideologies, barely papered over by a Common Minimum Programme.

It's not only the BJP, smarting from its Maharashtra loss, that is waiting for the alliance to collapse under the weight of these contradictions. Feeling the onslaught of the Modi might, opposition parties across the country will be watching it for lessons to be learnt.



HOW THEY VOTED

KARJAT

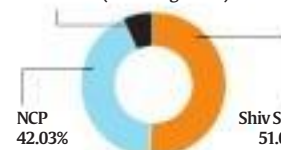
WINNER: Mahendra Thorve, Shiv Sena
VOTES POLLED: 1,02,208

RUNNER UP: Suresh Lad, NCP

VOTES POLLED: 84,162

VOTE SHARE

Others (including NOTA) 6.93%



SHRIVARDHAN

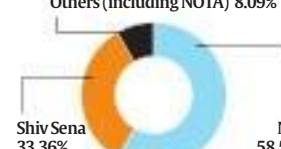
WINNER: Aditi Tatkare, NCP
VOTES POLLED: 92,074

RUNNER UP: Vinod Ghosalkar, Shiv Sena

VOTES POLLED: 52,453

VOTE SHARE

Others (including NOTA) 8.09%



Source: Chief Electoral Officer, Maharashtra; Election Commission of India



Tightrope walk awaits unlikely allies

UNLIKELY ALLIANCE. Three-legged stool. Opportunistic. Ragtag. Power-hungry. Short shelf-life. From the polite to the contemptuous, many epithets have been used to describe the Maha Vikas Aghadi, Maharashtra's newest political formation that took shape over an extraordinary month.

The reality is that three parties, one of them with a starkly different ideology to the other two, pulled off what many thought could never happen: buried their differences, put out a common minimum programme and managed to form a government.

Even Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray seemed a little surprised that he and his two new-found allies, Congress and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), had managed to achieve what they had. "Even today, I feel I have come here to give a memorandum to the CM," he said on his first day in office.

But as the real work of running a government begins, what next?

Thackeray is certainly aware that he is walking a tightrope — he is the leader of a coalition with disparate ideologies, constituencies and interests. Shiv Sena's core interest in this experiment is to reclaim ground that its erstwhile ally, BJP, had wrested from it. Thackeray will now have to ensure that the Shiv Sena's loyal voter base does not feel alienated and at the same time keep the alliance together.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar giving away the chief ministership to Uddhav for all five years was a kick-start even though this is what is said to have led to nephew Ajit Pawar's short-lived rebellion. Now, however, a tug of war is already underway between the Congress and NCP for the post of deputy CM. Besides, there is no consensus yet on who will get the Speaker's post.

While six ministers have been sworn in, a Cabinet expansion can accommodate 37 more ministers, as per rules. A Cabinet full of stalwarts will test the coalition's staying power, especially when the BJP has already indicated that it won't miss any opportunity to corner the Thackeray government.

The new CM's inexperience as an administrator and an elected politician may give rise to its own dynamics in the coalition.

The story of the 38 days that shook Maharashtra is essentially a Sharad Pawar story. The NCP chief did much of the heavy-lifting to bring the three parties together in the initial days. Then, waking up on the morning of November 23 to realise that his nephew Ajit Pawar had done a runner on him with at least a dozen party's legislators, instead of having a meltdown, he rebuilt his party, MLA by MLA, finally managing to bring the family dissident back too.

How the Sena, whose leader Balasaheb Thackeray once declared that he held the remote control to the then Shiv Sena-BJP government, views Pawar in this role, will set its own biting point in the alliance.

Well before the secret swearing-in of Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar, the three sides had agreed as early as November 21 that the CMP would be based on the Constitution. This is said to have been Sharad Pawar's idea.

Jairam Ramesh and Prithviraj Chavan sat with Pawar and other NCP leaders to finalise it. The NCP sold the idea to the Sena to see it as a commitment to the Constitution rather than secularism itself, and this is what the Sena is telling its cadres. Another compromise was on the 5 per cent quota for Muslims that the previous Congress-NCP had brought in, and which was cancelled by the last BJP-Sena government, with all three agreeing to "eliminate the social, educational and economic backwardness of the minority community" without mentioning quota, but by invoking constitutional guarantees.

Now the Congress hopes is that it can use the alliance with a saffron party to shed its image of a "Muslim appeasement" party, while the Sena, desperate to emerge out

of the BJP's shadow, hopes to reinvent itself as a soft saffron regional party for wider appeal. For the NCP, which draws much of its clout from state-run cooperatives, staying close to power is vital to rebuild its brand of regional politics. However, the saffron vs secular divide in the alliance also remains the alliance's most open faultline.

Within 24 hours of Thackeray's swearing-in, an editorial in the Shiv Sena daily, *Saamana*, reached out to PM Narendra Modi invoking the "brotherly ties" between him and Thackeray.

Repairing ties with the Centre will be top on Thackeray's agenda, especially since timely Central grants are key to fund welfare measures. Here, Pawar's contacts in the BJP could be handy, but could trigger suspicion too, especially in the Congress. Despite the *bhai-bhai* mood, there remains a trust-deficit between the Congress and NCP, something the BJP may seek to exploit. Rifts in the future within the Shiv Sena over the perceived diluting of the Hindutva agenda may also give the Modi-Amit Shah duo a handle. There is also the small but nagging matter of ED and CBI investigations against both NCP and Congress members. To name a few — the irrigation scam, the Adarsh scam, the Maharashtra Sadan scam, the Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank scam.

— ZEESHAN SHAIKH, SANDEEP ASHAR, SHUBHANGI KHAPRE AND VISHWAS WAGHMUDE



Posters at a Sena office in Karjat. NCP lost the seat after 10 years. Amit Chakravarty

Poll tension, govt tremors settle down, parties say ready to work together

KARJAT MLA: SENA'S MAHENDRA THORVE

ON THURSDAY afternoon, with hours to go for Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray's swearing-in as the 19th Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Nadeem Khan is the only partyman around at the Shiv Sena Jan Sampark Karyalaya in the bustling Karjat city. The rest, including senior party leaders and corporators, as well as local MLA Mahendra Thorve, have gone to Mumbai, over two hours away, for the historic ceremony marking the first Thackeray holding a public office. Khan, 34, is planning his own celebrations, with a gathering at the city *chowk* and distribution of sweets.

As he talks about the plans, there is a call on his cellphone. "Bhai, are we to invite our friends from the Congress in the evening?" asks Khan. He speaks about who all and how many people he has in mind, and the two conclude that it is best to wait for instructions from Mumbai on that.

"We have a party protocol. When we print banners, it is always Shivaji Maharaj first, then Balasaheb, then Uddhavsaheb, then Aadityasaheb and so on. Now we don't know yet if our banners will also have to bear the photos of Nationalist Congress

Party (NCP) and Congress leaders. We are waiting for instructions," Khan says. A saffron "Shivbandh" around his wrist, a symbol of allegiance for Sena workers, he adds, "Here, it is not like it is in Mumbai. People may be working for different political parties but they are all related in some way. People have in-laws across parties, so their political differences never get in the way of personal relationships. As political workers, we sometimes have to resolve matrimonial disputes too."

This message of bonhomie is a far cry from the recent Assembly polls. Ahead of the elections, rumours had been rife about a rebellion within the Sena and its candidate Thorve jumping ship to the NCP. Ultimately, Thorve had won by 18,046 votes, wresting a seat held by the NCP for 10 years.

As evening sets in, the celebrations at the heart of Karjat city draw Shiv Sena workers, including a dozen women dressed in festive finery. No other party flags can be seen at the venue. Khan leads the way in bursting firecrackers.

About questions regarding the propriety of the Sena's alliance with the ideologically disparate NCP and Congress, Khan

says he welcomes a Sena CM, as it is the fulfilment of a promise made to founder Bal Thackeray. Khan, a former professional disc jockey in Karjat and Mumbai, says he made a trip to Ajmer ahead of the election results and offered a *mamrat* (prayer) at the Ajmer Sharif Dargah for a Sena chief minister.

Karjat lies at one end of the Central Railway's suburban train network, about 74 km from its Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, and is a popular weekend getaway for Mumbai's residents. Its proximity to hill stations like Matheran and the N D studio theme park also add to its attraction.

Mohan Vaidhal, 27, a jewellery shop employee and a Sena supporter, says, "We are not concerned with who becomes CM, who is in the alliance and who will become a minister. We are only concerned with what our MLA does for our area; we look at the candidate and not the party. We think every party deserves a chance if the candidate is good. And don't think my vote was wasted because the CM is still from the Sena."

Over the Sena-NCP-Congress tie-up, "This alliance is unfit, it won't last more than two months. After that the Sena will be over because it has abandoned Hindutva. We voted for the Shiv Sena because we wanted the BJP to stay in power. I feel cheated as a voter... I don't know if I will vote again."

According to him, what makes the alliance unwieldy is the presence of power centres like Sharad Pawar and Sonia Gandhi, who will each want a say.

Karjat's Sena MLA Thorve acknowledges the hand of BJP supporters in his election win. "While we were in alliance with the BJP, they always treated with disrespect. I am aware that some BJP supporters voted for me in Karjat but perhaps, they now feel what we felt for the last five years," he says.

Vishal Joshi, 41, a VHP functionary, is as disappointed about the BJP falling to form a government. An ice-cream parlour owner, Joshi asks what the Sena stands for now. "Now it can't raise Section 370 or Ram Mandir. The only way it can last is if it is able to support a National Register of Citizens across the country and a Uniform Civil Code. There is no certainty, and there is no doubt that voters have been deceived."



The Akhara is home to 14 teenagers, whose activities revolve around praying to Ram. Most of them hope to become Katha Vachaks. Vishal Srivastav

‘Nirmohi Akhara has everything, yet nothing’

At the Akhara, whose suit over the disputed Ayodhya site was rejected by the Supreme Court, teenage residents accept the verdict as Ram's wish, call for better education to help secure their future

MAULSHREE SETH

NEARLY A MONTH after the Supreme Court rejected its claim to the Ram Janmabhoomi site, the Nirmohi Akhara, located in one of the bylanes of Ayodhya, is surprisingly quiet. While it hopes to find a place in the trust to be set up by the government to build a temple on the disputed land, the six teenagers sitting next to its gate are more concerned about their future.

There are 14 teenagers currently living at the Akhara, whose activities revolve around praying to Ram. Head Mahant Dinendra Das says he accepts the Supreme Court verdict as Ram's will. "Jo nirmaya aaya, woh uchit tha (Whatever the decision, it was right)."

For the residents of the Akhara, which is spread over two bighas and buildings that have seen better days, the day starts at 4.30 am and includes chores, prayers, cooking and lessons on Ram Katha. They hope to become Katha Vachaks (those who recite religious literature and perform prayers).

Not very interested in the nitty-gritties of the Ayodhya title suit case, 17-year-old Ram Sarvendra Nath Shukla says, "Nirmohi Akhara has everything, yet nothing." Belonging to a poor family, Shukla came here

from Siddharthnagar, about 140 km away, two years ago. His cousin is also at the Akhara.

The residents share a room, which is bare but for a few mats and cots. In a corner grains, vegetables, and rice are stored, while another corner has a gas stove for cooking.

Most of the residents have mobile phones, which was how they kept track of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case. Asked about it, they say, "Ramji ki kripa hai, ismein Ram ki ichcha chhupi hai (It is all a blessing of Ram. His wishes are evident)."

There are a few other rooms, including the one where Dinendra Das lives. These rooms are in a new structure, built in 2017, with an LED television in the verandah that the boys sometimes watch.

Most study at a nearby Sanskrit school run by a private trust. A few also go to a priest at the neighbouring ghat for free lessons. Says Shukla, "The education is not as it should be, but we have few options. We wish we had better access to Sanskrit teaching."

The 17-year-old studied at a private school till Class 8 before moving to the Akhara. Shukla says his father, also a Katha Vachak, got to know

about the Akhara from an acquaintance. He has no regrets, Shukla adds, saying his family is happy he is studying, and are not worried as yet that he may become an ascetic, like some Akhara students.

Apart from what he studies at the Akhara, one of the residents, Arvind Tiwari, is enrolled in Class 11 at a private English-medium school nearby, in the science stream. "Since my family has been associated with the Akhara, they decided to send me here. I want to eventually join the NDA (the National Defence Academy)," says Tiwari, who came two years ago.

That makes Tiwari an object of envy for his fellow residents, who call him "English-medium wale bhaiyya". They let him skip cooking duties because of this status. Says one of them, "Bhaiyya studies from 10 am to 4 pm, then goes for coaching." Tiwari nods, "I have no time."

Ayush Das, 16, also knows both worlds. While his father is an engineer, he came to the Nirmohi Akhara through his uncle, a Katha Vachak and local priest, around a year ago. Back at his village in Sultanpur, Das studied at a private school.

Arvind Tiwari is an object of envy for his fellow residents. They call him "English-medium wale bhaiyya", and let him skip cooking duties as he has "his studies"

One of the Akhara members, Durgesh Shukla, says the Ayodhya judgment shows that the organisation needs to educate the world about its contributions, including in managing the Ram Janmabhoomi site. The Akhara claims that one of their gurus was killed by Babur's commander Mir Baqi in order to capture the disputed area and build the Babri Masjid. "Nirmohi is one who has given up all worldly possessions. The Akhara was formed for the protection of sadhus. There are records showing it fought battles along with then naresh (king) against invaders such as Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Aurangzeb, Wajid Ali. However, today, we have lost a political battle. We failed to put forward our claim properly," says Durgesh Shukla.

While the Allahabad High Court had given the Akhara one-third of the disputed 2.77 acres in Ayodhya, in a three-way share in 2010, the Supreme Court dismissed its suit ruling it was barred by time limitation.

The Akhara is hoping the government will now include it in the temple trust, as the court asked. At a recent meeting, it resolved to seek "important" posts in the trust's management, and that the rights to worship Ram Lalla be given to the Ramanandi Vaishnav Sect, to which the Akhara belongs.

However, a request for a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi is still to get a response.

TAKE 5

FACES ON THE FRINGES OF NEWS

SUNITA SWAMI, 36, A DOMESTIC HELP IN JAIPUR

‘CM can say what he wants... Let women decide’

Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot recently urged women to give up the *ghoonghat* (veil) as "times have changed". "Women can't progress as long as there is *ghoonghat*... You have to proceed with courage... the govt (is) with you," he had said.



'It's up to my bahus to wear or not'

1 How long have you worn the ghoonghat?
I got married 19 years ago. I have been wearing the *ghoonghat* since, mostly at home. Earlier, I would pull the *ghoonghat* till my chin, now I just cover my eyes.

2 Is it difficult to work in a veil?
I started working in homes 13 years ago. The women there didn't wear a veil. When I worked, I could see things only faintly... It was very inconvenient. My employer told me to stop covering when I worked.

3 Do you support wearing a ghoonghat?
Fayde ka pata nahi, par parampara chali aa rahi hai (I don't know if there is any advantage, but it is a tradition). I feel incomplete without it. Even if I don't cover my face fully, I cover my head, or at least my back with a *pallu*. I feel very uncomfortable otherwise.

4 Would you want your daughters-in-law to wear veils?
I have three sons (ages 19, 17, and 13). We kept the *izzat* of our in-laws, it is up to the next generation to decide for itself. When my *bahus* come, I will tell them once to wear a *ghoonghat*, that's all... No one forces anybody anymore, unlike when I got married.

5 CM Gehlot has urged women to let go of the ghoonghat...
What does he stand to lose? It is about our honour. Let women decide for themselves. *Marzi hai toh karo, nahin hai to mat karo* (If you want to, wear it; if you don't want to, don't).

ANKITA DWIVEDI JOHRI

Sanskrit school 'best option', parents worried after Firoze row

At Rajakiya Varishth Upadhyay Sanskrit Vidyalaya in Bagru, where Firoze Khan, the Sanskrit teacher at the centre of the BHU row, studied, teachers and parents wonder: 'What has religion got to do with education?'

DEEPA MUKHERJEE

AMIDST the incessant hum of Sanskrit *shlokas* on the sprawling campus of Rajakiya Varishth Upadhyay Sanskrit Vidyalaya in Bagru, around 30 km from Jaipur, there is perceptible unease. One of its most well-known alumni, Firoze Khan, has not been able to take up his post as Assistant Professor, Sanskrit, at Banaras Hindu University, on account of his religion. At this government Sanskrit school, where around 20-30 per cent students are Muslims and which is regarded as one of the best institutions in these parts, teachers and parents are dismayed at what the controversy means for their wards.

"Karam ka dharma se koi lena-dena nahin hota (Work has nothing to do with religion)," says Abdul Qayum, a daily wager, whose two children, Bilal, 10, and Muskaan Bano, 13, study at the school. "Bilal can recite the Quran Sharif by heart and is equally proficient in Sanskrit," he adds.

But now, he is worried: "We thought that after getting a good education, they can lead a better life, maybe become teachers. But seeing what happened to Firoze, we are not sure... What's the use of studying Sanskrit? My children can't pursue it as a career."

The school has around 300 students from



classes 1 to 12, with its middle school and senior secondary buildings located adjacent to the village's Jama Masjid. With students drawn from the alleys around the mosque, as well as from nearby villages, the school imparts two formal levels of Sanskrit education, Praveshika and Varishth Upadhyay, says Principal Yogendra Kumar Sharma.

"People trust the school to give their chil-

dren a good education along with cultural values," he says, talking about its history and alumni who have gone on to become judicial officers, professors and Sanskrit scholars.

The municipality of Bagru has two other senior secondary schools, one for boys and another for girls, apart from around 10 private schools. There are Sanskrit schools too, but those are around 18 km away. But the 60-

year-old Rajakiya Varishth Upadhyay Sanskrit Vidyalaya is one of the oldest, and among the most reputed.

Says Ashok Yogi, Assistant Director, Sanskrit Education Department, "Many students from minority communities study at these schools and a large number of them apply to be teachers at the Rajakiya school as it is a government job and is in high demand."



The Bagru school, located next to the Jama Masjid, has around 300 students, 20-30 per cent of them Muslims. Deep Mukherjee

The walls of the single-storey building are painted with names of famous Sanskrit poets Kalidasa, Magha and Banabhatta. The students study Sanskrit literature as well as grammar.

"When I was a child, people used to talk about how both Hindus and Muslims had helped get land for the school," says Babu Qureshi, a resident.

Abdul Majid, whose 13-year-old son Abdul studies here, is worried the controversy will affect him. "I am illiterate. We send our children to school so that they can make a better life for themselves. But if Muslims can't study Sanskrit, we will have to think twice before sending our children here," says Majid.

Dinesh Kumar Sharma, 55, a teacher at the school, says Firoze was his student. "On each of his trips home, Firoze makes it a point to visit the school, and touches my feet. Education and religion should not be allowed to mix," says Sharma. "We don't understand why a Muslim teaching Sanskrit is seen as strange. We have had Muslim teachers, it's a language anybody can learn."

Ramswaroop Kumawat, 60, also a former student of the school, says Firoze's father Ramzan was his classmate. "Ramzan used to be a very good *bhajan* singer. These days, he spends most of his time singing at local temples or programmes."

In school, on occasions to mark August 15 and Sanskrit Diwas, Firoze is often held up as the "ideal student". Having just finished reciting the Deep Jyoti, an ode to light that is a favourite among students, Mohammad Salman, who is in Class 8, says he has decided what he wants to be when he grows up: "I want to become the school principal."

Dalitality
JITENDRA SUNA

JNU has failed larger cause in fee protests

AMID PROTESTS against the JNU fees hike, photos of me trying to cross over a barricade, singing songs of liberation holding a *nissan* (small drum) as I was dragged by the Delhi Police, were widely shared.

My mother is a farm labourer and part-time vegetable hawker from Kalahandi. The family's sole breadwinner, she always told me to "study so that you can understand what is right and wrong". Experiences of humiliation and indignity were part of our everyday life-world. Separate seating in classrooms and castiest slurs were routine. The systematic exclusion caused many Dalit students to drop out, and drove several to the extremes of suicide.

Many Dalits, like me, carry the illusion that when they leave the village, they leave the violence and indignity behind. In 2012, in my last year of graduation, I went to Nagaloka in Nagpur, where I was introduced to Ambedkarite leaders like Savitribai Phule, Jyotirao Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Periyar and others. I realised that the education system in India was not designed to change the existing social structure; rather to reinforce the caste hierarchies. The curricula, for example, exclude the above-mentioned revolutionaries.

Ambedkar argued in 1927 that the sole purpose of education is to "moralise and socialise people". We expect education to reshape our lives with such values as liberty, equality and fraternity. However, due to the regeneration of exclusionary practices in independent India, the *bahujan* of this country are left without devices to understand, and thereby transform their lives.

The current regime is hell-bent on privatisation and commercialisation of the education system. This will inevitably strengthen the monopoly of *Savarnas* in education. It is also creating a State where the voice of the marginalised is suppressed. To silence me, the State has already sent police to my home. People raising their voice against the unjust moves of the current regime are branded 'anti-national', 'Naxals', 'urban Naxals', while people accused of rape, murder, extortion and mass killings are promoted in politics.

The current government-sponsored crackdown on public-funded educational institutions is part of a larger agenda to implement the Manu model. The agitation that started in JNU against fees hike has drawn national attention with the ap-

propriation of the 'Fee Must Fall' movement that originated in South Africa. But, unlike the South African movement which led to reform of the education system as a whole, including free education to poor students, and to the de-colonisation of educational institutions through representation for black South Africans and diversification of the medium of instruction, the protest in JNU is reduced to the fees hike issue and is limited to one institution.

Movements in JNU have failed to meaningfully engage with the issues of reservation, gender deprivation points, and accessible public education. For instance, the poor record of ensuring reservation in faculty appointments speaks volumes about the 'inclusive' nature of JNU. In 2017, a Dalit professor said the JNU administration had denied him promotion because he was a Dalit.

The administration constituted an eight-member Abdul Nafey Committee, which said its findings "indicate the pattern of difference in the written and the viva voce marks across all social categories, which indicates discrimination".

In 2016, Rohith Vemula's institutional murder, in 2017 Muthu Krishnan's institu-

tional murder, in 2018 Payal Tadv's institutional murder and most recently Muslim student Fatima Lathi's institutional murder in IIT Madras, have exposed how Brahmanical and Islamophobic our education system is.

The current JNU protest is neither concerned with affirmative action nor about the nature of enormous dominance the *Savarnas* have. Secondly, this protest has reduced the fees hike issue to an issue of only poor students, which in turn helps the BJP government bring poor students into its politics. Instead the debate should have been around the idea of public institutions.

Various social justice organisations, such as the UDSF (United Dalit Student Forum), BAPSA (Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association), the forum for visually challenged students and SIO (Student Islamic Organization) within the campus have raised questions of social justice, such as reservation policies in hostel admissions, non-implementation of reservation in teaching posts, gender deprivation points, dropout issues and discrimination against SCs, STs, and OBCs. These issues have neither been taken seriously in the ongoing protest nor have

they been carried forward within or outside the campus... As Dalits, we demand free, quality, equal education for all. The model of education should be that of Switzerland, the UK, Canada, Italy, France, or the Nordic countries, wherein huge resources are devoted to educational initiatives and students are a responsibility of the State.

The post-colonial State-sponsored education in India was directed at violently homogenising India rather than creating an inclusive society. The current regime is determined to maintain the caste inequality. Nation-building cannot be successful while excluding its large majority of Dalit, Adivasi, OBCs, Muslims and other minorities. It will only distort, destabilise and destroy whatever little has left in the so-called nation and democracy.

The writer is a PhD research scholar at Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, JNU

The fortnightly column 'Dalitality' is curated by Suraj Yengde, author of Caste Matters, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard Kennedy School and a recipient of the Rohith Vemula Memorial Scholar Award

Fifth COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH
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Modi's first mistake

NO POLITICAL party or leader has come out of the Maharashtra mess looking good. But, nobody has come out looking as damaged as the BJP. It chose to perch on a pedestal as a shining star of morality and ideological righteousness. And, now looks just like any other grubby old political party. Its behaviour in the Maharashtra 'tamasha' was disgraceful and puzzling. What possessed it to try and grab power in such an underhand and squalid fashion? Personally, I have found it hardest to understand the role the Prime Minister played. He has spent five years using his monologues on *Mann Ki Baat* to project himself as a highly moral leader, so should he have risked everything by being party to the machinations that took place under the cover of darkness? Equally puzzling is why, as someone who sees himself as a crusader against corruption in public life, he chose to ally with a leader who has serious corruption charges against him. And, one whose limited credibility as a political leader in Maharashtra is derived entirely from the reflected power of his uncle.

Modi's closest confidant Amit Shah has tried aggressively to portray the BJP as the victim of the plot. On national television he took the stand that the mandate was for a BJP government and that it was the Shiv Sena that was the betrayer of this mandate.

In his usual bullying, bumptious style he declared at the Republic TV's annual conclave that 'the people' understood exactly what had happened and would never forgive the Shiv Sena even if the media was trying to paper over its treacherous role.

Not true, Mr Home Minister. Not true at all. If you could mingle among 'the people' you would soon discover how disturbed they are by the midnight plotting that led to the sudden installation of Devendra Fadnavis as chief minister, with Ajit Pawar as his deputy. It was an illegal move and these gentlemen were ousted so soon that 'the people' are making jokes and memes about Fadnavis being the Ganpati that comes home for just a day-and-a-half during Mumbai's famous Ganesh festival. When political leaders become the butt of jokes you can be sure that they will face a longish period of ignominy.

It is unfortunate for the Prime Minister that the stain of ignominy has spread beyond the borders of Maharashtra and 'the people' are beginning to ask if Modi is the great moral leader they thought he was or whether they misjudged him completely. Questions started to be asked a while ago when immoral political deals were struck in Goa and Karnataka, but when this sort of thing happens in a big, important state like Maharashtra, the consequences are more serious. The Home Minister has said proudly in defence of the BJP that it has not needed to lock its MLAs up in hotels and this he believes is proof that the BJP is still morally above other political parties. This has not stopped ugly rumours from spreading about horse trading.

Amit Shah is famous for his organisational skills. He is rightly credited with having built the BJP into a formidable election machine. What he seems not to have noticed is that the main reason for the BJP having won the Lok Sabha elections twice was because Modi's personal image was of a sincere, honest leader whose only motivation for being in public life was to make India a better country. It is this image that has now taken a serious beating.

It is hard to say what Modi can do now to try and bring back some lustre to his public image, but one way would be for him to be seen once more as the real face of the BJP.

After winning his second term in office he has spent so much time travelling in foreign lands that his personal rapport with the people has weakened. On most political matters it is the Home Minister who speaks for the party, and often when he does this, he exhibits the rough, crass manner of the provincial politician that he was until he was elevated to the national stage by the Prime Minister. There is a political language that politicians can get away with when they are in provincial politics that is unacceptable at the national level. There are also political machinations that pass muster in provincial politics that do not at the national level.

So my humble advice to the Prime Minister is that it is time that he is seen once more as the real face of the BJP. It is time for him to remind people why they have voted for him a second time. Time for him to remember that it was not the BJP that won a full majority twice. He did and he alone.

My gender is my right

GAINED IN TRANSLATION



A REVATHI
ரேவதியின்

TRANSGENDER BHARATANATYAM dancer Nartaki Nataraj (from Tamil Nadu) was the first transwoman to claim her identity as *Thirunangai*. The term was later adopted by the Tamil Nadu government through an order. Kalaigarr M Karunanidhi, who issued this government order as chief minister, insisted that derogatory terms such as *onbathu* (nine), *ali* or *pombalachatti* to refer to a transgender should be done away with and that they should be addressed as *Thirunangai* — a respectable, dignified term.

In Tamil Nadu, the respectable term came to be accepted by almost everybody. The transgender community in Tamil Nadu expressed its gratitude to Kalaigarr. Since this government order, the media has been addressing us as *Thirunangai*. It is pertinent to note that the present state government in Tamil Nadu has removed the term *Thirunangai* and replaced it with "third gender".

In keeping with the Supreme Court's direction, DMKMP Tiruchi Siva introduced a private member's Bill for the rights of the transgender community. This includes the rights of the community to safety, education, employment and identity. The transgender community across India welcomed this move and expressed their gratitude to Siva for the same.

But today, the Centre and the state government have created an undesirable situation for the transgender community as a whole. The present Bill of the Centre seeks to deny the right of the transgender community to decide their own identity — a right granted by the Supreme Court.

This inevitably gives rise to questions: How can a third person decide my identity or my gender? Who else will know who I really am? My gender is my right. Is it not well within my right to decide if I am a man, woman, transman or a transwoman? Can anyone deny that the Supreme Court has reiterated this right of ours?

The Bill is not just a transgression of our rights reaffirmed by the Supreme Court but also a gross violation of human

rights. The Bill does not augur well for democracy and freedom. I could only understand the decision of this government to undo a good move of the previous government as an outcome of political vendetta. I firmly believe that a new government should work upon the already existing good schemes in the interest and welfare of its people. Unfortunately, in this Bill, this is not the case.

I also firmly believe in individuals' right to decide their identity. I wish to identify myself as a woman. I know many *Thirunambis* (transmen) who wanted to identify themselves as men. (The Bill effectively tramples on our rights and wishes to be identified as we would want to be.)

The identity "third gender" raises many questions. Who are categorised as first gender? If it is men, are they superior to women? Does it imply that transgender are inferior to women? On what basis is humankind discriminated as such? Former Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa (the state government still claims to be led by her in spirit) often said she was made of the woman and she exists for the people. Aren't those who follow her duty-bound to honour those words and work in the interests of people, heeding to their views and rights?

The Central government should examine if the Bill recently passed is in accordance with the order passed by the Supreme Court and wishes of the transgender community. It should also examine if the Bill will really ensure the safety of the transgender community and act in deference to the wishes of the community.

I wish to make it clear that as a community we hold no grudges towards any government. We wish to offer assistance to the government in all welfare schemes that it would want to carry out for the people. But at the same time, we have the right to protest against a Bill or a scheme thrust on us against our interest.

I still believe that I am born in a free and democratic country. By passing this Bill, I record with pain that the government will only push us back by 50 years, undoing all the good measures that have happened in society. The governments should reconsider their acts and do what will take us forward as a community.

Revathi is a transgender activist, writer and actor. Her autobiography, Vellai Mozhi, is out in English as The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story. She also does solo performances based on it. Translated from Tamil by Kavitha Muralidharan

She SAID
ALAKAMBASU

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WHEN I got married some decades ago, I switched from idly and unobservantly watching my mother and her generation of women lead their conventional gendered lives, to more carefully watching the gendered behaviour of my mother-in-law and her generation of women. As an outsider to the family, I suddenly became more aware of the incongruence between what women of my mother's and mother-in-law's generation said and what they did. In their speech, they were all active or passive (usually active) supporters of the patriarchy, vehement that they lived by the instructions and the expectations of their fathers, husbands and sons.

And yet, out of sight of their supposed heads of households, these women seemed to make numerous decisions on matters big and small. From what to cook for dinner, to how much to spend on curtains for the drawing room to what colour the new family vehicle would be, it often seemed to me that the men were under the false illusion that they decided these things. Thus my mother-in-law would declare that *rohu* was being cooked rather than *katla* because her husband preferred *rohu* to *katla*; and, soon enough, my *katla*-loving father-in-law also believed that this was so.

It is true that these were usually small victories, and there were (and are) indeed plenty of (especially younger) women who rightly surmise (d) that rocking the patriarchal boat can come with grave costs. However, after years of anecdotally watching as well as gradually grappling intellectually with the now trendy question of women's empowerment, I think that many women, all over the world, are as good at performing gender as at actually practising gender. I think of this as camouflaged empowerment.

And thank god for this camouflaged empowerment, if it means that, by pretending, to themselves and to the world, to obey a boss, women are actually assuming some of the rights of the boss. Of course, in an ideal world, we want a gender equality that is vocal, visible and taken for granted. But while we fight for that world to arrive, it also helps to appreciate that a little bit of the gender inequality one sees everywhere and especially in women's survey reports on their decision-making ability is a manner of speaking rather than a manner of being.

In a classic paper in 1988, the sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti theorised what she called Bargaining with Patriarchy (*Journals.sagepub.com*), where she described women's agency as both accommodating as well as resisting male dominance. In my example, such accommodation happens through submissive language and perhaps such language itself then enables resistance through purposeful

Empowerment, via the dinner table



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

action. Kandiyoti later critiqued her own work as being simplistic, but the kernel of it can be applied to so many levels of gender performance. This kind of doublespeak, so to say, often maintains domestic and societal peace while at the same time opening up spaces for women to occupy that potentially increase their real agency and empowerment.

It is true that these increases are incremental, often frustratingly slow, and sometimes socially or economically half-hearted. Recent qualitative research on women micro-entrepreneurs in urban Ghana (*www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii*), for example, documents how these women frequently make sub-optimal business decisions in order to reinforce their husbands' primary role as family breadwinners. So they prioritise savings over investments, hide their profits, are extra cautious in their investment choices and think about long-term security rather than immediate profit.

These women and many other working women probably know that not only is half a loaf better than no bread, the half loaf itself is in danger if they more boastfully display their business or other income-generating skills. For the few studies that demonstrate that women's economic activity increases their 'bargaining power' in domestic relations, there are several more which suggest that women's labour force participation can lead to increases in domestic violence; more often psychological than physical, but violence all the same. Many of these studies on both sides are methodologically problematic and the technical field is still evolving. However, the theoretical literature on this subject agrees that men might use violence as a way to get women to give up these bargaining strengths (i.e., leave the labour force)

and/or as an expression of their own insecurity as they fear the loss of the one source of clear male advantage — the control of the purse strings.

The propensity to violence against working wives seems to be greater in men who lose their own jobs or whose wives earn more than them. Relative income matters — the largest resentment is unleashed when the woman's income exceeds her spouse's.

And nor is this male rage confined to poor countries. A recent analysis of US data (*Journals.sagepub.com/doi*) finds that men's discomfort with working wives is at its lowest when their wives earn about 40 per cent of the income they make; beyond that, it rises steadily. Not surprisingly, the stress of low-skilled men losing their jobs in the country in recent years has reportedly worsened with their wives becoming the primary earners.

No wonder women all over the world frequently find it much easier to keep up the façade of acceptance of and allegiance to gender inequality even as they quietly exercise their camouflaged empowerment. I am using the term gender performance somewhat differently from its use in Judith Butler's radical theory of ritualised and repetitive gender practice as performative gender. Instead, I use the term to refer to the frequent verbal and self-attested enactment of loyalty to unequal gender norms simultaneously with behaviour that actively resists and challenges these norms.

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Out of MY MIND
MEGHNAD DESAI

THE STRANGEST aspect of Devendra Fadnavis's 80-hour chief ministership was the manner of its commencement. Why choose an early dawn hour to wake up the Governor to swear yourself in? It almost seems like he knew he was doing something not quite proper. It was like a homeowner breaking into his own house like a burglar. If it was above board and legal, with proper certifiable majority support, Fadnavis should have come in broad daylight to stake his claim. As it was, it sounded like a bit of *jugaad*, cutting of corners, hoping no one would notice.

Modi 2.0 and Mumbai's jugaad politics

These sorts of reversals happen when a party steals a march over the better claimant. The BJP did it famously in Goa last time. But then they were relative newcomers as a ruling power, still learning the tricks. Now they are firmly established, expected to stay in power at the Centre for a while. They ought to believe in their own success. They had to behave responsibly, not play *jugaad* politics.

There is a difference in this matter between Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0. Modi 1.0 was focused on Swachh Bharat, rural housing and electrification, women's health, Ayushman Bharat, Make in India. Modi 2.0 seems to be focused on the BJP's ideological programme — Article 370,

temple, perhaps Uniform Civil Code, citizen registration, Hindi as sole national language. It is almost as if there is a sense of urgency, as if time is running out and the programme has to be finished this term. There is a glaring lack of interest in the fortunes of the economy, which was the central focus in Modi 1.0. Has Modi 2.0 abandoned *Sabka Vikas*?

Think of what happened in Maharashtra. The Congress has had a problem with admitting that it is no longer the dominant party. It has been in denial about its shrinkage in the Lok Sabha. The sense of entitlement is ever there, as the fuss over the change in security cover showed. (Why do Indian leaders love high

levels of security, unlike leaders in other democracies? After all, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her guards and no security was able to protect Rajiv Gandhi.)

In Maharashtra, however, Sonia Gandhi was happy to play the No. 3 role and waited astutely to secure what she wanted. It could herald the new, modest Congress. Watch out!

The BJP used to have a sore side for years as an outsider. Yet, it was alert, cautious and unwilling to take risks. But in the Maharashtra case, it claimed that Fadnavis had been returned as Chief Minister even when results showed that, on its own, the BJP had failed to break through. It may have been Fadnavis

rather than Amit Shah or Narendra Modi who hurried the swearing-in without checking if NCP leader Ajit Pawar had the party numbers. Did it stem from a sense of entitlement, having secured a second big victory in the general elections?

Politics has not changed just because the BJP/NDA is comfortable now in both Houses of Parliament. People still want *roti, kapda, makaan* and *bijli, sadak, paani*. The larger national concerns of Article 370 or the NRC may engage the leadership but did not impress the voters in Haryana or Maharashtra.

The first and last lesson of democratic politics is: Do not take the voters for granted. They bite back.

16 BOOKS

EXPRESS EDITORS
RECOMMEND

THE BEGINNING of this week was consumed by the extraordinary drama in Maharashtra, which began before dawn the Saturday before yesterday and ended on Tuesday afternoon at the same point at which the politics had gone off-script to begin with, give or take a few faces tinged with red and egg. Those three-and-a-half days from curtain-up to curtain-down produced a fairly competent panorama shot of the seamier side of extant Indian political processes and techniques, with prominent roles for high constitutional offices. It is only appropriate, therefore, that the reading list recommends these important developments (and a range of associated aspects) as the main course for this week.

ON MY TERMS

Without a shred of doubt, the Amitabh Bachchan of the Maharashtra potboiler was Sharad Pawar. From the time he first became chief minister in 1978 to forklifting Uddhav Thackeray to that seat on Thursday, this subject of endless political punditry has succeeded in justifying all the headline

puns that mediocre copyeditors have written about "Pawar-play" over the decades. In 2015, though, the man wrote his own story, "dedicated to all the people of India" — *On My Terms: From the Grassroots to the Corridors of Power*.

BAL THACKERAY & THE RISE OF THE SHIV SENA

The man who founded the largest party in Maharashtra's ruling coalition triggers strong opinions ranging from unqualified reverence to its polar opposite. As his son and political heir prepares to run the state, a look at the journey of Bal Thackeray and his party is helpful. While the Sena in government can be expected to restrain its nativist and exclusionist impulses, Vaibhav Purandare's 2012 book, *Bal Thackeray & the Rise of the Shiv Sena* is a competent guide to the original template of the party's politics.

PRANAB MUKHERJEE

The other eminent marathoner of Indian politics is Sharad Pawar's sometime colleague, Pranab Mukherjee. Like Pawar, Mukherjee had a long, good look at Indian politics over many decades — and produced a large, three-volume autobiography to show for it. *The Dramatic Decade: The Indira Gandhi Years; The Turbulent Years: 1980-1996; and The Coalition Years: 1996-2012* have been criticised for revealing far too little of what their author probably heard and saw — even so, it is a remarkable kaleidoscope of stories and portrayals.

CHANDRA SHEKHAR

Lot of practices that are now seen as 'normal' in Indian politics — both good things and bad — started to first emerge around the seven months of 1990-91 when Chandra Shekhar, the leader of a 64-MP party, was propped up and pulled down as Prime Minister by the Congress. The story of the times of Chandra Shekhar, if not that

of the man himself, remains relevant today. *Chandra Shekhar: The Last Icon of Ideological Politics*, by Harivansh, now Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, and Ravi Dutt Bajpai (2019) is an enlightening, lucidly written account.

MAHARASHTRA MAXIMUS

What is it about Maharashtra that makes all parties covet it so? What are the defining strands in the workings of its society and economics that engender the pulls and pressures of its politics? The story of Maharashtra, the cradle simultaneously of enlightened social reform, Ambedkarite revolution, and of Hindutva, is complex. Journalist Sujata Anandan's *Maharashtra Maximus: The State, Its People & Politics* (2018) makes an attempt at telling this story with reasonable success.

Before Setting Sail

Of an upper-class milieu and how it navigates a fraught future in the build-up to Partition



AMITABHA BAGCHI

IT IS probably true that the privileged young of every generation are idealistic and narcissistic in equal parts, just like it is probably true that idealism and narcissism are two sides of the same coin. In Qurratulain Hyder's second novel, *Safina-e-gham-e-dil*, published in 1952 when she was just 25 and ably translated into English by Saleem Kidwai under the title *Ship of Sorrows*, idealism and narcissism balance each other out in a delicately crafted work that appears to follow the artistic conventions of music rather than those of narrative fiction.

The protagonists of this sometimes cryptic but always engaging book are a set of young people from upper-class families, some Muslim, some Hindu, one English, who are coming of age in the years leading up to Partition. And these aren't ordinary young people by any means. The men are powerful civil servants, army officers and even a genteel revolutionary, the narrator/author's brother Ali who is hunted down and shot in the leg by his old friend, the English administrator of the region, Elmore Rexton, who then offers him a cigarette to which Ali says "thanks for the cigarette but you know Craven A is not my brand." The women include Mira, who has danced with Uday Shankar's troupe and has several suitors, and Anne Hyder, the writer,

who the readers of the English translation of 2019 know is going to develop into a giant of 20th-century literature, her reputation sealed in 1959 (seven years after the publication of *Safina-e-gham-e-dil*) by the appearance of *Aag ka Darya* (translated into English as *River of Fire* in 2003).

The common thread that runs through these two books, the author's second and third novels, is the difficulty of the choice facing the young elite Muslim at the time of Partition. On one side is the prospect of Pakistan that means various things to various people. For the less privileged, it might have been a place of refuge from rampaging mobs, but for the more privileged among the men it can be as banal as a place where their career will flourish, as it does for Riyaz in *Ship of Sorrows*, or, in the case of Fawad, just a place to run away to in the way a callow young man sometimes does when the demands of adulthood weigh too heavy. For the more conventional of the women, it is the place where they have to make a new life with their successful husbands, moving "from one Gymkhana to another", leaving behind their Hindu suitors who have now become unsuitable for geopolitical reasons.

On the other side of the argument is the pull of the land and its poetry, of the songs of Gopala, of the tales of Alha and Udal, of "... Mir Anees, sitting in a deserted Imambara, reading something softly... reciting *It's the end of the night, time to praise and salute God*." Both *Ship of Sorrows* and *River of*

Fire approach the question of whether to stay or whether to leave, a question the author herself struggled with, on similar terms: as a kind of choice between numbing confinement in the material everyday on one hand ("In affluent suburbs the uninteresting wealthy are preparing to die") and ranging the vast spiritual depth of an ancient and multifaceted culture on the other.

The difference in approaches between Hyder's second and third novels is signalled by the titles of the two books. The title, *Ship of Sorrows*, comes from Faiz's famous lament 'Subh-e-Azaadi' where he talks of the destination that the idealistic young of pre-Independence India had sought, hoping that "kahiin to ja ke rukega safiina-e-gham-e-dil" (the ship of sorrows will find landfall somewhere). Seven years later the writer shifts her attention from the ship to the waters it navigates: "ek aag ka darya hai aur doob ke jaana hai" (it is a river of fire and we have to swim submerged) in the words of Jigar Moradabadi. For Hyder, the grand stream of history is a river of fire and it is the dramatic and all-encompassing sweep of *River of Fire* that makes it the more widely read of the two books. *Ship of Sorrows* is in some ways a subtler novel which hints at the vastness of the book to come but also works very well if read as a story of a smart idealistic set whose smooth passage through life has been upset by the tectonic actions of history. The trouble is that it is difficult to tease out the meanings of the various hints and allusions

that appear regularly throughout the book. The effect of these allusions is like that of phrases and themes in a large musical composition; they feel like specific evocations designed to create particular emotional textures. But the suspicion lingers that the reader would have to be much more well-read than this reviewer to fully realise those textures. Nonetheless, if we suspend the requirement that a novel must lasso us with narrative and pull us relentlessly towards its conclusion, if we allow ourselves to be taken by the hand and led into the numerous rich dimensions the work conjures up, *Ship of Sorrows* is a greatly satisfying and enriching reading experience.

And perhaps this is what is most important about this book: it makes reading into a form of experiencing the world, of making a kind of experiential sense of a world that has stopped making any other form of sense a long time ago. "Our youth are walking into fire. The old are paralyzed. Women weep silently... Priests have fires blazing in the havans and tourists are chartering planes to visit these sacred sites." Once again we find ourselves in times where lines such as these run a finger down our spine and make our hair stand on end, so once again we must turn to Qurratulain Hyder for the unique brand of succour she provides.

Bagchi teaches computer science at IIT Delhi and is shortlisted for the DSC Prize this year



SHIP OF SORROWS
QURRATULAIN HYDER (Author),
SALEEM KIDWAI (Translator)
Women Unlimited
316 pages
₹ 550

Nature's Rage

A searing indictment of the systemic devastation wrought by human activity on the Western Ghats

KAUSHIK DASGUPTA

"IT WAS scary. The river had never behaved like this in my lifetime," recalls Girija Karambayan in *Flood and Fury, Ecological Devastation in the Western Ghats*. Girija's tribal hamlet at Vazachal is on the banks of the Chalakudy river. Last year in July-August, the river, the fifth largest in Kerala, was among those that went into spate. So did several of the 43 other rivers in the state. Nearly 500 people lost their lives, nearly 1.5 lakh people were evacuated from their houses. A large number of people, actually, lost their lives because boulders came rolling down the Western Ghats hills. This year too, the raging waters claimed more than 90 people, a large number of them again the victims of landslides. "Why did the mountains turn hostile," asks Biju V, the author of *Flood and Fury*.

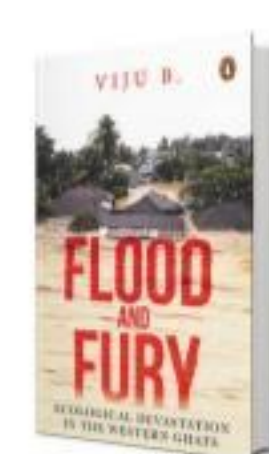
The book is an indictment of the human activities in modern times that have made the monsoons, loved almost universally across Kerala, a bane in the past two years.

Implicated in this account are rice cultivation, plantation development, mass migrations, hydro-electric projects, dams, large-scale quarrying, pilgrimages and tourism. Viju also surveys the other Western Ghats states of Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra. This is necessary because, as Biju writes, the Ghats are one ecosystem. Floods in one part of the region are inextricably linked to droughts in another.

It's also a story narrated very gently, and with enormous sensitivity to the economic aspirations and cultural leanings of the different social groups in the affected regions of the Ghats. "The first step towards the conservation of the Western Ghats should be empathising with the concerns and aspirations of the communities inhabiting, and

understanding their centuries-old culture sub-cultures that are rooted in the mountains... The settlers of Idukki and the tribals of Attapady are two ends of a social spectrum. The aspirations of both need to be taken into account before implementing any regulation," writes Biju.

His account is a combination of a travelogue and sympathetic reportage, suffused with an ethnographer's sensitivity, to unravel the processes that have brought the Western Ghats to their current state. And he has a diverse range of interlocutors — tribal people, migrants, plantation labourers, government officials, political party representatives, ecologists and academics, ordinary people engaged in conservation, singers, pilgrims, even bikers. It reiterates certain eco-truths. But times are such that these truths need to be told over and over again. For instance, at one point, Biju writes,



FLOOD AND FURY:
ECOLOGICAL
DEVASTATION IN
THE WESTERN
GHATS
VIJU B
Penguin eBury Press
296 pages
₹ 399

"The tribals were once kings of forests but they never thought of owning the land in order to exploit it. Their worldview was thought to be anti-development and primitive till the beginning of the 20th century and concepts like community rights were considered to be outdated, socialist approach to development. But in the era of climate change and diminishing natural resources, these concepts assume real significance, especially when the exploitation of large tracts of eco-sensitive lands need to be regulated".

How have regulations and measures to protect the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats fared? It's a story of EIAs not always following the laid-down procedures and miners conniving with officials to circumvent rules. Biju, in fact, is at his sternest in referring to the real estate lobby and the mining industry. "There is no such thing as sustainable mining," he says.

Flood and Fury is also about governments taking up issues with ecologists. It's now well-known that political resistance is behind the Kerala government riding roughshod over the Madhav Gadgil report to conserve the Western Ghats. Even the much diluted Kasturirangan Committee Report on the conservation of the Ghats remains largely on paper.

Though Biju doesn't do so directly, *Flood and Fury* is also an indictment of the developmentalist Left politics in Kerala that pays scant regard to eco-reasoning. The Left Front that holds office in the state had dismissed any links between the floods and the destruction of the Western Ghats with the argument that the deluge was a once-in-a-hundred-years-affair.

Even more pertinently, at the heart of *Flood and Fury* lies a critique of the lifestyle choices of modern civilisation. What happens to rivers and mountains are, after all, fallouts of our energy use options, food choices and the ways in which we construct our homes, workplaces, towns and cities. As Biju warns, "The Kerala floods might be a trailer of the grimmer things to come. We have pushed too many boulders down the hills and the next big disaster might leave us with nothing but ruins".

17 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Hafiz Saeed. Reuters/File

PAKISTAN
Hafiz Saeed to face trial on December 7

Lahore: Mumbai terror attack mastermind and chief of JuD, Hafiz Saeed, will be prosecuted for terror financing charges here next month, an official said on Saturday. An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Lahore held a hearing against Saeed and his accomplices on terror financing on Saturday and fixed December 7 as the date for indictment of the Jamat-ud Dawa (JuD) chief and others. "ATC judge Arshad Hussain Bhutta fixed December 7 for indictment of Saeed and others after hearing the arguments of prosecution and defence lawyers," a court official told PTI after the hearing.

NETHERLANDS
Man arrested in Hague stabbings

Amsterdam: Dutch police said on Saturday they had arrested a 35-year-old man in connection with a stabbing incident that took place in The Hague on Friday, in which three youth were wounded. In a statement, Hague police described the suspect as "not having any fixed home or place to stay". The incident caused panic in The Hague as it happened just hours after two people were stabbed to death in London allegedly by an ex-prisoner convicted of terrorism offences. The male attacker ran off after the stabbings at a department store.

IRAN
Govt disputes 'exaggerated' protest death toll

Tehran: Iran on Saturday disputed death tolls issued abroad for bloodshed that erupted during protests in the country over fuel prices, after a rights group said over 160 demonstrators were killed. Officials in Iran have yet to say how many people died in the ensuing violence that saw banks, petrol pumps and police stations set on fire. London-based human rights group Amnesty International said in a tweet on Friday that the crackdown claimed the lives of 161 demonstrators. But Iran's deputy interior minister, Jamal Orfi, disputed such figures.

CHINA
Belize, Taiwan citizens held for HK 'meddling'

Beijing: China has arrested a citizen of Belize for allegedly colluding with the US to meddle in the affairs of Hong Kong, the official Guangdong Communist Party newspaper reported on Saturday. It said Lee Henley Hu Xiang supported activities that led to chaos in Hong Kong, the Southern Daily said. It also said a Taiwanese man, Lee Meng-Chu, was also arrested in Shenzhen on October 31, for allegedly stealing state secrets for foreign forces after he made a trip to Hong Kong in August to support "anti-China" activities.

TWO PEOPLE KILLED, ACCUSED SHOT DEAD

London Bridge attacker was convicted in 2012 for PoK terror training camp

People convicted of terror offences must serve full prison terms: Boris

AGENCIES
LONDON, NOVEMBER 30

THE MAN who stabbed and killed two people in the London Bridge terrorist attack on Friday has been identified as a convicted terrorist who was jailed seven years ago over a plot to bomb the London Stock Exchange and build a terrorist training camp on land owned by his family in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The suspect, identified as Usman Khan, had also discussed staging a Mumbai-style attack on the UK Parliament and described by the judge who sentenced him for terrorism offences in 2012 as an ongoing risk to the public with a "serious, long term venture in terrorism".

Khan went on a rampage while out of parole on Friday and killed one man and a woman and injured three other people before being shot by armed police officers. "We are now in a position to confirm the identity of the suspect as 28-year-old Usman Khan, who had been residing in the Staffordshire area," said Scotland Yard's Head of Counter Terrorism Policing, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu on Saturday.

"This individual was known to authorities, having been convicted in 2012 for terrorism offences. He was released from prison in December 2018 on licence and clearly, a key line of enquiry now is to establish how he came to carry out this attack," the senior Indian-origin top police officer said.

On Khan's early release from jail, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said people convicted of terrorism offences should not be allowed out of prison early.

"I think that the practice of automatic, early release where you cut a sentence in half and let really serious, violent offenders out early simply isn't working, and you've some very good evidence of how that isn't working, I am afraid, with this case," Johnson said on Saturday.

The profile of Khan dating back to his conviction in 2012 reveals his links with Islamist terrorism, believed to be al-Qaeda but could also have an Islamic State (ISIS) connection. He had been secretly recorded talking about plans to recruit UK radicals to train at a camp in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the region his family comes from.

He and two other co-conspirators had conducted a surveillance trip around central London



Prime Minister Boris Johnson with Home Secretary Priti Patel on Saturday. Reuters

as they talked about launching a Mumbai-style attack on UK Parliament. The then-20-year-old pleaded guilty to engaging in conduct for the preparation of terrorism, which included travelling to and attending operational meetings, fundraising for terrorist training and preparing to travel abroad.

UK home secretary Priti Patel, who had recently unveiled plans for tougher sentences for violent criminals, said the police needed "space and time" to complete the investigation and that it was not right to "speculate".

JAIL BACKGROUND

THE MAIN CHARGES
Usman Khan (28) had been jailed over plots to bomb London Stock Exchange, building a training camp on his land in PoK and stage a 'Mumbai-style' attack on UK Parliament

guilty in 2012 and was released in December 2018 'on licence'

TOUGHER LAWS
Many have asked why Khan, who was 'being monitored' via an electronic tag, was released before serving his full 16-year term. They have also cited the incident to push for tougher prison laws.

OUT 'ON LICENCE'
Khan was believed to have ties to the al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. He pleaded

AFTER GOTABAYA CALLED DEAL A MISTAKE

Lanka port project based on win-win spirit, says China

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, NOVEMBER 30

CHINA HAS said the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka was developed with a "win-win spirit" and "equal-footed consultation" with the host nation after the island nation's newly-elected president called the deal a "mistake" and should be renegotiated, a media report said on Saturday.

Earlier this week, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said giving away the Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease was a "mistake" by the previous government headed by President Maithripala Sirisena. "The deal has to be renegotiated. Giving a small loan for investment is a different thing but giving a strategic important economic harbour is not acceptable. That we should have controlled," Rajapaksa said in Colombo.

Responding to an email by the Daily Mirror, the Spokesperson's Office of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing said, "Our co-operation, including the project of Hambantota Port, are based on equal-footed consultation and win-win spirit."

The office said the project aims to help Sri Lanka leverage its own advantage for better development. "China would like to work with Sri Lanka to build the Hambantota Port into a new shipping hub in the Indian Ocean, which will further boost local economic and social development," the statement added.



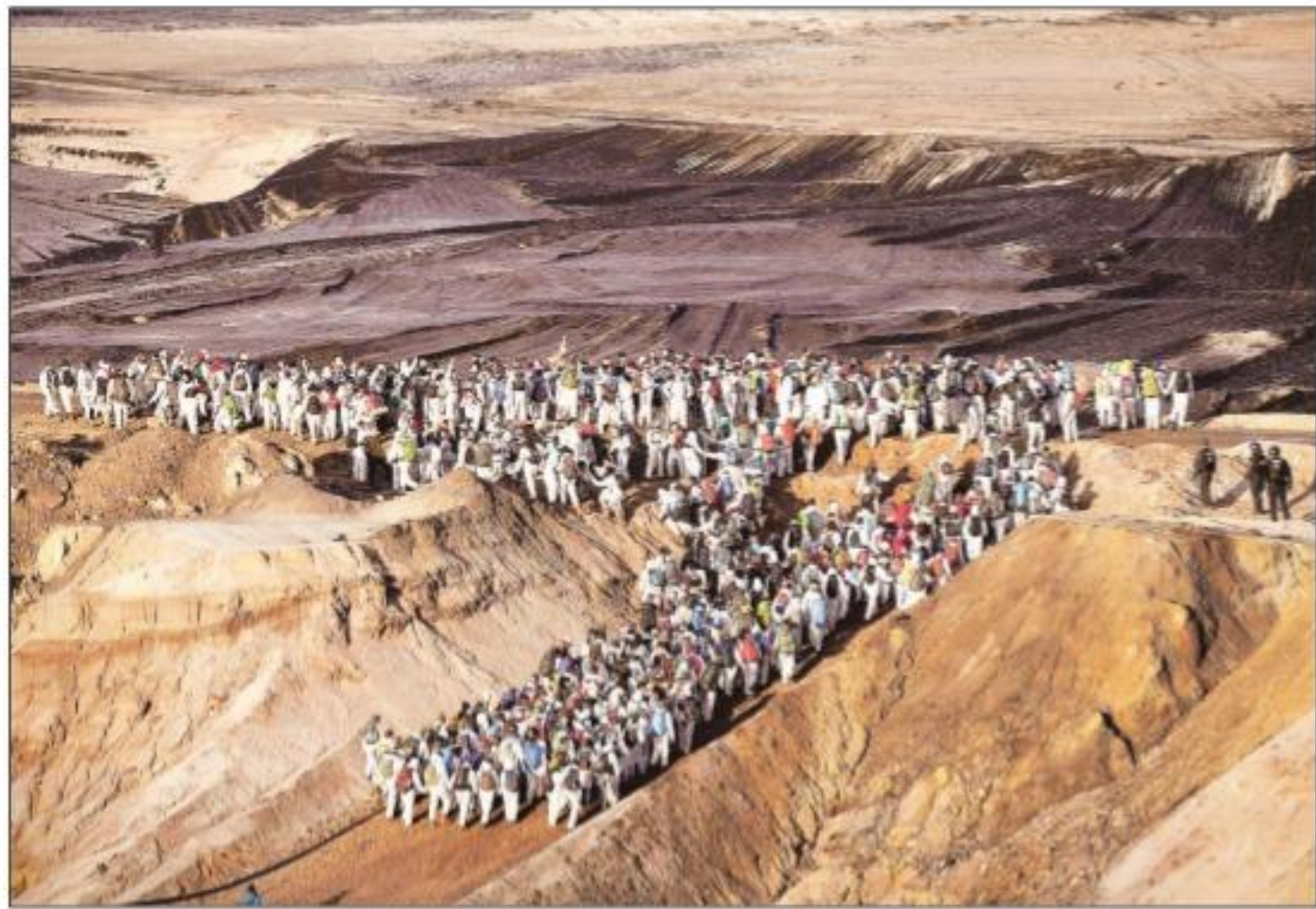
Hambantota Port. Reuters/File

EXPLAINED

Strategic foothold

SRI LANKA had handed over the Hambantota Port to China in 2017 as part of a deal to pay off a debt of over \$8 billion to state-run Chinese firms, as per reports. The deal had raised hackles in international circles, with many highlighting the risk of handing over too much control to China in the Indian Ocean. While Beijing has sought to portray the deal as an economic one, India in particular has always seen the idea of a Chinese foothold so close to its own territory as alarming.

RALLY IN GERMANY AHEAD OF CLIMATE TALKS



Protesters at a coal-fired power station Lippendorf near Leipzig, Germany. AP

■ Mass protests, a last-minute venue change and talk of climate tipping points are adding some unplanned drama to this year's international talks on tackling global warming

■ Delegates from almost 200 countries had hoped to put the finishing touches to the rules governing the 2015 Paris accord, ironing out a few wrinkles left over from last year's conference in Katowice, Poland, and setting the scene for a major review of their efforts in 2020

■ Scientists didn't have any good news either. Study after study published in recent months has underscored the rapid pace of global warming and the need to cut emissions of greenhouse gases as soon as possible.

Students, seniors march in Hong Kong

REUTERS
HONG KONG, NOVEMBER 30

SECONDARY-SCHOOL students and retirees joined forces to protest in Hong Kong on Saturday, the first of several weekend rallies planned across the city, as pro-democracy activists vowed to battle what they say are police brutality and unlawful arrests.

A top Hong Kong official said the government was looking into setting up an independent committee to review the handling of the crisis.

"I came out for the peaceful protest in June when there was



At a demonstration in Hong Kong on Saturday. AP

more than one million people, but the government did not listen to our demands," said a 71-

year-old woman in Hong Kong's Central district, who only gave her name as Ponn.

She brought her own plastic stool to join a cross-generational protest of a few hundred people at the city's Chater Garden. Elderly Hong Kongers, some with visors and canes, stood not far from young, black-clad protesters. All listened to pro-democracy speakers in a gathering marked by a festive mood.

"I have seen so much police brutality and unlawful arrests. This is not the Hong Kong I know. I came today because I want the government to know that we are not happy with what they have done to our generation," said Ponn, who attended with her daughter and son-in-law.

more than one million people, but the government did not listen to our demands," said a 71-year-old woman in Hong Kong's Central district, who only gave her name as Ponn.

lashed out at various factions in casting blame for the forest fires. In a Facebook live post on August 21, he said, "Everything indicates" that NGOs were going to the Amazon to "set fire" to the forest. When asked then if he had evidence to back up his claims, Bolsonaro said he had "no written plan," adding, "that's not how it's done."

One day later he admitted that farmers could be illegally setting the rainforest ablaze, but roughly a month later he attacked the "lying media" for saying that the rainforest was being devastated by the fires.

Iraq PM resigns; 3 more shot dead amid protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BAGHDAD, NOVEMBER 30



Demonstrators help an injured youth during a protest on Saturday. Reuters

Three anti-government protesters were shot dead and at least 58 wounded in Baghdad and southern Iraq on Saturday, security and medical officials said, as Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi formally submitted his resignation to parliament.

Lawmakers were expected to either vote or accept outright Abdul-Mahdi's resignation letter in a parliamentary session Sunday, two MPs said. The prime minister announced Thursday he would hand parliament his resignation on Friday amid mounting pressure from mass anti-government protests.

The announcement also came after Iraq's top Shiite cleric withdrew his support for the government in a weekly sermon. The formal resignation came after an emergency Cabinet session earlier in which ministers approved the document and the resignation of key staffers, including Abdul-Mahdi's chief of staff.

In a pre-recorded speech, Abdul-Mahdi addressed Iraqis, saying that following parliament's recognition of his stepping down, the Cabinet would be demoted to caretaker status, unable to pass new laws and make key decisions. He listed his government's accomplishments, saying it had come to

power during difficult times. "Not many people were optimistic that this government would move forward," he said.

He said the government had managed to push through important job-creating projects and improve electricity generation. "But unfortunately, these events took place," he said, referring to the mass protest movement that engulfed Iraq on October 1.

"We need to be fair to our people and listen to them."

At least 400 people have died since the uprising shook Iraq with thousands of Iraqis taking to the streets in Baghdad and the predominantly Shiite southern Iraq decrying corruption, poor services, lack of jobs and calling for an end to the post-2003 political system. Security forces have used live fire, tear gas and sound bombs to disperse crowds.

N Korea issues threat: Abe may see what a real ballistic missile is

REUTERS
SEOUL, NOVEMBER 30

NORTH KOREA'S state media on Saturday lashed out at Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as an "imbecile and political dwarf" for calling Pyongyang's latest test of a large multiple-rocket launcher a ballistic missile launch and warned he may see a real one in the near future.

North Korea fired two short-range projectiles into the sea off its east coast on Thursday, with its North Korean leader Kim Jong Un expressing "great satisfaction" over the latest test. Abe said on Thursday that North Korea's missile launch was a threat to Japan and the international community.

"It can be said that Abe is the only one idiot in the world and the most stupid man ever known in history as he fails to distinguish a missile from multiple launch rocket system while seeing the photo-accompanied report," KCNA news agency said, citing a vice director general of North Korean Foreign Ministry's Department of Japanese Affairs.

"Abe may see what a real ballistic missile is in the not distant future and under his nose... Abe is none other than a perfect imbecile and a political dwarf without parallel in the world."

UN Security Council resolutions ban North Korea from firing ballistic missiles and using such technology.

WHILE WORTHY OF SUPPORT, WE DID NOT FUND THE ORGANISATIONS TARGETED: ACTOR

Brazil's president accuses DiCaprio of financing Amazon fires

MARCELO TEIXEIRA & EDUARDO SIMÕES
SAO PAULO, NOVEMBER 30

BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT Jair Bolsonaro claimed on Friday that Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio financed fires being set in the Amazon rainforest, without presenting any evidence, the right-wing leader's latest broadcast in casting blame over forest fires that have generated international concern.

Bolsonaro appeared to be commenting on social media postings claiming that the envi-



Jair Bolsonaro



Leonardo DiCaprio

ronmental organization the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) had paid for images taken by volunteer firefighters that it then sup-

posedly used to solicit donations, including a \$500,000 contribution from DiCaprio.

The WWF has denied receiv-

ing a donation from DiCaprio or obtaining photos from the firefighters. "This Leonardo DiCaprio is a cool guy, right? Giving money to torch the Amazon," Bolsonaro said on Friday during brief remarks in front of the presidential residence.

DiCaprio denied having donated to the WWF. In a statement, the actor lauded "the people of Brazil working to save their natural and cultural heritage." But, he said, "While worthy of support, we did not fund the organizations targeted."

DiCaprio has been an outspoken advocate on behalf of com-

bating climate change, speaking frequently about environmental issues including the Amazon forest fires. His Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, which is focused on projects that "protect vulnerable wildlife from extinction," is part of the Earth Alliance.

Four members of the non-governmental organization Alter do Chão Fire Brigade were arrested on Tuesday with police accusing them of purposefully setting fires in order to document them and drum up more donations. They were released on Thursday on a judge's order. Bolsonaro has repeatedly

18 ECONOMY

TOTAL INVESTMENT IN STOCKS FROM LIFE FUND AT OVER ₹34,000 CRORE

LIC makes over ₹14,000 crore profit from markets till mid-Nov this fiscal

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 30

LIFE INSURANCE Corporation of India (LIC), the country's largest financial institution with a corpus of over Rs 31 lakh crore, has booked a profit of over Rs 14,000 crore from the stock market during the April 1-November 15 period of the current financial year.

The 30-share Sensex had gained 1,985 points, or 3.82 per cent, during the period under review, enabling the corporation to post good returns. The market value of LIC's investment as of end-FY19 stood at around Rs 28.7 lakh crore, growing 8.6 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

The insurer's total assets had touched an all-time high of Rs 31 crore in FY19, an increase of 9.4 per cent. This is nearly 20 per cent

EXPLAINED FY19 assets nearly a fifth of total stock market value

THOUGH LIC has invested in some high-priced PSU IPOs and played a big role in the government's disinvestment programme, the market value of the state-owned insurer's investment as of end-FY19 stood at around Rs 28.7 lakh crore, growing 8.6 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

LIC's total assets hit an all-time high of Rs 31 crore in FY19, a 9.4 per cent rise. This is almost 20 per cent of India's stock market capitalisation, which is at present Rs 154 lakh crore.

of India's stock market capitalisation, which currently stands at Rs 154 lakh crore. LIC — which started with an initial capital of Rs 5 crore in 1956 — began the 2019-20 fiscal year with an investible

corpus of Rs 348,692 crore, that will be invested in capital market instruments like bonds, including government securities, corporate bonds and equities.

"We have earned a profit of

above Rs 14,000 crore in the stock market this fiscal up to November 15, 2019 from Life Fund," said TC Suseel Kumar, managing director, LIC. "The total investment in the stock market this year so far from the LIC's Life Fund is over Rs 34,000 crore and the same was around Rs 31,000 crore last year," he added. LIC is the largest stock market investor in the country.

"Our investment depends on the market movement. We sell normally when the market rises and buy when it falls," the LIC MD further said.

LIC has seen a good growth in its business consisting of single premium, non-single premium, group pension business and investment income. "We haven't seen any slowdown in our business," Kumar said.

The corporation realised a lower profit of Rs 23,621 crore

from its equity investment during 2018-19, down 789 per cent from Rs 25,646 crore in the previous year. It made Rs 19,302 crore profit in 2016-17, while the Sensex gained 4,279 points.

Currently, about 65 per cent of investments in Life Fund — total investment corpus accumulated over decades — of LIC are in central and state government long term securities with high interest coupons.

At a time when the Indian financial sector is facing a huge crisis due to rising non-performing assets in the banking sector and defaults in debt payments by India Inc, LIC's growth in the investment income has risen by 5.17 per cent during 2018-19 as a result of regular follow-ups. Over the last four years, LIC's investments income has increased from Rs 1.53 trillion to Rs 2.06 trillion up to 2018-19.

FIRMS INTERESTED AFTER CORPORATE TAX CUT ANNOUNCEMENT

FM: 12 global companies showed interest in moving from China to India ... task force in contact

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 30

THE GOVERNMENT has finalised the first list of infrastructure projects as part of the recent proposal to invest Rs 100 lakh crore over the next five years and it will be announced by December 15, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Saturday, adding that as many as 12 global companies have shown interest in investing in India following the recent cut in corporate tax by the government.

"... a set of officers were looking into pipeline that can be readied so that once the fund is ready and it could be front-loaded. That task is near completion. Before December 15, I think we will be able to announce the front-loading of at least ten major projects. So the work is rapidly moving on it," Sitharaman said at the Economic Times Awards 2019 event.

The Finance Ministry, in September, had set up a task force headed by the Economic Affairs Secretary to prepare a roadmap for the "national infrastructure pipeline" from 2019-20 to 2024-25 under a Rs 100 lakh crore infrastructure plan.

Sitharaman said that when the Centre announced the corporate tax rate cut, it had said it will form a task group to look into those companies which want to get out of China. "So, this task force has already started contacting many of these companies. The last count, I came to know, was about 12 of them have already been spoken to, their minds understood, their expectation listed out so that the government can come up with a concrete offer for them to shift from where they are now, so that the ecosystems can get built here, new industries can come," the FM added.



PTI file photo

"Before December 15, I think we will be able to announce the front-loading of at least ten major projects. So the work is rapidly moving on it"

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
FINANCE MINISTER

She said the word that was given for bringing newer industries, which are moving out of China, is actively moving forward. "And I am sure, I will be able to report some progress on that," the minister added.

Talking about the GDP growth rates, she expressed hope that the next set of numbers would be better. During the loan outreach programme in October, public sector banks have disbursed more than Rs 2.5 lakh crore, the FM said.

"They (banks) reached out to 400 districts, literally the hinterland where the money went. And, as a result, now I can see something that kind of spend has helped in reviving the consumer spirits and purchases have gone up and I also hope that it will lead to improvement in tax collections," she said.

Sitharaman, however, said the progress on partial guarantee scheme is not very satisfactory. She said they focused on identifying the blocking points for liquidity and with help of the Reserve Bank of India, the government was able to prove that there was no liquidity deficit.

On the tax front, the FM said she met tax administrators across India and held discussions with them to ensure that even if it is impossible to meet their targets, they should not do anything which can

be construed as harassment. She further said that faceless assessments has been introduced in direct tax to ensure transparency in taxation and indirect tax too will have this system soon. She said systems for GST are being worked on so that it becomes as simple as the claim. "We would further like to simplify it," she said.

With regard to the rationalisation of tax rates, Sitharaman said, "We are having a good conversation with all the states and want to make sure that those essential items may be put to the lowest, if not exempt, but for the rest of them, we are trying to rationalise".

Earlier in the day, Sitharaman had tweeted saying that the government has taken structural reforms and will continue with its interventions and responses.

"Today, we mark the completion of six months of the second term of @PMOIndia @narendramodi. Several significant steps in structural reforms have been taken in these months. Responses/interventions addressing the needs of the economy will continue," her Twitter handle read.

The GDP growth for the second quarter fell to over six-year low of 4.5 per cent, primarily due to contraction in manufacturing, weak investment and consumption demand, data released on Friday showed.

THREE YEARS OF INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY CODE

Challenges for IBC: Lack of operational NCLT benches, low approval rate of resolution plans

AASHISHARYAN
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 30

THE INSOLVENCY AND Bankruptcy Code (IBC) of India, which turns three on Sunday, was hailed as a landmark legislation for debt resolution of companies of all sizes. A successor of sorts to the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act (SARFESI), Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR), and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) regime, the IBC might have reached a corner — but has failed to take the turn.

Data from the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), the sector regulator, is telling. Of the 2,542 corporate insolvency cases filed between December 1, 2016 and September 30, 2019, about 156 have ended in approval of resolution plans — a mere 15 per cent, according to latest data released by the IBBI.

In the current fiscal, as many as 1,037 cases of corporate insolvency have been admitted by var-

RISE IN CASES ADMITTED TO NCLT

■ This fiscal, as many as 1,037 cases of corporate insolvency have been admitted by various benches of NCLT across the country until September 30 — an rise of 51.6 per cent over the corresponding period last year

■ However, only 76 resolution plans have been approved this financial year

ious benches of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) across India until September 30 — an increase of 51.6 per cent over the corresponding period last year.

However, a meagre 76 resolution plans have been approved in the current fiscal, while the number of companies which have either been liquidated or are headed

at liquidation stands at 351 — which is one-third of the total number of insolvency cases filed until September 30.

Between April 1 and September 30 this year, 43 cases of insolvency have either been appealed for review or have been settled. There are as many as 52 cases in which the lenders have allowed corporate debtors to move out of corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) by use of Section 12 (A) of IBC.

In the past three years, the number of companies which have been sent for liquidation — either due to lack of feasible resolution plans or absence of any resolution plans whatsoever — stand at 587. These include big ticket names such as Adhunik Metaliks, Khaitan Electricals, and Orchid Health Care Private, among others.

The IBBI, however, defended the number in its latest data newsletter and said that nearly 427 of the companies which underwent liquidation were earlier with the BIFR and or defunct. "The economic value in most of these CDs (corporate debtors) had already

eroded before they were admitted to CIRP," the IBBI had said.

As of September 2019, 535 companies have spent more than 270 days, waiting to get resolved. In August this year, the Centre had introduced an amendment to increase the deadline to 330 days, but said that the CIRP shall mandatorily be completed within this time. "This would include extension of time as well as any exclusion of time on account of legal proceedings," the government had then said.

The Supreme Court, however, while delivering the judgment in the Essar Steel insolvency case, relaxed the criteria of "mandatorily" resolving the CIRP within 330 day, allowing the possibility of extending it beyond even that if need be.

Though the government had, in July, announced setting up of 25 additional single and division benches of NCLT at various places including Delhi, Jaipur, Kochi, Chandigarh, and Amravati, most of these remain non-operational or partly operational on account of lack of proper infrastructure or adequate support staff.

Cross-border insolvency: 'Work is on to amend IBC'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 30

INSOLVENCY AND Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) Chairman M S Sahoo on Saturday said that work is going on to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 that will address cross-border insolvency.

On Thursday, the IBBI chief had said the government is keen to introduce a globally accepted and well-recognised cross-border insolvency framework, which will make India an attractive investment destination, given the increased predictability and certainty of the insolvency process.

"There is proposal to amend the IBC to provide for such cases like cross border insolvency and to address some of the problems that have come up, but I will not be able to say which are these," Sahoo told reporters here on the sidelines of "Roadshow on Competition Law and Practice" organised by CII here.

BRIEFLY

Maruti crosses 20 million PV sales mark

New Delhi: Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Saturday said it has crossed milestone of 20 million passenger vehicle (PV) cumulative sales in the Indian market. The company accomplished this landmark number in less than 37 years of selling its first car on December 14, 1983, when it first rolled out the Maruti 800, MSI said. PTI

Yes Bank invokes pledged shares of Rlnfra

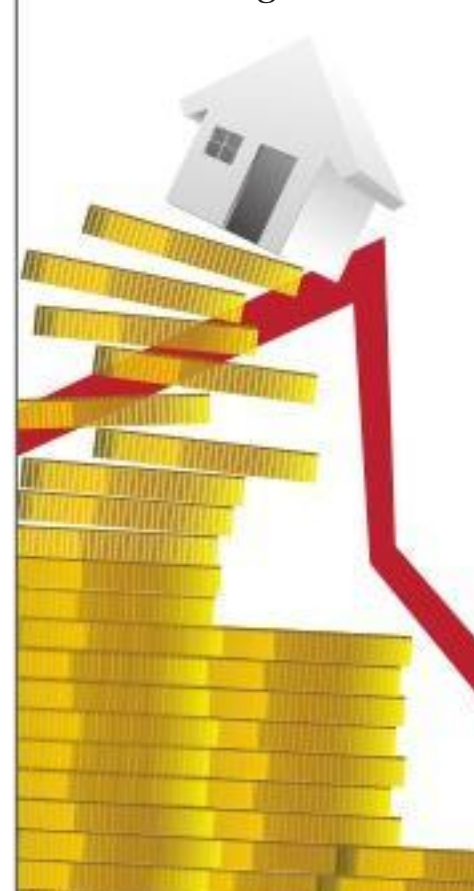
New Delhi: Yes Bank has invoked 65 lakh pledged shares of Reliance Infrastructure's (Rlnfra) promoter between November 25 to 28, the company has said in a BSE filing. These shares were held by one of the company's promoters Reliance Project Ventures and Management Ltd.

NCDs bought back by Adani Transmission

New Delhi: Adani Transmission on Saturday said it has bought back non-convertible debentures (NCDs) worth Rs 135 crore. As per a BSE filing, the NCDs were bought back on November 29. "Company has bought back 1,350 rated, listed, secured, redeemable, NCDs having face value of Rs 10 lakh each aggregating to Rs 135 crore on November 29, 2019," the filing said. PTI

'Liquidity pressures faced by non-banking financial sector to continue'

Still reeling from the IL&FS crisis, the non-banking financial sector is likely to continue facing liquidity pressures, though funding costs have come off the peak, Fitch Ratings said in its outlook for emerging market finance and leasing companies



VULNERABILITY OF HFCs: Wholesale and housing finance companies (HFCs) are viewed as more vulnerable — given their higher leverage, weaker asset-and-liability maturity (ALM) profiles and higher concentration risks

FUNDING ACCESS TO RETAIL FINANCIERS: Large retail finance companies with well-managed ALM profiles should continue to access bank and capital markets funding

SLOWER GROWTH IN 2020: Indian finance and leasing companies are likely to grow at a

slower pace in 2020 than in prior years, amid weaker economic growth and liquidity constraints

RISE IN COMPETITION TO AFFECT LOAN GROWTH: Increasing competition to offset lower growth may weigh on profitability and test risk appetite, which is likely to impact loan growth, including for business and commercial vehicles

FUNDING CONSTRAINTS FOR CONSTRUCTION: Acute slowdown in real estate may have a prolonged impact on construction financing as new disbursements have halted

HEADWINDS FOR FINANCIAL SECTOR IN 2020

- Challenging operating environments
- Lower growth prospects
- Rising funding pressure

FOCUS ON SMALL-TICKET CONSUMER LOANS:

Companies focused on small-ticket consumer loans continue to grow above the industry rate

CATERING TO DIVERSIFIED RETAIL MARKET:

Finance and leasing companies in India cater to a diversified retail market

PURCHASING MANAGERS' INDEX RISES TO 50.2 IN NOVEMBER, HIGHEST SINCE MARCH, NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS SAYS

China's factory activity unexpectedly returns to growth in November

YAWEN CHEN & SE YOUNG LEE
BEIJING, NOVEMBER 30

FACTORY ACTIVITY in China unexpectedly returned to growth in November for the first time in seven months, as domestic demand picked up on Beijing's accelerated stimulus measures to steady growth.

However, gains were slight, and export demand remained sluggish. More US tariffs are looming within weeks and Beijing and Washington are still haggling over the first phase of a trade deal.

With China's economic

growth cooling to near 30-year lows and industrial profits shrinking, speculation is mounting that Beijing needs to roll out stimulus more quickly and more aggressively, even if it risks adding to a pile of debt.

The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) bounced back to 50.2 in November, its highest since March, China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Saturday, above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction on a monthly basis.

The result compared with 49.3 in October. A Reuters poll showed analysts expected the November PMI to come in at 49.5.

IMPROVEMENT IN MANUFACTURING SECTOR

■ The official factory gauge pointed to an improvement in China's vast manufacturing sector last month. Total new orders rose back to expansionary territory with the sub-index rising to 51.3, the highest level seen since April

The official factory gauge pointed to an improvement in China's vast manufacturing sector last month. Total new orders bounced back to expansionary territory with the sub-index ris-

ing to 51.3, the highest level seen since April.

That indicates domestic consumption firmed up after Beijing repeatedly urged local governments to kick stimulus up a gear

to meet economic goals before year-end. Factory output also rose to 52.6 in November, marking the strongest pace since March.

"In the short term, we may have already passed the low point where the economy hit the bottom," Zhang Deli, a macro analyst with Lianxun Securities, wrote in a note.

Beijing has front-loaded 1 trillion yuan (\$142 billion) of a 2020 local government special bonds quota to this year and has urged that these bonds be issued and used as early as possible to boost infrastructure investment

downward economic pressure.

Zhang attributed to the better-than-expected November PMI to a government push on infrastructure investment, less property market control, and a de-escalation in US-China trade tensions in October, when both sides said they had substantially reached a "Phase 1" agreement and the United States delayed a tariff increase scheduled to take place on October 15.

But recent developments underscore rising uncertainties in the trade conflict, which bodes ill for the outlook for external demand. New export orders fell for an 18th straight month in November, albeit at a slower

pace, with the sub-index rising to 48.8 from 47.0 in October.

US President Donald Trump said this week that the world's largest economies are close to reaching agreement on the first phase deal. But trade experts and people close to the White House said it could slide into the new year, given China is pressing for more extensive tariff rollbacks.

An additional 15 per cent in US tariffs are scheduled to take effect on about \$156 billion of Chinese products on December 15. Trump has also highlighted Washington's support for protesters in Hong Kong, potentially a huge sore point for China. REUTERS

20 SPORTSLINE

SPORTING GAME FACES

Careers, cult followings and coming-of-age angst mean PUBG is not all fun & games for its biggest stars. GAURAV BHATT writes

THE KD Jadhav indoor hall at Delhi's Indira Gandhi stadium is never short on quality sporting action. Last November, Mary Kom won a record sixth world title here. PV Sindhu competed two months later and Sushil Kumar is a regular at the venue, named after an Indian wrestling great. Three weeks ago, the aforementioned Olympic medalists were outdrawn by a bunch of youngsters playing PUBG on their phones.

Esports is knocking on the Olympic door. And while the battle royale game itself wouldn't make the cut due to its 'violent' nature, a footfall of 25,000+ over five days (including fans willing to shell out Rs3,000 for VIP passes) signifies there's both a market and a talent pool of gamers. But what about those at the forefront of this revolution?

Professional players such as Naman Mathur, Abhijeet Andhare and Tanmay Singh double up as cult personalities, with millions of followers hanging on their every word. Streaming for hours, battling trolls, talking trash, competing with the world's finest; all the while setting an example for their impressionable young audience. It all comes with the territory, and this bunch of twenty-somethings is learning on the job. All they want is to be able to walk down the street unrecognised, and for people to call them sportspersons.



TANMAY 'SCOUT' SINGH

TANMAY SINGH recalls how India captain Sunil Chhetri's visit to the Minerva academy refuelled the football trainee's dream to play in Germany. Better yet, make it to the Bundesliga somehow. While a brutal hamstring injury during a try-out for Mohun Bagan put an end to that fantasy, Tanmay did book a ticket to Berlin through PUBG, but couldn't get a visa.

Tanmay's team made the cut for the qualifiers in Berlin, but their visa application was rejected twice (that the 'teams' were a ragtag bunch of teens not associated with a professional outfit didn't help matters). So while the world's finest assembled in Berlin on LAN (local area network), the Indian teams marked their attendance from an office in Gurgaon, in a game dictated by split-second actions.

"Indians go out everywhere as tourists, that is okay. But when players from a country are going out to compete, this happens," says the 21-year-old from Daman and Diu. "Gamers in China, other countries don't step on the ground without a red carpet. Even Sri Lanka now considers esports an official sport. But people here still think we are wasting our time."

He nods patiently when the plight of many other, er, traditional sports is detailed, but gets in the final word: "But how many of those athletes get this sort of attention?"

For Tanmay's parents, who wanted their only child to join the family business, even football wasn't viable. In a recent documentary, mother Sasmita shares how her friends told her to convince Tanmay to take up cricket instead since it has more scope. Imagine their dismay when he chose to play games for a living.

"When people say esports is not a sport... Dude, don't tell me what a sport is. I was a right-back, running up and down the field for 90 minutes. Woke up early, fitness, speed and ball drills. Practice, analysis. Fear of breaking your bones and being left out," says Tanmay. "I feel the same thing in PUBG. Being physically fit helps, and the hours spent improving are the same. The mental and motor skills required is too high."

Tanmay currently plays for Fnatic. The high-profile London-based organisation, which has been ruling the esports circuit since 2004, made its foray into PUBG this year and signed Tanmay and three others. The team finished ninth in Delhi and Tanmay admits feeling the pressure of representing a brand worth \$120 million.

"If we fail, the world will say Fnatic is not performing. Our real assessment starts from 2020 when they assign a reporting manager. Bad performances will cost us our contracts."

Tanmay is the closest PUBG has to a Nick Kyrgios, and it's not just the fashion sense. (Hair dyed white, piercings and a full-sleeve tattoo soon coming.) Despite his 408k subscribers on YouTube, Tanmay often is public enemy no 1 due to his run-ins with the community and gamers. Some would say he shoots his mouth as well as he does the in-game M416 and AKMs.

"Most of our viewers are children, teens. They believe in love one, disrespect all. They don't have that sort of maturity. Every time somebody trashed me, I shot back. Then I realised you have to ignore toxicity." In an interview, Tanmay shares the story of a failed relationship after a section of viewers targeted his girlfriend. "Daily, 1000-2000 messages. Very disgusting things. So we had to end."

Fans pose their own set of problems. "I am nothing without my fans. But I can't go to a crowded place, anywhere with a crowd of 12-25-year-olds," says Tanmay. "I get mobbed. It's good, but I don't want that. Kids surrounding you and screaming at you. I want to go out, relax. But when it's kids, you can't shout or tell them no. Strike a balance."

"What we do in competition, during streaming, is different from our personal lives. It's what we want to show you. Who we are personally is not for you," he signs off. "Idolise us, sure. But don't make us gods."



Despite his 408k subscribers on YouTube, Tanmay often is public enemy no 1 due to his run-ins with the community... In an interview, Tanmay shares the story of a failed relationship after a section of viewers targeted his girlfriend.



NAMAN 'MORTAL' MATHUR

ABHIJEET 'GHATAK' ANDHARE

A COMICALLY large prize cheque worth Rs40 lakh lies in the foyer of a Gurgaon flat, leading to a bunch of gamers lazing around in the living room. This is Team Entity, which managed to pip the Team Soul juggernaut to win the regional Southeast Asia finals of PUBG PMCO. The cash bounty is exciting, but team captain Abhijeet Andhare points to the beautiful trophy made of solid steel.

"18kg," Andhare informs. "Isko jeetna bhi mushkil tha aur uthana bhi."

Andhare is not your run-of-the-mill PUBG player. He's 28 and knows that a professional gamer's career dips post 30. He's also married, runs a photo lab in Pune and still has trouble convincing his wife to "let me go compete".

A competitive gamer a decade before PUBG even existed, Andhare won the 'Age of Conquerors' national tournament at the Symbiosis University in 2008. "I also played and won in DOTA. There was not this kind of exposure for gamers back then. You couldn't get anywhere playing games," says Andhare, who signed earlier this year with Entity Gaming, one of the more professionally-run outfits in India. Entity's roster spans several games and the pro-players share a 6BHK 'bootcamp' in Mumbai, earn a competitive salary and share of prize money, along with new iPhones to play on.

"I had that elite PC gamer mentality, so when I first saw friends play PUBG on their mobile phones, I went 'how can you play on a small screen? Why are you sitting around yelling into earphones?' They got me hooked and for a while, my photo lab suffered badly," laughs Andhare. "I sat around playing PUBG for 8-9 hours, and my wife would scold me. But I am earning through this game, I've been to Milan and I'll be going to Kuala Lumpur next. Even now, she gets a little annoyed but at least she knows I am doing something useful."

Asked if he would be comfortable letting future children take up PUBG as a career option, Andhare says: "Academics take priority. But parents should also avoid believing rumours about the game, how it makes people kill their parents or run away. Everybody is different."

Then there's the age-old question of esports being a sport. Andhare — who played under-17 cricket for the Deccan Gymkhana club in Pune — realises the significance of competing at the Capital's Indira Gandhi stadium but is also "tired of people telling me I'm not a sportsman."

"That swagger of being a batsman is something else. Everybody in your town knows your name. But this is better. I have friends from other countries, where esports is a degree in college and government supports athletes."

On that fateful night in Delhi, adrenaline and euphoria helped Andhare and Co hoist the trophy, but they couldn't lift the disappointment upon seeing the stream's chat section filled with congratulatory messages... for runner-up Naman 'Mortal' Mathur's Team Soul, punctuated by merciless trolling of Entity.

"The mentality of the Indian audience needs to change a little," laments team manager Kamaljeet Singh. "They just follow blindly. Naman has been very transparent too, he has such a nice heart. But he needs to tell his audience, 'cheer for Team Soul, not for one person.' Forget us, who actually won. But there are three other players in his team."

Andhare chooses not to talk about Mathur — "he is very respectful and friendly, and has helped bring so much exposure to this game" — but feels for parents not in the know.

"Parents, relatives would watch these events but wouldn't understand why their child is being abused so badly by so many people," says Andhare. "Imagine, in future, my son is competing at a global level. After several setbacks, wins but gets trolled. It will break my heart. It will take some time for the Indian audience to mature."



Abhijeet Andhare is not your run-of-the-mill PUBG player. He's 28 and knows that a professional gamer's career dips post 30. He's also married, runs a photo lab in Pune and still has trouble convincing his wife to "let me go compete".

IF YOU or someone you know has even a fleeting interest in the mad worlds of YouTube, PUBG or esports, you probably know Naman Mathur. Or his in-game name 'Mortal', a moniker rendered absurdly ironic by Mathur's skills in the game. Racking up kills in competitive events or spouting *Gully Boy* phrases such as 'Kya bolti public', 'Bohot hard' and 'bantai' while interacting with his fans, the 23-year-old phenom from Navi Mumbai has transcended into the mainstream. Most recently, he is being celebrated for donating his prize money to the Indian Army. To his 3.5 million YouTube subscribers and a million Instagram followers, Mathur is Ranveer Singh and MS Dhoni rolled in one.

A self-proclaimed 'influencer', Mathur is called upon when Manoj Bajpayee wants to promote his web series, or when phone manufacturers want to sell their latest handsets.

In India, PUBG has been installed on more than 100 million phones. Close to 250,000 players compete in nationwide events. But what differentiates Mathur from the dreamers is the ease with which his fingers dance on the 6-inch screen. In the 'life or death' firefights, Mathur's in-game spatial awareness is down to picking on smallest of cues like muffled footsteps or the sound of a can opening. He knows when to peek, when to engage and when to pick off unsuspecting players. No wonder his tutorial videos are what got him the traction initially.

Last month, Mathur led his equally-popular 'Soul' clan to a second finish, to qualify for the ongoing finals in Kuala Lumpur. While those present at the Indira Gandhi stadium screamed 'Mortal' and 'Soul' hoarse, a sizeable number followed the action online. Never mind the many bootleggers duplicating the stream, on PUBG's official YouTube channel, 120,000 viewers simultaneously caught the Hindi stream; 150,000 if you add those watching the English broadcast. While it was a fraction of viewers watching Virat Kohli bat against Bangladesh in the third T20 taking place simultaneously, it remains a sizable chunk of the important youth

demographic which chose to get its sports/entertainment fill from their PUBG heroes.

"This time around, the crowd reception was even better," Mathur told *The Indian Express*, and threw his weight behind the notion of PUBG as a sport. "It's all about communication. Holding up your end with skills. You're also representing your country overseas."

Behind the scenes, the commerce graduate is evasive but polite. His father passed away when he was four, and him and his seven-year-elder brother were raised by mother Kavita.

"Financially, we were troubled. My mother used to cook food for bachelors and office-goers and that used to be the major source of our income. She paid bills, put us through college and I cannot express in words how much I adore her," Mathur said. "She used to yell at me initially. Now she says, 'why are you wasting your time sleeping, you should be streaming.'"

His previous world finals appearance in Berlin ended in a 12th-place finish, following which Mathur took a break from competitive gaming. "Mentally, it had become taxing. I had decided that I will just stream games full-time now," says Mathur, whose sabbatical lasted a few weeks before sheer boredom and his team's requirements pulled him back. "The decision to quit was made pretty early, but then *Soul* needed a player. We played a few practice matches and the touch was still there."

Mathur says that the majority of the community welcomed him back, but acknowledges the sliver, which turned on the team and wanted them to fail. "I learnt very early to not focus on negative comments, because as the number of fans went up, that percentage also kept growing," says Mathur, who's also aware of the rabid fans waiting to go after a fellow player/streamer at the first perceived insult. "Being an influencer, you have to be entertaining, and you have to play it up. But when we are competing, we meet each other respectfully."

Those who bear the brunt of such attacks however feel Mathur should rein his audience in a bit...

Higher, Stronger, Warner

Australian opener puts banishment, poor Test form behind; surpasses Bradman with an unbeaten 335 against Pakistan



Steve Smith reached the mark in his 126th Test innings, bettering Wally Hammond's 73-year-old record by five innings. File

Smith fastest to 7,000 runs in Tests

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
ADELAIDE, NOVEMBER 30

STEVE SMITH on Saturday became the fastest man to score 7,000 Test runs, shattering a record that had stood since 1946, while moving past Donald Bradman to become Australia's 11th highest scorer. The 30-year-old took a single off Muhammad Musa during the second Test against Pakistan in Adelaide to reach the milestone and take possession of a record held for 73 years by English great Wally Hammond.

Hammond reached the mark in 131 innings, while Smith, who played his first Test nine years ago, made the grade in his 126th. India's Virinder Sehwag is the third fastest in 134 innings.

"The fastest to 7K -- you're a star Steve Smith!," tweeted Cricket Australia.

Smith also passed the legendary Bradman's 6,996 Test runs. It took Smith 70 Tests to do so, while Bradman needed only 52. The 30-year-old's heroics at the Ashes in England this year saw him widely labelled the best since Bradman, considered Test cricket's greatest ever, when he scored a mammoth 774 runs in just seven innings.

He had the opportunity to pass both Bradman and Hammond in the first Test against Pakistan in Brisbane, but fell for just four in a rare failure. In an insight into Smith's determination to be the best, he said after missing out in Brisbane that he punishes himself when the runs do not flow.

"I always punish myself when I get no runs, just like I reward myself when I score runs with a chocolate bar at the end of the night if I get a hundred," he said. "So yeah, if I get no runs I always like to have a run or go to the gym or do something just to give myself a bit of a punishment." Smith still has 10 other Australian players above him in total Test runs scored.

Greg Chappell (7,110) is his next target, but he has a mountain to climb to reach Ricky Ponting, who amassed 13,378 runs in his 168 Tests.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NOVEMBER 30

DAVID WARNER walked off the Adelaide Oval with his bat held aloft in one hand and his helmet in the other, forming the shape of a big V for victory. He'd already taken a theatrical bow after reaching a triple-century for the first time, and had leaped in his customary celebration of every 100.

Former Test captain Mark Taylor and tens of thousands of fans stood and applauded his unbeaten 335 against Pakistan in the second Test on Saturday.

Warner, who missed the last southern summer while serving a 12-month ban and entered the series against Pakistan after a poor Ashes return in England, beat the great Donald Bradman's record of 299 -- set against South Africa in 1931-32 -- for the highest test score at the Adelaide Oval. The 33-year-old left-hander opener is putting runs on the board, physically and metaphorically, in his rehabilitation with the Australian public.

Warner overhauled Bradman's highest test score of 334 with a single before his captain Tim Paine declared Australia's first innings at 589-3 on Saturday evening to give the bowlers a chance to get wickets before the main interval on day two of the match. It worked in favor of the team, with Australia's pacemen having Pakistan reeling at 96-6 at stumps on day two.

There was a strategic time limit for the declaration, Warner knew, so he wasn't upset at all at not getting the chance to take on Brian Lara's world record of 400 not out. Regardless, Warner's score is the 10th-highest in Test cricket and second only to Matt Hayden, who scored 380 against Zimbabwe in 2003, among Australian batsmen.

That was a position previously shared by Bradman and Taylor, who declared when he was on 334 against Pakistan at Peshawar in 1998.

Taylor was in a broadcasting box on Saturday when Warner surpassed his record. He applauded Warner, saying he had no problem with the Aussie opener taking a chance to surpass 334 runs. Bradman died in 2001 but his legacy lives on at his long-time home ground.

Warner knew the key numbers, "100 percent I was aware of it," he said. "You grow up knowing what those milestones are. You look at the history books and say, 'How did they get there?' It's a long time in the middle. It takes a lot of patience, which I surprised myself."

Warner walked through a guard of honour his teammates formed on the boundary as he went back to the dressing rooms for a well-deserved break. Warner's innings lasted 418 balls and contained 39 fours and one six -- which he whacked on 302 to surpass Pakistan skipper Azhar Ali's record for the biggest innings in a day-night Test.

"Around 280. I wasn't teary, but I was thinking 'this could actually happen,'" Warner said in an interview on Fox Sports.

When he reached 300, the TV cameras panned onto his wife, Candice, wiping away tears from behind her sunglasses. It's been an emotional ride for Warner, his wife and their three daughters. Shane Warne, who endured plenty of attention on and off the field in his record-setting career, told a national TV audience about the toll that being an international cricket star can have on a family.

Rise after fall from grace

Warner was widely perceived as the ar-



FULL CIRCLE AT ADELAIDE OVAL

David Warner celebrates after bringing up his triple hundred on Day 2 of the second Test against Pakistan. AP

8 Australians account for more than a quarter of the 31 individual scores of 300 or more in Test cricket. David Warner's became the seventh Aussie to reach the mark with Don Bradman having hit a triple century twice.

3 It's only the second triple ton in Day-Night Tests, after Azhar Ali's 302 vs WI in 2016. It is also the first triple century in Tests anywhere in the world in almost three years, after Karun Nair hit 303 not out against England in Chennai in December 2016.

162 Warner hit 39 fours and a six in his marathon innings, meaning he scored 162 runs in boundaries. Hence, as many as 173 of his runs were scored by sprinting between the wickets, testament to his fitness and stamina.

One hundred percent I was aware of it (the history). You grow up knowing what those milestones are. Forever you talk about Donald Bradman. I remember Michael Clarke at the SCG declared on 329 not out. They're things that you look at the history books and say, 'how did they get there -- that's a long time in the middle'. I managed to go out there and do that but it takes an incredible amount of patience which I surprised myself."

DAVID WARNER
AUSTRALIA OPENER

chitect of a clumsy plan to tamper with the match ball in a Test match in Cape Town against South Africa in March of last year. The episode made Warner one of the biggest outcasts in Australian sport. His fellow opener Cameron Bancroft was caught by TV cameras rubbing the surface of the ball with sandpaper, and got a nine-month ban. Steve Smith was banned for 12 months for not doing enough to foil the tampering plot.

All three accepted their bans, by far the harshest ever imposed in cricket for such an infraction, and each faced a grilling at news conferences on their returns to Australia. Warner returned in good one-day form at the Cricket World Cup in England, where he and Smith were constantly booed by the crowds until Australia lost in the semifinals.

But he only scored 95 runs in 10 innings in the subsequent Ashes series in August and September -- 61 and 11 were his only scores in double-digits -- casting doubt over his status as Australia's premier opener. He has answered any doubters with a rapid return to form in home conditions. He scored 100 not out, 60 not out, 57 not out, 2 not out, 20 and 48 not out in six Twenty20 internationals.

Then he opened the series against Pakistan with 154 in Australia's victory by an innings and five runs at the Gabba.

"I've prided myself on contributing," to Australia's cause, said Warner, who now has 23 centuries in 81 Tests. "Games are so close these days, you sort of lose what's just happened. You don't really get much time to celebrate because the schedule is so tight. When I've retired, having a beer with my mates, I'll reflect on it then."

Cricket Australia chief executive Kevin Roberts acknowledged in a radio interview before play on Saturday that there'd be people who can't forgive Warner for bringing the national team into disrepute.

"But," he told SEN radio, "hopefully there is a level of human respect for what he is doing and what is trying to contribute to his team and to the game."

Roberts said he understood there were people who told him Warner "is not their cup of tea".

"Dave is a street fighter," Roberts said. "And we get the best of that and, at times, you get the shadow side of that because like the rest of us he is human. What we're seeing is a fresh David Warner after his time out... the break has done him the world of good and we're seeing David Warner at his best."

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 589/3 declared in 127 overs (Warner 335 not out, Labuschagne 162; Shaheen Afridi 3/88) lead Pakistan 96/6 in 35 overs (Babar Azam 43 batting; Starc 4/22) by 493 runs

Sheetal wins national title, now eyes Olympic berth

NITIN SHARMA
JALANDHAR, NOVEMBER 30

SHEETAL TOMAR continued her dominance over Nirmala with a 7-3 verdict in the women's 50 Kg final at the Senior National Wrestling Championships on Saturday. It was Tomar's fourth meeting with Nirmala in recent years with her only loss coming in the World Championship trials, which meant she missed the showdown against Seema Bisla, who booked a spot in the major event. But after becoming national champion, the Rajasthan Police inspector expressed confidence of winning a quota for the 2020 Olympics in her weight category.

"Nirmala *didi* was in good form here. Before losing to her in the trials for the world championships, I had defeated Nirmala *didi* three times and knew I can do the same today. I had worked upon my leg attacks, which helped me gain control in the final. It's a dream for any wrestler to qualify for the Olympics and today's win will add to my confidence," shared Tomar.

Hailing from Pachgaon village near Meerut, Tomar started wrestling under coach Jabar Singh Saum at the akhada in Chaudhary Charan Singh University with her father Sompal Singh dropping her daily. Her father died following a heart attack six months later

'Sheetal can surprise any wrestler in the 50 kg category and her strength is her speed. This weight category is the most competitive in India as Seema, Anju and now Nirmala have been doing well.'

and a young Tomar had to worry about her training and diet.

She became national sub-junior champion in the 44Kg category apart from claiming a bronze medal at the Asian Junior Championships in Thailand in 2013, a year in which she also finished sixth at the world junior championship. Last year, Tomar won a bronze in the 50 Kg category at the nationals.

"I had started wrestling on seeing Alka Tomar didi win medals at the national and international level and would try her moves at the akhada. We had to take some loan to support my training and diet initially but things improved when I joined as an inspector with Rajasthan Police. We have repaid the loan and seeing my medals brings the biggest joy to my family," shares Tomar.

Chief national coach Kuldeep Malik believes Tomar has the game to excel at the international level. "Sheetal can surprise any wrestler in the 50 kg category and her strength is her speed. This weight category is the most competitive in India as Seema, Anju and now Nirmala have been doing well, and any of these girls can win against any other on any given day," he said.

Return of the old guard

On a day when World Championships bronze medallist Vinesh Phogat (55 Kg) and Rio Olympics bronze medallist Sakshi Malik (62 Kg) added to their gold tally at the nationals, it was a day for the old guard too. Delhi Commonwealth Games gold medallist Anita Sheoran, 34, emerged as the champion in the 68 Kg category with a 5-1 win over Divya Kakran, while Punjab's 35-year-old Gursharan Kaur, a single mother of a five-year-old girl, claimed the title in the 76 Kg with a 4-2 win over Pooja of Haryana. Sheoran had competed in last year's nationals in a different weight category.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
HAMILTON, NOVEMBER 30

ENGLAND LOST two early wickets in reply to New Zealand's 375 as their hopes of saving the series faded after another Black Caps defining partnership involving BJ Watling in Hamilton on Saturday. When New Zealand had the wobbles, their first-Test hero partner debutant Daryl Mitchell in a 124-run stand for the sixth-wicket to get them up to a respectable total.

England were then in immediate trouble with Dom Sibley and Joe Denly removed as they reached stumps at 39 for two. With only three days remaining England appeared to have little chance of building a big enough total to win the Test and square the series Sibley was out for four, not long after he ducked into a Tim Southee delivery and was hit on the helmet, Joe Denly was also out for four, caught off Matt Henry while Rory Burns made it to stumps unbeaten on 24 after being dropped twice. Joe Root, who has been out of form in the series, was not out six.

While Southee and Henry had England under pressure the tourists had struggled to exert the same dominance while in the field for nearly two full days. They removed both overnight batsmen early on day two and then lost the initiative as Watling and Mitchell staged their repair mission before Stuart Broad removed both batsmen either side of the tea break.

Watling, whose double century set New Zealand up for a comprehensive victory in the first Test, was out for 55 on the last ball before the interval while Mitchell departed in the fourth over after play resumed. New Zealand's last four wickets added a further 60 runs, with Broad finishing with figures of four for 73 and Chris Woakes three for 83.

All-rounder Mitchell, the son of former All Blacks coach and now England assistant rugby coach John Mitchell, was unruffled in



England's Stuart Broad picked up four wickets for 73.

All-rounder Mitchell was unruffled in his maiden Test performance. He brought up his 50 pulling Ben Stokes through mid-wicket for four in a 159-ball innings.

his maiden Test performance. He brought up his 50 pulling Ben Stokes through mid-wicket for four in a 159-ball innings which included eight boundaries and one six.

An even more cautious Watling, who reached his 18th half century with an elegant cut to the cover boundary off Sam Curran, faced 192 deliveries for his 55. It was

slow going by the pair, but from New Zealand's viewpoint their innings lasted almost two days which left England with only a remote chance of winning the Test to square the series.

England had their tails up at the start of the day when overnight centurion Tom Latham added only one boundary to his total before he misjudged a Broad delivery seaming back at him and was bowled for 105. Broad stayed in the action to catch Henry Nicholls for 16 off Sam Curran, which brought the untested Mitchell to the middle to join Watling and bat New Zealand to a position of strength.

BRIEF SCORES: New Zealand 375 in 129.1 overs (Latham 105, Mitchell 73, Watling 55, Taylor 53; Broad 4/73, Woakes 3/83) lead England 39/2 in 18 overs by 336 runs.

BCCI AGM set to water down cooling-off clause

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, NOVEMBER 30

THE BCCI AGM in Mumbai on Sunday is expected to focus on some proposed amendments in the existing cricket board constitution, including a relaxation in the cooling-off clause for office-bearers. The existing BCCI constitution sends an office-bearer to a mandatory three-year cooling-off after serving six years either consecutively at the state association or the BCCI, or a combination of both. The proposed amendment seeks to look at the six-year periods separately, at the BCCI and state level.

"We will take the approved amendments to the Supreme Court and will seek the court's approval," said a BCCI official.

The BCCI constitution allows the provision of amending the Rules and Regulations "by a 3/4th majority of the members present" at the AGM or a Special General Meeting (SGM). But to put them into effect, the Supreme Court's approval is required. For any further amendments in the future, the BCCI has sought an amendment to the constitution which, if approved, will not require the court's intervention.

The cooling-off amendment, if approved, will allow Ganguly to continue as BCCI president for six years at a stretch. Going by the present constitution, he will have to step aside for a three-year cooling-off in July next year, because he has already served as a Cricket Association of Bengal office-bearer for over five years.

Meanwhile, the BCCI is likely to wait till December 3 before appointing the Cricket Advisory Committee. With the next court hearing scheduled that day, the board has decided to play a waiting game. The CAC is authorised to appoint all cricket committees, including selection committees. But the Board is finding it difficult to form the CAC because of the conflict-of-interest issue.

Mismatch and a record

India beat Pak 4-0 to book spot in the 2020 qualifiers as Paes improves Davis Cup mark

SHAHID JUDGE
NOVEMBER 30

IT TOOK just under 300 days for the India-Pakistan Davis Cup tie to take place - from the day the two countries were drawn against each other - but once it did, the Indians took just under three hours to seal it.

Ramkumar Ramanathan and Sumit Nagal gave the Indians a 2-0 lead after the first day, and on Saturday, debutant Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan paired with Leander Paes, the world record-holder for most doubles wins in the Davis Cup, to secure the tie with a 6-1, 6-3 win over 17-year-olds Huzaifa Abdul Rehman and Muhammad Shoaib.

Following that, Nagal played a dead rubber against Yousaf Khalil, winning 6-1, 6-0 as India ran out 4-0 winners.

Ever since the two neighbouring countries were drawn to play each other, back in February, for a spot in the World Group Playoffs, the tie remained under a shadow of doubt - for non-sporting reasons. Tensions between the two countries first grew after the Pulwama terrorist attack. But after Article 370 was revoked in Jammu and Kashmir in August, with the state divided into two union territories, All India Tennis Association (AITA), at the behest of its players, started haggling with the International Tennis Federation (ITF) to have the tie either shifted to a neutral venue or delayed to November. The world body eventually approved both requests, and the September 14-15 tie in Islamabad was moved to November 29-30, to be held in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan - much to the annoyance of Pakistan's stalwarts Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan.

The veteran Pakistani pair decided to boycott the event, and their federation was forced to field a three-man team of Davis Cup debutants - all college students with little to no tennis experience at a high level. The result of the tie was already a foregone conclusion once India announced a strong team and Pakistan fielded a depleted squad, and the Indians made sure of it in a no-nonsense fashion.

So much so that in the six sets that were played over the three live rubbers, Pakistan only managed to win six games, and had no break point opportunities. So vast was the gulf in class between the two sets of players that the Indians toyed with their opponents and seemingly tried to earn bragging rights within their own team.

"I was trying really hard to match Ram's score. That was one



The Indian Davis Cup squad after the win over Pakistan in Nur Sultan on Saturday.

Ever since the two neighbouring countries were drawn to play each other, back in February, for a spot in the World Group Playoffs, the tie remained under a shadow of doubt - for non-sporting reasons.

of my goals," Nagal said after winning the second rubber against Rehman 6-0, 6-2 on Friday. Ramkumar had earlier beaten Shoaib 6-0, 6-0. "I went with the mentality that I want to win this match 6-0, 6-0, but he (Rehman) did play well in a few of the games, so I have to give it to him."

By that stage, Shoaib had already set a new Davis Cup record by, at 17, becoming the youngest ever player to captain his side. The previous record belonged to 19-year-old American Maurice McLoughlin, who had led the United States against Australasia in 1909.

On Saturday though, 18-time Grand Slam champion Paes extended his own Davis Cup record

of most number of doubles wins in the competition. In 2018, the 46-year-old had won his 43rd doubles match in the tournament, breaking legendary Italian Nicola Pietrangeli mark of 42. That record now stands at 44.

The Indians also had a chance to equal a 28-year-old Davis Cup record. In 1991, Sri Lanka had beaten Syria in a tie that saw them drop only six games - the most decisive win in the competition till date. But the lone game Nagal dropped in his win against Khalil in the dead rubber took India's tally to seven. But they were not complaining.

For a tie that took 10 months to be held, and with all the drama around team selection, venue assessment and a curious decision about captaincy, the matches in chilly Nur-Sultan were quick and painless. That may not be the case when the Indians next compete in the Davis Cup, against the mighty Croatians in their own backyard.

Van Dijk helps Reds surge 11 points clear

REUTERS
NOVEMBER 30

LIVERPOOL HUNG on after having goalkeeper Alisson Becker sent off to beat Brighton & Hove Albion 2-1 and extend their lead at the top of the Premier League to 11 points thanks to two first-half headers from defender Virgil van Dijk.

Liverpool, who also equalled their unbeaten top flight run of 31 games set between May 1987 and March 1988, have 40 points from 14 games, with second-placed champions Manchester City on 29 after they were held to a 2-2 draw at Newcastle United.

It was a nervy record-extending 14th successive Premier League win at home for Liverpool, who missed a string of chances either side of Van Dijk's double before they were forced to defend desperately in the closing stages. The towering Dutch defender acknowledged Alisson's sending off was a blow ahead of Liverpool's Merseyside derby at home to Everton on Wednesday and also praised Brighton.

"We should have done better," Van Dijk was quoted as saying by the BBC. "We put him in that situation but it is what it is. We have to deal with it. It is a disappointment but we go again."

"They (Brighton) are a good side. They play football and take risks. It's not easy. We should have gone better than we did in the second half but you have to give them credit as well."

Van Dijk opened the scoring in the 18th minute with a looping header after Trent Alexander-Arnold floated in a free kick from the right and the two combined again for the second goal six minutes later.

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