

INDIA PERSPECTIVES

Volume 35 | Issue 01 | 2021

AND SHE RISES

Women who were honoured with Padma Awards in 2021

PINK BLOSSOMS

Witness Himalayan cherry blossoms in Meghalaya



Map not to Scale

INDIA LEADS THE WAY

The country is at the forefront in providing Covid-19 vaccines across the globe

POTPOURRI



TILL **27** APRIL, 2021

MAHA KUMBH

One of the most auspicious Hindu festivals, the Maha Kumbh, which takes place once in 12 years, is being organised in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. The festival sees devotees take holy dips in River Ganga. This year, the first bathing date was on January 14 and the last auspicious day of the festival is on April 27.

WHERE: Haridwar, Uttarakhand

11 MARCH, 2021



MAHA SHIVARATRI

One of the most significant festivals in the Indian religious calendar, Maha Shivaratri is dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. The day is marked by fasts and prayers. Throughout the day, temples dedicated to the Lord are visited by devotees, who come in large numbers to offer prayers, following a traditional ritual of taking a dip in the waters of the River Ganges and pouring water from the river on a Shiva linga.

WHERE: Across the country

27-30 MARCH, 2021

RAJASTHAN FESTIVAL

Organised by the tourism department of Rajasthan, this event marks the founding day of the state. Festivities include a wide range of activities like a fashion show highlighting the heritage of the state, a spectacular Army pageant, captivating musical concerts and a grand closing ceremony. The festival also offers visitors a chance to experience the culture, traditions and folk heritage of the desert state.

WHERE: Rajasthan





1-2 APRIL, 2021

AOLEANG FESTIVAL

An ancient spring festival celebrated by the members of Nagaland's Konyak tribe, Aoleang Monyü is observed to mark the end of the old year and to welcome the new year, beginning with spring. It is celebrated in the first week of Aoleang lee (April) and is marked with prayers for a bountiful harvest.

WHERE: Mon, Nagaland



13 APRIL, 2021

GUDI PADAVA

Gudi Padava marks the beginning of the Hindu new year in Maharashtra and neighbouring states. Gudi Padava is derived from two words - 'gudi' meaning flag or an emblem of Lord Brahma and 'padava' meaning the first day of the phase of the moon. One of the main attractions of the festivities, especially in Mumbai, is a rally by women bikers.

WHERE: Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana

21 APRIL, 2021

RAM NAVAMI

Ram Navami marks the birth of Lord Rama and is celebrated with pomp and joy across the country. On this day, devotees recite verses from the Hindu epic Ramayana and from such ancient scriptures as *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Temples dedicated to Lord Rama across the country are thronged by devotees. Some of the grandest festivities can be witnessed in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, the birthplace of Lord Rama.

WHERE: Across India



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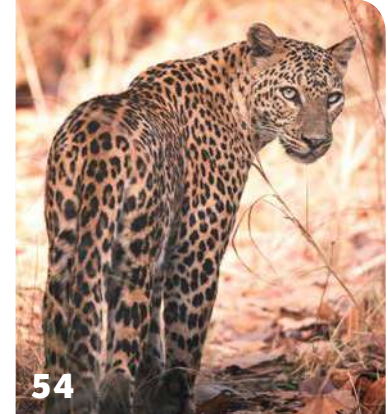


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CONTENTS

Partnership

- 06 In aid of humanity
- 12 Pandemic and beyond
India's soaring ties with Gulf
- 20 India at the Arctic

Success

- 24 India's highest glory

Economy

- 28 The sun shines bright on
Indian technology start-ups

Institution

- 34 India's cradle of
military leadership

Heritage

- 42 Lost and found Treasures
of India

Personality

- 48 India's atom man

Progress

- 54 Leopard country

Sports

- 60 The art of warfare

Cuisine

- 68 Scarlet strands
- 74 Khavanu, peevanu ne majha
ni life jeevanu

Travel

- 80 Dainty blooms

Snapshot

- 86 A cornucopia of colours

FOREWORD

Under the Vaccine Maitri initiative, India, the largest vaccine-manufacturing nation in the world, has been sending a steady stream of Made in India vaccines to neighbouring and friendly countries around the world. India has also provided medical supplies to nearly 150 countries, on both commercial and non-commercial basis. The success of this initiative bears testimony to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Make in India campaign and his commitment to help the global community to fight the pandemic.

In this issue of *India Perspectives*, we take a closer look at how bilateral ties between India and the Gulf countries have strengthened during the pandemic. This has also opened up new avenues of collaborations and partnerships in economic and emerging technology spheres to aid the recovery of the global economy.

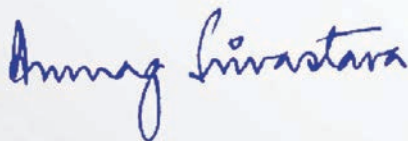
As countries across the world struggle to revive economic growth in the post-pandemic era, India's economy has been gaining from its robust start-up ecosystem. In 2020, 12 start-ups from the country joined the prestigious unicorn club. We look at how start-ups have been creating new opportunities while simultaneously furthering PM Modi's Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

In one of his recent radio addresses to the nation, PM Modi had hailed the superior quality of saffron produced in Jammu and Kashmir. We delve deeper into the versatility of this unique cooking ingredient and its numerous health benefits. Also in focus is another culinary delight from the country – Parsi cuisine. With the Parsi community in India getting ready to celebrate Navroze on March 21, we focus on how food is an integral part of the community's culture and history.

In the 'institutions' section of this edition, we highlight National Defence Academy, one of the most prestigious military establishments in the world, which trains young cadets for Army, Navy and Air Force. The training imparted at the academy not only covers academics and defence drills but also instills such life lessons as discipline, empathy and camaraderie among its cadets, who go on to become world-class military officers.

Discipline also forms the bedrock of sports, and taking cue from PM Modi's radio address where he highlighted the success that the Indian martial art form of Mallakhamb has attained overseas, we explore various forms of Indian martial arts.

In this issue, we also pay our respects to Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha, who spearheaded the nation's civil nuclear energy programme and was instrumental in establishing two of the country's premier institutions for scientific research - Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC).



Anurag Srivastava





IN AID OF humanity

As the largest vaccine producing country, India has been helping neighbours and friendly countries with 'gifts' of Covid-19 vaccine as a part of its Vaccine Maitri Mission, and this effort has been highly appreciated by the global community

BY ASHOK SAJJANHAR

Speaking at his first UN General Assembly Session in September 2014 soon after assuming power, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that India's foreign policy is governed by India's age-old maxim of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is a family)". This doctrine has been rigorously practised by India since coronavirus hit the world early last year, as PM Modi had realised that the only way to quell the virus was by working together.

INDIA REACHES OUT

India has emerged as one of the most significant producers and suppliers of

medicines and drugs around the world, exporting to more than 200 countries globally, with the US being the largest market. India's pharmaceutical industry supplies more than 60 per cent of the global demand for vaccines, 40 per cent of the generic demand for the United States, and 25 per cent of all medicines for the United Kingdom. It is for the above reasons that India has been termed as the "pharmacy of the world".

At the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, India's manufacture of medical equipment like PPEs, masks, ventilators etc. was minuscule. Very quickly, however, India was able to ramp up its production of masks

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during the 75th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2020. The UNGA met in a virtual environment for the first time in its 75-year history due to the pandemic



“AS THE LARGEST VACCINE PRODUCING COUNTRY OF THE WORLD, I WANT TO GIVE ONE MORE ASSURANCE TO THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY TODAY; INDIA'S VACCINE PRODUCTION AND DELIVERY CAPACITY WILL BE USED TO HELP ALL HUMANITY IN FIGHTING THIS CRISIS.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

PARTNERSHIP

Countries that received India-made vaccine

As of February 13, 2021, the Government of India has supplied a total of 229.7 lakh doses to the global community. Of these, 64.7 lakh doses have been supplied as grant, while 165 lakh doses have been supplied on a commercial basis. The following countries have received supplies as gifts:

- Bangladesh - 20 lakh,
- Myanmar - 17 lakh,
- Nepal - 10 lakh,
- Bhutan - 1.5 lakh,
- Maldives - 1 lakh,
- Mauritius - 1 lakh,
- Seychelles - 50,000,
- Sri Lanka - 5 lakh,
- Bahrain - 1 lakh,
- Oman - 1 lakh,
- Afghanistan - 5 lakh,
- Barbados - 1 lakh and
- Dominica - 70,000.

The countries that have received vaccines on a commercial basis are Brazil - 20 lakh, Morocco - 60 lakh, Bangladesh - 50 lakh, Myanmar - 20 lakh, Egypt - 50,000, Algeria - 50,000, South Africa - 10 lakh, Kuwait - 2 lakh and UAE - 2 lakh.

Source: mea.gov.in



Bhutan was one of the first two countries to receive India-made vaccines. India sent 1,50,000 vaccines to Bhutan

and PPEs to 3,00,000 a day. India provided medicines and medical supplies to nearly 150 countries, more than half on a non-commercial basis, and also sent medical teams to a number of its neighbouring countries to help them in dealing with the pandemic.

To bolster confidence in the Indian vaccine manufacturing industry and to promote better understanding and appreciation of India's pharmaceutical capabilities, 64 foreign Ambassadors and High Commissioners posted in India visited, on December 2020, two key biotech companies in Hyderabad - Bharat Biotech and Biological E - that were developing vaccines.

Speaking on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in October 2020, PM Modi said that India has always been mindful of the interests of mankind. He committed: "As the largest vaccine producing country of the world, I want to give one more assurance to the global community today; India's vaccine production and delivery capacity will be used to help all humanity in fighting this crisis."

ROLLOUT OF VACCINE MAITRI

Since India produces 60 per cent of all vaccines manufactured globally, the responsibility was to supply Covid-19 vaccines to other countries, especially developing ones.

In accordance with India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, Bhutan and Maldives were the first two countries to receive 1,50,000 and 1,00,000 India-made vaccines, respectively, on January 20, 2021. Bangladesh and Nepal came next, and

India's Vaccine Maitri mission is an ideal combination of soft and hard power, seamlessly converging into smart power



received 2 million and 1 million doses, respectively, on January 21, 2021. Myanmar received 1.5 million doses, Seychelles 50,000 doses, and Mauritius 1,00,000 doses on January 22. Sri Lanka received 5,00,000 doses on January 28, immediately after it accorded approval for use of the vaccine. The Sri Lankan supply was received by its President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The first consignment of Indian vaccines arrived in Bahrain the same day. Afghanistan also received 500,000 doses of India-made vaccine.

Applauding India's efforts, Bhutan's PM Lotay Tsherin said, "The gesture signifies compassion and generosity of PM Modi, and people of India for well-being of humanity." He added, "It is of unimaginable value when precious commodities are shared even before meeting your own needs."



Zahid Maleque, Minister of Health and Family Welfare in Bangladesh, said that India had stood by his country during its Liberation War of 1971, as well as the pandemic that has impacted the world. "This proves the true friendship between Bangladesh and India," he said.

Nepalese Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli thanked Prime Minister Modi and the Indian

Above: Maldives was one of the first two countries to receive India-made vaccines. As many as 1,00,000 vaccines were received by Maldives officials on January 20, 2021

Top: A Sri Lankan frontline health worker receives a COVID-19 vaccine shot at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases hospital in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on January 29, 2021. India sent 5,00,000 doses of vaccine to Sri Lanka

PARTNERSHIP



Left: A container with the Oxford / AstraZeneca vaccines arrived at the Guarulhos International Airport on January 22, 2021, in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Brazil's Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello accompanied the arrival of two million doses of the vaccine, coming from India



Above: (left to right) Nisia Trindade Lima, President of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation; Eduardo Pazuello, Health Minister of Brazil; 'Zé Gotinha', Brazil's vaccination campaign mascot; Ernesto Araújo, Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Suresh Reddy, Ambassador of India to Brazil receive Oxford/ AstraZeneca vaccines from India at the Tom Jobim International Airport on January 22, 2021, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

government for the “generous grant of one million doses of Covid vaccine to Nepal at this critical time when India is rolling out vaccination for its own people”.

Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Prime Minister, Crown Prince of Bahrain, thanked PM Modi for sending the vaccines. He said the gesture is a “sign of India’s global generosity and the strong partnership enjoyed between our two nations”.

All the above supplies were made on gratis basis.

Not just supplying vaccines, India has also conducted training programmes for healthcare workers in its neighbouring nations and allies to help them in the vaccination drive.

Brazil and Morocco also got two million doses each on January 22. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro thanked PM Modi for sending Covid-19 vaccines with a photograph of Lord Hanumana bringing the holy *sanjeevani buti* (an Ayurvedic medicine) to treat Lord Lakshmana, as narrated in the Hindu epic Ramayana.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has termed India’s vaccine production capacity as the “best asset” the world has to fight the pandemic. The US State Department; the PM of Mauritius; Director-General of the World Health Organisation; co-founder of Microsoft Corporation Bill Gates



Top: Bangladesh's Health Minister Zahid Maleque (second from right) received a box containing India-made vaccines in Dhaka on January 21, 2021

and several other world leaders have spoken appreciatively of the selfless manner in which India is helping several countries with the vaccines.

India will supply 10 million doses of vaccine to Africa and another one million shots to the UN for its health workers under GAVI, a global health partnership arrangement. India will also “gift” vaccines to Oman, Nicaragua, the Caribbean and the Pacific Island states.

Other than the efforts being made by the Indian government, vaccine producing companies in the country and the industry have reportedly signed contracts with around 90 countries, including South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Canada and Mongolia to supply Covid-19 vaccines on commercial basis.

India's Vaccine Maitri mission is an ideal combination of soft and hard

power, seamlessly converging into smart power. It incorporates India's ethos of altruism while advancing India's geo-political and geo-economic interests. What has been particularly appreciated by observers is the rapidity and selflessness with which India rolled out millions of doses as aid, despite the massive requirements at home. This has significantly enhanced India's global credibility and trust-worthiness. The Vaccine Maitri initiative has further strengthened India's image as the first responder in emergency situations across the world.



*Ambassador **Ashok Sajjanhar** has worked for the Indian Foreign Service for over three decades. He was the Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan, Sweden and Latvia, and has worked in diplomatic positions in Washington DC, Brussels Dhaka and Bangkok, among other nations.*

PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

India's soaring ties with Gulf



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives HRH Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince, Vice President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the latter's arrival at New Delhi Airport on February 19, 2019

Ties between India and the Gulf countries have strengthened during the pandemic period and set to scale new frontiers as the two sides proactively collaborate in the post-pandemic global economic recovery process

BY MANISH CHAND

T rue friendship, as an Arab proverb says, is tested in times of adversity. The deepening of India's multi-faceted partnership with Gulf countries during the Covid-19 period exemplifies this spirit of solidarity in times of crisis.

Right from the time the coronavirus pandemic struck the region and the world, over a year ago, India emerged as the first provider of humanitarian assistance to friendly Gulf countries and

promptly provided emergency medical supplies to several countries in the region. India sent medical teams to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE to help them address the challenges of Covid-19. India and the Gulf countries also forged cooperation in Covid research and testing.

VACCINE MAITRI: CARING & SHARING

The same spirit of caring and sharing is now evident in the supply of vaccines from India to

“ FURTHER WEST, WE HAVE REDEFINED, IN A SHORT SPAN OF TIME, AND DESPITE UNCERTAINTY AND CONFLICT, OUR PARTNERSHIPS WITH GULF AND WEST ASIA, INCLUDING SAUDI ARABIA, UAE, QATAR AND IRAN.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India



A healthcare worker administers a shot of the COVID-19 vaccine to a Sikh man at the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurudwara in Dubai on February 28, 2021

PARTNERSHIP

Gulf countries under the “Vaccine Maitri” programme. Three million doses of Made-in-India vaccines were provided to Saudi Arabia and 2,00,000 doses were sent to Kuwait and the UAE each. India gifted 1,00,000 doses of the anti-Covid vaccine each to Oman and Bahrain. The supply of vaccines to Gulf countries on this scale reflects India’s deep sense of universal humanitarian desire to fight the pandemic together. In a statement at the Rajya Sabha on

the “Vaccine Maitri Initiative” on March 17, 2021, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar said, “Quite appropriately, Vaccine Maitri began in the immediate neighbourhood, starting with the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, as also Mauritius and Seychelles. The extended neighbourhood followed thereafter, especially the Gulf... To date, we have supplied ‘Made in India’ vaccines to 72 nations across geographies.”

India has gifted 1,00,000 doses of the counter-Covid vaccine each to Oman and Bahrain

DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH

The pandemic period saw sustained diplomatic outreach between India and the energy-rich Gulf



India's External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S Jaishankar with His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, in Abu Dhabi on November 29, 2020

“Discussed our historical ties and cooperation in diverse sectors. Exchanged views on regional and international issues. Thanked Bahrain for taking special care of the Indian community during COVID times (sic),” EAM Dr S Jaishankar tweeted on November 25, 2020



countries. Defying constraints imposed by the pandemic, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and EAM Dr S Jaishankar held telephonic conversations with their counterparts from nearly all Gulf countries. When the pandemic situation eased slightly, Dr Jaishankar visited the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, and Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan travelled to the UAE and Oman. Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan visited Kuwait in October 2020 to offer condolences to the Kuwaiti

leadership on the sad demise of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the former Amir of the State of Kuwait.

EAM Dr S Jaishankar (left) meets HE Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in Manama on November 24, 2020

CARING FOR DIASPORA

What stood out during this difficult period was the exceptional compassion and care shown to the Indian community by the Gulf countries. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, comprising Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, collectively host around 8.5 million Indians, forming the

PARTNERSHIP



EAM Dr S Jaishankar (second from left) interacts virtually with the Indian Community in Bahrain on November 25, 2020

largest expatriate community in the region. Indians are highly valued and appreciated in the Gulf countries. Leaders and ministers of the GCC countries have often showered praise for Indians and highlighted their contributions to their respective countries' economic growth and development.

Most Indian professionals, who returned to India last year due to Covid-related difficulties have gone back to their adopted home in the Gulf countries. The demand for Indian migrants in the region is expected to revive significantly as the pandemic eases. Qatar is looking to employ 15,000 workers/managers in construction and hospitality

connected to the FIFA World Cup, which it will be hosting in 2022. The Indian government is also in the process of aligning its e-migrate platform with GCC countries to spur the return of Indian workers to these countries. In this regard, pilot projects have already been launched with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The government is already negotiating for "prior recognition of skills" with GCC countries that will enable quicker employment and deployment of Indians.

ENERGY MATRIX

Energy security remains a key driver of India's Look and Act West Policy that is designed to

Defying constraints imposed by the pandemic, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar held telephonic conversations with their counterparts from nearly all Gulf countries

strategically engage and expand the collaborative matrix with the Middle East, especially the GCC countries. Increasingly, energy partnership between India and the Gulf countries is acquiring a strategic orientation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE planning to partner with India in the next phase of the Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) programme. During Prime Minister Modi's historic visit to the UAE, a consortium of Indian oil companies was awarded a 10 per cent interest in Abu Dhabi's offshore Lower Zakum concession. Moving beyond hydrocarbons, India is also looking to deepen a new partnership with the Gulf region in renewables. Many countries in the region have backed the India-led International Solar Alliance. In October 2020, Indian engineering conglomerate Larsen

& Toubro unveiled its portfolio of power and water projects in the GCC region, which also included its first large-scale renewable energy project.

Besides economic and energy ties, India and the Gulf countries are poised to transform their defence and strategic relations. The visit of Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane to the UAE and Saudi Arabia in December 2020 was the first such visit in the Gulf region. The trip highlighted increasing strategic cooperation with countries in the region and opened avenues of defence cooperation.

NEW HORIZONS

While energy security remains at the heart of the blossoming India-GCC partnership, the relationship is diversifying into

EAM Dr S Jaishankar (centre) at the India-Qatar Business roundtable in Doha on December 27, 2020



PARTNERSHIP



Top: EAM Dr S Jaishankar meets Foreign Minister of UAE, HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi on November 26, 2020;

Above: India's Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan (second from left) interacts with Indian community in Oman on December 17, 2020

new areas, including cutting-edge technology. In the backdrop of global economic churning, the two sides are aiming to forge an “ahead of the curve” partnership with the energy-rich West Asia region focussed on Industrial Revolution 4.0, technology collaboration, R&D and high capital-intensive projects. This new transformed partnership between India and the Gulf will focus on new emerging

technologies, especially ICT, consultancy, fin-tech, logistics, edu-tech and health-tech.

THE ROAD AHEAD

India's multi-dimensional ties with the Gulf region, supported by centuries-old historical and cultural connections, found a new energy and resilience during the pandemic period. Sustained diplomatic outreach, accompanied by growing trade and investment, continued apace, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading India's diplomatic outreach from the front. Prime Minister Modi's visit to nearly all Gulf countries over the last seven years have decisively transformed this mutually-empowering partnership and imbued it with a strategic vision. Prime Minister Modi provided a quintessential personal touch to this reinvigorated and transformed Gulf diplomacy. He broke protocol to receive Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh



Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (extreme right) and former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee (extreme left) receive His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, at the Ceremonial Reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on January 25, 2017

Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2017 and repeated this special gesture for Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s visit to India in 2019. “Further west, we have redefined, in a short span of time, and despite uncertainty and conflict, our partnerships with Gulf and West Asia, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Iran. This has helped us protect and promote our security interests, nurture strong economic and energy ties and advance the material and social welfare of around 8 million Indians,” said Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the second Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi on January 17, 2017.

Looking ahead, India-Gulf ties are set to scale new frontiers as India seeks to collaborate across the spectrum with all countries in the region for the post-pandemic

global economic recovery process, and to stimulate the resurgence of each other’s economy. As India pursues its plans of becoming a USD five-trillion economy, Aatmanirbhar Bharat, with its emphasis on promoting Make in India-Make for World mission, offers exciting opportunities of joint ventures in infrastructure and manufacturing sectors. Partnering in future-looking innovation and start-ups is set to keep India-Gulf ties humming with new ideas and entrepreneurial energy. And at this rate, India-Gulf ties can only move to a higher trajectory.



Manish Chand is CEO & Editor-in-Chief of India Writes Network (www.indiawrites.org), and *India and the World*, a pioneering magazine focussed on global affairs

India at the Arctic

India has had big successes during its first stint as an observer in the Arctic Council. With its re-election, India can now offer a lot more to the global organisation's role in promoting environmental stability in the polar region

BY DR CHAITANYA GIRI



In 2019, India was re-elected as an Observer to the Arctic Council, a multilateral organisation consisting of eight littoral Arctic nations that works towards promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states, its indigenous population, and other inhabitants on sustainable development and environmental protection. India was

first granted the Observer status in 2013, along with five other nations. During its previous tenure, India has had privileged access to Arctic Council's side-events and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change made vital contributions to the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI) under the Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group. The ministry has facilitated

India, an observer to the Arctic Council, has been successful in meeting the commitments of global climate action goals. Here, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks at the Elysee Palace on June 3, 2017, in Paris, where he vowed to go "above and beyond" the Paris Agreement on climate change

studies and conservation efforts of migratory birds that fly to India during northern winters.

India's experience in the AMBI has helped it recognise what is now known as the Gandhinagar Declaration, which emphasises that improvement of ecological connectivity is the top priority for the Convention on Migratory Species. In February 2020, the Government of India hosted the Convention of Migratory Species under the 13th United Nations Environmental Programme Conference of the Parties (UNEP-COP-13) in Gujarat's capital city Gandhinagar. The convention was used to prepare effective action

plans for preventing the killing and trade of migratory birds traversing the Asian, African, Eurasian and American flyways, and formulate ecological conservation measures applicable to all UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) member countries. The Gandhinagar Declaration is, perhaps, India's most significant success coming out of the relatively limited engagement it has had with the Arctic Council. But India has a lot to offer to the Arctic Council, now more than ever before.

India has been tremendously successful in meeting the commitments of global climate action

One of India's stellar contributions to address the effects of climate change has been to establish the International Solar Alliance (ISA) that aims to boost solar energy output in an effort to reduce global dependence on fossil fuels. Here, PM Modi (right) with French President Emmanuel Macron at the founding conference of the ISA in New Delhi on March 11, 2018



PARTNERSHIP

Point to note

India is one of the few countries to have a permanent station in the Arctic for scientific research in the polar region, which offers unique opportunities to carry out research related to atmospheric and climate sciences. With the opening of new routes in the Arctic as a result of climate change-induced ice-melt, many countries are vying for access to the region's untapped minerals and hydrocarbon resources.



Top: PM Modi (third from right) with former French President François Hollande (fourth from right) and other dignitaries at the COP21 World Climate Change Conference in Le Bourget, near Paris, on November 30, 2015; **Above:** In February 2020, India hosted the Convention of Migratory Species under the 13th United Nations Environmental Programme Conference of the Parties (UNEP-COP-13) in Gujarat's Gandhinagar. Here, flamingoes take flight from Gujarat's Nalsarovar lake

goals. In 2015, India led a global coalition of 121 countries towards establishing the International Solar Alliance. In 2019, India took the mantle of establishing an international multi-sectoral Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure to mitigate impacts on ecological, economic, and social infrastructure. India's forest cover has increased substantially in these years, and the large polluting industries are proactively pledging to attain

sustainable development goals in this decade. India does all this despite ranking amongst the lowest per capita carbon emitting countries in the world.

In late 2020, India recorded substantial progress in its climate action pledges made during the 2015 Paris Agreement and became one of the few countries and the only large economy to do so. India's "spirit of trusteeship towards planet Earth", as professed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the G20 Summit in November 2020, sums up its efforts as a conscientious economic power. This conscientiousness qualifies India as an equitable partner to the Arctic Council members and observers.

India is also in the advanced phases of formulating a comprehensive National Arctic Policy. This policy framework will streamline India's engagements and activities in the region. The consolidation of this policy will develop strong technical, scientific, economic, financial, and strategic capacities within the country, which will only accentuate India's role in the Arctic Council. However, the council is



Maintaining the Arctic biodiversity is one of the main focus areas of the Arctic Council. **(Clockwise from top)** Arctic fox, bearded seal, polar bears and snowy owl are a few of the most iconic species endemic to the Arctic

not the only entry point for India in the Arctic region. India maintains cordial and productive bilateral relations with all Arctic Council members. These bilateral relations are the main drivers of India's economic and strategic engagements in the Arctic.

India has a co-operation agreement with Finland in environmental protection and biodiversity conservation, which was signed in November 2020. India and the US have been maintaining an effective Climate and Clean Energy Cooperation Agreement since 2015. India imports natural gas from Yamal, Russia, and Louisiana, USA, and has stakes in offshore oil and gas fields in the Northern Pacific.

In May 2021, Russia will preside as the new chair of the Arctic Council, and during its tenure, India will complete a decade as an observer and align its Arctic goals with some of the

shared aspirations of other council members. India has been proactively working towards universal reduction of industrial methane and carbon black emissions, and alleviation of their disastrous impact on the environment. This call fits well with the Council's Arctic Contaminants Action Program as well. India, along with other council members, can play an active role in formulating a strategic Asian Hydrogen Energy Technology Roadmap. The roadmap can focus on the sharing of hydrogen fuel and energy technologies that can support transportation, chemical, fertiliser, electricity generation and oil refining industries. Also, India's leadership of the International Solar Alliance can help countries generate the cleanest "green" hydrogen using solar energy, reinstating India's commitment to secure its energy and trade interests in the Arctic region by respecting internationally-amenable environmental safeguards.



Dr Chaitanya Giri is Fellow of Space and Ocean Studies Programme, Gateway House (a foreign policy think-tank). His present research focusses aquapolitics and astropolitics, the new-age techno-geostrategy, the space and marine industrial complex, and the science of space exploration.



INDIA'S highest glory

There is nothing a woman cannot do if she puts her mind to it. Be it scaling Mount Everest five times, turning a small business into one of India's prominent consumer goods companies or successfully running an organic farm at 105 years of age. Here are a few women achievers, from all walks of life, who have been recognised by the Government of India with the prestigious Padma Awards in 2021

One of India's highest civilian honours, the Padma Awards, are announced on the occasion of Republic Day (January 26) every year. The awards are conferred by the President of India in three categories - Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service), Padma Bhushan (for distinguished service of high order) and Padma Shri (for distinguished service in any field) - honouring Indians who have made exceptional contributions in various

fields, including art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports and civil service.

This year, President of India Ram Nath Kovind approved the conferment of 119 Padma Awards -- 7 Padma Vibhushan, 10 Padma Bhushan and 102 Padma Shri. Of the total awardees, 29 are women.

On the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8), we feature the inspiring stories of five of this year's women Padma awardees.

BHURI BAI

ART, MADHYA PRADESH



Image: Suyojan India

Bhuri Bai is a familiar name in the field of Indian tribal and folk art. In fact, she is a champion of the traditional Pithora painting of the Bhil community. She was the first woman from her village in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, to take the indigenous art, which is primarily done on the walls of the huts in her village, and put it on paper and large canvases. The dedication with which she pursued her passion not only garnered her accolades in the Indian art community but also got her one of the most prestigious recognitions of the country this year – the Padma Shri.

Bhuri Bai's works have travelled the world and have even been showcased in galleries and museums in Europe, Australia and the US. One of her paintings titled "*Story of the Jungle*" was auctioned by Sotheby's in 2007. For her contribution to the indigenous art of Pithora painting and taking it to the world, she has been honoured with Shikhar Samman and Ahalya Samman by the Government of Madhya Pradesh.

ANSHU JAMSENPA

SPORTS, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Scaling Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, is every mountaineer's dream. And Arunachal Pradesh's

Anshu Jamsenpa is no different. But what sets her apart is the fact that she did not climb the mountain once or twice, but five times! In 2011, she achieved the incredible feat of conquering the mountain twice in the same month – first on May 12 and then on May 21. With this, she scripted her name as the fastest woman in the world to climb Mount Everest twice in one season. She scaled the Himalayan peak for the third time in 2013.

Jamsenpa, however, broke all records when she took on the 8,848.86-m-high giant in 2017 twice in a gap of five days – on May 16 and May 21. This achievement is hailed as the fastest double climb of Mount Everest ever by a woman. For her grit, resilience and determination, she was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2021.



Anshu Jamsenpa also received the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award in 2017. Here, she can be seen accepting the award from Indian President Ram Nath Kovind

“WE ARE PROUD OF ALL THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN CONFERRED THE PADMA AWARDS. INDIA CHERISHES THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATION AND HUMANITY AT LARGE. THESE EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUALS FROM DIFFERENT WALKS OF LIFE HAVE BROUGHT QUALITATIVE CHANGES IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.”

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India



SUMITRA MAHAJAN

PUBLIC AFFAIRS, MADHYA PRADESH

Former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan is as humble as she is passionate about development. Lovingly called “*ta*” (elder sister in her native language, Marathi), she started her career as a corporator in the Indore Municipal Corporation in 1982. She soon rose through the ranks to serve as Speaker of Lok Sabha for five years till she retired in 2019. She was the longest-serving female Member of Parliament representing the Indore constituency of Madhya Pradesh from 1989 to 2019. She was also instrumental in bringing a number of developmental projects to Indore, starting from railways and aviation to urban development.

An affable lady with a warm demeanour, she championed the cause of women by effectively articulating their issues. Side by side, she also upheld the values and traditions that enhanced the dignity of the Parliament. She has always maintained that her step towards politics was not one of ambition or of seeking power, but of service. She is the only woman to be bestowed with the Padma Bhushan in 2021.

R PAPPAMMAL

AGRICULTURE, TAMIL NADU



Image: facebook.com/narendramodi

She is 105 years old but that does not stop her from waking up before dawn and taking a tour of her village in Thekkampatti, Coimbatore (in Tamil Nadu) before heading off to her 2.5-acre organic farm every day. R Pappammal is no less than a local hero in her village, and after being honoured with the Padma Shri in 2021, the centenarian is over the moon.

Farming, however, is not new to her as she hails from a family of agriculturalists. She joined the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University to further her interest in the subject. Once asked about the secret to her long life, she pointed out that the food she has eaten growing up and still continues to consume – farm fresh vegetables, wholesome millets and local produce – is what has kept her healthy for so long.

JASWANTIBEN JAMNADAS POPAT

TRADE & INDUSTRY, MAHARASHTRA

What started on March 15, 1959, with a group of seven Gujarati women residing in Bombay (present-day Mumbai), attempting to create a sustainable livelihood for themselves, has today become one of India's largest women-run institutions —

Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, led by Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat. She borrowed INR 80 (approximately USD 1.1 in the current exchange rate) as capital investment and, along with her group, rolled out four packets of *papad* or poppadom (a large circular piece of thin, spiced bread made from ground lentils) to sell in the local market. Over time, and with the incredible success of the hand-rolled products, the members, or “sister” as they like to be called, grew. The company, too, diversified its products to include traditional and ready-made *masala* (spices), *gehu atta* (whole wheat flour) and detergent powder. The Government of India honoured Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat with the Padma Shri in 2021 for her visionary venture that has stood the test of time.



Image: twitter.com/mygovindia

THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT ON Indian technology start-ups

Backed by rapid digitalisation, tech adoption and liberal government policies, India's technology start-up ecosystem is witnessing a significant growth trajectory. The next step will be global expansion, says author and public policy expert
Aashish Chandorkar



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launches an initiative to bolster start-ups at an event in New Delhi on January 16, 2016

A key tenet of Indian entrepreneurship growth in the last few years has been to support and catalyse job-givers in the economy. Given India's fast workforce, it is critical that new employment opportunities are created by risk-taking first-generation entrepreneurs, who dream of building strong global firms out of India. Technology start-ups have been at the forefront of this thinking.

There are 500 unicorns around the world. These are technology start-ups with more than USD one billion in valuation. Forty-four of them are now in India – about nine per cent of the total. Twelve of these unicorns got to the coveted valuation benchmark in 2020 – a year otherwise throttled by the global pandemic.

This shows that the Indian start-up ecosystem is not just innovative but also robust. The ability to scale up and demonstrate viable business models

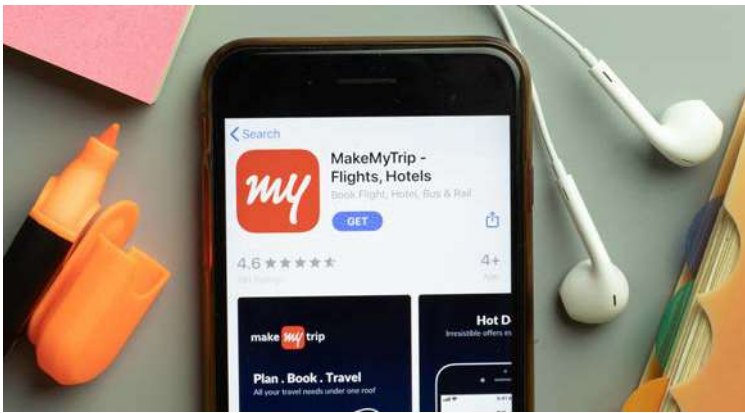


Indian technology start-up innovators are now diversifying to such professional areas as commercial logistics, merchant automation and construction management

“START-UPS ARE THE ENGINES OF EXPONENTIAL GROWTH, MANIFESTING THE POWER OF INNOVATION. SEVERAL BIG COMPANIES TODAY ARE START-UPS OF YESTERDAY

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

ECONOMY



Top to bottom: Start-ups like MakeMyTrip, Ola, Byju's and Paytm are some of the Indian unicorns with a valuation of over USD one billion. According to reports, Paytm continues to be the most valuable unicorn (at USD 16 billion)



has set Indian start-ups apart. The 44 technology unicorns have been valued at more than USD 106 billion. To put this in perspective, the market capitalisation of the National Stock Exchange is USD 2.7 trillion. The top 44 technology firms are already valued worth four per cent of the old economy, some of them being global leaders in their own right.

These 44 firms have also created about 1.5 million jobs in direct or indirect employment. Many of these jobs have been in the Gig economy sector (a free market system in which temporary positions are common and independent workers are hired for short-term commitments), which directly benefits job seekers who may not have the best educational qualifications, but who are willing to work hard towards improving their and their family's standard of living.



That the Indian start-up ecosystem has come this far should hardly be a surprise. India has always had the brainpower behind some of the biggest technology firms globally. This brainpower used to make a beeline for foreign shores a few years ago. Now, many individuals are searching for opportunities locally and finding them.

The access to capital for Indian start-ups is also rapidly improving.

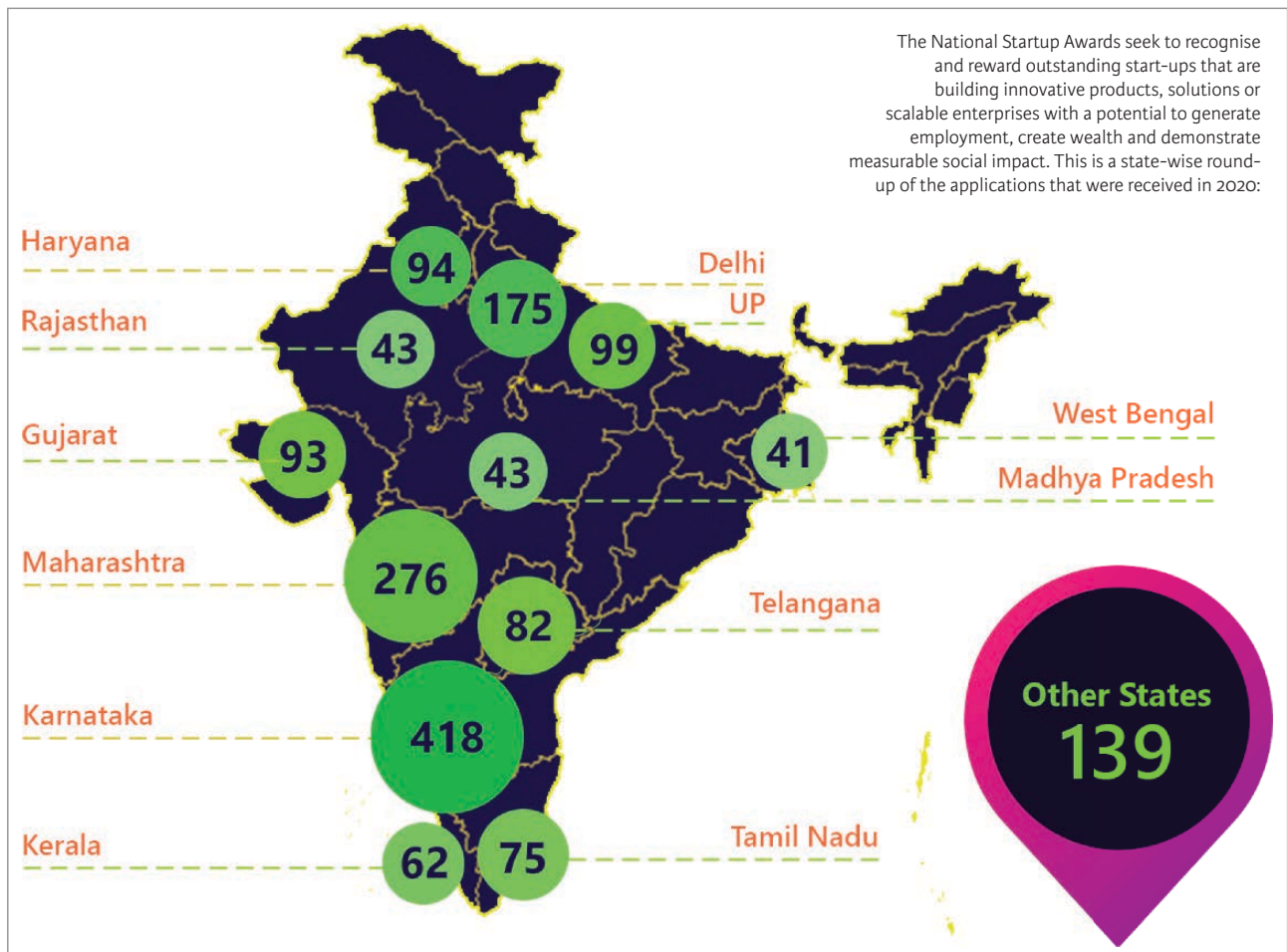


With the world awash with liquidity owing to loose monetary policies of global central banks, India has attracted large investments. This is reflected year after year in the burgeoning Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) figures, where India is one of the hottest destinations.

The next stop for Indian technology start-ups is to expand globally, conquering new markets. Given India's market, which is not just large but also diverse in terms of consumer behaviour characteristics – the global leap of faith may be a matter of when and not if.

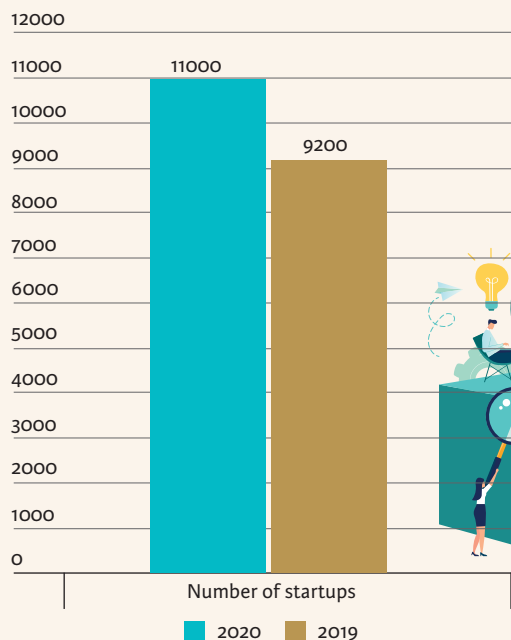
To facilitate Indian start-ups getting a platform alongside similar firms elsewhere, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), which works under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, had organised Prarambh: Startup India International Summit in January 2021.

This two-day summit was attended by several participants from BIMSTEC countries. BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an economic platform that India has been actively participating in. This event attracted



Source: startupindia.gov.in

How the startup ecosystem fared in 2020



According to the NASSCOM-Zinnov report on 'Indian Tech Start-up ecosystem', a staggering number of 8,900-9,300 start-ups have been inceptioned during 2014-2019



investors, scholars, policy makers and start-up professionals from various member nations in a first-of-its-kind exchange of ideas.

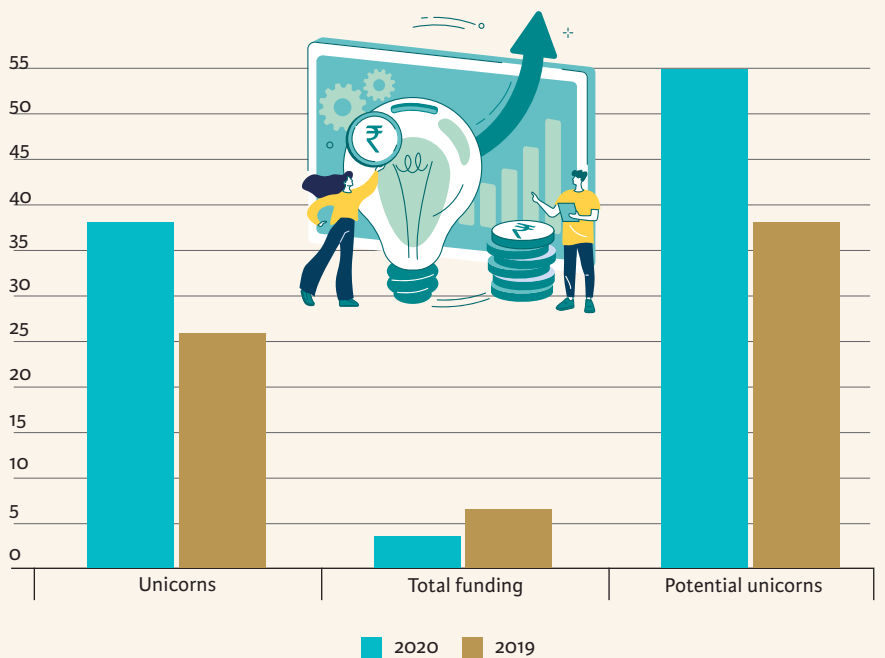
Such global platforms are significant in the region, as many countries share a similar economic trajectory as well as consumer traits. The experience obtained in a large country like India can be transferred relatively easily to other markets, where it may be possible to apply the Indian success. In fact, several Indian productivity applications are already being used in other countries in the region.

Especially in the areas of merchant automation, new-age mobility, and social commerce and networking, there are already enough proofs of concept that the mantra for commercial success in India and other countries in the region may not be too different. Such platforms thus provide the exploratory opportunities for Indian start-ups to expand geographically.

In the recently-presented Union Budget, the government has allowed Indian firms to list themselves overseas without listing in India first. The Indian securities market regulator is also working to create a facilitative environment to ensure such firms that opt to raise capital outside won't be subject to dual jurisdictions and regulations. These steps are critical in ensuring that growing and promising Indian firms are not starved for resources.

In the recent past, the technology start-ups have also diversified. While the initial wave of

Startups in 2020



Sources: Nasscom-Zinnov report



According to startupindia.gov.in, India has the second-largest start-up ecosystem in the world and is expected to witness year-on-year growth of 10-12 per cent

unicorns came from FinTech (finance and technology) and consumer apps in food and mobility aggregation businesses, the recent success stories go much beyond. Technology innovators are now making a dent in varied areas like commercial logistics, merchant automation, construction management and healthcare.

This change is critical for Indian economy as a whole, too. As new players enter the market and start challenging long-time incumbents, yesteryear leaders are forced to respond in kind. This leads to new investments in research and development, and employee upskilling, which, in turn, leads to greater economic productivity and, eventually, higher wages. In this sense, start-ups also play a critical

role in uplifting and modernising old economy players they compete with, creating a virtuous economic cycle.

With an educated workforce, well integrated in the global ways of working, and a young nation comfortable with using mobile-first technology, Indian start-ups are on a fast growth trajectory. Some of these players will eventually become national and global business leaders in their own right.



Aashish Chandorkar writes on public policy, politics and current affairs. He takes interest in business, sports and technology, and has authored a book on Devendra Fadnavis, the former chief minister of Maharashtra, titled *The Fadnavis Years*. He holds an MBA from IIM Calcutta and a Bachelor of Engineering degree from Indore University.

INDIA'S CRADLE OF MILITARY Leadership

One of the most prestigious military training institutions in the world, the National Defence Academy (NDA) shapes bravehearts who serve all the three wings of the Indian Armed Forces - Army, Navy and Air Force. A deeper insight into the philosophy of the academy, the facilities it provides and how it instills discipline, empathy and camaraderie in its cadets, turning them into world-class military officials

BY AIR MARSHAL TEJBIR SINGH RANDHAWA



A bird's-eye view of the National Defence Academy at Khadakwasla (close to Pune) in Maharashtra. The iconic reddish-pink dome of the academy's Sudan Block (right) is in clear sight. When seen from the air, the Sudan block appears as a gigantic gun

One of the premier and highly-decorated military training institutes in India, the National Defence Academy (NDA) was founded on October 6, 1949. It was amongst the first training academies in the world that sought to train cadets for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force with specialised training for each service.

The institute was also the result of an attempt to create a separate ideology and Indianisation of the Indian Armed Forces after Independence. Hence, combined academic instructions and military training from the formative stage were considered essential. It was an important decision as at that time, neither the UK nor the US had similar training academies.

Built at the base of the Sinhagad

Fort in Pune that stands testimony to the courage and sacrifice of Tanaji (the general of Maratha ruler Shivaji's army) during a battle against the Mughals in 1670, the NDA embodies fearlessness and valour. Inaugurated on January 15, 1955, it nurtures in cadets a spirit of service and sacrifice in the line of duty for the nation.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The main buildings of NDA include the administrative centre called



Top and left: Cadets pay homage to martyrs and decorated heroes at the academy's Hut of Remembrance. Built by the cadets between January 1956 and May 1957, this sublime memorial hut enshrines and commemorates the sacrifices of all those alumni who laid down their lives for their motherland

INSTITUTIONS



Top: The Passing Out Parade is one of the most important milestones of a cadet's journey in NDA. Filled with nostalgia and happiness, the cadets take their first steps towards their vision of protecting their motherland. A cadet leaves the academy a young man strong in body and mind, confident, assured and proud of the values imbibed at the NDA;

Bottom: A match of tent pegging, an equestrian sport where a participant, while riding on full gallop, tries to strike a tent-peg firmly fixed on the ground with a lance (a long weapon with a wooden shaft and a pointed steel head)



Sudan Block and two academic blocks named after noted Indian cosmonaut and NDA alumnus Rakesh Sharma, AC (Ashok Chakra), and Captain Manoj Kumar Pandey, PVC (Param Vir Chakra, posthumous).

An impressive Parade Ground named after Param Vir Chakra recipient (posthumous) Arun Khetarpal is where all cadets receive basic military drill training. The Passing Out Parade that marks the completion of a successful term is also held here. The parade's unique showcase comprises over a thousand participating cadets who bid farewell to their senior colleagues.

Other training infrastructures include two gymnasiums, three Olympic-size swimming pools, an astro turf hockey field, ranges for weapons training, synthetic tennis and basketball courts, an aerodrome, a bay for navy training and an army training complex.

An important structure at NDA is the Hut Of Remembrance, a hallowed memorial ground where the academy honours its brave alumni. The names and squadrons of the alumni who have sacrificed their lives for the nation are written in stone here. Learning to respect and pay homage to the martyrs is an essential part of training.

The NDA campus is spread over 8,200 acres and houses a variety of flora and fauna. A number of trees were planted during the initial



construction of the academy. To this, each newly-inducted cadet adds a plant and bears its responsibility during his three-year training period.

TRAINING

The NDA is one of the finest military training academies in the world. Initially, training patterns of West Point (United States Military Academy) were followed to train NDA cadets but over the years, the patterns have changed dynamically to meet Indian challenges. There is no better proof of good military training than its results in war, and the number of NDA alumni who have attained glory while leading from the front in every military campaign India has been a part of, speaks volumes of the training imparted at the academy. When cadets pass out of NDA, they not only possess the qualities of a



responsible officer but also emerge as compassionate human beings as values like empathy, solidarity and kindness are imparted to them.

The underlying philosophy of training at the NDA is jointness (inter-service cooperation) - living, studying and working together, understanding joint organisations,

Top: NDA cadets marching on to the drill square;

Bottom: A glimpse from one of the academy's passing out parades

INSTITUTIONS

Additional offshoots of NDA training

Cadets learn the value of time

Cadets train to relentlessly and ceaselessly pursue their goals

Cadets develop an effective and quick conditional response to challenging situations

Instills a deep sense of purpose

NDA engrains in its cadets the virtue of order and value of discipline, and this endures long after passing out from the academy



administration, capabilities and limitations of services, and tackling problems together. Cadets undergo outdoor training, engage in games and embark on adventure activities together as a group, thereby imbibing the squadron spirit.

Joint training is an integral aspect of training at the academy. The objective, for a cadet, is to imbibe and appreciate the functioning of the three services and the inter-service cooperation between them through military education and training programmes. Orientation towards this begins from the first term. The three-year course consists of combined



service training for the first two years and in the last year, a part of the training consists of individual service training. Cadets, during their last semester, visit service establishments to see how they operate and get a first-hand knowledge of their future work ethos.

NDA boasts a number of engaging clubs too - riding, polo, shooting, golf, painting, hiking, flying, sailing,

Top and above:
Archival images
from NDA's passing
out parades

photography, cycling and more. It is compulsory for every cadet to be a part of at least one club. He can even change clubs every six months to diversify his skills.

ACADEMICS

Academic studies are carried out under the guidance of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Syllabuses for BA, BSc (Chemistry and Computer Science) and BTech have been made in conjunction with JNU. BTech is mandatory for Naval and Air Force cadets as it helps them in understanding the technology they will have to work with during their service. Classrooms in the academy are equipped with the latest technologies and the labs are set up in conjunction with IIT Mumbai. Several topics taught at the NDA are drafted to include examples from a

military point of view, which makes understanding of military history and allied subjects relevant for the cadets. The NDA is connected on the National Knowledge Network (NKN) and e-learning facilities are available, which was put to good use during the Covid-19 period.

Top: An aerial view of the Bombay Stadium where cricket matches, mass PT, athletic training and continuity drill displays are held

Bottom: The Habibullah Hall, an impressive double-storeyed auditorium with a seating capacity of over 1,700, hosts various events such as lectures, presentations, musical evenings, debates, quiz competitions, etc., in addition to the momentous Convocation Ceremony. Once a week, Hindi and English movies are also screened here



INSTITUTIONS



FOREIGN CADETS

Training at the NDA is a prestigious experience and a matter of pride, a reason why several countries across the world send their cadets to train at the academy. This training outreach extends to Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and more. Over the years, cadets from 33 countries have trained at the NDA. In fact, of the 284 cadets who graduated from the institute in 2019, 20 were from Bhutan, Tajikistan, the Maldives, Vietnam, Mauritius, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Presently, cadets from 16 countries are training at the NDA. Most foreign cadets who have trained at the NDA have gone to reach higher ranks in their services in their countries. Their induction enriches both them as well as Indian cadets. While foreign cadets learn about Indian culture and arts, Indian cadets assimilate areas

Top: The garden around the Hut of Remembrance was landscaped in 1992 to complement the serenity and the inspirational aura of the shrine;

Bottom: Cadets during the Convocation Ceremony of the 134th course of NDA in 2018





NDA cadets voluntarily take part in the cleaning of the Khadakwasla Lake, which instills in them the values of protecting and serving nature

of excellence like cross country and boxing, etc. NDA also has a regular exchange programme with foreign military academies.

ENVIRONMENT

To maintain the pristine environment of the academy, cadets commute on cycles that are provided on their arrival. The vehicle not only keeps the cadets fit but also furthers NDA's 'Carbon Neutral' philosophy. While solar power is utilised for heating water, LED lights illuminate the academy. With tree plantations and voluntary cleaning of the nearby Khadakwasla Lake, the essence of serving the environment is imbibed by each cadet, which they put to use wherever they serve their duty as officers.

The NDA is one of the few inter-service training institutions in the world that has stood the test of time and provided a continuous flow of

aspirants into the three services. The rapidly-changing technology levels and military concepts have necessitated an evergrowing need for inter-service cooperation and esprit de corps, which have been the bedrock of NDA training. The training imparted at the NDA has not only lived up to the vision of our founding fathers but continuously evolved to meet their stated aim of keeping the country safe and secure following the institute's motto of 'Seva Paramo Dharma' (Service Before Self).



Air Marshal TS Randhawa is an alumnus of the NDA. Commissioned into the Flying Branch of the Indian Air Force in 1972, he was a founding member and the Leader of 'Thunderbolts' the IAF 9 aircraft Formation Aerobatics Team.

A former Commandant of NDA, he was awarded the Param Vashisht Seva Medal and the Vayu Sena Medal for his distinguished service.

LOST AND FOUND

Treasures of India

Over the last few years, India has been able to steadily retrieve several ancient artefacts of cultural importance illegally taken away from the country. We look at some of these returned heritage pieces and their significance

BY JUHI MIRZA



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) gestures while talking with former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott about the dancing figure of Lord Shiva, or Nataraja, prior to a delegation level meeting in New Delhi on September 5, 2014. During this visit, the former Australian PM had handed over to PM Modi two antique statues of Hindu deities that were allegedly stolen from temples in Tamil Nadu before being bought by art galleries in Australia. One of the returned idols was a Nataraja, which belonged to the Chola dynasty

In November last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that an ancient statue of Devi Annapurna, stolen from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh about a century ago, is being brought back home from Canada. The statue of the goddess of food, holding a bowl of rice, is said to be an 18th-century idol carved in the Benaras style. The return of the idol is a major success story in India's quest for its lost ancient treasures, a mission being spearheaded by PM Modi. "Every Indian will be proud

to know that a very old idol of Devi Annapurna is returning to India from Canada.... the coming back of the idol is pleasing for all of us. Just like the idol of Mata Annapurna, a lot of our invaluable heritage has suffered at the hands of International gangs," the Prime Minister said.

India's archaeological treasures have been a constant victim of plundering and looting, which has left several rare specimens of antiquity scattered across the world. Under the guidance of PM Modi, the initiative to bring them home

“JUST LIKE THE IDOL OF MATA ANNAPURNA, A LOT OF OUR INVALUABLE HERITAGE HAS SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF INTERNATIONAL GANGS. THESE GANGS SELL THEM AT A VERY HIGH PRICE IN THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET. NOW NOT ONLY ARE THEY BEING SUBJECTED TO HEAVY RESTRICTIONS; INDIA HAS ALSO INCREASED HER EFFORTS FOR THEIR RETURN. BECAUSE OF SUCH EFFORTS, INDIA HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN BRINGING BACK LOTS OF SUCH IDOLS AND ARTIFACTS IN THE PAST FEW YEARS.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India



Left: An idol of Lord Shiva in Brihadeshwara Temple, Thanjavur. This sculpture shares an outline and halo similar to the idol of Lord Shiva in Nataraja form that was retrieved from London last year;

Right: An idol of Mahishasuramardini from Gangaikondacholapuram in Tamil Nadu, which bears similar *aayudhas* or attributes as the idol of Mahishasuramardini returned to India by Germany in 2015

HERITAGE



Above: An idol of Lingodhbhava Shiva from Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, depicting iconographic elements similar to the Shiva Linga that was returned to India by Alabama Museum authorities, the US, in 2018;

Right: A wall plaque in Mamallapuram portraying Lord Shiva surrounded by celestial deities that shares a striking resemblance with the plaque retrieved by American authorities



has been revived and has transpired into a mission. Several programmes and efforts have been initiated by authorities to procure these artefacts from the world over. The Ministry of External Affairs, along with law enforcement agencies, has been actively pursuing the retrieval of stolen and smuggled Indian artefacts, and several pieces have been returned to India from various countries, including the US, Australia, the UK, Canada and Germany. Here's a look at some of them that have successfully found their way back home.

The United States of America has, over the last few years, returned several antiquities to India. The list includes some of the finest pieces of terracotta idols belonging to various periods along with elegant

statues of religious and sentimental value. One of the most significant in this consignment is a bronze idol of Manikkavachakar, a saint who had found patronage under the Chola dynasty (9-13th century AD). The idol had allegedly been stolen from a temple in Sripuranthan village in Ariyalur district of Tamil Nadu and smuggled to the US. The idol, worth at least a million US dollars in the open market, was recovered by American authorities in 2015 and returned.

Another important idol returned by USA is an idol of Manjusri, a Bodhisattva associated with Mahayana Buddhism. Dating back to the 12th century, the idol depicts Manjusri holding a sword and a lotus in his hands, and is painted in gold leaf. It has immense significance in the history of Buddhism, with the sword symbolising the Bodhisattva's intent to cut or remove the fog of illusion and bring forth light. The idol also denotes wisdom and is highly revered in the Indian and Buddhist pantheon. The statue was allegedly

stolen from a temple in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, in the late 1980s. It was repatriated in 2018 from Auckland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina.

Along with the idol of Manjusri was returned a granite phallus idol of Lord Shiva. The iconic Shiva Linga dates back to the 12th century and traces its origin to the Chola dynasty rulers of Southern India. Carved in accordance with the laws of traditional iconography, the idol depicts the Lord holding a *parasu* or battle axe along with Krishna Mruga or a deer. It was stolen from Tamil Nadu and was on display at the Birmingham Museum in Alabama.

In November 2020, a set of three bronze idols of Lord Rama, Lord Lakshmana and Goddess Sita was

Artefacts of cultural significance are an integral part of Indian heritage and play an important role in defining the historical context of the country

returned to India by authorities of the United Kingdom. These bronze idols, rich in artistic heritage and belonging to the Vijayanagar reign (1336–1646), had been stolen in the 1970s from a temple in Tamil Nadu’s Nagapattinam district and were recovered from a private collector in London.

Another valuable statue that was returned to India last year by the UK is an ancient Lord Shiva idol, which was stolen from Ghateshwar temple in Baroli, Rajasthan. The idol, around four feet high, depicts Lord Shiva in

Left: A panel portraying Mithuna figures from Mamallapuram, which is similar in pose to the idol of “parrot lady” that was returned to India by Canada in 2015;

Right: The High Commission of India in London played an active role in the repatriation of a 10th-century idol of Lord Shiva that was stolen in 1998 from Ghateshwar temple, Baroli, Rajasthan, to the Archeological Survey of India in 2020

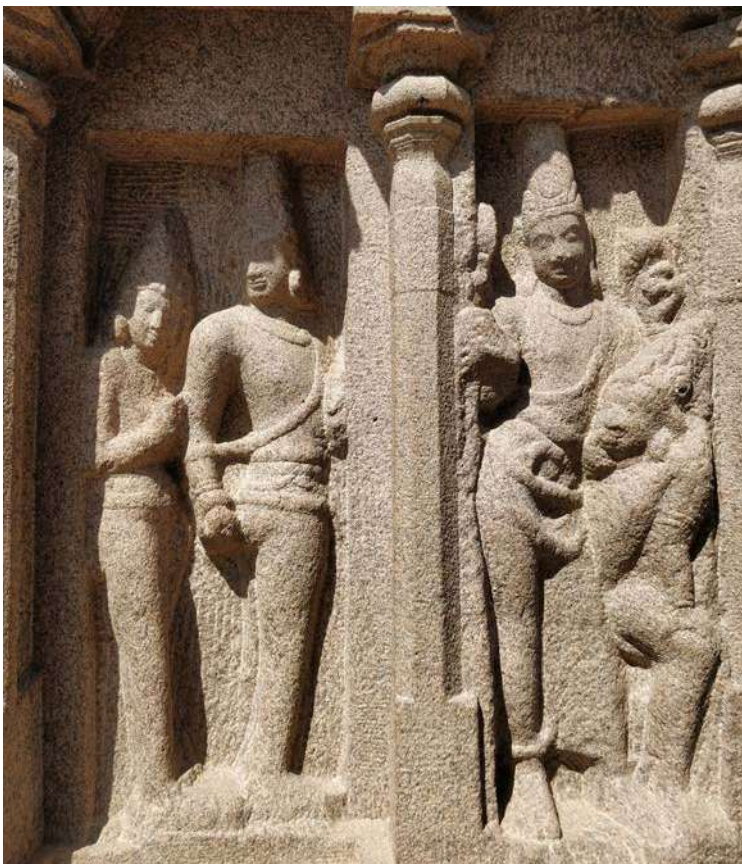


Image: twitter.com/HCI_London

HERITAGE



Author and international law expert Jeanette Greenfield, in her book *The Return of International Treasures*, writes: “UNESCO has estimated that more than 50,000 art objects were smuggled out of India over the decade 1979-1989 alone.”

Other than statues and idols, a large number of antique items made from precious metals and stones sourced from India are included in private and museum collections across the world. Here, a visitor looks at a vintage Indian golden case from Goa at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the US

Chatura Nataraja pose and dates back to the 9th-10th century. It was in the possession of a private collector. The High Commission of India in London played an active role in the repatriation of this priceless piece of art.

Canada too has returned several heritage artefacts to India in the recent years. Among them is the statue of the “parrot lady”, a prized cultural representation of Indian history. The delicately-carved sandstone statue of a woman holding a parrot is almost 900 years old and represents aspects of everyday life in ancient India. The sculpture that was in the possession of a private

collector was returned to PM Modi by former Canadian PM Stephen Harper in 2015, during the Indian Prime Minister’s visit to Canada.

Among other Chola dynasty artefacts returned to India are the bronze idols of Nataraja and Ardhanarisvara recovered in Australia. The idols date back to the 11th century AD and are regarded as one of the finest specimens of skilled bronze casting from the Chola period. Ardhanarisvara is an amalgamation of Lord Shiva and his consort Goddess Parvati in a half man-half woman form. Along with these, a stone relief of a pair of *dwarpalas* (mythical temple guards) had also been retrieved from Australia. Australia has also returned to India a stone statue of Nagaraja (serpent king) from the 6th to 8th century period. These statues had been allegedly stolen from Indian temples.

In a similar appreciable and welcoming gesture, Germany returned a piece of Indian history during German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit to India in 2015. The 10th-century idol of Mahishasuramardini, a form of Goddess Durga, which was returned, had gone missing from a temple in Kashmir over 20 years ago.

Over decades, India has lost thousands of artefacts of cultural importance. In the recent years, the government of India has been assiduously working towards the repatriation of stolen art objects and the records of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) show that the government has been able to retrieve



Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper returning a 12th-century sculpture, known as the 'Parrot Lady', to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during the latter's visit to Canada in April 2015

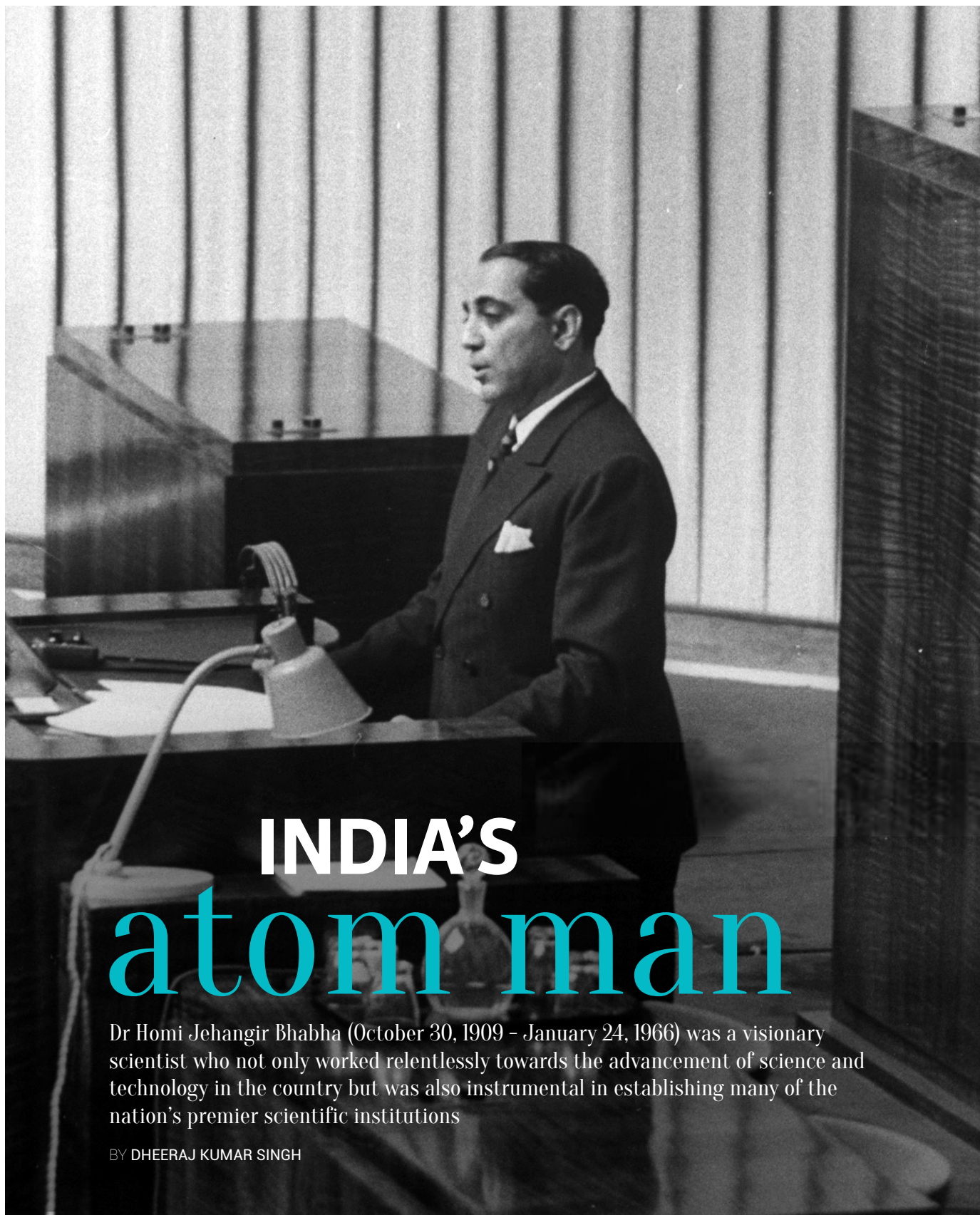
40 art objects between 2014 and 2020, and 75-80 art objects are in the pipeline to be returned. These priceless artefacts returned to India facilitate research and analysis on their origin and antiquity that further enriches our history and culture. Dr BR Mani, former director general, National Museum, New Delhi, said: "Due to the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his emphasis on the importance of preserving national folklore and culture, returning of lost treasures and heritage exchange between nations have gained incredible momentum. This process has compelled other countries to look up to India as a cultural icon."

Such pursuit of bringing back pieces of our history and filling gaps in historical information is of utmost importance in integrating a sense

of cultural assimilation. Artefacts of cultural significance are an integral part of Indian heritage and play an important role in defining the historical context of the country. These rare antiquities have not only helped revive India's impressive past but have also managed to build and foster strong cultural, social and economic ties with other countries and their people.



Juhi Mirza holds a master's degree in Archaeology and is a keen enthusiast for all things ancient. She takes a deep interest in cultures and traditions of India and the world. She has travelled extensively to document ancient ruins and cultures across the world.



INDIA'S atom man

Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha (October 30, 1909 - January 24, 1966) was a visionary scientist who not only worked relentlessly towards the advancement of science and technology in the country but was also instrumental in establishing many of the nation's premier scientific institutions

BY DHEERAJ KUMAR SINGH

An archival photograph of Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha

The history and evolution of the Indian atomic energy programme is synonymous with the life of Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha. Often referred to as the father of India's atomic energy programme, Dr Bhabha had a prodigious persona and dominated the world of nuclear and particle science with his brilliance. Born on October 30, 1909, in Bombay (present-day Mumbai), Dr Bhabha was a man of high adroit and intelligence, coupled with a creative mind. He was one of those rare geniuses whose insatiable urge for knowledge and unsurpassable contribution to India's development in the sphere of atomic energy, led the nation to find a firm footing in the realm of science and technology globally.

EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

Dr Bhabha's interest in science began at an early age. He hailed from a family of academicians – his father Jehangir Hormusji Bhabha, a lawyer, was educated at Oxford, and his grandfather, also named Homi Jehangir Bhabha, was Inspector General of Education in

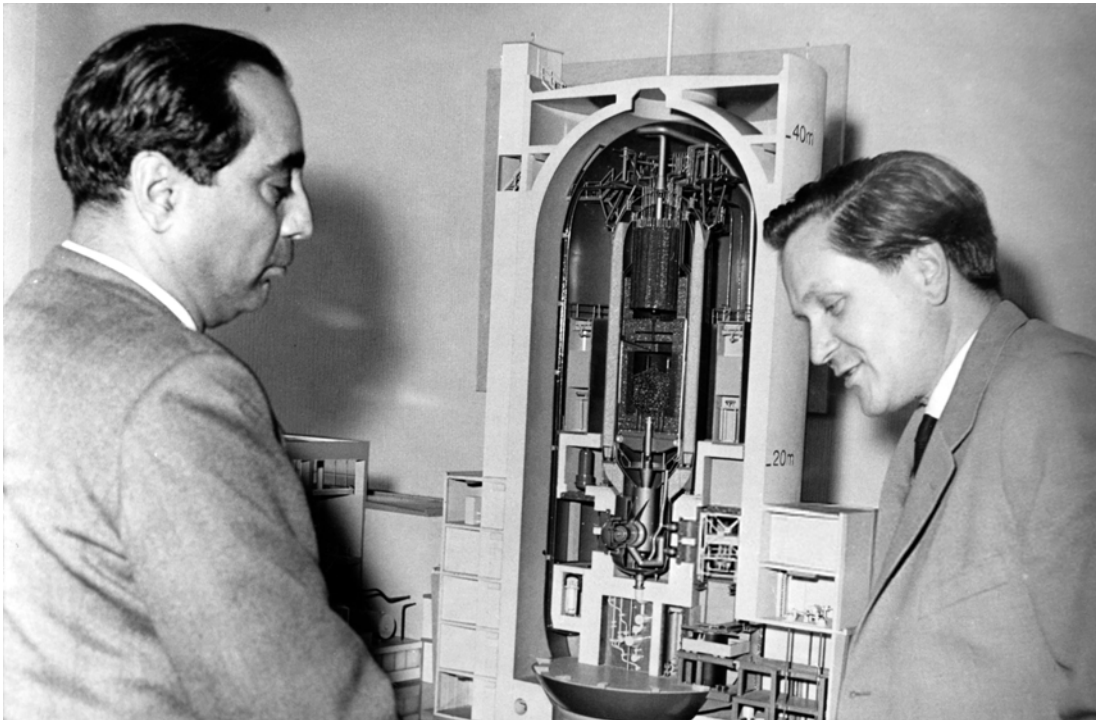
the erstwhile state of Mysore. At the age of 15, Dr Bhabha passed the senior Cambridge examination and joined Elphinstone College, later moving on to the Royal Institute of Science (both in Bombay). Dr Bhabha was passionate about science but his father wanted him to pursue Mechanical Engineering in the hopes that the young man would join the Tata Iron and Steel Company at Jamshedpur (his paternal aunt was married to Dorab J Tata, the eldest son of Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata,

An archival image of Dr Homi J Bhabha (extreme left) with Lewis L Strauss (extreme right), former chairman of the US Atomic Energy Commission



Bhabha recognised, quite early, the importance of space research. In 1957, when the first artificial satellite (Sputnik 1) was launched by the Soviet Union, he persuaded the Government of India to delve into the scientific study of space

PERSONALITY



Left: An archival image of Dr Homi J Bhabha (left) and noted German scientist Dr Rudolf Schulten in Mannheim, Germany;

Bottom: An archival image from the 1940s depicting research students at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay that was founded by Dr Bhabha



the founder of the Tata Group). Even while pursuing Mechanical Engineering from Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge, Dr Bhabha maintained his interest in Physics. He not only earned a first-class degree in Mechanical Engineering but also one in Mathematics.

Such was his appetite for Physics that he received the Isaac Newton Studentship at Cambridge in 1934, which subsequently helped him obtain his PhD in theoretical physics from Cavendish Laboratory. During his time at the university, Dr Bhabha's work centered around cosmic rays. He also worked with Austrian theoretical physicist Wolfgang Pauli, who is said to be one of the pioneers of quantum physics, in Zurich, and Italian physicist Enrico Fermi, who created the world's first nuclear reactor, in Rome. These experiences not only enriched his scientific mind but also fuelled his desire to delve



An archival image of Dr Homi J Bhabha (fourth from left) on the day of Atoms for Peace Conference

more into research.

As per an article published by Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS), the research Dr Bhabha conducted at Cambridge till 1939 “had a direct bearing on the resolution of several important issues of cosmic ray phenomena and the interaction of particles (electrons, protons and photons) in the context of the developments in the fields of quantum mechanics and relativity”.

INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

Dr Bhabha returned to India for a brief holiday in 1939 before World War II began. Since he couldn't go back to Cambridge, he took it as an opportunity to stay back and utilise his talent and experience for the

advancement of science in India.

In 1940, he joined the Physics Department of the Indian Institute of Science (IIS), which was then headed by noted Indian physicist Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, in Bangalore (present-day Bengaluru). A readership in Theoretical Physics was especially created for Dr Bhabha, who went on to become a professor in 1944. During his time at IIS, Dr Bhabha guided research on cosmic rays but felt the need for India to have an institute that had the necessary facilities for conducting original work in nuclear and high energy physics, cosmic rays and associated areas of research. This prompted him to send a letter to the trustee of Sir Dorabjee Tata

Homi J Bhabha: lesser-known facts

Bhabha suggested the term 'meson', which refers to a subatomic particle that is intermediate in mass between an electron and a proton, and transmits the strong interaction that binds nucleons together in the atomic nucleus.

In 1933, Bhabha published his first scientific paper, which won him the Isaac Newton Studentship. He was 24 years old at the time.

During his time in Cambridge (1927-1939), Bhabha worked on Positron theory (Bhabha scattering), Bhabha-Heitler theory of Cosmic Ray Air Showers and meson.

Bhabha was chosen as president of the historic first International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy held in Geneva, Switzerland, in August 1955.

PERSONALITY



Top: An archival image of Dr Homi J Bhabha (extreme right) with Swedish economist and Nobel Peace Prize awardee Dag Hammarskjöld (standing) and other members at the Atoms for Peace Conference;

Above: A commemorative stamp depicting Dr Homi J Bhabha

Trust in March 1944, showing his willingness to establish “a vigorous school of research in fundamental physics”. In it, he pitched the importance of research in nuclear science and predicted that nuclear energy (or atomic energy) would become a reality, which was proven by the nuclear bombings in 1945. This bears testimony to Dr Bhabha’s far-sightedness. To broaden the horizon, and bolster teamwork and cooperation, Dr Bhabha established

the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay, which was renamed Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), after his demise in January 1966.

Dr Bhabha always held that a scientist doesn’t belong to a particular nation, rather to the whole world. Research reactors like APSARA, CIRUS and ZERLINA were commissioned under his leadership at BARC. APSARA was a major milestone because it was the first nuclear research reactor to be designed and built in India.

At a time when most scientists were concerned with the destructive potential of nuclear energy, Dr Bhabha was contemplating to harness the same energy for the welfare and upliftment of mankind. The three-stage nuclear programme, based on a closed nuclear fuel



The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) under construction at Trombay (1957 to 1961)

cycle to utilise India's vast thorium reserve and fulfill the energy needs of the country, was first outlined by Dr Bhabha.

Dr Bhabha didn't stop with atomic energy. He recognised, quite early, the importance of space research as well. In 1957, when the first artificial satellite (Sputnik 1) was launched by the Soviet Union, and rockets and satellites added a new domain in space research, Dr Bhabha persuaded the Government of India to delve into the scientific study of space.

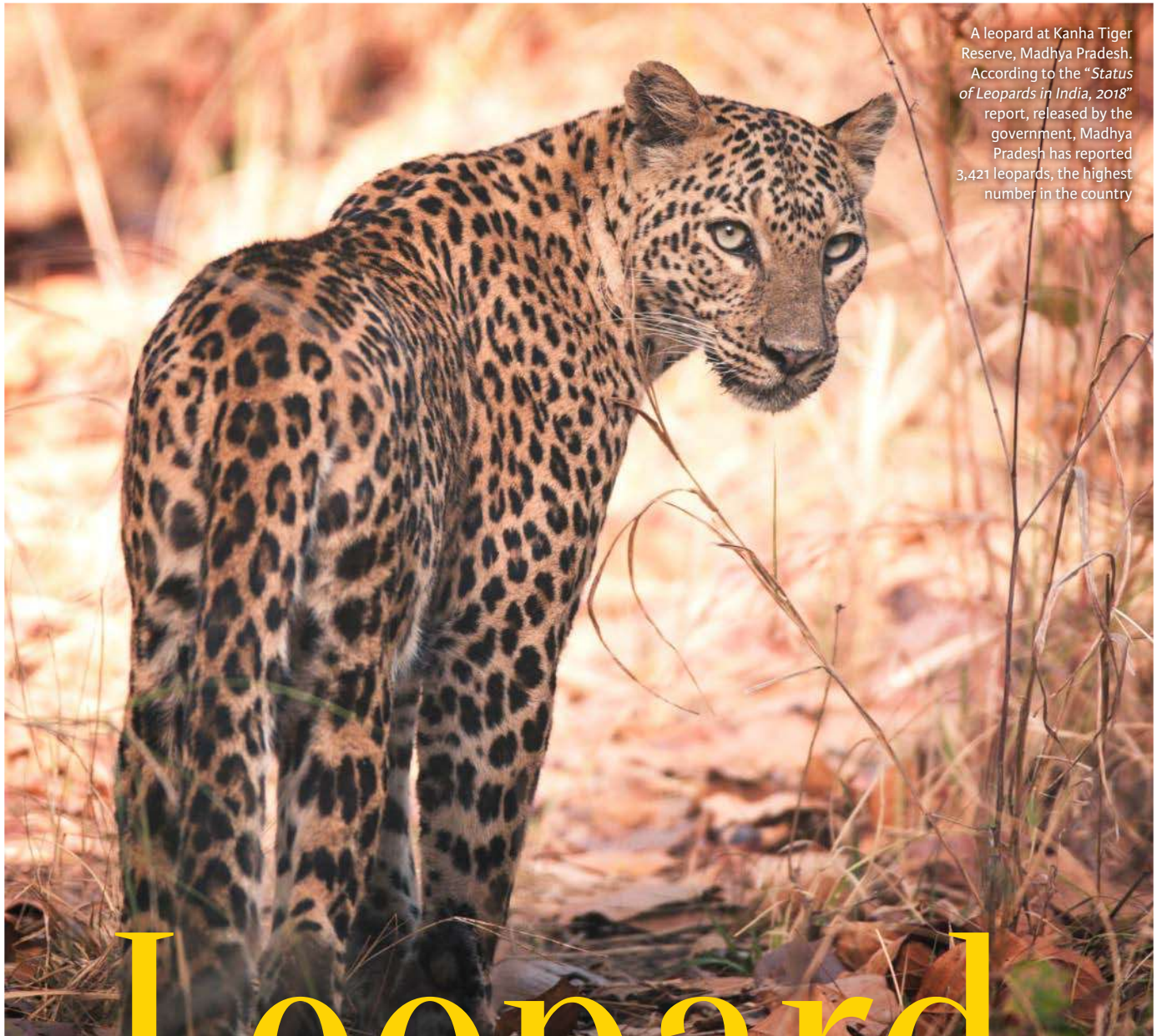
For his noteworthy contributions to science and the advancements he brought to India's nuclear programme, Dr Bhabha was honoured with numerous awards, including the Padma Bhushan in 1954. Universities like Lucknow, Allahabad, Cambridge and London

awarded him with honorary doctoral degrees in science. Dr Bhabha was even nominated for the Nobel Prize in Physics five times by French mathematician Jacques Hadamard.

Under Dr Bhabha's 22-year leadership, India's atomic energy programme made breakthrough achievements, and new possibilities of multidisciplinary research established roots and flourished. India will forever remain indebted to Dr Bhabha for his visionary approaches and his relentless efforts to advance science and technology in the country.



Dheeraj Kumar Singh is a scientist working with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Trombay.



A leopard at Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh. According to the "Status of Leopards in India, 2018" report, released by the government, Madhya Pradesh has reported 3,421 leopards, the highest number in the country

Leopard

COUNTRY

India's leopard population has grown by 60 per cent, according to a report released recently by the Indian government. This is a significant success for the country's conservation efforts as the species' numbers rapidly dwindle in other parts of the world. Wildlife conservationist Daulat Singh Shaktawat offers an analysis

It was recently announced that India has recorded a significant rise in its leopard population. According to the Indian government's report titled '*Status of Leopard in India, 2018*', published on December 21, 2020, the leopard population in India has seen a 60 per cent growth in the period of four years from 7,910 in 2014 to 12,852 in 2018. As per the report, of India's current leopard population, the Northeastern region is home to 141 leopards while the

Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains range has recorded 1,253 leopards. Central India and the Eastern Ghats range has 8,071 leopards, and Western Ghats range has 3,386. Interestingly, the report also says that due to sampling inadequacy, the numbers recorded could be lower than the actual figure.

The leopard population in India had started decreasing in the late 1960s. After widespread conservation efforts of the government and

GREAT NEWS! AFTER LIONS AND TIGERS, THE LEOPARD POPULATION INCREASES. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THOSE WHO ARE WORKING TOWARDS ANIMAL CONSERVATION. WE HAVE TO KEEP UP THESE EFFORTS AND ENSURE OUR ANIMALS LIVE IN SAFE HABITATS.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India



A female leopard being released into the wild at Jaldapara National Park in West Bengal. In India, leopards often stray into human habitats but care is taken to rehabilitate them back in the forest

What leopards are known for

Leopards are mainly active at dawn and dusk, and prey on small animals. They are good climbers. In a wildlife reserve dominated by tigers or lions, leopards prefer to live in the periphery to avoid competition. This means leopards often venture into villages near forests in search of livestock.

Leopards are opportunist hunters, focussing on strength rather than speed, as they are more likely to drag a hunt up a tree. Their primary preys are deer, wild pig, monkey etc. In the last few years, there have been many records of black panther or melanistic leopard sightings in India. These beautiful animals, which are basically colour variants, have been frequently sighted in Karnataka's Nagarhole National Park and Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, and Maharashtra's Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. India has also made significant progress in conserving the snow leopard through the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program.



Top: Newborn leopard cubs at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati. Leopard cubs are regularly rescued from the surrounding area and brought to the zoo;

Above: An archival image of a leopard at the snow-covered Dachigam National Park located on the outskirts of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

independent organisations, there has been a significant rise in their numbers.

Not just leopards, in recent years, Indian forests have seen a rise in the numbers of such big cats as tigers and lions too. Now, along with the rise in the number of leopards, this overall increase is a testimony to India's conservation efforts in protecting its wildlife and biodiversity. Congratulating those working on the conservation of leopards, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, "Great news! After lions and tigers, the leopard population increases. Congratulations to all those who are working towards animal conservation. We have to keep up these efforts and ensure our animals live in safe habitats."

In India, around 15 species of wild cats are found, among which the leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is one of the big cats, and one of the most



beautiful and agile. In the habitat of the tiger or the lion, the leopard is a co-predator. Leopards are known for their unique skill and adaptive nature, which have helped them to survive. India remains the largest home for this animal outside of Africa, and the fact that the animals are thriving here is extremely encouraging, as it is under threat in other parts of the world. The leopard is found in the wild across most of India, except the Alpine Himalayas, the extreme western parts of Rajasthan's desert, Rann of Kutch in Gujarat and the deltaic Sundarbans in West Bengal. Its habitat varies from dense forests and open jungles to scrub areas. It is also found

around densely populated cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru and Mysuru.

A leopard's adaptable trait also brings it into direct conflict with humans, posing serious consequences to the lives of those affected and impeding larger conservation goals. The '*Status of Leopard*' report highlights this factor as one of the many that pose a threat to the conservation efforts of the species in India.

Linear infrastructure projects and poaching are other major factors impacting the species, especially in the Northeastern region. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has a set of operational guidelines regarding

The Kabini forest in Karnataka is well known for tiger and elephant sightings and last year, a rare black panther was spotted here

PROGRESS

human–leopard conflict and the best practices to handle such situations. The aim of the guidelines is to reduce human conflict with leopards, discourage translocation of the animals and suggest improved ways of tackling emergency conflict scenarios.

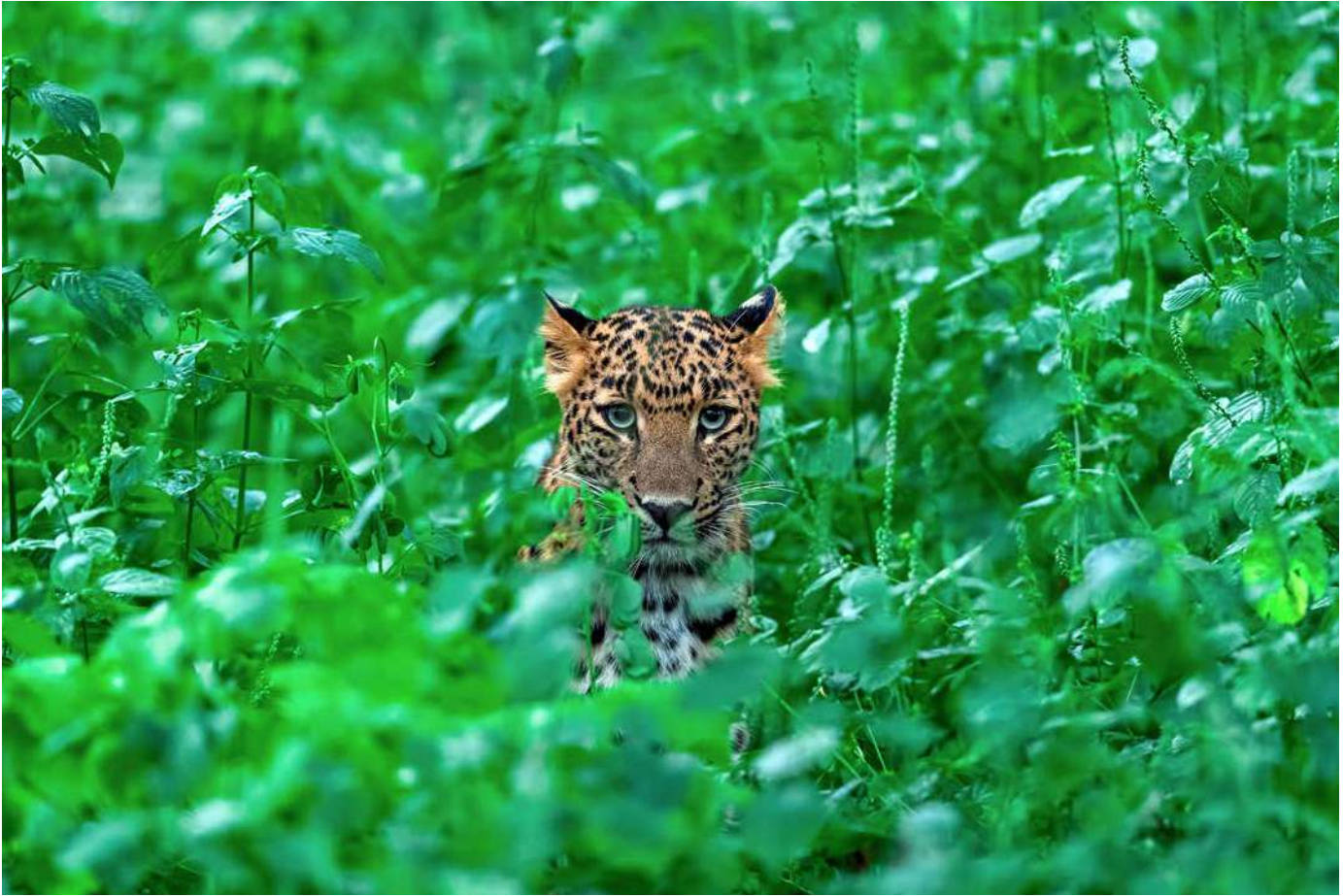
According to the report, the second-biggest threat to leopards (as other wildlife) is linear infrastructure growth such as roads, railways, power lines and canals, which is necessary to support India’s economic development but also adversely impacts wildlife. Linear infrastructure may require relatively small portions of forest land but has a disproportionately large impact, resulting in the disruption of wildlife corridors, which, in turn, leads to the

fragmentation of wild habitat and wildlife mortality. India has taken several steps to harmonise biodiversity conservation and linear infrastructure growth with actions that include creating and strengthening protected areas where wildlife can thrive, and adopting mainstreaming



Above: A pair of snow leopards at the Hemis National Park, Ladakh. In India, this rare big cat is found in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh;

Left: A leopard with its kill caught on camera at the Jhalana Forest Reserve, Jaipur



A leopard at Jhalana Leopard Reserve. The reserve is home to more than 35 leopards, including 5 cubs

approaches. The latter refers to ways that make linear infrastructure animal-friendly.

Technology is being used in forests across India to monitor and protect all big cats, including leopards. The camera trap method and radio-telemetry technology are being used for understanding the behaviour of these elusive animals. This helps in collating information about the animals' lifestyle, which, in turn, aids in protecting them from various threats and in preventing man-animal conflict.

The Indian government has been making rigorous and constant efforts towards afforestation, improving habitat, taking stringent protection measures and creating

wild corridors in concerned states. This continuous effort has resulted in significant growth in forest cover and wild population. As per the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019, there has been an increase of 5,188 sq km of forest and tree cover at the national level, which has contributed to the rise in the number of all wild animals, including the leopard.



Daulat Singh Shaktawat is a wildlife conservationist and a naturalist, and the former Dy Conservator of Forests at Ranthambore National Park. He has published a book titled *My Encounter with the Big Cat and Other Adventures in Ranthambhore*. He is also a consultant of the World Wide Fund (WWF)-India and a member of the members of State Level Standing Committee.



THE ART of warfare

Indian martial arts may have lost some sheen with the passage of time. But with encouragement from the government and individuals, they are being preserved and popularised

BY ABHISHEK DUBEY

India has a long history of martial arts, with some forms going back thousands of years. While some of the east Asian martial arts have gained a wider acceptance, it is believed that many of these forms trace their lineage to Bodhidharma, the Indian Buddhist monk, who, according to a well-known legend, was said to

have developed Shaolin kung fu and taught Indian yoga around the 6th century AD. An integral part of our heritage and culture, Indian martial art forms are now becoming popular, not just within the country but even internationally.

In October 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his popular radio programme *Mann Ki*

Padma Shri awardee Meenakshi Amma has been practising and propagating the Indian martial art form of Kalaripayattu for decades

Baat, highlighted India's indigenous sports, especially Mallakhamb and how it's being promoted outside India. PM Modi had said: "Nowadays, our traditional sport of Mallakhamb is gaining popularity in several countries. In the US, when Chinmay Patankar and Pradnya Patankar started to teach Mallakhamb from their home, even they did not have an idea how successful they would be. Today, there are Mallakhamb training centres at many places in the US as the youth there are learning Mallakhamb in large numbers."

The following are a few Indian

martial art forms that are finding new platforms.

MALLAKHAMB

Mallakhamb is a traditional Indian sport dating back to the 12th century. It is said to have originated in the Maharashtra region. The word "*malla*" means a wrestler and "*khamb*" or "*kham*", in colloquial Marathi, means a pole. Therefore, Mallakhamb refers to a sport in which an athlete wrestles against a pole. *Manasolhas*, a text written around 1135 AD during the reign of the powerful Chalukya dynasty kings,

A Mallakhamb performance during the launch of Fit India Movement on National Sports Day at Indira Gandhi Stadium Complex on August 29, 2019, in New Delhi



FRIENDS, OUR COUNTRY HAS MANY FORMS OF MARTIAL ARTS. I WOULD LIKE OUR YOUNG FRIENDS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THEM, LEARN THEM AND, OVER THE COURSE OF TIME, BRING ABOUT INNOVATIONS IN THE SAME

Narendra Modi
Indian Prime Minister

SPORTS

Thoda

A form of martial art common in Himachal Pradesh, especially Kullu and Manali, Thoda needs expertise in archery. Considered more of a dance form than martial art, it used to be performed by Rajput warriors. It is said the sport finds mention in the Hindu epic Mahabharata and it is played between two teams called '*paasha*' and '*saatha*', who are believed to be the descendants of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Thoda is organised during the Baisakhi festival.

who ruled over southern and central India, mentions a sport wherein a wrestler practices with a pole to maintain his agility and postures. In the 19th century, Balambhatt Dada Deodhar, the fitness and sports instructor to Maratha king Peshwa Bajirao II, revived this sport and introduced it to his army. The sport was used to enhance the fitness levels of soldiers and aid in guerilla warfare tactics. In this sport, the wrestler turns, twists, stretches and balances on a pole in a perfect blend of grace, agility and suppleness of body, combined with quick reflexes. There are two other Mallakhamb styles - rope Mallakhamb, where a rope is used instead of a pole, and

hanging Mallakhamb, in which acts are performed on a hanging pole or rope.

Today, this sport has got a new lease of life, having become popular not just in India but also across the world, especially in the US, where it is being practised to stay fit and agile. PM Modi, in his reference to the sport, had hailed the Pune-based couple Chinmay Patankar and Pradnya Patankar. Chinmay and his wife are among the new-age practitioners of Mallakhamb, who are spreading its knowledge internationally. Having shifted to the US to pursue his career, Chinmay, a national-level Mallakhamb athlete, started training groups of people



Natalie Nicholas, a native of Switzerland, initiates her first batch of women trainees into Kalaripayattu at Chirackal Kalari in Kottayam, Kerala

Image: Vignesh Krishnamoorthy/Malayala Manorama



in the backyard of his home. Later, he launched a federation for Mallakhamb in the US. Today, the Mallakhamb Federation USA is an official not-for-profit organisation that trains both adults and children in this traditional Indian sport.

KALARIPAYATTU

In 2017, when the Indian government, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, conferred the Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civilian award in the country, to 76-year-old Meenakshi Amma, it was not just the septuagenarian

who was applauded. The honour also recognised an Indian martial art form, Kalaripayattu, which the deceptively diminutive Meenakshi Amma has been practising and propagating for decades. She has been practising Kalaripayattu at Kadathanad Kalari Sangham in Kerala's Kozhikode district since she was five years old. She trains around 150 to 200 students, including foreigners, free of cost.

This ancient martial art form, which is said to have originated in Kerala, is considered among the

Kalaripayattu is said to have originated in Kerala and is considered among the oldest and most scientific forms of martial arts in the world

Traditionally, soldiers would train in Silambam as it increases flexibility and body coordination. It also increases a person's ability to stay calm and concentrate

SPORTS

oldest and most scientific in the world. The form's primary aim is to let the *kalari* practitioner achieve perfect coordination between mind and body. But Kalaripayattu also focusses on wellness practices and includes medicinal oil therapies.

The training of Kalaripayattu begins with an oil massage of the entire body until it is agile and supple. Feats like *chattom* (jumping), *ottam* (running) and *marichil* (somersault) are integral parts of the form. Lessons are also imparted in the use of such weapons as swords,

daggers, spears, maces, bows and arrows. Other than centres in Kerala, the Kalari Kendram in New Delhi also conducts classes to train youngsters in this form. The centre, recognised by the Indian Council for Culture Relations (ICCR), also conducts online workshops to connect with students across the world.

SILAMBAM

Silambam is another traditional Indian martial art that is seeing a revival. One of the oldest self-defense techniques, it incorporates various types of weapons and

Mardani Khel is a weapon-based martial art form indigenous to the Kolhapur region of Maharashtra. Here, women practise Mardani Khel before International Women's Day (March 8) in Mumbai in 2019





movements. As per Sangam literature (earliest writings in the Tamil language), Silambam has been around since 4th century BC. It is said this martial art form was successfully used to provide stiff resistance to the British forces, as a result of which, it was banned in India and gained popularity in Southeast Asian countries, especially Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

The word Silambam is derived from the Tamil word “*silam*”, which means hills, and the Kannada word “*bambu*” from which the English bamboo originates. Traditionally, the practice of Silambam included weapons made of bamboo of a special variety sourced from the Kuringi hills of modern-day Kerala. Today, however, with the passage of time, the art form has included the use of weapons like *maru* (made from



deer horns), *aruval* (sickle), *savuku* (whip), *vaal* (sword), *katti* (knife), *katari* (blade), *surul kaththi* (flexible sword) and *sedikuchi* (short stick).

Traditionally, soldiers would train in this art as Silambam increases flexibility and body coordination. It also increases a person’s ability to stay calm and concentrate. Today, the art-form is practised by enthusiasts across the world and is promoted

Top: An artiste conducts a workshop on the ancient Indian martial art form of Silambam at the Hyderabad Literary Festival in 2017

Above: Silambam is a traditional art of stick fighting from South India

SPORTS

Other forms of traditional Indian martial arts

Mardani Khel

Indigenous to Kolhapur in Maharashtra, this armed martial art form involves several ways to wield a sword, a stick and other weapons. The performers usually carry a 'fari' or a leather shield, daggers, *lathi* (stick), sword and *madu* (boomerang). Traditionally, Mardani Khel experts used to train young fighters for war. Over the years, the form was transformed into a folk game.

Gatka

Gatka is a weapon-based martial art form performed by members of the Sikh community. The art uses weapons like *kirpan* (knife), *talwar* (sword) and *kataar* (dagger). Over 100 traditional weapons are used, including the *chakra*, which draws the most attention with its unique shape. The *chakra* is a round weapon with small wooden balls and is rotated with swift wrist movements. Once used in warfare, today Gatka is taught to youngsters to keep them agile and fit, and also to keep the heritage alive.

Mushti Yudha

An unarmed martial art form, Mushti Yudha originated in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Broadly, its techniques include kicks, punches, knee and elbow strikes, and aids the development of the mind and body.

by several organisations, including the World Silambam Association, which organises tournaments and workshops globally. The first Silambam World Cup was held in October 2019, in Kedah, Malaysia.

THANG TA

Thang Ta or Huyen Lallong is an

ancient Manipuri martial art that is characterised by the use of a *thang* (sword) and *ta* (spear). Developed by the Meitei community to protect their kingdom against invasions, Thang Ta dates back to the 17th century. It is practiced in three different ways. The first is ritualistic in nature. The second includes a spectacular performance involving sword and spear dances, while the third is the actual fighting technique. Thang Ta features the use of various weapons, including the sword, spear and dagger, with the sword being at the heart of the martial art form. There are hundreds of different sword drills used for training. However, Thang Ta is more than



Left: Artistes display *chakra*, a weapon used in the martial art form of Gatka, outside the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab;

Below: Young members of the Sikh community during a Gatka performance at the Golden Temple in Amritsar





Top: Thang Ta is a traditional martial art form of Manipur. Here, Thang Ta artistes display their skills at the 2018 edition of the Sangai Festival in Manipur;

Above: Thang Ta integrates various weapons and the practice of physical control through swift movements

just a fighting skill. It is an austere and elaborate system that includes immense physical control and knowledge of breathing techniques. It also involves meditation and religious rituals. Today, Thang Ta is not only practised as a martial art but is also used in theatre and dance performances. Last year, to promote Thang Ta, the Union Government had announced that the martial art form would be a part of the Khelo India Youth Games 2021, scheduled to be held at Panchkula in Haryana.

India is blessed with a diverse culture that has roots in the country's rich history and mythology. Inspired by this treasure-trove is a plethora of traditional martial art forms that continue to exist in the remotest parts of the country. With encouragement from the government and individuals, these art forms have the potential to become a part of contemporary lifestyle not just within the country but across the world, teaching us the importance of physical strength and mental agility.



Abhishek Dubey is among India's leading sports journalists. He has covered international sports for over 15 years now and, at present, is the National Advisor at Prasar Bharati Sports.

SCARLET strands

Be it imparting a host of health benefits or adding a distinct colour, flavour and texture to culinary delights – the uses of a few saffron strands are unparalleled. This spice, produced in Jammu and Kashmir, was recently hailed for its uniqueness by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his monthly radio address *Mann ki Baat*. **Gita Hari** explores the several applications of saffron in everyday life



A Kashmiri family plucks saffron flowers from a saffron field in Pampore near Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. Pampore is one of the main saffron producers in India

Touted to be one of the most expensive spices in the world, saffron (*Crocus sativus*), popularly known as *kesar*, is the golden-hued stigma of the purple crocus flower. Each crocus bears up to four flowers, each with three stigmas. The reason behind its high value is the simple fact that harvesting saffron is a labour-intensive process and is carried out entirely manually. On the outset, the flavour profile of this spice is not easily definable. It exudes a strong exotic aroma that is not overpowering. And once added to food, it not only adds a beautiful colour to the dish but also a distinct flavour.

Although this almost 4,000-year-old spice was first said to have been produced in Greece, one of its major producers today is India, specially in the Karewa



The Kashmir saffron was given the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indications Registry of India in 2020



Top: Saffron adds a buttery hue to sweet treats. Here, homemade saffron ice cream topped with pistachio

Bottom: *Basundi* or *rabri* is an Indian sweet popular in Gujarat and Maharashtra. It is a sweetened condensed milk garnished with dry fruits and saffron

CUISINE



Top: Separating the saffron strands (stigmas of the purple crocus flower) is a laborious manual process

Bottom: Saffron strands are also used in the preparation of vegetarian delicacies. Here, pumpkin cream soup is garnished with saffron

(highlands) of Jammu and Kashmir. Such is the quality and exclusivity of the Kashmir saffron that it was given the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indications Registry in 2020. In his monthly radio address to the nation (*Mann ki Baat*) on January 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, highly praised the Kashmir saffron, calling it “unique”. “It has a strong aroma, rich colour

and its threads are long and thick, which enhance its medicinal value. It represents the rich cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir. If we talk about quality, then Kashmiri saffron is very unique and it is entirely different from saffron of other countries,” PM Modi had pointed out.

HEALTH BENEFITS

The advantages of the spice as a therapeutic agent were ascertained by ancient Egypt and Rome. One of the most common and age-old applications of saffron has been in Indian kitchens for the treatment of common cold and fever. According to a paper published by the United States National Library of Medicine (a branch of the National Institutes of Health), crocin, the orange water-soluble carotene, which is one of the components of saffron, has the ability to trigger apoptosis (programmed cell death) in a number



of human cells, including that of cancer, leukemia, ovarian carcinoma and soft tissue sarcoma. "As per a study published by the US-based National Center for Biotechnology Information, saffron was initially used for depression but it can also be used to treat epilepsy, asthmatic attacks, digestive disturbances and fever. It is best absorbed in the stomach with milk but can also be had with warm water," says Dr Shakkeel, chief medical officer of Viveda Wellness Village, Nashik, Maharashtra.

Pranati Bollapragada, head of nutrition and dietetics of Dharana at Shillim, a wellness retreat in Pune, informs, "Saffron contains more than 150 volatile compounds which include carotenoids and safranal (also an antioxidant). It is rich in vitamin B that assists in elevating serotonin levels, which, in turn, helps fight depression."

Health experts believe that saffron contains such potent anti-oxidants as

Saffron is also traditionally used to garnish and add colour to healthy cooling drinks. Here, almond *lassi* (almond buttermilk) is topped with cardamom pods and saffron



Purity check

Sriram Iyer, organic food promoter and founder of WHO-certified company Theo Organics, advises, "Buy saffron strands and avoid the ground varieties. Adulteration in powdered saffron is common and difficult to decipher. Whole threads of saffron are easy to check and attest for purity. Store in a clean glass bottle to preserve the freshness of saffron for long."

Rashida Vapiwala, food label specialist and founder of LabelBlind, a NutriTech product service, informs, "Adulteration in saffron is commonly detected in labs by methods of spectroscopy and gas chromatography, where saffron is tested on parameters like aroma, bitterness and strength of its colour." She shares some common methods to test saffron at home:

Put the threads in a small container of tepid water. Wait for at least 15 minutes.

- i. Real saffron slowly turns the water yellow. The colour change is slow and gradual, and may take up to an hour. The saffron threads themselves retain their red colour. If the water changes colour immediately, turns red or does not change colour, or if the threads lose their colour, the substance is not saffron.
- ii. After the saffron is soaked, real saffron threads will retain its body and stay intact if you rub them between your fingers. Fake saffron, on the other hand, will fragment and tend to fall apart.

Also, keep these points in mind while buying saffron:

1. Read the label. It should mention 100 per cent saffron without any additives.
2. Check for FSSAI logo on packets manufactured in India.

CUISINE

safranal and picrocrocin, which help in reducing insomnia. The presence of manganese, a nutrient known for its subtle sedative properties, helps in inducing sleep.

Saffron also contains a compound called crocetin, which is known to curb the blood's cholesterol level, thereby checking heart-related ailments. But like all good things, saffron should be consumed in limited portions.

CULINARY TAKE

Saffron's resilience and adaptability has seen it come a long way from being just an ingredient to foster good health. It finds a wide variety of application in the culinary arts too. Chefs and gourmands swear by its compliance and ability to create a strong flavour, along with its golden yellow hue in dishes like *zaffrani murg* (where chicken is cooked in aromatic Indian spices with saffron as the key ingredient) or lend a delicate touch to



sweet treats like *shahi tukda* (clarified butter-fried bread slices dipped in thick sweetened milk) or *ras malai* (small, flat cakes of curd cheese immersed in thickened milk). Just a sprinkle of a few saffron strands in a dish can uplift the experience from delicious to sublime.

Saffron's mainstays are milk and rice-based dishes like turmeric latte, biryani, pulao and meat dishes. Throwing light on its usage, Nilesh Limaye, chef culinaire of the entrepreneurial venture All 'Bout



Top: *Haldi doodh* or turmeric milk, a popular Indian health drink, is traditionally topped with a pinch of saffron and cardamom pods

Left: Adding saffron to cake batter adds a mellow golden hue. Here, a slice of a sticky gooseberry saffron cake with vanilla custard

Right: Saffron is also used in the preparation of fish dishes. Here, fish garnished with saffron and served with vegetables and mashed potatoes

Bottom: Tuna and rice salad with saffron



Cooking, says, “Traditionally, saffron has to be mildly roasted to release its oils and then soaked in warm water or milk. I use this decoction to infuse flavour, colour and texture to my saffron and ginger sauce.” Amit Kocharekar, executive chef of Mumbai-based hotel, The Resort, says, “Soak saffron in water and rub it on meat to obtain maximum flavour and desired colour.”

To get the most out of this pleasant

spice, it is best to use it on its own and not with too many other zests. Chef Limaye points out, “It has to be used sparingly and in the end. If mixed with other spices, its flavour can get masked. However, saffron works best when combined with ginger, lemongrass, rose water, cardamom or nutmeg.”

Saffron is more than just another culinary ingredient in the kitchen. It is an all-round performer. From possessing compounds and antioxidants that impart a host of health benefits to properties that elevate a dining experience – its uses and benefits are truly unmatched. PM Modi’s appeal to the nation to purchase Jammu & Kashmir-produced saffron will not only help saffron cultivators but will also further the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat.



An expert on indigenous Indian cuisine, Gita Hari curates healthy Sattvik cuisine for premium hotels. Her recipes have been featured in the health columns of leading newspapers. The recipient of Women Achievers’ Awards, Hari has conceptualised, scripted and hosted shows on television and the digital platforms as well.

KHAVANU, PEEVANU NE MAJHA NI life jeevanu

Parsi cuisine is steeped in tradition and culture, and over the years has evolved and adapted to local nuances

BY SHELLEY SUBAWALLA



A traditional Parsi spread that is prepared during Navroze and celebrations like weddings. Traditionally served on banana leaves, the delicacies include *machchi no saas* (fish cooked in a white vinegar-based sauce), *salli ma marghi* (spicy gravy chicken topped with potato straws), *kachumbar and rotli* (onion and tomato salad, and flatbread), *marghi na farcha* (fried chicken) and *saariya* (Parsi papad)

“**K**havanu, peevanu
ne majha ni life
jeevanu (eat,
drink and live
a happy life)”.

This is an age-old adage the Parsi community lives by. A community with a culture rich in history and traditions (both social and culinary), dating back to the early-10th century in India, Parsis have always prided themselves on living in harmony and integrating themselves into the local and existing ethos of the prevalent surroundings.

Legend and history have it that when Parsis landed in Sanjan, Gujarat, after fleeing Iran and were presented to the king, a Parsi priest stepped forward and requested for a bowl



Above: Parsis love breaking an egg on almost every dish. Here, a popular Parsi preparation *bheeda par edu* (spicy okra topped with an egg)

Left: Another Parsi egg preparation is Parsi *akuri* or Indian spicy scrambled eggs served with toasted brown bread

CUISINE



Right: Marghi - chicken na curry chawal (left) and kolmi - prawn na curry chawal (right);

Bottom: Parsi mava cakes (slightly spiced traditional cakes made with mava or thickened milk) form a part of every Parsi celebration

of milk filled to the brim and some sugar. The priest mixed the sugar into the milk without spilling a drop and then promised the king that similarly, Parsis would merge into the local community and sweeten the lives of those around them. Interestingly, even then they used food as the medium to state their point!

Parsis went on to thrive and spread their wings across India, all the while embracing harmony and adapting to the local culture and traditions. A perfect example of this is the way their cuisine has evolved over the centuries. While they have stayed true to their traditions while celebrating their festivals, they have also adapted themselves according to the local society and customs. This history is encapsulated in their food and general way of living.

One of the most important Parsi festivals is the spring or vernal



equinox, also known as Navroze. Celebrated on March 21, vernal equinox is, according to the Parsis, the dawn of a new year. The actual time when the change takes place is recorded in Iran and then the information is sent all over the world. Navroze, as all Parsi festivals, is a

day of celebration, spending quality time with family and meeting friends. But no Parsi celebration is complete without food. Hence, platters full of delicious food are cooked with tables creaking under the weight.

The day starts with sweets like *ravo* (a semolina pudding) or *sev* (a vermicelli dessert), both generously topped with fried dried fruits or *falooda* (rose-flavoured milk). Lunch is usually either a *pulao daar* (a Parsi version of a mutton or chicken biryani served with a spicy lentil curry) or *dhun daar ne patio* (rice, plain *daal* or lentil and a sweet-and-sour curry made with fish or shell fish). Fish is considered a sign of good luck in Parsi culture to such an extent that one would actually find sweets shaped like fish at a traditional table. Navroze is the time when Parsi households are filled with the delectable aromas of traditional food being cooked, doors being decorated with garlands and *torans* (ornamental garlands) and on the floors are drawn horse shoe, fish or flower, depicting prosperity, happiness and luck.

A beautiful tradition practised by Parsis in India is the laying of the Navroze table. In this tradition, a table is covered with a white table cloth, as white indicates purity,



Top: *Marghi na pulao* and aromatic mutton *gos* feature prominently in most Parsi spreads
Bottom: One of the most-loved dishes of the Parsi community is the delicious *ghan saak* (made with lentils, vegetables, mutton and spices) and caramelised rice



A traditional Parsi festive meal includes *pulao* or a spicy chicken served with fried potato straws (*salli ma marghi*), a carrot and dry fruits pickle (*lagan nu achchar*), *saariya* (*papad*) and sweets

CUISINE

and is then loaded with food and various food items, each with a deep meaning. Among these are seven food items beginning with the letter 'S' – *sirka* (vinegar), *sumac* (spice), *samanu* (halwa), *sib* (apple), *sir* (garlic), *senjed* (berry of the sorb tree) and *sabzi* (herb) – along with seven food items beginning with 'SH' in Persian – *sharab* (wine), *shakar* (sugar), *shir* (milk), *shirini* (sweetmeat), *shirberenj* (sweet), *shira* (syrup) and *shahad* (honey). Also kept are painted eggs (much like the proverbially famous Easter eggs), fresh fruits, dried fruits, vegetables and grains (signifying abundance).

The lady of the house invites

her guests to look into a mirror so that they may have a year of good reflections, offers them a coin each for prosperity and sprinkles rose water on them before leading them to the table. Nothing spells happiness and contentment more than a group of friends and family, sitting around, laughing with extreme merriment and breaking bread.

The most common Parsi dish is *dhan saak*. This dish, made with a variety of lentils, vegetables, mutton and spices, has become synonymous with Parsis across the world. It is served with caramelised rice and *kachumbar* (an onion and tomato salad). However, *dhan saak*, though a

A traditional Navroze table. Each object placed on the table carries a special significance - a mirror to signify a year of good reflections ahead and coins to usher in prosperity





Top: An elderly Parsi woman walks past figures of “knights”, believed to be the guardians of Mumbai’s Parsi Fire Temple, on the occasion of Navroze; **Bottom:** An Indian Parsi family enjoys a meal on Navroze at a Fire Temple in Hyderabad

staple at most Parsi Sunday lunches, is never prepared on an auspicious occasion. Served on the fourth day of a person’s demise, one will never find it served on a birthday, Navjote or Navroze. A traditional festive meal includes *pulao* or a spicy chicken served with fried potato straws (*sallima marghi*), a carrot and dry fruits pickle (*lagan nu achchar*), *saariya* (papad), thin *chappatis* (flatbreads) and *ravo*, *sev* or *lagan nu custard* (Parsi custard) for dessert. Served on

Banana leaves, the entire community eats together, traditionally.

Parsi cuisine is steeped in culture. Most of the dishes have a story to them. These time-honoured recipes have been passed down through centuries from one generation to another in families and modified over the years, yet their core has stayed intact. Parsis try their best to maintain their individuality and uniqueness, teach the same to their children and inculcate in them a part of the rich cultural and culinary heritage. A heritage that is rich in spice, flavour and is a perfect blend of ancient origins and modern adaptations.

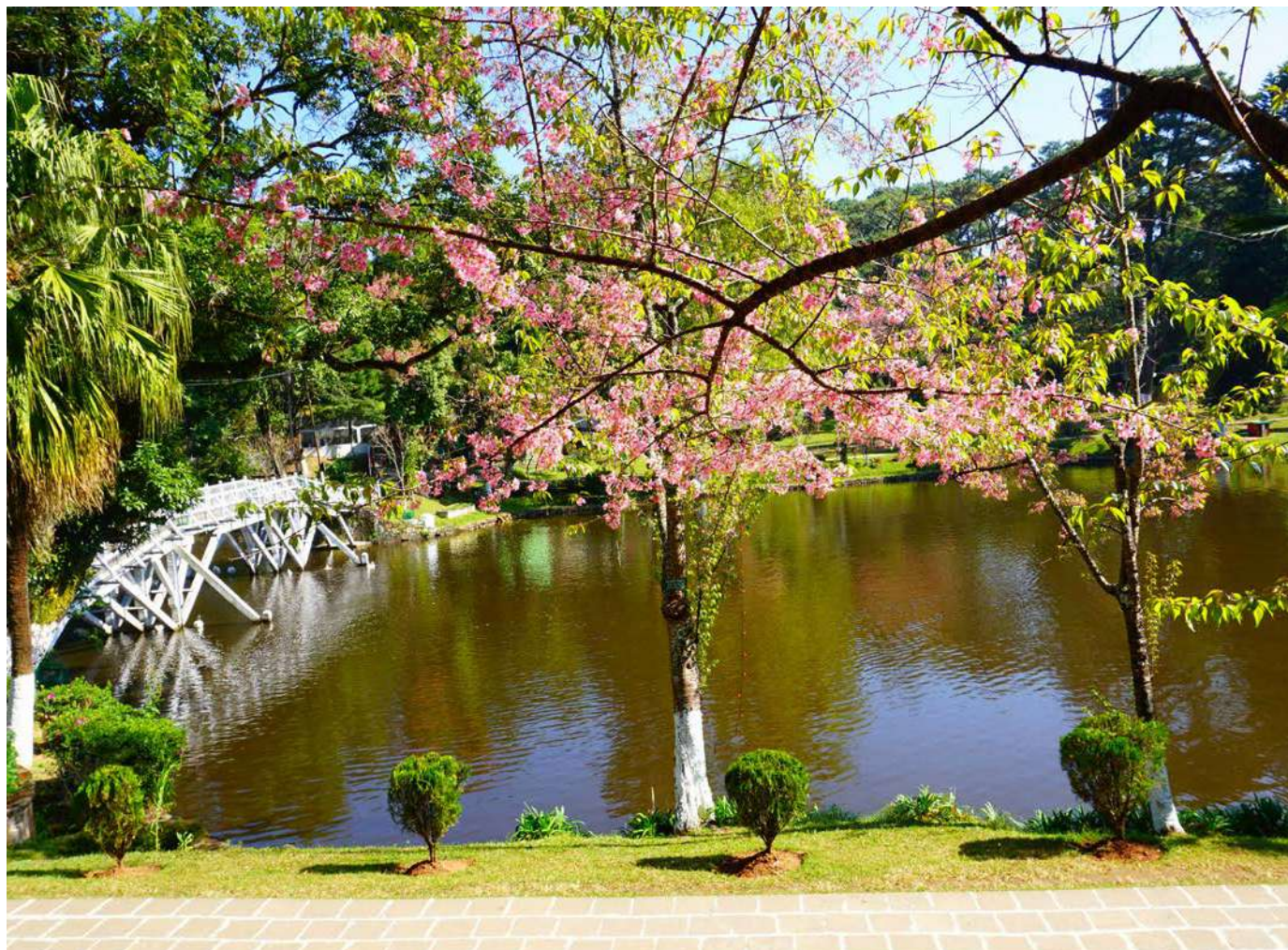


Shelley Subawalla is the proprietor of *Zarin’s Secrets*, a venture aimed at promoting and preserving the ancient culinary traditions of the Parsi community. Based in Delhi, she makes and sells Parsi spices and condiments, making Parsi food accessible to the world. Her aim is to spread the word about her community, its cuisine and its traditions.

DAINTY blooms!

Every year between autumn and spring, Shillong in Meghalaya decks up in various shades of pink with the blossoming of the Himalayan cherry blossoms. We look at a few noteworthy natural sights in and around the capital city of Shillong

BY RAJIV VERMA



The Himalayan cherry blossom blooms can be best viewed at Ward's Lake in Shillong

The mere mention of sakura or cherry blossoms brings stunning images of the delicate flowers in full bloom in Japan. But one doesn't need to travel to Japan to sight these florescence. One just needs to make one's way to India's Northeastern state of Meghalaya.

While cherry blossom trees around the world usually bloom in spring, Meghalaya's capital, Shillong, wears the dainty pink hues of Himalayan cherry blossoms in autumn, giving it the unique distinction of celebrating the flowers in November. This phenomenon turns the East Khasi Hills into a floral

paradise. A fact reiterated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in one of his monthly radio addresses to the nation, *Mann ki Baat*. Referring to images of beautiful cherry blossoms on the Internet, PM Modi had said, "You might be thinking that when I am referring to cherry blossoms I am talking about Japan's distinct identity but it's not like that. These are not pictures of Japan. These are pictures of Shillong of our Meghalaya. These cherry blossoms have further enhanced the beauty of Meghalaya."

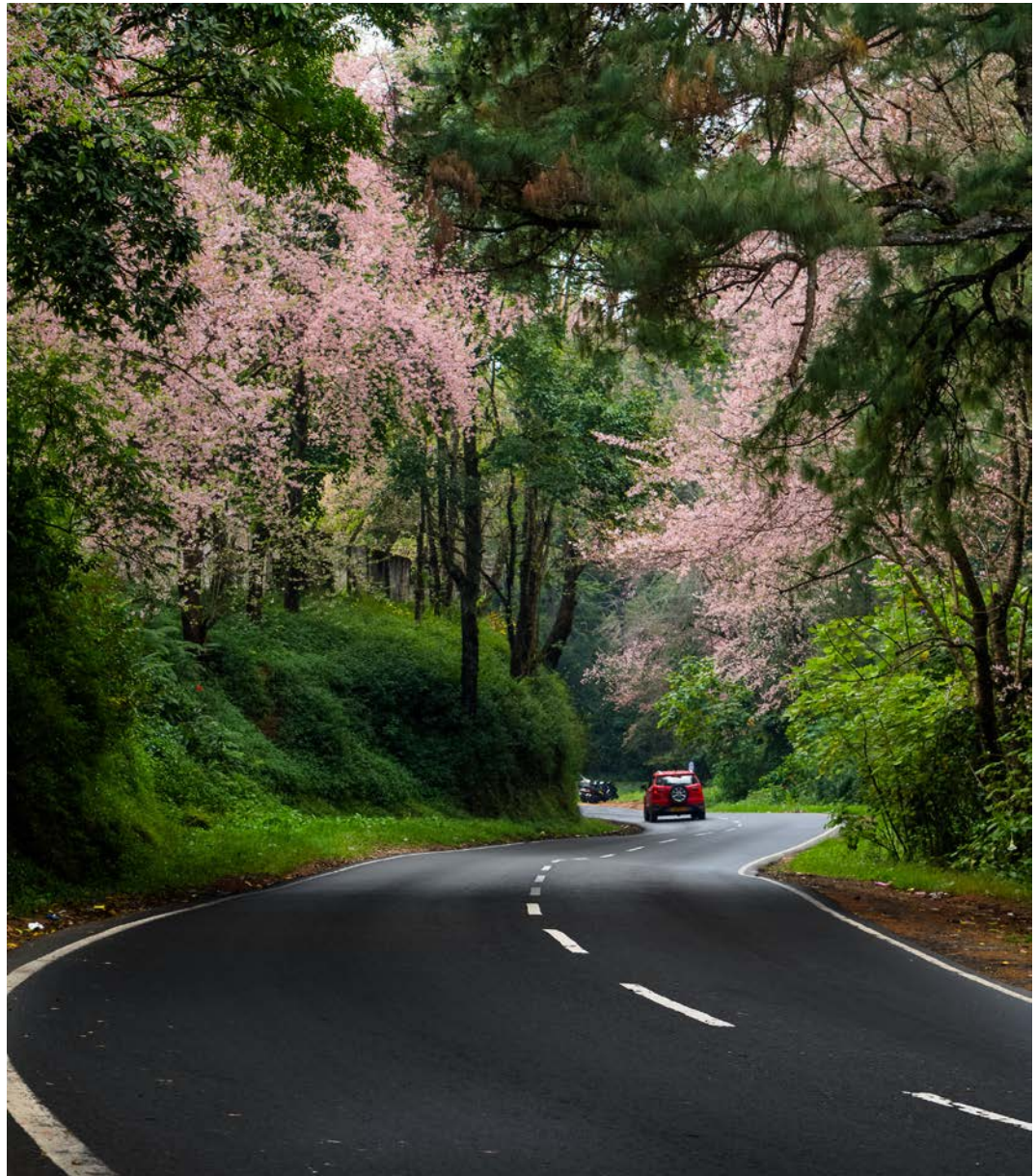
Shillong, the district headquarter of the East Khasi Hills, hosts the annual Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival that is regarded as one of the most vibrant and colourful events in

Left: The Shillong golf course hosts an amateur golf tournament as a part of the Cherry Blossom Festival activities;
Right: Cherry blossoms in full bloom in Shillong



Meghalaya facts

- Meghalaya became a full-fledged state of the Union of India on January 21, 1972
 - Meghalaya is the homeland of three of India's ancient hill communities - the Khasi, the Jaintias and the Garos.
- The soil of the West Jaintia Hills is ideal for the cultivation of Lakadong turmeric that has a curcumin content of seven per cent. In fact, Lakadong Turmeric has a Geographic Indication (GI) tag linked to West Jaintia Hills district.



Road journeys or long drives in and around Shillong during the blooming of the cherry blossoms is an enchanting experience with the trees lining both sides of the road filled with pink flowers

the state. Begun in 2016, this festival is organised by the Government of Meghalaya in association with the Institute of Bioresources and Sustainable Development (IBSD). Tourists from far and wide come to feast their eyes on the delicate blooms. One of the best views of the blossoms can be had while taking a boat ride on the waters of Ward's Lake. Considered to be one of the most endearing attractions

of Shillong, the 100-year-old Ward's Lake boasts a pretty wooden bridge, verdant slopes and manicured gardens, making it a much sought-after recreational spot for locals and tourists alike.

The Shillong golf course is another spot in the city ideal for spotting cherry blossoms. Nestled inside a border of pine trees, this 18-hole golf course in the heart of the city is a popular place for

relaxation. Long walks and leisurely strolls on the lush expansive meadows are enjoyed here. Visitors can even bring their golf set along to participate in the amateur golf tournament that is organised as a part of the festival.

But Shillong is more than just the city where cherry blossoms bloom in India. It is a major tourist hub, welcoming travellers with open arms to experience its natural wonders and charms of a bygone era. Those seeking respite from the cacophony of everyday life will find it in the quaint environs of the Phan Nonglait

Park, earlier known as Lady Hydari Park. Located in the heart of the city, this sprawling park boasts a miniature zoo and a deer park.

A stone's throw away from the park (about 1.5 km) lies the Cathedral Mary Help Of Christians. High arches, stained glass windows and interior artworks made of terracotta are major attractions of this beautiful building.

About four km away from the cathedral lies another popular city attraction - Wankhar Entomological Museum. This privately-owned museum run by Werwina Wankhar,

While cherry blossom trees around the world usually bloom in spring between March and April, Shillong wears the pink hues of Himalayan cherry blossom in autumn, around November

Living roots bridge near Riwai village, which is close to Mawlynnong



TRAVEL

Meghalaya's wildlife



Meghalaya boasts a diverse range of fauna spanning from the rare and elusive clouded leopard (state animal, pictured above) and the Indian wolf to such species of birds as wood srupe, Blyth's kingfisher and king vulture.



the daughter of noted Indian entomologist Dr S Sarkar, has a stellar collection of rhinoceros beetles, and 1,600 species of butterflies and moths on display.

Around 10 km away from this lepidopterology haven lies a natural marvel – Elephant Falls. Called Kshaid-Lai-Pateng in the local Khasi language, this mesmeric waterfall plunges three levels into a sparkling pool. The best experience to be had here is the walk (along a railed path) that begins from the head of the falls and ends at the bottom.

About 10 km from the city, and perched at an elevation of 1,966 m, Shillong peak is the highest point

in the city. It offers a breathtaking panoramic view of the entire city and, on a clear day, the Himalayas. A telescope is available here for enhanced viewing pleasure.

On the outskirts of the city, about 25 km away, lies Mawphlang, one of Meghalaya's most sacred groves. A must-visit spot for nature lovers, it houses a variety of flowering plants, trees and butterflies. According to local legend, the forest is protected by the Lyngdoh clan, who is believed to be the custodian of all sacred groves in the East Khasi Hills.

An approximate 65-km road drive from Mawphlang leads to Mawlynnong, one of Asia's cleanest

A sweeping view of Shillong from Shillong Peak

The annual Cherry Blossom Festival in Shillong is organised by the Government of Meghalaya in association with the Institute of Bioresources and Sustainable Development (IBSD)



The mesmeric Elephant Falls near Shillong

villages. It is home to the state's iconic Nohwet Living Root Bridge - a simple suspension bridge created by weaving the roots of the *Ficus elastica* (rubber fig) tree around a framework through generations.

For science enthusiasts, the balancing rocks (or Maw Ryngekew Sharatia, as it is called locally) are a big attraction. Located on the village outskirts, it features a giant boulder that is naturally balanced over a small stone. Locals claim that the structure has been like that for several years and that no force of nature has been able to disrupt the balance.

Meghalaya does more than just offer natural wonders at every step. It acquaints us with mother nature and inculcates in us the importance

of respecting and preserving her plentiful bounty. It welcomes visitors to its sacred groves, enchants them with its varied blooms and mesmerises them with bridges made of living plant roots. Meghalaya, which literally means 'abode of the clouds', is, in the truest sense, nature's paradise.



Rajiv Verma is a seasoned traveller from Northeast India who has extensively toured the seven sister states of the region. He curates guided tours for visitors wanting to explore the beauty of the seven sister states. He is the founder of North East Explorers, an eco-travel company based in Northeast India. Website: www.northeastexplorers.in

A CORNUCOPIA OF colours

One of the brightest festivals in the Indian calendar, Holi is celebrated in different ways across the country. Keeping the underlying joie de vivre alive, we feature glimpses of the festival from across the nation and the traditions that are followed during the occasion



Holi (March 29, 2021) is celebrated with pomp and joy across the country, and even welcomes foreign nationals and tourists to join the festivities. Here, an international traveller applies colours to a man dressed in traditional Rajasthani attire in Pushkar, Rajasthan



Top: Holi is called Dol Jatra in West Bengal. However, one of the most unique versions of the festival in the state can be witnessed in Santiniketan, where it is known as Bosonto Utsob. A tradition begun by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore in Visva Bharati, a university which he founded, it is characterised by traditional attires, cultural events and a play of powder colours called *rang khela*

Bottom: Women playfully hitting men with cloth dipped in coloured water in Beawar, a city in Rajasthan. In this form of the festival played in this region of the state, the mock fight ensues between sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law



SNAPSHOTS

Holi (March 29, 2021) is known by various names like Dol Jatra in West Bengal, Yaosang in Manipur and Rang Panchami in Maharashtra



Holika dahan, celebrated a night before Holi in many parts of the country, is marked by burning a pyre with an idol of Holika, an Indian mythological character who was blessed with the boon of being immune to fire. According to legend, Holika's brother Hiranyakashyap (a demon king) wanted his son Prahlad to worship him. But the young boy was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Engulfed in rage, Hiranyakashyap conspired with Holika to immolate Prahlad, whose devotion saved him while Holika paid the price of cruelty by burning in the fire. Holika dahan, therefore, also signifies the victory of good over evil



Top: In Bihar, a tradition called Phaguwa or Phagwah is followed during Holi. It is characterised by folk music and dance. Here, students perform during a Holi function at Patna Women's College

Right: Foreign nationals soak in the spirit of Holi in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. In the state, Holi is celebrated through various traditions. One of them is called Baithki Holi, in which men sit down and sing songs about the season and the festival



INDIAN IMPRESSIONS

Know India a little more with these interesting facts



Image: twitter.com/SaranSasikumar2

WORTH A MILLION WORDS

Saran Sasikumar, a 14-year-old Dubai-based boy, recently made a six-layered stencil portrait of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to mark the occasion of India's Republic Day (January 26). The portrait was handed over by Sasikumar's parents, who hail from Kerala, to Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs, V Muraliedharan, during his visit to the UAE in January 2021, to be gifted to PM Modi. In reciprocation, PM Modi sent a letter of appreciation to the young artist, encouraging him to hone his talent.

INNOVATION PAR EXCELLENCE

- Providing an impetus to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign, scientists from IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Kharagpur have developed a solar-powered pest-control device. This mobile and semi-automated innovation ensures even distribution of pesticides and resembles a cart with three wheels and a roof of solar panels.
- Furthering the goals of Aatmanirbhar Bharat is Tamil Nadu resident PM Murugesan, who has designed a machine that makes ropes from banana fibre. These ropes are then used to create environment-friendly bags, baskets and other utility objects.



L to R: The solar-powered pest-control device developed by IIT Kharagpur; PM Murugesan with his creations

Image (left): kgpchronicle.iitkgp.ac.in; (right): betterindia.com



Image: twitter.com/Wangchuk66

A WARM SUPPORT

In a bid to provide respite to the soldiers of the Indian Army posted in high-altitude areas from freezing temperatures, Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer, innovator and education reformist, has built a solar-powered 'military tent'. In a tweet dated February 19, 2021, Wangchuk made the world know of his creation. The portable tent, which weighs less than 30 kg, can accommodate 10 soldiers. According to his social media post, the tent can also function at temperatures as low as -14 degree Celsius. Wangchuk decided to work on this unique innovation after learning that nearly 50,000 Indian troops are deployed at high altitude areas in harsh winter conditions.



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