



THE MARKETS ON FRIDAY

	Chg#
Sensex	41,681.5 ▲ 7.6
Nifty	12,271.8 ▲ 12.1
Nifty futures*	12,290.0 ▲ 18.2
Dollar	₹71.1 ** ₹71.0 ***
Euro	₹78.9 ₹79.1 ***
Brent crude (\$/bbl)**	67.1** 67.7**
Gold (10 gm)***	₹37,968.0 ▲ ₹91.0

* (Dec) Premium on Nifty Spot; ** Previous close; # Over previous close; ## At 9 pm IST; ### Market rate exclusive of VAT; Source: IBA

SATURDAY, 21 DECEMBER 2019 • MUMBAI (CITY) ₹10.00
VOLUME VII NUMBER 21 • 22 pages in 2 sections



WEEKEND SEPARATE SECTION

ANGLO-INDIAN COMMUNITY: A MINORITY AMONG MINORITIES

BACK PAGE P14

JOHNSON WINS DEAL VOTE, BREXIT ENTERS FAST TRACK

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM AHMEDABAD, BENGALURU, BHUBANESWAR, CHANDIGARH, CHENNAI, HYDERABAD, KOCHI, KOLKATA, LUCKNOW, MUMBAI (ALSO PRINTED IN BHOPAL), NEW DELHI AND PUNE

www.business-standard.com

SIX DIE IN CLASHES AS CITIZENSHIP LAW STIR ROCKS NATION



Massive protests against the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens continued for the sixth consecutive day across the country on Friday. Protests were mostly peaceful, barring Uttar Pradesh, where six people lost their lives in the state in protest-related violence and police action. **14 ▶**

ECONOMY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS P6

Fitch cuts GDP growth projection to 4.6%

Fitch Ratings on Friday cut India's economic growth projection to 4.6 per cent from its earlier forecast of 5.6 per cent for the fiscal year 2019-20 as credit squeeze and deterioration in business and consumer confidence over the past few quarters hurt growth.

Rural jobs scheme to get ₹10K cr more in Budget

The Union government might announce an 8-10 per cent increase in average wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act by linking these to an updated inflation index, the revamped consumer price index - agriculture labour (CPI-AL). **SANJEEB MUKHERJEE reports 4 ▶**

THE SMART INVESTOR P10

Bharat Bond ETF raises over ₹12,000 crore

The Bharat Bond Exchange Traded Fund (ETF), the country's first corporate bond ETF, has raised over ₹12,000 crore through its new fund offer, getting subscription of 1.7 times over its base issue of ₹7,000 crore.

BS ON SATURDAY SPECIALS

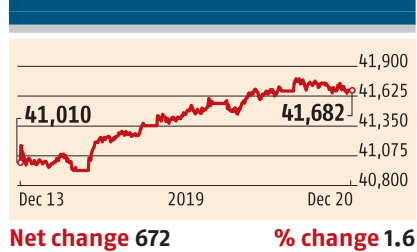
WEEKEND RUMINATIONS: Re-think GST

Perhaps GST was too complex a system for the Indian economy at its present stage of development. Regardless, the Centre has to break heads in the GST Council and make a fresh start, writes **T N NINAN**

NATIONAL INTEREST: Indian, nationalist and Muslim

A new Indian Muslim is rising. They're dressed like Muslims but are also flaunting their patriotism, nationalism, love for tricolour, national anthem and Constitution. **SHEKHAR GUPTA writes 9 ▶**

SENSEX THIS WEEK



Take bold investment steps: PM to India Inc

Modi says the economy has resilience to reverse the current slowdown

SUBHAYAN CHAKRABORTY
New Delhi, 20 December

Structural weaknesses in the economy have been taken care of and India Inc should now make bold investment decisions to push up growth and help the economy reach the \$5-trillion target, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told corporate leaders on Friday.

Speaking at an event to mark 100 years of industry body Assocham's foundation, Modi said there would be investments worth ₹100 trillion in the infrastructure sector over the coming years while ₹25 trillion would be spent on the rural economy. He added the government would spend ₹3.5 trillion on delivering clean and safe drinking water to every household.

Referring to public discourse on the current ongoing economic slowdown, Modi said he refused to challenge the criticism of the government, and instead focused on positive signs of growth. However, repeatedly hitting out at the previous United Progressive Alliance government, Modi said gross domestic product growth had plummeted to only 3.5 per cent during one quarter.

He also said the inflation rate then was a high 9.4 per cent while the fiscal deficit was hovering at 5.6 per cent of GDP. GDP growth fell for six consecutive quarters to a six-year low of 4.5 per cent in July-September 2019 amid a sustained slump in manufacturing and declining consumption.

"I don't want to engage in the debate over why some people (who are speaking now) were silent back then. The country's economy has faced ups and lows earlier as well but now the economy has the resilience to reverse the current slowdown and return to a high-growth trajectory," Modi said.

Achieving a \$5-trillion economy is absolutely possible, he added.

Commenting on detractors who argued the target was unnecessary, Modi clarified he remained unfazed by criticism since the beginning. The government is working to end the inverted duty structure for goods, as a result of which the cost of manufacturing was going down.

Turn to Page 10 ▶



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Assocham annual conference in New Delhi on Friday. PHOTO: DALIP KUMAR



PIYUSH GOYAL VOWS MORE MEASURES TO BOOST TRADE



VILLAGE INDUSTRIES TURNOVER TO BE ₹2 TRN IN 5 YEARS: GADKARI

We are with you: FM

ARUP ROYCHOUDHURY
New Delhi, 20 December

Finance Minister (FM) Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday assured India Inc that the government would help revive businesses as it did not want any company to shut down, and urged industry to come out of "self-doubt". "This government does not want businesses to close. We want to help them to be revived by legislative and other administrative changes... we are with you. I want this mood of self-doubt to be completely removed from your minds," the FM said at an event by industry body Assocham.

"Several steps (have been) taken post-Budget which were essentially responding to industry and some of them are probably showing some impact on the ground now."

The FM said state-owned banks had been told to lend more instead of holding it in reverse repo with the Reserve Bank of India. **Turn to Page 10 ▶**



Mahindra to take a back seat

Switch to non-executive role from Apr; Goenka gets additional charge

T E NARASIMHAN
Chennai, 20 December

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M), the Indian automobile major with interests in defence manufacturing, energy, and farm equipment, is revamping its senior management structure as part of a succession plan in which Anand Mahindra will transition to the role of non-executive chairman, effective April 1, 2020. Currently, he is executive chairman of the group.

Pawan Kumar Goenka, who has been reappointed managing director at M&M, will have an additional responsibility as chief executive officer (CEO) for a year, effective April 1, 2020. In an announcement on Friday, the company said M&M's governance, nomination and remuneration committee (GNRC) undertook a board and senior management restructuring exercise. It has created the CEO position as it aims to implement its plans around electric mobility and capitalise on the synergies with Ford's India operations in the near future. **Turn to Page 10 ▶**



Anand Mahindra, Chairman, Mahindra group



Pawan Goenka, Managing director, M&M

Equity investors shrug off NCLAT blow to Tatas

Most key Tata stocks have gained since Wednesday's order; weakness remains in smaller stocks

KRISHNA KANT & DEV CHATTERJEE
Mumbai, 20 December

Equity investors have largely shrugged off the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal's (NCLAT's) adverse judgment in the Tata Sons-Cyrus Mistry case. Most of the leading Tata stocks have either gained in the past three days or have fallen marginally. There has been no major meltdown or correction in the stock prices of Tata companies, despite the judgment having the potential to create uncertainty in the top leadership.

The NCLAT had on Wednesday restored Cyrus Mistry as Tata Sons chairman, setting aside the appointment of N Chandrasekaran to that position. The group is likely to appeal against the NCLAT order in the Supreme Court in the coming weeks. Analysts say that even if the apex

UNSHAKEN

The stock market performance of Tata stocks since NCLAT judgment



Company	Current m-cap (₹cr)	3-day chg (%)	Chg YTD (%)
TCS	8,33,986	2.6	19.7
Titan Co	1,06,707	3.8	29.2
Tata Motors	54,509	-2.3	2.0
Tata Steel	52,392	4.9	-11.6
Volta	21,524	-2.8	17.7
Tata Global	19,720	-3.9	42.4
Trent	18,780	2.6	46.1
Indian Hotels Co	16,685	-6.0	-5.0
Tata Chemicals	16,546	-0.7	-8.3
Tata Power Co	14,984	-1.2	-27.8
Sensex	41,681.5	0.8	16.0

Source: Capitaline; Compiled by BS Research Bureau

court grants a stay on the order, it will curtail Chandrasekaran's ability to take major decisions, including those related to top-level appointments. This could hamper decision making

in key group companies whose boards of directors are chaired by the Tata Sons chairman, they said. "In the short term, it will certainly bring uncertainty into the group as

the NCLAT order has called the appointment of the current Tata Sons chairman as illegal. And if the case drags on in the Supreme Court, then it will make life difficult for the Tata group companies. An early decision by the top court is good for all stakeholders," said Shriram Subramanian, founder and managing director of proxy advisory firm InGovern.

The bourses are, however, not giving much importance to the issue. The group's top two most valuable companies — Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Titan Company — have gained since Wednesday in line with the general buoyancy in the large cap stocks. The benchmark BSE Sensex is up 0.8 per cent since the close trading on Tuesday. The two companies account for nearly 80 per cent of the group companies' combined market capitalisation. **Turn to Page 10 ▶**

No cut in spectrum price as govt okays auction by April

Payment modalities relaxed with 2-year moratorium

MEGHA MANCHANDA
New Delhi, 20 December

The Union government has set the ball rolling for the next round of airwave auction by approving the sale of 8,300 MHz spectrum across all 22 telecom circles, including for 5G services, in March-April at a reserve price of ₹5.23 trillion. The Digital Communications Commission (DCC), the apex decision-making body in the telecom department, has kept the spectrum price unchanged as it accepted the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai).

Although the industry is disappointed with the government decision not to lower spectrum prices at a time telcos are saddled with over ₹4-trillion debt and an estimated ₹1.43-trillion licence fee dues, the DCC has relaxed the payment structure to offer some relief to the financially stressed sector.

Critical of the DCC decision to proceed with spectrum auctions in the near future, Rajan Mathews, director general, Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), said it wouldn't be easy for the industry. "With spectrum reserve prices four to six times higher than that of similar spectrum sold recently in several countries, high levels of debt and prevailing financial stress in the sector, telecom service providers will find it very difficult to raise funds to participate in the auctions."

Of the spectrum to be put on sale, a lion's share of 6050 MHz has been set aside for 5G spectrum that will enable services using cutting-edge next-generation mobile technology. It's another matter that most telcos including Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel have maintained that they would stay away from 5G auction due to high spectrum price in the midst of financial stress. To lift the industry mood, Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had said at an event in October that the government would bring in reform in spectrum pricing, but that hasn't happened.

While there's no spectrum price reduction, the DCC has decided to offer a two-year moratorium on payment for the airwaves across bands, besides relaxation in upfront payments. **Turn to Page 10 ▶**



SPECTRUM OF WOES

8,300 MHz Amount of spectrum to be put up for sale by March-April

25% Upfront amount that successful bidders will have to pay for sub-1 GHz spectrum

50% Upfront payment for higher frequency bands (over 1 GHz or 1,000 MHz)

2 years Moratorium period for payment after the upfront amount is given

16 Number of annual instalments from the third year onwards

₹492 cr Pan-Indian base price per MHz suggested by Trai for 5G radiowaves

₹6,568 cr Reserve price for the premium 700 MHz spectrum, which went unsold in the 2016 auction. Then its price was ₹11,485 crore per MHz



4G spectrum to be allocated to BSNL; Railways has been excluded from these auctions

A DAY OF APPOINTMENTS

Sunil D'Souza to be MD & CEO of Tata Global Beverages

Whirlpool India's Managing Director Sunil D'Souza will be the new MD and chief executive officer (CEO) of Tata Global Beverages, the firm said on Friday. The firm said Ajit Krishna Kumar would take over as chief operating officer. D'Souza's appointment is effective April 2020. The announcement of D'Souza at the helm of Tata Global brings to an end a nearly six-month search for a new captain to steer the company, which is changing focus from being a beverages-only company to one that includes foods as well. Incumbent MD and CEO Ajoy Misra is retiring from the company at the end of FY20. The change in focus at Tata Global is due to the proposed demerger of the consumer products division of Tata Chemicals into it, announced in May, which will see the turnover of the former increase 25 per cent to ₹9,099 crore. The demerger is likely to be completed by the end of FY20.



VIVEAT SUSAN PINTO

CG Power names ex-CJI T S Thakur investigation head

CG Power and Industrial Solutions on Friday said it has appointed former Chief Justice of India T S Thakur as head of investigation to monitor the ongoing forensic investigation. The proposal was accepted by Justice Thakur, the company said.



Sridharan joins Piramal to lead consumer finance

Jairam Sridharan, ex-chief financial officer of Axis Bank, has joined Piramal Enterprises as chief executive officer of its consumer finance business. Anand Piramal, executive director, said the enterprise looks at good growth opportunities in consumer and small-business financing segment.

OYO appoints Ankit Gupta chief operating officer

OYO Hotels & Homes on Friday said it has appointed Ankit Gupta as chief operating officer and senior vice president for its coliving, rental homes and self-operated hotel businesses in Indian and South Asia. Gupta has been appointed as COO & SVP - Frontier Businesses, OYO India & South Asia.

Jaideep Nandi joins Bajaj Consumer as chief executive

Bajaj Consumer said it had appointed Jaideep Nandi its CEO, effective January next year. An alumnus of the IIM Bengaluru, Nandi was working with Asian Paints. The decision was approved by the board on Friday.



Becky Schmitt appointed EVP, chief people officer of Cognizant

IT firm Cognizant has named Becky Schmitt as its new executive vice-president (EVP) and chief people officer. Schmitt will succeed Jim Lennox, who is retiring after a 16-year stint with the company. She will join Cognizant on February 1. She is currently the senior vice-president and chief people officer at Sam's Club, a \$59 billion division of Walmart. The announcement was made by Cognizant Chief Executive Officer Brian Humphries in a e-mail to employees.

ONGC to get Panna-Mukta fields from Shell, Reliance

Production-sharing contracts for the fields will expire on Dec 21

SHINE JACOB
New Delhi, 20 December

After operating the Panna-Mukta oil and gas fields for 25 years, Shell and Reliance Industries (RIL) will hand over the fields to state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Saturday.

RIL and Shell, through its subsidiary BG Exploration & Production India (BGEPI), hold 30 per cent each in Panna, Mukta, and Tapti joint venture (JV), while the remaining 40 per cent is owned by ONGC, the government nominee. "The Panna-Mukta and Tapti (PMT) JV partners will be handing over the Panna-Mukta oil and gas fields back to the government's nominee, ONGC, on December 21," Shell and RIL said in a statement on Friday. The production from Tapti field had stopped in early 2016, while the output from other fields was dipping constantly.

The Production Sharing Contracts (PSC) for the PMT fields, which were executed by the JV with the Centre in 1994, will expire on December 21. The Tapti process platform facilities were handed over to ONGC in 2016. Decommissioning and site restoration of residual Tapti facilities, including five unmanned platforms and in-field pipelines, are being carried out by the JV under India's first offshore decommissioning and site restoration project. The Tapti decommissioning and other commercial activities would continue in BGEPI even after Panna-Mukta handover.

AT A GLANCE

Panna-Mukta production since 1994

CRUDE OIL
211 million barrels

NATURAL GAS
1.25 trillion cubic feet

Production in 2019

CRUDE OIL
10,000 barrels a day

NATURAL GAS
140 million metric standard cubic feet a day



million barrels (mmbbls) of oil and 1.25 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas since December 1994. In 2019, the average monthly production from the fields was 10,000 barrels (bbls/day) of crude oil and 140 million metric standard cubic feet (mmscf/day) of natural gas.

B Ganguly, president of exploration and production at RIL, said: "At their peak, Panna-Mukta has contributed to nearly 6 per cent of India's oil production and almost 7 per cent of India's gas production in 2007-08. RIL has been a part of this journey and contributed, by providing energy, to the growth and development of India's oil and gas sector."

The PMT fields were the first in India to be operated under a joint operatorship model. The Panna-Mukta fields, off the Mumbai coast, have produced 211

Jet's insolvency process gets 90-day breather

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 20 December

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Friday approved the extension of Jet Airways insolvency resolution process by 90 days.

The committee of creditors (CoC) sought extension of the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) of Jet Airways from the Mumbai Bench of the NCLT, in view of South America's Synergy Group wanting more time for due diligence and two new interests being shown for the grounded airline.

The tribunal, comprising Bhaskara Pantula Mohan and Rajesh Sharma, gave their approval for the extension of time as the 180-day deadline for CIRP period of the grounded airline had ended on December 16.

On Thursday, Synergy Group Jet Airways' sole potential bidder had sought more time to take a decision on investing in the grounded airline. After being asked to expedite their decision, the representative of the Synergy Group had said the company wants to comply with the tribunal's directions, but it also has to ensure that it takes the right decision on behalf of its stakeholders.

"We understand the urgency of the matter.



SHARES RISE

Dec 19	Dec 20	Chge (%)
₹23.35	₹24.50	4.93

Source: Bloomberg

However, we will require a little bit more time to arrive at the conclusion that this is the right decision on behalf of the stakeholders," he added.

He said the company sees a good opportunity in Jet Airways, given some issues are resolved.

"Some of the criteria that needs to be resolved are that we are looking to float a new company free of all legacy liabilities of the erstwhile Jet Airways. We may want to look at partnering with an Indian partner. We also expect clarity on getting back Jet's airport slots, especially the domestic slots and seek further clarity on Heathrow, London, slots," the Synergy Group representative told the tribunal.

Embassy Group to infuse more funds into office park REIT

DEBASIS MOHAPATRA
Bengaluru, 20 December

Embassy Group plans to add more assets to its office park real estate investment trust (REIT) in the coming quarters.

The Bengaluru-headquartered real estate entity was the first company to list its REIT on Indian stock exchanges, after raising ₹3,000 crore earlier this year through issue of non-convertible debentures maturing June 2022 with annual yield of 9.4 per cent.

Blackstone Group is the other sponsor of this REIT.

"Our REIT is performing pretty well and we are putting in some more assets into it," said Aditya Virwani, chief operating officer at Embassy. "We are more inclined towards the REIT model because of predictable cash flow, which makes investors comfortable with this asset class."

Currently, the Embassy Office Parks REIT has 25 million sq ft of completed assets, with a pipeline of another eight mn sq ft in major cities, including Bengaluru and Mumbai.

WE ARE MORE INCLINED TOWARDS THE REIT MODEL BECAUSE OF PREDICTABLE CASH FLOW, WHICH MAKES INVESTORS COMFORTABLE WITH THIS ASSET CLASS

ADITYA VIRWANI
Chief operating officer, Embassy



Firm picks Kotak, Morgan Stanley for fundraising

Embassy Office Parks REIT (real estate investment trust) has picked Kotak Mahindra Bank and Morgan Stanley to help raise funds for a potential acquisition of commercial property assets in India, according to people familiar with the matter.

The trust selected the banks as advisors, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the discussions are private. There's no final decision on the size and structure of the financing, which could be a combination of debt and issuance of new units, the people said. The funding needs come as Embassy REIT is evaluating a purchase of its sponsor's office assets in Bengaluru. Embassy REIT has the "right of first offer" for these assets. Deliberations of the financing are ongoing and they might not lead to a deal, the people said.

BLOOMBERG

After launching this REIT, Embassy says it sees such an opportunity in the warehousing space, too. "Warehousing is something which we will eventually pull into a REIT, once we have a sizable portfolio with similar predictable income flow from rent," the COO said.

Aditya Virwani, younger son of Embassy Promoter and Managing Director Jitu Virwani, has started taking bets on new asset classes after taking over the reins as COO this October. "In partnership with Phase-1 Experiences, we will be jointly developing India's first multi-purpose venue that can be used for concerts and expo purposes at the Bangalore International Airport," he said.

According to the company, as the live events and enter-

tainment sector is likely to touch ₹10,000 crore in revenue in 2020-21, such a facility will help diversifying its revenue source. "Though the investment amount will be just over ₹100 crore in this new facility, it is another asset class Embassy is betting on," Virwani said.

The new facility, to accommodate around 9,000 people at concerts and mega events, is likely to take around 18 months for completion. "If this project becomes successful, we will be looking at other airports which might be interested in setting up such facilities," he added.

On taking the group company public, he said they were not in favour, as real estate companies were not getting a good valuation in the market.

Air India receives ₹500-cr guarantee for fundraising

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 20 December

The government has given a ₹500-crore guarantee to cash-starved Air India, which will help it secure fresh funds for operational requirements, a senior airline official said.

Striving to keep afloat because of liquidity issues, the loss-making carrier had last week sought a ₹2,400-crore guarantee from the government for raising funds to mainly meet its operational requirements.

"The government has extended ₹500 crore guarantee to Air India. It was provided the airline on Wednesday," the official said. The sovereign guarantee will help the airline secure some funds, a part of which has already been drawn, he said adding, "Air India is already in discussions with the banks." The amount of ₹2,400 crore is part of the ₹7,600-crore guarantee that was to be provided to the airline in the current fiscal year.

Air India's net loss in 2018-19 is provisionally estimated to



LOSSES TO WIDEN

Standalone figures in ₹ cr

FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18
-6,280	-5,860	-3,837	-6,282	-5,338

Source: Capitaline
Compiled by BS Research Bureau

be ₹8,556.35 crore. Last month, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Hardeep Singh Puri informed Parliament that Air India will have to shut business if it is not privatised. The Air India Specific Alternative Mechanism has approved re-initiation of process for the government's 100 per cent stake sale in Air India.

IN BRIEF

Lenskart secures \$275 million from SoftBank Vision Fund

Eye-wear start-up Lenskart said it was raising over \$275 million from Softbank Vision Fund to augment tech capabilities and strengthen supply chain infrastructure. Avendus Capital was the exclusive financial advisor to this transaction. Business signals platform Paper.vc on Friday said the deal gave the company a post-money valuation of about \$1.5 billion. Lenskart is engaged in the manufacturing and supply of eyewear products. "A large part of this investment will go towards building next-generation technology and supply chain to deliver billion glasses with the highest quality at the best price and most amazing customer experience," said Peyush Bansal, founder and chief executive officer of Lenskart. "We are thrilled to have Softbank Vision Fund with us in our journey. Experts said the deal would allow the Delhi-based company to scale operations to more locations in small towns and overseas territories.

CCI nod to Qatar Holding's stake buy in Adani Electricity

The Competition Commission of India on Friday said it has given approval under the green channel route to the acquisition of over 25 per cent stake in Adani Electricity Mumbai and Adani Electricity Mumbai Services by Qatar Holding. The Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) earlier in December agreed to buy a 25.1 per cent stake in Adani Electricity Mumbai — the firm that distributes power to three million consumers in Mumbai — for ₹3,200 crore.

CRISIL to acquire Greenwich Associates for \$40 mn

CRISIL, an S&P Global firm, will acquire Greenwich Associates for \$40 million. Greenwich is a provider of proprietary benchmarking data, analytics and qualitative, actionable insight. The acquisition will be done through CRISIL's 100 per cent subsidiary, CRISIL Irevna, and funded entirely through internal accruals.

Glenmark gets nod to market Ryaltris in Australia

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals on Friday said that it has received approval from Australian regulator Therapeutic Goods Administration to commercialise Ryaltris in Australia through its partner Seqirus. Ryaltris is a new fixed dose combination nasal spray of an antihistamine and a steroid indicated for treatment of symptoms associated with allergic rhinitis and rhinoconjunctivitis in patients over 12 years of age.

Benling launches new high-speed two-wheeler

Benling India Energy & Technology, an Indian arm of Chinese electric two-wheeler manufacturer, launched its latest model Aura. With this launch, the firm has entered into high speed segment of India's EV market. Aura is likely to go on sale from the first quarter 2020.

'Burmah-shelled' BPCL could be new owner's delight

A foreign or private investor may not find it difficult to fit into the firm's pre-nationalisation work culture

AMRITHA PILLAY
Mumbai, 20 December

In 2016, when the NDA government repealed the Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) 1976 Nationalisation Act, life for the once private company came full circle.

Even after its nationalisation, the company continued to remain "foreign" and "privatised" in its work culture, say former and present employees and some industry executives. "BPCL has always been spoken about as a multinational company though it is state-run...this sets our work culture also apart from the others," says a senior BPCL official, who did not wish to be named.

From Burmah Oil Company to Burmah-Shell, the company that started from Scotland travelled through the South Asia markets and found its bearings in India's manufacturing sector when it built a modern refinery at Mumbai's Trombay in the 1950s. Burmah Shell was nationalised in 1976, paving way for the present day BPCL.

It is believed the major reason for nationalisation of BPCL was the reluctance by the company to supply fuel to the Indian armed forces during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan.

On November 20, the Centre decided to go for sale of its entire 53.29 per cent stake and transfer of management control to a strategic buyer. People in the know add the sale is likely to attract attention from a host of foreign bidders, mostly oil producers aiming to secure a market for their produce. In the event of a foreign or private investor, they may not find it difficult to fit into the company's pre-nationalisation work culture,



BPCL'S LEGACY

- Fuelled JRD Tata's historic solo flight in 1932
- Signed an agreement with the central government to build Trombay refinery in 1951
- Introduced LPG as a cooking fuel to Indian homes in the mid-1950s

Source: BPCL website

which some believe has been preserved well. "The Burmah Shell culture continued even after the nationalisation. A lot of the Burmah Shell employees stayed with BPCL and the new recruits were trained in the same culture. The company was different in terms of decision making; faster and response to crisis management was more professional," says Sarthak Behuria, former chairman and managing director, BPCL, who also worked as chairman for Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).

Behuria says the culture was advantageous when deregulation of petroleum pricing first happened after the

dismantling of administered price regime. BPCL started its marketing initiatives, like Pure for Sure campaign. "The company was considered to be more progressive," he adds.

P Elango, managing director for Hindustan Oil Exploration Company, refers to the absence of name-plates at BPCL offices as symbolic of this culture. "There would be no nameplates for directors and associates have a culture of calling each other by names," he said. The BPCL official quoted earlier adds the salutation 'sir' is used sparingly, only for senior-most persons. According to BPCL's 2018-19 annual report,

the company has a workforce of around 12,000 employees across the country. A retired senior official from BPCL refers to this culture as "people above oil." "Thanks to Burmah Shell, the organisation had a people above oil culture, which continued even after it became a state run," he said.

The workforce employed during Burmah Shell's times was part of BPCL's recent strength till as late as 2015. "Some of the Burmah Shell employees retired as recently as four to five years back," said the BPCL official quoted earlier.

Elango recalls an international safety certification that Cairn won few years back. "We thought we were the first in India, to achieve level-8 of the International Safety Rating System (ISRS), only to realise BPCL already has it," he added. Elango is a former chief executive officer for Cairn India. "Because of their origin as Shell, their safety culture has always been strong," he adds.

While the work culture continued, the 1976 nationalisation also brought in some changes, including in its retail operations.

"During Shell's time, the company reached out to the most aristocratic family in the town and made them a dealer. This meant, the family's reputation was also at stake along with the brand. This, however, later changed with the government regulations and other vigilance," the former official quoted earlier said.

Though operational and financial structure challenges may still bother a new buyer, what is assured of at least is a faster implementation of any intended business plan.

With inputs from Shine Jacob

In a first, NTPC to bid for stressed assets under NCLT

To vie for Avantha's 1,200-Mw Jhabua power project

SHREYA JAI
New Delhi, 20 December

India's largest state-owned power producer, NTPC, is likely to bid for the first time for a stressed asset under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). NTPC will bid for Avantha Power's Jhabua thermal power project (1,200 Mw), which has been submitted to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) by Axis Bank-led lender consortium.



Lack of power purchase agreement is not an issue as the firm will be able to facilitate power sale

Company sources said banks were ready to finance the "war chest" that NTPC would use to bid for projects NCLT. NTPC will only participate in bidding held under IBC. Executives said the company would follow strict criteria for shortlisting assets for bidding.

"We are looking at projects, which have any kind of coal supply stream, robust infrastructure built by noted contractor, land and allied clearances and in either operational or about to be operated state," said a senior company executive requesting anonymity. Lack of power purchase agreement (PPA) is not a hindrance, as NTPC would be able to facilitate power sale, said a senior executive.

"NTPC would either pursue

states to sign long-term PPA (25 years), or sell through medium-term contracts through central agencies. If nothing, we can also use these units for selling power in merchant or spot market."

NTPC had shortlisted 10,000 Mw of capacity, which matched its criteria. It had also issued tender to purchase stressed assets and received interest from four firms. Sources said it didn't reach closure due to issues around the "valuation of a project".

Jhabua is in the list of around 40 stressed thermal power units, which are deemed to become non-profitable assets (NPAs). Earlier efforts to sell Jhabua power plant did not

yield any results. Its sale deal with Goyal MG Gases also fell through.

Jhabua, commissioned in 2016, is located in Madhya Pradesh. Of the planned 1,200 Mw, only one unit of 600 MW was commissioned. The coal source for the plant was tied up with Mahanadi Coalfields and South-Eastern Coalfields.

The plant has been operating at below optimum capacity. Earlier, it was due to low demand from its beneficiary states Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. Later, the parent company did not infuse required working capital and the plant also faced coal supply crunch. The project is ₹4,800 crore and has debt of ₹3,488 crore.

Ex-IL&FS directors got richer as firm failed

SUBRATA PANDA
Mumbai, 20 December

While Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) went belly up in September 2018, its erstwhile directors were earning large sums of money as remuneration, the company's 2018-19 annual report shows. Even as the government replaced the entire board in October 2018, the former directors earned handsome salaries for the first half of financial year 2018-19 (FY19).

Hari Sankaran, who served as vice-chairman and managing director (MD) of IL&FS and as a non-executive director of the company till September 2018, took home ₹6.38 crore as remuneration. Former chairman Ravi Parathasarthy took home about ₹4 crore as a non-executive director from April 1, 2018, to July 21, 2018, when he retired.

Arun K Saha, erstwhile joint MD & chief executive officer (CEO), took home a hefty remuneration of ₹6.88 crore for FY19. He was a whole-time director of the subsidiaries and group companies.

Even erstwhile independent directors were being paid substantial remuneration including commission. The median annual salary of IL&FS employees was ₹13.1 lakh. Some of the



REMUNERATION OF FORMER DIRECTORS (₹ crore)

Arun K Saha	6.88
Hari Sankaran	6.38
Ravi Parathasarthy	3.97
RC Bhargava*	0.59
Michael Pinto*	0.48
SB Mathur*	0.39
Rina Kamath*	0.38
Jaithirth Rao*	0.37

* Erstwhile independent directors
Source: IL&FS Annual Report

directors appointed by the National Company Law Tribunal have taken no remuneration, while for other directors it ranges between ₹50,000 and ₹13.7 lakh for the October 2018-March 2019 period.

After the beleaguered firm defaulted on its debt obligations causing a liquidity squeeze in the non-banking financial sector, the central government replaced the erstwhile board with a new board led by Uday Kotak, the managing director and chief executive officer of Kotak Mahindra Bank.

He serves as non-executive chairman of IL&FS. IL&FS has posted a staggering net loss of ₹22,527 crore in

2018-19 on a standalone basis, as against a net profit of ₹333 crore in the last year.

The company's revenue declined 52.5 per cent to ₹824 crore in FY19 from ₹1,734 crore in FY18. Similarly, its assets declined 81.5 per cent to ₹4,148 crore compared to ₹23,868 crore in 2017-18. Liabilities of the company increased 15.3 per cent in FY19 to ₹21,083 crore. In FY18, these stood at ₹18,276 crore.

The company also reported a negative net worth of ₹16,935 crore in FY19, compared to a net worth of ₹5,592 crore in the previous year. The entity, on a consolidated level, has debt to the tune of over ₹94,000 crore.

CARE Ratings MD Rajesh Mokashi puts in papers

CARE Ratings on Friday said its Managing Director Rajesh Mokashi tendered his resignation. He was sent on leave by the firm in July. The order had said he would be on leave till the company had examined an anonymous complaint against him sent to the Sebi.

"While the board of CARE Ratings at Friday's meeting have taken on record the said resignation, the same is without prejudice to the ongoing examination of anonymous complaints forwarded to CARE Ratings and any action, if required to be taken pursuant thereto," the rating agency said in a filing.

TN Arun Kumar will continue as the interim CEO of the firm. The ICRA complaint was about interference by the firm's top executives in assigning top investment-grade ratings to IL&FS and its subsidiaries last year.

The government had removed IL&FS' management and took control of the company after the provider of infrastructure financing defaulted on a series of debts. PTI

Agarwal: Vedanta to definitely evaluate making bid for BPCL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 20 December

Vedanta Resources will definitely consider making an offer for state-run Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) when the bids will be invited, Executive Chairman Anil Agarwal said on Friday.

The Cabinet recently approved strategic divestment of the government's 53.29 per cent stake in BPCL, along with transfer of certain management control. This is excluding BPCL's equity share holding of 61 per cent stake in Numaligarh Refinery.

"We are evaluating. We are in oil business. We produce 30 per cent oil and gas of the country and we will be very keen because oil, energy security. We will evaluate if it makes sense where we can supply our oil. It makes sense, we should look at BPCL or any kind of asset which comes," he said.

He said there will be a bidder



"WE ARE EVALUATING. WE ARE IN OIL BUSINESS. WE PRODUCE 30% OIL AND GAS OF INDIA AND WE WILL BE KEEN BECAUSE OF OIL, ENERGY SECURITY. WE WILL EVALUATE IT IF IT MAKES SENSE FOR US TO SUPPLY OUR OIL"

ANIL AGARWAL,
Executive chairman, Vedanta

whenever the expression of interest and tender are issued. "When it (tender for BPCL) comes, we will definitely

look at it," Agarwal added.

Asked whether the protests related to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) will hurt the Brand India image, he said the government was taking a bold decision. "I have never seen any kind of government taking these kinds of bold decisions. Bold decisions are very important, decisive. I am not a politician, I don't understand. The only thing is... this government without vested interests takes bold decisions and that was very important," Agarwal said.

He heaped praises on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he is among the top three leaders in the world and his brand image is tremendous. Asked if this meant it (CAA protests) were not going to hurt India's image in the world, Agarwal said he was talking "in general" and if Modi says he is going to start 100 infrastructure projects, there will be no shortage of money because of his credibility.

New housing supply at Thane, Mumbai & Pune falls 40-50% in July-Sept: Report

Thane, Mumbai, and Pune in Maharashtra saw a significant decline of 40-50 per cent in new supply of residential units during July-September period, owing to demand slowdown in the real estate sector, a report said.

According to data analytics firm PropEquity, new launches or supply declined by 49 per cent in Thane to 4,490 units during July-September quarter of 2019 compared to the same period of last year. Mumbai and Pune witnessed 44 per cent decline in new launches. Supply stood at 6,341 units in Pune and 1,862 units in Mumbai. In the Delhi-NCR, Noida saw maximum decline of 100 per cent as there was no fresh supply in the city during July-September 2019.

"Gurugram witnessed almost negligible new launches of 80 units in one project and there were no new launches in Noida. Pune, Mumbai and Thane saw an addition of 6,341, 1,862 and 4,490 units, respectively. This represented a decline of 44 per cent each in Mumbai and Pune and 49 per cent in Thane on year-on-year basis," the report said. PTI

Wipro partners Nasscom to launch skilling platform for engg students

IT firm Wipro on Friday said it has partnered with IT body Nasscom to launch a skilling platform for new age technologies like AI that will reach 10,000 students from over 20 engineering colleges in India.

The platform Future Skills will bridge the industry-academia skill gap and help students keep pace with the

emerging technologies. The initiative is a part of Wipro's Corporate Social Responsibility programme, TalentNext which aims to enhance the quality of engineering education by preparing faculty and academic leaders to train students.

"The programme has now been extended to students

directly through Future Skills, which is a new age platform built to bridge the industry-academia skill gap and help students keep pace with the emerging technologies — Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Cloud Computing, Cybersecurity and Internet of Things (IoT) — to make them future-ready," Wipro said. PTI

Google to add 3,800 customer support jobs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mississippi, 20 December

Google will add over 3,800 customer support jobs in Mississippi (US), India, and the Philippines to support users and customers around the world. Previously, customer and user support, such as answering calls, product troubleshooting, and campaign set-up, was usually supplied by third-party companies on Google's behalf, a blogpost said.

In 2018, Google had announced a pilot programme to enhance customer and user support by bringing some of these jobs in-house, so the work



The agents in the centres receive benefits, including three weeks of paid vacation, up to 22 weeks of paid parental leave, and comprehensive health care

is undertaken by employees. "Based on the feedback, we're expanding — by the end

of 2020, we will create over 4,800 Google customer support jobs, including the 1,000

Google user support agents working in Google Operations Centres," GOC Vice-President Troy Dickerson said in the blog.

He said in 2020, GOCs' footprint will be expanded with the opening of a new centre in Mississippi, to join new and expanding sites in India and the Philippines.

The agents in the centres receive benefits, including three weeks of paid vacation, up to 22 weeks of paid parental leave, and comprehensive health care (medical, dental, and vision coverage), the blog said, adding that agents will also have access to free meals while at work.

Alphabet boss Sundar Pichai awarded \$242-mn pay package

BLOOMBERG
San Francisco/New York, 20 December

Sundar Pichai is getting a hefty pay raise.

The new Alphabet Inc. chief executive officer will receive \$240 million in stock awards over the next three years if he hits all of his performance targets, as well as a \$2 million annual salary beginning in 2020, the firm said Friday in a filing.

If Alphabet shares outperform the S&P 100 Index, Pichai could receive an additional \$90 million in stock grants. It's the first time the company has bestowed performance-based stock awards.

Pichai, 47, was named to the top job this month after Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin stepped down as leaders of the Mountain View, California-based firm.

Pichai is no stranger to massive compensation. The engineer received about \$200 million in stock awards in 2016, which have since vested. Last year, he turned down a grant of restricted



THE NEW ALPHABET CEO WILL RECEIVE \$240 MILLION IN STOCK AWARDS OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS IF HE HITS ALL OF PERFORMANCE TARGETS, AS WELL AS A \$2 MILLION ANNUAL SALARY BEGINNING IN 2020

stock because he said he felt he was already paid generously, according to a person familiar with the decision.

His total compensation for 2018 was \$19 million, according to the Bloomberg Pay Index.

Internal Crackdowns At a staff meeting this year, one Google worker asked why Pichai had been paid so much while some

employees struggle to afford to live in Silicon Valley, people with knowledge of the matter said at the time. Tensions between workers and management have intensified lately after internal protests sparked a crackdown.

Pichai, who grew up in India, has degrees from Stanford University and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

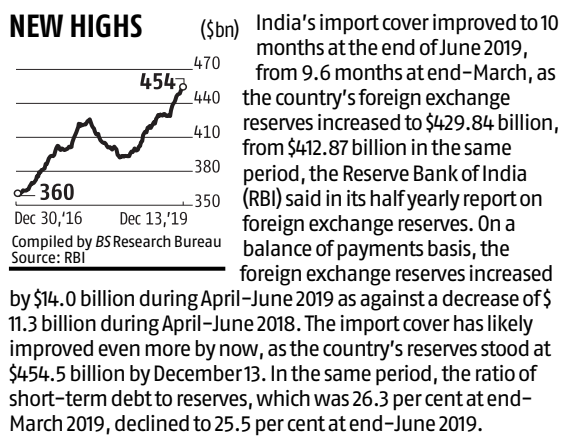
He joined Google in 2004 after a stint at McKinsey & Co. and quickly took on responsibility for some of its most popular products, including Gmail, the Chrome browser and the Android operating system.

When Page and Brin created the Alphabet holding company in 2015, they chose Pichai to run the core money-making businesses as Google CEO. Over the years, Pichai has taken on more duties and it was he who answered questions at a congressional hearing about the political slants of his staff, the firm's algorithms and Chinese censorship and surveillance, among other things.

On December 3, Pichai replaced Page as CEO and Brin stepped down as president.

Brin and Page, both 46, each own about 6% of the internet-search giant and control Alphabet through special voting shares. Pichai isn't receiving any such shares as part of his compensation package, according to the filing.

IN BRIEF
Import cover improves to 10 months in June



AIIB announces \$210-mn loan for projects in India

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) announced a total loan of \$210 million for irrigation and solar energy projects in India. The multilateral institution will lend \$145 million to improve irrigation services and strengthen flood risk management in West Bengal, while \$65 million has been set for a solar project in Rajasthan, statement said.

Investments in P-notes hit 13-month low

Investments in the Indian capital market through participatory notes (P-notes) hit a 13-month low of ₹69,670 crore till November after registering a rise in such fund infusion in the preceding month. P-notes are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors to overseas investors.

PNB scam: Fresh charge sheet names Nirav's brother

The CBI on Friday filed a supplementary charge sheet in the \$2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam, naming fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi's brother Nehal and four others as accused. It also named suspended deputy general manager at PNB Sanjay Prasad, and Nirav Modi's associates Amit Magia, Sandeep Mistry and Mihir Bhansali.

Ad-hoc RS panel talks perils of porn with FB, others

An ad-hoc committee formed under the direction of the Chairman of Rajya Sabha met Facebook, TikTok and other government representatives to discuss the issue of "pornography on social media and its effect on children and society as a whole".

FinMin wants tax evaders booked via data analytics

To meet the tax target, the finance ministry held a review meeting with tax officials and directed them to make efforts to identify and book tax evaders through data analytics and information sharing.

Rural jobs scheme may get ₹10K cr more in FY21

SANJEEV MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 20 December

The Union government might announce a 8-10 per cent increase in average wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act (MGNREGA) by linking these to an updated inflation index, the revamped consumer price index — agriculture labour (CPI-AL).

This is part of a government plan to consolidate existing welfare schemes for farmers such as PM-KISAN. Sources in the government said it had decided to go for consolidation as it is reeling from dwindling resources.

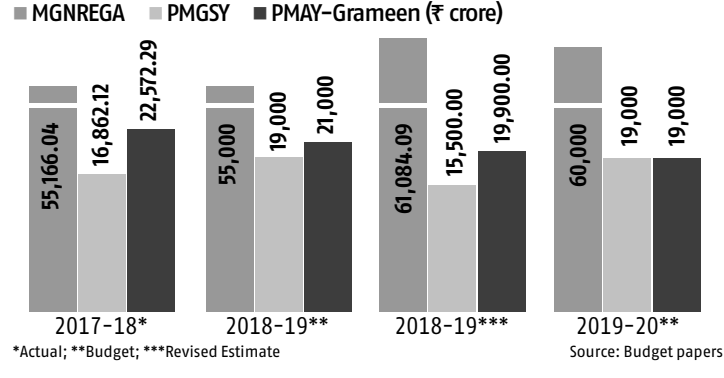
Officials said in agriculture, the thrust would be on expanding the network of cold storages and warehouses by giving them some tax incentives or easy credit facilities. There could also be incentives to farmers to diversify from rice and wheat to more profitable crops.

To boost rural income, the government could raise the total MGNREGA Budget for 2020-21 to ₹70,000 crore. In 2019-20 (FY20), it was ₹60,000 crore.

This fiscal year, the rural development ministry has reportedly sought an extra ₹20,000 crore for MGNREGA. Currently, the national average wage of an MGNREGA worker is ₹178.44 per day — less than the minimum agriculture wage rate in several states. Sources said after several rounds of discussions with industry experts, agriculturists and economists, a consensus seems to be building on



HOW THEY STACK UP



enhancing the allocation for expediting setting up of 22,000 rural markets under the Gramin Agricultural Programme (GrAM) launched in 2018.

So far, officials said, the programme is financed through a ₹2,000-crore dedicated agriculture infrastructure fund created in Nabard. But, it has been found to be inadequate to finance such a large programme.

"A separate budgetary allocation is needed to kickstart the scheme as the current model of a dedicated fund hasn't exactly yielded desired results,"

a senior official said. He said besides GrAMs, some fund allocation is also expected for the Electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM) scheme.

Under this, the Centre plans to link 1,000 markets through a common pan-Indian electronic trading portal. So far, over 500 mandis or APMC markets are trading online under eNAM.

Officials said there was also a proposal to create a dedicated fund for agriculture start-ups, so that they get a proper ecosystem to grow and develop.

"There is need to attract more private funds in the agriculture sector for which specific steps should be taken," the official said.

Goyal vows steps to boost trade

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 20 December

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday asked industry to flag the countries that are placing non-tariff barriers on Indian exports and promised to take retaliatory actions against those countries.

He also countered veteran industrialist Rahul Bajaj's remarks that people are afraid to criticise the government, saying everybody has a say and the government listens to all.

However, Goyal, speaking at a conference organised by ASSOCHAM, said this is a listening government and it wants to engage more and more to understand what is happening on the ground.

At a separate annual Convention of FICCI, the commerce and industry minister said India needs to get more competitive, and stressed on addressing the problems of the entire value chain, be it inverted duties, dumping, or unfair subsidies.

"Our government does not believe in solving issues individually for a company. We believe in doing a root cause analysis, we believe in understanding where the problems are and



"Whatever Rahul bhai may say at the ET Awards, the fact is that everybody has a say. It does not matter even if an Opposition party leader may have given you your name, for us each one of you are equally valuable and equally important"

PIYUSH GOYAL
Commerce and industry minister

we believe in finding a sustainable solution that can outlive an individual's problem," Goyal said. The minister said "a responsible government, a listening govern-

ment" can impact business, can make a change and assured the corporate leaders present at the event that his office and he himself was available 24x7 to address the industries' concerns.

He further said the stakeholders need to tell the government, which country is using any trade remedial measures or non-tariff barriers which impact their exports to that country.

"Our government is willing to stand by you and look at retaliatory actions and impose similar trade remedial measures," Goyal said. Industry and internal trade secretary Guruprasad Mohapatra said that the country's aim to reach \$5-trillion economy will be smooth if India is able to first move into top 50 and then 25 countries on the Ease of Doing Business rankings.

Speaking at the 92nd Annual Convention of FICCI, Mohapatra said, "To realise the dream of a \$5 trillion economy, we have to ensure that the services sector maintains its primacy. We need to encourage agriculture to be more income-oriented, and less farm-oriented, and the manufacturing sector needs to be given emphasis."

Govt plans to take khadi turnover to ₹2 trn: Gadkari

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 20 December

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Friday said that plans are afoot to take khadi and village industries' turnover to ₹2 trillion in the next five years from ₹75,000 crore at present.

Urging the industry to expand its share in global trade to about 10 per cent, Micro, Small & Medium

Enterprises (MSMEs) Minister Gadkari also urged players to grab the opportunity to expand in the wake of China — that accounts for 17 per cent of the global trade business — battling increased cost and difficulties.

"The turnover of khadi and village industries is ₹75,000 crore at present. Steps are on to take it to ₹2 trillion in five years," Gadkari said while addressing industry

body FICCI's 92nd annual convention. He said infrastructure sectors along with MSME has potential to help India becoming \$5 trillion economy.

No driverless cars
The minister also said he will not allow driverless cars in India, which has a shortage of 22 lakh drivers. Speaking at an ASSOCHAM event, he said, "Many times I am asked what about driverless car? Then I say till the time I am transport minister, you forget that. I will not allow driverless car to come in India." Gadkari said there was a need for growth of employment as well as industry in the country. He said he was "saddened" to see India importing commodities like coal, newsprint, and other things despite having huge dry-fuel reserves.

Infra companies for captive green energy policy

Infrastructure sector on Friday urged the government to bring captive renewable policy and exempt from cross subsidy and transmission charges to make renewable energy more viable for those willing to set up clean energy plants beyond factory boundaries. The infrastructure companies raised these issues during a pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and top officials from finance, new & renewable, road transport and environment ministries. They also asked to make finance available for real estate and affordable housing to boost consumption of cement and other inputs like steel. Besides, they were of the view that government should release stuck up funds meant for infrastructure sectors as soon as possible for bringing in buoyancy in the economy. "We asked government to see, how can finance be made available for real estate and affordable housing. We also asked to release funds withheld at different levels in the government," Dalmia Bharat Cement MD & CEO Mahendra Singhi said.

Economists tell FM to focus on growth, not fiscal targets

ARUP ROYCHOUDHURY
New Delhi, 20 December

A number of economists on Friday advised Finance Minister (FM) Nirmala Sitharaman and her officials to focus on reviving economic growth and leave aside fiscal concerns for a while.

At a pre-Budget meeting, the FM was asked to ensure that non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) come out of the liquidity crisis they are facing with the help of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

"Almost all economists present said fiscal expansion will be an inevitable consequence as the Centre needs to boost expenditure to revive the economy. Growth should be the priority," said a person present at the meeting. The economists also spoke about the futility of trying to achieve a 3 per cent fiscal deficit target over the medium term, something which has never been accomplished since the Fiscal Responsibility and

Budget Management (FRBM) Act came into being. According to the latest iteration of the FRBM Act, the Centre hopes to have a fiscal deficit for 2020-21 at 3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The budgeted target for 2019-20 is 3.3 per cent. However, with the economic slowdown affecting tax revenues, fiscal deficit this year could be as high as 3.8 per cent.

The economists present also spoke about the need to rescue NBFCs. "Some ideas which were suggested include a bad bank to take over the non-performing assets of NBFCs, or the RBI being a lender of last resort," said the official.

The idea floated was that the RBI can provide liquidity support and buy out the toxic assets from NBFCs. These assets will go into RBI's books and there should be some arrangement with the government to liquidate them later, the person said. The experts also said that



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chairs a pre-Budget meeting with economists in New Delhi on Friday

agriculture reforms should be carried out as soon as possible, and that the Centre should ensure more disposable income in the hands of the rural population through schemes such as PM-KISAN and NREGA. "The slowdown was discussed at length. Participants said that the Centre should remove policy uncertainty from certain sectors, like we are seeing now in the telecom sector," the person said. India's GDP growth for the July-September quarter came in at a 26-quarter low of 4.5 per cent. While the Centre is still hoping for a recovery in the second half of the year, other agencies don't share its optimism, with even the RBI cutting its growth forecast for 2019-20 to 5 per cent from 6.1 per cent earlier. Additionally, the economists also raised concerns about the fiscal situation of the states and poor resource mobilisation

Gopinath: Stick to fiscal consolidation

DILASHA SETH & INDIVIAL DHASMANA
New Delhi, 20 December



India must stick to the fiscal consolidation in the medium term, International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief economist Gita Gopinath said on Friday.

This comes amid the rising debate on whether the government should go for fiscal expansion to perk up the economy.

Speaking at the 92nd annual convention of FICCI, Gopinath also said the IMF will revise India's growth projections downwards in January. This is because high frequency indicators are not showing an uptick in the second half. "For India, macro stability is very important as it means stability on the fiscal front. A clear sense of keeping to the target of fiscal consolidation is very important," said Gopinath, adding that would require increasing revenue mobilisation and rationalising expenditure.

Amid severe revenue shortfall under the goods and services tax (GST), several states had on Wednesday asked Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to revise the fiscal deficit target to 4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), up from 3.3 per cent. Gopinath added, "When we talk about fiscal consolidation, we think of it as a medium-term target which is something that has to be addressed over a period of time and not necessarily overnight."

India's consolidated deficit (the Centre and states combined) is the highest among G20 nations, she added. "So, it's not a free lunch and this has to be very carefully managed," she said.

On GST, the IMF chief economist said that while reforms were important for formalising the Indian economy, certainty and clarity was needed as far as regulation and tax rates were concerned. "GST, which has been very important for formalising the Indian economy, but again there... certainly more needs to be done on what the rules are, what the rates are going to be." GST rates on over 400 goods and about 80 services had seen a revision since rollout on July 1, 2017. The government is planning an upward revision of certain slabs to compensate for the GST revenue slowdown.

On revision of India's growth outlook, Gopinath said some high frequency indicators did not show an increase in India's growth in the third and fourth quarters as was anticipated earlier.

"Our expectation was that the first two quarters of fiscal 2019-20 would be a slowing scenario and then there would be an uptick in the third and fourth quarter. Looking at some of the high frequency indicators, we are not seeing the kind of uptick we were projecting. So, this is why I mentioned that we will be revising the numbers again in January."

She said it was important for India to take up reforms but with greater clarity and certainty. There are important reforms needed with respect to land acquisition and labour laws, she said. "Now, we would like to think that with the government having strong political mandate, this would be the right time to undertake those kind of reforms. In the absence of it, India is missing out on what we assume globally in terms of shifting global supplies," she added.

India's economic growth fell to an over six-year low of 4.5 per cent in the second quarter of the current financial year. Gopinath stressed on the need to revive rural demand and improve health of NBFCs. She pointed out that although the government has taken several measures to revive rural demand but that were not enough. "There is a big need to raise productivity in agriculture in India," she said. Weak monetary transmission by NBFCs was a source of supply problem in 2019.

"Many of us expected that NBFCs will be rectified by itself. But if we look at the data more closely, there still seems to be stress. Some high quality NBFCs are doing fine. But there seems to be a segment of NBFC that used to lend to MSMEs and households, which are still not in best of shape. On the demand side, the demand coming from rural is another factor that matter," she said.

No space for expansionary fiscal policy: Subramanian

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 20 December

Former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian on Friday said there is no space for expansionary fiscal policy and opined against reducing personal income tax rate.

"...no space to have expansionary fiscal policy. There's a lot of talk about personal income tax cut and raising GST rates, and I would be categorically against the both, we do not have the space," he said at an event.

Subramanian further said that he thinks personal income tax cuts motivated by desired increased consumption are highly inequitable.

Any cut in personal income tax, he said, will benefit the only top 5-7 per cent people, who are actual taxpayers. "So if you want to boost consumption it has to be something much more, which actually reaches much poorer people. It has to be some kind of direct benefit transfer (DBT) or universal basic income (UBI)," he said.

Reminding that all the countries that are developed have more number of tax payers in their respective systems, he said adding that it is beneficial in the long term.

While on the other hand opposing GST rates hike, the former CEA said that it will affect the consumption and a slowdown or a recession is not the time to be embarking on (such options).

"You can't have too much expansionary fiscal policy but equally you can't be crunching government demand at a time when the economy is weak and in stress," he added.

India's economic growth fell to the lowest in more than 6 years at 4.5 per cent during the second quarter ended September of the current fiscal due to slowing demand as well as fall in output, exports among others. In the first quarter ended June of 2019-20, the economy grew by 5 per cent, which was the lowest in six years.

ON THE TABLE

- Fiscal slippage inevitable as government needs to boost spending, say economists
- Participants say chasing 3% medium-term target futile
- NBFCs should be rescued with RBI as lender of last resort
- Govt should focus on agri reforms
- Policy uncertainty needs to be removed

monetary transmission, government's fiscal prudence and fiscal stimulus, revival of NBFCs and inflation targeting among others," said a press release after the meeting.

The economists at the meeting included Neelkanth Mishra of Credit Suisse, Rathin Roy of National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, Shekhar Shah of NCAER, former chief economic advisor Arvind Virmani, executive director for India on the board of the IMF Surjit Bhalla, Abheek Barua of HDFC Bank, Soumya Kanti Ghosh of State Bank of India and Ajit Ranade of Aditya Birla Group.

From the government's side, the meeting was attended by Finance Secretary Rajeev Kumar, Economic Affairs Secretary Atanu Chakraborty, Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey, DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey and Chief Economic Advisor Krishnamurthy Subramanian.

Fitch cuts India growth forecast to 4.6% for FY20

Sees moderate fiscal slippage, retains sovereign rating and outlook

INDIVIAL DHASMANA
New Delhi, 20 December

Fitch Ratings on Friday cut India's economic growth projection to 4.6 per cent from its earlier forecast of 5.6 per cent for the fiscal year 2019-20 (FY20) as credit squeeze and deterioration in business and consumer confidence over the past few quarters hurt economy.

The move incorporates the expectation of moderate slippage in the fiscal deficit target of 3.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in FY20, it said in a statement.

Fitch, however, retained India's sovereign rating at the lowest investment grade of 'BBB-' and outlook at stable.

The rating agency expected the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to cut the policy rate by another 65 basis points (bps) in 2020 as uptick in the consumer price index-based inflation rate to 5.5 per cent in November appears to reflect a temporary spike in food inflation.

It said pressure on core inflation, which remained stable at 3.5 per cent, seems limited in the current environment. The RBI has cut the rate by 135 bps cumulatively since February this year, but refrained from any reduction in its December policy review because of hardening food inflation.

Fitch said banks generally have thin buffers to deal with continued systemic stress in the non-banking financial company (NBFC) sector, to which their exposure reached 7.4 per cent in FY19.

It estimated that banks are already \$7 billion short of the capital required to meet a 10 per cent weighted-average common equity tier 1 ratio by FY21 — the level that would give the banks an adequate buffer above regulatory minimum.

It attributed its move on rating to the economy balancing a still strong medium-term growth outlook and solid foreign-reserve buffers with high public debt, a weak financial sector and some lagging structural factors, including governance indicators and GDP per capita.

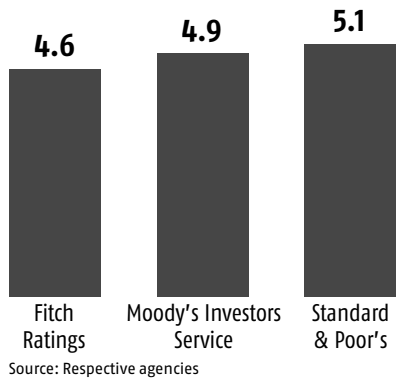
Fitch said the measures announced to support NBFCs have not fully arrested liquidity pressure and that the Modi government 2.0 is likely to remain focused on reforms.

Fitch's growth forecast is lower than what the economy clocked in the first half at 4.6 per cent, which means that it expects the econo-



WHAT THEY PREDICT

Economic growth YoY (%)



my to slow further in the second half.

Also, the projection is lower than what other rating agency Moody's Investors Service estimated at 4.9 per cent. Fitch is also more pessimistic than the RBI which predicted the economy to grow by 5 per cent in FY20.

"Our outlook on India's GDP growth is still solid against that of peers, even though growth has decelerated significantly over the past few quarters, mainly due to domestic factors, in particular, a squeeze in credit availability from NBFCs and deterioration in business and consumer confidence," Fitch said.

It expected the growth to gradually recov-

er to 5.6 per cent in FY21 and 6.5 per cent in FY22 with support from easing monetary and fiscal policy and structural measures that may also support growth over the medium term.

The positive impact of the reforms recently undertaken on growth is likely to materialise in the medium term, rather than the near term, and will depend on the details and implementation, Fitch said.

The government is again facing a trade-off between stimulating the economy and reducing the deficit in the medium term. Some fiscal slippage has occurred in recent years against government targets, even during periods of sustained stronger growth, it said.

"The FY20 deficit target had already been exceeded by end-October due to a weak revenue intake, and deceleration of nominal quarterly growth suggests further revenue pressure for the rest of the financial year," it said.

The Centre's fiscal deficit crossed the entire year's target by 2.4 per cent by October itself against 3.9 per cent a year ago.

Fitch also said the government has indicated that its corporation tax rate cut could lower revenue by 0.7 per cent of GDP in 2019-20 and it hoped to finance spending by more aggressive asset divestment, including Air India and Bharat Petroleum Corporation.

"We believe there is a risk of more significant fiscal loosening in the event of continued weak GDP growth, for example, in the context of lingering problems in the NBFC sector," it said.

Andhra agrees to pay average rates to renewable projects

AP HC directs state to clear dues in 4 weeks

SHREYA JAI
New Delhi, 20 December

Andhra Pradesh (AP) on Friday told the high court that it will pay solar and wind power producers at an average rate till the legal proceedings are concluded over the state government's decision to review tariff of all renewable power projects.

The power distribution companies of the state said they will pay solar power projects ₹2.44 per unit (kilowatt an hour) and wind projects ₹2.43 per unit till the issue is resolved.

Both outstanding and future payment will be made at the same rate. The average rate decided by the state is half the prevailing rate. The average tariff for wind is ₹4.8 per unit; for solar, it is ₹4.5 per unit.



The average tariff of wind projects in Andhra Pradesh is ₹4.8 per unit and for solar is ₹4.5 per unit

Sources said discoms on Friday submitted an affidavit with an undertaking to make the payment within four weeks from Friday. "The high court recorded the undertaking given by the discoms and directed them to positively comply with the terms of affidavit," said a government source who did not want to be named.

Of total dues to the tune of ₹1,450 crore, the state gov-

ernment has paid ₹355 crore, and it is waiting for funds from the Centre to pay the balance, according to the affidavit filed by the state to the HC. *Business Standard* has reviewed the affidavit.

Project developers have alleged they have not been paid for over six to eight months.

In July, the YSR Congress government in Andhra Pradesh formed a high-level

negotiation committee to "review, negotiate and bring down" the tariff of all renewable power projects that had been given out by the previous Telugu Desam Party government. It cited poor financial health of its discoms for this. As the companies protested, the state government curtailed the purchase of renewable power.

Project developers moved court, which ruled in the favour of the companies.

In an order on September 24, the court dismissed the state government-appointed committee. Despite that, the state has continued to curtail power purchase from renewable projects. The government has filed a review petition before the HC against its earlier order.

The renewable power project developers also moved the AP Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) against the government, which will decide on the tariff of these plants.

DISCOMS IN TELANGANA

CARE sees higher counterparty risk

ABHIJIT LELE
Mumbai, 20 December

CARE Ratings has maintained a negative outlook for 13 solar generators that are selling electricity to financially stressed distribution companies (discoms) in Telangana. The aggregate installed capacity of generators that are being rated is 671 Mw. Of the total 14, CARE Ratings had downgraded the ratings of the borrowing programmes of four solar power generators that

have installed capacity of 257 Mw.

The rating action reflects increased counterparty risk and weakening liquidity position of these generators owing to significant delays in the receipt of payments from these discoms.

Amod Khanorkar, senior director, CARE Ratings, said solar power generators in Telangana have been facing delays in payments by 10 months. They saw a marginal improvement compared to the last review on

account of commencement of payments by Telangana.

State utilities in Telangana are cash strapped and rely on state subsidies to survive. Furthermore, there is no revision in tariff for FY20. According to the tariff order for FY19, the two distribution licensees have projected a revenue deficit of ₹9,770.98 crore for FY19.

Based on the prudence check of the filings of distribution licensees, the revenue deficit for FY19 has been pegged at ₹5,940.47 crore.

Mega job losses feared in ferroalloy industry



ADITI DIVEKAR
Mumbai, 20 December

With seven manganese and four chromite non-captive mines heading for a shutdown by March 2020, the mining industry is staring at huge job losses. The ratio of direct to indirect employment in this industry is 1:10.

"Nearly 90 per cent of labourers at these mines are on contract. They include migratory labourers, too," Sunil Duggal, president at Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI), told *Business Standard* on telephone.

This is just the beginning since leases of 329 mines in the private sector, including 48 operative and 281 non-operative mines spread across 10 states, are set to expire on March 31, 2020.

Of these, 50 per cent of operative mines are in Odisha and the largest share of non-operative mines is in Goa with 184 mines and Karnataka with about 42 mines.

"There is no guarantee whether the new owner (post-auctioning) will employ the entire workforce at the mine site as a lot also depends on how much technological advancements would be applied to the mines, which could curtail employment," Duggal added.

Since the ratio of direct to indirect employment is 1:10, an estimated 250,000 direct job losses are expected by March 31, 2020.

The cumulative loss is expected to reach 2.5 million and can grow further. Further, once mining stops, the revival of mining activity takes months, said FIMI.

"Contribution of the mining industry to India's GDP is continuously decreasing. At present, it is just about 1.53 per cent compared to 7-7.5 per cent in mineral rich countries like Australia and South Africa. India's production of minerals stood at ₹58,638 crore while the

import of minerals was ₹4,34,925 crore, about 8-9 times more. Moreover, Indian miners are not able to export many minerals due to levy of heavy export duty," said Duggal. With focus on infrastructure and domestic manufacturing, India has set a steel production target of 300 million tonne of crude steel by 2030-31. This means, the industry needs to increase the present capacity by 2.11 times from 142 million tonne to 300 million tonne in the next 11 years.

This translates into an annual requirement of 11 million tonne of manganese ore and 5 million tonne of chrome ore, according to the National Steel Policy (NSP) 2017. Despite having a total production capacity of 5.15 million tonne per annum in the ferroalloy industry, this industry has been battling a slowdown in the past five years (2013-18).

Production of ferrochrome was stagnant at 1 million tonne, ferro-manganese was at 0.52 million tonne and ferrosilicon at 0.09 million tonne. Ferroalloy production is an important part of the manufacturing chain among mining, steel and alloys and not a single steel grade is produced without ferroalloys, said experts.

India had manganese ore to the tune of 496 million tonne and chrome ore of 344 million tonne as on April 2015, said FIMI. However, the country is currently importing these minerals.

A demand-supply mismatch in the ferroalloy industry could also affect domestic steel production further. The latter is already reeling from production cuts due to weak demand in the domestic market.

Among the top steel producers in the country, Sajjan Jindal-led JSW Steel reported a drop in crude steel production in November by 7 per cent year-on-year to 12.90 million tonne. Long steel production dropped 14 per cent during the period under review.

CCI approves Qatar Holding's 25% stake buy in Adani Electricity

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Friday said it has given approval under the green channel route to the acquisition of over 25 per cent stake in Adani Electricity Mumbai and Adani Electricity Mumbai Services by Qatar Holding.

The Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) in December agreed to buy a 25.1 per cent stake in Adani Electricity Mumbai — the firm that distributes power to three million consumers in Mumbai — for ₹3,200 crore. "Adani Transmission (ATL), Adani Electricity Mumbai (AEML) and a subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) have signed definitive agreements for the sale of a 25.1 per cent stake in AEML to QIA and for a shareholder subordinated debt investment by QIA in AEML.

"The total QIA investment in AEML will be approximately ₹3,200 crore," a company statement had said.

Qatar Holding, registered as a foreign portfolio investment with Sebi, is an investment holding company of the QIA, the CCI said.

Under the green channel route, CCI also approved acquisition of IDBI Asset Management and IDBI MF Trustee Company by Muthoot Finance.

Muthoot Finance in November said it has "entered into a definitive agreement to acquire IDBI Asset Management (AMC) and IDBI MF Trustee Company".

Upon completion of the transaction, Muthoot Finance will purchase 100 equity shares of IDBI AMC and IDBI MF Trustee Company held by the sellers for a total consideration of ₹215 crore, it had added. **PTI**

RBI's OMO move brings down long-term yields

ANUP ROY
Mumbai, 20 December

The 10-year bond yield fell 15 basis points (bps) on Friday, while that in the 14-year segment fell 20 bps, which according to bond market dealers helps the government borrow cheap provided the central bank continues to do such market intervention.

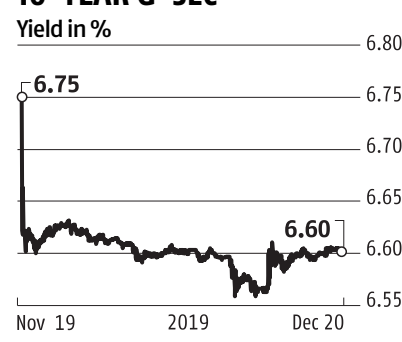
The 10-year bond yield closed at 6.604 per cent after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it will buy 10-year benchmark bond, and sell four short-term bonds worth ₹10,000 crore, on Monday.

If the central bank made it a one-off exercise, then the yields should climb back, the bond dealers said.

The yields on one-year bonds rose 5 bps, as the central bank moved to correct the steep yield curve.

According to Badrish Kulhali, head of fixed income at HDFC Life Insurance, the spread between the overnight and 10-year bond had climbed to 160 bps, but the long-term average has been 80-100 bps, which the central bank is probably trying to achieve.

10-YEAR G-SEC



The high spread gives banks ample opportunity to a safe arbitrage, in which they can borrow short and invest in longer dated bonds at a risk spread of nearly 2 percentage points, bond dealers say. If the longer-term yields come down, that arbitrage opportunity lessens significantly. The short-term rates, however, are determined by liquidity and repo rate. While the liquidity is abundant in the system, and repo rate is low, the short-term yields can't

remain high for long.

"After December, the short-term yields should come down. This is a short-term phenomenon, a near-term dislocation, which should rectify itself," said Kulhali, adding this is unlikely to be a policy tool for the central bank, but a "specific tool to address very steep yield curve".

This is also not a countercyclical policy response, IDFC Mutual Fund wrote in a report. Term spreads, the difference between one-year yield and 10-year yield, are the highest since 2010, but this is happening now even as credit growth has collapsed and liquidity remained abundant.

"Just as commentators have observed that credit spreads need to be brought down for the riskier borrower, there clearly has been a need to bring down sovereign term spreads as well. While the effect to the overall system is decidedly lower than compressing the credit spread, it is still of relevance and can be executed with much less moral hazard," IDFC AMC wrote in the report.

However, there are those in the market who don't see much merit in softening the

longer-term yield curve, except to make the government borrowing cheaper.

"When the US does Operation Twist, it affects lots of loan products linked to 10-year and 30-year bonds. In India, such products simply don't exist. Banks' lending rates are calculated based on short-term rates, by trying to push them up, the RBI is hardly helping in transmission," said a senior economist, requesting anonymity.

"In any case, the RBI will have to be very repetitive in such operations, otherwise 10-year bond will again reprise itself," said the economist. However, by doing so, the RBI risks inverting the yield curve, in which longer tenure bond yields are lower than the smaller one. Such yield curve technically signals a recession.

As far as corporate bonds are concerned, such operation doesn't help the lower rated companies much because they were not able to tap the bond market anyway. However, if the short-term rates rise, it may hit the same set of companies, and even better rated ones from tapping the commercial paper market for their working capital requirement, bond dealers said.

Urad prices jump 20% in two months over crop damage

DILIP KUMAR JHA
Mumbai, 20 December

Urad prices have surged 20 per cent in the past two months owing to crop damage in the kharif sowing period following incessant rain and floods in the monsoon season. Data compiled by government-owned Agmarknet portal showed urad prices have jumped to trade at ₹70 a kg in the benchmark wholesale Latur mandi in Maharashtra compared to ₹58 a kg in the beginning of October.

This is significantly above the minimum support price (MSP). In retail, urad dal trades at ₹100 a kg.

All other pulses, including milled (dal) tur, gram and masur have also become costlier following urad, which is hurting the middle class consumers.

"Urad prices have run quite a bit in the last two months due to crop damage in major growing areas. Devastating floods during the monsoon have hit the standing kharif crop," said Bimal Kothari, managing director, Pancham International, a pulses trader and importer.

However, Kothari expects the price of pulses, led by urad, to decline in the coming months.

This is because extended seasonal rainfall has left adequate soil moisture in the field, thereby leaving the potential of a bumper rabi pulses crop this year.

Meanwhile, sowing area under urad bean reported a marginal decline to 3.88 million hectares this year compared to 3.96 million hectares last year.

But trade sources estimate that around 20 per cent urad crop has been damaged due to floods in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and other major growing regions.

To ease the price pressure, the gov-



KITCHEN BILL RISES

WHOLE GRAIN	Centre	Dec '19, '19	% Change*
Black gram	Latur (MH)	7,000	20.3
Lentil (masur)	Sagar (MP)	4,500	16.1
Green gram	Nagaur (Rajasthan)	6,600	14.8
Bengal gram	Sagar (MP)	4,005	0.1
Arhar	Amarawati (MH)	5,033	-5.7

DAL	Centre	Dec '19, '19	% Change*
Black gram	Lucknow (UP)	7,395	9.6
Green gram	Mumbai (MH)	9,000	4.7
Arhar	Goa (Goa)	8,225	2.6
Bengal gram	Goa (Goa)	5,900	1.7
Masur	Jorhat (Assam)	7,200	-4.0

*Change over Sep 30, 2019
MSP (₹ per quintal) Arhar—5800, Black gram—5700, Green gram—7050 as on Jul 07, '19
Source: Agmarknet, Ministry of Agriculture; Compiled by BS Research Bureau

ernment has allowed urad imports to the tune of 400,000 tonnes for the one-year period ending December 18, 2019.

Additionally, the government has also allowed urad imports of 250,000 tonnes, which needs to be completed by March 31, 2020.

Trade sources, however, believe that full quantity of urad imports would be impossible during the specified time. India imports urad primarily from Myanmar. While harvesting of early season crop is complete, farmers in Myanmar are set to sow the second round of urad crop for harvesting by February-end.

"Given that the shipment from Myanmar farms to Indian ports takes at least 20 days, the import of full quantity by March 31, 2020, would be impossible. Hence, the government must extend the timeline by at least one month to achieve full quality of urad

import," said a senior industry official.

Apart from imports, the government has also announced release of 850,000 tonnes of various pulses from its buffer stock. "The government should release only urad, which is selling above MSP, from the buffer stock. All other pulses are selling below MSP and therefore buffer stocks of these should not be liquidated. Apart from this, the government should actively consider relaxing import norms for urad," said Jitu Bhedra, chairman, India Pulses and Grains Association (IPGA).

Selling of pulses from the buffer stock though is a continuous process. Kothari, too, believes that further liquidation of buffer stock may not have much impact on prices.

With an estimated production of around 25 million tonnes, India is self-sufficient in pulses but imports occasionally to meet the deficit.

A bureaucratic nightmare awaits us



COUNTRY CODE

RAHUL JACOB

Ganesh Devy, an activist for tribal rights and a well-known writer, is the most mild-mannered, level-headed of academics. Yet to listen to him on the challenges ahead for India as the Modi government seeks to cobble together a National Register of Citizens is guaranteed to give most people an anxiety attack. When we spoke yesterday morning, Devy took the narrative back almost 150 years to British colonial administrators designating large numbers of nomadic tribals in the course of drafting the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Among those regarded as a threat to the government were tribes such as the Meenas who made coins for mints and stonemason tribes called Wodders. "Many of these tribes were sent to detention camps," says Devy. When India became independent, these tribes were denotified in 1952 but Devy worries that many will not have the requisite paperwork to satisfy the powers-that-be who will decide on their inclusion for the NRC. How many people will be affected? More than a hundred million, he said.

If even a quarter of these people are unable to prove they have the paperwork to qualify as a citizen, the travails of the 1.9 million Assamese, including more than one million Hindus left off the register, will seem like a rounding error by comparison. On Friday evening, the Home Ministry put out a series of tweets clarifying the situation: "Indian citizens do not have to prove any ancestry by presenting documents like identity cards, birth certificates etc of parents/grand parents dating back to pre-1971 situation." It also said that people who were illiterate could be vouched for by members of their community. These are important qualifications but the process itself will entail every Indian citizen having to prove they are citizens in one way or another. Devy speaks of the large number of undocumented Gurkhas living for generations in India and the flow of people between Nepal and Uttar Pradesh to the extent that the Nepalese rupee could be cashed in Uttar Pradesh. Then there are the large number of Tibetan refugees living in and around settlements in Karnataka and in Himachal Pradesh, living there since the Dalai Lama escaped to India in 1959. Their documents are typically in the name of camps rather than individuals. Given the large number of tribals in this country and the lack of personal documents carried by many people in rural India where "the poorest, least legally empowered people will be the first category" to be affected, those unable to provide documentary evidence and even those who can will be subject to "multiple confusions" as they work through the bureaucratic quagmire, says Devy, who has worked with tribal communities for three decades.

The poor will be the worst affected by CAA-NRC as they navigate their way through queues trying to provide proofs of legacy and identity

As the Indian government goes forward with the Citizenship Amendment Act and the NRC, Devy foresees a process that could "span 60 to 70 years to do it for the entire population." Yet, despite the widespread protests across the country this week, the Modi government appears determined to push ahead although the Ministry of Home Affairs tweets amount to reassurance of a kind. The process still promises to be nightmarish and test India's under-staffed bureaucracy to the fullest. Given that India's businesses are still dealing with the problems of documentation required for the goods and services tax and that an annual return for GST was finalised only recently, two-and-a-half years after the tax was introduced, the odds are that the government machinery will seize up. The chaos of demonetisation and the invoice matching saga of GST might seem as orderly and festive as a Republic Day parade by comparison.

The videos of women students being beaten with lathis in Jamia Millia Islamia University, the threatening raised fist of a policeman as the historian Ramachandra Guha was taken into custody on Thursday in Bengaluru and the indiscriminate use of the colonial era law of Section 144 in various parts of the country to try and intimidate those who want to protest peacefully are just a few examples of how ugly the Indian government looks when it swings into action. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's denunciation this week of "Maoists, separatists and jihadists" somehow infiltrating students' protests was not unlike the Communist Party of China earlier this year blaming the "black hands" of the United States and the United Kingdom for somehow brainwashing hundreds of thousands of young people in Hong Kong who lead the protests there. Students in Hong Kong have in the past worn t-shirts with Mahatma Gandhi's quote emblazoned on them: "An unjust law is itself a species of violence.

What will this process accomplish? Samrat, a journalist who edits *East Wind*, a magazine about northeastern India, and has watched the tragedy in Assam unfold, observes that even a simplified and improved version of the registration and document verification process that took five years in Assam will likely take longer to complete and cost countless crores when it goes nationwide. Documents will need to be okayed by the bureaucracy. "The process will be determined by clerks in a government office," he says. We can all relate to just how uncomfortable that could be.

What's the hullabaloo over the citizenship act?

Whatever the legal position, it is my understanding that in practice, the Indian authorities have always treated Hindu refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh far more sympathetically than Muslims



WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

While deploring the crackdown on Citizenship (Amendment) Act protesters, I cannot for the life of me understand the hysteria over the measure. Cities erupted in violence, universities were in ferment, chief ministers on the rampage. Suicides were blamed on the new law. Yet, it is no more than a gesture of humanity. It isn't even new. Whatever the legal position, it is my understanding that in practice, the Indian authorities have always treated Hindu refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh far more sympathetically than Muslims.

If India doesn't rescue them, who will? India was divided on religious lines. This is an unfinished legacy of partition. Both sides acknowl-

edged this at the very first India-Pakistan conference on stranded minorities held in Calcutta in April 1948. "Mr Sri Prakasa looks after the interests of Hindus in Sindh," said Pakistan's finance minister, Ghulam Muhammad, assuring India's first high commissioner of the Pakistan government's cooperation. Sri Prakasa's house was a "beehive of lots of people" Ghulam Muhammad added. As for Bangladesh, the Custodian of Enemy Property told me after the 1971 war that it would be monstrous to demand documents for compensating Hindu refugees. "A man has fled for his life leaving everything behind, in only the clothes he stands up in, and we should ask him for *pattas*?" he asked in righteous outrage.

Afghanistan is irrelevant. It was never British India and the successor state has no obligations there. In any case, Afghanistan has only about a thousand Hindus. But even secular India cannot reject responsibility for Pakistan's two million Hindus and the 17 million in Bangladesh. Nearly five million Hindus and Sikhs left West Pakistan in 1947. By 1962, 1.5 million Bangladeshi Hindus had escaped to India. When the trend was mentioned at the 1948 conference, Subimal Dutt, later foreign secretary and India's first high commissioner to Bangladesh, blamed Pakistan's "undeclared war against India". It's impossible to distinguish between economic refugees and those fleeing communal persecution because a biased regime inevitably creates economic dif-

ficulties, forcing waves of men, women and children to seek security abroad.

Assamese neurosis about being overwhelmed by Bengalis, especially East Bengalis, has also provoked riots and expulsions over the years. Gopinath Bordoloi, Assam's first chief minister, waxed eloquent at the Calcutta conference about the threat, seeking to revive a 1945 agreement between his state and the Muslim League about evicting migrants. Other suggestions included an exchange of population with East Pakistan and separation of a strip of land, perhaps west of the Padma river, for a new state for homeless Hindus. The Centre was urged to be as generous to eastern refugees as to those in the west. Presumably, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah hope to put an end to an argument that has dragged on painfully for 72 years by recognising once and for all the subcontinental Hindu's right in Hindu-majority India.

True, any determination based on religion may seem contrary to the Constitution's secular commitment. But this is a formality. Indians can be secular in conduct and attitude without the fig-leaf of a label. It's even more ridiculous to claim that the measure will disenfranchise Indian Muslims. Even if all 19 million Bangladeshi and Pakistani Hindus are accommodated, they could not possibly displace 200 million Indian Muslims who are entrenched in this country's soil, culture and history. Perhaps

the measure does to an extent demonise the governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh, but it's no more than they deserve for persistent ill-treatment of their minorities. In any case, I have a lurking suspicion that neither country will be too unhappy to see the backs of their Hindus.

For one technical reason or another, the new law does not apply to the tribal areas of Tripura, Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya or to much of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. So there's absolutely no reason for the north-east's panic. Extending the privilege to Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians is only a courtesy, perhaps because the authors needed to demonstrate they weren't legislating only for Hindus. Since dates are often manipulated in South Asia, the December 31, 2014 cut-off may be a more serious challenge. The National Register of Citizens even more so for lists can always be tampered with. But the NRC can't be bracketed with the CAA.

The protests recall an East Bengal Hindu peasant being forced at bayonet point into the lorry to take him "home" after India's 1971 victory. Seeing the man's reluctance, I asked if he regarded himself as Indian or Bangladeshi. He replied without a pause, "Consider me an Indian national resident in Bangladesh!"

It was a succinct summary of an anomaly that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act might remove.

LUNCH WITH BS ▶ SUBHASH GARG | FORMER FINANCE SECRETARY

Always ready for a good fight

Over lunch with Arup Roychoudhury, Garg talks about his two years as finance secretary as the government went into an unprecedented confrontation with the Reserve Bank of India

Former Finance Secretary Subhash Garg is one of those lucky Indian Administrative Service officers whose home cadre — Rajasthan — is also his home state. So we decide to meet at a Rajasthani restaurant in Hotel Ashok. While I am on my way, Garg calls to say that he had phoned the hotel reservation desk and found that the restaurant had been shut down. As an alternative, we decide on the Frontier Restaurant, also in Hotel Ashok.

The restaurant is well lit, but appears dark once inside. "Not very inspiring... hope the food is good," Garg says. We decide to order before settling down for our longish chat. Garg orders a *subz-e-seekh*, which is a vegetarian kebab, and I order a *mutton khyber kabab*. To go along with that, we order *dal* and stuffed *kulcha*.

Garg is a vegetarian, and a teetotaler. "In the Academy, I used to drink occasionally with batchmates. My wife comes from a pure-vegetarian, no-alcohol family. We made a deal at the time of our wedding that she would start using onion in food and I would stop drinking totally. We have kept that deal."

Originally from Rewari district in Haryana, Garg was academically gifted. But irregular family income meant he had to pay for his own education through tuitions and a national scholarship. He stuck a deal with his father that whatever he would otherwise earn from a steady job, he would earn through tuition, and he would continue his studies. In January 1983, Oil India offered him his first job in the accounts department but by August that year the results of the civil services exam that he had taken were announced and he decided to join the IAS Academy. Two of his brothers are also civil servants.

Our food arrives. The kebabs and the *kulcha* are good, and the *dal* is exceptional. We now turn our attention to his eventful two-year stint in the finance ministry.

A quick recap for our readers: While tensions between the Reserve Bank of India and the finance ministry are seen as par for the course and are even considered healthy, serious trouble started brewing when the Department of Economic Affairs under Garg, in an internal note, stated that the central bank owed it as much as ₹3.6 trillion in surplus in 2018. By November 2018, the battle between the two institutions was out in the open and ended with the resignation of then Reserve Bank of

India (RBI) governor Urjit Patel in December 2018 and deputy governor Viral Acharya in January 2019.

"You reached a compromise with your wife on your lifelong food habits, and with your father on your career decision. Why could you not reach a compromise with the RBI?" I ask Garg half-jokingly. Garg responds quickly: "You need two reasonable people to strike a compromise."

Garg is of the firm belief that since the RBI's profits are largely based on the free sovereign currency resources, and it has no liability of its own, its capital reserves essentially belong to the government. "There's always been very serious differences regarding what should be the capital requirement of the RBI. I came to know it for the first time when I attended the meeting of the board in August 2017. Though the new Economic Capital Framework was complex, my argument was that it has to be more reasonable than what it was, which is the most conservative economic capital framework ever adopted by any central bank in the world."

On the demand for ₹3.6 trillion, Garg says that the Department of Economic Affairs made the calculation based on what should be a reasonable framework and on a par with the best practices among the central banks. "In fact, the RBI board had agreed that they will review the framework," Garg maintains.

Garg admits that the now infamous "Feb 12 (2018) circular" — which abolished alternative avenues to deal with stressed assets outside the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code — led to major fissures between the two institutions. "Unfortunately, the RBI refused to participate in the committee headed by the cabinet secretary to discuss power sector resolution issues. That was entirely unexpected."

"There was no communication breakdown between us and the RBI. We were communicating regularly, but there came a point where we were talking at each other rather than talking to each other. Nothing was getting resolved. There was frustration about how do we get across to them..."

Garg says that during its hearings on the circular, it was the Allahabad High Court that suggested, for the first time, that the government had the power to use Section 7. This is what gave former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and Garg the idea to seek a discussion with Patel under that section. "Dr Patel is a brilliant economist who knew his data very well. But his com-



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

munication was not the best, if I can put it that way. I think communication was his problem. If you can't see the whole picture and remain stuck only to a narrow viewpoint, then there is a problem," Garg says, stressing again that a resolution became difficult because RBI did not want to discuss pending matters at all.

In January 2019, a committee was formed under former RBI governor Bimal Jalan to

review the RBI's economic capital framework. Garg was part of the panel, but when the panel firm up its recommendations in May-June, Garg did not agree with the findings. He wanted his views reflected in a dissent note. However, he was transferred to the power ministry in July before the panel signed the report. He sought voluntary retirement and completed his career with the IAS in October.

"In this committee also, the discussions were polarised around the fundamental point of how much of the surplus must the RBI retain. I still believe there is no case for the RBI to retain a surplus. We were expecting Dr Jalan to play the balancing role. At some stage, he also decided to lean towards the retain-the-surplus-with-the-RBI group."

"And in that situation, I had no way except to say that, to be intellectually honest, I would record a dissent. I had the right to record a dissent note, like in any other committee," Garg says, and adds that he was not informed why the points contained in his dissent note, which were also part of the minutes of the Committee, were neither included in the report nor made their way into the public part of the committee's record.

The main course over, we decide to share a *kulfi*.

A much publicised part of the panel's proceedings was that Garg refused to attend one of the meetings. Garg says that was not the case. "There had been discussion a day prior to the meeting that it would be postponed. At that time, Parliament was on. But then they decided to hold the meeting and I could not attend the meeting which was not supposed to have been held in the first place."

Another controversy which dogged Garg during his tenure at the North Block related to overseas sovereign bonds. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in the 2019-20 Budget that the centre would borrow from overseas markets. Garg had subsequently said that around ₹70,000 crore would be raised from such instruments. After much criticism from former RBI governors and economists, the government quietly buried the proposal.

"These aren't the only or the biggest challenges I have faced. In 1995, I was asked to take over as managing director of Rajasthan Roadways. The state transport minister and the chairman were fighting; there was rampant corruption. The state government told me to clean up the department. Within 35 days of my arriving there, the warring factions banded together and sought my ouster as their first priority. And I was transferred to the State Insurance and Provident Fund Department, a place where I had to invent work to keep to the 10 to 5 schedule," Garg says with a laugh.

Retirement, Garg is as busy as ever. He has stated that he wants to set up a policy think-tank, and is writing articles and being invited for guest lectures. "One has to work hard to be able to do or be equal to the job one is doing," he says as we leave the restaurant.

Fear and humanity know no god



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

At a time when many of us are up in arms over the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA and the National Register of Citizens or NRC, I'm reminded of conversations I've had with refugees across the country in the last few years. I remember Tehmina (name changed) from Afghanistan, whose husband was kidnapped and lost to the Taliban. She was tortured by her in-laws for years before she was able to flee to India with her three children. She now lives in Delhi, a non-citizen who can't open a bank account, buy property, get a proper job or live a normal life. All she has by the way of identification, is the Refugee Card issued

by the UNHCR. I also remember Daya Ram, who fled to India from the Sindh province in Pakistan over a year ago after facing acute religious persecution. Over the years, he told me, his family fled to India in stages, whenever they could collect enough money to pay for a couple of them to come to India on a 15-day religious visa (and pay agents ₹20,000 per person in "fees"). Daya Ram was the last person in his family to leave his homeland — where he was reviled for being Hindu — for India where he's reviled for being a Pakistani.

Till the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill became an Act, I have to say I hadn't given their religious affiliation even a moment of thought. Call me naïve, but to me both Tehmina and Daya Ram have faced similar problems in India. Refugees and displaced people pouring in from its neighbouring conflict zones have no status in the country. Both Tehmina and Daya Ram have entered India without official papers. Both live in a strange limbo in camps and settlements, away from their respective homelands, unable to call India their own. Tehmina's elder son, now 22, only gets jobs where he can be paid in cash and kept off books as he has no means of identification. Her eleven-year-old, has been too traumatised to even go to school. For years,

she's educated him at home.

Daya Ram faces the same prospects as his brother Amir Khan (half his family adopted Muslim names to avoid persecution in Pakistan) who fled to India three years ago, also on a 15-day religious visa. Both live in the Aanganwa Camp for Pakistani Hindu refugees in Jodhpur. After all this time, his brother has no job. Around him, neighbours are getting their daughters married younger and younger, to avoid them being "dishonoured" in the close confines of the camp. "Often I wonder," he said to me, "what is this life worth?"

Which is why as the country erupts over CAA and NRC, all I can do is think of Daya Ram from Pakistan in Jodhpur and Tehmina from Afghanistan in Delhi. They've faced the trauma of fleeing from the countries of their birth — and the problems of fitting into the country they have sought refuge in. Instead of looking at refugees through the unnecessary lens of religion, India should ratify the 1967 Protocol of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention (signed by 140 of the world's 190-odd nations). If not, then at least the powers that be need to look into the eyes of Tehmina and Daya Ram to see that fear knows no god. Neither, for that matter, does humanity.

Street protests are hard work



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

When my daughter said she'd like to participate in the pro-citizenship protests sweeping across the capital, I couldn't help feeling triumphant at having raised an upright, civic-minded child. Friends, children of friends and colleagues had taken leave of absence to register their solidarity with the protesters. "I really admire them," my daughter said wistfully, so I checked my messages to draw up a list of places where the marchers were gathering. She could have the car and driver, I suggested, as news of metro stations being shut down came in. "What for?" my daughter asked. "So you can be dropped at a point close to Jantar Mantar," I said, having

heard from a friend how she had been forced into a bus at Mandi House. "I respect their spirit, I really do," my daughter reiterated, "but it's so cold outside, I'll stay in today." Adding, "Could you ask Mary *didi* to give me breakfast in bed, please?"

While our daughter was having her breakfast, my wife was fretting about her plans for the weekend. She'd invited a host of her friends and acquaintances to an open house lasting two days, and thought the blockage of the roads inconvenient and cavalier. "How am I to order supplies?" she fumed. "How tiresome of everyone to choose to demonstrate when I am hosting a gathering." I pointed out that the movement was spontaneous and perhaps she should cancel her event seeing how it violated the spirit of collective dissent we were witnessing. "I don't understand all this politics-sholitics," my wife demurred, "so I'm going to have my party anyway."

My son, I hoped, would spare some time to show support for his friends, and ours, in the melee of campaigners, but he had other ideas that didn't include shouting slogans, or passing robesuds to policemen. He's been predisposed to avoiding anything that appears even remotely confrontational, preferring to

lay down arms than get into a war of words — which is strange for a lawyer. "I'm an interlocutor," he explained, when I expressed my disapproval at this lack of interconnectedness, "I can help resolve any issue between two or more parties, but I can't appear to take sides, or a stand. You understand, don't you?" I didn't, actually, but not wanting to appear a stuffy, old coot from another generation, I let it go, and my son worked out a route that he and his biking buddies could take to give their sports bikes an airing.

When I told my wife I was going to ask our daughter-in-law if she was planning on hitting the streets, my wife took me aside and whispered fiercely in my ear, "Don't let her learn the language of dissent because it'll come back to bite us." I told her I didn't understand why, so she explained, "If you teach her to shout slogans and raise her hands, then she'll need somewhere to practice. What if she complains about you or me to our children, and the staff — what will we do then?"

"But you," she said, "It's all right for you to go to India Gate, or wherever, and be part of the protests." "Me," I balked, "I can't do that, not when I've got a batch of new books that I plan to devote the weekend to reading."

Re-think GST

The Modi government has rolled out an ambitious spending programme for building the transport infrastructure and the provision of various goods of value to ordinary citizens. The problem has been arranging the money to pay for it all. One of the key assumptions was that the introduction of goods and services tax (GST) would raise the share of indirect taxes in gross domestic product (GDP) and provide the wherewithal. It hasn't worked out that way. Central revenue from GST may be anything up to 40 per cent short of target this year, and the states are now complaining about non-receipt of their GST share. Pushed to the wall, the government is busy finding ways to pay its bills indirectly, or not pay at all. The Comptroller and Auditor General has reported that the actual Central deficit is more than 2 percentage points higher than officially stated.

There were four mistakes made on GST. First, the political leadership did not realise until quite late in the day that GST is essentially a flat tax, with variations. So all the goods consumed by the poor, and broadly enjoying favourable tax treatment, would now attract a higher tax. Equally, the goods consumed by the wealthy would attract a lower tax. So the poor would end up paying more, and the rich correspondingly less, if the GST rate were revenue-neutral. That led to the first mistake: Going political, and introducing extreme progressivity in GST rates (all the way from zero to 28 per cent). This was GST without the logic of GST.

The second mistake was to promise the states a guaranteed 14 per cent increase in GST revenue from one year to the next. This, when a new monetary policy framework was being put in place for the Reserve Bank, with a target inflation rate of 4 per cent (with 2 percentage point variation on either side). What this meant was that an economy growing at 7 per cent would ordinarily be expected to deliver nominal growth (i.e. including inflation) of about 11 per cent — well short of the 14 per cent revenue buoyancy promised to states. The compensation cess was available to help bridge the gap, but only for five years.

The third mistake was to keep key goods outside the scope of GST (petroleum products, tobacco, liquor). Since these have usually accounted for the bulk of excise revenue, it affected calculations on what a revenue-neutral GST rate might be. The fourth mistake was the drive by the Modi government to lower the cost of goods in the run-up to the general elections. In the process, the tax rate on many consumption goods was dropped more than the tax rate on their inputs. So we now have companies claiming refunds of taxes on inputs that are more than the GST they pay on their final product!

Meanwhile, in the implementation phase, we have seen a repeat of what happened in the wake of the demonetisation three years ago: People found all kinds of creative ways to turn black into white. In the case of GST, we seem to have spawned a fake-bill industry that provides convenient bills to producers, even as chunks of the production chain seem to have found a way to escape the GST net. The initial promise, that eventually bills would be matched as a way of preventing such fraud, will be put to the test in April; we will have to see if it is doable or just causes chaos. If it does not work, it will have belied one of the central promises of GST, that it would address tax evasion and raise the tax share of GDP.

Even if invoice-matching proves successful, there are other elements of the system that are broken. Perhaps GST was too complex a system for the Indian economy at its present stage of development. Regardless, the Centre has to break heads in the GST Council and work out new slabs and rates (the fewer the better) and make a fresh start. No economy can afford to persist with a tax experiment that has failed.

Read *Jana Gana Mana*, in full

VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATTA

Our national anthem is the first verse of a five-verse Brahma hymn. The second verse goes, "Aharaha Tabo Awhbhan Pracharito/ Shuni Tabo Udaar Bani/ Hindu Bauddho Sikh/ Jains Parasik/ Musalman Khristani/ Puraba Pashchimo Aashay / Tabo Singhasano Pashay / Premoharo Hawye Gantha / Jano Gano Oikya Bidhyaka / Jaya Hey Bharata Bhagya Bidhata."

A free translation: "We hear your inclusionary call broadcast 24x7. We, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Muslims and Christians come from East and West to pay homage at your throne, and

weave the garland of love. Victory to you, O Bringer of Unity and Decider of India's Destiny".

That hymn was a clarion call to patriotic Indians, whatever their religious beliefs, or lack thereof. I last heard the song in its entirety at a Brahma gathering a decade ago. But the second verse and the three that follow have been ear-worming me ever since I read the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and understood the implications of the CAA being tied to the data-suction exercises of the National Population Register (NPR) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The CAA carefully omits mention of the religious groups mentioned in the hymn. The individuals who drafted it, in the hope of deciding India's destiny, are definitely not advocates of unity. Here's a quick summary of how the NRC/NPR/CAA change the state's relationship with citizens.

Assuming the government does implement these, everyone who lives in India will have to prove they have lived in

India for many years. Alternatively, they must prove that their parents, or ancestors, lived in India prior to a certain date.

If they can't prove this, and they want citizenship, they must claim to be refugees fleeing persecution from one of three specific neighbouring countries. They must belong to one of several specified religions to claim asylum under this clause. They cannot claim to be refugees from any of five other neighbouring nations, which have actually generated refugees in large numbers.

Nor can such "refugees" claim to be born into any faith other than the ones specified in the CAA. Atheists are excluded even though atheists are persecuted in those three countries (and arguably discriminated against in India). Brahms are excluded (unless we claim to be Hindus and we've fought legal battles to

assert that we are not). Animists are excluded and, of course, Muslims are excluded. So if you belong to one of the excluded communities, you may have been born in Bhopal or Burdwan in a family that has lived there for generations. But you will go crazy trying to prove it.

This Act is not only discriminatory and deliberately crafted to exclude people born into faiths that the ruling dispensation doesn't like. It is also designed to create a sinkhole of corruption, much larger and deeper than anything that India has experienced in its long, corruption-riddled history.

Consider the fact that the NRC asks for documents most Indians don't possess, to let them claim citizenship. Lower-income groups are even less likely to possess such documents. Some of the documents that will be Muslims. But transgender folks, nomadic

peoples, tribals, Dalits, landless labourers, urban migrants in rented accommodation, etc., will all be sieved out, regardless of faith. Will they, therefore, all end up in camps?

Probably not. Don't underestimate the ingenuity of the average Indian and don't underestimate the enabling power of bribery. Hark back to demonetisation. All the wise men who hailed that lunacy as a masterstroke confidently claimed vast quantities of cash would not come back to the banking system. But all of the cash did come back. People found ways to change notes and they were helped to do this, by "money-changers" within the system who charged commissions.

The same thing will happen with the alphabet soup of the NRC, NPR and CAA except that this exercise will deal in documents, not cash. Bribes will be paid. Documents will be magically generated. If it happens at all, the alphabet soup will not only cause endless misery. It will end up being a ₹53,000 crore "cleansing" exercise that makes the people implementing it much wealthier.

with secularism also. Whatever the proximate and longer-term reasons for it, Indians are now overtly non-secular.

But political bargains aren't always one-sided. By 1974, a huge economic crisis, together with her brute majorities in parliament and assemblies, had both forced and enabled Indira Gandhi to discard the communists as she no longer needed them. She was able to stabilise and consolidate the economy after that, albeit in socialist, shortage mode.

Compare this to the present. In just seven months into its second term, the Modi government has pushed through everything that it and its ideological partner want — triple talaq, abolition of Article 370, and the new Citizenship Act.

But now, with the big political job done, the time has come for it to pay attention to the economy, which is the main problem now.

In probability theory, this is called variable change, meaning you change the variable if you can work out that doing so will stack the odds in your favour.

Indira Gandhi used it with great success. Now Mr Modi too. In fact, he must. She nationalised. He must de-nationalise.

Indian, nationalist and Muslim

A new Indian Muslim is rising. They're dressed like Muslims but are also flaunting their patriotism, nationalism, love for tricolour, national anthem and Constitution

This Republic owes a huge debt of gratitude to celebrity writer-activist Arundhati Roy. She single-handedly saved India from the armed Maoist insurgencies.

She did it when she described our Maoists as "Gandhians with Guns". It was a great quotable quote forever. It also buried whatever little sympathy the Maoists might have had as underdogs.

As the oldest truism goes in marketing, nothing fails faster than an obvious lie. You couldn't be both Gandhians and Maoists at the same time.

Watching the pictures from the steps of Delhi's Jama Masjid, a brisk 15-minute walk or one metro station away from where I sit and write this on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, I'd wonder how she would have described thousands of Muslims spilling over Jama Masjid's 17th century steps today (Friday).

These are Muslims, "dressed" like Muslims. We underline this since our prime minister just indicated that what clothes people wear signal their intentions. They are "armed" with the tricolour, the Constitution, many framed portraits of Babasaheb Ambedkar, some of Gandhi, chanting "Jana Gana Mana" and Hindustan Zindabad. In the classical Left-liberal worldview, flaunting aggressive symbols of nationalism, the flag, the anthem and assertion of national identity are symptoms of exaggerated majoritarian nationalism, and the last step before jingoism.

What happens when the Republic's largest minority (one out of six to seven Indians) comes out on the steps of their holiest mosque to pronounce they are Indians first, believe in the Constitution, the flag and the anthem, and reject the idea that someone could now reimagine the basis of the Republic, whatever his majority.

Think hard to understand what has changed in India. The Muslims are questioning the majority's first claim to Indian patriotism. They are also saying something immigrants, dominated by those from India, chanted in Britain four decades ago when racism grew rampant: Come what may, we are here to stay.

No one can fight them. No one can open fire at them with any justification. Our country has changed. Or, as the more contemporary line goes: Mera desh badal gaya hai, mitron.

You cannot even convince them of the nuance

between the CAA and NRC, the citizen and the refugee. You've said too much already, especially with the 2021 West Bengal elections in mind. You had gone out to achieve two things.

One, retrospectively protect the Bengali Hindus caught in the NRC net in Assam, expel Bengali Muslims. And two, impress Bengali Hindus in West Bengal with the promise of a repeat. In trying to put out a fire in Assam, and light another one in West Bengal, you now have the flames in Delhi. Jama Masjid is just about 7 km from Rashtrapati Bhavan, it is supposedly under Section 144. See who is defying it and how.

Clothes — caps, burkhas, hijab, the colour green — have been the most visible aspect, and stereotype, about Muslims. Also, their religious chants. One such was picked up from the Facebook page of one of the two young women who drew nationwide notice for saving a male friend by coming between him and the police lathis. The implication was, along with some other scribbles, that she is driven by orthodox Islam, not nationalism or any commitment to secularism.

There's been an even stronger symbolism of the angry Muslim, represented by the AK-47, RDX, the many Mujahideen and Lashkars, al Qaeda and ISIS. Those angry Muslims are also easy to fight and defeat. Just as this column is written, a Jaipur court has sentenced four such to death for serial blasts there. For almost three decades now, the concern has been, what if the Muslims get really frustrated and take to terror?

Tiny groups, from SIMI to the Indian Mujahideen (IM), have confirmed this notion. Even someone as liberal and far-seeing as Dr Manmohan Singh had said to a hall full of senior journalists at his 2009 election-time interaction at New Delhi's Constitution Club, that anyone complaining about special facilities for the Muslims, should be aware that even if 1 per cent of India's Muslims (about 200 million now) decided that there was no future for them in India, the country would become ungovernable.

That was the flavour of the UPA decade. India had to be generous to Muslims so they won't go rogue.

Some young Muslims, in the odd pocket, did take to terror. The UPA put these down as firmly as the



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

NDA might today. The Batla House encounter, in the heart of the troubled zone of Jamia Millia last week, was one such.

There can be many interpretations of these facts. But the conclusion would be the same. One side felt sorry for the Muslims and wanted to do something to "assuage" them so they won't turn anti-national. The other wanted both eyes for an eye, and even countenance terrorist vigilantism from the majority. Both agreed on viewing the Muslims with suspicion.

The other negative about Indian Muslims was their clergy — the Bukharis of Jama Masjid, the Madanis, the sundry beards who would appear on commando-comic channels issuing or defending one nutty fatwa or the other.

There are so many of them, you could always find a Bukhari or a Madani to take a position for and against anything. Check out the Babri-Ayodhya judgment, for example. Or a Bukhari pronouncing that the CAA-NRC was no threat to Muslims. He wouldn't dare to come to the pulpit in the mosque he is the custodian of and say this to the thousands on its steps.

A perfect world has not been achieved yet. But most of these negative images have been challenged today. With "Jana Gana Mana" in place of the kalma, the tricolour, not the green, for a flag, pictures of Ambedkar and Gandhi and not Ka'aba, and "Hindustan Zindabad". The one thing not changed is the "clothes". As we said earlier, these are Muslims dressed like Muslims. They're reminding us there is no contradiction between how an Indian dresses and her patriotism or what the Constitution owes her as a citizen. That larger stereotype is being broken by persisting with a smaller one.

Those who see the Indian Muslim in the usual "Clash of Civilizations" binary make a terrible blunder. In 1947, a majority of Indian Muslims walked away with Jinnah into their new nation, Pakistan. In the 72 years since Jinnah, they've never trusted a Muslim as their leader. It's always been a non-Muslim. What it means we had debated in an earlier National Interest column (https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/shekhar-gupta-pulping-the-modi-script-on-muslims-11511301293_1.html).

It isn't a perfect world yet because not everybody is as measured and astute as those on the steps of Jama Masjid. Cars have been burnt in old Delhi's Darya Ganj, abutting Jama Masjid. Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat are all seeing violent elements and West Bengal remains one spark away from a return of violence and arson. But none of this can put in the shade the change India's Muslims have signalled in Delhi.

They are signalling the rise of a new Indian Muslim. Not afraid to look Muslim, and not shy of flaunting her nationalism. With a willingness to fight carrying the Constitution, the flag, the anthem, Ambedkar, Gandhi and the chant of Hindustan Zindabad. The immortal words of Urdu poet Rahat Indori are being quoted often in these fraught days: *Sabhi ka khoon shaamil yahan ki mitti mein, kisi ke baap ka Hindustan thodi hai* (everyone has shed their blood on this soil, nobody can claim exclusive right over India). He must be smiling.

With special arrangement with ThePrint

Road-tracking criminals

EYE CULTURE

S MURLIDHARAN

Fortuitous and serendipitous spinoff of fastag, which the Modi government is introducing and hard-selling for electronic payment of toll on national highways, could facilitate nabbing criminals. And this spinoff could have a heightened impact if all the states follow suit and join in the national effort to make all the highways — national as well as state — a pleasure to drive on for normal people and a no-no for criminals.

Of course this is an incidental benefit of fastag, with saving precious fuel thanks to less idling of engines on toll booths, saving time for motorists, less overheads on booth management and toll collections and transparency in toll collections, etc being the main advantages thereof. But as it happens, sometimes a spinoff can over a period of time become one of the major causes for celebration of a measure.

In a country where crimes are rampant, including financial crimes with ATMs sometimes being uprooted and spirited away in vans, electronic payment of toll is a godsend inasmuch as the resultant trail can be latched on to with alacrity by the police to nab the criminals unless of course they seek the safety of tortuous and potholed non-toll roads after committing a crime. This is not to suggest that criminals will chicken out, deterred purely by fastag and its dreadful consequences for them but they will surely be dispirited and think several times before committing a crime.

And the mandatory requirement to furnish vehicle registration papers (RC Book) as a precondition for granting fastag registration and account will eliminate substantially the menace of fake number plates. Now it would be impossible because Radio Frequency Identification Technology, the technology behind fastag and its adjunct, electronic payment of toll, would flag the imposters no sooner than they zip past the sensor. Of course no amount of technology would be of use unless the police are vigilant and present where they should be. In the US, police lurk at every exit, giving road offenders a hot chase till they are nabbed. The motorists in the US know that in many of the highways they are monitored from the sky as well and any deviation from the straight and narrow of road discipline would be promptly reported to the law-enforcing agencies in the terra firma! Whether our police too will rise to this new opportunity is the million-dollar question. Rise they must.

In the US, there are cash counters

at turnpikes or toll-roads. The government seems to be of the view that 25 per cent of the lanes should be reserved for cash and card counters. Narendra Modi's demonetisation of 2016 was a flop mainly because it allowed too many escape routes — exchange counters which the crooks thronged through their numerous minions, hospitals, and petrol bunks. Of course avuncular and friendly bank branch managers too played a handmaiden role in facilitating conversion of banned notes into accepted ones. This time round, fastag should be implemented without any latitude even though that might make our government intolerantly martinet on roads, as it were. In our country crooks take a foot when given an inch of latitude. And there is no way people would be inconvenienced by the insistence on fastag as the only means of driving on highways unbridled and unstoppable. They are sufficiently attuned to the idea of electronic payments and withdrawals with the ubiquitous debit cards enduring them to the card habit. And electronic wallets like Paytm too have played a catalytic role in fostering the electronic payment habit. The ubiquitous Smartphone has had the effect of making our folks net and online savvy. In any case, motorists, of all people, cannot complain of being electronic-illiterate so as to latch on to cash. Therefore, the government must close cash counters on toll roads sooner rather than later. If Sweden can consign cheques and drafts to the dustbin of banking history, India surely can blaze the trail on toll roads with this revolutionary step.

Every progressive step must wield both the stick and the carrot rolled into one. Fastag should go beyond tokenism and offer discounts that are substantial. For, the savings to the National Highways Authority of India and toll booth franchisees are immense. Sensors like swipe machines in merchant establishments and ATM cash vending machines are one-time investment

which they would recover many times over, thanks to enormous savings in operating toll booths including on staff expenditure. Part of the savings must be given to the users in the form of stepped up discounts that go up with the amount prepaid.

The itinerant vendors who flock the toll booths and sell local snacks and fruits would of course be put out of business. They must seek solace and employment elsewhere.

Every week, Eye Culture features writers with an entertaining critical take on art, music, dance, film and sport

A time to consolidate



LINE AND LENGTH

T C A SRINIVASA-RAGHAVAN

Between May 2014 and November 2016 the Modi government was in continuity mode and everyone complained that it wasn't going fast enough. After that it has adopted "bash on regardless" mode, which has sometimes been hugely disruptive.

Whether it was demonetisation or GST or triple talaq or Article 370 or the latest amendment to the citizenship law, the government has chosen to force change in a series of sudden and massive strokes rather than gradually. Even the JNU fee hike was massive — which is tenth in the order of smalls — from ₹20 per month for a single

room to ₹600!

To understand this behaviour, we perhaps need to understand what the Germans call *zeitgeist* and, simultaneously, the push exercised by a government's political benefactors. To see why and how, go back to 1969.

In July that year Indira Gandhi had split the Congress party and was running a minority government with the help of the Communist Party of India. To please them she nationalised 14 of the biggest banks in India. Then she abolished privy purses, via which the rulers of non-British India were promised a monthly stipend in return for joining the Indian union. She said she was abolishing privilege. Between 1971 and 1973, she nationalised the coal industry. Her coal minister Mohan Kumaramangalam was a former communist. In 1973 she even nationalised the grain trade. Mercifully this lasted only for a few months. The foreign oil companies were also nationalised between 1974 and 1976.

All this was Disruption with a capital D. India hadn't seen any-

thing like it.

The reason why

I have two explanations for why governments sometimes disrupt so massively. One is elemental, the other is tactical.

The latter requires the government to please someone whose support is critical to survival. Or someone who provides the ideological moorings of the ruling party.

But for this to succeed the first should already have happened, namely, a massive change in the *zeitgeist* or the spirit of the times. A good politician senses this when it happens and exploits it. Indira Gandhi detected the hankering for redistribution of wealth that had developed by the late 1960s, and capitalised on it.

In that sense it is important to understand that the problem of massive disruption is not caused by the government alone but by the mood of the country itself when it changes. The correct question to ask, therefore, is why a new mood comes about, and whether it is the politician who creates the new mood or the new mood

that creates the politician.

For instance, until the end of the 1960s neither socialism, nor the self-conscious secularism we see now was very evident on political platforms. No one talked very much about these things.

In fact, any attempt to use these ideas as a political tool was intensely disliked and dismissed by the people. Those who insisted, like the Jana Sangh, were regarded as nuts who were best ignored. The Jana Sangh's electoral performance till 1989 is witness.

So what changed? As I said earlier the most important driving force at the end was the Congress party's dependence on the Communists. Together, these two hugely exploited the spirit of the times in favour of redistribution and India became overtly socialist.

In 1976 Indira Gandhi even inserted the term socialist into the preamble of Constitution. She also inserted secular.

The driving force

I think something like the change in mood that happened vis-a-vis socialism has now happened

PFRDA seeks withdrawal in NPS, tax only on interest component

Wants a more efficient option for subscribers than annuity products

JASH KRIPLANI
Mumbai, 20 December

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) wants systematic withdrawal plans (SWPs) to be allowed in the National Pension System (NPS), so that subscribers may choose a more efficient option than annuity products.

Supratim Bandyopadhyay, whole-time member (finance) of the PFRDA, on Friday shared a clutch of changes that the regulatory body is seeking from the government.

According to people in the know, the PFRDA is expecting some of these changes to be introduced by the Centre in the upcoming Budget itself.

In the NPS, 40 per cent of the accumulate pension assets need to be used for an annuity product, while 60 per cent can be withdrawn by the subscriber. PFRDA officials say that with lower returns and taxation on annuities, investors would be better served with the SWP option.



WISH LIST

- Increase deduction under Section 80CCD (1B) to ₹1 lakh
- Extend 80C exemption from central government employees to others
- Bring all pension products under one regulatory body
- New management fee structure for NPS products
- NPS trust should be made independent of PFRDA

Even though 60 per cent of the total money received at maturity from the NPS is tax-free, annuities are taxed in the hands of investors. PFRDA has suggested that only interest earned should be taxed and not the entire annuity. As on December 14, 2019, the total assets under management of NPS stood at ₹3.92 trillion.

As part of its Budget proposals, PFRDA has also asked the government to increase the deduction under Section 80CCD (1B) to ₹1,00,000 from ₹50,000 per annum.

Instead of different regulatory bod-

ies overseeing pension products, the PFRDA wants all pension-related products to be brought under its ambit. At present, the overall assets managed in pension products stand at around ₹25 trillion.

It has also suggested that the NPS trust be independent of the PFRDA. "Being the creator and settler of the trust, there could be conflict of interest," said Bandyopadhyay.

In addition, the body has proposed extending tax exemption under 80C to tier-II voluntary NPS accounts. Right now, the exemption can only

be availed by central government employees. The PFRDA has been advocating exemption to other employees as well.

The PFRDA is also planning to develop an industry body on the lines of the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi).

Bandyopadhyay said that we have been pleased with the investor awareness work done by Amfi to deepen the penetration of MF products.

To improve the management fee at which NPS products are offered, there could be a fresh request to submit a proposal to set a new benchmark for the same, said people in the know.

Currently, the low management fee at which NPS products are run also deters other players from entering the fray, industry sources said.

Over the last ten years, the equity NPS products have delivered annualised returns of 11 per cent. The corporate bond schemes have delivered 10.3 per cent returns, while government securities schemes have yielded 9.5 per cent returns.

Meanwhile, a conservative investor exposed to a diversified mix of the above products, would have seen a blended return of ten per cent over the last ten years.

SAT asks Sebi to pass order on Karvy case by January 15

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai, 20 December

The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) on Friday asked the Securities and Exchange Board of India to pass by January 15 an order in the Karvy Broking case.

This is with respect to Axis Bank's plea that the regulator's ruling was preventing it from accessing securities pledged by the brokerage company through another account. The tribunal modified its earlier directive passed on December 17, wherein it had asked the regulator to pass an order within 15 days in the case.

Axis Bank had moved SAT seeking shares pledged by Karvy Stock Broking to the lender to be unfrozen so that it could invoke the pledge.

"We modify our order dated December 17, 2019 to the extent that Sebi will pass appropriate orders on the representation of the appellant on or before January 15, 2020," the tribunal said in the order passed on Friday.

THE COMPASS

AGR ruling adds to GAIL's woes but investors have buying opportunity

UJJVAL JAUHARI

Following the disappointing September quarter results for GAIL, which were led by one-offs, adverse news flow like the one on the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) payment with respect to its mini-cable telecom business has added to the firm's woes.

The GAIL stock has lost a third of its value since early June. Analysts, however, say the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is looking at the wider impact of the Supreme Court's order on AGR dues for non-telecom entities (including GAIL) holding telecom licences.

That on Emkay Global say GAIL and Oil India have received demands totalling ₹1.30 trillion and ₹40,000 crore, respectively (including interest and penalty), but the same is untenable.

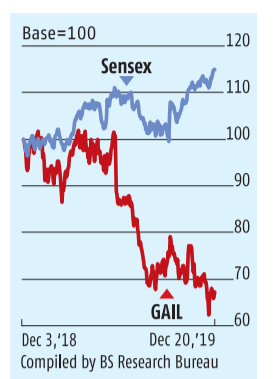
Importantly, the core business prospects look good, with strong upside potential in the stock.

GAILTEL, the telecom arm of GAIL, provides communication services to its pipeline business along with some third-party commercial leasing of optical fibre cable. GAILTEL's annual revenue, which was in the ₹18-28 crore range from FY05-09, fell steadily to ₹2.4 crore in FY19.

Based on analysts' rough estimates, on a cumulative revenue of ₹300 crore, a 7-8 per cent licence fee would work out to ₹20-30 crore, which, along with interest and penalty, would take the amount to ₹70-80 crore.

In the core business, demand for gas is growing and coming from the city gas distribution, fertiliser, and refinery sectors.

The largest gas trading and transmission segment, which contributes over 80 per cent to GAIL's financial performance, will continue driving



growth even as the smaller LPG, liquid hydrocarbons, and petrochemicals segments see weaker prospects with realisation under pressure.

Gas availability, which has been good, is expected to improve further. Transmission volumes, aided by the ramp-up of Petronet LNG's recently added capacities, are also expected to rise. GAIL's Kochi-Mangaluru pipeline is expected to be commissioned shortly, while completion of pipelines in east India is expected by FY22.

Analysts at Motilal Oswal see GAIL's gas transmission volumes rising 30 per cent by FY23, with improved gas availability.

Further, in the gas marketing business where GAIL sources gas for sale to customers, the Take-or-Pay charges (in case of commissioning delays) will kick in after 2019. This is despite delays in fertiliser plant commissioning and maintenance shutdowns affecting performance.

Analysts at Jefferies say GAIL will even raise the Take-or-Pay charges in the March quarter for lower uplift, to recoup its losses.

Analysts say the stock is trading at an attractive valuation of 0.8x its trailing FY19-adjusted price-to-book value.

The target price of Emkay, Jefferies, and HDFC Securities indicate up to 65 per cent upside for the stock, trading at ₹120.

Litigation may impact UTI MF valuation as IPO looms

ASHLEY COUTINHO
Mumbai, 20 December

UTI Mutual Fund is involved in a number of cases of employee-related litigation, which could have a bearing on its valuations as it hits the market for a public share sale.

The asset manager is yet to resolve the impasse surrounding the payment of pension to its erstwhile employees who had opted for voluntary retirement in 2003. The pension payout to the 1,200-odd employees could amount to ₹400-600 crore, according to sources.

It is not clear if the amount will be paid out of UTI MF's books or whether the Specified Undertaking of the Unit Trust of India (Suuti) — formed by the restructuring of the erstwhile UTI in 2003 — will step in to foot the bill.

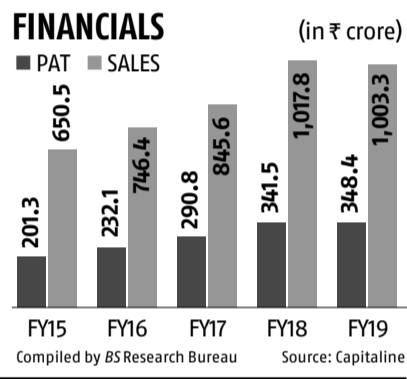
A full or part payout by the former could impact valuations for the asset manager's upcoming share sale, said experts. The UTI Retired and VSS Employees' Social Association (UTIRAVESA) has filed two writ petitions before the Bombay High Court,

demanding the opportunity to exercise options to avail of pension.

"UTIRAVESA has filed a writ petition before the Bombay High Court against our Company, among others, challenging the legality of the UTI AMC Pension Regulations 2003, and demanding, among others, that its members be paid pension under the Unit Trust of India Pension Regulations, 1994, and not under the UTI Asset Management Company Pension Regulations, 2003, with arrears of pension from their respective dates of retirement. Our company has filed its reply, among others, challenging the maintainability and seeking dismissal of the petition. The matter is presently pending," the draft offer for UTI MF observed.

The UTI MF management had written to the government regarding the pension conundrum in 2013 and 2015 but drew a blank on both occasions. According to sources, former managing director Leo Puri, as well as acting Chief Executive Officer Imtaiyazur Rahman has written to the government on the matter.

"The staff welfare fund was creat-



ed by the Unit Trust of India and has about ₹500 crore. We are trying to get that money released from the government and knocking on the finance ministry's door because the money is meant exclusively for the benefit of employees. The government is now seeking the opinion of the Ministry of Labour and Employment on the issue," said a person familiar with the matter. An email sent to UTI MF did not get a response.

The erstwhile UTI had constituted a staff welfare fund, which became

part of Suuti after the former split into two entities. Suuti and UTI MF have not been on the same page with regard to the pension payout.

UTI had offered a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) in 2003 for employees completing 10 years of service, opted for by about 1,200 employees. "The objective is to make the organisation lean. We are not hugely overstuffed but there could be a VRS to cut the flab," former UTI chairman M Damodaran had told *Business Standard* in January 2003.

Back then, UTI had an employee base of 2,500 in 54 offices of the country.

According to the Unit Trust of India Pension Regulations, 1994, pension would be payable to all full-time and part-time employees (exceeding 13 hours per week) who have completed 10 years of service.

Notably, the AMC is also involved in litigation with an association of employees and a former employee. This, in addition to reliefs in connection with service conditions, also challenges the sale of equity shares by the sponsors to T Rowe Price in 2009. One of the cases has sought a prohibition on the listing of equity shares or disinvestment of the respective shareholdings by the sponsors till the matter is decided.

In addition, UTI AMC is also involved in various labour- and employment-related proceedings and consumer-related matters, the draft offer noted.

UTI AMC will become the third fund house to get listed on the bourses. Year-to-date, HDFC AMC and Nippon India MF have both delivered gains of over 100 per cent.

Bharat Bond ETF raises over ₹12,000 crore

JASH KRIPLANI
Mumbai, 20 December

The Bharat Bond Exchange Traded Fund (ETF), which is the country's first corporate bond ETF, has raised over ₹12,000 crore through its new fund offer (NFO), getting subscription of 1.7 times over its base issue of ₹7,000 crore.

The ETF, launched on December 12, was floated in two series. For the three-year ETF, the mobilisation plan included ₹3,000 crore of issue size and ₹2,000 crore of greenshoe option.

For the 10-year series, it included a ₹4,000-crore issue size, along with a ₹6,000-crore of greenshoe option. According to sources, the Centre will take a call on whether it needs to exercise the greenshoe option to retain the excess subscription against the base issue.

Further, sources said the ETF saw strong participation from non-resident, high networth and retail investors, as well as top-tier corporates and foreign institutional investors.

"The response shows there is enough investor appetite for debt products. Today, at least 70 per cent of debt flows are in short-term assets. This offering has pulled in significant long-term money," said Radhika Gupta, CEO of Edelweiss Asset Management Company.

With the management fee of the ETF at a measly 0.0005 per cent, there were reservations about how the product would get wide distribution. Gupta says this has been a digitally-driven distribution. "All our digital partners whether it is Paytm Money, HDFC Securities, Zerodha or ICICI Securities, have facilitated this NFO." The ETF was opened on December 12.

► FROM PAGE 1

It's time to take bold investment steps: PM

Modi also stressed foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows had continued with more than 50 per cent of all inbound investments over the past 20 years being made during the past five years of the BJP government's tenure. However, official statistics show equity capital investments have seen a 1 per cent dip in 2018-19 to ₹44.36 billion after scaling a peak of 35 per cent annual growth in 2015-16.

The prime minister said India's rank was 142nd among all countries on the ease of doing business, which has now risen to 63rd, and noted that India was among the top 10 nations which had in the last three years made continuous improvement.

Seeking support for the comprehensive policymaking which led to this, Modi said he had to suffer anger and allegations directed at him, and talked of the support Indians allowed him to achieve it.

In the 50-minute speech, Modi took digs at industrialists in the audience. Referring to the government's decision to decriminalise offences under the Companies Act, Modi said people should not forget how difficult it was to do business under the earlier regime.

After a round of claps from the audience, he said the claps were not loud enough and many people seemed not to know what his government had done.

Mahindra to take a back seat

The statement said, Anish Shah, group president (strategy) at M&M, will replace Goenka, who will retire once his term ends on April 1, 2021.

Shah, who also takes over the role of CFO from April 1, 2020, for a year, replacing V S Parthasarathy, will be appointed MD and CEO at M&M for four years beginning April 2021. His term will end in March 31, 2025.

"Mahindra will serve as a mentor and sounding board for the managing director on issues to be presented to the board, especially in the areas of strategic planning, risk mitigation and external interface. In addition, he will be available to provide feedback and coun-

sel to the managing director on key issues facing the enterprise," said the release.

On April 1, 2020, Rajesh Jejurikar will join the M&M board as executive director (auto and farm sectors), with direct operational responsibility and accountability for the sectors. He will report to Goenka for the transition year, and then to Shah.

C P Gurnani, MD and CEO of Tech Mahindra, will join the M&M board as non-executive director. Rajeev Dubey, group president (HR & corporate services) and CEO (after-market sector), will retire in April 2020 on reaching the age of superannuation and will continue to be associated with the

group in a non-executive and advisory capacity.

VS Parthasarathy will head the mobility services sector, a new vertical being created by combining the after-market sector, Mahindra Logistics, and auto mobility services.

"This plan reflects M&M's depth of management talent and will ensure continuity in terms of culture, values, governance, and operational effectiveness. In my new role, I see myself as the conscience keeper of the Mahindra group, as the custodian of its values, and the watchdog of the interests of its shareholders. Internal audit will continue to report to me. I will continue to exercise oversight through the

board," said Anand Mahindra.

Speaking on behalf of the governance, nomination and remuneration committee of the M&M board, M M Murugappan, the panel's chairman, said: "The GNRC interviewed internal candidates and also considered the prospect of external candidates. This thorough and rigorous process reflects the highest standards of corporate governance. We are confident the new leadership team is well equipped to perpetuate the Mahindra Rise culture."

There are more changes on the anvil, both at the group corporate office and at the auto and farm sectors, the company said.

We are with you: FM

The most stressed NBFCs had been provided liquidity, as the government looks for ways to turn around a flagging economy, she added. The government has identified at least 10 projects so far as part of an infrastructure pipeline and these will get funds upfront. "I had announced during the Budget that ₹1 trillion will be given for infrastructure and I also announced that this is front-loaded. At least 10 new infrastructure projects are ready for clearance in the coming year so that they get the money upfront," she said.

After Sitharaman's Budget announcement, the Centre had, in September, set up a high-level task force to identify infrastructure projects for ₹100 trillion investment by 2024-25. Addressing industry representatives, Sitharaman said India's macro-economic indicators were on a solid footing. Inflation had been kept under control, macro-economic fundamentals and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows were strong, and foreign exchange reserves at record highs.

Highlighting some of the steps taken by the government after the Budget, she said liquidity crunch was addressed, capital was infused in public sector banks as well as the NBFC sector



FM Nirmala Sitharaman has said the move to slash corporation tax rate has made a difference

and professionalisation of Public sector undertaking (PSU) boards was done. The government's decision to slash corporation tax rate in September has made a difference and a lot of new investments are expected to flow into India, she said.

The FM also emphasised that the government has brought in transparency and technology in tax collection and eliminate harassment. With the introduction of faceless assessment, tax harassment is going to be a thing of the past, she added.

Equity investors shrug off NCLAT blow to Tatas

The NCLAT judgement came during the market hours on Wednesday.

Others say Mistry has a stake in the group companies' financial performance through his family stake in Tata Sons. They say it precludes a lengthy legal tussle that may adversely affect the group's functioning for long-period.

"Unlike other Tata group management, Mistry has skin in the game as he owns a 18.5 per cent stake in Tata Sons and indirect holding in TCS worth \$13 billion. Any share price movement impacts them the most, unlike other top management. We always believe that companies should be run by those who have skin in the game," said Anil Singhvi, founder director of proxy advisory firm Stakeholders Empowerment Services (SES).

There has been some weakness in the smaller Tata stocks but it tough to link it to the NCLAT judgement. Indian Hotels saw the maximum sell-off and the stock is down 6 per cent in the past three days. Analysts say it could be because of the impact of the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests. Many European and North American countries have issued travel advisory against India in view of the protests.

No cut in spectrum price as govt clears...

Trair had given recommendation for radio waves at a reserve price of ₹4.9 trillion. While setting the spectrum value at ₹5.23 trillion, DoT has increased the quantum of airwaves, thereby maintaining the Trair price.

The quantum is up by a little over 150 MHz as the DoT has also included additional spectrum which will be free after licences of Reliance Communications, Bharti Airtel in eight circles and Vodafone and Idea Cellular in four circles each expire.

Installments will be spread over a period of 16 years, with a two-year moratorium for payment after the upfront amount is given. This means that installments will have to be paid from the third year, in 16 annual tranches.

This is a change from the previous auction when spectrum payments had to be made in 10 annual installments. Subsequently, in January 2017, the DCC revised the payment methods extending the duration for installments.

"The DCC has today approved the recommendations of Trair and we are hopeful that the auctions should be conducted sometime in March-April," Telecom Secretary Anshu Prakash told reporters.

For less than 1000 MHz spectrum (or 1GHz), the upfront payment is 25 per cent of the total amount and for higher bands (above 1000 MHz), the upfront payment is 50 per cent.

It would be further relaxed to 10 per cent upfront payment (for sub 1GHz band) and 20 per cent upfront payment (for above 1GHz band), in case the spectrum is not available for allotment within 30 days of announcing the

successful bidders.

"The companies will have to make the remaining upfront payment a month before the allocation of the spectrum," Prakash said.

In the 2020 auctions, the DoT will also offer the spectrum, the licences for which would expire in December 2021. The 4G spectrum to be allocated to Bharat Sanchar Nigam (BSNL) and Railways would be excluded from these auctions.

Based on views sought by the government, Trair on August 1, 2018, had recommended auction of spectrum in the 700MHz, 800MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300-3400 MHz, 3400-3600MHz bands.

Bids from agencies to conduct e-auction have already been invited. Interested companies can submit their bids by January 13, for which financial bids will be opened on January 24.

When asked about the approval to Chinese gear maker Huawei for 5G trials, Prakash said, "No decision has been taken as yet and will be taken soon and it will be in the best national interest."

Meanwhile, the DCC at its meeting on Friday, also approved submarine fibre cable connectivity between Kochi and Lakshadweep island, and under the plan, 11 islands will be connected.

The proposal that entails ₹1,072 crore outlay — capital expenditure of ₹837 crore and operating expenses of ₹235 crore — will require Cabinet approval. There will be two-way connectivity between and among the islands.

After award of the contract, 24 months will be required to complete the project.

Cong-JMM ahead in Jharkhand exit polls



Voters during the fifth phase of the Jharkhand Assembly elections, in Godda district on Friday PHOTO: PTI

ARCHIS MOHAN & PTI

New Delhi/Ranchi, December 20

The five phase polling for the 81-seat Jharkhand Assembly concluded on Friday evening with exit polls indicating a hung assembly. Exit polls predicted the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led alliance in the lead, and incumbent Raghubar Das-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) likely to fall significantly short of the majority mark.

The fifth and final phase of polling in 16 assembly constituencies of Jharkhand passed off peacefully. Election Commission officials said in Ranchi. An estimated 70.83 per cent of the total 40.05 lakh voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm when the polling ended, they said.

According to the India Today-Axis exit poll, the BJP was on course to win 22 to 32 seats in the Jharkhand Assembly. It said the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) alliance could win 38 to 50 seats, while the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM) likely to win 2 to 4 seats, All Jharkhand Students Union 3 to 5 seats and others 4 to 7 seats. The exit poll said the JMM-led alliance could corner 37 per cent of the votes to the BJP's 34 per cent.

The Times Now exit poll said the JMM-led alliance could win 44 seats and the BJP 28. The IANS-CVoter-ABP exit poll forecasted 31 to 39 seats for the JMM-led alliance and 28 to 36 seats for the BJP.

As the exit polls trickled in, AJSU's Sudesh Mahato said his party was not closed to doing business with the BJP in future. The AJSU had parted ways with the BJP in the run up to the polls. It had won 5 seats in the 2014 Assembly polls. BJP candidate and Jharkhand Agriculture Minister Randhir Singh is seeking re-election from Sarath constituency, while another saffron party nominee and Women and Child Development Minister Louis Marandi is pitted against JMM working presi-

THE PREDICTIONS

TOTAL SEATS 81

	JMM+ Cong+ RJD	BJP	JVM	AJSU	Others
Times Now	44	28	3	0	6
India Today-Axis	38-50	22-32	2-4	3-5	4-7
IANS-CVoter-ABP	35	32	3	5	6

dent Hemant Soren in Dumka. Marandi had defeated Soren in 2014 assembly elections. The JMM leader is also contesting the polls from Barhait seat. His sister-in-law Sita Soren is seeking re-election from Jama seat.

Among others, former deputy chief minister and sitting JMM MLA Stephen Marandi is seeking re-election from Maheshpur and JD(U)'s Jharkhand unit chief and ex-MP salkhan Murmu is contesting the polls from Sikaripara.

The seats that went to polls are Borio (ST), Barhait (ST), Litipara (ST), Maheshpur (ST), Sikaripara (ST), Rajmahal, Pakur, Nalla, Jamtara, Dumka (ST), Jama (ST), Jarmundi, Sarath, Poreyahat, Godda and Mahagama.

Out of 81 assembly seats in the states, elections concluded in 65 constituencies in the previous four phases — between November 30 and December 16. Counting has been scheduled on December 23. Of the 5,389 polling stations in the state, 396 in Naxal-affected areas have been marked "critical" and 208 as "sensitive".

The Election Commission has set up 8,987 ballot units, 6,738 control units and 7,006 VVPAT machines.

Johnson wins deal vote, Brexit enters fast track

REUTERS

20 December

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (pictured) won approval for his Brexit deal in Parliament on Friday, the first step towards fulfilling his election pledge to deliver Britain's departure from the European Union by January 31, next year after his landslide victory.

Lawmakers voted by 358 to 234 to pass the second reading of the legislation, underlining Johnson's large majority in Parliament that should ensure a smooth ratification of the divorce deal to implement Britain's biggest policy shift in more than 40 years.

More than three years since Britain voted to exit the EU in a 2016 referendum, the deep uncertainty over Brexit

has now been replaced by the firm deadline of the end of January. Only after that will the prime minister face talks to secure a trade deal with the bloc and another target date of the end of next year.

Getting "the Brexit vote wrapped up for Christmas" was the main aim for Johnson showing that, unlike his predecessor Theresa May, he now had free reign to drive Brexit forward despite continued criticism from opposition lawmakers.

"This is the time when we move on and discard the old labels of 'leave' and 'remain'... now is the time to act together as one reinvigorated nation, one United Kingdom," Johnson told parliament before the vote.

Andrew Bailey to be head of BOE

Andrew Bailey will be the next head of the Bank of England after the government chose to replace Mark Carney with the UK's top financial regulator, just as Britain faces the next phase of Brexit. He'll start on March 16, with Carney, who was scheduled to leave at the end of January, extending his term until then to allow more time for the handover. The UK is set to leave the EU on January 31. Bailey was "the standout candidate in a competitive field," Chancellor of the Exchequer Sajid Javid said. The appointment comes despite recent speculation that Minouche Shafiq would get the job.

BLOOMBERG

No let up in anti-CAA stir; 6 die in UP

ARCHIS MOHAN, AVISHEK RAKSHIT, & T E NARASIMHAN
New Delhi/Kolkata/Chennai,
20 December

Massive protests against the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) continued for a sixth consecutive day across the country on Friday.

Protests across the country were mostly peaceful, barring the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled Uttar Pradesh. Six people lost their lives in the state in violence and police action, police officials said. Samajwadi Party accused the state government of ordering the police to commit atrocities on people by barging into their homes.

In a setback to the BJP, its allies Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) made public their reservations about NRC. "Kaaha ka NRC? Bilkul laagu nahin hoga" (NRC, what for? Will not at all be implemented)," said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, his most categorical statement on the issue until now. Lok Janshakti Party chief Chirag Paswan said nationwide protests show the Centre had "failed" to dispel confusion among a significant section of society.

After West Bengal, Kerala became the second state to issue official directions to stop work on NRC-related activities, including the National Population Register (NPR). The Union Home Ministry said no Indian citizen will be unduly harassed or put to inconvenience by asking to prove citizenship. In a series of tweets, a ministry spokesperson said illiterate citizens not having any documents, will be allowed to produce witnesses or local proofs supported by members of community. The National Human Rights Commission set up a team to look into allegations of police excesses in Jamia Millia Islamia University last Sunday evening.

In the national capital, thousands took out protests in Seelampur, Jama Masjid and Daryaganj areas. Tricolor in hand, they raised slogans like *Hindustan Zindabad* and *Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai* (Hindus and Muslims are brothers). Protests were peaceful. At Jama Masjid, Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad took part in the protests. The police later detained him.

However, the police resorted to lathicharge in the Daryaganj in the evening to disperse the crowd after a vehicle was torched.



373

Total number of Internet shutdowns between 2012-2019

As several parts of India see protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, a fallout has been the shutdown of internet services in several parts of the country. This is perhaps the first time internet services are being impacted at such a large scale. A report last year estimated that 16,315 hours of internet shutdown in India cost the economy about \$3.04 billion in the same period. Here is a look at the internet shutdown data in India, compiled by non-profit legal services organisation Software Freedom Law Centre.

NEHA ALAWADHI

YEAR-WISE DATA

2012	3
2013	5
2014	6
2015	14
2016	31
2017	79
2018	134
2019*	101

STATEWISE DATA

J&K	180	Tripura	5
Rajasthan	67	Manipur	5
Uttar Pradesh	25	Odisha	5
Haryana	13	Madhya Pradesh	5
Gujarat	11	Arunachal Pradesh	4
Bihar	11	Assam	3
Maharashtra	10	Nagaland	3
West Bengal	9	Uttarakhand	2
Meghalaya	5		

*so far

India's appetite for petroleum products to drop to 6-year low

BLOOMBERG

New Delhi, 20 December

India expects its oil consumption to expand at the slowest pace in six years as the economy sputters.

The nation's consumption of petroleum products in the financial year to March 2020 is expected to rise by 1.3 per cent to 216 million tons, the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell said in its estimates. That's the slowest since the 0.9 per cent demand growth in 2013-14, when crude



oil averaged over \$100 a barrel.

Slowing consumption growth reflects a widespread slump in demand for goods from cars to houses. India's

economic growth is at a six-year low and latest data shows the country's industrial production contracted for a third straight month in October, mainly dragged down by ener-

gy-intensive industries such as capital goods, infrastructure and construction goods. Earlier this month, Fitch Solutions slashed its 2020 forecast for India's oil demand growth to 3 per cent from an earlier estimate of 5 per cent because of weaker economic growth prospects in the coming quarters. The International Energy Agency, which expects the country to be the fastest-growing oil consumer through 2040, expects India's demand growth to slow to 145,000 barrels a day in 2019 and recover

to 180,000 barrels in 2020.

Consumption of diesel, the most-consumed petroleum fuel and the lifeblood of Indian manufacturing, transport and agriculture, is estimated to grow at the slowest pace in six years at 0.9 per cent, according to the PPAC.

"We think the story for gasoil is not over yet," said Senthil Kumaran, a Singapore-based analyst at industry consultant FGE. "We expect a gradual recovery in diesel consumption in the next six months."

New housing supply in Maharashtra falls 40-50% in Q2, says report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, 20 December

Thane, Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra saw a significant decline of 40-50 per cent in new supply of residential units during July-September period, owing to demand slowdown in the real estate sector, a report said.

According to data analytics firm PropEquity, new launches or supply declined by 49 per cent in Thane to 4,490 units during July-September quarter of 2019 compared to the same period of last year.

Mumbai and Pune witnessed 44 per cent decline in new launches. Supply stood at 6,341 units in Pune and 1,862 units in Mumbai. In the Delhi-NCR, Noida saw maximum decline of 100 per cent as there was no fresh supply in the city during July-September 2019.

"Gurugram witnessed almost negligible new launches of 80 units in one project and there were no new launches in Noida. Pune, Mumbai and Thane saw an addition of 6,341, 1,862 and 4,490 units, respectively. This



represented a decline of 44 per cent each in Mumbai and Pune and 49 per cent in Thane on year-on-year basis," the report said.

In Hyderabad, there were 4,797 units launched in July-September 2019, up 22 per cent on year-on-year basis.

Similarly, Bengaluru witnessed new launches of 9,509 units in July-September quarter, an increase of 1 per cent from the year-ago period.

Chennai, with an addition of 2,749 units, also witnessed an increase of 8 per cent in new launches on yearly basis. New supply in Kolkata dipped by 5 per cent to 2,816 units during the period under review.

Onion prices to crash 80%

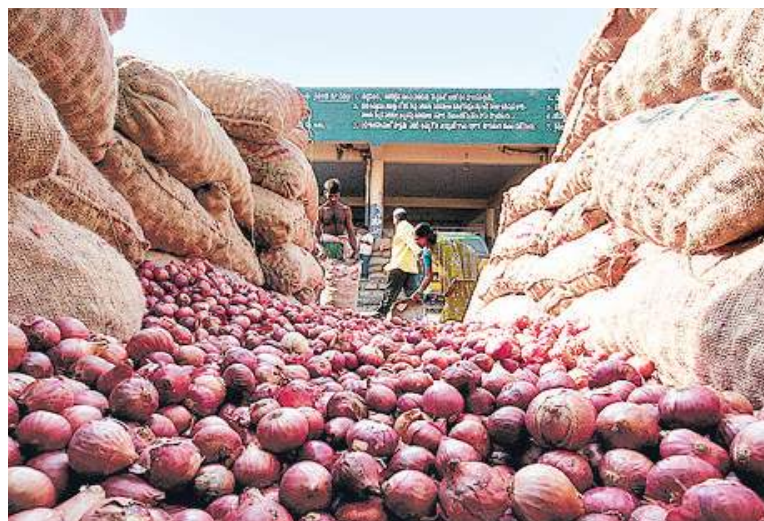
BLOOMBERG

New Delhi, 20 December

The rampant onion prices may finally be running out of steam, with fresh supplies of the pungent vegetable set to hit the market next month.

Prices at one of the biggest wholesale markets may plunge to about ₹20-₹25 per kilogram from mid-January, according to Jaydatta Sitaram Holkar, a director at Agricultural Produce Market Committee, a state-run wholesale market for farm commodities at Lasalgaon in Maharashtra. That's more than 80 per cent below Tuesday's record price.

A new onion crop should help ease what has been a catastrophic year for the vegetable in the world's second-most populous nation. Soaring prices have been blamed for accelerating food inflation and even triggering onion thefts and fist fights, according to some reports.



The key ingredient for Indian curries and chutneys is so ubiquitous that economists are keeping a close eye on prices for signs of when the

central bank may cut rates.

The country usually produces more onions than it needs. But this year, heavy rains and flooding dam-

aged stockpiles as well as the monsoon crop in the main growing areas, according to Siraj Hussain, a visiting senior fellow at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations in New Delhi.

"The government should provide grants to farmers to create modern storage facilities" to cut losses, said Hussain. An estimated 30 per cent to 40 per cent of winter onions get lost in storage every year, he said.

The government sought to control prices by banning exports, restricting hoarding and increasing imports, yet the rally continued with shipments from overseas not due to arrive until December 27.

Prices surged to a record ₹111 per kilogram on December 17, according to Narendra Savaliram Wadhavane, a secretary at the state-run wholesale market. Average wholesale prices are still about ₹80 per kilogram, compared with about 15 rupees in June and July.

ii
PEOPLE
Raj and DK,
satirists at work

iv
THE GOOD LIFE
Treats in store at
Mumbai Art Weekend

v
THE GOOD LIFE
A taste of Japanese
whiskies

vii
WIDE ANGLE
Angry young people –
voices from the streets

21 DECEMBER 2019

Business Standard

WEEKEND



**Anglo-Indian MPs
Richard Hay (left)
and George Baker
with Prime Minister
Narendra Modi in
New Delhi in 2015**

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (GOV/INDIA) (HTTPS://INDIA.GOV/IN/STES/DEFAULTFILES/GALLETIE/NOTIFICATION_000L.PDF)

THE MINORITY AMONG MINORITIES

Ritwik Sharma on what the Anglo-Indian community feels about the decision to do away with their nominated seats in Parliament and state legislatures

When the British left India, the Anglo-Indians felt betrayed. They feared retribution in an independent nation whose "purebred" natives had been denied even the paltry privileges that this mixed breed of half-British descent enjoyed under colonial rulers. Seventy-two years later, the country's Anglo-Indians are sensing a second betrayal after the government last week decided to do away with nominated seats reserved for members of the community in Parliament and state legislatures.

The Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill, which Parliament passed on December 12, has ended the provision with effect from January 25, 2020. In the current Lok Sabha, the 17th, the two reserved seats have been lying vacant as the government did not nominate anyone. However, one nominated Anglo-Indian legislator each is part of 13 state Assemblies at present.

The microscopic minority has reason to suspect marginalisation. And the suspicion can grow at a time when people across India have taken to the streets to protest and accuse the Centre of introducing exclusionary ideas of citizenship through fresh amendments and a proposal to update a nationwide listing of citizens. The Anglo-Indians, though, are characteristic in their response to the government's decision on reserved seats. They want a peaceable settlement.

The All India Anglo-Indian Association (AIAIA) wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting him to reconsider the Cabinet decision. Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad's statement in Parliament that the population of Anglo-Indians was a mere 296, claiming to quote Census 2011 figures, has shocked the community. According to Charles Dias, a former MP (2009-14) who heads the Federation of Anglo-Indian Associations in India, there are over 347,000 Anglo-Indians in the country. Their last Census count as a distinct group was in 1941.

Article 334 (a) of the Constitution relates to the reservation of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Parliament and in legislative Assemblies, while Article 334 (b) concerns with the representation of Anglo-Indians. Although the initial plan was to do away with reservations after 40 years of the Constitution being adopted on January 26, 1950, subsequent amendments extended them till January 2020. While the government has extended the quota for SCs and STs by another decade, it has done away with the reservation for Anglo-Indians.

Dias says this decision is unjust and cruel. "According to Article 331 of the Constitution, the President has the power to nominate two members when the Anglo-Indian community is not adequately represented. In the 17th Lok Sabha no Anglo-Indian has been elected," he says, adding that the government should have at least conducted a study of Anglo-Indians instead of presenting an argument not bolstered by facts.

Dias adds that a 2013 report by the ministry of minority affairs on the community mentions that, among the various problems and challenges the Anglo-Indians face, the more significant ones are related to identity crisis, lack of employment, educational backwardness, lack



Anglo-Indians led by former MP Charles Dias at a protest in Kochi last week

of facilities and cultural erosion.

The federation's vice-president Augustine Roy Rozario says Anglo-Indian culture and identity will be threatened by the lack of nominated members, as they don't elect anyone to represent them. Rozario, too, has written to the prime minister requesting a review of the decision. Although members of the federation staged demonstrations in Kerala last week, he stresses that the community is not in favour of litigation. "We are raising objections in a peaceful way. People don't come even if you call them for a dharna," says Rozario, who heads the Anglo-India Suburban Front in Chennai, a member unit of the federation. In the absence of an MP, they have no one to draw the government's attention to issues concerning them.

Apart from legislative seats, the benefits granted to Anglo-Indians after Independence included employment reservations. Article 336 of the Constitution granted special provisions for their appointment in railways, customs, postal and telegraph services. And Article 337 promises allocation of grants for Anglo-Indian schools, provided they enrol at least 40 per cent of other Indians.

Keith Flory, a Bengaluru-based journalist, puts it bluntly, "We lost reservation in jobs earlier. And now we have no reserved seats in the legislatures. So we are nowhere."

He explains that they are too small and scat-

tered a community to protest the denial of political representation that had become more token than genuine. "In the early years after Independence, the government looked for eminent Anglo-Indians for nomination. Later, when the numbers became very tightly contested, governments began to nominate those seen as their men."

The best known among its nominated representatives was Frank Anthony, the eight-time MP who was part of the Constituent Assembly and a long-serving president of the AIAIA. He is credited with securing the reserved seats from Jawaharlal Nehru.

Flory says that the Anglo-Indian representatives have never been overtly political, unlike other politicians who are associated with parties. Derek O'Brien — the Trinamool Congress MP in the Rajya Sabha who has often been vocal against the Modi government — is an exception.

In July 2014, after Modi first came to power, O'Brien had appealed in the Rajya Sabha to extend the reservation of seats for Anglo-Indians in the Lok Sabha beyond 2020. Former MP Beatrix D'Souza, who was nominated to the 12th and 13th Lok Sabha (1998 and 1999), had also raised the issue of the Census count of Anglo-Indians who get absorbed in the larger Christian community during the exercise.

D'Souza says the removal of reserved seats

was expected, especially after the National Democratic Alliance government abrogated Article 370 to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir earlier this year. "The nominations were not meant to last permanently, but depended on the government of the day. There was no question of revoking it during Congress, Janata Dal or even Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA rule, when I was part of it. But Modi is different," she says.

Both Dias and D'Souza feel the current government does not care about giving representation to minorities.

"What do they gain by getting rid of two MPs? They don't need the two extra seats," says D'Souza, who was nominated twice as a member of the Samta Party. She says that back then she could speak openly about atrocities against Christians, even though her party was an NDA ally led by the late George Fernandes.

Inclusion at a time of identity crisis, around Independence, was not a colonial legacy but due to the efforts of figures like Anthony, Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, B R Ambedkar Vallabhbhai Patel, says Vinisha Nero, the nominated Congress MLA in Karnataka and an AIAIA member. "Now it appears there is no inclusive India."

With the law minister saying the door isn't shut for a review of the decision, members of AIAIA are planning to convene in Kolkata on January 6 to deliberate and discuss legal options before them, says Nero. She iterates that Anglo-Indian MPs and MLAs do not have a constituency view, but a national outlook, and emphasises that their nomination is not merely of token value because they have contributed greatly to nation-building.

Supreme Court advocate Kaleeswaram Raj says the benefits provided in Article 334 were to cease after 10 years of the Constitution coming into force. The Constitution Amendment Act,

1959, substituted the period of 10 years by 20, which was followed by further extensions. Before removing the reservation for Anglo-Indians, he opines, there should have been a pre-legislative study as well as deliberations on the issue.

Article 336, which provided employment reservations to Anglo-Indians, was similarly intended for 10 years, he adds. But several state governments count them as "Other Backward Community" (OBC), and thus extended the quota benefits to them. "According to Rule 2(14) of the Kerala State and Subordinate Service Rules, read with List III of the Schedule attached to it, Anglo-Indians are given the benefit of reservation in public service by treating them as OBC," he adds.

Although Europeans started arriving in India in the late 15th century, starting with the Portuguese and French, Anglo-Indian history is predominantly linked to British rule. The Constitution defines Anglo-Indian as a person whose father or patrilineal lineage is of European descent but who is domiciled within India.

Immediately after Independence, thousands left for England. A second wave of migration occurred in the early 1960s as the English-speaking community faced the possibility of Hindi becoming India's national language. A third wave is continuing since the 1970s — with the result that more Anglo-Indians now live abroad than in India. A lack of understanding of historical reasons among other sections hasn't helped the community as it battles stereotypes.

Cheryl-Ann Shivan, principal of Kasthurba College for Women in Villainur, Pondicherry, points out that a majority of the women are much better qualified than the Anglo-Indian men. "The women were seen as frivolous and happy-go-lucky. However, that stereotype is slowly losing credibility as a more positive stereotype of the hardworking, meticulous worker has emerged." She explains that when the mixed race in Haiti revolted against their Spanish rulers (1791-1804), the British in India feared the same thing might

happen to them because the Anglo-Indians far outnumbered the British in the land. So, overnight there was an order expelling Anglo-Indians from all posts in the administration. When the men found themselves unemployed, with a majority having no savings, many must have taken to alcohol in despair, she says. In all probability that's how the stereotype evolved. "It is then that the women started going out to work as teachers, nurses and nannies. Because women back then didn't go to work or talk to men on equal terms, they were seen as 'loose'."

Shivan, who has raised two daughters in a social circle full of Anglo-Indians, also rues that children of Anglo-Indian women who have married outside the community are not recognised as one of them. Shivan is married to a Malayali. However, AIAIA's youth wing has decided that those born of mixed marriages and aged below 35 will be recognised as Anglo-Indian.

Anglo-Indian identity is complex, but on a day-to-day basis they are not in crisis about who they are individually or as a community, says Robyn Andrews, a senior lecturer, social anthropology programme, at Massey University in New Zealand, who has researched the community extensively. "That they are more 'Western' than many others does not mean they are aspiring to be something they're not. Rather it is a sign that they are maintaining and augmenting their Anglo-Indianness," she says.

The political representation, she adds, has given them a voice and has been a source of pride for this minority community which has contributed well beyond its numbers. She reckons they are now feeling confused and dispirited about the sudden change in representation that has come without a warning. "But whatever happens I am confident that they will resume joyfully celebrating their Anglo-Indianness, especially at this time of the year."

About their un-protesting nature, Shivan says that the Anglo-Indians were specifically engendered to be the "go-between" — the trouble-shooters or negotiators between the British and the Indians. "They did it best in a non-controversial manner." This time too they are choosing dialogue over confrontation.



**'WHAT DO THEY
GAIN BY GETTING
RID OF TWO MPS?
THEY DON'T NEED
THE EXTRA SEATS'**

BEATRIX D'SOUZA
Former MP (1998-2004)



**'IN THE 17TH
LOK SABHA NO
ANGLO-INDIAN
HAS BEEN
ELECTED'**

CHARLES DIAS
Former MP (2009-14)



Sport and its silences

DHRUV MUNJAL

Now is perhaps a good time to admit that I've started feeling genuinely sorry for Mesut Özil. If his embarrassingly limited game time for Arsenal wasn't depressing enough, football fans across China are burning his shirts and calling for Arsenal to terminate his contract — the disappearing act may be an Özil patent, but his fans are pulling one on him now. All because the playmaker, a German footballer with Turkish roots, chose to condemn the Chinese government's treatment of Uighur Muslims in the country's Xinjiang province. China's communist government, in an expected display of exemplary intolerance, has even gone to the absurd extent of removing the player's name from the Pro Evolution Soccer 2020 video game available in the country.

Given his uncomfortably close relationship with Recep Tayyip Erdogan — the Turkish president was best man at his wedding — Özil espousing the cause of minorities may reek of hypocrisy, but the truth is that the backlash at his concern once again underscores the perils of high-profile celebrities weighing in on politics. Whatever his ties with Erdogan, the grim reality would suggest that Özil was right in pointing to the plight of Uighur Muslims in China, many of whom, as a recent news leak revealed, are being systematically brainwashed in a network of high-security prison camps.

In the age of social media and fan engagement, Özil should, of course, be allowed to say whatever he desires, and his stance is indeed laudable, but at some level it is also needless — the price you often end up paying for such courage is just not worth the hassle. Mainly because players who speak up against brutalities aren't offered the kind of protection they deserve. In this case, Arsenal has already decided to walk away, clarifying that the "content published is Özil's personal opinion", and that "as a football club, it has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in politics". And it'd be nothing short of a miracle if one were to hear anything from the German Football Association in Özil's defence, since the midfielder himself quit the national team last year after getting fed up of being discriminated against in his own country.



Özil should, of course, be allowed to say whatever he desires, and his stance is indeed laudable, but at some level it is also needless — the price you often end up paying for such courage is just not worth the hassle

This tendency to hang them out to dry could be partly why our own sportspersons are so terribly afraid of saying anything that is even remotely against those in power. Not to mention the vicious trolling that that would attract.

It's easy to question our cricketers' silence over something like the

Citizenship Amendment Act without acknowledging the fact that the body that employs them is essentially a political one. How can one expect anyone to speak out when the Board of Control for Cricket in India is led by a man who was apparently put in charge at the behest of the ruling party at the very last minute? Or worse, his second-in-command is the son of the very minister who read out the contents of the tendentious Bill in Parliament.

Moreover, athletes — traditionally conservative in India anyway — will forever be wary of getting on the wrong side of people who pretty much make them who they are. Unlike most other walks of life, sport is driven more by fan devotion than anything else. Without fanatical support, sport would cease to be sport. And without intense fan loyalty, athletes would just be athletes, not godlike superstars. By that logic — given their humongous following — they also perhaps owe society a greater responsibility, but one that can only be performed if we spectators choose to separate our politics from our sport.

Historically, athletes who have bucked the trend have triggered substantial change but also paid dearly for their outspokenness. Tommie Smith and John Carlos may have raised a black-gloved fist at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, but they were subsequently sent home from the Games after the International Olympic Committee deemed the gesture unsuitable for such a stage. Muhammad Ali defied the US government by refusing to serve in the Vietnam War; in return, he had his titles taken away and put in prison during the peak of his career. Similarly, Colin Kaepernick may have kneeled during the American national anthem to protest racism and police brutality, but the act has left him without a team for more than three years.

These athletes took these risks well aware of the harsh repercussions that would follow. Not everyone is blessed with such bravery. And while more from the sporting world need to raise their voice, that can only happen if we create an environment not of intimidation but of understanding. As the Özils of this world continue to suffer, it is perhaps important to recognise that standing up for something mustn't always end in some form of social ostracism. Because mostly, that's the very idea they're urged to speak out against.

THE MAN WHO...

was known as 'Snakehips'

BRIAN SEIBERT

There are many mysteries about the dancer Earl Tucker, but the meaning of his stage name isn't one of them. To understand why he was called Snakehips, you have only to watch him move.

Take his solo routine in the 1930 short film *Crazy House*. About 30 seconds in, Tucker rolls his hips to one side. He rolls them so far that his torso tilts in counterbalance, his ankles sickle over, and his whole body bends into an S-curve of improbable depth. He reverses the shape — first churning slowly, then at twice and four times the speed, the smaller, quicker undulations making him slither sideways on one foot.

By the time he appeared in the film, Snakehips Tucker was already a name attraction in Harlem nightclubs like the

Cotton Club and Connie's Inn, and he had appeared to acclaim on Broadway and in Paris. He died on May 14, 1937, when he was just 31.

The cause, as described in his obituary in *The Baltimore Afro-American*, was a "mysterious illness". Neither that obituary nor those in other African-American newspapers — the mainstream press did not report the death — included many biographical facts about Tucker. Back then, obscurity wasn't unusual for black entertainers, but the articles praised him as one of the most imitated artists of the day.

Tucker's influence didn't end with his death. Elvis Presley, who was born two years before Tucker died, probably never saw him dance, yet he scandalised 1950s America with a more timid version of Tucker's below-the-waist action, making girls in the audience scream. Elvis the Pelvis also

took on the moniker "Ol' Snakehips".

Later, Tucker's loose kicks and unwinding spins found an echo in the signature moves of Michael Jackson. Some hip-hop dancers who came across video footage of Tucker were said to have experienced a shock of recognition: This guy was doing some of their steps decades before they were.

Even if these dancers didn't imitate Tucker directly, they drew on a style that he had heightened and popularised. He could also tap dance and do the Charleston.

Duke Ellington, who hired Tucker to dance with his band at the Cotton Club and elsewhere, once speculated that Tucker had come from "tidewater Maryland, one of those primitive lost colonies where they practice pagan rituals". Tucker was, in fact, discovered in Maryland, dancing in the streets of



Earl Tucker, aka Snakehips

Baltimore, and Ellington's claim is probably accurate in other ways: What Ellington called "pagan rituals", scholars would identify as African spiritual practices that informed African-American culture.

The best information about Tucker comes from the interviews with black entertainers that Marshall and Jean Stearns conducted in the 1960s for their sem-

inal book *Jazz Dance* (1968). Today, Tucker's dancing would be considered less disturbing than other aspects of his behaviour. The entertainers interviewed by the Stearnses remembered Snakehips as a heavy gambler and "a mean guy" with a violent temper who was nevertheless popular with women. Newspaper reports about the "bad boy of Harlem" covered his arrests as often as his performances.

Today what remains, beyond these fragmented memories, are a few seconds of him at the end of the 1935 musical short *Symphony in Black* and his two-minute routine in *Crazy House*, a comedy set in the Lame Brain Sanitarium. He doesn't look so menacing there. His snaps and claps draw attention to a musicality that runs through all his hip rolling, through his every sinking to the ground and miraculously rubbery recovery. He wasn't a contortionist. He was a dancer, one of a kind.

© 2019 The New York Times



Raj Nidimoru (far left) and Krishna DK

Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, makers of Manoj Bajpayee-starrer *The Family Man*, speak to Nikita Puri about writing ordinary characters in extraordinary situations

There's a moment in *The Family Man*, a Hindi drama series on Amazon Prime Video, when a bomb disposal squad is called in to defuse an explosive. The character's protective suit is torn and so, upholding the great Indian tradition of *jugaad*, his mates use duct tape to fix it. The deadly serious situation becomes comical for viewers in that moment.

Manoj Bajpayee stars as Srikant Tiwari in the series. A world-class spy with a track record of saving the country many times over, he is also shown checking up on his request for a home loan and getting bullied by his son.

It is moments such as these, which capture the nitty-gritty of everydayness, that define Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, creators of *The Family Man*. As does their talent for making a point in the most understated manner. Such as when Tiwari's friend, another intelligence agent, remarks in passing, "Privacy is a myth, just like democracy."

The series, a spy thriller laced with humour, has emerged as the most watched Amazon Original in India. *The Family Man* has also won the award for Best Series (Drama) in the second edition of the Critics' Choice Shorts and Series Awards announced earlier this month.

Popularly known in film circles as Raj and DK, the two complete a decade as filmmakers in Bollywood, after cult hits such as *Go Goa Gone* (2013) and the more popular *Stree* (2018).

It's been something of a rollercoaster journey for the duo, who are both in their early 40s. Originally from the temple city of Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Nidimoru and DK first met while studying engineering in their hometown. DK studied computers, Nidimoru opted for mechanical engineering. This was in 1994.

They'd partner for various intercolle-

ge festivals, bagging prizes while maintaining good grades, being "everything their parents could ask for," they say (they insist on being quoted as a team). They later went for higher studies to the United States, and in the Indian tradition of seeking jobs there, settled into professional lives as tech consultants. "We were doing well, but it was like only one side of our brain was working. Our hearts were not in it."

What did give them joy was writing stories, and so they taught themselves filmmaking, editing and scriptwriting. While Nidimoru is all for writing outside the box, DK is the rational and logical half of the team.

After making short films such as *Just Me*, an eight-minute thriller that was screened in independent film festivals and won awards, they set off to Hyderabad with a script for a full-length feature in hand.

In Hyderabad, they say, "a well-established Telugu actor" told them that while he loved their script, he would like to do a "more commercial" film with them first. Set in 1999, in the backdrop of betting controversies in cricket, the script focused on two small-time crooks. Such a story hadn't been taken up earlier, largely because, as Nidimoru and DK put it, "there was no precedent for it". There was no precedent for a hero who was an Everyman in settings so familiar it could be your own neighbourhood.

After some similar reactions in Bollywood, the film was finally made with Kunal Khemu, Cyrus Broacha and Soha Ali Khan. It was called 99. Days before its release in 2009, a well-meaning member of their crew told them, "This is a really funny and well-crafted film, but I just wanted to let you know it's not going to be a hit. People

just don't know about it." Nidimoru and DK were running on fumes, there wasn't any money to promote it and it looked like their first full-length film was doomed to die in empty theatres.

The first two days after 99's release seemed to confirm this. The website *Box Office India* had this to say: "The reports are not great for 99... Recovery may well be an uphill task." It was crushing. And then the filmmakers got a call on Sunday ("from either Eros or another theatre," telling them it was a "mast movie" and inviting them to see their film in the theatre). They went for a night show and found the theatre about 75 per cent occupied. "It was such a relief to know people were actually watching it and enjoying it," they say. The film went on to play for eight weeks. "We recovered our money and made a little profit, too." The Telugu film industry's loss was Bollywood's gain.

The two have had their fair share of hurdles, of course. Every now and then someone from Bollywood would tell them that "that's not the way we say it in Hindi". "And we'd tell them that's how we wanted to say it."

"We knew our knowledge of Hindi was a little bookish because we had only studied it as a compulsory subject in school (in Andhra Pradesh)," say the filmmakers. But this turned out in their favour. Both 99 and *Shor in the City* (a story of a love-hate relationship with Mumbai) were nominated for their dialogue.

Besides writing, they now occasionally wear other hats, that of directors and producers, so as to be a part of as many stories as possible. But they never imagined they would get where they are today. "In college we took part in all extra-curricular activ-

ities, except drama," they say. However, they believe that every Indian is at heart a filmmaker, a storyteller. "As Indians, we are passionate about cinema. We love films, we criticise them, we think about what they could have been."

Their most popular film, *Stree*, which features a malevolent female spirit, was written as a trilogy. The comedy-horror starring Rajkumar Rao was what the filmmakers describe as the "middle" of the story. The sequel is expected next year.

A sequel to their action-packed zombie apocalypse film *Go Goa Gone*, starring Saif Ali Khan, Kunal Khemu and Vir Das, is also in the works. But Nidimoru and DK insist they aren't really "sequel kind of people". "The sequel to *Go Goa Gone* is largely because of the demand for it. We've decided to succumb to that demand." Also in the works are at least three yet unannounced projects, including one with Shah Rukh Khan.

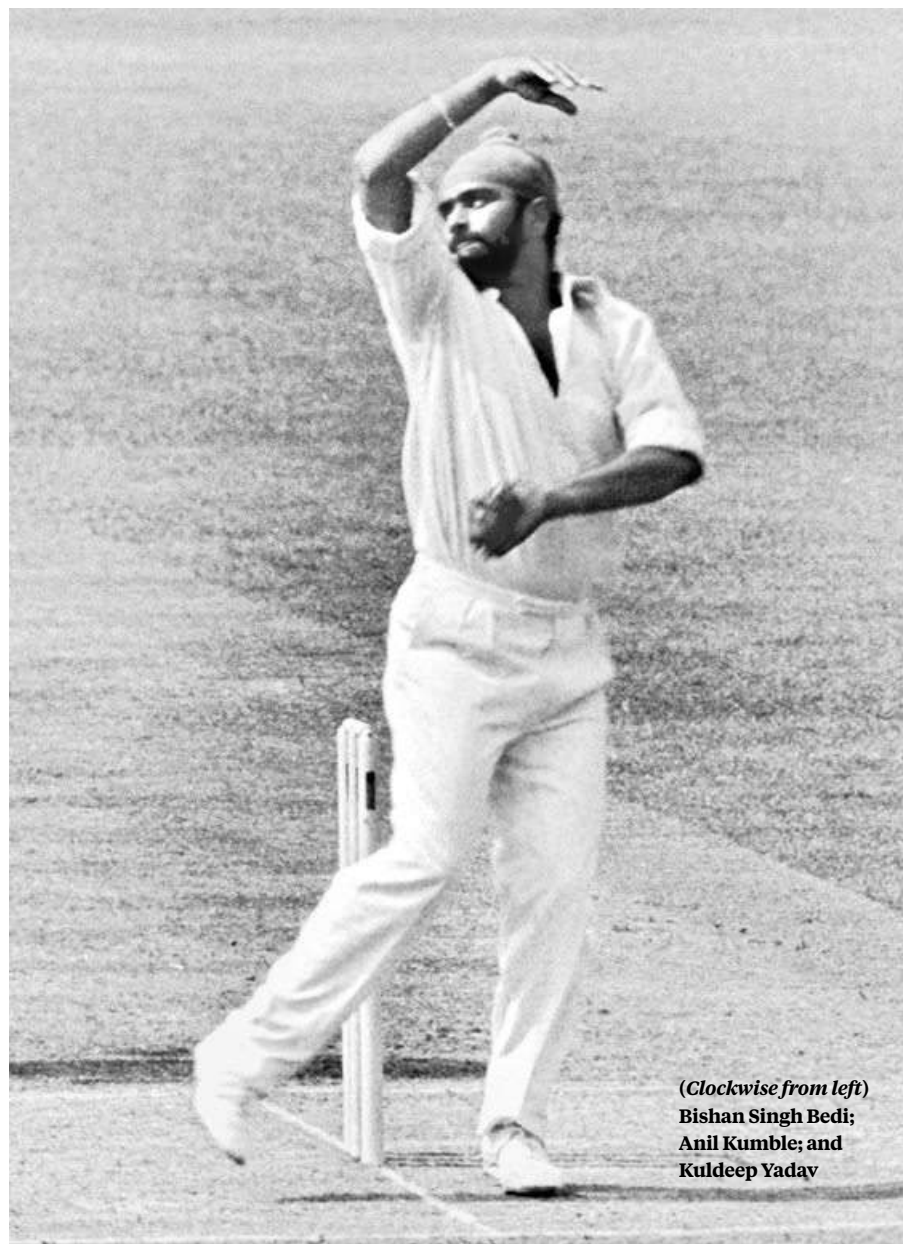
"We've discovered that humour that comes organically is a great way of telling a lot of things, including talking about subjects that are too serious to have humour associated to them, like terror or communal riots (as in *The Family Man*). Stories that need telling can beautifully use humour too." They also have great faith in being subversive. In *Stree*, for instance, men are told not to go out alone, to stay inside homes and always in the company of others.

Characters like Tiwari (*The Family Man*) and plotlines such as the one in *Stree* could easily have veered into being silly beyond measure. They carry the dangerous potential to go either way. They could have been the undoing of these projects. But they clicked. It is this desire to experiment and innovate, to mould distinct genres together, that keeps them going.

Currently shooting for the second season of *The Family Man*, Nidimoru and DK continue to craft stories irrespective of which city they are in. They wander on streets familiar and unfamiliar, looking for parks and coffee shops where they can dream of ordinary people in less than ordinary circumstances.

Tweaking the data

Anindya Dutta relies on facts and figures rather than back stories to trace the history of Indian spin bowling, writes Partha Basu



(Clockwise from left) Bishan Singh Bedi; Anil Kumble; and Kuldeep Yadav

PHOTOS: REUTERS

Any author who sets out to write a book on sporting phenomena has to deal with a common and pernicious problem that afflicts the majority of his kind. It's entrapment, in a way. Take cricket, for example; the easy way to fill out 300 or so pages is to draw on dates, events and any records you can ferret out and then let the statistics do your work for you. Chances are your efforts will be applauded because there's a substantial readership out there that wants more of the hard points and rather less of the back stories.

There are, of course, the few who believe that the cutting edge of any noteworthy achievement resides in the circumstances that led up to it, more so the apparent adversities that had to be overcome. Famed champion Lance Armstrong's remarkable run of Tour de France titles makes for great knowledge about Armstrong's superior cycling skills but in the context of his cancer survival and his later admissions of drug delinquencies, his life's work takes on a coloration that statistics, however unique they are, can't underpin. Therefore, as far as *Wizards* is concerned, did we not require Anindya Dutta to do more than make only brief references to what made Bhagwat Chandrasekhar the most explosive fourth of India's famed spin quartet? For instance, what made him so lethal? Was it the fact that his polio-affected bowling arm released the ball in the most unpredictable manner? Or how much he relied on the predatory instincts of a Solkar at forward short leg and a Venkataraghavan at gully to threaten and then finish off the batsman? And how exactly did this socially average youngster, struggling to come to terms with his disability, leave all that behind him and become the world's best leg spinner of his time?

Talking of leg spinners, Gideon Haigh, arguably the best cricket writer there is, writing incisively about the world's most successful leggie, deconstructs the Shane Warne ethos over a major part of his book to tell us how Warne the spinner developed the lethal attitudes of a fast bowler. The point in all of this

being that too many sums and summaries, without much attention given to the back stories that more often than not shaped the person, can turn a good sports read into a Wikipedia page.

Somewhere in the book I read this analysis of Bishan Singh Bedi's magic by Suresh Menon, a former editor of *Wisden*: "... Bedi could pitch six balls on the same spot and do different things, or pitch them at different points and make them do the same thing. Few understood better than Bedi the separate role played by the fingers, the palm, the arm, the shoulder, the hips, the legs and the toes. He could alter the position of one of them at the top of his bowling mark and change the delivery." How's that for insight?

It's not that Dutta is shy of analyses. In fact amongst the best parts of this long book belong to where he examines the young captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi's SWOT analysis that led to the ascendancy of India's spin department over a weak, non-existent pace attack through the seventies. Dutta calls it Pataudi's Blue Ocean Strategy, a banker's term he explains, which means finding and then using your strengths in situations that are adverse to you. Fast forward a decade or so; though our pace attack is now just about the best in the world, our spinners continue to afford their captain great winning options; he labels this as the young Nawab's well-formulated gift to our cricketing climate.

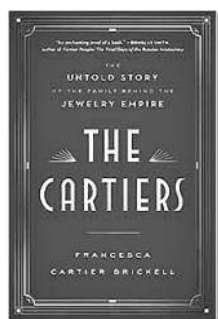
Dutta adds that Pataudi's other contribution to India's cricketing matters was a resolute moving away from the regionalism that defined the Board's policies (he presents numerous examples of this ridiculous mindset) towards a strong sense of unity in the team's Indian-ness; decades later, he explains, a later Nawab, this time of Kolkata, established himself as a worthy successor to the Pataudi royal.

Dutta has over two decades of international banking under his belt and is very capable of sorting and collating data. His book further reveals his banker's genes in the manner in which he works his way methodically past every Indian spinner you've heard of and many of whom you haven't, from Palwankar Baloo (1906), an "Untouchable", to Yuzvendra Chahal (2016), a national chess player. At the end of it, the book, heavy with facts and figures concerning people and tours and wickets and averages and matches and careers and wins and losses, tends to become a bit tiresome as Dutta reaches for data overkill. However, he is a committed writer and let's hope his next book is more about back stories.

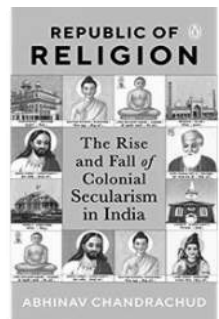
DUTTA WORKS HIS WAY PAST EVERY INDIAN SPINNER YOU'VE HEARD OF, AND MANY OF WHOM YOU HAVEN'T, FROM PALWANKAR BALOO, AN 'UNTOUCHABLE', TO YUZVENDRA CHAHAL, A NATIONAL CHESS PLAYER



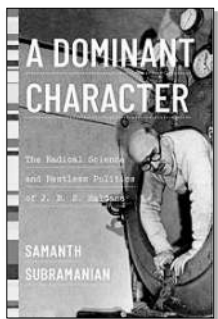
OUT NOW



THE CARTIERS: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE FAMILY BEHIND THE JEWELRY EMPIRE
The story of four generations of a family that turned a Parisian jewellery store into a global icon as told by the founder's great-great-great granddaughter, **Francesca Cartier Brickell**
Penguin Random House
₹799, 625 pages



REPUBLIC OF RELIGION: THE RISE AND FALL OF COLONIAL SECULARISM IN INDIA
The well-known lawyer argues that the secular structure of the colonial state was imposed by the British and was to come apart once colonialism ended. **Abhinav Chandrachud**
Penguin
₹599, 320 pages



A DOMINANT CHARACTER: THE RADICAL SCIENCE AND RESTLESS POLITICS OF JBS HALDANE
An acclaimed writer reconstructs the extraordinary life of a British polymath who took Indian citizenship, was a radical communist and a breakthrough evolutionary biologist. **Samantha Subramanian**
Simon & Schuster
₹799, 378 pages

IN A PURE MUSLIM LAND: SHI'ISM BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST
A scholar of Islamic studies in Germany examines the fortunes of this minority community in the Land of the Pure and the alternative views of Islam it posits to Pakistani society. **Simon Wolfgang Fuchs**
Speaking Tiger
₹599, 352 pages

VERSE AFFAIRS



UTTARAN DAS GUPTA

Misfits matter

In the third poem of the volume under review, *The Centaur Goes Beyond Binaries*, the protagonist — half-horse, half-man — recalls being defeated in a wrestling bout. Even as he nurses his wounds and his ego, the Centaur has a realisation: "It was then that I knew / I would never fit in / and that this was alright." To not fit in, to stand out, to be offensive, is not only an inalienable characteristic of individualism, but also an aesthetic and political standard. It is, as the poem claims, a rejection of the binaries in which an increasingly polarised world wants us to cast our visions. The Centaur, like the artist, is an odd ball, a misfit.

In his debut collection, Mumbai-based journalist and poet Suhit Kelkar has channelled Greek myths to indulge in a sort of personal mythopoeia. This is at once a testimony to the cosmopolitan aspirations of the poet as well as the robust health of Indian poetry in English, which seems to find so few publishers these days. (Kolkata-based Hawakal is, in fact, one of the independent presses that has been performing a yeoman's task in bringing out debut collections of poets.) In a different time,



THE CENTAUR CHRONICLES

Author: Suhit Kelkar
Publisher: Hawakal Publishers
Pages: 40
Price: ₹165

one might have accused Kelkar of not exploring his own culture and instead adopting Western myths for his purposes, but now, that would be a surrender to the binaries that the poet and the protagonist of this book reject. Right in the middle of the book are two love poems, but like everything else in this book, it is like throwing down a gauntlet. In the first one, "The Centaur Threatens the God of Love", the protagonist tells the god: "I've seen through your PR. / To humans you bequeath / the choicest of love, / disappointment and misery / for us centaurs." Disappointment is only too often the handmaiden of love; to make oneself vulnerable is to invite pain. But disappointment in love often whets the appetite instead of killing it. Kelkar uses humour to address the situation: "Help me now / I implore, cajole, curse you / My centauress has been skittish / for many weeks now, / and my breath is flagging."

The second poem, "The Centaur Speaks of Lost Love", uses torrential rain as a metaphor for the coldness experienced when love withdraws. "Stung by sharp drops, drenched / to the bone and shivering, I laughed, / scampering in search of shelter / as truth revealed itself to me." The landscape of the poem is a beautiful valley, but the natural beauty is a contrast to the mood of the character: "Whatever else may be illusion / the world is real. Proof: we suffer." Suffering, especially the kind induced by loss of love, is undeniable proof of one's existence.

All the 22 poems in the book are written in unrhymed tercets, favoured by Dante and Petrarch in their longer works. In Kelkar's book, they are unrhymed. This is clearly a part of the artistic stance of the poet, aligning himself to Western epic writers. To a careful reader, it is also a signal of the epic aspirations of the poet. Kelkar uses the apparatus of myth and mythology in a bid to conceal and also reveal. This technique comprises elaborate aesthetic callisthenics, which Kelkar performs with grace, leaving no doubt in the minds of his readers about why he was the winner of the 2018 US National Poetry Contest of the RaedLeaf Foundation.

Towards the end of the book, the Centaur is overcome by morbid thoughts, struggling with the dichotomy of his existence: "My thwarted wildness scorns me, / my borrowed humanity shames me." He is aware that he cannot surrender to his wilder impulses nor reconcile with the domesticity of a human existence. It is an Orpheus-like situation, of being torn from limb to limb. One might have expected a resolution at the end of the book; Kelkar denies it to his readers. But this is not a betrayal. It is a promise, hopefully, of another book and more of the Centaur's adventures.

The writer's novel, *Ritual*, will be out early next year

SMART ART

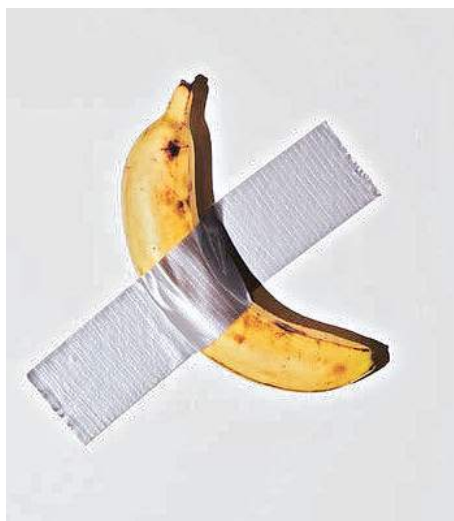


KISHORE SINGH

Year of the banana?

Art can range from the sacred to the sacrilegious — and has often done — but it is a matter of time before what was considered provocative is deemed acceptable. It can trigger protests, and the last decades have seen Indian artists being subjected to ridiculous acts of censorship. That absurdity can test limits, but what happens when the art becomes absurd instead? Not banal, not mediocre, but plain insulting to the viewing public.

By now everyone knows about the banana on the wall that Paris-based Sarah Andelman paid \$120,000 (₹85 lakh) for, with a second edition snapped up by Billy and Beatrice Cox of Miami. Maurizio Cattelan is a satirical artist known for his hyperrealistic sculptures who went for “real” instead with a duct-taped banana that many are referring to as a new low for art. He created three “editions” of the work, challenging most critics who failed to fathom how a banana taped to a wall could be deemed to be “original” or have any editions at all. Then, a performance artist wandered into the booth where the work was displayed, picked the banana off the wall, and ate it up.



The farcicality should be obvious to everyone, but artists and art writers can be persuasive about the ‘meaning’ of such work, laying it at the altar of high art

Goodbye artwork? Apparently not, said Cattelan, who had tagged the third edition by then at a steeper \$150,000 (₹1 crore). Bananas left out on their own decompose, so this was a renewable

work. Buy a new banana, tape it back on a wall — and voila! New (very expensive) artwork. The Coxes plan to donate the “work” to a museum.

The farcicality should be obvious to everyone, but artists and art writers can be persuasive about the “meaning” of such work, laying it at the altar of high art. The Coxes call it “the unicorn of the art world”, as defining as Andy Warhol’s Campbell’s soup cans of the 1960s. A case can indeed be made about how the decomposing banana reflects the temporality of life, about nature’s cycle, about death amidst life yada-yada-yada, but there is only so much blah one can impose on any audience.

What it does is codify newer benchmarks that people will pay for something that will headline news around the world — as, certainly, the banana did. While the artist might be duplicitous, what about the complicity of the collector? Art patronage is considered serious business, but here — in paying good money for something ridiculous — the collectors were creating a yardstick for triteness while ensuring a footnote in art history. Mention of the banana will now be forever enshrined, just as, previously, letting a dog starve to death in the name of performance art, fossilising poo, laying down naked amidst a feast of fruits, grafting one’s own bleeding skin as part of mixed media on canvas, smearing semen along with paint, have been attempted in the name of art.

Most of these distractions occur in the West. Markets in the East have been less adulatory about embracing the incongruous. India has great art — just take a peep in the numerous museums and galleries — and while there is bad, hackneyed, clichéd, boring, idiomatic, shocking or pusillanimous art to be found, the absurd doesn’t have a place yet. Indian collectors, no matter how well or ill-informed they remain, would not countenance a banana — or mango, guava, orange or other fruit — stuck to the wall as a work of art. But it should serve as a warning to India’s contemporary artists to stay away from any form of gimmickry that could harm their already subdued market. Such absurdities mark the decadence of art in developed countries; India, instead, should raise the bar by experimenting but not denigrating the purpose — and soul — of art.

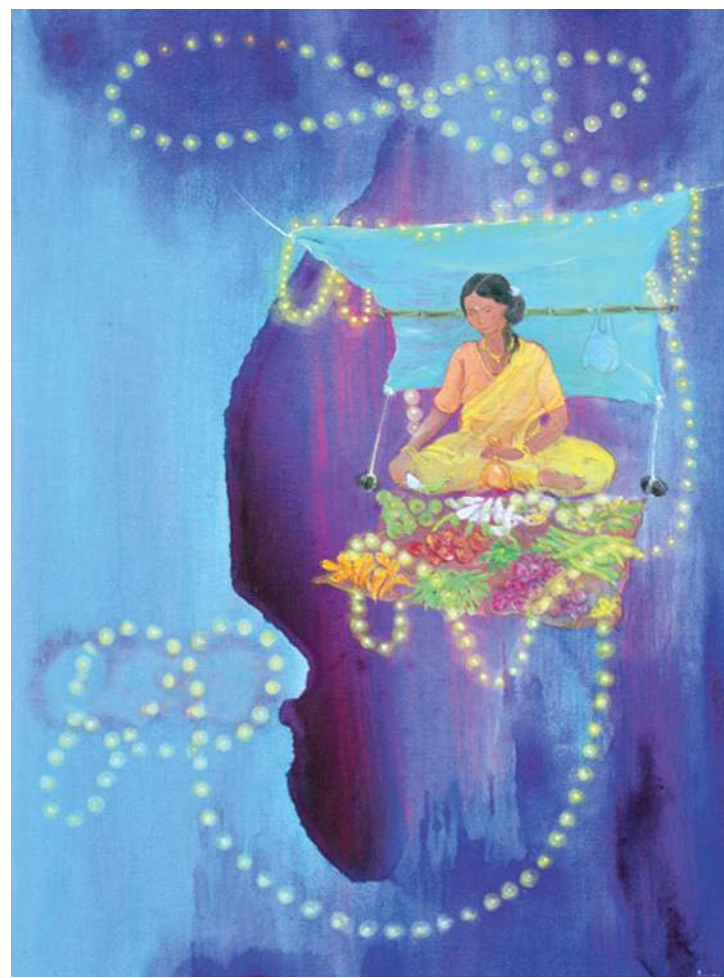
Kishore Singh is a Delhi-based writer and art critic. These views are personal and do not reflect those of the organisation with which he is associated



Party Wall (Bombay Series) by Vishwa Shroff

Arty WEEKEND

The Mumbai Gallery Weekend will return for its eighth, even more egalitarian edition, hoping to draw diverse crowds to the city’s art district, reports Ranjita Ganesan



Beginning by N S Harsha

Even if you don’t have the budget to book a room at one of the city’s five-star hotels, you can still dip your toe into Parisian glitz and glamour by splurging on one of these on-property experiences.

Dinner at V Restaurant

Seated in one of the leather banquettes beneath the romantic stained-glass dome designed by Gustave Eiffel, it’s impossible not to have a pinch-me-I’m-in-Paris moment. With only 35 seats, V Restaurant is a paean to the talents of the chef Richard Robe, a master of French gastronomy who coaxes intense flavour from seasonal products and delights in reimagining historic dishes for contemporary diners. This winter, à la carte highlights include the V pie — a puff pastry filled with a savoury mélange of duck, foie gras and porcini mushrooms — and a modern take on an 18th-century recipe, *Lievre à la Royale*: slow-braised rabbit stuffed with foie gras and a roulade of Parmesan-crust cannelloni pasta brimming with stewed meat and crushed juniper berries. The seven-course tasting menu (₹95) balances richness with lighter, acidic dishes: think crayfish carpaccio with avocado and passion fruit purée, risotto laced with chanterelle mushrooms and chorizo, and “Le Chocolat” puffed pastry for dessert. *Hotel Vernet, 25 Rue Vernet, 75008 Paris*

Cocktails at the Duc de Morny Library

A brush with Belle Époque glamour can be had at this mansion-turned-hotel originally built for Napoléon III’s half brother, the Duc de Morny. The bar is one option. But, the splendid library, a jewel-toned nook with coffered ceilings, herringbone parquet floors and deep



Paris de luxe

Amy Tara Koch tells you how to have a five-star hotel experience in Paris without booking a room

green furnishings set off by walls lined with 3,000 antique books from the 19th century, offers an intimate ambience, especially if you nab a seat in front of the (original) wood-burning fireplace. Here, you can enjoy a signature cocktail like the *Femme Fatale* — Champagne mixed with lime, cucumber and elderflower liqueur, or the *Bain de Folie*, a sweet blend of raspberries, lime, Hendrick’s gin, Chambord, egg white and fresh mint. *La Réserve, 42 Avenue Gabriel, 75008 Paris*

Cooking class at the Ritz Paris

Don a toque and take a half-day course at the prestigious Ritz Escoffier cooking school and

then consume your creations ensemble with the chef and newfound friends. The three-hour, sweet-and-savoury course (₹150 per person) involves dishes like roasted duckling filet with quince and creamy polenta, along with desserts like warm molten chocolate cake with orange custard. If pastry is your passion, there are classes focusing on Madeleines, modern tarts, macarons and all things chocolate (₹110-140 per person). You’ll go home with printed recipes and a chic Ritz apron. *Hôtel Ritz Paris, 15 Place Vendôme, 75001 Paris*

Art experience at Le Royal Monceau

With an in-house art concierge, its own 99-

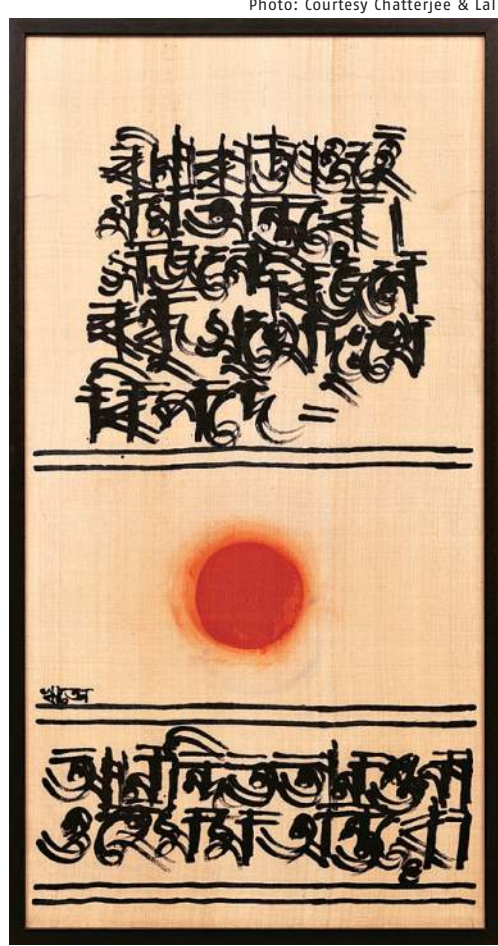


Photo: Courtesy Chatterjee & Lal



Riten Mozumdar and his Untitled artwork (left)

Since it was dreamt up in 2012, the Mumbai Gallery Weekend has gone from trying to take art to the people, to bringing people to the art. For its first edition, the organisers — galleries in the Fort, Kala Ghoda and Colaba areas — had gathered in a single hall in Bandra’s Taj Land’s End hotel and pooled their artworks to create a set of exhibitions. What they really needed, however, was to invigorate their own flock of tony South Mumbai spaces with patrons from everywhere in the city. Which is why they switched to hosting a themeless yet somehow coordinated weekend of art previews, shows, talks and performances across venues which people could hop around.

“There are no invitations or RSVPs. The idea is to activate the art district,” says Tara Lal, co-founder of contemporary art gallery Chatterjee & Lal, which is one of the organisers. The same set of galleries came up with Art Night Thursdays, when galleries stay open for longer than usual to welcome working professionals. Rather than quiet meditation on the works, these experiences are about collegiality. Newbies and experts alike drop in to sip wine, judge the art, and disappear into shows happening elsewhere in the neighbourhood. The air is much less stuffy, much more convivial, than at other times.

In keeping with its professedly democratic aspirations, the Weekend is not bound by any one common subject. Participating galleries usually try to time their best openings with the event. This year, visitors will be able to see the retrospective of Sudhir Patwardhan’s works at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Fort. Everything ranging from his preparatory sketches, photographs, early post-impressionist experiments and more recent Escheresque graphic labyrinths which reflect on Mumbai in all its complexity is on display. For the uninitiated, the group Carpe Art will conduct walking tours covering this and other major exhibitions.

The paintings of Mysore-based contemporary artist N S Harsha, which are very often about life in a small town, will return to the big city after a gap of 13 years. To be exhibited at the Chemould Prescott Road gallery, the new selection illustrates his shift away from “multitudes” and “monumentality” to agnosticism about scale and themes. So there are more paintings rather than installations and each individual piece has its own specific concerns. The “artist’s artist”, as Chemould’s Shireen Gandhi describes him, is also seen using vivid colours like pinks and purples that were previously not

IN KEEPING WITH ITS PROFESSEDLY DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS, THE WEEKEND IS NOT BOUND BY ANY ONE COMMON SUBJECT

in his oeuvre. Harsha will conduct a walkthrough on the final day of the Mumbai Gallery Weekend.

One of the rarer names that will be showcased is that of the late Riten Mozumdar, who emerged during the post-independence modernist design renaissance in India. It was a time for both historical revivalism and technical modernisation. Santiniketan-trained Mozumdar, for instance, is known for modifying traditional printing blocks to make contemporary motifs. He defied categorisation by creating both arts and crafts. As such, his works rendered in wool, wood, metal and paper, among other materials, will cover the walls of the Chatterjee & Lal gallery. This exhibition draws from ongoing research on the largely forgotten artist by scholar Ushmita Sahu.

Paintings by another Santiniketan artist, Jogen Chowdhury, will be celebrated by the auction house Pundole’s. To be a part of the mix, auction houses including Prinseps and Christie’s have also been dipping into their collections and putting up exhibitions during the Gallery Weekend. Christie’s, which has a South Asian contemporary and modern art sale in New York in

March, will host a preview of the works which come from a selection belonging to collectors Jane and Kito de Boer. The couple has amassed over 1,000 Indian artworks since they started buying when they lived in the country briefly in the 1990s.

Sonal Singh of Christie’s India says it is not necessarily buyers or collectors but students and young artists who walk into their third floor office over the course of the Weekend. It is not widely known that the space is open to visitors, so the event has helped with outreach for the auction house’s “museum-quality works”. Prinseps, meanwhile, will show a set of Bengal masters including

Abanindranath Tagore and Meera Mukherjee to trace how the movement developed over 100 years to include local folk styles and surrealism.

The Gallery Weekend will also include talks from Women in Design 2020+, an international conference put together by architects Brinda Somaya and Nandini Sampat to discuss what women have brought to the world of design. A full schedule will be available on the website mumbaigalleryweekend.com, which is being revamped so that it can carry details of galleries throughout the year.

Lal says the scope of the event is growing. A book launch will be among the offerings this time. Further, restaurants are creating special menus and local shops are participating too. Apparel boutique Raw Mango will host “*Baithak*”, an evening of Hindustani classical music by Chhannulal Mishra and dance by the Manipuri Jagoi Marup troupe. “Organisations in the area are making an effort so that there is something for everyone,” says Lal.

Mumbai Gallery Weekend will be held across art venues in Mumbai from January 9 to 12, 2020. Entry is free.

seat cinema and avant-garde artworks installed throughout the hotel, this five-star property (pictured) has firmly staked its claim as the “artsy” one. On Sunday evenings, non-hotel guests can attend a private screening at Katara Cinema (₹40 per person), which includes a glass of Champagne and a cone of caramelised popcorn by the hotel’s acclaimed pastry chef, Pierre Hermé. Or pop outside to the holiday-themed Winter Terrace for a Veuve Clicquot tasting experience in an alpine-feeling chalet. *Le Royal Monceau, 37 Avenue Hoche, 75008 Paris*

Afternoon tea at Four Seasons George V

From the moment you strut through the grand wrought-iron door, past the fairy tale floral arrangements (the hotel uses approximately 14,000 blooms per week) and settle into a perch at La Galerie as a pianist plays, you’ll feel the force of swank à la française. With tea or, better yet, Champagne (₹60 per person), you’ll enjoy a selection of scones, financiers, artful pastries and savoury bites like blini with salmon and cauliflower cream. For the holidays, the new pastry chef, Michael Bartocetti, has designed a speciality Christmas tea featuring Candied cédrat pie with lemon caviar, Parisian fland, spiced quince pastry and the pièce de résistance, an orchid-shaped Yule log fashioned of almond biscuit interlaced with a thin layer of crunchy hazelnut with vanilla scented cream (₹95 per person). To extend the experience, sign on for a made-to-measure massage in the glamorous, just-revamped spa (₹130). *Four Seasons George V, 31 Avenue George V, 75008 Paris, France*

@ 2019 The New York Times



The spirit of Japan



Age statement Japanese whiskeys that charmed the world continue to elude Indian buyers. But a taste of them is here, writes Veer Arjun Singh

Japanese whiskeys are drying up across the world. (People are drinking too much of them.) But Shinji Fukuyo, chief blender at major Japanese whisky maker Suntory Spirits, is busy with an odd assignment: understanding India. How Indians can go from drinking and munching to eating a full meal of spicy curries and back to drinking and munching all within the same night still baffles him and his disciplined colleagues who are touring the country.

The 58-year-old is up and running every morning at 4. "We have to follow a very strict routine to keep our senses sharp," he says. Perhaps that's what it takes to understand the collective palate of a population that consumes 48 per cent of the world's whiskeys.

On his sixth visit to India this week, Fukuyo finally unveiled the fruit of his strenuous travels. They are called OakSmith and OakSmith Gold, new blended whiskeys which will start retailing in Maharashtra and Telangana for ₹850 and ₹1,375, and ₹650 and ₹1,100, respectively. OakSmith is a mix of scotch and bourbon and is categorised as an Indian made foreign liquor (IMFL), blended (here comes the pitch) "with Japanese sensibilities" by Fukuro

himself. But it's nothing like what we had hoped for.

Like the rest of the world, we are in urgent need of bottles and bottles of the Yamazaki 12-, 18- and 25-Year-Old expressions from Japan's oldest distillery, the Yamazaki. Its Sherry Cask expression won whisky connoisseur Jim Murray's heart in 2015, and subsequently the world's. We would have also liked a few cases of the Hibiki 21-Year-Old, awarded the Best Blended Whisky for a record sixth time at the World Whiskies Awards this year, and what Murray defined as "unbelievably balanced and dangerously drinkable" in his 2014 *Whisky Bible*.

Ask the Delhi Duty Free guys and they will tell you how bottles of the Yamazaki 12-Year-Old have a shelf life of five minutes. That's how fast they go. Nothing Japanese spelled with a Y was available at the travel retail store while writing this story. But do grab a bottle or two of the Japanese Nikka From The Barrel (retailing at ₹4,840), another jewel from the world of blended whiskeys, before it flies off the shelves. Suntory and Nikka command 80 per cent of the spirits market share in Japan and produce some of the best whiskeys in the world.

Neeraj Kumar, India managing director of Beam Suntory, a subsidiary of Suntory Spirits which sells many popular whiskeys in India including Jim Beam, Teacher's and Ardmore, assures me that the age statements of the Yamazaki and the Hibiki will follow. For now, the official launch of the House of Suntory portfolio in India that took place in Gurugram on Tuesday brought the Yamazaki Distiller's



Shinji Fukuyo, Suntory's chief blender at the Yamazaki distillery in Osaka, Japan

Reserve single malt, the Hibiki Japanese Harmony whisky and a Japanese craft gin, Roku, to the Indian market for the first time.

The Yamazaki's cherry and mizunara (Japanese oak) notes on the nose, the touch of coconut on the palate and a long finish of cinnamon and vanilla is the stuff of legend. The Hibiki Harmony is more fruity and floral on the nose (think rose, lychee and sandalwood), chocolatey on the palate and has a subtle finish of

mizunara. Sounds yummy, but hold on.

The two will retail at select stores in the country for around ₹20,000 a bottle. But Kumar says that 95 per cent of the stock will go to high-end bars. The unfortunate strategy to make the limited stock count is also an opportunity to taste it Indian style.

Though I would very much, Fukuyo doesn't mind his Yamazaki whiskied into an Old Fashioned. Our serving style is usually a Highball with water or soda, he says. But he understands the trend of single malts ending up in cocktails. "Every country has a way of enjoying their drinks," he says tolerantly. He means it. I noticed cans of Coca-Cola unabashedly on display on the bar at the launch event.

Roku, the new craft gin, for instance, is delicious in a classic G&T. But George Kumekawa, the representative from Suntory Spirits, who has mastered his gin studies, recommends a Roku gin sonic (soda and tonic) with exactly eight thin strands of ginger. "It's the best drink to wash down and digest the spicy Indian curries," he says confidently.

Till the Yamazakis, Hibikis and the Hakushus that have taken the whisky world by storm honour us with their presence, enjoy the new portfolio from Suntory. In a cocktail, if you must.



'A ROKU GIN SONIC (SODA AND TONIC) WITH GINGER IS THE BEST DRINK TO WASH DOWN SPICY INDIAN CURRIES'

GEORGE KUMEKAWA
Representative, Suntory Spirits



End of the resistance

Despite lightsaber duels and twists aplenty, the latest — and possibly last — from the *Star Wars* epic leaves one strangely dissatisfied, finds Nikita Puri

It's hard to know where to begin discussing the latest instalment of the nine-part series which has popularly come to be known as the "Skywalker Saga". One of the greatest rides across galaxies, this is a journey that has lasted 42 years. Director J.J. Abrams' *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* hit theatres this week and in all likelihood will mark the end of the saga.

For those who've managed to evade the cultish magnetic pull of the series, *Star Wars* is a space opera epic (do not, please, confuse it with *Star Trek* — that's a piece of science fiction based in space in front of a fan). First seen in 1977 in theatres, the series began with *Episode IV — A New Hope* and the visual effects were breathtaking for its time. The latest 3D instalment does justice to its visual effects team as well, as we travel across desert plains, forested lands and watery planets enveloping the remains of old wars.

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker begins with the ascension of Kylo Ren, a conflicted character por-

trayed by Adam Driver. Kylo Ren, who previously went by the name of Ben before going over to the dark side, has found himself a Wayfinder, an otherworldly compass of sorts. This helps him get to Exegol, a planet that no one knows how to get to. It is here that he finds himself looking at the cloaked and enfeebled figure of Emperor Palpatine who buys his loyalty with promises of a new empire. Palpatine has only two demands of Ren, the harder of which

requires him to "kill the girl".

The girl in question is Rey. Abandoned by her parents as a child and brought up as a scavenger on the planet of Jakku, Rey is now among the best fighters who've pledged loyalty to the Resistance, the sole force working to fend off Palpatine's empire.

At the core of this series is essentially a battle as old as time itself — good versus evil, light versus darkness. While Palpatine represents darkness, or the Sith in *Star Wars* lingo, Rey represents the light, the Jedi. As if an entire army wasn't adequate to create conflict, the fact that Ren is herself fighting darkness within herself forms a significant part of the movie. On the plus side, this movie will finally answer the question of

Rey's origins, and we get scenes such as a stormtrooper (a bad guy's minion in a space suit) flying around in the air in concentric circles like a pierced balloon. And there's lots of lightsaber-wielding and gravity-defying stunts too. (Lightsabers are fictional *Star Wars* swords made of energy.)

Rather unfortunately, characters in the film have to continuously remind themselves that what they are doing to fight the forces of evil has to work, else whatever they've fought for so long and all the resistance that has been put up before will be in vain. It can work as a clarion call, sure, but not

when it is repeated over and over again. Then it's just lazy writing and ineffectual brainstorming.

A Stars Wars film is not complete without the droids who've proved time and again that they should never be underestimated, as well as Chewbacca (a Wookiee, a fictional being), as well as a bunch of other human and non-human new characters who play their parts diligently. The camaraderie between the characters is lovely, but it suffers from not being given a moment more for it to blossom.

The movie is set at an almost breathless pace that seems to be a continuation of a chase that started many movies ago.

Yes, the villain to beat all villains, Palpatine, is readying for an attack that could destroy all worlds, but the loss of pause is dearly felt. In fact, the whole film feels rushed, as if director Abrams was forced to cramp a two-part movie into 142 minutes. Those unfamiliar with the series can take a stab at it and are likely to follow the film without any homework; there's no keeping fans away, of course.

Ending the series is perhaps for the best, even if it was an unsatisfying one over all. The exuberance slips away as you leave the theatre.



CINEPHILE FILES



RANJITA GANESAN

Lessons from behind the door

What can we possibly learn from a propagandist film made in 1919, after World War I, by a white American Southerner? The kind who had a Confederate flag jammed in the barrel of a rifle at his doorstep? For years after it released, Irvin Willat's silent *Behind the Door* had the reputation of being a film that shocked because of the brutal fashion in which an enemy officer was depicted meeting his end. "A climax of terrific power which is so horrible that it may sicken," one review said.

In its recent second run, following a laborious restoration in 2017, the film's post-war patriotic edges have worn away and instead it holds a mirror to our troubled historical moment. The tale of its tragic hero Captain Krug (Hobart Bosworth), taken from a short story by Gouverneur Morris, becomes cautionary rather than one worthy of emulation. We find him old and forlorn in the opening as he returns to a ramshackle home in rural Maine where the sight of a dirty handkerchief — "her handkerchief" — turns him into a tearful heap.

Flashbacks show Krug in happier times as a retired soldier running a taxidermy shop, stuffing and stitching things back together. He is deeply in love with Alice (Jane Novak) but her father Matthew Morse, a wealthy banker, disapproves. So when news arrives of America joining the war, the banker uses it to fuel suspicions over Krug's German ancestry. Spontaneous nationalism, intolerance and moral panic lead to a gory confrontation, which is more unsettling as a sequence than that much-touted climax.



Townsmen who didn't think twice about sending weepy toddlers with damaged toys to Krug so he could fix them now stood outside his shop with balled-up fists. Suddenly he is a German "Hun". He appeals to them that he, and his father before him, had served the nation. The mob does not care. But didn't his mother come from Germany, they spit. This stirs Krug's own patriotism and he announces he will fight anyone who challenges his Americanness before enlisting to fight the Germans. It is only after Krug overpowers the mob with raging-bull force that the townsmen admit defeat and accept him.

Who belongs and who doesn't, and who gets to decide on matters of inclusion? In such arbitrary othering, the burden always falls on the "foreigner" to prove one's allegiance to the state or wear gratitude to the nation on one's sleeve. Krug, sadly, gives in to this and continues the cycle of violence. He marries Alice and sails away for the war. He and Alice, who joins the ship's nursing unit, survive an attack by a German submarine but she is taken prisoner and he is left in the waters. The two never meet again.

Krug is back to leading a ship months later and, as circumstances will comfortably have it, his crew overpowers the same enemy submarine and takes its commander Brandt (a leering Wallace Beery) prisoner. Tellingly, the cloud of suspicion never really leaves Krug. When he decides to question Brandt behind closed doors (thus the film's title), his crew still wonders whether the ancestry he shares with the German will test his loyalty to America.

After coaxing out in great detail (gratuitous detail even on the part of the filmmaker) the truth about Alice's final days on the submarine, Krug is maddened into performing a gruesome revenge. The good German (the "American" German) eliminates the evil one. Ultimately, though, as he cries out helplessly, "it doesn't bring her back." Nothing is fair in love and war. In a tolerant world, he might have continued to spruce up toys and Alice might have run a chain of successful dispensaries.

Willat, a cinematographer-turned-director, shows his flair with the camera in intertitles that are superimposed on sweeping hills and high waters. The film was screened recently in Hyderabad during an annual workshop by the Film Heritage Foundation. Its restorers, the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, put Willat's original tints of red, yellow and green back in the frames. They also used shots from a Russian copy of the film wherever American reels were lost. The restoration itself is a reminder of the magic of colours and countries coming together.

ranjita.ganesan@bsmall.in



The rewards of audacity

A non-profit that aims to get 1.6 million girls into school in 35,000 villages across India has been chosen as the first TED Audacious Project in Asia, writes **Anjali Bhargava**

When Safeena Hussain met three little girls, named "Achuki", "Naraz" and "Antim Bala", her life changed — as did that of hundreds of others (but more on that shortly). Achuki meant "arrived unwanted", Naraz "angry" and Antim Bala "last girl". All reflections of the attitudes of large parts of rural India to women and girls, areas where a goat or cow is considered an asset and a girl a liability.

That's when Hussain set herself the target of getting each and every out-of-school girl in India — a Unesco-estimated four million, the third highest figure after Nigeria and Pakistan — into school. What entire governments aim for, she wanted to accomplish on her own.

Hussain understood that the benefits of educating a single girl go well beyond literacy and education. Rural India is filled with girls who marry too early and often don't survive childbirth. Many suffer domestic violence, or are trafficked, and few have hopes of earning any income. An education ensures that the girl will have a smaller, healthier family and will be 50 per cent more likely to immunise her kids. She'll leave her mark on future generations, as climate scientists rank girls' education number six out of 80 actions that can reverse global warming. She'll be twice as likely to educate her own girls, keeping the cycle going.



(Above) Safeena Hussain with young girls her NGO is helping educate; (below) Educate Girls volunteers conducting a door-to-door survey

In 2007, soon after Hussain returned from the UK and USA, where she led the non-profit Child Family Health International for seven years and worked closely with underserved communities in Ecuador, Mexico, South Africa and the Amazon, she knew she wanted to work in girls' education. She approached India's ministry of human resource development, which shared with her a list of 26 districts where the educational gap between boys and girls was critical. Nine of these were in Rajasthan and that's where she focused her early efforts. The problem was most acute in areas where poverty and social

marginalisation coincided. "The SC/ST, minorities and other poor and marginalised communities often fail to see value in educating their girls," she explains.

Hussain registered her non-profit, Educate Girls, the same year. The outfit worked through community mobilisation. In every identified district, teams would go into each house in every village and find out exactly which girls were either not being sent to school or had dropped out. The team would then hold a series of community and neighbourhood meetings as well as individual counselling sessions with families to bring girls back into school. The volunteers, who make up "Team Balika", are from within the village community. Follow-up visits would ensure that those admitted were not withdrawn.

In the early days, many dismissed Hussain and her organisation because the targets sounded unattainable and the model impractical. In a country as vast as India, who could possibly visit every house in every village? It was all too big, too hairy and too audacious.

But Hussain's desire to "not leave a single girl out" also owed to her own life experience. Raised almost single-handedly by her mother in Delhi, a variety of adverse circumstances made even finishing school doubtful for her. Till good luck arrived in the form of an aunt who took her to London and gave her the opportunity to

study (Hussain went on to graduate from the London School of Economics).

What if even one Safeena Hussain is left out from one house in one village in India? That's the thought that underpins the way Educate Girls works. "Even at a personal level, there are few who understand the value of an education as keenly as me," she reflects.

In the last ten years or so, Educate Girls has grown at a breakneck pace. The network of community volunteers and field staff has enrolled close to 500,000 girls in public elementary schools, with 90 per cent retention rate spread over 13,000 villages (in 17 districts in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh). Learning outcomes have risen by an average of 25-30 per cent for students across genders, thanks to their remedial (after school hours) curriculum. The organisation now has 1,800 full-time staff and 14,000 volunteers, who make up the Team Balika.

As with anything being attempted at this scale, technology became an integral part of the movement. Door-to-door surveys were conducted using smart phones, and each village was geo-tagged. And, as Educate Girls and their teams went knocking on doors, they were also gaining something very valuable: Data. Free of sampling errors since it was not sample-based, this was authentic data collected real time, evidence gathered painstakingly.

Using the data gathered over a decade and the latest techniques of machine learning, analytics and data sciences, the outfit reached an "aha moment" of sorts. They realised that out-of-school girls tend to occur in "hot spots" and that 5 per cent of the villages in India had 40 per cent of out-of-school girls. "We now had the tools to identify the clusters and to target specifically those regions where the problem was most acute," explains Hussain. That's how they arrived at a target figure of 1.6 million across 35,000 villages.

Meanwhile, in New York, members of the TED Conferences team were asking each other some urgent questions. What if a million black women launched a health revolution? What if they supported millions of African farmers in growing more food, for themselves and the world? What if plants could help slow down climate change? What if they could massively reduce disease from parasitic worms in Africa? What if every child came to school on day one ready to learn?

Questions like these were being tossed around TED's Audacious Project. The Project is an initiative that "shows what humanity can accomplish when bold ideas meet visionary, generous supporters". Started in 2018, it invites social

entrepreneurs and non-profits to dream big and helps shape those dreams into sustainable multi-year plans. The project then invites its coalition of partners, along with the public, to pool resources to help finance these ambitious ideas.

"As a collaborative funding initiative, The Audacious Project aims to catalyse social impact on a grand scale by convening investors and social entrepreneurs to channel funds towards bold solutions to the world's urgent challenges," explains Anna Verghese, executive director of The Audacious Project. So far, \$ 1 billion in funding has been raised for 15 projects, selected in 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, Educate Girls was chosen as the first Audacious project in Asia. The question they posed: What if we could empower more than a million girls to enter the classroom?

The numbers were startling and convincing, enough to hand Educate Girls the big vote of confidence from TED. So, 1.6 million girls spread over 35,000 Indian villages are to be targeted over the next five years.

Since 2007, Educate Girls has grown from a 50-village test project to a 13,000-village movement. There's no reason why 13,000 can't become 35,000 and why 500,000 cannot rise to 1.6 million. Not with a determined Safeena Hussain at the helm of affairs.

CHESS #1381

By DEVANGSHU DATTA

The Candidates suspense continues. Wei Yi meets Ian Nepomniachtchi in the final of the Jerusalem Grand Prix. The 20-year-old Chinese GM defeated David Navara in tiebreaks while Nepo beat Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in the other semi-final. Earlier, Wei beat Sergei Karjakin while Nepo beat Wesley So.

The two best performers in the four-event Grand Prix get entries to the Candidates. One slot has been booked by Alexander Grischuk. If Wei wins, Vachier-Lagrave gets the other slot. If Nepo wins, he gets it. But he also gets a second chance by right of birth. If he loses to Wei, Nepo would play a match with Kirill Alekseenko for a wild card entry from the host Russian Federation.

Wei is a prodigy who hasn't quite lived up to his promise as the youngest player to cross 2700. This could be his breakthrough tournament. China already has two Candidates in Wang Hao and Ding Liren. Unfortunately Wei's surge came too late for a decent GP placement.

In Majitar, Sikkim, another 20-year-old, Aravindh Chithambaram defended his title as national champion. He won with 9.5 from 11 rounds while G Akash and S Ravi Teja (both 8.5) finished second-third. Akash made a GM norm in the 11-round Swiss (186 players including 18 GMs).



The Women's Grand Prix in Monaco ended in a three-way tie. Alexandra Kosteniuk, Koneru Humpy and Alexandra Goryachkina (all 7/11) were just ahead of Kateryna Lagno (6.5) while Dronavalli Harika (5.5) faded after a good start. Goryachkina led until Humpy beat her in the last round. Humpy had suffered defeat against Elisabeth Paetz and Kosteniuk beat Paetz in the last round.

Humpy (293 P points) leads in overall standings after two GP events while Goryachkina (253) is running second. The overall winner has a Candidates slot. As challenger, Goryachkina is guaranteed this, if she loses her upcoming title match.

The Diagram, White to Play (White: Wei Yi Vs Black: Sergey Karjakin Jerusalem GP, 2019) features superb efforts by both players. Wei took 35 minutes here to play 13. Nh6+! gxh6 14. Qg4+ Kh8 15. Qf5 Nf6! Forced so far for both sides.

Now white played 16. Nxd5! Nxd4! Great move from "The Minister of Defence". White is forced to take his material back with **17. Qxf6+ Qxf6 18. Nxf6**. Black's knight hangs and 18.—Ne6 19. Bc3 is plain horrible.

But Karjakin found **18 — Nf3+! 19. gxf3 Rg8+!** [If 20. Nxd5? Rxd5+ 21. Kh1 Bxf3#] 20. Ng4 [Now black can get his material back any time, after he prevents Bc3] **Be5 21. Bc2 Bxb2 22. Rxc5! bxc5 23. Rb1 Bg7 24. Rxb7 h5!** [The knight is still trapped but white has the strong 25. Bc4] **He played 25. Rxf7! hxg4 26. fg4 Rg8 and (1/2-1/2, 40 moves).**

Devangshu Datta is an internationally rated chess and correspondence chess player

BS SUDOKU #2927

6				1	9			
		2	3	8	6		1	
		4		5				
				1	4	6		
1	3			7		8		
	8	5	9		2			
				7	3			
	6							

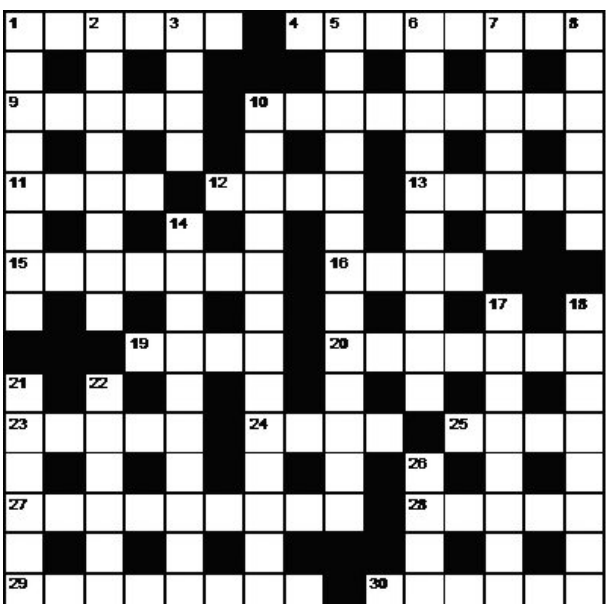
Easy: ★★
Solution on Monday

HOW TO PLAY

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9

SOLUTION TO # 2926

9	5	3	7	1	4	8	6	2
1	6	8	2	5	3	4	9	7
7	4	2	6	8	9	3	5	1
3	1	6	9	2	8	5	7	4
5	7	9	4	3	1	2	8	6
8	2	4	5	6	7	9	1	3
6	8	5	1	4	2	7	3	9
2	9	1	3	7	5	6	4	8
4	3	7	8	9	6	1	2	5



THE BS CROSSWORD #3296

ACROSS:

- 1 Pretend to have an adverse influence (6)
- 4 Encouraging egg-nog in whisked form (6,2)
- 9 Certainly not ignored when the whole film is shown (5)
- 10 Make out an order that's dispensable (9)
- 11 Part of ship to retain (4)
- 12 Angle at which to approach windmill (4)
- 13 Five old N.Y.C. subways turn into objets d'art (5)
- 15 Fan has a look at large animal (7)
- 16 Move clumsily when the vessel's abandoned (4)
- 19 A little inclined to be apologetic, but game (4)

- 20 Adding and carrying around a casual shirt (7)
- 23 Foul smell about head rotting on fork (5)
- 24 Warmonger seen in a mortarboard? (4)
- 25 Olympian getting up for port (4)
- 27 Small group in charge, a disaster for Loch Gairry (9)
- 28 Drink from fractured pipes (5)
- 29 Confuse the starters in brilliant Eclipse fields unless deemed decidedly less eclipsable (8)
- 30 Bars giving the old king continental articles (6)

DOWN:

- 1 A little flower she, albeit grabbing every other one in the Emirate! (3,5)
- 2 Beauty treatment? Item of manicure rejected (4-4)
- 3 Build up of financial expertise (4)
- 5 Big colourless method of conjuring up New York theatreland (5,5,3)
- 6 It's not what one ought to expect from public servants (10)
- 7 Glandular swelling with blood around it (6)
- 8 Evan removed American's birthmark (6)
- 10 Having the wisdom not to get excited (13)
- 14 Distributes the swag around when having been a vigilante (3,2,5)
- 17 Sack old mate for taking a gem (4-4)
- 18 Used for serving a portion of breakfast (3,5)
- 21 A place no doctor shows self-confidence (6)
- 22 To annoy cat, condition loudly (2,4)
- 26 Point to the need for faster movement (4)

SOLUTION #3295

A	B	U	D	H	A	B	I	E	P	O	N	Y	M
M	A	N	E	T	E	A	P	R	T				
A	R	D	E	N	T	L	I						
N	E	R	I		W	T	R	I					
D	E	R	B		E	P	O	N	Y	M	O	U	S
A	T		V		L	W							
P	O	U	F	F	E	F	L	A	P	P	E	R	
S	W	O	S	T	E	S	T	A	L	O	N	S	
U		S	I		A		K						
D	I	A	G	H	I	L	E	V	J	I	F	F	
G	P	W	L	E	A	L	V						
I	M	P	A	I	R		P	R	I	M	R	O	S
N	L	N			N	B	E	Y	R				
G	R	E	E	D		P	A	S	S	E	D	O	N



Angry young people

The sentiments of students and their supporters being expressed on streets across India's cities

▶ DELHI

The morning of Thursday, December 19, the declared date for India's nationwide protest against the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA), is a tense one. Two protests, one originating at Red Fort and the other at Mandi House, are already in the news, for all the wrong reasons. Before 11 am, the official time for the protest at Red Fort to begin, reports of students being detained and packed off in buses begin making the rounds.

The protest at Mandi House is being organised by Left parties and student-led wings such as Students' Federation of India (SFI) and All India Students' Association (AISA). Soon, reports of protesters exiting the Mandi House Metro station and immediately being hauled into buses begin to come through too. Meanwhile, protesters from Gurugram are stuck in a 10km-long traffic jam. During this chaos of updates and upheavals, 20 Metro stations around Central Delhi have been shut down. The intention is clear. The police, under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, is trying to discourage protest.

But the deterrence fails. Jantar Mantar, an iconic protest zone in the heart of Delhi, becomes a natural point of convergence. Those who were detained at Red Fort, those held at Mandi House, those simply following updates, all make their way to Jantar Mantar. The crowd doesn't stop pouring in till 5pm. Despite patchy mobile network, internet shutdown and network jammers, people manage to converge.

In the last few days, social media has exploded with calls for more protests. And the scenario at Jantar Mantar is exactly that: an organic meeting of like-minded individuals fighting what they perceive as oppression. "If change has to happen, we have to carry on the idea of what it means to be modern, free and secular citizens. Everyone should be out here on the streets," says Dipta Bhog, a women's rights activist.

Thousands of protesters, young and old, chant slogans that are not limited to CAA and the NRC. Jantar Mantar comes alive with calls of *Azadi!*—freedom for Kashmir, freedom of expression, freedom for women, freedom for farmers. Where is the employment? Where is economic growth? Universities are not battlegrounds. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians are all one...

While some express themselves by writing slogans and drawing graphics on Parliament Street, others protest with posters in their hands and slogans and songs on their lips. While the tipping point was the violence reportedly inflicted on students at Jamia Millia Islamia by Delhi Police the preceding Sunday, the voices here are raised against a host of regressive and oppressive practices.

"With the NRC and the CAA, we will be easier to target," says Sarah Ali, a 21-year-old former student at Miranda House. "But seeing the people here, most of whom are not even Muslim, gives me some hope of India still being a secular democracy."

The police and Rapid Action Force remain ready throughout the demonstration, posted on both entry and exit sides of Jantar Mantar. They're passive, as the uniformed men lean against their barricades, but armed with rifles. A large water

cannon stands right behind them, the monstrosity ready to charge towards slogan-chanting, foot-thumping, answer-seeking protesters. But the opportunity to use it doesn't arise, not this time.

—Amrita Singh

▶ BENGALURU

After the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in Karnataka announced the imposition of Section 144 in parts of the state and the whole of Bengaluru starting December 19, a heavy khaki presence marks the streets leading to Puttana Chetty Town Hall — a place that has often seen citizens coming together to express their dissent or solidarity.

Protesting against the CAA, they had come in twos and threes, and had no idea that hundreds would show up. Tuesday's protest ended with 11 of them being hauled into police vans and taken away. Released in about two hours, some joined protests happening at another site, Freedom Park (ironically a former central jail and also one of the state's first gallows).

"It's scary to know that Section 144 has been imposed but we know we have to go out there. It's important to be on the right side of history," says Mrinalini Komandur, a student at the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru. Having spent a semester in Singapore recently, Komandur has newfound appreciation for India's acceptance of opinions that may be contrary to the establishment's.

"The implications of CAA are so widespread that none of us can afford to ignore it. The government seems to think that these protests will just die down and calm will restore and people will accept what's to come. But the only way to put pressure on the government is to keep these protests going," she says.

Understanding how the worst affected may not fully comprehend the ramifications of the Act, the students of her college drafted a pamphlet of commonly-asked questions in Tamil, Kannada, English and Hindi. These were distributed earlier this week during a candlelight march in Nagarbhavi, Bengaluru. They are also forming a committee to file a petition in the apex court. "Our petition, like several other petitions that have been filed, will challenge the constitutionality of the CAA in the Supreme Court," she says.

—Nikita Puri

▶ KOLKATA

The students of Jadavpur University (JU) have decided to continue their agitation till the CAA is withdrawn. It's semester time at the university, but students are dividing their time between studies, examinations and protest marches.

While they have decided to protest on their campus, they are also collaborating with other colleges. "We have received communication from students of Harvard and Oxford universities expressing their solidarity," says Debnath Debraj, general secretary of the Left-leaning Students' Federation of India (SFI). The graduate student in

the Bengali department says the opposition to CAA is because it contradicts the secular principles of the Constitution and because the idea of citizenship based on religion cannot be tolerated. "We are in talks with other colleges and universities across India to launch an organised pan-India students' movement against CAA," says Debraj.

Ashavari Bhattacharya, a graduate student in the history faculty, says, "After CAA was passed, some of my friends have started taunting my friends from the minority community telling them that they will now be sent to Pakistan. This is so disheartening."

—Avishek Rakshit

▶ CHENNAI

On the night of Wednesday, December 18, police officials took away over 20 students from University of Madras who were protesting the CAA and NRC. One of the policemen asked the students whether they were worried about getting arrested. "We told him that we are more afraid of CAA," responded one student.

Hundreds of students assembled at the Madras University campus near Marina Beach on Monday and many stayed back at night raising slogans against the CAA and the police action at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. The police did not charge them and even offered them food, say students.

The University declared the campus and hostel shut from December 18 to 23. "If they allow us inside, then we can try to organise the protest again," says Arur T Elakkiyan, a political science graduate student. He said that the aim is to focus the protest peacefully and non-violently within the campus.

The relevance of the Act and NRC in Tamil Nadu is different from that of Northeastern states, especially in the context of Sri Lankan Tamils, says Ragu Prasath, another student at Madras University. "After 75 years of Independence, if we need to stand in queues to prove that we are Indian citizens, it is a shame," he says.

Students from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IITM), who usually keep their distance from political statements, also conducted a demonstration on their campus earlier this week.

—Gireesh Babu

▶ HYDERABAD

Since the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill became a law, no day has passed without protests at Osmania University, Hyderabad Central University, Moulana Azad Urdu University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Nizamia Tibbi (Unani Medical College) and other campuses. So far these student protests have remained peaceful and within the confines of their campuses. Some demonstrations were also

held by the Forum Against CAB and NRC beginning November 26, the Indian Constitution Day.

But the voices became louder after the Delhi Police entered Jamia Millia Islamia and allegedly roughed up students last Sunday. Students in Hyderabad Central University burnt copies of the Bill at the university entrance each day. Osmania University students blocked roads for two hours while burning copies of the Bill on the day it was passed in Parliament. On Wednesday lawyers joined the anti-CAB protest by staging a protest inside the Hyderabad High Court premises.

Kiran Kumar Vissa, who heads Citizens against NRC and CAA, a civil society forum, says that all the poor and the underprivileged who do not own property, and not just the Muslim minorities, will be impacted by the Centre's CAA and NRC. "Though Union ministers are telling the people that they should see the CAA and NRC separately, the government's real intention is to combine the two at the time of implementation. How can anyone believe their assurances that citizens will not be harmed?"

Syed Salim Pasha, Osmania University student activist, says, "We all feel threatened by the government's action as it is trying to change the fundamentals of the Indian Constitution. It will not stop at CAA. These protests also mark the unrest being built among the student community over a period of time. We will continue our protests. We are planning to hold a public rally on December 23." Adds M Sreecharan, vice president, Hyderabad Central University Students' Union: "From the day the citizenship Bill was passed, we have been staging peaceful protests on the campus after taking permission from the

police. We want to continue peaceful demonstrations as non-violence was our biggest weapon in the freedom struggle. We will continue our peaceful protests till these demonstrations turn into another freedom struggle."

THOUSANDS OF PROTESTERS, YOUNG AND OLD, CHANT SLOGANS, NOT LIMITED TO CAA AND THE NRC



REUTERS

Shaik Umer Faruq Quadri, president, Moulana Azad National Urdu University Students' Union, adds: "We keep the campus gates closed all the time for our safety because police have made attempts to enter the campus even though we have been protesting peacefully. In Assam a father got NRC enrolment while his daughter was denied the citizenship. They might do the same thing to the rest of us in India."

—B Dasarith Reddy

▶ AHMEDABAD

Police excess was also seen in Ahmedabad when students and faculty members from top institutes like Indian Institute Management Ahmedabad (IIMA), National Institute of Design (NID) and CEPT University gathered to express solidarity with JMI students. On Monday, citing lack of official permission to hold such protests, Ahmedabad Police detained some students, academics and prominent citizens who had gathered outside IIM A.

By Thursday, protests had spread across the city. Students have been skipping classes to take part in city-wide protests with support from the faculty. "Holding a protest was urgent and we have gathered in front of IIM-A to discuss the future course of action even as some of us have gone to the police seeking permission to hold the protest," says Mansi Shah, faculty member at CEPT University.

While the institutes have not issued official comments, students and faculty members have come out in support in their personal capacities. Faculty members and students from IIM A have joined their peers from IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Bombay, IIM Bangalore, IIM Indore, IIM Calcutta, XLRI Jamshedpur, FMS Delhi and AMU, among others in signing a letter protesting the Act.

"As citizens and members of the academic community, we write to register our protest at the recent enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. The Act is discriminatory and violative of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution. It is inconsistent with the cherished values of equality under law and secularism. It institutionalises preferential treatment based on religion which is in direct conflict with the inclusive spirit on which our nation was formed," the letter reads.

Amidst lack of police permission and institutional support, students from across campuses are now holding silent vigils on their campuses even as debates over CAA and NRC are being held to generate more awareness. "We have been looking at innovative ways to protest and planned rallies where we will take charkhas to Gandhi Ashram as a silent and non-violent protest," says a Gujarat Vidyapith student.

IIMA faculty member Reetika Khara, who was part of the protest held on Monday and Tuesday, says, "Apart from the questions on the CAA raised in the letter, it is distressing to see the violent response of the state to democratic dissent. Further, the NRC (which will follow the CAA) has already been shown in Assam to be an expensive, futile exercise, with terrible human costs. It will affect all of us, but the greater burden will fall on the poor."

—Vinay Umarji

The quiet brain of the athlete

The brains of fit young athletes dial down extraneous noise and attend to important sounds better than those of other young people, says Gretchen Reynolds



Top athletes' brains are not as noisy as yours and mine, according to a fascinating new study of elite competitors and how they process sound. The study finds that the brains of fit young athletes dial down extraneous noise and attend to important sounds better than those of other young people, suggesting that playing sports may change brains in ways that alter how well people sense and respond to the world around them.

For most of us with normal hearing, of course, listening to and processing sounds are such automatic mental activities that we take them for granted.

But "making sense of sound is actually one of the most complex jobs we ask of our brains," says Nina Kraus, a professor and director of the Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, who oversaw the new study.

Sound processing also can be a reflection of broader brain health, she says, since it involves so many interconnected areas of the brain that must coordinate to decide whether any given sound is familiar, what it means, if the body should respond and how a particular sound fits into the broader orchestration of other noises that constantly bombard us.

For some time, Kraus and her collaborators have been studying whether some people's brains perform this intricate task more effectively than others. By attaching

electrodes to people's scalps and then playing a simple sound, usually the spoken syllable "da", at irregular intervals, they have measured and graphed electrical brain wave activity in people's sound-processing centres.

And they have found interesting variations in proficiency. The brains of trained musicians, for instance, tend to show greater spikes in processing activity when they hear the "da" than do the brains of other people, indicating that learning and practising musicianship also hones and refines the portions of the brain that process sound.

More recently, Kraus and her collaborators began to explore whether the reverse might also be true and that some experiences might blunt sound processing. In particular, they wondered about the effects of knocks to the head, such as concussions, a question that drew them, naturally, to athletes. Might contact injuries to the head during sports alter and sour sound processing, they wondered, and perhaps even serve as a marker of the severity of any brain injury?

To find out, she and her colleagues partnered with the athletics department at Northwestern University several years ago and began checking the sound-processing abilities of 495 Division I male and female athletes at the school, as well as another 500 students who weren't athletes.

The athletes played sports ranging from football to track, some involving tackling and similar contact and others little contact but considerable exertion. Kraus and her colleagues began testing them at the start and end of their competitive seasons and after any suspected concussions, with a plan to compare the readouts after heavy training and injuries and look for patterns.

That study is ongoing, but Kraus realised in the meantime that she possessed a wealth of baseline data about the brains and sound-processing abilities of fit young athletes and other students. She could crosscheck their brain wave readouts, she thought, and see if the athletes, when healthy, processed sounds differently than the other students.

So, for the new study, which was published this month in *Sports Health*, she did just that. And she found that the athletes did hear and make sense of sounds differently than most of us.

According to their electrical readouts,

almost all of them attended to specific, specified sounds better than the other students. When the "da" syllable played, their brain waves jumped more than the other students'.

What interested and surprised Kraus, though, was that the athletes' brains could focus on the "da" sound so well because they had filtered out more background noise beforehand than other students. Their brain wave response to the kind of constant, murmurous aural clutter around us was lower than among the other students, allowing the athletes to better amplify and pinpoint the sound they wanted.

"Basically, their brains were quieter," Kraus says. Some of the athletes' acoustic agility most likely developed during years of attending to crucial sounds despite clutter, Kraus says. "You have to be able to hear the

coach yelling something or what a teammate is saying," she says. "Brains change in response to that kind of repeated experience," and the sound-processing components within the brain strengthen.

But many of the athletes played sports that, typically, are not noisy, she points out. Cross-country running and golf, for instance, most likely demand less sound filtering during most practices and competitions than a sport like football or basketball. But the university's runners and golfers had brains just as quiet as those of linemen.

For them, "fitness and regular movement of the body also change the brain," Kraus says. And sports that seem quiet can still demand a focus on subtle sounds and signals, like the whoosh of a breeze through branches alerting golfers and runners to wind speed or a creak in a joint that could warn of early injury.

Over all, the results suggest that being active, whether as part of a team or on your own, may alter how well brains respond to and understand sounds.

This kind of study cannot tell us definitively, though, whether being an athlete changed the young people's brains or whether they succeeded as athletes because they were better at sound processing from the start. Kraus hopes that her continuing research with the university's sports teams will help to answer that question, as well as whether older people can reshape their sound processing by becoming active.

@ 2019 The New York Times

BRAIN WAVE RESPONSE TO THE KIND OF CONSTANT, MURMURIOUS AURAL CLUTTER AROUND US WAS LOWER AMONG ATHLETES

Fitbit Versa 2 (₹20,999)

Fit for the wrist

The Fitbit Versa 2 is a great watch, but not a great upgrade, writes Veer Arjun Singh

The Fitbit Versa 2 is not an Apple Watch Series 5 competitor. The Watch 5 costs twice as much, has twice the features and lasts less than half as long on a single charge. Plus it has things for iPhone users — such as voice replies and phone-free access to Apple Music — that the Android-first Versa 2 is simply not allowed to. I refuse to indulge in this equivocal war on paper. Instead, here's my take on Versa 2's capability as a smartwatch and its value for money as an upgrade to the OG Versa.

Design 3/5

The new Versa's AMOLED screen is brighter and more lively than its predecessor's LCD. But it's stuck in the same 1.34-inch case with the same 300x300 pixel display, which is too small for me to appreciate the difference. The interface, too, is maybe deliberately simple that it hardly needs a better screen. Does it work? Yes. But despite Fitbit's battery

and fitness tracking prowess, the screen and interface are stale.

On the upside, the Versa 2, at about 450gm, has shed a few grams (a couple of buttons, in particular) and looks slimmer. My advice on dressing it up will be to stay away from the black aluminium dial and instead opt for the copper rose dial, which looks great with green and bordeaux straps. Both Versa 1 and 2 come in 40mm and their straps are interchangeable. In terms of comfort, if there's one watch I can sleep with strapped to my wrist, it's this.

Performance 4/5

Talking about sleep, winter is here. And Fitbit is excellent at indulging lazy bones. It doesn't go as bonkers as it does

over rapid muscle movement but a detailed sleep score is good motivation. The Fitbit app interface is also great at keeping a count on steps taken, floors climbed, calories burnt and minutes spent active, and also calories and water consumed (both have to be logged manually), every day. Good stuff, but nothing that the OG Versa didn't already do.

The new version is an always-on display. But there's a catch. The "always-on" is not a dimmed version

of your colourful analog or specs-rich digital clock face, but a dull, black-and-white display that tells time and a few other things. Another new feature is the built-in Alexa. But she is mute. There's a microphone for you to give her commands but there's no speaker for poor Alexa to voice her interpretations. You will have to read them on the screen. For what it's worth, she can hear you well even in noisy places.

Verdict 4/5

The Versa is an excellent fitness tracker, which has been tuned to last even longer — about five full days, which is a day more on paper than the Versa OG and at least eight hours more in practice. It also has a better display, a faster processor and a mute Alexa (I can't get over it).

The tweaks are not perfect (clearly) but they are a step forward. Which makes the ₹14,900 Versa 1 a great buy, too. My advice: spend the extra ₹6,000 and buy the Versa 2 if it's your first Fitbit. It's a better watch. Fitbit Versa 1 and lite users, hang on, this one is just not the right upgrade.

- Pro
- ▶ Excellent battery
- Con
- ▶ Not the best screen



GEAR



Reebok Forever Floatride Energy 2.0 (₹9,999)

Vanilla run

VEER ARJUN SINGH

The fanfare around new launches these days is often enough to convince someone to buy a ₹15,000 pair even before they know they like running. Might as well start with the best shoe, right? Wrong. Entirely. The sophisticated tech can often be counterproductive for the wrong feet.

Beginners often complain that well-cushioned, long-distance running pairs are inflexible for training. Some say they are too heavy for daily use. This is because most performance pairs are not meant to be trainers, joggers or athleisure sneakers. A good performance shoe is tailor-made for a particular sport or a track event. And beginners are better off without them.

A beginner shoe has to be more versatile. A shoe which can pace out

10km, is not a misfit at the gym and is flexible enough for everything in between. And is lightweight, too. Reebok Floatride Energy, launched earlier this year, is the best such going.

Its 2.0 version launched in October is identical in design and form to its predecessor, adding a little more zing in performance but mostly just new colourways. It's a tried-and-tested, sub-₹10,000 running pair that can put many overpriced running shoes to shame.

The science is simple: the upper is made entirely of engineered mesh, which lends the shoe its breathability, punched eyelets and a lightly-padded tongue comfortably locks the foot in place and a no-frills design keeps things flexible. So much so that despite

its medium 10mm heel drop, you won't mind a CrossFit session in these shoes.

I took them out for a few sub-5k free runs and the Floatride foam midsole turned out to be surprisingly cushioned for a shoe that weighs just 250gm a piece. The carbon rubber grips roads and pavements well.

The Floatride Energy is not among the most responsive shoes for a quick toe-off for speed or interval runs. It's not a marathon runner, either. The lack of strength along the edges of the mesh upper can expose your foot to

abrasions over long distances. But up to 10km, it's foolproof.

Verdict 4/5

The Forever Floatride Energy is one of the best pairs in the market today for

a beginner runner who dabbles in a bit of everything. What makes it even more special right now is the discounted price of ₹5,999, which is excellent. Don't confuse yourself deciding between the original and the "improved" 2.0 version. They are almost identical and grabbing either of them for this price amounts to a steal.

Trusox (₹3,500) Foot soldier

DHRUV MUNIAL

Turns out there's more to Raheem Sterling's evolution at Manchester City than just Pep Guardiola's coaching. His feet may be tormenting defences across Europe but it's what's underneath that's performing the real magic. I'm talking about Trusox, Sterling's preferred brand of socks. The invention of an American football coach, Trusox is now available in India, promising to equip athletes with better grip.

Trusox is a welcome innovation since socks are often an overlooked part of an athlete's attire. Most people perhaps don't realise what a difference a good

pair can make. Trusox's USP lies in its patented non-slip performance pads, which offer protection both on the inside and the outside. I tried a pair and was impressed by its build quality. Without feeling tight, the socks offer a snug fit, and the pads across the length of the foot make for great cushioning.

As for performance, Trusox is best utilised on the football pitch. Slippage is a major problem for some players, and Trusox helps address that quite efficiently. Apart from comfort, the socks also keep your foot in place, and allow for better movement and stability. But the best part is how it can prevent blisters, often caused by excessive friction. I tried the socks in the gym and while running outdoors as well, but felt they made little difference.

Moreover, it is an expensive technology. A pair costs ₹3,500, meaning



that any takers are likely to be professional athletes. I would've also liked some more colours — currently it's available in only white and black in India, but the company says more variants are on the way. Nonetheless, it is a serious investment, and one that will have your feet thanking you.