Corporate Tycoons

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Sona Group:
GLITTERING SUCCESS

Chocko Valliappa
Vice Chairman, Sona Group

THE
BIG
THINKERS
MAGAZINE

Corporate Tycoons

The Complete Business and Travel Magazine

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COVER STORY

The Resurgence of Pandemic

India particularly has experienced a huge spike in Covid-19 cases since March this year after incidence of infections started dropping in January. What is alarming is the infections are spreading faster than the first. Many states are reporting shortage of hospital, beds, oxygen supply, medicines and even space in morgues and crematoriums. Executive Editor T N Ahok analyses the resurgence of the pandemic and gives an outline of the challenges that India is facing.

The pandemic recorded a declining curve by January and February this year, but paradoxically an unexpected sharp upsurge has been noticed since March. On 27 March, India's confirmed active cases on the day were 62 632, the highest seen since October 2020. Globally, India has had the third highest number of confirmed cases and deaths from covid-19 after Brazil and the US. As of 29 March, India had 12 million cases and 162 000 deaths from the disease.

The cover story in this issue is on The Sona Valliappa Group , It is a premier business group which has pioneered India's growth in the fields of agriculture, textiles, real estate, Information Technology , education and research. Consulting Editor Sekhar Seshan meets the top management team of the company and tries to find out what makes the Sona Group glitter. The institution, set up in 1957, won the 2019 AICTE-CII IndPact Award for Best Industry-Linked Polytechnic and has been elevated to the status of a Mentor Institute last year by virtue of winning the award for successive years in different streams. As a Mentor, it guides 100 polytechnics and 50 engineering colleges on how to increase their students' learning capabilities.

In the Guest Column Mr K Srinivasan the founder of the Sansadratna Awards says even as the country is in the midst of the State Assembly Elections in five States – West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, India is need of urgent electoral reforms that has been long pending. Although the first official consolidated proposal for Electoral Reforms was made in June 2004 to the then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, by the then Chief Election Commissioner of India, Mr. T S Krishnamurthy, to date nothing noteworthy has happened. Any major reforms that have taken place like NOTA, declaring criminal cases in election affidavit by candidates, and disqualification of membership for convicted MPs/MLAs, have happened only through judicial orders from Supreme Court of India.

In another guest column headlined Lockdown Will Change Social Fabric of Many Nations, the director of Kinetic Communications Mr Deepak Shikarpur says the lockdown will change social fabric of many nations. The global economy shrank by 4.3 per cent last year, over two-and-a-half times more than during the global financial crisis of 2009. The modest recovery of 4.7 per cent expected in 2021 would barely offset the losses of 2020.

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CHANDRAN IYER
Editor
chandran.iyer@corporatetycoons.com

The Seven Golden Steps

▶ **FIRST,** to take special care of the elderly, especially those who have chronic disease.

▶ **SECOND** to completely adhere to the 'Lakshman Rekha' of Lockdown and Social Distancing; use homemade face-covers and masks without fail.

▶ **THIRD** to follow the instructions issued by AYUSH ministry to enhance immunity.

▶ **FOURTH** to download the Arogya Setu Mobile App to help prevent the spread of corona infection. Inspire others to download the app as well.

▶ **FIFTH** to take care of poor families; to fulfil their food requirements.

▶ **SIXTH** to be compassionate towards the people who work in every individual business or industry. Do not deprive them of their livelihood.

▶ **SEVENTH** to pay utmost respect to our nation's Corona Warriors – our doctors and nurses, sanitation workers and police force.
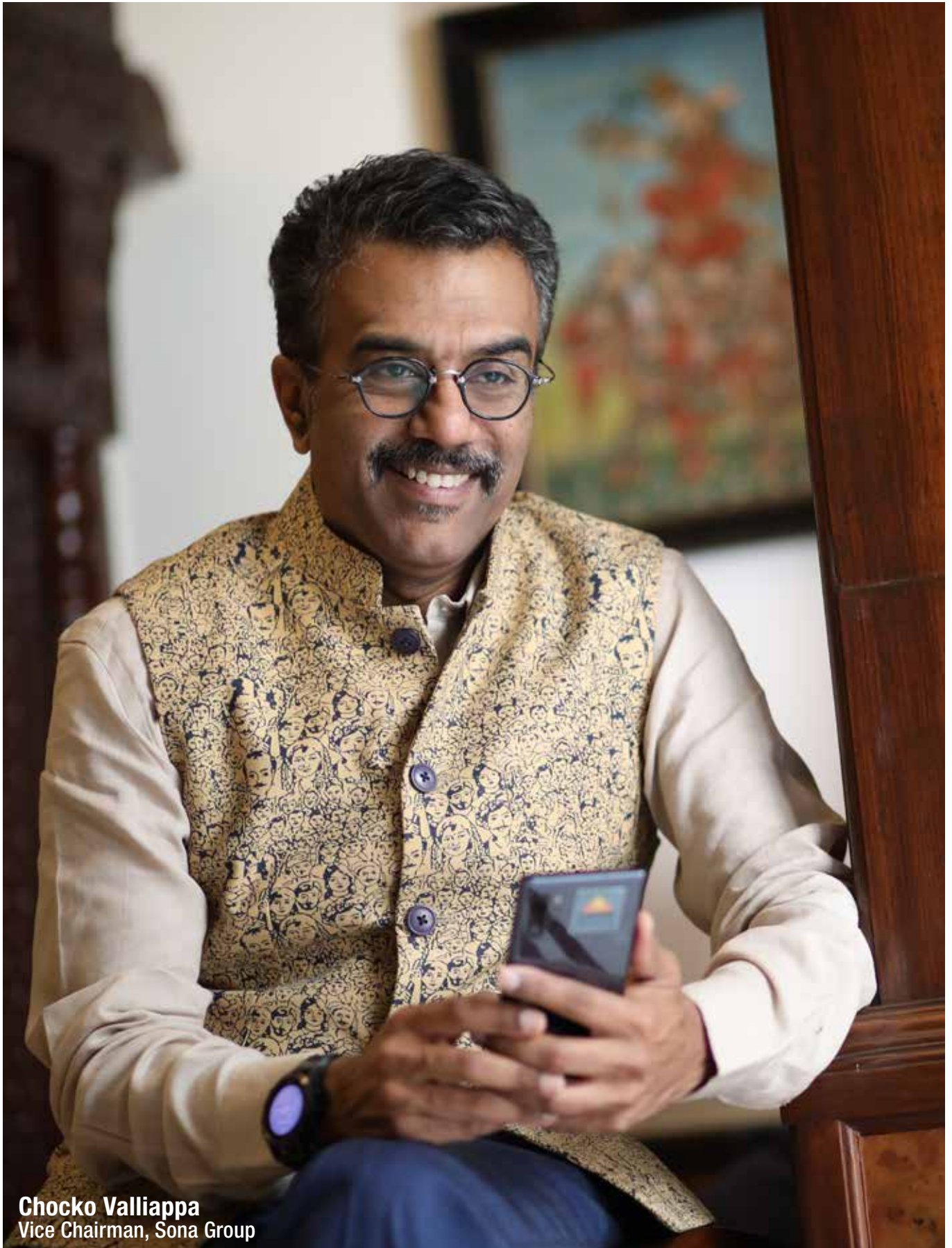
Chocko Valliappa
Vice Chairman, Sona Group

Sona Group: Glittering Success

The Sona group has turned a small town into a hub of education and development with a slew of institutions that teach youngsters a variety of subjects from arts and commerce to engineering, and offer vocational training to impart livelihood skills to youth and women.

- By Sekhar Seshan

Fuerza. That's a Spanish word meaning 'force'. In Salem, Tamil Nadu, it is a smart electric motorcycle made from an old scrap motorcycle, customised by a four-member team from the Thiagarajar Polytechnic College from a normal petrol-run bike. The new e-bike is only one of the many things that have turned a sleepy town which was known for only its age-old textile units and being the railway station from which to take a bus or cab to the hill station of Yercaud, into an industrial and educational hub.

Much of the credit for this transformation of Salem belongs to M.S. Chockalingam, a textile businessman and at heart a big giver with a desire to give back to society and nurture the next generation. The group got its name Sona from what Chockalingam's friends and admirers addressed him as. The group today shines like the north Indian meaning of the word, gold. Over the years, it has spawned a number of other educational bodies, each of which has lived up to the name it carries.

Long before him, however, the group has his origins in pre-Independence India, having been founded by Kalaithanthai Karumuttu Thiagaraja Chettiar in the 1920s to bring about economic development through education and industrial development. The polytechnic, named after him, is the first embodiment of his dreams, having spread roots in agriculture, textiles, real estate, informational technology, education and research.

Back to the Fuerza, built by a six-member team: Elavarassan, Abinash, Ahmed Taufeeq, Balachandran, Chandradevan and Jagadeeswaran.

The institution, set up in 1957, won the 2019 AICTE-CII IndPact Award for Best Industry-Linked Polytechnic and has been elevated to the status of a Mentor Institute last year by virtue of winning the award for successive years in different streams. As a Mentor, it guides 100 polytechnics and 50 engineering colleges on how to increase their students' learning capabilities.

Having defined the main problem in the move towards greener transportation as electric vehicles' high price, low travel range and lack of adequate access to charging stations, the team researched for three months to select components with the right specifications. They finally decided to work with a brushless DC motor, which is capable of delivering a maximum speed of 40 kmph. "The specialty of this motor is that it provides a noiseless and high-power transmission to the system," Elavarassan explains. "We installed highly efficient lithium-ion battery, which can run 80 km per full charge of three to four hours.

A section of Steve Jobs computer lab at Sona College of Technology

Sona College of Technology students display award for a project

Computer lab at Sona College of Technology

Sona College of Technology library

This overall electric system is customised to the bike with a mono shock absorber, which reduces the vibrations affecting the body and suits all types of road conditions."

They used a belt drive to connect the motor and the rear wheel to reduce the power consumption and increase the motor life. After solving various problems in fabricating this drive, they finally tested the prototype to carry a load of 250 kg at a speed of 35 kmph. Another problem was insufficient storage space – which they solved by altering the 12-litre fuel tank to an all-purpose storage carrier.

The cost to recharge the bike would be below Rs. 20, which is far lower than a fossil fuel alternative for the 80-km run. The prototype cost Rs.98,000, but such a vehicle can be produced at around Rs.60,000-70,000 at sustainable volumes, the team adds.

The institution, set up in 1957, won the 2019 AICTE-CII IndPact Award for Best Industry-Linked Polytechnic and has been elevated to the status of a Mentor Institute last year by virtue of winning the award for successive years in different streams. As a Mentor, it guides 100 polytechnics and 50 engineering colleges on how to increase their students' learning capabilities. "We have taught more than 50,000 students," says its Principal, Dr V. Karthikeyan. "Two in every five of our staff members are our alumni."

The teaching system, he explains, is totally student-centric: the students are divided into groups according to their capabilities, judged on the basis of their replies to questions aimed at grading their analytical skills. They are also involved as student facilitators to prepare for, and take, classes in the teacher's presence and answer their peers' questions. They even get paid for all this, at Rs.125 an hour or Rs.6 lakh per semester – with an additional incentive of 10 per cent if they achieve a result of 80-90 per cent. They also conduct special evening closes for the slow learners among them, with no teachers to supervise them.

eBike

Apart from the e-bike which one team has created, the polytechnic also offers testing services to industry, earning what Karthikeyan calls "a lot of revenue". It is also the first autonomous institution in the country to have a green building which got a LEED platinum rating.

At the Sona College of Engineering in the sprawling campus, its Principal Dr S.R. Senthil Kumar talks of the introduction of Mechatronics as a subject in Mechanical Engineering. "It was possible for us because we are autonomous," he points out. "Artificial Reality and Virtual Reality are possible for everyone now, not only for the Electronics students. We also provide Artificial Intelligence as well as the traditional machine training, and give them hands-on experience in 3D printing, too."

Chocko Valliappa, who now runs the group with his father C. Valliappa, Chairman, and brother Thyagu Valliappa, as fellow Vice Chairman, says that with 36-plus research centres and many products created through in-house R&D, the aim is to drastically reduce what he calls PPP – paper per person. "We also execute projects for waste treatment plants (WTPs) with the help of the Department of Science & Technology fund of Rs.1.26 crore. We make these available for local farmers to use at a price."

Certifate distribution by Dr. Mariyappan, Designated food safty officer

Chairman interaction with solar food proessing candidates

The group has also set up plants to recycle waste paper and make files and folders which it uses for its own marketing. It is training more than 700 local rural women and helping them to establish technological solutions with loans from Nabard. Other initiatives to provide employment opportunities are the manufacture of paver blocks using steel slag and cement, solar food processing with a 7-lakh solar tunnel, pulse plating for Silver anklets – which makes the process less complicated than nano plating - and special sewing machines for differently-enabled women – with an optional sensor added on to make them hands-free. "Some industries have approached us to train disabled women employees for their CSR activity," Chocko says.

Sona Yukti, established in 2012, looks after various skill development initiatives in association with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). "I met the NSDC Chairman for this affiliation, which is a good thing to take us to the next level," Chocko explains. "We have training centres all over India – in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Maharashtra and other states – with the main operations centred in Salem and the head office in Bengaluru. Every centre matches the government's specifications."

The operations have now become international, with students in Bhutan and Nepal, while Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Indonesia have also been approached for development programmes in those countries. Courses for the foreign centres include shoe design and manufacture, automotive repair and maintenance, photography and design, HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) and solid waste management, as well as for training as chefs and chocolatiers.

The apple of Chocko's eye, however, is his Vee Technologies. Set up as an

Silver anklets

Development of Paver Blocks -Batch-4 Training

e-learning company in Bengaluru and New York in 2001, it now provides hospitals and other healthcare providers in the US with their business plans including one of the biggest things in that country, meeting insurance claims.

"When we began setting up the Valliappa Software Technology Park, of which I am the co-founder, our satellite dish came to the venue in a bullock cart! Veetech's headquarters building now has a 'museum room', where the satellite earth station was located," he recalls. "The Government of India nationalised the room for the Overseas Communications Service of India, which later became VSNL," he says. "It was the only connected place for uplinking."

One night, he remembers, there was a massive voltage surge of 4000 volts, and he was woken up at 2 a.m because the earth station was essential for the launch of an Indian satellite that was being launched from French Guyana. He had to rush to the office and call up various officials to make sure that the issue was sorted out.

Today, Vee Technologies is among the Global Outsourcing 100 companies listed by the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals® (IAOP). "Our inclusion among the Best Outsourcing Advisors strengthens our commitment to our customers, our people, and the community," Chocko says. "Our keen desire to attain technovation will spur us to add even greater value to our clients and make a positive impact on their business."

Explaining his HR philosophy in business, Chocko says he never believed in body-shopping: "People should be able to go home and sleep in their own beds," he says. "So I used Indian talent based in India to service the international market. My Vee Technologies dream became a reality!"

Candidates Making of Paver blocks

Loading in drier

Moving from BPO (business process outsourcing) to KPO (knowledge process outsourcing) in 2010, he realised that his organisation could solve a huge problem in the US, with the doctor having to go beyond being a healer to getting inundated with recording data. "We listen to the entire conversation securely and provide the data to the doctor so that he can give more face time to his or her patients," he adds.

His employment platform, Hire Mee, takes into consideration the fact that potential employers find it difficult to visit Salem – "no-one goes beyond Bengaluru!" he says – even though there is so much talent available everywhere else too. His company "removes rejection from the face of the candidate" by taking online assessments of Sona graduates and other applicants to 4,000 companies all over India and abroad who are looking for people. "More than half a million people have registered with us, and we have moved the ball for about 150,000 applicants," he says.

But Salem is only a small town which

nobody knows or visits. Right? "Wrong!" say Chocko and his family - and have set about proving it. One of the big achievements of the Sona College of Technology is the recognition of its Special Electrical and Electronics Drives Division (SPEED) by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) as a Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (SIRO) after it supplied three products that are part of India's moon mission Chandrayaan-2.

SPEED had supplied three products for the mission. These were the fuel mixer motors that mix liquid oxygen with fuel, the Doppler mechanism for the Vikram module to guide the laser to ensure smooth landing on the moon and the Robotic arm that would enable the module to pick up sand and rock

Solar tunnel drier

samples from the moon.

This was not the first time that the college had supplied components to Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Earlier, too, SPEED had suppled ISRO with special purpose BLDC (Brushless DC) motors for satellites and rockets as well as lunar robots for many earlier space missions.

"It was a momentous day for India as ISRO's scientists got us so near the moon through Chandrayaan-2. Researchers, professors and doctoral students from Sona College of Technology should not be disappointed but take heart that they contributed in a small way, to the courageous attempt to land on the moon. These efforts will go a long way in India's quest to unravel what is on the moon," Chocko says.

His father, group Chairman Valliappa, says he was put in charge of the business when he was only 23 years old, with no knowledge of the language or the people. "We came as strangers, now we are well known!" he says. In India, he says, a job needs to get created every 1.28 seconds, with 400 million aspirants coming into the market at a time. Only 30 per cent of this is actually happening – which is why automation needs to come in in a big way. "Handling placements in the college since about eight years ago, I realised the problem of finding people for ourselves. We have now developed a bot which will replace 30 people."

Thyagu, Vice Chairman, looks after the group's interest in coffee and textiles. "We have about 1,500 to 2,000 people in three mills. I also took over another mill in Salem, and bought factories in Europe which I brought here."

Salem, Bengaluru, India, the US, space: the entire universe is Sona's playground! ◨

Sewing

The Second Wave of Corona Virus
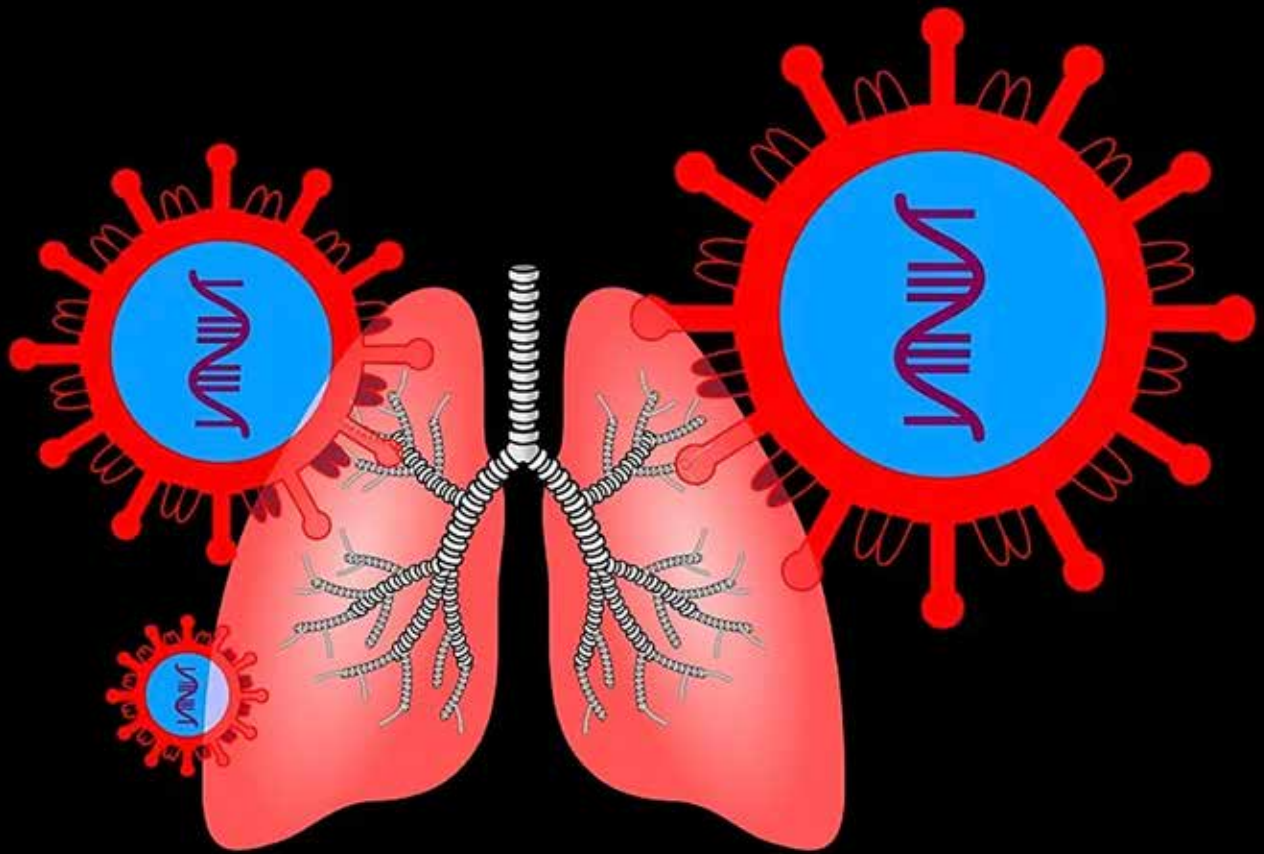
Maharashtra is once again the worst sufferer in terms of the resurgence of cases, the largest contributor to the tally.

- By TN Ashok

India as also countries such as South America (Brazil), USA (New Jersey/New York) Canada (Toronto), UK (London) and South Africa in the dark continent are highly alarmed over the resurgence of Coronavirus cases with the appearance of new mutants, especially the South African variant, which seems to defy the strongest of vaccines introduced globally. It has also defied the Indian vaccines.

India particularly has experienced a huge spike in Covid-19 cases since March this year after incidence of infections started dropping in January this year. The rise incidence or resurgence of corona virus cases could be due to two reasons : 1) With the vaccination drive by India, claimed to be the biggest in the world since the small pox inoculation, people have started throwing cation to the winds. Wearing of masks in public is less common, washing of hands has become less frequent and assembly of people in crowded places has become rampant with celebrations for birthdays and marriages. The rise comes as India celebrates festivals like Holi, religious functions like the Kumbh Mela, and with five states currently involved in assembly elections.

The pandemic recorded a declining curve by January and February this year, but paradoxically an unexpected sharp upsurge has been noticed since March. On 27 March, India's confirmed active cases on the day were 62 632, the highest seen since October 2020. Globally, India has had the third highest number of confirmed cases and deaths from covid-19 after Brazil and the US. As of 29 March, India had 12 million cases and 162 000 deaths from the disease.

The BJP led NDA government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a statement on March this year stating the resurgence of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in a few states of India, especially Maharashtra, was a matter of serious concern. The daily new cases, that had decreased to less than 9,000 per day in mid-February, have now increased to more than 20,000 cases per day. The graph of active cases of the disease that was consistently declining, has also increased now for the first time in the last couple of months. Currently, the number of active cases in India is 189,226, according to reports in a leading Delhi daily.

Maharashtra is once against the worst sufferer in terms of the resurgence of cases, the largest contributor to the tally. Active cases in the state as on February 11, 2021 were 36,917, officials from the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said at a press conference. This number increased to 100,240 on March 11.

Punjab has recorded a fourfold increase in the

Uddhav Thackeray
Chief Minister of Maharashtra

Maharashtra contributed the bulk of active cases in India, as on 28 March 2021, the state had 320 000 active cases of covid-19, far ahead of the second highest state of Kerala, which has 24 578 active cases. According to a recent government assessment, Maharashtra accounts for 62% of all active cases in the country.

number of cases. "The other states that are showing rise that is not consistent include Haryana, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. They are at the tipping point," Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan is quoted as saying in the media.

"Be careful. Be watchful. The virus has not gone away," Niti Ayog Member (Health), VK Paul said. The top 10 districts of India in terms of active cases are Pune, Nagpur, Thane, Bengaluru urban, Ernakulam, Amravati, Jalgaon, Nashik and Aurangabad.

"The strategy to beat the virus is the same but with more efficiency, including testing, tracking and treating," Bhushan is quoted saying. To specific questions at a press meet on whether newer variants of the virus were responsible for the surge, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Director General Balrama Bhargava replied with a categorical NO. However, a ministry team that went to Maharashtra to study the causes, did say that

some "internal mutation" in the virus was reported from Amravati but did not attribute the surge to it. "Reduced testing, suburban trains, congregations and improper following of COVID-appropriate behavior seem to have contributed to the surge," Bhargava said.

Vaccination Ramped Up by opening up to Age Groups of 45 plus

Niti Ayog member Paul said the states that were witnessing a surge should ramp up vaccination and claimed that Bharat Biotech International's Covaxin has been granted an emergency use authorization license similar to Covishield made by the Serum Institute of India and the 'clinical trial mode' condition of the former had been taken off. The subject expert committee had made such a recommendation to the Drug Controller General of India March 9 and the license was to be changed based on his decision, media reports claimed.

A revision in the grant of fresh license would mean the beneficiaries of this vaccine will not have to sign a consent form. Also, the recipients were supposed to get four-follow up calls from the Centre from where they would have taken the vaccine. That would also stop now.

"We look forward to scaling up production of this vaccine now. Some 1.9 million have been administered till now and a minimal of 311 adverse events were observed," Paul said.

The government officials, however, refused to answer how many doses of the two vaccines would be procured in the near future. "That is something we would not want to address because procurement and manufacturing is under consideration of the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court of India," Bhushan said.

The ministry also refuted claims of Rajasthan's Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot that the state was facing a shortage of vaccines. The ministry also claimed that India was only behind the United States in terms of the cumulative doses administered, according to data collected till March 9.

The ministry is yet share to share any numbers about deaths following immunization. "The national committee to investigate this has met only once and considered only two such deaths. No causal link was found between them and vaccination. It will be meeting again soon," Manohar Agnani, joint secretary, was quoted as saying.

The Indian government has been transparent enough to acknowledge the sudden "surge in covid-19 cases" and directed states to focus on "stringent containment and public health measures" including increased testing, tracing, and vaccination. A government press release put the onus for the second wave of infections on "the laxity among everyone." The central government has asked state governments to take this surge in infections seriously, so as to not be "frittering away" the gains of last year's work to bring down numbers.

Mr. Srinath Reddy, President of the Public Health Foundation of India, said there has been a "perfect storm" of reasons for the spike. "The recent rapid upswing in cases is from a confluence of careless crowd behavior, slackening of governmental vigil, and mutations of the virus." The decline in deaths between October 2020 and January 2021, "gave rise to a popular belief that the danger has fully passed, reinforced by overly confident assertions by some experts and politicians that we have attained herd immunity, " Reddy was quoted by the media as saying.

Maharashtra contributed the bulk of active cases in India, as on 28 March 2021, the state had 320 000 active cases of covid-19, far ahead of the second highest state of Kerala, which has 24 578 active cases. According to a recent government assessment, Maharashtra accounts for 62% of all active cases in the country.

Indian vaccines Covaxin & Covishield

The medical community in the country opines that India's ability to control the spread of covid-19 and its demand for and supply of vaccines will impact global supply. India has so far exported millions of doses to neighboring countries in the SAARC region besides countries such as South Africa, countries in Europe and North America. In fact, Canada staged a flag march for India's vaccines exports to that country.

According to available government data, 74 countries are using Made in India vaccines. So far, India has supplied 60 million doses to the world—8.1 million have been grants to counties including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Nepal. Some 34 million have been commercial sales, and 18 million have been given to Covax. India launched its covid-19 vaccination programme on January 16. In the beginning distribution of the vaccines was

restricted to health and frontline workers. On March 01 this year,, this was expanded to everyone older than 60, and those older than 45 who have specific comorbidities. So far, it has administered over 60 million vaccinations, placing it third globally after China and the US.

New Variants Resurgence

According to reports, India began its genomic sequencing project for covid-19 last year but, a research paper published by Indian government scientists involved in the sequencing, its pace and volume has been insufficient when compared with India's high number of cases. A recent press statement from the government said that even though variants of concern have been found in India, they have not been detected in high enough numbers to either establish a direct relationship or explain the rapid surge in cases, the reports said.

Laboratories owned by the Indian government did the genome sequencing of 10 787 samples of SARS-CoV2 to look for variants, and found 771.

Lock-Downs in the Offing ?

Some state government are reported to be considering a second wave of Lock-Downs following the resurgence of the virus in the form mutants, the central government has not enforced another national lockdown as it did in the early months of the pandemic.

In Maharashtra, the chief minister Udhav Thackeray has said repeatedly that another lockdown could be imposed if case numbers continue rising. The government has instead imposed a night curfew, restricting movement after dark. Earlier this month, the state published guidelines insisting that private offices continue to work from home and allowing 50% of their staff to work from office. Theatres and auditoriums have also been told to function at 50% capacity, media reports from western india said.

In Delhi, the national capital, the chief minister has said that a lockdown would not be a solution, and that people should "learn to live" with the disease instead. The Delhi government has announced that

Health authorities will resort to random testing for SARS-CoV2 at public places which includes airports, railway stations and public meeting. The civic corporation in Mumbai, the capital city of Maharashtra, has endorsed the view. Fines for not wearing a mask have increased in some states. Many

states insist on a negative RT-PCR test result for covid-19 in order to be allowed entry into the state via flight or road. Public gatherings like weddings have been given caps on how many guests can be allowed. Festival celebrations have been barred in public, although the restriction has not so far been strictly enforced.

Much of the matter on the resurgence of the covid virus, government action has been extracted from the website BMJ to support the arguments in the article.

Reports from other sources claimed that corona virus infection had peaked in mid-September and declined steadily until February this year, until the current resurgence in a few states. The daily count of cases is back in the 70,000 range, while about 400 deaths in a day are being reported now. In a country that counts roughly 27,000 deaths a day as a baseline, the coronavirus death numbers do not seem very alarming.

The reasons for the five-month decline starting in September, and the current resurgence, are not very well understood. In fact, an analysis of the data leads us to more confounding questions, and some contradictory findings, health experts say.

Cases & Deaths on the Splurge

Cases and Deaths is the matrix used to assess the spread or resurgence of the disease. Although India has over 12 million cases now, the cases as a proportion of population are at 9.02 per thousand. India is outperforming many countries on this metric. Coronavirus deaths in India are low no matter which parameter is assessed. The best parameter is Infection Fatality Rate (IFR). It measures deaths as a proportion of total infections (and not just confirmed infections). Total infections are estimated through serosurveys. The IFR in India is 0.08% according to initial government surveys. The US estimate is about 0.6%, about 8 times that of India. Almost half the difference can be attributed to India's relative younger population. The reasons for the remaining difference are unknown, media reports said.

What is the actual prevalence of the disease ?

To understand whether the low case numbers are real or due to lower testing, metrics such as Test Positivity Rate (TPR) are relevant. TPR is the ratio of positive results and total number of tests. A TPR below 5% is considered

the benchmark for appropriate level of testing. The chart shows a 7-day rolling average TPR for US and India since April 1, 2020. India's performance on this metric seems adequate barring the months leading up to the September peak, medical experts are quoted in the media as saying.

The actual prevalence of the disease is an indicator that has been glossed over. Actual prevalence is actually more than the total cases confirmed by test results. It is determined through serosurveys.

The latest data indicates about 21% of the population was affected by Covid by December end. Comparisons with other countries are difficult because not all countries run countrywide surveys that match the Indian survey time-frame. An estimate for the US based on numbers in different states indicates a range of 15-20%. By this metric, India appears to have one of the highest spreads in the world.

This number can also be used to assess testing adequacy. A 21% spread equals about 280 million infected people. By December 31, the total number of cases identified were 10.3 million leading to ratio of 27 for total infected to total detected. In the US, this same ratio is around 2.5 (using 15% as prevalence for December-end). Therefore, in India for every detected case, 26 were missed. This assessment indicates testing has been very inadequate. It also raises the confounding question —why was the TPR low if so many people were infected? Also, if testing wasn't the control mechanism for disease spread, then what led to the decline?

Indications are that the decline in cases in India from mid-September was genuine and it could not be attributed to reduced testing. A year into the pandemic, cases and deaths are low in India. The spread of the disease, however, is one of the highest. Testing appears to have missed many infections. It appears that the disease is widespread but in a milder form, one that escapes testing and does not cause serious illness, health experts say..

Possible Causes for the Spread

The daily number of infections (not just positive results, but total infections) is dependent on three factors:

* The number of infectious individuals who can transmit the disease
* The rate of transmission. This in turn depends on several parameters, including virus strain, susceptibility of population and exposure time.
* The number of susceptible individuals in the population. More people available for infection would increase new infections.

Different strategies are deployed to control one or more of these three numbers in order to bring down the daily count of infections, reports say. So, what the possible strategies to contain the spread of corona virus ? According to Dr Tushar Gore, university of Minnesota and former CEO and MD of the pharmaceutical company Resonance Labs Nordisk, there could be a three-pronged strategy to contain the spread. He has also worked with Mackinsey and Nordisk.

STRATEGY 1: Reduce the number of infectious people in the population. This can be done through lockdown, which reduces the circulation of infected individuals. It can also be done through testing and quarantining, which means identification of infected individuals and their isolation.

STRATEGY 2: Reduce rate of transmission. Lockdown plays a key role. Reducing contact between infectious and susceptible individuals. Masks and physical distancing also help. So does adequate ventilation, because this dilutes the virus in the air surrounding a susceptible individual.

STRATEGY 3: Reduce the number of susceptible individuals. Here, vaccinations play an important role.

The three factors act together. In a situation wherein the infectious and susceptible population are high, reduction of cases is possible by controlling the rate of transmission (through distancing measures, for example). As the infectious population goes down due to better control, or the number of susceptible individuals goes down due to increased immunity, the contact between individuals, and consequently the rate of transmission, can be allowed to increase (relaxation on assembly, for example) without an upward effect on the new cases.

In India, serosurveys indicate that testing missed almost 24 out of possible 25 exposures. Consequently, testing and quarantining lever has not been the most effective, and is ruled out as a possible reason for the decline.

What has been explained and unexplained ?

LOCKDOWN: This exercise does not explain the decline in the number of cases since strict lockdown ended way back in May. In the initial months, however, it did help the health care system to prepare itself to deal with increasing cases.

MASKING, PHYSICAL DISTANCING: After the most recent round of relaxation in restrictions in public transport and gatherings, cases have increased in some states, indicating that these restrictions could have been a factor in controlling the spread earlier. However, many of these measures were being relaxed gradually from June onwards. It doesn't explain why the cases peaked in September, and did not continue to increase further. Nor does it explain why the recent increase in cases is still concentrated in a few states.

Representative photo

'HERD IMMUNITY' IN SOME CITIES: A sero-survey in August in Mumbai indicated 45% prevalence in slums and 18% in other areas. While these numbers are not near the threshold that is generally considered as herd immunity level, these could have potentially explained the decline when coupled with a low rate of transmission. But then, the current rise is maximum in these very cities, like Mumbai and Pune, which had reported high levels of immunity. Also, rural areas, which had lower prevalence rates earlier, are still showing a lack of any major rise.

PRE-EXISTING IMMUNITY: This is often referred to as the hygiene hypothesis, proposing that the Indian population has better immunity against coronavirus because it has been exposed to a lot of other infectious diseases earlier. This is still an untested hypothesis.

How Covid-19 pandemic has affected pregnancy outcomes

Reinfections. The lack of spread in rural areas in the absence of herd immunity could be explained by lower population density and higher natural ventilation. It is possible this rate is low enough to compensate for the higher susceptible population. A decline in cities could be explained by a decrease in the susceptible population due to high disease spread, and the resulting acquired immunity. The recent surge then becomes difficult to explain unless re-infection rates are high. Re-infection is still poorly understood and it is possible that a "milder" initial exposure still leaves the individual susceptible to recurring exposure. A helpful analogy is the common cold, a mild reaction that does not really provide immunity from recurring infections. Another possibility is that a new strain with a higher transmission rate is the driver of the latest surge. At this point, however, it is a theory without any detailed evidence in support.

The above discussion indicates that we have to rely on many conjectures beyond the basic tactics/levers to explain the timing of decline, lack of spread in rural areas, and resurgence in some areas. With lack of certainty on factors contributing to the decline and the low death rates, it will be premature for individuals to breathe a sigh of relief and resume activities at a pre-Covid scale, a feature in a leading newspaper of Delhi says.

So that appears to be the logical answer in government steps to contain the resurgence of the corona virus disease to expand the coverage of vaccinations and opens up the inoculation program to all age groups. Limit exports so that there is greater availability of the vaccines domestically. Launch educational programs for the population to observe all the protocols strictly even as they get vaccinated.

Feedback : ashoktnex@gmail.com

Nihilent Expands its Digital Footprint in South Africa, Partners with SAP

This partnership will cater to the growing needs of South African enterprises to transition to an 'Intelligent Enterprise'.

- By A Correspondent

> Nihilent today is in a unique position to transition organizations struggling to get a grip on digital. Our technology depth coupled with digital strategy execution capabilities has added immense value to our clients. In this context, we are aggressively globalizing our SAP Practice." – Minoo D Dastur

Minoo D Dastur,
President & CEO, Nihilent
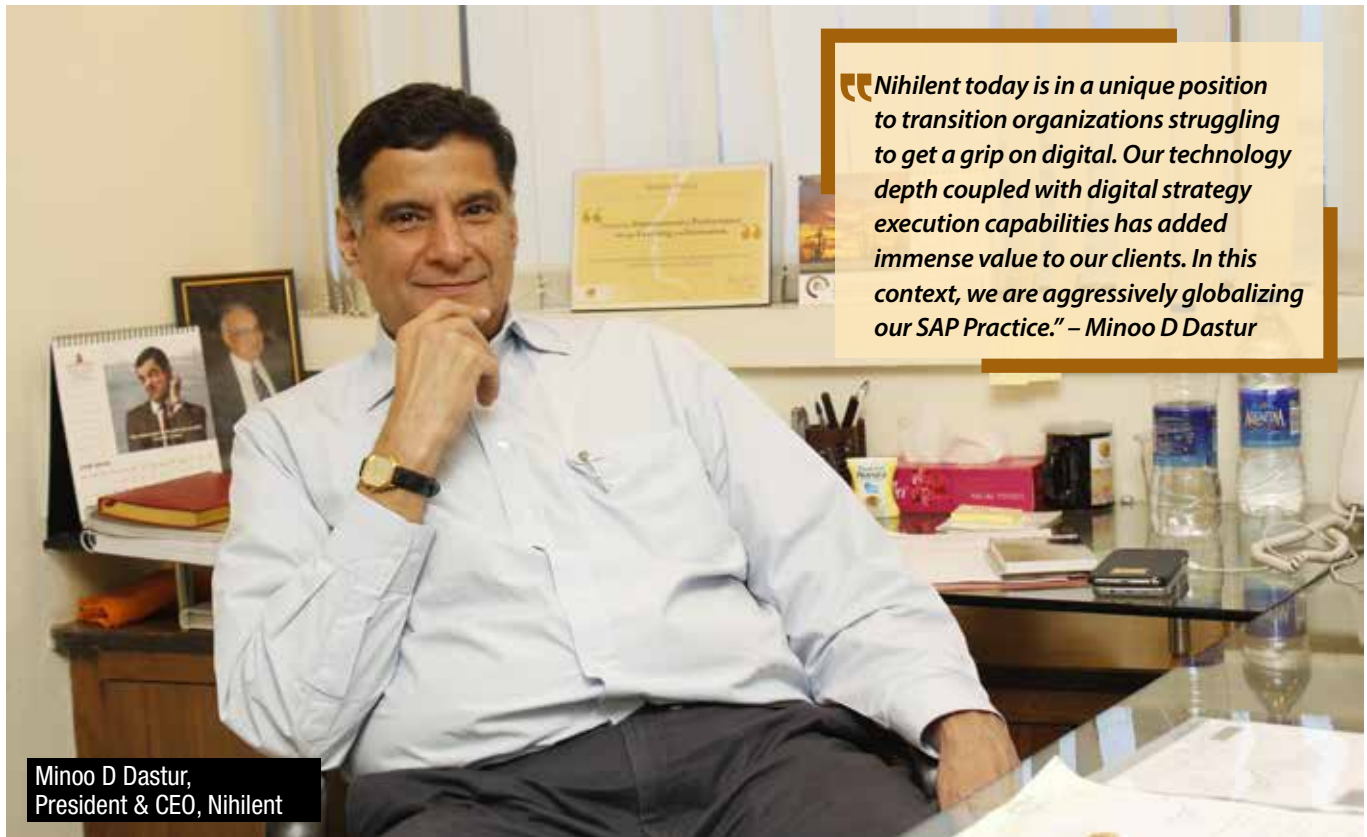
Nihilent, a global consulting and change management company that uses a human-centered approach to problem-solving has announced that it has forged a strategic partnership with SAP South Africa. Nihilent's positioning since its inception in 2000 has been one of a 'Change Management organisation'. Over the last two decades, we have enabled enterprises to adopt best-in-class solutions and services powered by our Design Thinking led patented consulting and change management frameworks. We are one of the pioneers in providing an Interaction-experience to our clients by granulating their needs, wants, and aspirations. This partnership with SAP will help us further deepen our digital mandates in South Africa by cross leveraging each other's strengths.

The post-pandemic world is characterized by new rules of engagement and all industries need to pivot to a digital future. Nihilent has been a trusted consulting and technology organization globally, and this strategic partnership with SAP South Africa puts us in a unique position. It gives us the leverage to extend our global expertise and competencies across various areas within the SAP ecosystem including Rise with SAP, SAP Private Cloud, ECC to S/4HANA migrations that can immensely benefit organisations in South Africa to accelerate their digital initiatives and transition to an 'Intelligent Enterprise'.

Reflecting on this partnership, Minoo D Dastur, President & CEO, Nihilent observes, "Nihilent today is in a unique position to transition organizations struggling to get a grip on digital. Our technology depth coupled with digital strategy execution capabilities has added immense value to our clients. In this context, we are aggressively globalizing our SAP Practice."

Nihilent's SAP expertise runs deep. Over the last 14 years, we have enabled numerous enterprises across Manufacturing, CPG, and Retail, among others, to harvest the power of SAP solutions. With existing deep customer/prospect connections, a strong

SAP foundation, and onshore/offshore advantage, Nihilent is fully geared up to provide end-to-end business and digital transformation services. With well-curated industry-relevant SAP Qualified Partner Packaged solutions, Nihilent understands enterprise digital pain points and provides relevant panaceas. We are confident in making rapid inroads into the South African region and have chalked out a long-term roadmap to address the diverse SAP needs of South African enterprises that are looking for a trusted SAP partner.

Adds Sabahat Kazi, Global Head, ERP, Nihilent, " Our SAP Practice is powered by 400+ professionals who have worked on various SAP applications across industries. In the S/4HANA space alone, we have executed over 50 projects and 10 conversions from ECC to S/4HANA. Combined with our award-winning expertise on the Business Technology Platform, we are very well positioned to leverage SAP's latest offering, 'Rise with SAP' to our clients."

Lillian Serobatse, Head of Channel at SAP Africa, "We are extremely pleased to onboard Nihilent. With our broad portfolio of solutions coupled with Nihilent's deep domain expertise in SAP technologies, this partnership further strengthens our presence in South Africa."

"Our goal is to build SAP as a major practice in South Africa by hastening the adoption of SAP's leading offerings such as 'RISE

About Nihilent

Nihilent is a global consulting and services company that uses a human-centered approach for problem-solving and change management. Nihilent's comprehensive range of expertise in customer research, process, and technology enables newer heights of business performance. Nihilent enables customers to realize these strategic goals through its comprehensive Business Consulting, Analytics, and Technology offerings. Nihilent's User Experience (UX) Labs are in Pune and Johannesburg, with the third launching soon in Dallas. Each UX Lab is guided by a structured framework following industry-recognized principles and includes the six stages: Sense, Immerse, Define, Ideate, Build and Validate.

with SAP Cloud, private edition', ECC to S/4HANA migrations and future-fit the organization to transition to an intelligent enterprise," says Vikash Gokul, Head, Market Development, South Africa, Nihilent."

GMR Group Floats GMR Innovex as Group-Wide Platform

It will operate on an 'Open Innovation' model, acting as an 'Innovation Exchange' to partner with startups, corporates, innovation platforms, research institutions and academia.
- By A Correspondent

Mr SGK Kishore with Mr Ravi Narayan, CEO-T Hub

Building on its commitment to 'Creating tomorrow today', GMR Group on April 3 launched a new business vertical dedicated to fostering and driving innovation - GMR Innovex. Mr Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary, Ministry of Aviation, Govt. of India, Mr Somesh Kumar, Chief Secretary, Govt of Telangana, Mr Jayesh Ranjan, Principal Secretary, Industries & Commerce (I&C) and Information Technology (IT), Govt. of Telangana along with Mr. GBS Raju, Business Chairman – Airports, GMR Group; Mr. SGK Kishore, ED-South and Chief Innovation Officer – GMR Airports and Mr. Rama Iyer, Head – GMR Innovation and other dignitaries were present during this launch event.

Over the years, GMR has redefined air travel in India by building world-class infrastructure, embracing innovations and employing futuristic technologies at its airports. Innovations like India's first fully paperless e-boarding solution, indigenous self-service check-in machines, Express Security Check, and Face recognition based passenger processing to name a few were all incubated, developed and rolled out with in-house expertise.

Building on this foundation and with a vision to create an enabling framework for innovation across all aspects of the business, GMR Innovex will operate on an 'Open Innovation' model, acting as an 'Innovation Exchange' to partner with startups, corporates, innovation platforms, research institutions and academia to bring innovative ideas and solutions to life and help to nurture and sustain a Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. A dedicated new facility for innovation has also been established at the Hyderabad Airport campus to act as a platform for various innovation activities by various collaborating startups, industry partners and GMR employees.

On this launch event, GMR Innovex also announced innovation-focused partnerships with multiple new partners including Airbus; Plug and Play (leading global corporate innovation platform); Swedish Institute (SI); T – Hub (Innovation intermediary and business incubator based in Hyderabad); IIT-Hyderabad; International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-

Inauguration - Mr Pradeep Singh Khalora and Mr Somesh Kumar

Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Schulich Business School (Business School of York University Located in Toronto, Canada).

Speaking on this occasion, Mr Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary, MoCA, said, "Aviation and Innovation are synonymous words and the ultimate innovation is happening in Aviation. During Covid times the aviation sector was hard hit but has emerged stronger. Many new technologies took shape during this period and were all aimed at making the industry robust. The future of air travel is one of passengers just walking through an airport in a fully paperless way. GMR Airports has been the first airport to launch the e-boarding service and today 90 percent of passengers use this method. GMR Innovex will become an excellent hub to train talent for various specialised jobs across the aviation industry."

Mr Somesh Kumar, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Telangana, said, "Today Innovation has become a Necessity. In the ever changing and fast moving world, we either invent or perish. Despite being a new state Telangana has a clear policy of Innovation and is actively encouraging innovations. We are glad that GMR innovation is stationed in our state. With its strategic presence around the globe and being in one of the key sectors, GMR Innovation hub is going to make a difference."

Mr. GBS Raju, Business Chairman – Airports, GMR Group, said, "GMR Group has been a pioneer in leveraging and adopting innovations across its business verticals. Given the potential of today's new-age, digital savvy, entrepreneurial generation, our objective is to create a culture and atmosphere of innovation and take forward some of the best ideas to their logical fruition on a global scale through this new vertical. We hope the diverse landscape of GMR Group will help our collaborators to experiment on a wide canvas which is very

GMR has redefined air travel in India by building world-class infrastructure, embracing innovations and employing futuristic technologies at its airports. Innovations like India's first fully paperless e-boarding solution, indigenous self-service check-in machines, Express Security Check, and Face recognition based passenger processing to name a few were all incubated, developed and rolled out with in-house expertise.

essential in any creative domain. Through GMR Innovex, we wish to position GMR as an innovation thought leader and lay the foundation for the next phase of our growth journey."

Mr. SGK Kishore, ED – South, Chief Innovation Officer – GMR Airports, said, "GMR Innovex is a platform that will help both GMR as well as our partners and stakeholders to look beyond the present and get ready for challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. The partnerships announced today with our partners who are established leaders in their own fields will serve as a springboard for upcoming initiatives in this space."

GMR Innovex will focus on innovations across both digital and non-digital domains to deliver improved efficiency, better customer experience and higher value to all stakeholders. It will create a structured mechanism to build creative ideas, nurture and foster them, and build a Go-To-Market strategy for all successful initiatives. It will provide an avenue for its partners to work on their ideas and bring it to a forum to validate. The advantage that this exchange brings in is that collaborators can also try their products/services at GMR Innovex across a very large landscape of Airports, Air Cargo, MRO, Logistics, and other Infrastructure sectors.

12 MPs Get 'Sansad Ratna Awards' for Best Performance

Veteran MP Barthruhari Mahtab (BJD), Ms Supriya Sule (NCP) and Mr Shrirang Appa Barne (Shiv Sena) get MahaSansad awards.

- By TN Ashok

The 11th Edition of the Sansadratna awards , being conducted by the Chennai based NGO Primepoint Foundation under its umbrella organisations Sansadratna Awards and E Magazine PreSense, gave away awards to 12 best performing parliamentarians at a glittering function at the Constitution Club of India on March 20 this year amid the strictest of covid protocols being observed at the function.

The awards were held with a clarion call from its founder K Srinivasan and Justice A K Patnaik on the need to institute urgently electoral reforms. Justice Patnaik argued for reforms concerning political parties and their regulation, political funding and ethics for parliamentarians. The Minister for Parliamentary affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal traced the growth of the awards as the chairman of the jury committee that selects the MPs from a list submitted by the PRS India. The minister said the awards were awarded in the most transparent manner and was the first

of its kind by a civil society organisation. He praised Srinivasan for his efforts at a time when the credibility of some of the MPs had come under serious scrutiny by the public and society. Today is an auspicious day because today is the International Day of Happiness. The appreciation and recognition conferred on the award-winning Members of Parliament will surely increase the happiness index of these awardees, he said.

Mr Sunil Arora, the Chief Election Commissioner, said remote voting would becoming a distinct possibility in the country in adverse times such as covd times when postal ballots would assume paramount importance. The sanctity and legitimacy of the institution of the parliament derives itself from the conduct of elections that are truly free, fair and participative – which represent the sovereign will of the people. The history of Indian elections bears testimony to the fact that Indian elections, despite their unprecedented scale and complexity, have always expressed

the democratic right of the people, he said.

Justice A K Patnaik (retd) of Supreme Court said Political reforms were the need of the hour which included proper selection of candidates by parties, political funding and ethics and conduct of MPs. "Considering the role that Parliamentarians play in our representative democracy, the best available in our country, in merit and integrity, must get elected to the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. I am of the view that our political parties do not send their best talents, with merit and integrity, to Parliament for various reasons, some of which I would like to narrate", he said.

The idea of Prime Point Foundation to confer Sansad Ratna Awards, which has been appreciated by late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, as I understand, is to promote high ethical standards amongst our parliamentarians. In my considered opinion, ethics cannot be expected from a Parliamentarian, who has to go through the struggles of politics to become a Member of Parliament. Max Weber in his lecture on 'Politics as a Vocation' has said that a political career provides a sense of power, but the three qualities required of a good politician are: passion for a cause, sense of responsibility, and sense of proportion".

The Awards President, Ms Priyadarshini Rahul Bhandari, an advocate of supreme court, welcomed the distinguished guests. The event was telecast live by Doordarshan News and some other private channels. Doordarshan did live streaming of the event on YouTube.

Mr Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJD, Odisha) and Mr Shrirang Appa Barne (Shiv Sena, Maharashtra) received the Sansad Maha Ratna Awards for the 16th Lok Sabha. Ms Supriya Sule (NCP, Maharashtra), though nominated for Sansad Maha Awards, could not participate due to prior commitments. Sansad Maha Ratna Awards are given once in five years.

This is the first time that the Sansad Ratna Awards function was held outside Chennai, and in the national capital of the country. For the first time in the 12 years

Parliamentarians Who Received Sansad Ratna Awards			
No.	Name	Party	State
SANSAD MAHA RATNA FOR 16th LOK SABHA			
1	Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab	BJP	Odisha
2	Shri Shrirang Appa Barne	Shiv Sena	Maharashtra
SANSAD RATNA FOR 17TH LOK SABHA (based on performance in 2019-20)			
3	Dr Subash Ramrao Bhamre	BJP	Maharashtraq
4	Dr Heena Vijaykumar Gavit	BJP	Maharashtra
5	Dr Amol Ramsing Kolhe	NCP	Maharashtra
6	Shri Ram Mohan Naidu	TDP	Andhra Pradesh
7	Shri Ajay Kumar Mishra	BJP	Uttar Pradesh
SANSAD RATNA FOR RAJYA SABHA (based on performance in 2019-20)			
8	Shri Vishambhar Prasad Nishad	SP	Uttar Pradesh
9	Smt. Chhaya Verma	INC	Chhattisgarh
DEPARTMENTALLY RELATED STANDING COMMITTEE			
10	Shri P C Gaddi Goudar	Chairman	Agriculture Committee

of the Sansad Ratna Awards functions, school students participated as volunteers at the function in New Delhi. The Management of Ahlcon Public School supported the event with the participation of 10 senior student volunteers. The students were given the opportunity to interact with India's top performing Parliamentarians.

India Emerging as the Simulation Capital of the World

Webinar organized by Corporate Tycoons magazine in association with World Peace University, Pune on The Future of the Information Technology: Trends and Predictions.

- By A Correspondent

India is emerging as the Simulation Capital of the world said Mr Rafiq Somani, Area Vice President, India and South Asia Pacific ANSYS. He said this it at a webinar organized by Corporate Tycoons magazine in association with MIT World Peace University, Pune on April 1, on the topic The Future of the Information Technology Industry: Trends and Predictions.

Rafiq said "Most of the international companies have their centres in India. This includes Bosch, Mercedes and several other companies. They have thousands of engineers and all them are suing simulation technologies".

Other speakers on Information Technology were Mr Deepak Prabhu, Vice President Consulting and Design Thinking at Nihilent and Mr Deepak Shikarpur, Director Kinetic Communications Limited.

Rafiq said there was a great demand for simulation engineers but the problem was that there was a dearth of such engineers and hence there was a good scope for the students who are persuing education in this sector.

In his presentation, he spoke about the Future challenges and Role of Simulation. He said companies that were non-existent few years ago had suddenly emerged and disrupted the market giving severe competition to the established players. "It does not matter in which company you are working, the technology will play a big role", he said.

He said ANSYS and BMW were partnering to jointly create the industry's first simulation tool chain for autonomous driving.

Rafiq also explained how ANSYS entered into a CSR agreement with an IIT Kanpur led consortium to assist in the development of ventilators to fight the COVID-19 outbreak in India. Under the supervision of the IIT Kanpur consortium, NOCCA Robotics Pvt. Ltd, an IITK incubated startup developed indigenized rapidly scalable, low-cost invasive ventilators with the aim of promoting healthcare, including preventive health care.

Deepak Prabhu, Vice President Consulting and Design Thinking at Nihilent said Nihilent was working as a change maker or change partner for the customers. "What we have been trying to achieve

is to be an experience delivery company by working on all three dimensions including emotional, physical and digital", he added.

He said in this era , the customer is the king. " Earlier it was the sellers market wherein the customer had little voice. But this has completely changed after revolution in the information technology sector. It is now the buyers market where the customer has a plethora of choices".

There was a time once when it took years to get the delivery of a branded scooter even after making initial payments. If there was any manufacturing defect, all that a customer could do was to complain to the retailer and hope that he would be kind enough to sort out his problems.

"But in these digital age, a customer can by a single tweet dent the reputation of a branded company and forcing them to run to placate the customer. This shows how powerful the customer has become in this digital age" Prabhu added.

The aspirations and expectations of customers have increased by leaps and bounds. He is not satisfied with standardization. He expects custom-fit. "We are living in the age of mass individualization. No two people get the same Google Search results, see the same products on Amazon.com, have the same Facebook Feed or catalogue. Each smartphone is unique after its first boot" he added.

"The mantra is not standardization, but custom-fit. Customer wants custom fit, products services and experiences" added Prabhu.

Mr Deepak Shikarpur Director Kinetic Communications Limited in his speech said adversity also brings in some opportunity and a good entrepreneur instead of crying over the adversity will look how to turn it into an opportunity for growth.

"Challenge in one industry creates opportunity in another. The fallout of the pandemic has been closure of large number of companies and several people losing their jobs. But even in these circumstances there are some industries which are doing extremely well. Take for instance mask and sanitizer industry which are groing by leaps and bounds", added Shikarpur.

He said as a result of the pandemic, we are witnessing a new normal. This differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. Now virtualization of education has become the new norm. The good side is one can interact with the best minds in virtual platforms", he added.

Taking about the jobs scenario, Shikarpur said even in times of the pandemic jobs are aplenty in some sectors. This includes Information Technology companies and Healthcare.

He said Capegemini wants to recruit large number of people from India in the next six months while TCS has given two salary hikes to their employees and they want to recruit more people.

"I also see a lot of investments taking place in the healthcare sector. Earlier most of the medical devices came from China and other countries, but now many Indian companies are diversifying into this sector. "This augurs well for Atmanirbharat as our country is becoming more and more self-sufficient" he added.

Another sector which is promising is the automotive sector. "Because of the new normal, people are not comfortable in using public transports and hence they are buying two wheelers and four wheelers" he added.

Earlier Prof Dr R M Chitnis, highlighted the significance of the webinar for the students of MIT World Peace University and explained how this University was becoming more and more techno savy in terms of high end technology and ERP solutions.

He said "collaboration, learning and innovation are extremely important in the lives of the students and that mere education is not enough". He said in the coming years data analytics and Artificial Intelligence are going to play a big role in the life of everyone.

Prof Dr P Srinivas Subbarao, Dean SOM(UG) MIT WPU congratulated the team for organizing this important webinar and expressed the hope that there will be a lot of takeaways for the students from it. He said "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a very important role in our lives and it is enhanced during the times of pandemic".

Mr Pravin Patil, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) MIT WPU said IT has become an integral part of people irrespective of whether they are an IT student or not. "It has over the years revolutionized our world and daily lives by creating amazing tools and resources. Who could have imagined a few years ago that one day we could order food by merely clicking on the apps? ', he added.

Prof Gautam Bapat, Head of School, School of Management (U.G), Faculty of Management, MIT WPU gave the welcome speech. He gave an outline of the aims and objectives of the Institute. He said "today we have organized this webinar especially for those students who are in the technology side of the School of Management. I am sure that the deliberations of the webinar will be of immense use to them".

Prof Geetika Parmar introduced the guests. Others who were played an important role in the webinar included Prof Shreyas Thakar and Prof Neha Lele.

The Editor of the magazine Corporate Tycoons, Chandran Iyer spoke about the vision and mission of the magazine. ◫

Hiring Will Witness a 7% Point Growth if Lockdowns are Not Imposed

Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals, Educational Services, Ecommerce & Technology Start-ups and Information Technology to drive the demand for talent.

- By A Correspondent

Photo Courtesy; Pixabay

TeamLease Services, India's leading human resource company has launched their hiring sentiments report called 'Employment Outlook Report' for the period April-June, 2021. According to the report, if further lockdowns and workplace operating rules are not enforced the intent to hire in the current quarter (April - June 2021) can rise to 7% point over the previous quarter (Jan 2021- March 2021). In fact, out of the 21 sectors reviewed more than 8 sector will witness a 9-11% points rise in their intent to hire in the current quarter.

As per the report Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals, Educational Services, Ecommerce & Technology Start-ups and Information Technology are the key sectors who are likely to ramp up their talent pool. In fact, more than 58% of the corporates in Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals sector (which is nearly 11% points higher than the period Jan-March 2021) are keen on hiring talent. Educational Services, Ecommerce & Technology Start-ups and

Information Technology have also indicated similar enthusiasm with 55% (12% point growth), 51% (10% point growth), and 50% (11% point growth) of the companies expressing intent to hire. According to the report, while there is an overall positivity, Power & Energy, BPO / ITeS, Media & Entertainment Consulting, Marketing & Advertising, Travel & Hospitality may take more time to reach the kind of intent to hire enthusiasm that the other sectors are expressing.

> *According to the report, if further lockdowns and workplace operating rules are not enforced the intent to hire in the current quarter (April - June 2021) can rise to 7% point over the previous quarter (Jan 2021- March 2021).*

Further from a geography perspective while Metro and Tier 1 cities (32%) take the lead in terms of overall intent to hire, with 9% increase each, Tier 3 cities also are not far behind. Tier 3 towns have witnessed a 5% point increase. Delving deep into cities barring for Kochi, Coimbatore, Nagpur and Kolkata most of the cities have expressed a growth in keenness to hire. With regard to functional areas similar to the previous quarter, Sales (41%) and Marketing (34%) continues to be the most sought after functional roles. However, when it comes to hierarchy the preferences seems to have changed substantially. The intent to hire senior level talent has dropped by 4% point over Jan-March, 2021.

Key findings

International hiring trends: Policy support and vaccine approvals/launches from governments around the world have shored up sentiment –in varying degrees –across all the five regions. However, the outlook remains cautious because of the renewed waves and virus variants, and uncertainty lingers on in the global economy.

Gain in intent to hire:

- APAC – [21%]
- Middle East – [11%]
- Americas – [10%]
- Europe – [10%]
- Africa – [9%]

Photo by Headway on Unsplash

India trend: Favourable growth forecasts ranging from 11.5% by the IMF, to 12.8% by the OECD. Increased government spending, a business and consumption friendly budget. Improved economic activity that has moved above pre-pandemic levels are driving a positive growth in the intent to hire. It has moved from 27% point in the period Jan –March, 2021 to 34% point in April-June, 2021.

Sector Trends

- **High intent to hire Sectors:** Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals-58%, Educational Services-55%, Ecommerce & Technology Start-ups -51%, Information Technology -50%, Fast Moving Consumer Goods-46%, Knowledge Process Outsourcing -46%,Agriculture & Agrochemicals-41%, Telecommunications 39%
- **Moderate intent to hire Sectors:** Power & Energy -31%, Fast Moving Consumer Durables-33%, Financial Services-32%, BPO / ITeS-30%.

Photo by Cytonn on Unsplash

New Hazira to Diu Cruise Route From Essar's ferry terminal

Mr Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ports, Shipping and Waterways & Minister of State for Chemicals & Fertilizers, virtually agged off a new ferry route - Hazira to Diu from Ferry Terminal developed by Essar at Hazira.

- By A Correspondent

Essar Bulk Terminal Ltd (EBTL), part of ports business of Essar, on March 31 said that a new cruise route from Hazira to Diu was launched from its passenger ferry terminal at Hazira Port, thus revolutionizing coastal transportation across the western coast of India and giving a boost to coastal tourism for the people of Gujarat.

Following the WHO guidelines for Covid-19 precautions, Mr Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ports, Shipping and Waterways & Minister of State for Chemicals & Fertilizers, Government of India flagged off the Ferry service at passenger terminal in Hazira through virtual presence.

Commenting on the launch, Mr Mandaviya, said "The development of cruise tourism has been the prime focus of the Government under the guidance of Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi. In 2014, there were around 1.07 lakh cruise passengers in India per annum which was 4.63 lakh per annum in 2019-20. The cruise calls to Indian ports was 139 and 445 for these periods.

Under the Maritime Vision 2030, we are aiming for more than 350 cruise ships, 3000 plus cruise calls per annum, more than 3 cruise training academies and 5 million cruise passengers by 2030. We are taking all-round steps to create perfect ecosystem

for cruise industry. The passenger ferry service has seen a giant leap with the development Hazira as a cruise tourism hub. This will also open up many opportunities for the tourism sector of Gujarat as well, " he added.

"Since inception Essar has been involved in the development of Indian Maritime Sector and it continues to do so. We are delighted with this launch as the project is aligned to the Maritime India Vision 2030 of Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and paves way for accelerated growth of India's Maritime Sector. We would like to thank the Union Ministry of Shipping and Government of Gujarat for their constant support in achieving this milestone." said Mr. Prashant Ruia, Director, Essar Capital.

JAI SOFIA "Mumbai Maiden", a state of the art cruise cum passenger ferry vessel with a capacity of 300 passengers will now sail in the inaugural route from Hazira to Diu. The vessel has all the facilities on board and provides a bouquet of services on board. The ferry services are being operated by SSR Marine Services Private Ltd

Speaking on the occasion Mr. Rajiv Agarwal, Managing Director – Essar Ports Ltd. said, "This is a big milestone for

us. The Ferry Terminal was commissioned in record time and the ferry services through it are a significant addition to air, road, and rail-based connectivity along Indian coastline. It is part of our strategic plan to reduce congestion on roads, cut fuel consumption and limit air pollution. In future we would like to add more services and connections which will reduce the time of travel and at the same time minimize impact on environment. The new route to Diu will serve as an outlet for recreation for the people of Gujarat and boost the Cruise/ Ferry sector in Maritime Space".

Covid-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on ferry and cruise operations across the globe. The pandemic has not only impacted the economy but hampered the travel. With the vaccination drive across the nation and nation coming out of almost a year of restricted travel. As the world learns to live with the pandemic, EBTL has made arrangements to launch the ferry services and shall follow World Health Organization recommended guidelines to ensure that the ferry operations are done in a safe and healthy environment.

Spurred by the PM's vision, Gujarat government gave its permission to EBTL to develop and operate a Passenger Ferry Terminal at Hazira, where the Company also operates a 50 MTPA dry bulk cargo terminal.

EBTL took charge of designing and constructing the facility, which includes both marine structures, like landing platform, passenger walkway and floating pontoon, as well as shore-based facilities, like a terminal building, cafeteria and vehicle parking area. The project was completed in record time using Essar's in-house expertise and resources. Essar's own dredgers were used, for instance, to ensure the draft required for operating the terminal.

Essar Ports specializes in development and operations of Ports and Terminals for handling liquid, dry bulk, break bulk and general cargo. It is one of the largest private sector port & terminal developer & operators in India by capacity and throughput. It has four operational terminals in India across Hazira and Salaya (in the state of Gujarat) on the west coast, and one each in Visakhapatnam and Paradip on the east coast. Current operational Port Terminal capacity in India is 110 MMTPA.

About Essar Ports

Essar Ports specializes in development and operations of ports and terminals for handling dry bulk, break bulk, liquid and general cargo. It is one of the largest private sector port developer and operator in India in terms of capacity and throughput. It has four operational terminals in India—one each in Hazira and Salaya (both in Gujarat) on the west coast, and in Visakhapatnam and Paradip on the east coast. The current operational capacity of the port terminals in India is 110 MTPA.

Aviation Sector Witnesses Flat Growth

In lines with ICRA's estimates of ~62-64% decline in domestic passenger traffic in FY2021, domestic passenger traffic pegged at 53.4 million in FY2021, a Y-o-Y decline of ~62%.

- By A Correspondent

Domestic passenger traffic in March 2021 has been estimated at ~77-78 lakh, implying a flat growth on a Y-o-Y basis on a low base of March 2020 (which had witnessed a Y-o-Y decline of 33.1% in domestic passenger traffic) as domestic travel was affected with effect from March 25, 2020. Passenger traffic in March 2021 witnessed a marginal sequential decline of ~1% over ~78.3 lakh domestic passenger traffic in February 2021. The airlines' capacity for March 2021 was around 2% higher than their March 2020 capacity (~71,300 departures in March 2021,

against 69,910 departures in March 2020). On a sequential basis, the number of departures in March 2021 were higher by ~11%.

According to Ms. Kinjal Shah, Vice President, ICRA, "The number of flights departing has also gradually increased from 416 on Day 1 to 2,885 on Day 267 (February 14, 2021). For March 2021, the average daily departures were ~2,300, higher than the average daily departures of 2,255 in March2020 (effect of cessation of domestic travel for the last seven days), and marginally higher than ~2,296 in February 2021. The average

Representative Photo

number of passengers per flight during March 2021 was 109, against an average of 111 passengers per flight in March 2020. Thus, it is expected that the domestic aviation industry operated at a passenger load factor (PLF) of ~72% in March 2021, against 73.1% in March 2020, which was also impacted by the pandemic. The PLF for March 2021 was lower than the ~79% in February 2021, due to the increase in capacity deployment by ~11%. Overall, for FY2021 (i.e. from May 25, 2020 till March 31, 2021), domestic passenger traffic has been pegged at ~53.4 million, a Y-o-Y decline of ~62% (over FY2020), in line with ICRA's estimates."

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) permitted increasing the capacity to 45%, with effect from June 27, 2020; post the initial recommencement of operations of the scheduled domestic flights, with effect from May 25, 2020 to a limited extent i.e. a maximum 1/3rd of their respective approved capacity of the Summer Schedule 2020. It further permitted increasing the capacity to 60%, with effect from September 02, 2020, to 70%, with effect from November 11, 2020; and further to 80%, with effect from December 03, 2020.

The number of flights departing has also gradually increased from 416 on Day 1 to 2,885 on Day 267 (February 14, 2021). For March 2021, the average daily departures were ~2,300, higher than the average daily departures of 2,255 in March2020 (effect of cessation of domestic travel for the last seven days), and marginally higher than ~2,296 in February 2021.

While the scheduled international operations are yet to start, the MoCA has permitted international operations under the Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) and Air Transport Bubbles (ATB). Under the VBM for evacuation of Indian citizens from foreign countries, which started from May 07, 2020, the international passenger traffic (inbound and outbound) for Indian carriers has been ~30 lakh for the period May 07, 2020 to March 31, 2021. For March 2021, international passenger traffic for Indian carriers under VBM was recorded at ~4.5 lakh, a sequential increase of ~12%.

As for the aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices, following the pandemic, crude oil prices declined materially – reaching a low of ~US$19/ barrel in April 2020, thus leading to a decline in ATF prices. However, the crude oil prices have increased gradually since then, and currently ranges at around US$65/ barrel. Consequently, the ATF prices increased sequentially by 24.1% in July 2020 and by 4.2% in August 2020. However, it declined sequentially by 3.4% in September 2020 and by 5.6% in October 2020, before increasing by 4.6% in November 2020, by 9.1% in December 2020, by 10.2% in January 2021, by 5.4% in February 2021, and by 10.4% in March 2021. It declined sequentially by 1.8% in April 2021. While until February 2021, the ATF prices were still lower on a Y-o-Y basis, the March 2021 prices were higher by 3.0% on a Y-o-Y basis, and April 2021 prices have been higher still by a whopping 59.8% on a Y-o-Y basis, attributed to the low base of April 2020, when the prices declined sequentially by 36.7% due to the impact of the pandemic.

Berger Paints Organises First Robotic Mural Art

Berger Paints India Ltd., recognized as one of the paint majors in India organized India's First Robotic Mural art in collaboration with Mural Artists from Estonia. The mural artists Mihkel Joala, the Inventor of the robots and Richard Murutar, CEO of Robot Muralist would be executing the first robotic mural activations in Kolkata by using Albert robot (featured in BBC News, Discover Channel, Lad Bible, Reuters etc. globally).

The concept of Robotics is considered as a huge innovation across sectors globally. It is continuously emerging as a large and influential market and are being used in many aspects of manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture etc. to help increase productivity and efficiency while lowering production costs. The latest application of this technology has been seen in the art sector especially in mural painting. A mural is basically a painting which tells stories when applied on public walls. The amalgamation of Robotics and mural art which is known as Mural Robotic Art is expected to paint murals 100 times faster than humans.

Robot Muralist has come to India with 2 robots Albert and Leonardo. Internationally, these robots have been used for advertising campaigns to replace or reuse vinyl banners, which are producing hundreds of millions of tons of plastic waste.

Mr. Richard, CEO of Robot Muralist said, "I am really excited to kick off Robot Muralist's success in India with such amazing company, Berger Paints India Limited. Together we bring our robots all over India very soon and promote large scale customized mural for décor and individuality. In addition, the ability to recoat hoardings and minimize flex sheet wastage has environment benefits for everyone. Our robots will help Berger's new DIY Spray paints range iPaint scale globally."

Berger Paints had always maintained a strong connect with the artist community who believes in innovation and creativity. The company has always been a first mover in establishing a number of trend setting innovations and always admired innovative and creative ideas. This time, Berger Paints will be pioneering concepts of robotic façade painting as well as customised mural art in India. The theme showcased through the painting would be on Berger celebrating the renowned culture of West Bengal by saluting the literature wizard "Rabindranath Tagore"

Dr. Anish Shah is MD of Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd.

The Board of Directors of Mahindra and Mahindra Limited, an Indian multinational corporation, one of the largest vehicle manufacturers by production in India and the largest manufacturer of tractors in the world, announced that Dr. Anish Shah presently the Deputy Managing Director and Group Chief Financial Officer would take over as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, effective April 2, 2021.

This follows the top management succession announcement dated December 20, 2019. In November, when Mr. Anand Mahindra transitions to the role of Non-Executive Chairman, Dr. Anish Shah will become the first professional MD and CEO in the history of the Mahindra Group to have a complete oversight of and responsibility for the Mahindra Group businesses.

Dr. Pawan Goenka will retire as the MD and CEO, and Member of the Board of Directors of M&M Ltd effective April 2, 2021. In his role as the MD and CEO, he had an oversight of Automobile and Farm Equipment sectors. Rajesh Jejurikar, Executive Director

Dr Anish Shah

will take full charge of these sectors and will report to Dr. Shah.

Anand Mahindra, Chairman Mahindra Group, said, "On behalf of the Board, I salute the work accomplished by Pawan throughout his twenty-seven years career in the company, which has resulted in its strong growth. My gratitude to him for making the transition as smooth and seamless as possible throughout the last year."

He further said, "One of the reasons we had succeeded and thrived over the past 75 years was that we were good at introducing change in the right measure at the right time. Anish is the right leader for the Mahindra Group. As the MD and CEO, he will have a complete oversight of all Mahindra Group businesses including our Global operations, the transformation agenda and, synergizing and driving several strategic programs. Anish embodies the spirit of Rise and brings an exceptional leadership track record, strong international exposure and a unique ability to forge long-standing relationships with our customers, partners and our employees."

GHAC Signs Pact With Sta Twig

GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo (GHAC), a division of GMR Air Cargo and Aerospace Engineering Limited (GACAEL) recently announced a partnership with Singapore-based technology startup StaTwig to roll out a new technology based solution for tracking and monitoring of vaccine shipments handled at the airport's cargo terminal. The MoU giving effect to the partnership was signed by Mr. Saurabh Kumar, CEO-GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo and Mr. Sid Chakravarthy and Mr. Nrupul Ponugoti, Co-Founders – StaTwig, at Hyderabad today.

Given its well-established position as the major Pharma hub of Indian Air Cargo and one of the primary gateways for vaccine exports from India, GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo through this exclusive partnership will leverage the Next-Gen Blockchain technology to deliver enhanced Track and Trace Solution and real time monitoring of Vaccine shipments at GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo Terminal.

The partnership brings together domain expertise of GMR Cargo and its time-tested relationships with vaccine exporters and Air Cargo trade with StaTwig's Proven Blockchain platform to help this solution strengthen the supply chain of vaccine exports from India.

The development assumes significance given Hyderabad's position as one of the biggest vaccine manufacturers globally, with the region set to produce over 3.5 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine doses over the next couple of years to aid the global battle against the pandemic.

Mr. Saurabh Kumar, CEO-GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo said "We are glad to announce this partnership for launch of VaccineLedger, a first

(L to R) Mr. Nrupul Ponugoti, Mr. Sid Chakravarthy, Mr. Saurabh Kumar)

of its kind initiative in Air Cargo Industry in India. This new technology product would enable us to deliver enhanced real-time visibility and status information on vaccine shipments to our customers. We are confident that the combination of GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo's domain expertise in vaccine handling and StaTwig's proven Blockchain technology based VaccineLedger platform will further strengthen the vaccine supply chain at this critical juncture in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic."

TVS Motor Company's two-wheeler export clocks 100,000 unit milestone

TVS Motor Company, a reputed two-wheeler and three-wheeler manufacturer, today announced that its two-wheeler exports clocked 100,000 units in March 2021. An increase in motorcycle sales in key markets across the globe has significantly contributed to this achievement.

Commenting on the milestone, Mr. Sudarshan Venu, Joint Managing Director, TVS Motor Company, said, "It is a momentous occasion for TVS

Sudarshan Venu, Jt. MD, TVS Motor Company

Motor as our international two-wheeler business achieved a sales milestone of 100,000 units in March. We are extremely thankful to our esteemed customers, distributors, suppliers and our passionate team who have made this possible. Along with our industry peers, we look forward to continue playing a role in making Indian two and three-wheelers popular and aspirational in many global markets. Over the past months, we have witnessed growth across various geographies with a

definite shift to premiumisation. We will strive to keep this momentum going forward as we seek to delight customers with our exciting range of products. Investments in technology and the future of mobility will be important for us in the next phase of our growth and transformation."

TVS Motor Company has a presence in over 60 countries in geographies across Africa, South East Asia, Indian Sub-Continent, Central & Latin America and is seeking to enter more markets in Europe and North America as well. The company's key export products include the TVS Apache, TVS HLX series, TVS Stryker series, etc. TVS owned Norton Motorcycles, in January 2021, announced that the company would move into the most advanced manufacturing facility in the brand's 123-year history. Norton is currently finalising the construction of its new factory in Solihull and is expected to open by the mid of Q2, 2021 and will mark the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the English marque.

DGCA Okays 18,843 Flights Per Week for Summer

Aviation regulator DGCA on Tuesday said it has approved 18,843 flights per week from 108 airports for the summer schedule, which begins on the last Sunday of March and ends on the last Sunday of October.

The number of flights for this year's summer schedule has been approved keeping in mind that airlines are permitted to operate not more than 80 per cent of their pre-COVID flights.

"It may be noted that 18,843 departures per week have been finalised to/from 108 airports. Out of these 108 airports, Bareilly, Bilaspur, Kurnool and Rupasi are the new airports proposed by the scheduled airlines," the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said on Twitter.

It said IndiGo's 8,749 weekly flights and SpiceJet's 2,854 have been approved for the summer schedule. GoAir's 1,747 flights, Air India's 1,683, Vistara's 1,288 and AirAsia India's 1,243 have also been approved.

India resumed domestic passenger flight operations on May 25 last year, after a gap of two months due to the coronavirus-triggered lockdown. At that time, airlines were permitted to operate a maximum of 33 per cent of their pre-Covid flights. This was gradually increased to 80 per cent.

Scaler Acquires FAANGShaadi.com

Scaler, a leading upskilling platform for students and working professionals, announced the acquisition of a matrimonial website for software engineers working with leading technology companies - FAANGShaadi.com.

Most engineers enrolled with Scaler have had little time to date while also honing their tech skills and often complain of low overall life satisfaction. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred more people to upskill themselves, it has restricted mobility and hence the chances of meeting one's soulmate. Scaler takes pride in preparing and propelling the most promising tech talent in India. Consequently, the acquisition of FAANGShaadi.com, a leading provider of matrimonial services to top-ranked coders in the country, would help fulfil Scaler's mission.

Abhimanyu Saxena, Co-Founder, Scaler & InterviewBit, said, "Over the past 2 years, we've been fortunate to have helped transform the lives of thousands of software developers. With the right kind of learning, guidance and mentorship, we have built a platform that speaks for itself. There are multiple data points to highlight our impact, and the one that stands out is that Amazon, one of the world's largest tech companies, hired more from Scaler last year than all IITs combined. As we move forward, we want to do a lot more for our learners. Our vision for the future is to become the one place that every aspiring and growing engineer comes to improve not just professionally but also personally. Finding a partner is one of the turning stones in everyone's lives, and we would love to be able to solve this for the thousands of engineers who become part of Scaler's network."

The team at FAANGShaadi.com meticulously curate and verify profiles and use an advanced, AI-powered (hand-tuned, GPT-3, trained on a massive dataset of 10,000 engineers) algorithm to match prospective alliances. Candidates can also choose to search on their own, sorting hundreds of profiles based on YoE (years of experience), CTC, verified typing speed, preference for tab vs spaces for indentation, choice of code editors, ranking on popular coding websites and so on.

The Uttar Pradesh Challenge

Once suspense is gone, the BJP's massive electoral machinery would shift to the biggest state of Uttar Pradesh where assembly elections are scheduled to take place in February-March next year.

- By Dr Satish Misra

Outcome of the ongoing electoral battle in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu along with the Union Territory of Puducherry on May 2 will end the national suspense paving the way for the next electoral battle in two of the Hindi heartland states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand that elect 85 MPs to the Lok Sabha.

At the same time, final tally of each party will also put to rest all speculation whether tall claim of Union Home Minister Amit Shah were real and BJP is able to wrest power in West Bengal from Trinamool Congress supremo Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and retain its government in Assam or the opposition has both strength as well as the will to stand to mighty electoral machinery of Modi-Shah duo.

Once suspense is gone, the BJP's massive electoral machinery would shift to the biggest state of Uttar Pradesh where assembly elections are scheduled to take place in February-March next year along with Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. In fact, 2022 state elections are far more crucial to the BJP as it has high stakes in both UP and Uttarakhand as the two states set the tone of for a contest in the other states of Hindi heartland.

In 2022, state assembly elections would also be held in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat and thus the electoral exercise would be akin to a mid-term poll whose results would give a definite clue if the BJP under Modi-Shah duo will win the 2024 Lok Sabha polls or not. At the same time, election results would also determine if Modi's popular appeal continues at the same level as it was in 2019.

While stakes of the BJP in the 2022 elections are high because it is in power in UP, Uttarakhand, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Manipur, the Congress which is
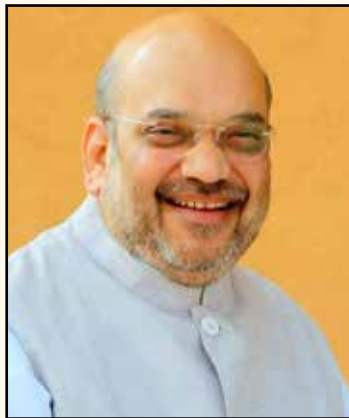
Union Home Minister Amit Shah

Yogi Adityanath
Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

Mamata Banerjee
Chief Minister of West Bengal

the main challenger in these states appears to be ahead in Punjab where state Chief Minister Captain Amrinder Singh is preparing for yet another term in government.

For the same reason that the Congress under Capt. Singh is confident of another term, the BJP in UP is facing a serious challenge. While farmers of Punjab and Haryana have been at the forefront of the protests against the three farm Acts enacted by Parliament in September 2020, agricultural community from Western UP are equally involved in the struggle as one of their leaders Rakesh Tikait is leading the movement from the front.

The BJP is depending upon time factor hoping that by the time elections come anger against them will subside and electorate will vote for the Yogi government but hope is based on a perception which does not match with the ground realities. Erosion of support for the BJP may lessen in its intensity but it is going to damage the party in a way that it would be difficult for the party to win the same number of seats as it did in 2017.

In November last year, the BJP was able to win all the three assembly byelections in the region winning Tundla, Amroha's Naugawan Sadat and Bulandshahr Sadar seats. Those victories came before the farmers' agitation had begun.

In 2017, the BJP had won 320 seats in the state with a vote share of little over 40 percent of vote share. Out of the 128 seats, the BJP had won 78 seats with a strike rate of over 60 percent. In 2012 assembly elections, the Samajwadi Party had won 63 seats from eastern UP while the BSP had won 71 seats in the wake of Brahmin-Dalit unity. It clearly establishes that the party which wins eastern UP also forms the government in Lucknow.

Sudhir Kunder

**Sudhir Kunder, is
Country Director at
DE-CIX India**

How an IEO Manages Continuously Growing Data Traffic

Data traffic is growing and demand for bandwidth is increasing. Managing this ongoing transformation in a way that guarantees a seamless user experience is crucial for both private or business purposes.

At the latest since the spread of the global Covid-19 pandemic, people have become more and more dependent on digital services and have come to rely on them – in both their private and professional lives. Digitalization is picking up speed faster than expected. On the front lines of accelerated digitalization, Internet Exchanges, as part of the critical Internet infrastructure, face the challenge of a fast, secure and, smooth interconnection of thousands of networks.

Coronavirus pandemic as a driver of digitalization

The past year was quite extraordinary for everyone. Never before, as companies, the entire economy, and even private individuals, have we been exposed to a truly global pandemic. The fact that the pandemic is a driver of digitalization became apparent early on. In 2020, India enjoyed a strong rise in Internet usage, which hit the peaks when recorded at Internet Exchanges. Data traffic indicated increases in all areas, especially in the home working environment through collaboration tools such as Teams, VPN use, or video conferencing as well as entertainment options such as online and cloud gaming or streaming.

Now, the virus, with its consequences of a changed culture of work and leisure, is not the only component causing data traffic to skyrocket. Growth in streaming services and cloud computing, mobile Internet, and real-time communication has been ongoing and accelerating for years now. Innovations and advancing automation of technologies such as 5G, Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence along with day-to-day events also play a decisive role, as do seasonal influences. Seasonally, in most years the Internet experiences a slow-down during the summer months – but not in the extraordinary year of 2020. During the Covid-19 pandemic, growth in the use of digital applications and Internet services continued unabated.

Increased demand: Interconnection available at any time

Data traffic is growing and demand for bandwidth is increasing. Managing this ongoing transformation in a way that guarantees a seamless user experience is crucial for both private or business purposes. Internet Exchanges are well equipped to meet these challenges: On the one hand, they can immediately upgrade existing customers' connections, for example, by upgrading a ten Gigabit Ethernet (GE) port

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to a 100GE port. Also, new networks that want to benefit from the advantages of peering – that is, a direct connection to and between different networks via an Internet Exchange – can be quickly connected. As a result of the direct connection, data packets reach their destination directly and as quickly as possible, as well as securely, cost-effectively and without packet loss.

Cloud connectivity is particularly in demand to enable dedicated access by enterprises to cloud service providers. Ever-increasing data volumes and increasingly critical business applications mean that dedicated connections are becoming more and more important. To constantly meet all of these needs,

sufficient capacities must be planned. In this way, Internet Exchanges can ensure fully comprehensive interconnection worldwide at all times. Strategic and proactive plans that ensure sufficient capacities are always available, making certain that these needs are permanently met and that there is full coverage at all times. As soon as the utilization of the connected bandwidth by networks at Internet Exchanges reaches 63%, it is common practice that it gets upgraded. This process allows it to ensure full coverage at all times.

High data traffic means growing responsibility

With high traffic comes great responsibility. Due to accelerated digitalization and the increased demand for interconnection, peering, cloud connectivity and the like, an Internet Exchange must be continuously prepared for the needs arising from increases in data traffic, not only by connecting new customers every day but also by always providing sufficient capacity for further growth. It is also necessary to look beyond the horizon: Digital technology will continue to evolve rapidly, and only by constantly monitoring developments and planning extensively in advance is it possible to live up to responsibilities encompassing partners and customers, to the end-users, and also to the environment. ◨

K Srinivasan

(Mr K Srinivasan is the founder of the Sansadratna Awards given to best performing MPs since the last 11 years under the umbrella of his civil society NGO called Primepoint Foundation and the E-Magazine PreSense of which he is also the publisher and the managing editor. He is a former president of the Cyber Security Society of India and Digital Journalists Association of India.)

India in Need of Electoral Reforms In 75th Year of Independence

Although the Law Commission and the Parliamentary Standing Committee have suggested reforms, so far, there has been no political will to legislate such reforms. Without the major electoral reforms, our democracy cannot be strengthened.

Even as the country is in the midst of the State Assembly Elections in five States – West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, India is need of urgent electoral reforms that has been long pending. Although the first official consolidated proposal for Electoral Reforms was made in June 2004 to the then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, by the then Chief Election Commissioner of India, Mr. T S Krishnamurthy, to date nothing noteworthy has happened. Any major reforms that have taken place like NOTA, declaring criminal cases in election affidavit by candidates, and disqualification of membership for convicted MPs/MLAs, have happened only through judicial orders from Supreme Court of India.

Although the Law Commission and the Parliamentary Standing Committee have suggested reforms, so far, there has been no political will to legislate such reforms. Without the major electoral reforms, our democracy cannot be strengthened.

The Election Commission is one of the 'Pride Institutions' of India. They deserve appreciation for their free, fair and transparent management of the Indian elections, the world's biggest event. They have derived the power to frame some rules only through the issue of judicial orders. They still need more power to disqualify candidates who violate the rules. There have been instances when elections were cancelled, when a candidate was caught distributing money during elections. However, the

same candidate contested again and won when the new date of elections was notified. The Election Commission is helpless in such situations, as they do not have the power to disqualify a person who violates the rules.

In the past 20 years, political parties have been spending huge amounts of money, even in Assembly elections, not to speak of Parliamentary elections. In spite of all the checks and controls, money gets distributed to the voters. Surprisingly, in one of the surveys conducted by a media house in Tamil Nadu, when voters were asked about the factors that they considered for selecting a candidate like political party, leader, candidate, manifesto, and so on, nearly 10% of the voters responded saying that they voted for 'money'. This situation prevails in some of the states. This is an alarming signal.

Another important matter of concern is the 'Opinion Polls'. Even though the Election Commission had once wanted to ban opinion polls before the elections, the Supreme Court held that it could not be banned on the grounds of 'freedom of speech and expression'. In India, many of the offenders seek protection under the garb of 'freedom of speech'. Exploiting this privilege, many opinion polls are released with the nexus of political parties and the media and poll agencies. These surveys are not transparent as they do not indicate the methodology and the sample size of the survey and the results. Since many of the media houses are owned by political parties or are in alliance with some parties, their views are unreliable. In the past elections, none of the surveys has proved right. The Election Commission can impose restrictions like minimum sample size, transparency of methodology, etc. If there is any legal provision, the Election Commission can permit survey results till the announcement of election dates, without infringing on the freedom of speech. Voters should decide based on their own perceptions. We need to draw the line between 'free and fair election' and 'freedom of speech' in the name of opinion polls.

In the past 20 years, political parties have been spending huge amounts of money, even in Assembly elections, not to speak of Parliamentary elections. In spite of all the checks and controls, money gets distributed to the voters.

In the current Assembly Elections, some of the prospective parties have released manifestoes promising 'the moon and the heaven'. They have not declared their source of funds to meet their impractical promises. One party has promised 'government jobs' and washing machines to all the ration cardholders. Many parties have promised monthly pensions to all cardholders, free gas cylinders, free houses, writing off of all education and agricultural loans, etc. Although there are guidelines from the Election Commission, they are violated, while misleading the voters. Unfortunately, the Election Commission does not have enough power to control them.

While on one side, the civil society and vibrant youngsters take initiatives to clean up the electoral system, they are unable to enter politics and contest elections due to the dominance of persons with criminal background and great ill-gotten wealth to fund. During the selection of candidates by many political parties, the first question asked is "how much money can you spend". The highest bidder is allotted the seat, and not the person who is loyal and committed to the party and the welfare of the society.

In the past four General Elections, none of the parties has promised in their manifesto to bring about 'Electoral Reforms'. As the nation prepares to celebrate its 75th year of independence, it is time for all political parties to join together to clean up the electoral and societal system and bring in legislation for Electoral Reforms, including Public Funding through National Election Fund for Funding of Elections as proposed by Former Chief Election Commissioner of India Shri T S Krishnamurthy, and provide opportunities to enthusiastic and committed youngsters to be part of the legislature. PreSense appeals to all authorities to enact a separate comprehensive law to regulate all political parties, as recommended by Justice Venkatachaliah Constitution Review Committee. ◼

Feedback at: prpoint@gmail.com

Unusual Gold Imports in India in March 2021

Increasing domestic demand is pushing up imports of gold.

- By A Correspondent

In March 2021, multiple factors contributed to the rise in imports of gold to 160 tonnes, a growth of 471% as compared to the same period last year. The growth is mainly attributed to factors like demand surge for gem and jewellery products from exports markets like the US, UK following lockdown relaxation, the wedding season in India, improved business and consumer sentiments and as well as recent sharp drop in gold prices, according to Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC).

There are many factors that pushed up the demand for gold that include festive time in domestic market and various countries during the said time; resumption of mining and exporting activities; resumption of production activities in domestic and global market; development of vaccine and start of vaccination and relaxation over the travel.

Apart from that there were various virtual gem and jewellery trade shows and buyer seller meets (VBSMs) organised by GJEPC which resulted in large orders for Indian manufacturers for varied gem and jewellery products.

While reiterating that increasing domestic demand is pushing up imports of gold, GJEPC Chairman Mr. Colin Shah said, "We should observe the overall market trends in a holistic manner in the forthcoming months to arrive at a rightful conclusion. Factors such as low base effect, reduction in Gold price, reduction in import duty may be attributed to the increased imports in the country in this period. An important observation is that from an average import of approx. 80 tonnes a year in 2018-19 is down to 50 tonnes last year."

The growth of gold imports is due to the low base effect as imports of gold in March 2020 was 28 tonnes due to outbreak of Covid-19. In a normal scenario, average import of gold in a month remains 60 tonnes to 80 tonnes. But, outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 resulted in nose dive of jewellery demand in domestic and international market and so as the import of gold in March 2020 to only 28 tonnes vis-à-vis 93 tonnes in March 2019.

"Growth in imports of gold indicates the positive sentiment in the domestic and international market. I am also expecting growth in exports of jewellery in the current fiscal." Colin Shah added.

Additionally, the rise in demand is also impacted by the reduction in gold prices. Gold prices have seen a phenomenal drop and customers and investors see an opportunity as the current prices may not sustain in future. Gold prices have declined on an average to Rs. 40179 in March 2021 which is the lowest through the Financial Year from April 2020 to February 2021.

More imports of gold are taking place through official channels after the cut in gold import duty. Colin Shah comments, "The import duty reduction has encouraged imports through official channels – The gold duty cut by the Government is not much but it has helped bring duty at par with other countries and more formal import of the metal through official channel."

About The Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC)

The Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC), set up by the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India (GoI) in 1966, is one of several Export Promotion Councils (EPCs) launched by the Indian Government, to boost the country's export thrust, when India's post-Independence economy began making forays in the international markets. Since 1998, the GJEPC has been granted autonomous status. The GJEPC is the apex body of gems & jewellery industry and today represents 7000 exporters in the sector. ◨

Noted Industrialist and Social Worker Anirban Sarkar Felicitated

This award is an initiative by Interactive Forum on Indian economy (IFIE) , a non-profitable company.

- By A Correspondent

Industrialist Mr Anirban Sarkar receiving award at the hands of Governor of Maharashtra and Goa Mr Bhagat Singh Koshyari

Noted businessman and social worker from Pune Mr Anirban Sarkar was given a the prestigious **"Champions of Change Award 2020´** at the hands of Governor of Maharashtra and Goa Bhagat Singh Koshyari on April 16 at Taj Resort & Convention Centre, Goa.

The award was given to Mr Sarkar for his services to the society. Mr Sarkar is a noted entrepreneur. He is the Managing Director of Deccan Water Treatment Pvt Ltd and also the Founder of Deccaleap Technologies.

The Chief Minister of Goa Mr Pramod Sawant was also the recipient of this award. Mr Sawant was selected for this award by the jury for social service. Mr Shripad Naik the Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Ayurveda was also one of the prominent Awardees.

Other awardees included actress Sushmita Sen, Sonu Nigam and others. Sushmita joined the ceremony virtually.

Champions of Change is an Indian award, for promoting Gandhian values, (Swachata), community service and social development.(in Aspirational district in india), selected by constitutional jury members headed by K. G. Balakrishnan Former Chief Justice of India and Former Chairman NHRC. It is given annually in four categories, and usually presented by the President, Vice president, Prime Minister of India or a leading figure.

This award is an initiative by Interactive Forum on Indian economy (IFIE), a non-profitable company. It also publishes a magazine Power Corridors in 'Hindi' and 'English' language from New Delhi and also owns a new digital portal A Panchayati Times. The foundation currently headed by Nandan Jha was created in 2011.

The Governor congratulated the awardees and the jury for selecting proper and deserving people for this award.

The Chief Minister of Goa Mr Pramod Savant welcomed the guests and congratulated the awardees and expressed the hope that it will motivate the people from all walks of life to be an agent of change. He said "we are celebrating 60 years of liberation of Goa and our focus is human development ".

Shripad Naik said the work done by the awardees is an inspiration for the others and was an epitome of excellence. ⊏⊐

The award comprises a certificate and a gold medal. It is given in the following categories, namely:

▸ **Constructive Work in 115 Aspirational districts in India.**
▸ **Application of Education, Helthcare, Science and Technology for Rural development.**
▸ **Outstanding contribution for the Development and Welfare of Women and Children (115 Aspirational districts)**
▸ **Outstanding contribution in Swatch Bharat Abhiyan**
▸ **International Award for promoting Gandhian values outside India.**

Dr Deepak Shikarpur

Dr Deepak Shikarpur is Director of Kinetic Communications and a prolific author

Lockdown Will Change Social Fabric of Many Nations

We need smart wearable device to be worn by covid positive patient. If they try to remove from the body exception message can be sent to Health authorities/police. If such a person starts moving even this exception can be tracked.

20th Century had some historic moments which changed the way people lived and transacted business e.g World wars, Gulf war etc. 21st Century is having one such catastrophe which all of us are going through (Corona Virus). We thought things are getting better. But on the contrary Second Wave seems more impactful and devastating than the first wave. It has created panic amongst all sectors .Barring improving Environment it has no positive takeaways. Developed and Developing nations are facing same issues. There are several options to arrest spread of Coronavirus. Test, Trace, Isolate, and Treat is the sequence followed globally.

Unfortunately many people don't wear masks nor follow Distancing norms thereby spreading corona. This is one area where Technology and Smart Automated tools can offer help to Health Authorities. Alibaba in China built an AI based Video Analytics tool to help authorities detect probable Covid positive suspects looking at CCTV Footage. China claims to have 600 Million Surveillance CCTV cameras. It is impossible to analyse information manually. As compared to this Pune City has installed base of over 12000 cameras. Footage from these many cameras is also impossible to analyse manually.

In addition we need smart wearable device to be worn by covid positive patient. If they try to remove from the body, exception message

can be sent to Health authorities/police. If such a person starts moving even this exception can be tracked. This way we can use smart tech to curb covid. In absence of these smart tools, only option to arrest spread is Lockdown. Lockdown should be considered as the last option to break the chain. But it has long term (only Negative) impact on the economy and hence should be tried only as a last option. In many cases actually positive cases have increased after lockdown. This is also because people create mad rush to buy things they need forgetting mandatory norms. Similarly limited period lockdown also doesn't work.

Lockdown will change social fabric of many nations. The global economy shrank by 4.3 per cent last year, over two-and-a-half times more than during the global financial crisis of 2009. The modest recovery of 4.7 per cent expected in 2021 would barely offset the losses of 2020. The devastating socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for years to come unless smart investments in economic, societal and climate resilience ensure a robust and sustainable recovery of the global economy. This is very unlikely as nobody knows when covid will become like normal flue .

Policymakers in India will need to strengthen their efforts to formalise labour markets and strengthen social protection systems to dampen the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable and improve macroeconomic resilience. We need to use several strategies to accelerate vaccination. Giving two rounds of jabs to around 100 cr people is not an easy task. This is where CSR Funds, Corporate outreach, Educational Institutions should partner directly with Hospitals and provide vaccines to its staff, families, students, faculties and families. Government should not take it upon itself to vaccinate entire nation. Otherwise this project will move at snail's pace and we will never come out corona, lockdown and work from Home cycle and its after effects. This is where 1+1 can become 11.

Post lockdown new normal will see a changed world. Theory of Globalisation will be revisited. Many families find trust and faith now with nearby grocery shop and won't do eCommerce any more. Every sector will get affected due to change of spending habits. Many luxuries

We thought things are getting better. But on the contrary Second Wave seems more impactful and devastating than the first wave. It has created panic amongst all sectors .Barring improving Environment it has no positive takeaways. Developed and Developing nations are facing same issues. There are several options to arrest spread of Coronavirus. Test, Trace, Isolate, and Treat is the sequence followed globally.

won't appear on shopping list. Healthcare sector will see sunrise growth . Like Ventilators many medical devices will be locally made at lower cost and many Indian Engineering companies have big opportunity in Medical devices sector. More hospitals, beds, wards in India means more demand. At the moment most of them are imported. Work from home was a popular term of IT professionals . Now every sector has successfully practiced it. People will meet more online than attending parties, corporate events in Star resorts etc. eLearning, eMentoring, eCertification will find many new takers as Millions will loose jobs globally. China dependence of many sectors (Automobile, Electronics, Mobile Phones etc) is expected to reduce and India should gain from it. This is a classical theory which needs to be proven with business case which is where Government needs to push friendlier "Make in India" program and giving preferential treatment to such investors. Our Telecom sector and Internet Service providers need to put in some steam as they are also in total disarray. ▣

Politician-police-criminal Nexus Needs to Be Broken

The implementation of apex court suggested police reforms including creation of state level security commission is required immediately to break politicians-police-criminal nexus that has created a crisis of governance in the country.

- By Kushal Jeena

Photo Courtesy; Pixabay

The reluctance on the part of India's political class irrespective of parties in power to implement much-awaited police reforms has created a crisis because politicians decide posting of police officers. If the reforms are put in place, the politicians will not decide posting of police officers as the security commission will be authorized to decide posting of officers and they would be given fixed term.

The creation of state police commissions will have proper representation of the society as it would have on board members from ruling and opposition parties, expert and credible members from civil society. This revolutionary administrative measure would not only help rescue police from the clutches of power hungry politicians but also break the back of notorious nexus that suits politicians use during election time to fix their rivals.

The criminalization of politics has often been debated in different platforms and all including politicians, experts, lawyers and influential members of civil society always stressed the need for the implementation of police reforms. However, it remains confined to debates that takes place in and outside the parliament. The political class of the country always stands united whenever the issue of implementation of police reforms comes up because if the reforms were put in place it would wrest the power of politicians to decide the postings and terms of police officials, which is key to the formation of a politicians-police-criminals nexus.

This nexus had seen an upward trend from the 80s onwards. Earlier the politicians used criminals now criminals have become

politicians and entered into the Parliament. The Supreme Court and the Election Commission of India have since undertaken some commendable steps to reform the electoral process. In a landmark judgment the Supreme Court had asked the political leadership to explain reasons for selecting candidates having criminal records and had advised the government to implement it. However, politicians decided otherwise as they never would like to be answerable for criminalization of politics.

There has been an alarming trend of increased criminalization of politics during last four elections. In 2004, 24 per cent of the Members of Parliament (MPs) had criminal cases pending against them. In 2009, it went up to 30 per cent; in 2014 to 34 per cent; and in 2019 as many as 43 per cent of MPs had criminal cases pending against them." The first test of implementation of this judgment was the Bihar elections, although successive judgments barring criminals have done little good. Under the current law, only people who have been convicted at least by two counts can be debarred from becoming candidates. What is needed are urgent judicial reforms, police reforms and electoral reforms, which are long overdue. For instance there have been number reports on electoral reforms, including the Dinesh Goswami committee, that are lying unimplemented. The Election Commission needs to be provided with more powers.

> *The Supreme Court and the Election Commission of India have since undertaken some commendable steps to reform the electoral process. In a landmark judgment the Supreme Court had asked the political leadership to explain reasons for selecting candidates having criminal records and had advised the government to implement it. However, politicians decided otherwise as they never would like to be answerable for criminalization of politics.*

The criminals entering politics and becoming lawmakers is not new in India. Nearly half of the newly-elected Lok Sabha members in 2019 have criminal charges pending against them, a 26 per cent increase as compared to 2014, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms. Many Governments have talked about these reforms but nothing concrete has been done. What is lacking is the political will and the support of parties to bring legislations to address these issues. The public, too, should not elect criminals. If we don't stop electing criminals then we are just getting the government we deserve.

Corruption is the most serious systemic issue. It affects all citizens but poor and marginalized sections suffer the most. The erratic and irrational working hours which transform even well-intentioned police officers into 'insensitive and mechanical' human beings? The technology deficit for prevention and detection of crime or crowd control is another factor that impacts efficiency of police force.

Rationalization of police working into three shifts and separation of crime investigation from law and order will reduce the workload of officers. Technology in the form of improved forensic laboratories and equipment would make police efficient and accelerate its response to citizens in distress. Creation of State Security Commissions and police complaint authorities, as mandated by the Supreme Court, will reduce unwanted political interference and enhance professional policing.

Transforming the basic environment of police stations all over the country is one initiative that the government if serious should immediately take. It's here that a citizen in distress comes. Most of their complaints are non-cognizable and minor in nature. If trained social workers and counselors are inducted in police, they can attend to it and do full justice to them. This will allow police officers to concentrate on crime and law and order issues. Inducting more women police officers in police stations will also demystify police and increase the comfort level of citizens.

A series of studies have proved that the more citizens interact with police, less fearful they become. Encouraging this interaction through formal and informal forums like Mohalla Committees, Students' Internship Programmes, and Mahila Dakshta Samitis should help. And of course training of policemen to treat a citizen as a valuable asset and respect of women's rights is essential.

Photo Courtesy; Pixabay

The criminalization of politics has often been debated in different platforms and all including politicians, experts, lawyers and influential members of civil society always stressed the need for the implementation of police reforms. However, it remains confined to debates that takes place in and outside the parliament.

Honest and transparent police processes, for example police verification for different purposes like passport and issuing of various licences, will also reduce the fear factor. Technology can add to the speed and reduce chances of corruption.

Mutual cooperation and trust between the political class and police administration are considered to be important to achieve the objectives of a democracy like India that is the only country in the world having multiple parties. Such cooperation would result into an ideal state where no individual is at distress. Currently, things are going wrong because one politicians get administrative authority and be tend to dictate terms to police and as result police fail to perform their duties. The notorious politicians-police-criminal nexus has hit the rule of law, which is primary pillar of a democracy.

Time has come for the apex court to mount pressure on the governments at the centre and states to ensure that all seven directives of police reforms are implemented in their spirit and are monitored on regular basis.

Only Rich Can Afford to Fight Elections

Scrutiny of members of the Lok Sabha as well as members of State Assemblies will show that majority of members have declared assets of several crores.

- By Brij Bhardwaj

Only rich can fight polls in India as cost of electioneering has gone up by many times. Gone are the days when professionals or social workers with limited means could get elected to State Assemblies or Lok Sabha. Now at the time of ticket distribution parties check if candidate has the resources of his own or has supporters who would provide funds for his campaign. Many get the ticket because they are in a position to finance their own campaign as well as give a donation to the party.

Scrutiny of members of the Lok Sabha as well as members of State Assemblies will show that majority of members have declared assets of several crores. Gone are the days when members travelled by bus now majority have cars. There are few volunteers and majority of campaigners are hired. Election offices have become war rooms staffed with professionals who decide campaign plans.

Surveys are conducted, data collected before campaign starts and candidates selected. The money spent in advance is considered good investment and a political party which prepares in advance does well, Campaign cost has also gone up. There are few togas or rickshaws with majority of campaigners moving in cars or motorcycles. As for central leaders and top state leaders helicopters have to be hired. Using buses to fetch crowds for political rallies is common. Provision also has to be made for food for those who come to attend these rallies.

Expenses run into crores as a result limits fixed by Election Commission on expenses have become a joke as they do not cover even a single day expense on polling day. Candidates

manipulate accounts by showing them as expense made by political party backing them as there is no limited on expense by political party. One has to also note elections in India are not held every five years but every year. One State or the other holds elections every year.

Gone are the days when Prime Minister or other top leaders did not participate in majority of elections for the State Assemblies. Situation has changed to the extent that many Central Ministers spend more time in looking after electioneering instead of attending to work allotted to them. The ruling party in India collects maximum amount of money for electioneering as such has no intention to check the same to provide a level playing field. .

The Election Commission is a mute spectator while laws relating to expenditure on elections are openly flouted. Laws relating to use of communal propaganda, use of inducements in cash or kind are also rampant. There was time when Election Commission headed by Mr Sheshan had been able to check malpractices, like booth capturing. He also checked use of communal propaganda. But over the years Election Commission has become a toothless tiger.

We see more violations and moral code of conduct is openly violated, personal

The money spent in advance is considered good investment and a political party which prepares in advance does well, Campaign cost has also gone up. There are few togas or rickshaws with majority of campaigners moving in cars or motorcycles. As for central leaders and top state leaders helicopters have to be hired. Using buses to fetch crowds for political rallies is common.

attacks on opponents and use of abusive language has become common. The Commission in some States is holding a single day poll while in others it has extended the same to eight rounds. The moral authority of the commission is not the same as it has been accused of favouring the ruling party.

Conducting of free and fair elections is important part of our democratic set up and there is urgent need to check malpractices like excessive use of money, state agencies and communal propaganda. There is need to restore faith of people in the electoral process. Despite some shortcomings the elections in India has been free and fair but to ensure that it remains so care will have to be taken so that it remains so in future also. Election Commission has done it in the past and can be effective in future also. We need people who run it to give up timidity and use powers they have been given. ◾
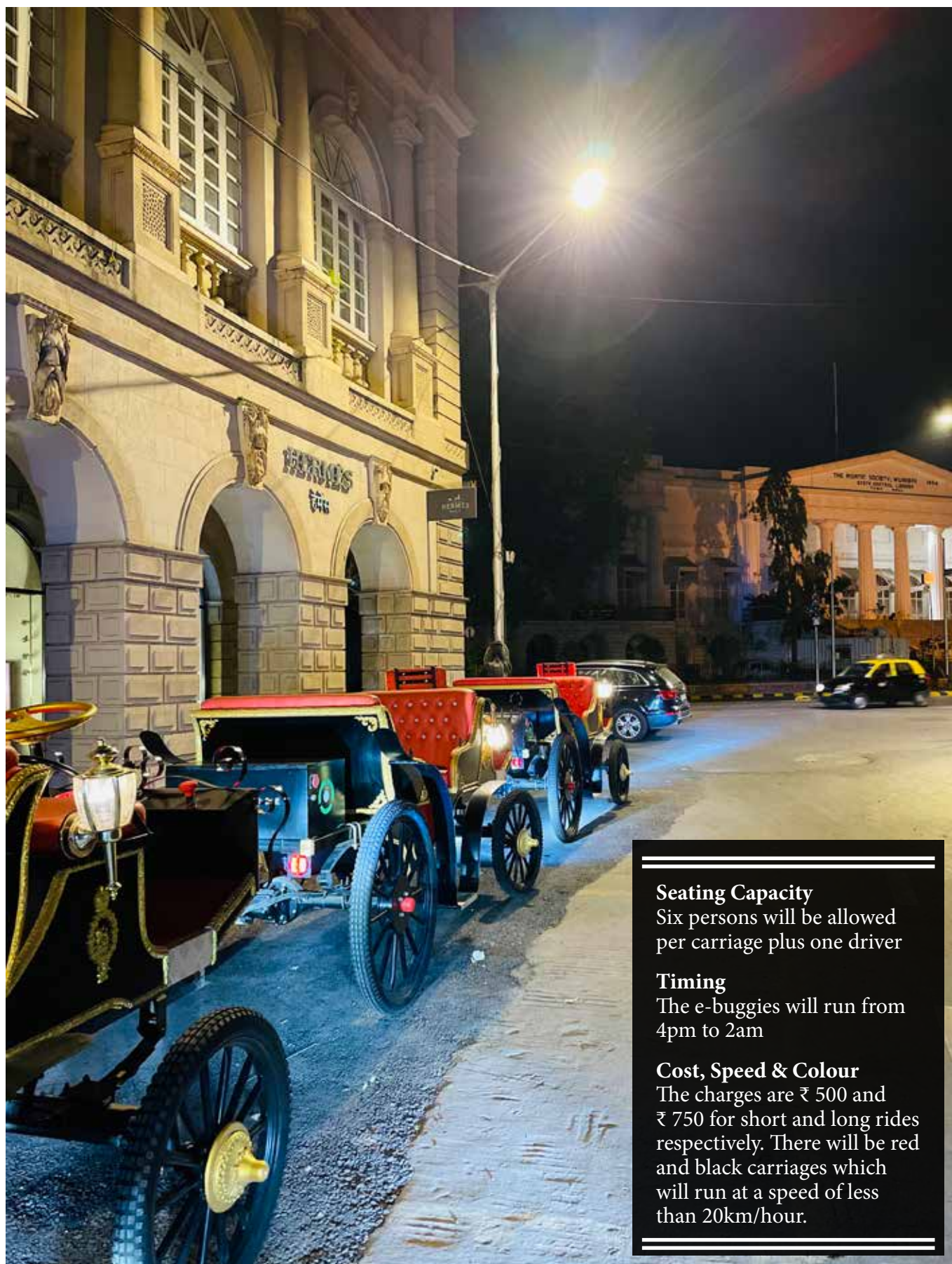
Seating Capacity
Six persons will be allowed per carriage plus one driver

Timing
The e-buggies will run from 4pm to 2am

Cost, Speed & Colour
The charges are ₹ 500 and ₹ 750 for short and long rides respectively. There will be red and black carriages which will run at a speed of less than 20km/hour.

Iconic Victoria Carriages All Set to Comeback in Mumbai

Another feather is added to the cap of Mumbai with the launch of these carriages.
- By A Correspondent

Maharashtra Tourism is all set to bring back the old charm of Mumbai with the launch of 'Victoria 2.0', the eco-friendly and hi-tech carriages. These 12 carriages will be battery operated, posing no harm to animals and will be equipped with GPS-driven audio tours. In the first phase, the e-carriages will run at the city's renowned landmarks such as the Gateway of India, Marine Drive and Nariman Point. The carriages will serve as another tourist attraction and an addition to the city's historical treasures and rich heritage.

So for all of you visiting Mumbai, don't forget to hop on these rides. They operate in South Mumbai area allowing you to sit back and appreciate the beautiful colonial architecture in the city. The carriage ride also promises to narrate the history of the city's wonders. It is equipped with almost everything you would ever need, it also has a Bluetooth speaker if you want to put on your favourite songs.

They are also equipped with a GPS Intelligent Proximity Triggering dynamic software that triggers one's multilingual commentary precisely at the right place each & every time about museums, historic and cultural sites which enhances visitors experiences.

The carriages are operated by lithium-ion batteries which are eco-friendly. They will have sanitisation stands and be cleaned after each ride, and everyone is expected to wear a mask on board as per the protocols.

Talking about the booking facilities, Ketan Kadam, Founder/CEO, UBO Ridez Pvt Ltd, said "We are encouraging E-wallet payments through all popular E-wallet platforms. As for the bookings, we are also tying up with multiple platforms such as Khaki Tours, Bookmyshow and our own Facebook and Instagram pages".

Will Vaccination Revive the Ailing Tourism Sector in India?

Stalwarts from the tourism industries who participated in the webinar included Mr P P Khanna, President of Association Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), Mr Yuvraj Padole, Deputy Director Events and Marketing Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board and Mr Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director of Global Panorama Showcase (GPS).

- By A Correspondent

The government of India has launched the massive vaccination programme which is claimed to be one of the largest in the world to save the people from the pandemic and return the country into normalcy. The pandemic also devastated the economy even as the business owners and employees struggle with the loss of revenue and jobs.

Tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, impacting economies, livelihoods, public services and opportunities on all continents. All parts of its vast value-chain have been affected. Tourism is one of the world's major economic sectors. It is the third-largest export category (after fuels and chemicals) and in 2019 accounted for 7% of global trade. For some countries, it can represent over 20% of their GDP and, overall, it is the third largest export sector of the global economy.

To discuss this issue in detail, Corporate Tycoons, India's Business and Travel magazine in Association with World Peace University organized an important webinar Will Vaccination Revive the Ailing Touring Sector in India?

Those stalwarts from the tourism industries who participated in the webinar included Mr P P Khanna, President of Association Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), Mr Yuvraj Padole, Deputy Director Events and Marketing Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board and Mr Harmandeep Singh Anand , Managing Director of Global Panorama Showcase (GPS).

Mr Khanna said India has a lot of tourism potential because of its diversity. "It is a country which is endowed with beautiful mountains, glimmering sea beaches, green forests, national parks and sanctuaries. These lure both national and international

tourists to India", he added.

He said " tourism and hospitality have a multiplier effect on the economy of any country and thereby contributing to over 9 per cent to the GDP of India in the pre covid days".

But now, the situation is different. It is not just India , but the whole world is grappling with the pandemic. The restrictions on road travel, train travel, airlines , hospitality etc have made a devastating effect on this sector. The domestic tourism industry has been a great shock absorber. People shun going to distance places using public transport but prefer to go to nearby places in their own vehicles, Mr Khanna added.

He said the roadmap of Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) is to attend a lot of workshops, attend travel markets and go to different states for networking and share knowledge about the states. "Once you know about the states, you can promote it better", he added.

Domestic tourism is the key driver for economic growth in India. He said with 20-million-odd Indian tourists travelling abroad on vacation every year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15 , 2019 urged the people to visit 15 tourist destinations within the country by 2022 to give a fillip to the domestic tourism sector. The Prime Minister said this while addressing the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 73rd Independence Day, Modi said India has much to offer and if domestic tourism increases, international footfalls too will increase.

Mr Yuvraj Padole, the Deputy Director Events and Marketing gave an outline of the tourism potential of Madhya Pradesh and highlighted the challenges that has cropped up because of the pandemic.

He said after the first wave of pandemic, things seemed to be improving but then there was the resurgence of the pandemic. This second wave was trying to dampen our morale but we are not allowing it to happen. I am sure we will win the battle against corona.

In his presentation he narrated how the historical fort cities of Gwalior, Orcha and other places in Madhya Pradesh are included in the list of world heritage cities.

He said MP which is considered to be a "Tiger state" was also emerging as a leopard state as it is becoming a home to a large number of leopards in the entire country. According to reports, MP has nearly a quarter of the country's 12, 852 leopards.

Yuvraj said MP was also promoting rural tourism in a big way to showcase the village life, food, tradition and culture by identifying exotic villages that could be showcased for rural tourism. "The objective is to showcase rural life, culture, heritage, art and craft , handloom and textiles and give the visitors a feel of what the actual village life is ", he added.

Harmandeep Singh Anand, the MD of Global Panorama Showcase said tourism is the main source of revenue for many countries. For example Maldives is totally dependent upon tourism for its growth and sustenance. He said "the way one travels in the world is no longer going to be the same now. Post COVID-19 everything is going to change."

The flights have restarted but one has to follow cumbersome protocols such as getting vaccination certificate before boarding the flight, masks, sanitizers, quarantine etc. To get the tourism industry back on its track may take two years.

He said tourism is the only business which is first to get impacted and last to recover in terms of calamities. "Whether it is a recession, slowdown or a pandemic, it is th tourism which bears the brunt first and takes long time to recover".

Harmandeep Singh Anand also gave details about his venture Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) which is one of the largest Business to Business Networking Events in the country. GPS is focused on educating and empowering the travel fraternity.

Students MIT WPU

It is a business meeting point for leading tourism service providers from India and overseas. The main objective of GPS is to facilitate connections between suppliers from across the globe, and agents and buyers from Tier II & Tier III Indian cities. Through its events, GPS aims to expand its reach to tourism professionals from all states and union territories in India.

Earlier in his keynote address Dr R M Chitnis, Pro Vice Chancellor of MIT World Peace University said this webinar is important considering the fact that COVID-19 cases are spiking up and there are severe restrictions on travel. As a result not only travel industry but all other sectors are taking a massive hit. "We had plans to take our students overseas as a part of their study tour .But after booking everything had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. The revenue lost in such cancellations is a permanent loss to the tourism industry" he added.

Dr Chitnis expressed the hope that this webinar will be a lesson for the all the students as to how the Industry copes up with such a catastrophe. He said to overcome the crisis, all the tourism industry people have to join hands to lift one another out of this blue.

"What is needed is to redesign the tourism sector in the wake of the new challenge, adopt cost cutting measures, use new technology to optimize performance and minimize manpower. There should be more B to B connects so as to reduce the marketing costs" added Dr Chitnis.

Chandran Iyer , Editor and Publisher of Corporate Tycoons magazine gave an outline of vision and mission of the magazine and how the magazine was trying to connect the students of the MIT WPU with the industry leaders.

Prof. Gautam Bapat, Head of School,School of Management (U.G.), Faculty of Management, MIT WPU, Pune spoke about the significance of the webinar in the wake of rising corona cases and its cascading effect on the whole tourism sector. He said the webinar will throw light on the challenges and opportunities connected with the travel and tourism industry.

 Prof Shreyas Thakar proposed the vote of thanks. Prof Neha Lele, Prof Vaidehi Mirajkar and Prof Prasad Pathak also played an important part in the webinar. ◧

India Has Finalised Air Bubble Pact with Sri Lanka

Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international passenger ights can be operated by their airlines into each other's territories under restrictive conditions.

- By A Correspondent

India has established a bilateral air bubble arrangement with Sri Lanka for operation of special international passenger flights between the two countries, the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Saturday. With this, India now has such pacts with 28 countries, including Afghanistan, Bahrain, Canada, France, Germany, Iraq, Japan, the Maldives, Nigeria, Qatar, the UAE.

Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international passenger flights can be operated by their airlines into each other's territories under restrictive conditions.

"India has finalized an air bubble agreement with Sri Lanka, making it the 6th such arrangement in SAARC region and the 28th in total," the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Twitter.

All the eligible passengers will be able to travel between the 2 countries in the near future," it noted.

Scheduled international flights have been suspended in India since March 23, 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, special international passenger flights have been operating under the Vande Bharat Mission since May last year and under bilateral air bubble arrangements since July.

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