

The 'fire and ice' decade that changed everything on Wall St

At its peak a record \$17 trillion stockpile of negative-yielding securities roiled global markets in 2019

BLOOMBERG
27 September, London

It started with animal spirits left for dead by the financial crisis. It's set to finish with stocks near records, volatility vanquished and the credit supercycle on steroids. This is the tale of global markets over a decade of "fire and ice."

In the 2010s traders braved everything from the sovereign meltdown in Europe and populist rage to "Volmageddon" and the shale revolution. Political earthquakes, shaky corporate earnings and credit shocks all came for the bull market. Central banks saved the day.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump began the era as a reality TV star and will finish it as president and Tariff Man, with his America First agenda whipsawing billions of dollars in investment flows around the world. It all leaves investors dodging political bombs, recession fears and disappearing yields even as they close out the decade with some of best gains in a generation. Here is how the past 10 years has transformed the major asset classes.

Bonds: Return-Free Risk

From risk-free return to return-free risk: The world of fixed income got turned upside down as bears went into extinction and every sell-off proved little more than a head-fake.

At its peak a record \$17 trillion stockpile of negative-yielding securities roiled global markets in 2019 — spurring capital gains for holders while saddling the likes of pension funds with loss-making investments down the road. Benchmark 10-year Treasury yields are a shadow of their former selves, with those in Germany and Japan at epic lows. Thank demographics, growth angst, vanishing inflation, or monetary interventions.

"These yields echo that the ghost of the Great Recession is still continuing to circulate through global capital markets," said Jack Malvey, a debt veteran and former chief global fixed-income strategist at Lehman Brothers Holdings.

The Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Treasuries index has returned some 5 per cent in 2019 alone through late December. It's gained more than 19 per cent since the start of 2010. Today coupons are paltry, if they exist at all. Further price gains look unlikely given the fierce starting point for valuations at the close of 2019.

FX: King Dollar

The biggest danger in global finance this decade landed with the euro-area crisis, which threatened to wipe out the most ambitious currency project in history.

High levels of government debt, soaring bond yields and a collapse in confidence pushed nations in Europe's periphery to the brink of bankruptcy. Greek yields soared past 40 per cent at one point in 2012 while those on Italian, Portuguese and Spanish securities also surged. It took a massive restructuring package and the famous "whatever it takes" declaration from then European Central Bank



President Mario Draghi to stave off disaster. But big institutional frailties remain, like the conspicuous lack of a fiscal framework and full banking union. With high debt levels across much of the region and interest rates already at historic lows, the threat of another crisis remains very real.

By contrast the dollar's status as the world's premier reserve currency looks as strong as ever, defying post-crisis fears that the center of monetary gravity would shift from America to China. The greenback accounts for some 60 per cent of global foreign exchange reserves, around the same as late 2009 though below 2015 levels.

That's little solace for traders who rely on price swings to make money. While the global currency market has grown by more than a third to \$6.6 trillion since 2010, volatility has plummeted. "It was pretty much a decade of fire and ice," said Ned Rumpelton, European head of foreign-exchange strategy at Toronto Dominion Bank.

There were flare-ups: Flash crashes hit currencies including the British pound and the South African rand, prompting the Bank for International Settlements to warn of danger ahead when volatility roars back to life.

Stocks: Unstoppable Bull

Events like the 2015 yuan devaluation and the 2018 risk rout gave stock bulls a scare, but in the first decade to dodge a US recession since records began it wasn't enough to break them. American stocks were ground zero for animal spirits, trouncing developed-market competitors. Adjusted for volatility risk, gains in the S&P 500 index since December 31, 2009 look poised to be the highest of any

decade since at least the 1950s.

In dollar terms the Stoxx Europe 600 has posted only a third of the S&P 500's total returns of more than 250 per cent this decade. The region's large exposure to beleaguered value shares, political risk from Brexit to Italian populism, and the absence of hot tech companies all played a role. Europe has suffered the biggest outflows among major markets, losing about \$100 billion this year alone.

Credit: Leverage Monster

Global corporate debt has nearly doubled this past decade, defying the oil-price crash and memories of the credit crisis. It became a seller's market like never before: Negative-yielding corporate bonds surpassed \$1 trillion in 2019, companies sold longer-duration debt and issuers dispensed with clauses to protect investors. Corporate bond buyers today are getting vanishing premiums, close to record interest-rate risk and hefty leverage to boot.

Crude: Awakening

Oil may have spent the first half of the decade dancing around \$100 a barrel, but the crash in 2014 told the story that would define global commodity markets for years to come: The shale revolution is here to stay.

"The US has disrupted the industry in a way that was never expected," said Abhishek Deshpande, head of oil market research at JPMorgan Chase & Co. American supply has bested the market with a game-changing buffer in the face of civil wars, terrorist attacks and military conquests.

A drone strike in September shut down half of Saudi Arabia's production in the single biggest disruption in the oil market's history, yet investor reaction was largely sanguine after the initial shock.

Citigroup recently pegged geopolitical risk at its highest in 15 years while WTI

prices for 2019 are set for their fourth-lowest average of the decade. Looming over the market is China's easing appetite for commodities to feed its export-led economic model.

Emerging Markets: Alpha Male

What unites Argentina, India, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Philippines and Saudi Arabia? At first blush, very little. It takes India hardly any time to produce the full-year gross domestic product of Ivory Coast. The sky-high inflation rates of Argentina contrast with negative price-growth in Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has never enjoyed the leadership continuity common among peers. Yet global investors have made billions over the past decade casting these markets in a similar vein in a key respect: They are in effect one-man shows.

Think Narendra Modi of India, Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, Vladimir Putin of Russia. These men and others helped set the terms for the asset class in the 2010s.

Despite progress made this decade to beef up fiscal, trade and currency regimes, developing economies remain acutely prone to capital volatility, social unrest, and inflation flare-ups. A year's gains can be wiped out in a week. A stable leader can make all the difference in pushing through reforms and maintaining order, rewarding investors with triple-digit returns along the way. So-called key man dependence is not without huge risks given the endless political games — a threat looming over markets of all stripes in the 2020s. Meanwhile, the US stock indexes rose slightly on Friday, continuing a year-end record rally that has been fueled by optimism over a US-China trade truce and an improving global economy. The benchmark S&P 500 index is about half a percentage point shy of logging its best year since 1997.

Finance panel chief questions 'discriminatory' IMF scrutiny

GEETIKA SRIVASTAVA
New Delhi, 27 December

N K Singh, chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, accused the World Bank as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of "developing rigidities" while encountering new challenges, and assigning higher weighting to developed regions such as the Europe and US. He went on to say that the "rules of the game" were applied in a discriminatory manner between the rich and poor nations.

Singh questioned the way the IMF scrutinises macroeconomic policies of the developing world, which he claimed is done differently than for the richer nations. He stressed on the need for Asia to have a bigger say in decision-making.

Addressing a gathering of The Indian Economic Association in Surat on Friday, he gave an example of Article IV of the IMF, where each member nation must subject themselves to a detailed scrutiny of their overall macroeconomic policies.

This comes days after IMF Chief Economist Gita Gopinath cautioned the Fund may revise India's growth forecast "significant downward".

"How is it that the IMF failed to spot the global financial crisis of 2007-08 when there was such a dramatic meltdown of the US economy, which impaired the financial systems so severely? How did the Fund not spot a crisis of this scale much less prompt the US to take timely corrective action. How is it also that the rule of the game in terms of conditionalities of both for structur-



al loans and for financial accommodation have more stringent conditions for developing world than other countries in Europe like Greece or Spain where these rules are more flexibly applied. Such discriminatory approach cannot inspire long-term confidence, both in terms of their technical competence or in terms of an impartial approach," he said. "A disorderly international framework would not be in anyone's interest," he said. "Over these decades both the World Bank and the IMF have developed many rigidities as they encounter new challenges. For one, in its decision-making process and quota rights, as they are called, notwithstanding recent changes they remain misaligned with the changing realities of the 21st Century."

Net shutdown costing telcos ₹2.4 crore/hr: COAI

REUTERS
New Delhi, 27 December

Mobile operators are losing at least ₹2.45 crore (\$350,000) in revenue every hour they are forced to suspend internet services on government orders to control protests against a new citizenship law, said the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) on Friday.

Internet shutdowns should not be the first course of action, said the COAI, which has Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and Reliance Industries' Jio Infocomm as its members. "We've highlighted the cost of these shutdowns," COAI director general Rajan Mathews told Reuters. "According to our computation at the end of 2019, with the increase in online activities we believe the cost (of internet shutdowns) is close to ₹2.45 crore for an hour of internet shutdown."

The revenue losses will pile on to the woes of the telecom sector, bruised by a price war and saddled with a combined \$13 billion in overdue payments following a Supreme Court ruling in October.

Airtel, Vodafone Idea and Jio did not respond to emails seeking comment.



Countrywide protests have raged for three weeks after Parliament passed legislation which gives minorities from neighbouring countries a path to citizenship but excludes Muslims. On Friday, internet was ordered shut in at least 18 districts in Uttar Pradesh, a telecom industry source told Reuters.

Indians consume an average 9.8 gigabyte of data per month on their smartphones, the highest in the world, according to Swedish telecoms gearmaker Ericsson. The country is the biggest market for Facebook and WhatsApp. Meanwhile, mobile internet services were restored in Kargil district of Ladakh on Friday after remaining suspended for 145 days in the wake of the Centre abrogating provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution, officials said.

Twelve dead as plane crashes in Kazakhstan



Police and rescuers work on the site of a plane crash near Almaty International Airport, outside Almaty, Kazakhstan. Twelve people were killed and dozens injured when a plane with nearly 100 passengers and crew on board crashed soon after take-off in Kazakhstan on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP/PTI

Netanyahu wins party vote in boost ahead of Israeli election

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu easily won a vote to keep the Likud party helm, the party said on Friday, in a boost ahead of what is likely to be a hard-fought general election in March. Netanyahu won 72.5

per cent of votes, against 27.5 per cent for challenger Gideon Saar, who conceded, tweeting that he would now back the incumbent "for the sake of a Likud victory in the (general) election".

REUTERS

Uniqlo founder Yanai resigns as SoftBank board member

SoftBank Group said on Friday Tadashi Yanai, founder and CEO of Uniqlo parent Fast Retailing, would resign as external board member at the end of the month after 18 years to focus on his fashion business. An

ally of SoftBank founder Masayoshi Son, the billionaire is one of only 3 external members of a board filled with SoftBank executives and heads of its portfolio companies. Yanai's successor is not decided.

REUTERS

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28 DECEMBER 2019

Business Standard

WEEKEND



A sadhu rides past a workshop that stores pillars for the Ram temple that is to be built in Ayodhya

THE FOUNDATION IS LAID

The year ahead will see greater consolidation of the Union government's ideal of a Hindu Rashtra, writes Mukul Kesavan

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Indian footprint, measured by the number of state governments that it controls, has been shrinking. Its failure to form a government in Maharashtra and its defeat in Jharkhand has left the political map of India looking considerably less orange than it did in 2017, when the Hindi heartland was a solid bloc of saffron.

But appearances are deceptive: 2019 was not a normal year because the BJP won a resounding parliamentary majority in the general election in May. The pan-Indian dominance of Narendra Modi's BJP at the level of the Union more than made up for the party's state assembly losses both before and after the general election. Messrs Modi & Shah might have lost a string of battles but they decisively won the war.

In the normal course, writing a political prospect for the coming year would focus on scheduled state assembly elections on which the fortunes of the government and its opposition might be said to turn. This is hard to do for 2020 because state assembly elections can't be bellwethers this early in the life of a powerful Union government with the mandate of an absolute majority. These elections can offer pointers to the BJP's popularity in this or that state but, given the prime minister's ability to lift the fortunes of his party in general elections, provincial losses can't be confidently used to make generalisations about the BJP's national standing.

However, the Delhi elections in February and those in Bihar towards the end of the year remain important for two reasons: first, as a guide to the morale of opposition parties and, secondly, as enablers of, or obstacles to, Modi's grand project for his second term, the redefinition of Indian citizenship. Despite the prime minister's disingenuous protestations, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) remains a crucial part of the BJP's bid to privilege Hindus as India's "natural" citizens and, en passant, destabilise Muslim citizenship. The cabinet's sanction of thousands of crores for the compilation of the National Population Register (NPR), designed as the database for the NRC, confirms this. As Prashant Kishor, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's strategist and party colleague, has pointed out, the success of this project depends on the cooperation of state governments. The fewer state

governments the BJP controls, the more likely it becomes that NPR/NRC operations might be thwarted or disrupted by recalcitrant provinces.

The election for Delhi's state assembly is important because, despite being little more than a glorified municipality, Delhi helps make the political weather by virtue of being India's capital. The BJP is still smarting from the paddling it received in 2015, all the more hurtful for happening in the aftermath of Modi's great triumph: his first parliamentary majority. Kejriwal's chutzpah in running against Modi in Varanasi in 2014 gave that state election a personal edge.

Five years later Modi & Shah will be eager to swat this pesky gadfly. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) isn't the transformative new broom it claimed to be in 2015, but it is, in miniature, the centrist, Hindi-speaking challenger that the opposition needs to conjure up at the pan-Indian level, to give Modi a run for his money in 2024. Kejriwal enters this election somewhat diminished, the maverick boss of a metropolis rather than a charismatic national leader. To use an analogy from another capital, he seems more Ken Livingstone than Boris Johnson. As the AAP's prospects in Punjab and Haryana have faded, it has become an irritant rather than a threat to the BJP, but to lose to it again in the national capital will be both infuriating and humiliating, so this will be an intensely contested election. Apart from anything else, it will be a test of the AAP's secular populism based on subsidised utilities and greater spending on public goods like improved government schools and mohalla clinics.

The more significant state assembly election is scheduled late in the year in Bihar. Nitish Kumar has remained chief minister on either side of his short-lived *mahagathbandhan* with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). It is unlikely that he will desert the BJP so early in its term of office at the Centre. His ambivalence about the Citizenship Amendment Act-National Register of Citizens joint project (he voted for the former and opposed the latter) is a much-diluted version of his "principled" objection to Modi in the lead-up to the 2014 election. It's his bid to show Bihar's Muslims a flash of leg because some of the JD(U)'s state assembly seats might turn on how many Muslims vote for him despite his alliance with the BJP. Should the BJP still find him useful enough to run as the face of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Bihar, he's unlikely to sidle up to the RJD if only because without Lalu Prasad Yadav, the RJD is not the force it was. But if Bihar were to

go the way of Jharkhand, the BJP will have ceded virtually all its heartland holdings except Uttar Pradesh. Given the dwarf *mahagathbandhan* assembled by Tejashvi Yadav for the general election, this is unlikely to happen short of a dramatic defection from the dark side by Nitish Kumar.

India's tanking economy is often talked up as the greatest threat to both Modi's image as a manager of *vikas* and his political prospects, but the recent history of the world suggests that economic pain doesn't create electoral openings for progressive parties. On the contrary, it seems to boost the Bolsanaros of the world. Right-wing populists seem to have a Midas-like gift for turning economic distress into political gold by blaming it on deracinated elites and treacherous minorities. Modi's second general election campaign was frankly communal and everything the NDA has done since, from Article 370 to the passing of the CAA, seems to suggest that the Modi government is determined to alchemise economic decline into majoritarian rage.

The brutal violence of the UP government's first response to the anti-CAA protests suggests that the BJP will test drive the NPR/NRC in UP, where it has both a massive majority in the assembly and a chief minister whose instinct for Hindutva extremism and whose appetite for punitive policing allows a prime minister as darkly majoritarian as Modi to appear statesmanlike.

Unlike demonetisation, which Modi owned from the very beginning, he allowed Amit Shah to be the face of the CAA and the NRC. Modi had learnt from his demonetisation experience: he needed distance and deniability from this great experiment in disenfranchising "counterfeit" Muslim citizens in case it backfired on him. This studied distance was why he thought he could affect injured innocence after the protests against the CAA erupted, and declare, against all the evidence, that his government had never approved of (or indeed even considered) an all-India NRC.

This is, of course, untrue: Modi's government never had any intention of withdrawing the CAA-NRC pincer, because it was too great a prize to be abandoned. For a majoritarian party like the BJP, the opportunity to redefine citizenship and then

subject Muslims, especially poor, undocumented Muslims, to the threat of disenfranchised limbo, is like winning a political lottery. The prospect of prolonged turmoil through which non-Muslim (read Hindu) citizens can be persuaded to accept the personal inconvenience of proving their citizenship as the price of a patriotic pan-Indian purge, and through which treacherous aliens are identified, interned and deported, makes CAA-NRC a gamble worth taking. The logic is that, just as the suffering of demonetisation yielded a landslide in UP, the violent churning of an all-India NRC process might deliver pan-Indian Hindu consolidation on an undreamt-of scale.

The licence given to Adityanath to meet anti-CAA protests with massive police violence suggests that Modi will continue to blandly deflect questions about an all-India NRC while using UP both as a shock-and-awe demonstration and as a violent dress rehearsal. Adityanath represents Hindutva's feral "fringe" translated into high office. He has brought his instinct for vigilante mobilisation to his administration. On his watch UP's police has effectively become a uniformed vigilante force: it has fired upon demonstrators with impunity, assaulted dissenters, vandalised homes, mosques and vehicles and in general behaved as if it were wearing khaki half-pants instead of uniform trousers. The chief minister has called for "revenge", has promised the punitive confiscation of property and has allowed the police to storm Aligarh Muslim University in the way a marauding army might reduce a medieval fort.

Now that the Union cabinet has approved thousands of crores for the NPR, it is certain that the work of compiling it will be given the highest priority in UP regardless of the opposition it might meet elsewhere. The NPR is best understood as the database for the NRC. Enrolment in the NPR is no guarantee that a person will be adjudged a citizen in good standing because the NRC's rules allow the names on its rolls to be challenged by members of the general public. There is a vigilantism built into the NPR-NRC process that fits Adityanath's regime like a glove. The data-gathering for the NPR has been merged with the operations of the decennial Census and we can be certain that, come April, it will be implemented in UP with the full force of the law (or what passes for the law in that

state) behind it. No prizes for guessing what the fate of undocumented Muslims will be in Adityanath's UP.

The notion of violently churning the Indian population in a higher cause (a Hindu Rashtra) appeals to the BJP's leadership. Only by subjecting every Indian to the trauma of proving their right to belong can Hindu consolidation be individually experienced as ideology. The CAA, the NPR and the NRC together constitute the BJP's answer to the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India campaigns. This menacing form-filling exercise is the Sangh Parivar's version of a nationalist mass movement. Where anti-colonial nationalists affirmed their Indian birthright by doing time in colonial jails, modern Hindus are being encouraged to pay their tithe to the Hindu nation by stoically suffering the bureaucratic inconvenience of proving their Indianness, the better to reveal the enemy within. By the terms of the CAA, these can only be Muslims. Over the next two years, in the lead-up to the assembly elections of 2022, UP will be both the laboratory and the prototype of Modi's Hindu Rashtra.

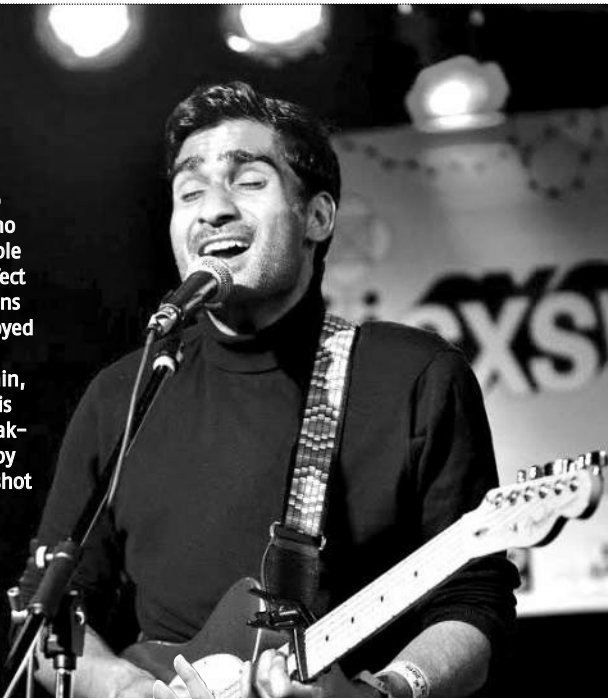
Narendra Modi is not a time server. Despite his narcissism, he serves a cause larger than himself. His life has been dedicated to the holy grail of the Hindu nation and in the CAA-NPR-NRC he has found both the mould and the sieve that will make it possible. Modi sees himself as a man of destiny. By winning a second parliamentary majority he has already staked his claim to being the most consequential prime minister of the republic since Nehru. Now a larger prize beckons. If in his second term in office he can successfully redefine citizenship in the way that Israel has, he will approach the election of 2024 at the head of a putatively Hindu nation. And should he win a third majority, his gift to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925, its centenary year, will be the Hindu Rashtra that it was founded to achieve.

To thwart this ambition his political opponents will have to sustain the pan-Indian resistance provoked by the Citizenship Amendment Act with a passion and purpose conspicuously lacking during Modi's first term. The gallant student protest that sparked this resistance will have to be sustained in 2020 by organised political opposition. The election in Delhi in February should tell us if those who swear allegiance to the First Republic have the stomach for this fight.



Prateek Kuhad

The singer-songwriter from Jaipur managed to capture the heartbreaks of today's youth like no other Indian musician. His poetic lyrics, relatable themes and soft melodies were somehow perfect for everything from work, solo-listening sessions and even house parties. While Kuhad has enjoyed a decent fan following since 2015, his song "Cold/Mess" starring Jim Sarbh and Zoya Hussain, brought him to the attention of the masses. His song about a couple recovering from their break-up made many young people particularly happy also because of the way the music video was shot — real and unapologetic. Kuhad has come to define India's indie music scene, bringing a breath of fresh air to mainstream music.



Jasprit Bumrah

It's a somewhat peculiar but now happily familiar sight. With a short run-up, left fist trained on the batsman and hyperextension of his right elbow, Jasprit Bumrah hypnotises his prey before felling them with a signature whiplash yorker. In 2019, Bumrah had a memorable World Cup, helped India win its first-ever Test series in Australia and fashioned a clean sweep in the West Indies, proving his supremacy across formats. The 26-year-old gave us plenty of occasions to smile and a precious opportunity to boast — of possessing the world's best pace bowler, an exalted position arguably never truly occupied by an Indian cricketer before.



Deepinder Goyal

Businesses are often risk-averse, to the extent that we are used to corporate leaders not wading into social or political issues for fear of losing customers. Deepinder Goyal, the founder of food delivery service Zomato, proved to be an exception that gladdened our hearts. A customer in Jabalpur refused to accept food delivered by a Muslim courier and sought a replacement. Zomato stood by its courier and, in response to the customer's complaint, tweeted that food has no religion but is a religion. Goyal won much appreciation on social media, and Zomato retained its place as one of India's top food aggregators.

Sanna Marin

The 34-year-old became the world's youngest sitting prime minister after replacing the nation's former leader, Antti Rinne. Marin, the current leader of Finland's Social Democratic Party, brought cheer for women all over the world, as someone who not only rose from the position of cashier to become prime minister, but also as the daughter of a lesbian couple. The working mother also normalised taboo subjects such as breastfeeding by posting pictures on social media of her nursing her daughter. She is the third woman to assume office and heads a parliament that is led by women, four of whom are also in their 30s.



Cheer leaders

Some people managed to make us happy in a gloomy year. Ritwik Sharma and Amrita Singh compile a list of the best



Eliud Kipchoge

Ahead of the Tokyo Olympics next year, the powers that be should consider changing the motto to "Citius, Fortius, Eliud". Long distance runner Eliud Kipchoge, hailed as the greatest marathoner in the world, etched his name in history with the first-ever sub-two hour marathon. His feat in Vienna didn't count as a world record because he enjoyed benefits that are not normally available in a competitive run, such as being supported by pacesetters. But in one hour, 59 minutes and 40 seconds of breathtaking skill, the Kenyan showed the world how sheer ability and a little bit of science can help redefine what is humanly possible.



Gourav Vallabh

Call him the professor of public debates. Gourav Vallabh's rise has been swift for a man who joined the Congress in 2018. But as a party spokesperson, he gained prominence this year for his clinical takedown of Bharatiya Janata Party's Sambit Patra at a panel discussion. Vallabh quizzed Patra if he knew how many zeroes a trillion had, as he questioned the government's claim that the Indian economy was set to reach \$5 trillion in 2020. As Patra evaded the question, the audience cheered a politician who, for a change, relies on facts. It's no surprise that Vallabh is a professor of finance with a doctorate degree in credit risk management.

Dutee Chand

India's fastest woman — she currently holds the national record in the women's 100m — came out as homosexual this year, thereby becoming the first sports person in India to publicly reveal her sexuality. Despite hailing from a conservative family, Chand won the hearts of millions as she spoke about her partner, a distant relative from her village, Chaka Gopalpur in Odisha. Her family refused to accept Chand's revelation, but that did not deter the athlete's quest for equality and respect. Swift and incredibly brave.



Hasan Minhaj

The first Indian-American to host a weekly comedy show with the *Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj*, he was named among *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people this year. Hasan Minhaj pulled off a difficult trick — entertaining viewers with sharp political satire on issues that concern us all. While he emerged as an important Muslim comedic voice in the Trump era, his journalistic take on hot topics in India amused and generated as much interest among Indians. Born to migrants from Aligarh, Minhaj talked about the Lok Sabha elections and cricket, and also took up the Citizenship Amendment Act on his show. The organisers of "Howdy Modi" didn't find him funny and denied him entry to the event.

Shawn Mendes & Camila Cabello

Their hit song, "Senorita", attracted the attention of millennials across the world this year. But the icing on the cake for legions of fans was the off-screen couple's admission in public that they were also in a relationship. Since then, Cabello and Mendes have come to represent the epitome of "couple goals", sporting bond-touch bracelets (the kind that light up if a partner touches a bracelet). Mendes has also reportedly been secretly pining for Cabello for a very long time, which makes this latest love story all the more thrilling for adoring fans.



Ilhan Abdullahi Omar

The 36-year-old former refugee became the first Somali-American to serve in the US Congress, and one of only two Muslim women to do so (Congress had to change its rules so that she could wear her hijab on the floor). Despite racial attacks by President Trump, Omar continued to wear her politics with pride, declaring that she didn't feel indebted to the country for accepting her as a refugee but is working to improve conditions for others like her. The articulate politician made many happy when she delivered a measured but devastating takedown of a television host who made the mistake of asking her template "Muslim" questions.

Aamir Aziz

As a wave of agitations gripped India at the year-end in reaction to the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, unknown youths came to the fore instead of usual public faces. And perhaps no one articulated the resistance better than Aamir Aziz. The singer-poet from Patna, who studied at Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia — one of the epicentres of the ongoing protests — had earlier composed songs on lynching victims and "achhe din". In a recent poem that went viral, he infused hope as he sang, "... *zulm se inkaar karna inqilab ki oar barha hua pehla kadam hai, main kadam peeche hatane se inkaar karta hun*" (to oppose oppression is the first step towards revolution, I refuse to step back).



Stella McCartney

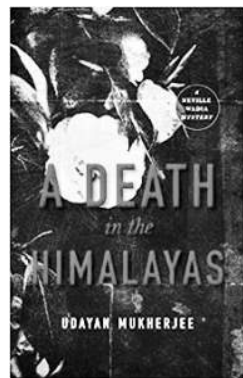
The woman behind the eponymous fashion brand has been environmentally alert since she launched her label in 2001. In the last two decades, McCartney has tackled the complex relationship between fashion and nature more frontally and has been a vocal advocate of sustainability when it wasn't even in vogue. Fashion may matter most to this McCartney, but that has not deterred her from expressing outrage at its appalling environmental footprint. Her label has become a model for brands that are only just opening their eyes to the crying need for sustainable fashion.




**THE MOUNTBATTENS:
THEIR LIVES & LOVES**
Author:
Andrew Lownie

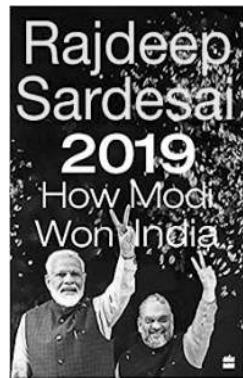
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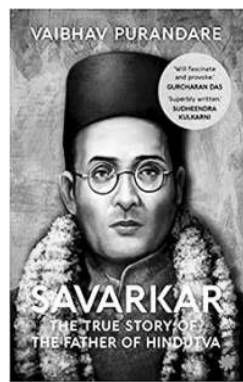
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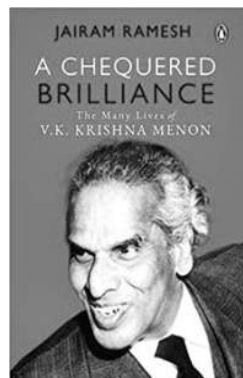
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**A CHEQUERED
BRILLIANCE: THE MANY
LIVES OF V.K. KRISHNA
MENON**
Author:
Jairam Ramesh

Publisher:
Penguin Viking

Pages: 744

Price: ₹999

The eclectic reader's choice

Karan Thapar on the best Indian books that came his way this year

I tend to be rather eclectic in the books I read. So the ones I'm likely to recommend won't just be varied and different but, possibly, surprising and, even, idiosyncratic. In a very real sense my eclecticism is enhanced — and not just made possible — by the fact that I get sent a lot of books to review or to interview their authors. I dip into many of them but read only a few.

One of the books that caught my fancy and which I spent a very happy weekend reading is Udayan Mukherjee's second book. Let me first, however, tell you something about him. Not so long ago he was the pride of CNBC and, arguably, India's foremost business affairs anchor. Today he has metamorphosed into a novelist. The transformation began last year with his first book, a novel called *Dark Circles*. The new one is a detective story set in Kumaon and, not surprisingly, called *A Death in the Himalayas*.

Only someone who loves the hills can bring them to life as Udayan does. It's an odd comment to make about a detective story — which succeeds quite magnificently as one — to say that a lot of its strength lies in its descriptions. Consider this: "She could see the faint silhouette of the Himalayan peaks — crude dark protrusions which the sun would kiss to splendour in under an hour." I intend to plagiarise that haunting phrase one day!

Now, if you are an aficionado of detective fiction you'll know that whenever the murderer is revealed it always seems like magic. By that I mean it takes you completely by surprise. That's as true of Hercule Poirot as it is of Miss Marple and I won't bother with the rest because, frankly, they're of a lesser order.

Well, it's also true of Neville Wadia, Udayan's detective. He's a retired police officer with a very winning manner and a chatty, if not also enchanting, wife. You can't help but like him. However, there's a trick. Though he's been a crack policeman you never think he's going to reveal the murderer and uncover his secret story.

Yet when Neville Wadia does precisely that you suddenly realise there were obvious clues embedded in the tale you've just read which you did not heed or may not have even fully registered. Yet they were there. Now, I suspect that's precisely what Udayan intended. If they had been planted more obviously he would have given the game away. But it's not easy to do it unobtrusively and beguile one into believing the finger is pointing in another direction.

The second book that lingers powerfully in my memory is very different. This is Rajdeep Sardesai's account of how Modi secured a second term. Called *2019: How Modi Won India*, it has a powerful chapter on the Indian media. Rajdeep is at his most pungent when he analyses how the last election was covered.

"I have never quite seen an Indian election where the mainstream media narrative, with rare exceptions, was so blatantly and horribly one-sided." In particular, television news created "a 'mahaul' (ambience) in which Modi was seemingly invincible and the opposition crimplingly inept". However, I would go further. Instead of watchdogs that should growl at the authorities, even if occasionally mistakenly, most of our television news channel behaved like guard dogs, who seek to protect, or pet dogs, who just wish to be liked.

Nothing illustrates this better than the way Mr Modi is interviewed on television. It's done with obvious deference which leaves little opportunity to challenge or, even, cross-question. Instead of focussing on a few well-researched subjects which are pursued with diligence, each question changes the issue. There's no follow-up. Consequently, a multitude of subjects is raised without any meaningful achievement. Equally importantly, the Prime Minister is permitted to answer at exorbitant length, often rambling, and frequently changing the subject and getting away with it.

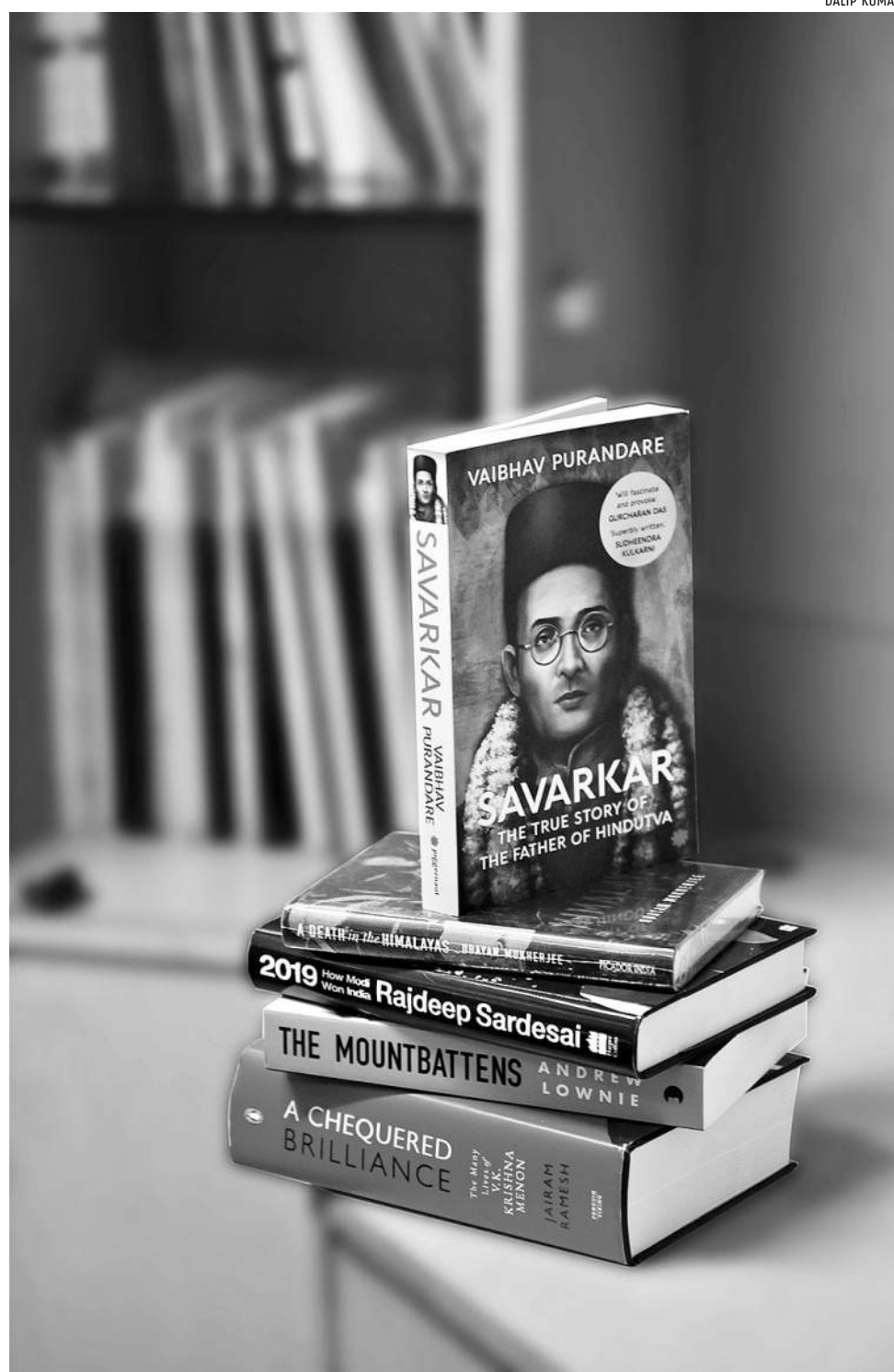
I agree with Rajdeep's conclusion, though I would have put it more forcefully: "The space for a free and independent media that offers democracy its much-needed oxygen is rapidly shrinking." Unfortunately, Rajdeep doesn't ask and, therefore, doesn't answer the question: Why has this happened? Is it fear of retribution? Are editors enamoured of Mr Modi? Or are proprietors to blame?

The other three books I want to draw your attention have one thing in common. They're all biographies and I have to admit I'm rather partial to this genre. I like reading about people I know of but not enough about. It satisfies my curiosity. If, in addition, the book reveals aspects of the person under consideration that I was not aware of, or details that are enriching and intriguing, then it can be quite captivating. I would say that's true of the three I'm going to recommend.

The first is a detailed account of the lives and loves of the Mountbattens. Of both there have been biographies aplenty — both official and intrusive — but none have delved so deeply into their numerous sexual affairs. This one does.

Called *The Mountbattens: Their Lives & Loves*, its author Andrew Lownie seems to present a catalogue of their sexual encounters. There are chapters where you'll feel they did nothing but pop in and out of bed, although never together and rarely their own. For the prurient it's fascinating. For the rest of us it's eye-popping.

If you like this sort of stuff, the book has gripping details of the libel case Lady



Mountbatten lost. I won't spoil it by giving you the details but I will add that she initiated proceedings in the mistaken belief the newspaper concerned could not validate its story of her affair, only to find it could.

The other chapter that hits you like a slap in the face is about Mountbatten's homosexual liaisons with teenagers, probably below the legal age of consent. Lownie spares no details. Even though this is pure sensationalism I have to concede it is irresistible. It completely overshadows the rest of the book which, in many respects, offers fairly solid and substantial accounts of his naval career as well as his term as Chief of Defence Staff.

The only bit I found unsatisfactory was the account of Mountbatten's vice-royalty and governor-generalship. It felt sketchy, incomplete and, occasionally, inaccurate. But I guess that would always be the case for an Indian reader.

Now you might think V K Krishna Menon — whose biography is the second I've chosen to write about — is almost the opposite of the Mountbattens but the truth is they were close friends. Menon wrote frequently to both and they thought highly of him. This is revealed by Jairam Ramesh in his book *A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V.K. Krishna Menon*. But what captured my attention is something else: a story connected to General Thimayya's resignation in 1959, a cause célèbre of the time.

Ramesh's book reveals that, as serving army chief, General Thimayya regularly met then British High Commissioner Malcolm Macdonald (who was also his neighbour) and revealed details of his disagreements with Prime Minister Nehru and Defence Minister Menon. All of this was conveyed to London and Macdonald's reports to the British foreign office are part of his papers at Durham University which Ramesh has accessed.

Macdonald reports Thimayya told him Menon "was perhaps trying deliberately to make himself the master of the armed forces so that he might one day have their support in the achievement of his political ambition to take Mr. Nehru's place either after, or even before, Mr. Nehru's withdrawal from public life".

Frankly, this is astonishing and deeply disturbing. First, you have a serving army chief criticising the Defence Minister to the British High Commissioner and doing so openly, not subtly, and pretty comprehensively. Then, even worse, the army chief clearly suggests the Defence Minister has Bonapartist ambitions which could threaten the Prime Minister's position. In simple language that amounts to a putsch!

It's almost embarrassing to characterise what Thimayya as army chief seems to have done. This is the sort of conversation one normally reads of in spy novels when informants brief their handlers.

From an army chief it's unforgivable. But that's not how Ramesh writes of it.

He euphemistically calls it "highly unusual". He goes no further than stating this "call(s) into question the General's judgement". It was only under pressure in an interview to *The Wire* that Jairam accepted this was, in fact, "inexcusable" and "sackable".

The final biography is Vaibhav Purandare's fascinating work on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. I approached it as someone who only knows of the subject as the "Father of Hindutva" and the first proponent of the two-nation theory. At the time he was not a man I looked up to. But this book sheds lights on aspects of his personality that suggest a more attractive side. I guess even the worst of us has redeeming qualities.

Called *Savarkar: The True Story of the Father of Hindutva*, it reveals he was not a cow worshipper. "If the cow's mother to anyone at all, it's the bullock," Savarkar wrote in his Marathi journal *Kirloskar*. "Not the Hindus. If Hindutva is to sustain itself on cows' legs it will go crashing down at the slightest hint of a crisis."

Purandare writes that Savarkar "abhorred the idea of consuming the animal's urine and, in some cases, cow dung. Such consumption, he believed, may have actually started... as a form of punishment." The cow, no doubt, was useful "but its worship made no sense... it was time to abandon the 'native practice' of 'gau-poojan' because it was nothing short of 'buddhi hatya' or 'murder of the intellect'."

The book tells you that Savarkar was not a vegetarian. He "loved his fish... and disliked all his fellow Brahmins who looked askance at those who relish non-vegetarian food".

If you find this surprising — as I did — Purandare has a lot more to shake up preconceived notions about Savarkar. Though the author of Hindutva he was "hardly a practicing Hindu in the religious sense. He followed no rituals and thought God, if indeed God existed, wasn't really in the habit of responding to prayer".

On one occasion, when informed of a sadhu who boasted of crawling on his stomach from Allahabad to Haridwar, Savarkar was scornful: "He sarcastically asked who had been closer to God, considering almost all religions said that God was in the heavens above — someone who was attempting to build an airplane or fly in it or someone desperate to turn himself into a maggot."

I don't know if historians will praise this book but Savarkar's followers will certainly squirm. That can't be all that bad, can it? And then there are the little nuggets you can toss around a dinner table. For one, Savarkar was close to Lata Mangeshkar, who "was once so moved by his thinking... she voiced her desire to give up singing altogether". For another, the prosecutor who sent him to the Andamans in 1910 was a certain MR Jardine, father of the famous Douglas of Bodyline fame. Finally, for such a "great" man he had a very small neck. It "was only 13.5 — that of a school boy!"

Business Standard's favourites in 2019

**ME: ELTON JOHN
OFFICIAL
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**
Author: Elton John

Publisher: Macmillan

Price: ₹999

Pages: 384 pages

A funny, honest and moving story of the most enduringly successful singer-songwriter of all time.


**MARGARET
THATCHER: THE
AUTHORIZED
BIOGRAPHY –
HERSELF ALONE**
Author: Charles Moore

Publisher: Knopf

Price: ₹899

Pages: 896 pages

The final volume in a three-part biography describes the last period in office of a woman who dominated in an age of male power.

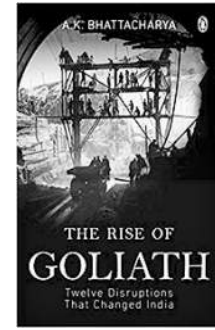

PERMANENT RECORD
Author: Edward Snowden

Publisher: Macmillan

Price: ₹699

Pages: 352 pages

The extraordinary account of how Snowden helped make the system that he eventually exposed, thus becoming the internet's conscience and one of the USA's most wanted men.

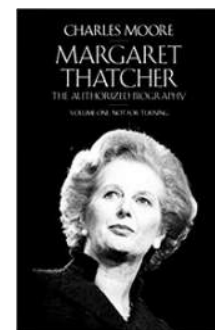

**THE ECONOMISTS'
HOUR: HOW THE
FALSE PROPHETS OF
FREE MARKETS
FRACTURED OUR
SOCIETY**
Author: Binyamin Appelbaum

Publisher: Picador

Price: ₹699

Pages: 448 pages

An accessible and authoritative discourse on the impact of the once-dominant free-market economics.


**THE ABSENT
DIALOGUE:
POLITICIANS,
BUREAUCRATS, AND
THE MILITARY IN
INDIA**
Author: Anit Mukherjee

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Price: ₹1,100

Pages: 336 pages

A volume that discusses civil-military relations in India and how they have hampered military effectiveness.

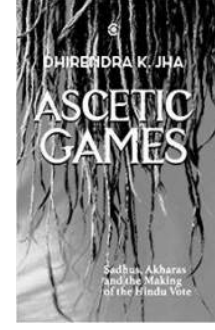

**GOOD ECONOMICS
FOR HARD TIMES:
BETTER ANSWERS TO
OUR BIGGEST
PROBLEMS**
Author: Esther Dufo and Abhijit V Banerjee

Publisher: Juggernaut

Price: ₹699

Pages: 416 pages

The 2019 winners of the Nobel Prize for economics make a persuasive case for intelligent interventions to create a society built on compassion and respect.


**A BEGINNER'S GUIDE
TO JAPAN:
OBSERVATIONS AND
PROVOCATIONS**
Author: Pico Iyer

Publisher: Penguin Viking

Price: ₹499

Pages: 288 pages

A playful and profound glimpse into Japanese culture.

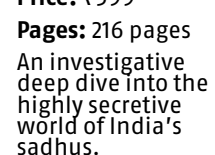

THE RISE OF GOLIATH
Author: A K Bhattacharya

Publisher: Penguin Portfolio

Price: ₹699

Pages: 360 pages

An account of India's history, shaped by disruptions such as the Partition, the Emergency and the economic reforms of 1990s.

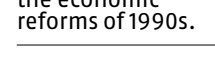

**ASCETIC GAMES:
SADHUS, AKHARAS
AND THE MAKING OF
THE HINDU VOTE**
Author: Dharendra K Jha

Publisher: Context

Price: ₹599

Pages: 216 pages

An investigative deep dive into the highly secretive world of India's sadhus.





ETHER, MUMBAI

AFTER SEVERAL STINTS AS A CHEF IN MICHELIN-STARRED restaurants in France, Belgium and the United States, Prateek Bakhtiani moved to Mumbai last year to set up an atelier dedicated to chocolate. The Cordon Bleu graduate recently launched Ether, a luxury brand which uses single origin chocolate alone, if not single plantation. His Smoke collection features Ecuadorian dark chocolate with oak wood smoke, the Madagascar one sees cherry wood smoke paired and candied orange peel. The same collection also features Tanzanian chocolate with apple wood smoke and cayenne. Ether's Clover Club is dedicated to juniper and jazz with flavours ranging from rose petals to passion fruit while the Nero Lanka collection, with ingredients such as burnt sugar, mangos, moss, toasted black tea and chestnuts, is a homage to the earthy scent of rain on dry soil. There are more blends afoot. Currently available only in Mumbai, Ether will be up for deliveries pan-India in the coming months. Meanwhile, buy them online (priced between ₹1,250 and ₹2,250) at www.etherchocolate.com.



GALLOPS ALFRESCO, MUMBAI

FOR A GOOD THREE DECADES, dining at Gallops has come with the promise of a view of the Mahalaxmi Racecourse in Mumbai. Second-generation restaurateurs Yajush Malik (also the chef) and Mikhail Singh (responsible for the drinks) have now thrown up an entirely new dining out area that has a menu and ambience of its own. The 'Gallops' in its name is for the brand value alone; this is an entirely new space that has come up on the expansive lawns of the older restaurant. Both co-exist peacefully, much like the old-world food that the founders of the original Gallops introduced, and the changes that the new generation of the founding families have brought. There's much to choose from on a menu that boasts of everything from maple and blue cheese popcorn, asparagus bhajiya, cognac braised scallops and bharwan guchi (featuring Kashmiri mushrooms). Watching horses races past, or just ambling along to their stables, is a perk.

THE HOUSE OF CELESTE, GURUGRAM

SUVIR SARAN IS THE CHAIRMAN OF ASIAN CULINARY STUDIES FOR THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, a prestigious academy located in New York. He was also the chef who ran Devi in New York City and is now back home with an all-new casual dining space in Gurugram. Devi was the first Indian restaurant in the US to win a Michelin star. Saran's latest outing prides itself on its short menu (21 items) which includes Indian favourites tweaked for memorable visual aesthetics. Offerings include Masala Pebbles (a modern take on *golgappa*), the Gilafi Apricot mutton seekh kebab and Noshi's Lahori Chilli mince (a version of *haleem* popular in Pakistan).



Eat, drink, love

Nikita Puri lists the newest indulgences in our cities as well as some coming up in the New Year



ARAKU ORIGINALS, ACROSS INDIA

NAMED AFTER THE VALLEY OF ITS ORIGIN IN ANDHRA PRADESH, Araku started out as a responsibly sourced coffee brand that opened its first store in the high streets of Paris in 2017. Now counted among the world's best award-winning coffees, Araku Original's organic coffee beans are grown and harvested by tribal communities living in the valley. The brand has now launched a gift box of all things coffee, including coffee-brewing equipment, and mugs designed by Norwegian designers Anderssen & Voll. Prices for these boxes start at ₹5,500. Available only online right now, at www.arakucoffee.in.



SANJAY RAMACHANDRAN

KAPPA CHAKKA KANDHARI, BENGALURU

NAMED FOR THREE INGREDIENTS BELOVED OF MALAYALIS, tapioca (*kappa*), jackfruit (*chakka*) and bird's eye chilli (*kandhari*), this brand-new restaurant in Koramangala, Bengaluru, aims to be the definitive guide to food from God's Own Country. Founded by Regi Mathew (also the chef), John Paul and Augustine Kurian, it showcases the staggering diversity from a state that owes much to its historically exalted position as a centre for trade and commerce. On the menu is Malabar food from the north, specials from toddy shops, favourites from Syrian Christian homes as well as stars from the princely state of Travancore. Check in for prawns cooked with grated coconut and *kadampuli* and steamed in banana leaves (Prawn Kizhi), or the Ayakura Melodu Vachathu, a tava-grilled tangy sea fish marinated in gooseberry, green peppercorn and bird's eye chilli.



VINAYAK GROVER



BEEYOUNG, YAVIRA & KINGFISHER ULTRA WITBIER, ACROSS INDIA

While Sweden might have perfected beer brewed from recycled sewage water, India's hop game has been strong, too, with a number of homegrown brands gaining market and new breweries opening up. Now after Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Kimaya Himalayan Beverages has launched two barley-based brews which come in 500 ml bottles, unusual for India. (The average here is 330ml or 650ml, but many, including the brand's founder Anubhav Jindal, feel that while the former is too little, the latter may be too much!) The brand opts for Basmati rice to up the smoothness of the brew, both of which feature Argentinean malt laced with noble hops and infused with Himalayan source water. In Delhi BeeYoung costs ₹100, and Yavira ₹130.

United Breweries has also stepped into the craft beer segment with the launch of Kingfisher Ultra Witbier. Its first non-lager brew, this one a wheat beer with orange and coriander flavours. Presently available in Karnataka and Goa, this Witbier will soon travel to Maharashtra, Delhi and Haryana. Priced at ₹110 in Karnataka.



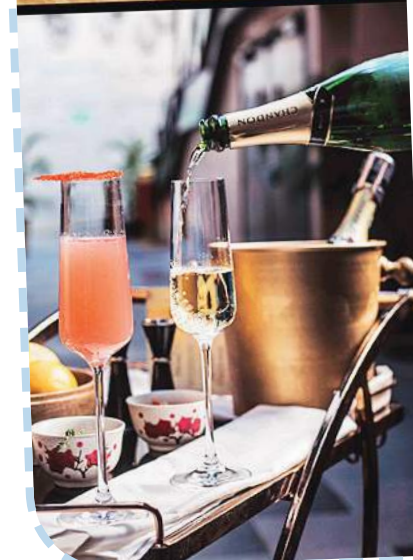
PROST, BENGALURU

IF THE PROMISE OF EIGHT DIFFERENT BREWS ISN'T ENOUGH TO DRAW ONE TO WHITEFIELD, the lure of a good view might just do it. Abandoning its old address in Koramangala, popular brewery Prost has now moved to Whitefield. Here it takes advantage of its new location, at 3,144 feet above sea level, and offers panoramic vistas of the city. To sweeten the deal, their floors are themed *Jungle Book* style with monkey murals and fixtures of the "wild" kind. Your average pub grub, classic finger food and continental make the menu.



KIKO-B AND DADEL, DELHI

KELVIN CHEUNG, A CHEF OF CHINESE AND CANADIAN ANCESTRY WHO PREVIOUSLY HELMED ACTOR SHILPA SHETTY KUNDRA'S BASTIAN IN MUMBAI, is expected to open two new ventures in Delhi in January 2020. While one of these outings, Kiko-B, will be an Asian venture with a focus on heirloom recipes modelled on Hong Kong's Cantonese cuisine, Cheung will also be seen opening a swanky new cocktail bar, Dadel. Both Kiko-B and Dadel will share the same address in Vasant Vihar, at 62 Basant Lok. That's two things we can never have enough of.



THE KIMONO CLUB, DELHI

South Delhi has a new spot for those who still have a life beyond Netflix. The Kimono Club in Delhi's Chanakyapuri is a place where Chinese meets Japanese somewhere between the swings at the entrance, vintage floral wallpapers and a whisky bar that's 40 feet long. The club of many quirks is courtesy restaurateurs Ashish Dev Kapur and Joydeep Singh. The lovely interiors are by Freddy Birdy and Vikramjit Roy is the chef here. Positioned somewhere between *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *Moulin Rouge!*, The Kimono Club has also done its homework on responsible sourcing of food materials (such as seasonal fish). A place for extreme meat gratification, there's caviar, lobster, oyster and duck aplenty. And, importantly, a buzzer on every table to keep the champagne flowing.



YOUMEE, KOLKATA & BENGALURU

IT'S UNCLEAR IF IT'S THE MANGA-THEMED DÉCOR OR THE SUSHI PLATES THAT DRIVES YOUMEE'S POPULARITY, but along with their baos and sashimis this Japanese restaurant is spreading its wings to Kolkata and Bengaluru (there's also one in Delhi). While the latter's second outlet in Bengaluru opens in Bharatiya City Centre by June 2020, Kolkata will see two new YOUMEEs by April in



Forum Mall and Acropolis Mall. Lite Bite Foods, the power source behind YOUMEE, also plans on expanding its other popular restaurant, Punjab Grill, by taking it to Chennai (February 2020), Lucknow (March 2020) and Kolkata (April 2020).

PERCH, MUMBAI

AFTER INTRODUCING DINERS AT DELHI'S KHAN MARKET TO SHRUBS AND FRUIT SYRUPS PRESERVED WITH VINEGAR AND SUGAR IN 2015, Perch has now set its sights on Mumbai. Opening in Bandra by the end of January 2020, this wine and coffee bar (they stock 37 kinds of wine in Delhi) does modern European cuisine featuring such items as Braised Pork Mango and Melon Salad. Mumbaiers will soon make the call on whether their cocktail menu is worth the hype.



GATSBY CLUB, CHENNAI

Less than a fortnight old, Chennai's newest party pod is located at the InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram, a luxury resort perched at the edge of the Bay of Bengal on the East Coast Road. While the menu has both Indian and Asian fare, the brand hopes to build a loyal following for their artisanal cocktails (Frisky Whisky is one, we are told), and drinks that celebrate locally grown ingredients. Here's where the curry leaf martini steps in. They also have an alfresco dining area to make the best of the ocean breeze.





(Clockwise from above) Anubhav Sinha's next, *Thappad*, will feature Taapsee Pannu; Irrfan will return to the screen with *Angrezi Medium*; Amitabh Bachchan and Ayushmann Khurrana in *Gulabo Sitabo*

It was smaller films driven by ideas, rather than star-studded big productions, that defined 2019 for Hindi cinema. Compare the warm reception of a *Badla* or *Article 15* with the absolute rejection of *Kalank* and *Dabangg 3*. All indications point to people wanting more from Hindi filmmakers. A number of films poised for a 2020 release look like they could make the cut.

There are a few stories of women that will be told by women. First among them will be Meghna Gulzar's *Chhapaak*, based on the life of acid attack survivor and activist Laxmi Agarwal. Deepika Padukone plays the lead. Vidya Balan will appear in and as *Shakuntala Devi*. The biopic of the "human computer" is directed by Anu Menon who previously made the romantic comedy *London, Paris, New York*.

Every recent Kangana Ranaut film has been marked by her airing her poorly considered political views just before its release. Somehow, still, her performances on screen remain enjoyable. In *Panga*, directed by Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, Ranaut will play the role of a woman who makes a comeback in the national kabaddi team after marriage.

After his searing drama on

caste violence, a lot will be expected from Anubhav Sinha's next film, *Thappad*. Taapsee Pannu, who earlier worked with the director in 2018's *Mulk*, will play the lead, alongside appearances by Ratna Pathak Shah and Tanvi Azmi among others. Not much is known about the film's premise, although it is reported to examine man-woman relationships.

If you agree that Tabu should be in every film made, then it will upset you to learn that she is only likely to appear in three films in 2020. One of them is *Jawaani*



Jaaneeman, about how the relationship of a father, played by Saif Ali Khan, with his teenage daughter comes of age. Tabu is a principal character in the story, which was shot in

London. Actor Irrfan will return to the screen, after a period of illness, in *Angrezi Medium*, the sequel to his *Hindi Medium* (2017). This one has been directed by Homi Adajania, and also stars Kareena Kapoor.

Shoojit Sircar's *Gulabo Sitabo*, for which the director joined hands with *Piku* teammates Amitabh Bachchan and screenwriter Juhi Chaturvedi, is billed as a quirky family comedy. Sircar's *Vicky Donor* discovery, Ayushmann Khurrana, is in the film too, playing the part of a



tenant of Bachchan's character. Khurrana, nicknamed "Content Khurrana" by fans in recent years for picking the best roles, has another release this year in a spin-off of *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan* titled *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*. Directed by Aanand L Rai, the film intends to tell a story of same-sex love.

A number of sports films are in the works. *Maidaan* has a lovely premise: Indian football's golden period (1952-1962). It will feature Ajay Devgn as Syed Abdul Rahim, a prescient coach — "football prophet", according to one of his players — who led India to the semi-finals of the 1956 summer Olympics. Rakesh

Omprakash Mehra and Farhan Akhtar will reunite for a boxing drama named *Toofan*, six years after teaming up to make the Milkha Singh biopic.

Regular collaborators, director Hansal Mehta and actor Rajkumar Rao, will come together for *Chhalaang*, after such sublime films as *Shahid* (2013) and *Aligarh* (2015). The social comedy will also feature Mohammad Zeeshan Ayub. *Laal Singh Chaddha* will be the Christmas offering at the end of 2020. The very late remake of the 1990s Hollywood favourite *Forrest Gump* is led by Aamir Khan and directed by Advait Chauhan.

Coming soon

What will we see in 2020's films and web series? Ranjita Ganesan sifts through the entertainment pipeline to find titles with the most promise

Predictably enough, Hollywood's year is filled with films of the superhero and fantasy genres. *Birds of Prey* with DC Comics' vigilante Harley Quinn as its protagonist, *Wonder Woman 1984* and *Black Widow* stand out for being directed by women and having female protagonists at their centre. There will also be a new Marvel feature for which actor Kumail Nanjiani has sprouted very many muscles. *The Eternals* is about an immortal alien race tasked with defeating an evil race called Deviants.

With nineties nostalgia being the other order of the day, Disney will continue to recast its old animated hits as live action films. No doubt encouraged by the very successful remakes of *Aladdin* and *The Lion King* in 2019. This year the 1998 animated musical *Mulan*, about a young woman who poses as a man to fight the war in place of her ailing father, will get the same treatment. The trailer indicates the film has its own sombre tone, distinct from the comical musical flavour of the original. *The Little Mermaid* will be rebooted, too,

with computer-generated and live action.

On Valentine's Day, make an anti-romantic choice and watch *Downhill*, an American remake of Ruben Östlund's *Force Majeure*, in which a couple on holiday survive an avalanche but have their relationship thrown into crisis. In an inspired bit of casting, the film features two geniuses of comedic acting, Julia Louis-Dreyfus alongside Will



Ferrell. One can expect the humour to be goofier and less absurdist than the Swedish original.

After Spike Lee's *BlackKkklansman* in 2018, the provocateur filmmaker will make a war drama called *Da 5 Bloods*, in which five African-American veterans journey back into Vietnam. Near the end of 2020, Steven Spielberg's first full-fledged musical, a screen revival of the Broadway hit *West Side Story*, will release. Ansel Elgort (*Baby Driver*, *The Fault in Our Stars*) will star alongside newcomer Rachel Zegler in it. Keep an eye out for an untitled Paul Thomas Anderson project which is also due next year.



(Above) The new year will see a screen revival of the Broadway hit *West Side Story*; Gal Gadot in *Wonder Woman 1984*



(Below) Director Apichatpong Weerasethakul during the filming of *Memoria*; Amy Adams in *Woman in the Window*

British director Joe Wright, of *Atonement* and *Pride and Prejudice* fame, has directed a thriller, *Woman in the Window*, with Hitchcock vibes about it. Amy Adams will play an agoraphobic woman who watches other people's homes and ends up witnessing a crime.

More adaptations are in the offing, including of the Agatha Christie bestseller about crime of passion, *Death on the Nile*. Actor Kenneth Branagh, who made Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* some years ago, will direct

and appear once again as the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, alongside Gal Gadot, Armie Hammer and even Ali Fazal. It will stand out for its scenes from Egypt.

Next year will have Jane Austen's *Emma* brought to life on screen by American indie filmmaker Autumn de Wilde with a mostly British cast of promising young actors. The brilliant comedian Miranda Hart is in it, too, which means laughs are guaranteed.

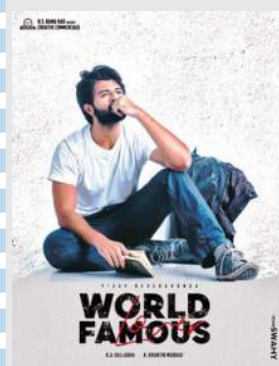
A new Wes Anderson is upon us. *The French Dispatch*, Anderson's usual suspects — Bill

Murray, Tilda Swinton, Willem Dafoe, Adrien Brody — will all make appearances although the film is led by Timothee Chalamet, Saoirse Ronan and Lea Seydoux.

The Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul, a festival favourite, is making his first English language film *Memoria*, backed by Chinese director Jia Zhangke as producer. The very international cast is led by American Tilda Swinton, Spanish actor Daniel Giménez Cacho and Jeanne Balibar of France.



Films from the southern states, which have always been interesting, have recently started finding audiences in other parts of the country. Malayalam cinema, in particular, has received much love.



Is Fahadh Faasil the best actor currently working in Indian cinema? There are very few who can achieve anything close to his post-doctoral understanding of the human face as a vessel for emotion. He will be seen in *Trance* next year. It is also notable for starring Nazriya Nasim and Soubin Shahir, and because Anwar Rasheed is making a film a full seven years after *Ustad Hotel*.



Kangana Ranaut will appear in a trilingual biopic *Thalaivi*, based on the life of the late actor-turned-Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, directed by Tamil filmmaker A L Vijay. It will be screened in Hindi and Telugu too. *Vaanam Kottattum*, a family drama about two generations written and produced by Mani Ratnam's Madras Talkies, is another important release for early 2020.



Telugu star Vijay Deverakonda, known for romancing women in quite intense fashion on screen, will do so again in *World Famous Lover*, slated for Valentine's Day release. Kannada film fans will look forward to the sequel to *KGF: Chapter 1*. Sanjay Dutt is set to step in as antagonist to Rocky played by Yash in *KGF: Chapter 2*.

In West Bengal, a spin-off from the 2011 hit *Baishhe Srabon*, which is remembered for bringing back thrillers as a genre in Bengali cinema, is expected to release. *Dwitiyo Purush* will retain several of the previous cast members including Parambrata Chatterjee and Raima Sen.

Back in 2008, when the comedy *De Dhakka* ran to packed houses, its title offered an easy pun. The film had "given a push" to Marathi cinema, it was said. The creators of that *Little Miss Sunshine*

remake will return a dozen years later with *De Dhakka 2*. The same cast, Makarand Anaspure and Shivaji Satam among others, will be seen travelling about London in the sequel. Another, albeit more serious, Marathi film that is poised for an early 2020 release is *Dhuvrala*. The political drama set in rural Maharashtra stars Sonalee Kulkarni of *Natrang* fame and Siddharth Jadhav, who is otherwise known for his comedy.

Some of the best minds in cinema will continue to take their work to web platforms. Indian big screen directors moving to the web platform? Raj and DK with *The Family Man*, Deepa Mehta with *Leila* and *Made in Heaven*. Anurag Kashyap, Zoya



Akhtar, Dibakar Banerjee and Karan Johar will come together again for *Ghost Stories*, a follow-up to their *Lust Stories* that Netflix released in 2018.

True crime's popularity as a series genre is only growing. *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* will debut on Netflix in January, and takes its inspiration from a real case of a phishing scam that operated out of a Jharkhand village. It is directed by Soumendro Padhi who previously made *Budhia Singh: Born to Run*.

No one makes social justice quite as riveting as Jordan Peele (*Get Out*, *Us*). His *Hunters* is doubly exciting because it stars Al Pacino, whose character leads a team in 1970s America which literally hunts Nazis, and he says things like, "This is not murder, this is *mitzvah*." It is being developed for Amazon Prime.

In more social justice television, there is *Mrs America*, which will tell the story of the feminists who fought for the Equal Rights Amendment. Cate Blanchett will play the antagonist Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative who led the campaign to defeat the amendment. The Hulu show will likely stream in India too.



(Top) Al Pacino in the Amazon Prime Original *Hunters*; *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega*, which will debut on Netflix in January



PHOTOS: REUTERS

ATHLETE OF THE DECADE

Dhruv Munjal on why Virat Kohli is an object lesson in supreme sporting dominance

Over recent weeks, I've been repeatedly going back to one particular Virat Kohli shot. He produces so many, each marked by such startling precision, that it's almost impossible to single one out. Yet this particular one keeps coming back to me. It's a reflection of a very rare form of practised nonchalance — a sterling illustration of consummate skill, singular audacity and unflinching belief. It's a stroke of pure genius.

It's against Chris Woakes from Pune in 2017. The Englishman pitches it short, slightly back of a length. Kohli, as if he's spent weeks preparing for this very ball, instantly stands tall on his toes to meet it, almost like Kate Winslet from that jaw-dropping scene in *Titanic*. Staying on the front foot, he then swivels ever so gently before miraculously sending the ball soaring over mid-wicket. It's not really a pull, but a punch. It's so outrageous it could have been developed in a lab.

The follow-up frame has him staring at the bowler, smug smile wide across his face, arrogance dripping — very much the expression of a man who knows he's roaming a sporting space very few before him have.

And what a space it is. Kohli finishes the decade with 20,960 international runs — 5,775 more than anybody else — and 69 hundreds — 22 more than anybody else. He has 98 half-centuries and 56 MoM awards to his name — both unmatched — and is the top-ranked batsman in both Tests and ODIs. This is a player operating to a very different set of physical rules, performing at an extraordinarily high all-format level unseen in the history of cricket.

The decade saw India win a World Cup, Sachin Tendulkar calling it quits, Rohit Sharma pulling out double-hundreds from his back pocket, and the emergence of Mahendra Singh Dhoni as the team's commander-in-chief. Yet all this seems powerless in front of the tour de force that is Kohli, who continues to maintain astonishingly high standards despite all the pressures that come with his job. He has won India matches both easy and hard, all with a breathless energy that is now ingrained in the very personality of the team.

Amid all this fanfare, it is easy to forget that Kohli's was once a slow coming of age. He



Kohli ended the previous decade with a hundred against Sri Lanka in Kolkata. He ended this one with another match-defining innings, against the West Indies

ended the previous decade with a hundred against Sri Lanka in Kolkata, but physically he resembled an overgrown high-school kid whose breakfast staples seemingly included no more than a couple of sugary nutrition bars and a bag of crisps. He ended this one with another match-defining innings, against the West Indies, but this time as role model to an entire generation, an athlete capable of transcending sport through sheer force of will.

Will, because nothing can quite eclipse Kohli's desire for success, an obsessive quest for constant perfection. One of the trademark traits of elite athletes is how they can make some of their illustrious equals look painfully prosaic. Kohli has almost made a habit of that. England 2018 was supposed to be his most decisive test. He delivered, emphatically. Australia's quicks were believed to have worked him out. He delivered, again. Captaincy was supposed to affect his batting. He defied that, too. This is a man who can move mountains by just glaring at them.

Watching him is always such an exhibition, an exhilarating display of batsmanship where the last ball is played with the same earnestness as the first, each stroke possessing a distinct beauty. The inside-out cover drive to the spinner is like a great liquid whip, akin to a Roger Federer forehand laced with heavy topspin. The on-drive is less brutal, constructed with a touch so delicate that it almost melts away the moment it leaves the bat.

Cricket is, of course, more mechanical and less spontaneous than football, but if you were ever to create a hybrid of Lionel Messi's raw, mercurial talent and Cristiano Ronaldo's insane work ethic, then you'd inevitably end up with Virat Kohli, a specimen bordering on the otherworldly.

Proof of that resides in the fact that in spite of his rich, free-flowing talents, Kohli can bend a game whichever way he wants.

Versatility in any sport is a hallmark of rare greatness, but the Indian captain seems to be able to elevate that quality to unfathomable heights. How he can successfully apply his skill-set to vastly different situations is not only exceptional, but also remarkably self-restraining in an age where the art of batting has been sullied by overly belligerent instincts. In an era of one-dimensional specialists, Kohli is a specialist across formats, a cricketing polymath of sorts who insists on playing a different sport to his peers.

That is perhaps why the debate is no longer centred on his standing among the modern greats. This is no longer a contest between Kohli, Steve Smith, Kane Williamson and Joe Root. Kohli has long surpassed all of them — the discussion has now moved on to his place among the game's all-time greats. Yes, Smith might better him as a Test batsman every now and then, but Kohli's stratospheric brilliance has entered an orbit where all comparisons sound hollow, all references futile. It's almost like he can't leap any higher.

Yet, he can. Nothing in the last year has suggested that he might slow down. In fact, in recent times you can't think of a period when he's suffered from a loss of form. Batsmen

often go through purple patches; Kohli has taken those patches and designed an entire purple landscape. In ODIs, he's out on his own. He may not get to Tendulkar in terms of total runs scored (18,426), but his hero's haul of hundreds (49) looks destined to be smashed — possibly in the next year itself. In the longer format, he no longer has final frontiers to conquer, except to keep churning out big knocks in tough conditions, keeping safe his reputation of a batsman who has vanquished every bowling attack in every land on earth. We may not realise this yet, but we are in the midst of true sporting royalty, the once-in-a-hundred-years variety. The kind that — in spite of cricket's limited global appeal — we thought was only reserved for the Messis, the Ronaldos and the Federers. For those who still don't get it, go back and watch that shot off Woakes.

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CHESS #1382

By DEVANGSHU DATTA

There's lots of title-related action coming up in the new year. The 2020 women's title match starts in Shanghai on January 5 and then moves to Vladivostok. Can Ju Wenjun stave off the challenge from a rapidly improving Alexandra Goryachkina?

The Candidates starts in Yekaterinberg on March 15. The field is Kiril Alekseenko, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Alexander Grischuk, Anish Giri, Teimour Radjabov, Ding Liren and Wang Hao, to join Fabiano Caruana. Alekseenko gets the wild card while Nepomniachtchi clinched qualification, beating Wei Yi to win the Jerusalem Grand Prix.

Before all that, the King Salman World Rapid and Blitz Championships kicks off in Moscow this weekend. Eight of the Top Ten, and another 150-odd active GMs, including the officially retired Vladimir Kramnik (Seeded no 16) will take a crack. In Elo terms, the Blitz no1 is Hikaru Nakamura and the Rapid no #1 is Maxime Vachier Lagrave. But Magnus Carlsen is no 2 in both formats (and reigning world blitz champion). He would be the favourite for a "triple crown" performance but anything can happen in short controls.

A large number of Indian GMs will play both events but Viswanathan Anand is missing out. One of the best performers in



the 2018 Blitz in St Petersburg was Nihal Sarin, who came 11th as a 14-year-old. A year later, the 15-year-old is a much stronger player and it will be interesting to see if he can repeat or improve. He was among the best performers at the recently concluded Classical Sunway Stiges where he tied for 4th-12th with 7.5/10 behind Anton Korobov (8.5) Vasif Durarbayli and Rasmus Svane (both 8).

Incidentally the brilliant Alireza Firouzja will play the King Salman events under the Fide flag rather than that of his native Iran. There is speculation he's relocating to France. This would also free him from the obligation of giving a walkover, or receiving punishment from his federation, if he is paired to play an Israeli. There have been a few discussions about whether the Russians will also have to play under the Fide flag, given a blanket sanction on Russian participation in sporting events!

The Diagram, Black to Play (White: Wang Hao Vs Black: David Howell, Fide Swiss Isle of Man 2019) is a key moment in the last round game that ensured Wang Hao's qualification. Black played 18—Bd5?! 19. Rd1 Bxb7 20. Rxd8 Rxd8 21. f4 Bxb2 22. Qa7

After an unnecessary sacrifice (or blunder), black can still draw with 22.—Re8 23. Qxb6 Bg7 with an unbreakable fortress. He played 22—Rd7? 23. Qxb6 Ba1 24. Qb5 Rd1+ 25. Kf2 Bh1 26. Qe8+ Kg7 27. Bc5! With a winning attack after 27.—h5 28. Bf8+ Kf6 29. Qe7+ Kf5 30. Qxf7+ (1-0, 37 moves).

Devangshu Datta is an internationally rated chess and correspondence chess player

BS SUDOKU #2933

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| | | 3 | 8 | 2 | 6 | | | 5 |
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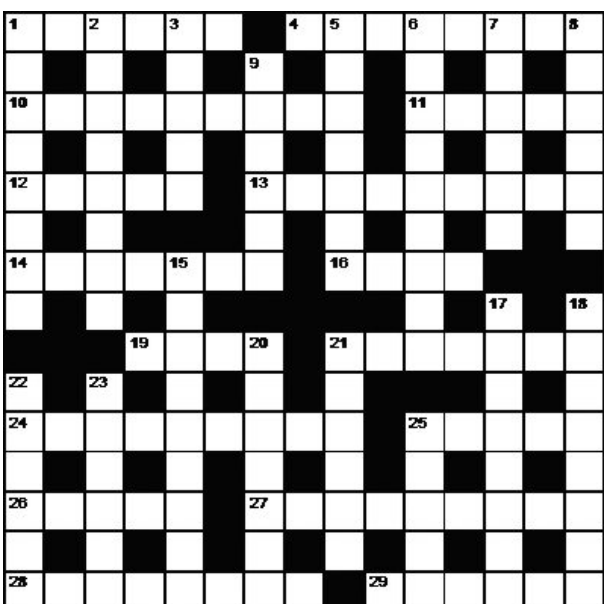
Medium: ★★★
Solution on Monday

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 # 2932

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 2 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 7 |
| 3 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 2 |
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| 9 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 5 |
| 7 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| 2 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 8 |
| 6 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 3 |
| 5 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 2 | 6 |



THE BS CROSSWORD #3297

ACROSS:

- Money if sent back to Supreme Court man (6)
- Kindly feeling not hard to place (4,4)
- Via this it will keep you on the straight and narrow (5,4)
- It's a mistake to be led astray over gold (5)
- Stay and flirt (5)
- Clerk, Fido had fun and games with? (9)
- Fabulous creature, but without standing (7)
- Not a makeshift defence organisation (4)
- Many old boys form unruly gangs (4)
- Cartoon character coming across

nothing that may be worn outside (7)

- Outlaw — say, one cooking food (5,4)
- Southern Cross person as detailed from the French also (5)
- Fit out in a fit of pique (5)
- Politician carrying little weight in the theatre (9)
- They may be mere lads to you but they're precious to me (8)
- Was responsible for accountant being exploited (6)

DOWN:

- Gas that's inspired a representative (8)
- They have taste for bits of embroidery (8)

3 To exasperate is negative in any case (5)

- That dot, now, has been there for long (3,4)
- Greatest spinner at the circus? (3,3,3)
- New peer seen around the United Kingdom in a wig (6)
- The abuse of one caught in traffic (6)
- Didn't act like a breadwinner! (6)
- Not so genuine part of Old Testament? (9)
- Gives counter-indications (8)
- Its tread may be grooved (8)
- Lacking animation having eaten such a lot (7)
- Grieve, perhaps but employ (4,2)

22 Worn out iron returned ... fair? (6)

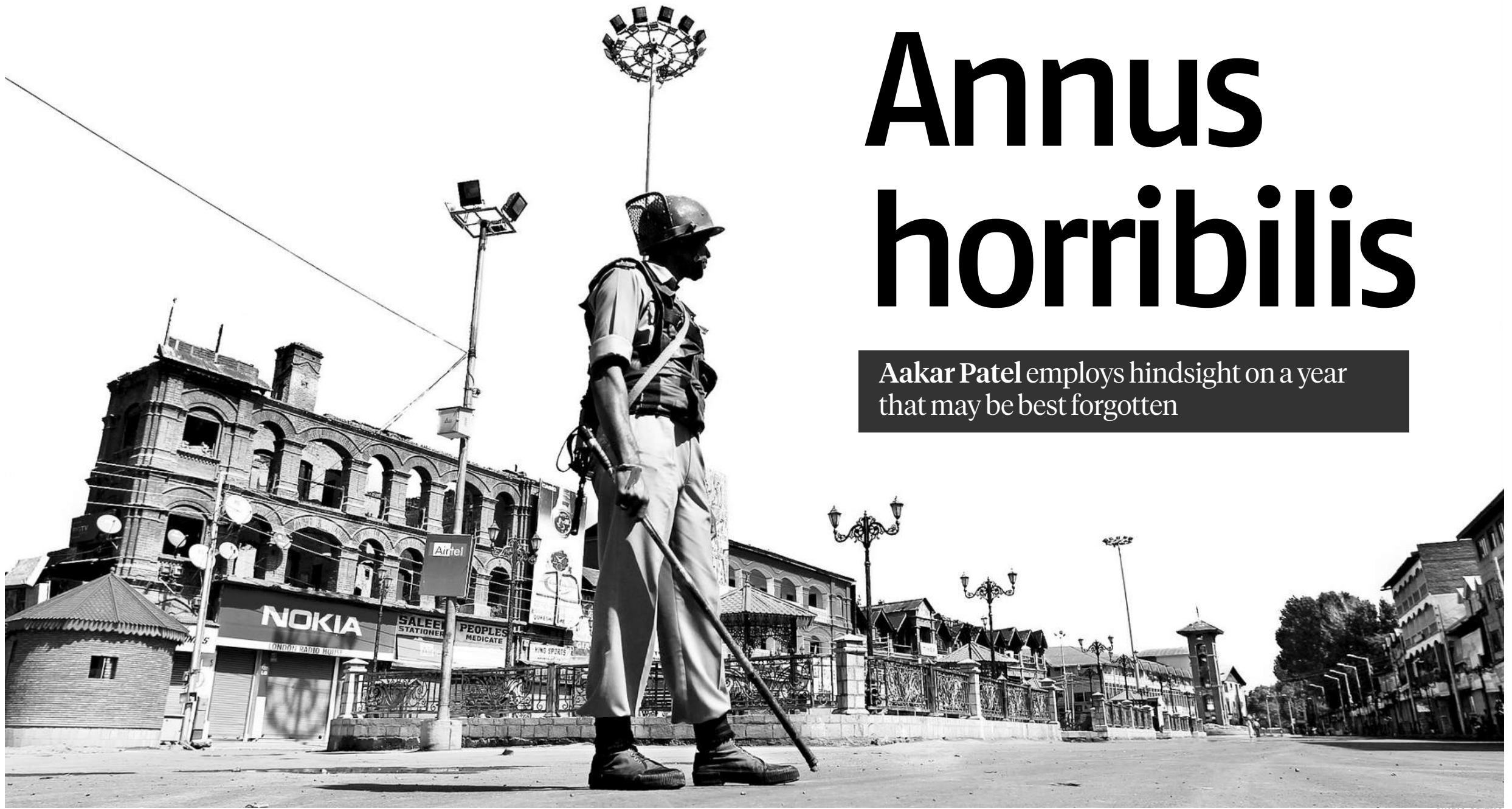
- Weaken the spirit? (6)
- Everyone gathers round a football team (5)

SOLUTION #3296



Annus horribilis

Aakar Patel employs hindsight on a year that may be best forgotten



PHOTOS: REUTERS

This year began with the realisation that India would continue to be directed by the current ideology for a long time. It is ending with the revelation that the group being victimised by this ideology will not submit without a fight. The rest of the happenings in the year seem almost incidental. But let's have a look at them anyway.

Straw polls around January showed that the National Democratic Alliance was far ahead of the almost dysfunctional Opposition and that the result of the coming election was going to be a done deal. Any doubt that remained was extinguished by the bizarre sequence of events around Balakot and Pakistan in February, in what passes for national security in India. There was a lot of bombast but it is unclear who got the better of the exchange, and certainly only one side could demonstrate that it had shot down an enemy aircraft and captured its pilot. However, the skirmish was portrayed in India as the greatest of military triumphs and the doing of a strong leader. Any challenging of this, or indeed even any probing of what exactly had transpired in this sequence, was considered treason.

Anyway, the momentum carried on to April, when we entered the longest election

season one can remember, a full six weeks from start to finish. This produced the expected result and the nation settled in for the second innings.

This was along predictable lines. In the first half of this year at least 20 people were harmed in cow-related lynching attacks. If you missed this then you are not to blame. The thing about such news is that once it becomes commonplace it gets demoted in the media and leaves the front pages. This is true of all news stories, but some of the silencing was also deliberate.

There was pressure on media groups to shut down their hate trackers. The last one capitulated around mid-year and it appears that, as of now, none exists. To repeat: Nobody is now recording data on lynching and related violence. The government does not recognise hate crimes as a category and so we will have no official data on this either. But they continue, of course, primarily because they are triggered by an externally generated sentiment against particular groups and, when that inflaming of passions is relentless, the violence will continue and spread.

Because of such things and others India continued to be clubbed with nations like Turkey and Russia. Meaning those nations

which were theoretically democracies but had a powerful leader who used a narrow nationalism to suppress internal dissent. In this lot, sadly, the United States also belongs, a country towards which many have looked in the past for leading the way on individual freedoms. This seems to have been paused or reversed under the current administration, which India's prime minister endorsed at a rally in Houston, the Gujarati — and specifically Patel — heartland of the US.

Shortly thereafter, the current American president got himself impeached, becoming the third in his nation's history (America has had a president impeached in each of the last three centuries). Of course, the Senate, which his party controls will bail him out, but what will be of more interest is the election to come at the end of 2020 when he will make a bid for another four years.

India has linked itself both ideologically and emotionally at the leadership level to the current US administration, so it will be interesting to see what happens if a Democrat wins the election. Already we can see that India is not comfortable with the current Democratic Party in the US, which is more socialist and more rights-minded than before.

In August, India further humiliated and disempowered Kashmiris through a clandestine action on Article 370. Kashmir's leaders, who for decades have been forced to profess loyalty to India, were locked up and remain locked up. The Supreme Court, once again, played the role that we have come to expect of it in such matters.

At a Congressional hearing in October, India was taken to the cleaners as its doings in Kashmir were revealed. In a follow-up to this, the Indian foreign minister ran away from a scheduled meeting with US Congressmen because one of their team, a vocal woman of Indian origin, had been part of the group that had criticised India. It will be interesting to see how the storied Indian foreign service, once a great institution but today merely a set of toadies, twists and turns its way out of trouble if the Democrats win.

It is said that in America, it is the economic growth and jobs delivered by a president that ultimately determine whether or not he will be re-elected. If this is the case then perhaps India, meaning the Indian government, will be fortunate and Trump will return. It says something about this year that the economy is but a footnote even though it produced news that would have in other times become headlines. The gross domestic product growth rate in India began a countdown-like implosion from the last quarter of 2017-18: It has gone from eight, seven, six and five to now four. The jobs situation is the worst it has been in five decades. But for some magical reason this does not seem to be of concern, and certainly is not the primary issue in Indian politics today because we have been kept busy on other fronts.

Rounding off the year, in November came the Babri Masjid verdict. My guess is that it will not stand the test of time, and the Supreme Court will be embarrassed of it, just as it was embarrassed by its habeas corpus judgment validating the violations that came in the Emergency. It may interest readers to know that the son of the man who presided over that first judgment is believed to have written the second one. Justice Chandrachud Senior wrote ADM Jabalpur and Justice Chandrachud Junior probably wrote Babri.

In 2017, Justice Chandrachud Jr sat on a bench that decades later overturned his



(Clockwise from top) A policeman on duty in locked-down Srinagar; supporters of the BJP celebrate after the results of the Lok Sabha elections; students offer roses to Delhi Police personnel during an anti-CAA protest in New Delhi; a statue of Ram towers over Ayodhya city; Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US President Donald Trump at the 'Howdy Modi' event in Houston

father's judgment. "It is difficult, to be honest, to dissent with somebody who is much wiser, who is so knowledgeable, so profound," Chandrachud Jr was reported as saying, when asked about how he felt overruling a verdict to which his father was party to.

"The day I dictated that part of my privacy judgment, when I held that the habeas corpus judgment in ADM Jabalpur was wrong, it was 12 noon. I had about seven or eight hours of dictation to go. I told my secretary, 'We'll close for the day'. I had this feeling in my head that is hard to describe. I had publicly stated that my parent was wrong. But even if I had to say that again, I would," Chandrachud said, adding that in hindsight, he reckons his father would have concurred with his verdict.

"I think my father would agree with the ruling. I have always had this feeling that through his life, he believed he was wrong in the ADM Jabalpur case. I think he would've done it differently (had the circumstances been different)," Chandrachud said. Very good. I hope we do not have to await the next Justice Chandrachud to come and overturn the wrong judgment of this man, who is also wise and knowledgeable and profound. But by then the temple should already be up and it will then become irrelevant whether or not this judgment on Babri was wrong and any hindsight will be useless.

To return to where we began, the last few days have been filled with resistance from Muslims. They have been the leaders and their community has been at the vanguard of the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). They know that they are the target of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and they face a long, long night of harassment and the threat of permanent detention. This is not speculation, and it is certainly not paranoia — this is what has already happened in Assam. A report by a team sent by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to Assam's detention centres (the NHRC predictably refused to publish it so the team published it on their own) will make this crystal clear.

The thing about the NRC and CAA issue is that it is only among the Hindus that there is a lack of knowledge and information and interest about what they are and what they are meant to do. The Muslims, being the target of the legislations, are fully informed about the government's intent and that is why they are on the streets. Their brave and courageous civil action, led by the students at the Jamia Millia Islamia university, and then by millions in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bengaluru and elsewhere, have been the best and most redeeming part of this thoroughly wretched year.

THE ECONOMY IS BUT A FOOTNOTE EVEN THOUGH IT PRODUCED NEWS THAT WOULD HAVE IN OTHER TIMES BECOME HEADLINES





iRobot intelligent mopping robot

Imagine two robots that can talk to each other and divvy up the household chores. It's like Rosie the Robot Maid (x2) from *The Jetsons* but without the face and the apron. Founded by roboticists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, iRobot is an American company which has been fairly successful at cutting man hours with their vacuum cleaner robot, Roomba. And in 2020, Roomba will get the assistance of its floor-mopping cousin from the Braava series. The company's imprint technology will allow the two robots to work in sync and, to make the experience even more seamless, the iRobot app is also expected to get Amazon Alexa support. Unlike, *I, Robot*, the film, looks like man and machine will finally be able to talk their issues through.

Oppo under-screen camera

Water drop or punch hole, the front camera is always an eyesore on a pretty screen. So, the nerds at Oppo put their heads together to invent a piece of tech genius that will hide the camera *under* the screen. Meaning a full, obstruction-free screen with the camera underneath. The new sneaky stuff unveiled at the Mobile World Congress earlier this year is coming from the same folks who first came out with an in-display fingerprint and a pop-up selfie camera in a smartphone. Talk about a bright future. It's full of colourful screens.



LG Ultrafine Ergo Display

Tied to a desk for long hours? LG wants to help relieve your neck pain. Its UltraFine Ergo Display monitor will come attached to an ergonomically advanced, arm-type adjustable stand, which can face up or down, and extend inward and outward to suit your posture. Oh wait, it can also swivel to face the opposite direction so that your mates can peep at your screen without being sneaky about it. The LG Ergo also replaces the conventional monitor stand-base with a desk clamp to free up more space and comes prepared with a USB-C "One Cable" solution for 4K imaging, fast data transfer and power. LG's 2020 Ultra series also includes the UltraGear and the UltraWide monitors made with gaming enthusiasts and content producers in mind, respectively.

Motorola Razzr

The Motorola Razzr will be the crown prince of nostalgia in 2020. It's razor-thin, bendable and on the flip side of speculation. Approaching the end of a decade, its India launch is already in sight. The iconic phone was first launched in 2004 and its chic new avatar unveiled this November packs a foldable screen that does not become a big, bulky tablet when opened. That's a key differentiator that sets its maker, Lenovo, apart from Samsung's and Huawei's visions for foldable screens. Rejoice! Pocket-size phones are making a comeback.



OnePlus 'Concept One' smartphone

The speculative excitement around the OnePlus "Concept One" has assumed many forms. The phone will bend like the Samsung Galaxy Fold or it will take the clean, port-less and button-less silhouette of the Vivo Apex (pictured) and the Meizu Zero. Truth to tell, one does not have the least hint about it (the Chinese manufacturer likes it this way), but it's expected to be the smartphone showstopper at the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. The countdown to January 7 has begun.



THE NEAR FUTURE

Khalid Anzar and Veer Arjun Singh on the most exciting tech products to look out for in 2020

Cyberpunk 2077

Marvel hasn't been able to woo him. But Keanu Reeves (more recently, the aloof, dog-loving assassin, John Wick) will indulge in mind-numbing violence yet again for his nerdy fans who just can't get enough of the gore. He will be roaming the streets of Night City, a graphic-generated megalopolis obsessed with power, glamour and body modifications, in a gaming title *Cyberpunk 2077*, as Johnny Silverhand. The trailer is out, and soon little children will be running around with gun-wielding action figures of Silverhand and his mercenary friend, V, before the game arrives in April next year. "Adult-rated" is only adding to the excitement.



Microsoft Xbox Series X

The Sony PlayStation nemesis from Microsoft is set to get a complete makeover next year both in terms of design and performance. But you might just have to exercise some patience. The Xbox Series X gaming console is expected to launch in the last quarter of 2020 along with its exclusive set of gaming titles. Microsoft plans to overshadow the conventional Blu-ray-like form factor with a towering new design, which does look more like an air purifier than a gaming console. Although the exact hardware specifications have been kept under wraps, the company promises that the graphic performance will be twice as good as that of the Xbox One X.



SCIENCE

Constant change

Devangshu Datta looks at the inventions, discoveries and events of 2019 that have taught us a little more about the universe

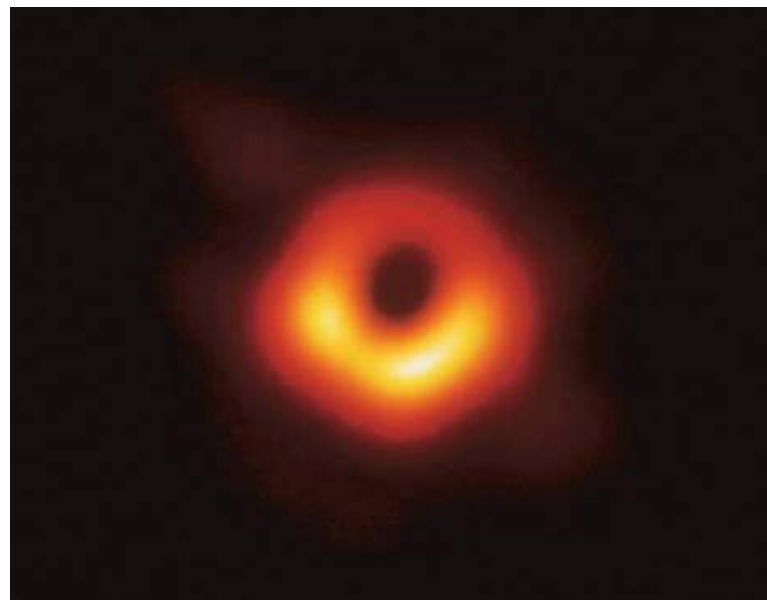
Three images defined science trends in 2019 and one of those was about the acceptance (or rejection) of science, but not science itself. The first, most awe-inspiring, image was that of a black hole, generated by the Event Horizon Telescope, with data stitched together by a team of 200 people, who used images from eight observatories on four continents. The collective resolution was so high that somebody sitting in Paris could read a newspaper in New York. Seeing is believing.

The second image: healthcare workers administering the first effective vaccine against the deadly Ebola virus. The civil war-ravaged Democratic Republic of the Congo has suffered over 2,200 deaths in an epidemic. But the vaccine, Ervebo, from Merck, has proved 90 per cent effective. It was backed up by another breakthrough. A new "cocktail" drug based on antibodies cultured from Ebola survivors that works on the infected. Thus, there is now a preventive vaccine, and a cure.

The third image was that of a tiny teenager standing up at the United

Nations General Assembly and shaming world leaders for their lack of enthusiasm in combating climate change. Greta Thunberg's activism helped spark huge environmental protests led by youngsters. Global warming continues — but this is not, and has never been, a failure of

science. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been screaming itself hoarse for decades and its models have accurately predicted warming. However, lobbies and vested interests have slowed down (and blocked) efforts to combat this.



The image of a black hole generated by the Event Horizon Telescope

Thunberg and her generation bring a new energy, and they have already been instrumental in the passage of new zero-emission laws.

New experiments in Israel suggest that common e-coli bacteria (the villain in many cases of upset stomach) can be redesigned to remove atmospheric carbon dioxide. Even assuming nations step up, there will still be a horrifying number of extinctions, wild weather and changing coastlines, et cetera, because we've left it till so late. Environmental scientists also need to alert policymakers to another looming threat found recently. Researchers in Boston University found microplastics in seafood chains in Belize. Subsequently, researchers discovered that micro-plastics contaminate all seafood chains.

There were other successes and failures and incremental advances across many disciplines. A new method of editing genes, termed Prime Editing, improves on the earlier methods of using CRISPR. Prime editing makes more precise changes to DNA and, in theory, this could be used to correct, or cancel, up to 85 per cent of disease-causing mutations. Sangamo Therapeutics, a California-based company, did the first ever human gene editing therapy to permanently alter DNA in a patient suffering from a genetic condition called Hunter Syndrome. Gene-editing could also help make

plants and animals more resistant to diseases and better adapted to climate change. In another experiment, scientists reported that some crops may now be engineered with genetic shortcuts that boost growth by up to 40 per cent.

In space exploration, the Chinese soft-landed on the dark side of the moon with their Chang'e 4 craft. A private group of investors from Israel financed the Beresheet spacecraft, which tried to soft-land on the moon and failed. Beresheet carried a cargo of tardigrades (or water-bears), incredibly hardy little creatures which could possibly have survived the crash. ISRO's Chandrayaan II also failed to soft-land the Vikram Lander but the orbiter is working fine.

In the realms of quantum computing technology or applied science, Google made a controversial claim that its Sycamore 54 Qubit computer had achieved "quantum supremacy" by solving a problem that the fastest conventional computer (IBM's Summit) could not handle within 10,000 years. This problem can be solved conventionally in about 60 hours according to IBM. But Google does have "quantum advantage" because Sycamore takes 200 seconds (a bunch of computer scientists prefer not to use "supremacy" due to racist overtones). Meanwhile, Austrian and Chinese scientists reported the

first teleportation of 3D quantum states, or qutrits, and Intel released its first quantum control chip, "Horse Ridge", for control of multiple quantum bits.

After Alphazero took on chess and Go, there was another gaming breakthrough. Carnegie Mellon University's AI program beat professionals in six-player, no-limit Texas Hold'em Poker. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University also demonstrated the first non-invasive, mind-controlled robotic arm, with a cap that interprets brainwaves. Researchers at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute showed that it was possible to 3D-print living skin, complete with blood vessels, for grafts.

Oh yes! The basis for our system of units also changed in 2019 as kilogram, ampere, et cetera, were redefined in terms of universal constants. The original kilogram, for example, is a metal cylinder sitting in Versailles, France. But the unit of mass is now fixed in terms of the second, the speed of light in vacuum and the relationship between the frequency of a photon and its energy (which is governed by Planck's Constant "h").

Many other interesting discoveries and developments happened in 2019. Enough for us to hope that 2020 will bring more in the way of advances in our understanding of the universe around us.

