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WHAT LIES BENEATH?

The part of Vohra Committee report that was never made public
may throw new lights on the politician-criminal nexus

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Focus is back on Vohra committee report

Many political leaders, who were in influential positions in Maharashtra and Gujarat in the 1990s had developed close relations with underworld don Dawood Ibrahim and his henchman Iqbal Mirchi. This assertion was officially put down on paper when the N.N. Vohra committee submitted its report to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 5 October 1993, roughly three months after it was established on 9 July 1993 in the aftermath of the 12 March 1993 Bombay bomb blasts. While the contents of the report, that was subsequently made public on 1 August 1995 in Parliament, were only limited to 11 pages, it is a part of the government's own records that the finding of the report, in total, was close to 100 pages. It is these 100 pages that were never made public, that have now become relevant, almost 26 years after they were brought into existence, after Union Home Minister Amit Shah highlighted the issue on the floor of the parliament. The 100 pages annexures, which are the most vital part of the report, as, according to old Intelligence Bureau (IB) hands, it contains the names of leading politicians and bureaucrats who were the key



players who helped Dawood and Mirchi from the 1970s till 1993 and beyond.

However, there is strong hope among former Intelligence officials that the present dispensation at North Block will now be able to gather the courage to make 100 pages of the report public, especially with Amit Shah now raking up the issue of the connections between politicians and Dawood. The matter has taken a serious turn in the present context when Pakistan is using Dawood & Co extensively to sabotage the progress of India. The terror attacks, gold smuggling, drug trafficking, money laundering is extensively pushed by Dawood network to weaken the Indian state on the behest of hostile neighbor Pakistan, proxy controlled by China.

The growth of Dawood and Mirchi was due to the fact that the concerned enforcement agencies did not timely take action against him and, later, this perhaps became difficult on account of the enormous patronage that he had developed. MHA was given all kinds of information, in volumes of pages, which were 'ultra-sensitive' in nature. This information clearly showed how politicians were on the payroll of Dawood and how they were acting as his servants. Much of this information was produced in the Vohra committee report, in the portion which was not made public. We can understand why it was not made public before, but now, there is no political compulsion as such. It should have been presented before the public to show the deep nexus that existed between the politicians, police and criminals. All the recent developments in Maharashtra related to Vazegate and his handlers rogue police commissioner Paramvir Singh, NCP & Shiv Sena political leadership are known to the entire country. It further establishes the fact that nothing has changed at the ground when it comes to criminal synergy between the various stakeholders.

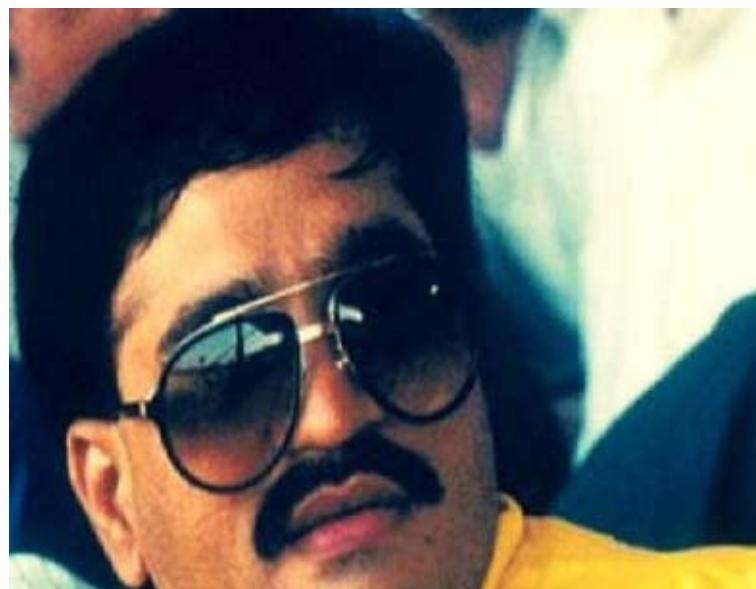
The syndicated crime has dented prosperity of the country and it has infected the system from top to bottom. It is imperative that the present government must table the Vohra committee report on the floor of the parliament and expose the nexus between the politics, police, bureaucrat, media linkage with syndicated mafia to clean up the governance. Narendra Modi has repeatedly promised corruption free governance, transparent society and his strong-willed home minister should take up Vohra committee report seriously and the process to clean up the opaque corrupt system controlled by mafia's must end. The role of the state governments is critical to clean up the mess since law & order is a state subject. The roadmap set up by UP Chief Minister to clean up syndicated mafia should be taken as the glaring example to set the law & order right. Our country has limited resources and the scarcity is going to increase further, hence the distribution of available resources become key for the success of the nation. We need a coordinated effort from all the stake holders to erase mafia nexus so that our next generations can live in peace.

—Prashant Tewari,
Editor-in-Chief

COVER STORY

Criminals & Their Political Masters

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Limitless power of the Middlemen



CRIMINALS & THEIR POLITICAL MASTERS

Saga of criminalization in politics and buried
Vohra Committee Report



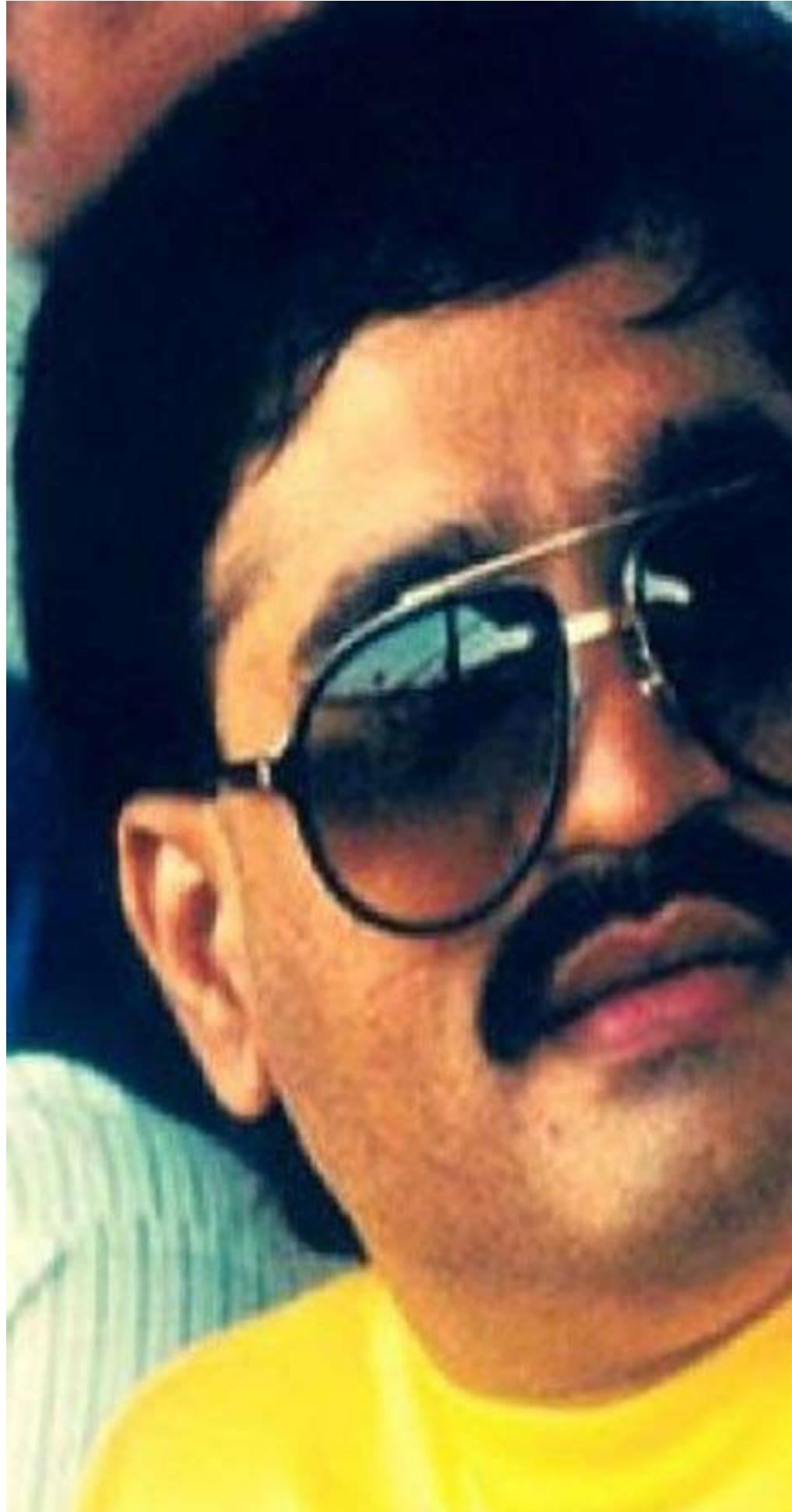
J Gopikrishnan

Whenever debates on criminalization and its link with politics, memories will resurface about the not yet fully published Vohra Committee Report of 1993. Actually the 12-page report prepared by Home Secretary NN Vohra names only fugitives Dawood Ibrahim, first parked in Dubai and now in Pakistan and late Iqbal Mirchy parked in London and then talks about criminalization of politics in Bihar, Haryana , Uttar Pradesh without any naming any politicians. It also talks about role of narcotics trade, film world mafia etc without naming anyone in the signed first 12 pages of the report. It is well known that Vohra who later enjoyed post retirement life of more than 25 years up to Governorship has annexed many unsigned intelligence reports, newspaper clippings and sensitive letters of many which names many big names.

Many portions of these unsigned annexure naming important politicians (one recently died) basically from Western region and their involvement with Dawood Ibrahim, narcotics gangs, hawala rackets are still available. Generally media avoided publishing due to its sensitive nature and these annexure are unsigned. Many Editors lost job for bringing out some of the portions of these annexure. Classic case was termination of late Editor Vinod Mehta for naming a big politician from Maharashtra for his links with Dawood Ibrahim. Not only Vinod Mehta lost job, the newspaper owned by The Times of India also closed down after this incident. We leave it to the guess of readers about the name of the politician, still controlling the affairs of Maharashtra.

Basically criminalization of politics starts from election winning techniques like booth capturing and retain the power by terrorizing the people to ensure the money collection. "In certain States, like Bihar, Haryana and UP, these gangs enjoy the patronage of local level politicians, cutting across party lines and the protection of governmental functionaries. Some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs/ armed senas and, over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, State Assemblies and the national Parliament. Resultantly, such elements have acquired considerable political clout seriously jeopardizing the smooth functioning of the administration and the safety of life and property of the common man, causing a sense of despair and alienation among the people," narrates Vohra Committee Report.

The Report goes on : "An organised crime Syndicate/Mafia generally commences its activities by indulging in petty crime at the local level, mostly relating to illicit distillation/gambling/organised satta and prostitution in the larger towns. In port towns, their activities involve smuggling and sale of imported goods and progressively graduate to narcotics and drug trafficking. In the bigger cities, the main source of income relates to real estate – forcibly occupying lands/buildings, procuring such properties at cheap rates by forcing out the existing occupants/tenants etc. Over time, the money power thus acquired is used for building up contacts with bureaucrats and politicians and expansion of activities with impunity. The money power is used to develop a network of muscle-power which is also used by the politicians during





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elections".

The above two paragraphs of the Vohra Committee Reports neatly narrates the role of criminalization in Indian politics. Now let us back to the electoral violence. After introduction of Electronic Voting Machine, booth capturing violence is not happening from 2000. Thanks to maverick former maverick Election Commissioner late T.N.Sheshan for forcefully implementing Electoral Identity Cards and Electronic Voting Machines. But politicians are not fools. They devise new methods to grab power. Violence is perpetrated using the local anti-social elements to fear the electorate to stay away from voting, money pumping to bribe voters still going on.

Elimination of political rivals

Elimination of political rivals is the worst in Indian politics, where Left parties have a say. This intolerant barbarism happens in Left controlled areas like Kerala and West Bengal and Maoist infiltrated areas of central India. Sadly though Left parties are sidelined in West Bengal politics, Trinamool Congress regime also this violence and elimination of political opponents happening. It must be interesting note that such barbaric methods are not happening in areas where BJP and Congress are strong. So we can attribute the origin of elimination of political enemy methods to Left parties which once even passed a

resolution (famously known as Calcutta Thesis) justifying the need of elimination of "class enemies".

There is another kind of violence still practiced in India. This is the violence

Another such incident of big violence was erupted inside DMK. In a tussle for to become party's No : 2, supremo Karunanidhi's sons Stalin and Alagiri went to street fights leading to the murder of Stalin's supporter MLA ThaKiruttinan in 2003

or elimination of enemies within the party. Here comes the real role of usage of mafia elements by politicians to eliminate their rivals within the party. Even terrorists, mafia underworld and ultra naxal gangs were used to eliminate the rivals within the party. Unfortunately probes in these cold blooded murders never proved due to the professional killings and alibis deployed with complete precision techniques. So still gen-

eral beliefs on these murders remain as hear says without any proof. Famous film 'New Delhi Times' narrates this kind of elimination of political rivals from within the party.

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Other crimes

Many big crimes involving politicians, agencies are literally tied of their hands. Police forced to act when public goes bigger. Many sleazy stories, black mailing also involved in the politically linked murders. These were many times stories for many action thriller movies. Aspiring lady politician Banwari Devi murder, activist Shehla Masood murder, journalist Shivani Bhatnagar murder cases are such full of sleaze involving many political leaders.

Sunanda murder case exposes the intricacies of politicians and IPL betting rackets. Sunanda was found dead

in seven-star Hotel Leela within few hours when she is going to expose her Husband Minister Shashi Tharoor and his IPL controversies in January 2014. It took more than a year for Delhi Police to register FIR and forced chargesheet Tharoor only in 2018. Actually Delhi Police was forced to act after BJP leader Subramanian Swamy approached Courts while all in politics and media were keeping criminal silence.

Smuggling, Narcotics rackets and Politics

Smuggling rackets and politicians are closely associated from time immemorial. From Mumbai under world dons to fugitives to latest Kerala's UAE Consulate involved gold smuggling are the telling examples of this big syndicate. Government's can if they want curtail this smuggling and narcotics syndicates. But no one wanted and that is why India's Customs Department is known as the most corrupt department. Corruption in Customs Department is always so bigger than Police and other money spinning departments and it is well known that politicians routinely get their cuts from these dreaded rackets which are capable of eliminating the people who stood against them. Smuggling is basically due to the Government's hyped taxation and when the tax terrorism ends smuggling will be ht

hard.

"The big smuggling Syndicates, having international linkages, have spread into and infected the various economic and financial activities, including hawala transactions, circulation of black money and operations of a vicious parallel economy causing serious damage to the economic fibre of the country. These Syndicates have acquired substantial financial and muscle power and social respectability and have successfully corrupted the government machinery at all levels and wield enough influence to make the task of Investigating and Prosecuting agencies extremely difficult; even the members of the Judicial system have not escaped the embrace of the Mafia.

"Certain elements of the Mafia have shifted to narcotics, drugs and weapon smuggling and established narco-terrorism networks, specially in the States of J&K, Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The cost of contesting elections has thrown the politician into the lap of these elements and led to a grave compromise by officials of the preventive/detective systems. The virus has spread to almost all the centres in the country; the coastal and the border States have been particularly affected" narrates Vohra Committee Report on the role big smuggling and narcotics trade syndicates," narrates the Report.

Detaileding the role of smuggling rackets, Vohra Report goes on : "It has been suggested that the menace has first to be tackled at the local level where the agencies of the State and the concerned Central Enforcement Agencies like Customs and Excise, Income Tax etc. would be required to take effective action. In cases where a crime Syndicate has graduated to big business, it would be necessary to conduct detailed investigations into its assets, both movable and immovable. It has been stressed that when such action is not timely and effectively taken, the lower functionaries of the concerned State and Central Departments/organisations start over-looking the activities of the crime Syndicates. To elucidate this point, the Director CBI has given the example of IQBAL MIRCHI of Bombay who, till the late 80's, was merely a visitor to passenger and carrier ships to obtain liquor and cigarettes for selling the same at a profit.

"In the last 3-4 years, MIRCHI acquired real estate valuing crores of rupees; he has many bank accounts and has been paying lakhs of rupees to his carriers. The growth of MIRCHI is due to the fact that the concerned Enforcement agencies did not timely take action against him and, later, this perhaps became difficult on account of the enormous patronage that he had developed. If MIRCHI is investigated, the entire





patronage enjoyed by him and his linkages will come to light. Director CBI has observed that there are many such cases, as that of MIRCHI where the initial failure has led to the emergence of Mafia giants who have become too big to be tackled.

"Director CBI has stated that the main mode of communications/contacts of the Mafias operating at the international level is through telephonic communications. Referring to the useful leads emerging from the investigations into the activities of Dawood Ibrahim, a Mafia leader, the director CBI has stated that the effective monitoring of the telephone calls made from India/received from abroad would yield useful information and, for this being done, Government may grant sanction to monitor certain telephone connections".

Role of Banks

Banks are always hesitant with the probe agencies in sharing details of the money movements. There are even instances of Enforcement Directorate, DRI which are under Finance Ministry complaining to the Ministry for resistance of State Bank of India in sharing details. See, all these organizations come under Finance Ministry. This is the system created and political boss is sole answerable. We have seen former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley venting his anger against CBI when it charged top bankers for frauds. What poor probe agencies and its good officers can

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do in such Catch 22 situation? Many whistle blower officers were kicked out and got all kind of service punishments and some were even jailed for concocted cases.

"The assistance of Banks is an essential input. The Bank Managers can be placed under obligation to render reports on all heavy transactions and suspicious accounts to the Enforcement agencies. Such a practice obtains in UK," said the Vohra Committee Report, which is not yet implemented for the past 28 years.

Trial Stage

Rarely do big cases come up before the trial. Many cases landed before the Courts due to maverick officers. But here come the problems in trial. Many big cases fail in trial due to bad prosecution and corruption in judiciary. There is a bizarre incident must be referred here. One smuggler and his brother now running India's big law office in handling smuggling and tax evasion cases. The smuggler was caught and jailed in his young age and from jail he passed LLB. Now he is running a big law firm handling such cases and few years ago he was caught flying with country's Attorney General to Dubai.

Suggestions

From the above mentioned incidents, how system can be cleaned up? The only answer is for the electorate to select ethical political leaders who have the desire, capacity, and moral integrity not only to root out systemic corruption and break the nexus between politicians, officials, and criminal elements, but also to fully support whistle-blowers, worthy officers, and prosecutors in order to ensure justice is delivered at all costs. And there is a responsibility for the electorate while selecting credible leaders and to be vigil always.

[J Gopikrishnan is a senior journalist working with 'The Pioneer' newspaper.]

‘Vested interest have blocked Vohra annexures to hide expose on political nexus with Dawood&Mirchi’

Many influential leaders in Maharashtra and Gujarat during 1990s had developed close relations with underworld don Dawood Ibrahim and his henchman Iqbal Mirchi. This assertion was officially put down on paper when the N.N. Vohra committee submitted its report to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 5 October 1993, roughly three months after it was established on 9 July 1993 in the aftermath of the 12 March 1993 Bombay bomb blasts.

Vohra was then the Union Home Secretary. While the contents of the report, that was subsequently made public on 1 August 1995 in Parliament, were only limited to 11 pages, it is a part of the government's own records that the finding of the report, in total, was close to 100 pages.

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The inputs given by the agency, at the time, had stated that there was a “definite” nexus between Dawood and a very big leader of Maharashtra since the

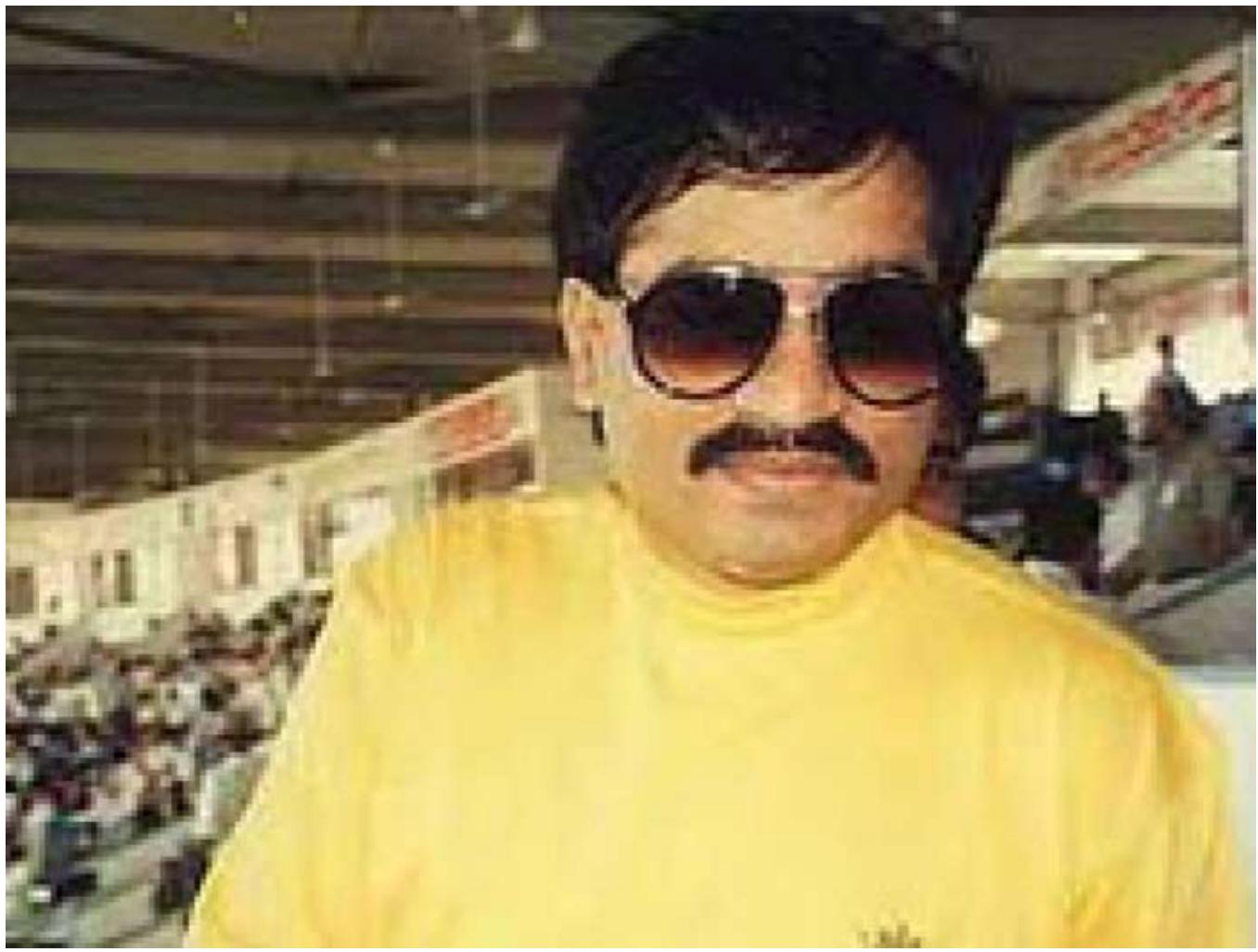
late 1970s and as per their findings, this very prominent leader of the state got almost Rs 70 crore from Dawood till the 1993 blasts. The reports also mentioned how Rs 5 crore was given to another politician through hawala to help him in contesting the 1990 elections. The report also had the name of a “former CM”. Another input that is a part of the annexures of the Vohra committee report, showed how two tranches of Rs 5 crore each was given by Dawood in 1992 to a relative of a Chief Minister who later himself became a politician. The annexures, as the officials recall, have prominently mentioned the name of a very powerful leader from the Congress, who at that time was a mid-level operative, but is now among the top ten.

A former top IB officer said: “Gujarat-based leaders were prominently mentioned in the annexures. If the Home Minister decides to summon these annexures, if he has not seen them till now, he will find very familiar names in them. Every leader comes and makes statements on Dawood and Mirchi. The real test of intent is whether they have the guts to take action on the basis of

what they already havethe findings of the Vohra committee that are encompassed in the annexures.”

Vohra report and after

The Vohra Committee report has highlighted the manifold dimensions of the malaise of criminalisation of politics. The germs of this malaise took birth in 1969 when there was a split in the Congress and the guiding motto became the pursuit of power. The demand of money for party funds to contest elections paved the way, as was inevitable, to political corruption. The two vicious offshoots of the demand for money in the garb of election funds were the malady of political corruption and the scourge of black money. Political corruption acts as the foster-mother of administrative corruption. Corruption has the vicious tendency of percolating. Once it is there at the top, it is bound to filter down, spread wide and become ubiquitous. When an outcry was raised by some public men about the menace of corruption and its immensity, they were sought to be silenced on the ground that corruption prevailed in all countries.



The fact that the extent of corruption in our country was much larger was simply brushed under the carpet. As things stands today, corruption has befouled the entire political and administrative apparatus of the country. Undoubtedly, earlier also, there was corruption but it was confined to officials at the lower level and the scale of corruption was also not high. As against that the malaise has now affected also those at the higher rung of administration and all factions of the State.

Subsequently, the criminals and mafia leaders felt that if they could get other elected, why should they not with, their grip and hold over a section of the population seek election for themselves. The result was that many of them contested elections and quite a number of them were elected. Some of them also came to occupy ministerial chairs. Things came to such a pass that according to newspaper reports, about 45 per cent of members of one State Legislature were those who were history-sheeters on the police records. Another fallout of criminalisation of politics has been the havoc brought in the administration of criminal justice. As things

Undoubtedly, earlier also, there was corruption but it was confined to officials at the lower level and the scale of corruption was also not high. As against that the malaise has now affected also those at the higher rung of administration and all factions of the State.

are, it has become most difficult, if not impossible, to secure the conviction of major culprits accused of serious offences such as murder, homicide, grievous hurt, intimidation and kidnapping. This is so because of interference by the political bosses in the investigation of crimes. As a result, effective investiga-

tion has to take a back seat and no serious effort is made to procure incriminating pieces of evidence. The question then arises on how to break the nexus between the criminals and politicians. It is thus necessary to evolve a code of conduct for the political parties so that they may not in the selection of candidates for election choose anyone with shady antecedents. The code of conduct, if it is not to remain a collection of pious sentiments, must be given some teeth. We should therefore give thought to the idea of giving legal sanction to the prescribed code of conduct to prevent its violation and infraction,

Even in the absence of legal sanctions public opinion, reinforced by vigilant media, should be built up to impel the parties to adhere to the code of conduct in the selection of candidates. Denunciation of the malady of criminalisation of politics would remain confined to the theoretical plane, unless the identity of the politicians having close links with criminals is brought out. The Vohra Committee has done the basic spade work and pointed out the various facets and dimensions of this malady of criminalisation of politics and how the

mafia network was virtually running a parallel Government. The Government has, as a follow up action, appointed a Committee of Secretaries to look further into the matter with the help of intelligence services. This is bound to operate as a cover up. It would be wholly unrealistic and an exercise in sheer naivete to think that a committee of serving civil servants, however upright they may otherwise be, to name the politicians some of whom may be Ministers having close nexus with criminals. If we are earnest in the matter, the further task should be entrusted to a body of independent persons not subordinate to the Government. Indeed, the present attempt to cover up the identity of the culprits remains one of an earlier attempt which was made at the highest political level to cover up die identity of the recipients of kickbacks of the Bofors gun transaction. The attempts then being made to find out the identity of the recipients of that tainted money were sabotaged at the highest political level when our then External Affairs Minister accompanying the Prime Minister to Switzerland told the Swiss Government to go slow. As regards the malady of the money power, the need of the hour is to ensure audit of party funds by an independent agency such as the Comptroller & Auditor-General India. A system of the audit of party funds by -an

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independent agency already exists in countries such as Germany and ensures transparency of the monetary affairs of political parties. The country today is passing through moral crises because of the doings of politicians. This is so, despite the presence in the political arena of a number of persons of the highest integrity, attached to moral values, although unfortunately they belong to a diminishing tribe.

Politics & crime

Beyond Vohra Committee (Report P. R. Dubhashi)

The Vohra Committee report on the criminalization of politics in India has been variously described as "a damp

squib" and "a cat out of the bag". A damp squib, because it did not reveal any specific names of politicians but only stated in a general manner what has already been widely known and talked about for several years now. At the same time, it was "a cat out of the bag" because it was for the first time that an official report clearly brought out that (a) crime syndicates and mafia organizations have developed significant muscle and money power and (b) they were virtually running a parallel government pushing the State apparatus into irrelevance. This is a frightening admission to make for an official committee but it does not state how to "bell the cat", how the situation has to be dealt with, how criminaliza-





tion of politics and government can be overcome and ultimately eliminated. All that it suggests is the setting up of a nodal agency which will provide one place where the intelligence and information relating to the activities of crime syndicates and mafia organizations gathered by different agencies like the Intelligence Bureau, Central Bureau of Investigation and various agencies under the Department of Revenue could be brought together and monitored. Lack of coordination between various administrative agencies is a well-known shortcoming of our administrative system and this holds good in our system of intelligence gathering also. An internal coordinating agency should be looked upon as a normal internal device of day-to-day working of administration and that such a device did not exist and had to lie suggested by a committee is a sad reflection on the state of our administration. But we have to go beyond intelligence gathering. The purpose of intelligence gathering is to plumb the depths of criminalization, unravel its genesis, lay bare the root causes and work out comprehensive measures to root out corruption and criminalization in politics, government and administration. The Vohra Committee report does not indicate how this can be accomplished. The first step is to see that candidates who stand for elections to Parliament and Legislative Assemblies do

The first step is to see that candidates who stand for elections to Parliament and Legislative Assemblies do not use the money and muscle power of criminals to get elected; nor criminals allowed to stand for election. The strict enforcement of the electoral code of conduct during the last State elections did serve this purpose, to a considerable extent, of curbing use of money and muscle power

not use the money and muscle power of criminals to get elected; nor criminals allowed to stand for election. The strict enforcement of the electoral code of conduct during the last State elections did serve this purpose, to a considerable extent, of curbing use of money and muscle power. Voters at large have welcomed this development and expect that this gain should be consolidated through similar strictness in future elections as well. The electoral law should be further strengthened so as to debar criminals from standing for elections. The strict enforcement of the electoral code of conduct is but part of the strict enforcement of the law of the land in every other sphere - whether urban building activity, trade, business and

industry, working of banking and financial institutions, imports and exports or use of arms. These are spheres in which illegal activity by gangs of criminals has flourished during the last several years with the complicity of politicians in power and the civil servants. It is the duty of the civil servants to enforce law. If they do not do so, it is because they are pressured by corrupt politicians who are in league with criminals or have themselves become corrupt and join hands with criminal elements. In the latter case, they should be brought to book by the Vigilance Commissioner or Lokayukta who are appointed in several States. The vigilance machinery should be strengthened.

But honest civil servants are some-

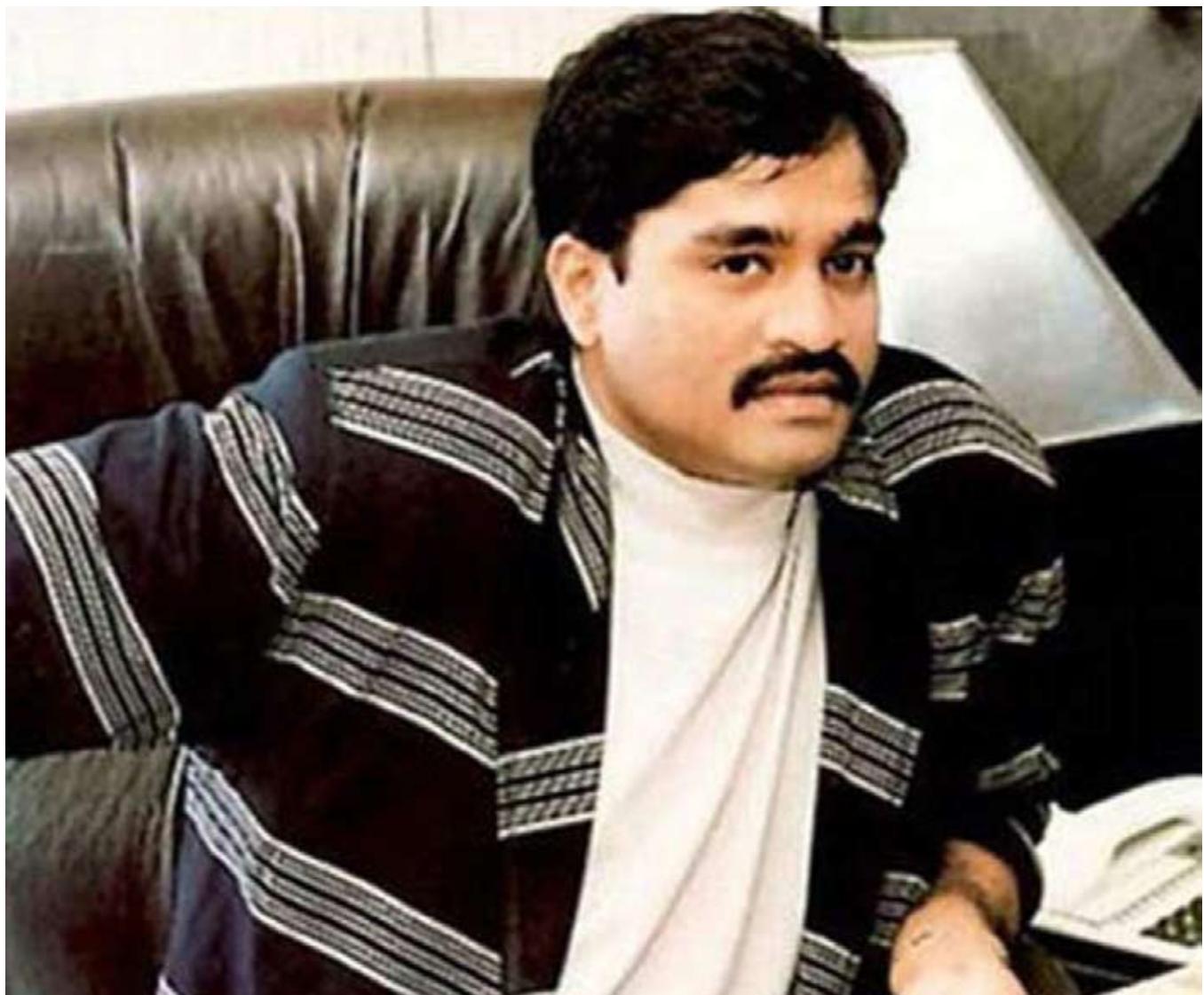
times prevented from proper enforcement of the law and taking decisions in the public interest. Where the officers refuse to be pressured, they are subjected to abrupt and vexations transfers taking a heavy toll of their family lives. Governed by the rules of a strict code of conduct and discipline, the honest officer finds himself helpless, it is idle to talk of professionalism in such an environment. If the nation wants civil servants to be honest and play their role in a professional manner, they need more protection than is available now. They should not be exposed to arbitrary 'transfers and their careers should not be ruined or jeopardized just for doing their duty. The public at large should also appreciate the importance of honest and strict administration, it should have its own autonomy and should function without political interference. Needless to say, that strict administration does not mean non-responsive administration.

Political interference on behalf of

They should not be exposed to arbitrary 'transfers and their careers should not be ruined or jeopardized just for doing their duty. The public at large should also appreciate the importance of honest and strict administration, it should have its own autonomy and should function without political interference. Needless to say, that strict administration does not mean non-responsive administration.

criminal elements is at present a worrisome feature of our administration. It is necessary, therefore, to go beyond civil service and police reforms and extend the reforms process to political parties as well. At present political parties seem to be beyond the pale of any framework of rules and regulations. Taking advantage of this, criminal elements enter into

and later dominate the affairs of political parties. Their youth wings seem to be especially vulnerable to the criminal and aggressive elements. How can the political parties be reformed? Neither the Constitution nor any law prescribes how they should function. The time has now come for laying down broad norms for composition and functioning



of political parties in the country. No less than a chapter in Constitution itself on the code of conduct of political parties can serve the purpose. Such a code of conduct could be on the lines of the prescriptions of the Nolan Committee in Britain - honesty, integrity, objectivity, openness and accountability. Honest administration can bring the culprits to book and prosecute them in courts of law - no matter who the culprits are and what positions they hold in public life. It is only through the relentless pursuit of criminal politicians by the honest prosecutors and intrepid judges that criminalization of politics has been halted in Italy. The crusades of those judges are a reflection of the public disgust and frustration of having to put up with corrupt politicians for so long. The trial of the former Prime Minister, Chiton Andreotti, for collusion with the mafia is the culminating point of this crusade. This powerful politician, 31 times Minister and seven times Prime Minister, is charged with having ordered the assassination of an over zealous journalist and colluded with mafia chiefs, even sending birthday and marriage presents to members of their families. The Italian case should provide an excellent example of how we should proceed to eliminate criminalization of politics in our own country. The ultimate remedy is, of course, awakening of the spirit of the people against criminalization of politics and government so that they do not fear criminals in politics and society and stand hold against them and their crimes, the time has now come to demand the setting up of a National Commission on ethics of public life for making comprehensive recommendations regarding an agenda of reform

Mafia running parallel Government

The Vohra Committee report tabled in Parliament on 1st August 1995: The Government had established a committee comprised as below, to take stock of all available information about the activities of crime syndicates mafia organization which had developed links with and were being protected by Government functionaries and political personalities. Based on the recommendations of the committee, Government shall determine the need, if any, to establish a special organization/agency to regularly collect information and pursue cases against such elements: Home Secretary Chairman: Secretary (R) Member: DIB Member: Director



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CBI Member and JS(PP) MHA Member Secretary. The Committee was authorized to invite senior officers of various concerned Departments to gather the required information. The Special Secretary (Internal Security & Police), MHA, was subsequently added as a Member of the Committee. The committee was desired to submit its report within 3 months. In the first meeting of the committee(held on 15th July '93), the Government had established the committee after seeing the reports of our intelligence and investigation agencies on the activities/linkages of the Da-

wood Ibrahim gang, consequent to the bomb blasts in Bombay in March 1993. From these various reports, it was apparent that the activities of the Memon brothers and Dawood Ibrahim had progressed over the years, leading to the establishment of a powerful network. This could not have happened without these elements having been protected by the functionaries of the concerned Government departments, especially Customs, Income Tax, Police and others. It was, therefore, necessary to identify the linkages and to also determine how such information could be timely

collected and acted upon in the future. In the course of the discussions, some of the Members appeared to have some hesitation in openly expressing their views and also seemed unconvinced that the Government actually intended to pursue such matters.

Accordingly, the various offices abroad of this Agency have a limited strength and are largely geared to the collection of militaries, economic, scientific and political intelligence. R&AW monitor the activities of certain organizations abroad only insofar as they relate to their involvement with narco-terrorist elements and smuggling arms, ammunition, explosives etc. into the country. It does not monitor the activities of criminal elements abroad which are mainly confined to "normal smuggling without any links to terrorist elements." The present strength of the Agency's offices abroad would not permit to enlarge its field of activities. If, however, there is evidence to suggest that these organizations have links with Intelligence agencies of other countries, particularly Pakistan, and that they are being used or are likely to be used by such countries for de-establishing our economy, it would become R&AW's responsibility to monitor their activities as is being done by this Agencies to collect vital information in regard to the investigations in the Bombay bomb

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and CBI could be made available to this nodal agency. R&AW will nominate an officer of suitable rank to liaise with the nodal agency on a regular basis to enable expeditious followup action. Crime Syndicate A report on the nexus between the Bombay city police and the Bombay under-world was prepared by CBI in 1986. It would be useful to institute a fresh study by CBI, on the basis of which appropriate administrative/legal measures could be initiated. An organized crime syndicate/mafia generally commences its activities by indulging in petty crime at the local level, mostly relating to illicit distillation/gambling/organized satta and prostitution in the larger towns. In port towns, their activities involve smuggling and sale of imported goods and progressively graduate to narcotics drug trafficking. In the bigger cities, the main source of income relates to real estate - forcibly occupying lands/buildings, procuring such properties at cheap rates by forcing out the existing occupants/tenants etc. over time, the money power thus acquired is used for building up contacts with bureaucrats and politicians and expansion of activities with impunity. The money power is used to develop a network of muscle-power which is also used by the politicians during elections.

The CBI has reported that all over India crimes syndicates have become

blasts case. The creation of a nodal agency to collect information regarding the activities of mafia organizations is very essential. All the existing information/data available with R&AW, IB



a law unto themselves. Even in the smaller towns and rural areas, muscle-men have become the order of the day. Hired assassins have become a part of these organizations. The nexus between the criminal gangs, police, bureaucracy and politicians has come out clearly in various parts of the country. The existing criminal justice system, which was essentially designed to deal with the individual offences/crimes, is unable to deal with the activities of the mafia: the provisions of law in regard to economic offences are weak: there are insurmountable legal difficulties in attaching/confiscation of the property acquired through mafia activities. It has been suggested that the menace has first to be tackled at the local level where the agencies of the State and the concerned Central Enforcement Agencies like Customs and Excise, Income Tax would be required to take effective action. In case where a crime syndicate has graduated to big business, it would be necessary to conduct detailed investigations into its assets, both movable and immovable. It has been stressed that when such action is not timely and effectively taken, the lower functionaries of the concerned State and Central Departments/organizations start overlooking the activities of the crime syndicates.

To elucidate the point, the Director CBI has given the example of Iqbal Mirchi of Bombay who, till the late 80's

he Director CBI has given the example of Iqbal Mirchi of Bombay who, till the late 80's was merely a visitor to passenger and carrier ships to obtain liquor and cigarettes for selling the same at a profit. In the last 3-4 years, Mirchi acquired real estate valuing crores of rupees; he has many bank accounts and has been paying lakhs of rupees to his careers.

was merely a visitor to passenger and carrier ships to obtain liquor and cigarettes for selling the same at a profit. In the last 3-4 years, Mirchi acquired real estate valuing crores of rupees; he has many bank accounts and has been paying lakhs of rupees to his careers. The growth of Mirchi is due to the fact that the concerned Enforcement agencies did not take timely action against him and, later, this perhaps became difficult on account of the enormous patronage that he had developed. If Mirchi is investigated, the entire patronage enjoyed by him and his linkages will come to light. The Director, CBI has observed that there are many such cases, as that of Mirchi where the initial failure has led to the emergence of Mafia giants who have become too big to be tack-

led. The CBI director has stated that the main mode of communications/contacts of the mafias operating at the international level is through telephonic communications. Referring to the useful leads emerging from the investigations into the activities of Dawood Ibrahim, a mafia leader, the director. CBI has stated that the effective monitoring of the telephone calls made from India/received from abroad would yield useful information and, for this being done, the Government may grant sanction to monitor certain telephone connections. The assistance of banks is an essential input. The Bank Managers can be placed under obligation to render reports on all heavy transactions and suspicious accounts to the Enforcement agencies. Such a practice obtains in U.K.





Concluding his analysis, the Director, CBI has made the following suggestions to bring under control the activities of the criminal syndicates: identification of offences and award of deterrent punishments, including preventive detention; trial procedures should be simplified and hastened; surveillance should be carried out through finger printing, photographs and dossiers; monitoring mechanisms should be established at the State and Central levels; establishment of Special Cells in the State CIDs and CBI; suitable amendments should be introduced in the existing laws to more effectively deal with the activities of mafia organizations, etc., this would also include review of the existing laws and a detailed case study of 10-15 cases would provide useful information regarding the administrative/legal measures which would be required to be taken to effectively tackle the functioning of mafia organizations.

The DIB has reported that due to the progressive decline in the values of public life in the country "warning signals of sinister linkages between the underworld politicians and bureaucracy have been evident with disturbing regularity as exemplified by the exposures of the networks of the Bombay blast case". He has recommended immediate attention to: identification of the nexus between the criminals/mafias and anti-national elements on the one hand and bureau-

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crats, politicians and other sensitively located individuals on the other; identification of the nature and dimensions of these linkages and the modus operandi of their operations; assessment of the impact of these linkages of the various institutions viz. the electoral, political, economic, law and order and the administrative apparatus: nexus, if any,

between the domestic linkages with foreign intelligence; necessary action to show effective action to counteract/neutralize the mafia activities and political and legal constraints in dealing with the covert/illegal functioning of the linkages. Like the Director, CBI, the DIB has also stated that there has been a rapid spread the growth of criminal gangs, armed senas, drug mafias, smuggling gangs, drug peddlers and economic lobbies in the country which have, over the years developed an extensive network of contacts with the bureaucrats/Government functionaries at the local levels, politicians, media persons and strategically located individuals in the non-State sector. Some of these syndicates also have international linkages, including the foreign intelligence agencies. In this context, the DIB has given the following examples: in certain States, like Bihar, Haryana and U.P., these gangs enjoy the patronage of local level politicians, cutting across party lines and the protection of Government functionaries. Some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs/armed senas and over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, State Assemblies and the national Parliament. Resultantly, such elements have acquired considerable political clout seriously jeopardizing the smooth functioning of the administration and the safety of life and property of the common man, causing a sense of

despair and alienation among the people: the big smuggling syndicates, having international linkages, have spread into and infected the various economic and financial activities, including hawala transactions, circulation of black money and operations of a vicious parallel economy causing serious damage to the economic fiber of the country. These syndicates have acquired substantial financial and muscle power and social respectability and have successfully corrupted the Government machinery at the levels and yield enough influence to make the task of Investigating and Prosecuting agencies extremely difficult; even the members of the judicial system have not escaped the embrace of the mafia: certain elements of the Mafia have shifted to narcotics, drugs and weapon smuggling and established narco-terrorism networks, specially in the States of J& K, Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The cost of contesting elections has thrown the politician into the lap of these elements and led to a grave compromise by officials of the preventive/defective system. The virus has spread to almost all the centers in the country: the costal and the border States have been particularly affected: the Bombay bomb blast case and the communal riots in Surat and Ahmedabad have demonstrated how the Indian underworld had been exploited by the Pak, ISI and the latter's network in UAE to cause sabotage, subversion and communal tension in various parts of the country.

The investigations into the Bombay bomb blast cases have revealed extensive linkages of the underworld in the various governmental agencies, political circles, business sector and the film world. The DIB has stated that the network of the mafia is virtually running a parallel Government, pushing the State apparatus into irrelevance. It is thus most immediately necessary than an institution is established to effectively deal with the menace. In this connection, the DIB has stated: presently, there is no system/mechanism which is specifically designated to collect and collate intelligence pertaining to the linkages developed by crime syndicates mafia with the Government set up. Nonetheless, the various intelligence/investigation/enforcement agencies collect, in the normal course of their functioning, information about the nexus between the bureaucracy and politicians with the mafia gangs, smugglers and the underworld. These agencies use such available

inputs "only within the narrow confines of their work charter and choose not to take undue cognizance and follow-up action, leave alone sharing with any other agencies." Thus, all these agencies "functioning within their own cocoons, with the result that a plethora of information fails to get specific and purposeful attention needed for the exposure of the linkages." It is, therefore, necessary



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to immediately have an institutionalized system which "while giving total freedom to the various agencies pursue their charter of work, would simultaneously cast on them the onus of sharing such inputs to a nodal outfit whose job will be to process this information for attention of a single designated authority." This will enable the Nodal Group to provide useful leads to the various to the various agencies and, over time, a progressive data base will get generated "to facilitate periodic reviews and analysis which could then be passed to a designated body."

Central Board of Excise & Customs (CBEC) Interalia, CBEC is responsible

for the prevention of smuggling. In this and other tasks, it is assisted by the Director General of Revenue Intelligence (DGRI) and the Director General of Anti-Evasion (DGAE). The DGRI deals with the evasion of customs duties: the DGAE with Excise duty evasion. Income Tax Department administers the Income Tax Act, Wealth Tax Act, etc. The CEIB is responsible for coordinating and strengthening the intelligence gathering activities and the investigative and enforcement actions of the various agencies responsible for investigation into economic offences and the enforcement of economic laws. The CEIB is responsible for maintaining liaison with the concerned Departments/Directorates both at the Center and at the State levels and is expected to provide overall direction to the investigative agencies under the Department of Revenue. The CEIB is expected, interalia, to attend to the following tasks: Identification of major sources generation black money: directing and developing intelligence about such sources: planning and co-ordinating action and operations against such sources. Assisting the various enforcement agencies in strengthening the intelligence gathering infrastructure and building up their capability for storage and retrieval of intelligence. Conducting investigative and analytical studies in difficult areas of black money operations and monitoring indicators thereof. This Directorate is concerned with the enforcement of the investigation and penal provision of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act; collection of intelligence relating to foreign exchange offences; enquires into suspected violations of the provisions of FERA etc. Narcotics Control Bureau The NCB is responsible for the administration of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Act. It is responsible for coordination with different Central and State Government Departments/Ministers and the various Central and State law enforcement agencies for the implementations of the NDPS Act. I explained to Secretary (Revenue) the broad considerations on account of which the Government had set up a committee to look into the linkages developed by the mafia elements. He informed me that he had recently held a meeting with senior representatives of the RBI, the Chairman CBEC, Chairman CBDT and the Economic Intelligence Council in the Department of Revenue, and readily agreed with my request to attend a meeting of the committee along with his concerned officers

for a full discussion on the issue before the committee.

Accordingly, a meeting of the Committee (30th Aug. '93) to hear the views of Secretary (Revenue), who was accompanied by chairman CBDT, DGRI, Members (Customs) and Director (Enforcement). During the course of the discussion with Secretary (Revenue) and his aforesaid principal officers, the following significant observations were made: In the normal course of his work, to detect violations of Customs & Exercise laws, the DGRI comes across information on linkages between crime Syndicates and governmental functionaries etc. As following up of such information is not within the charter of duties of DGRI, his officers focus primarily on the information relating to the violation of the laws relating to their charter. As in the case of DGRI, indirect information also becomes available to the CBDT about linkages. Here again, not being directly relating to their charter of responsibilities, the CBDT do not follow up such leads. While the NCB is specifically responsible for booking drug traffickers, with the increasing importance being given to Narco-terrorism, the NCB has been asked to gather further information so that the real kingpins in the narcotics trade can be apprehended. The Directorate of Enforcement comes across information on linkages and passed it on to the CBI and IB.

Of late, currency amounting to crores of rupees is being seized, invariably packed in suit-case and gunny bags. The Banks are reluctant to pass on information about account holders to CBDT and do not allow their officers to hold exploratory requires. While a certain amount of information is shared between the various organization under the Department of Revenue, and those under the MHA and Cabinet Secretariat, the exchanges are sporadic and limited. This is perhaps due to the fact that each concerned organization/agency is anxious to protect its sources and is apprehensive that a full sharing of all information might jeopardize its operations, on account of premature leakage of information. While DGRI, Director (Enforcement) and DG NCB are authorized to undertake phone tapping of suspected offenders, the DGRI has not Page 28 of 28 been allowed to enforce surveillance on the telephonic communications of political personalities. Senior police officers, even in the border States, are not trained or adequately informed of the work done



by the Directorate of Enforcement, specially in regard to money laundering operations, information about the activities of drug traffickers is passed on by DG NCB to the concerned State Governments and their agencies. However, niggardly responses by the latter and prolonged delays in the disposal of cases before the Courts seriously hampers the effective functioning of the NCB. While the NDPS act prescribes the award of deterrent punishments to offenders the results are to the contrary. It is necessary that the directorates of prosecution in the State Governments are urgently brought under the control of the State Police. The Secretary (Revenue) stated that the field officers of his various Departments were faced with various problems, amongst which are: The utter inadequacy of the criminal justice system: cases are not heard timely: functioning of the Government lawyers is grossly inadequate: all this results in a low percentage of convictions and mild punishments. Unless the criminal justice system is geared up, the work of the enforcement agencies cannot be effective, the field officers of the various agencies of the Revenue Dept. are often pressurised by senior Government functionaries/political leaders, apparently at the behest of crime Syndicates/Mafia elements. Unless the field level officers are offered effective protection, they cannot be expected to maintain interest in vigorously pursuing action against the activities of such

elements.

The Chairman, CBDT stated that the functioning of his officers is concerned, whenever they come into possession of any information regarding the violation of any other law, the pass it on the concerned agency. He suggested that, if the information available with the other agencies is passed on to him, his officers could pursue the same. As a result of the discussions held by the committee with the Secretary (Revenue) and his principal officers, it is evident that: While in the course of their normal activities, information on the linkages of the crime syndicates sometimes becomes available such information is not pursued on the score that is not directly related to offences falling within the laws administered by these agencies; such information is occasionally passed on by these agencies to the CBI and or IB; the various agencies under the Department of Revenue do not specifically search out information on the linkages of crime Syndicates. Consequent to the committee's discussions with the Secretary (Revenue) and his principal officers held a series of further personal discussions with the Secretary (Revenue). At my request, Secretary (Revenue) gave me a personal note indicating his views, which are briefly as below. The information gathered by the various agencies under the Revenue Department, while gathering intelligence on offences relating to the laws administered by them, is generally not put to any use

unless it is required to be passed on to other intelligence agencies outside the Department of Revenue. The linkages developed by crime Syndicates get generally confirmed when pressure is mounted on the concerned agencies not to take action against the offenders or to go slow in the case against them. Such pressures are amounted either immediately after a raid is conducted or at the time when prosecution is about to be initiated. Pressure is also exerted whenever corrupt and undesirable officers are shifted from sensitive assignments (Preventive Customs Divisions at the Airports, sensitive Collectorate in the Central Excise etc.) In the narcotics arena, which includes cultivation of opium, manufacture of alkaloids, prevention of narcotics, smuggling etc, the final stakes, are astronomically high.

Consequently, the level of corruption is a very high order in this area of functioning and enormous pressures are brought to bear even when subordinate officials are posted away, specially when the shift of an officer adversely affects the interests of those who are making easy money. Narcotics trade has world-wide network of smugglers who also have close links with terrorists. Terrorists indulge in narcotics trade to amass huge funds in various foreign currencies from which they source their procurement of weapons etc. While the Department of Revenue, has initiated a member of steps to deal with the activities of smugglers and to plug loop-holes in the system the Secretary (Revenue) has stated that a possible approach to effectively liquidating the linkages developed by the crime Syndicates would be to mercilessly prosecute the offenders without succumbing to any pressure whatsoever. He is of the view that once the offenders are deterrently punished under the law, their influence and strength will start declining, as also of all those who support them, wherever located. He has emphasized that for the objectives being achieved it will be extremely necessary that: the center governmental machinery involved in taking action against the crime Syndicates is allowed to perform its duties with total freedom; officer with impeccable integrity should be posted to head the various organizations, which are responsible for taking action against tax offenders, smuggling etc., such officers should be selected with utmost care and provided sufficiently long tenures, giving them the clear mandate to ruthlessly punish the offenders: action must be



While the CBI and IB and the various agencies under the Department of Revenue, in their normal course of functioning come across information relating to the linkages of crime syndicates/mafia organizations, there is presently no system under which they are expected to pass on such information to an identified nodal agency.

taken to ensure the objective functioning of Courts which deal with the trial of economic offences; all cases before the Courts should be speedily concluded without the judicial officers coming under any pressure or succumbing to temptations; insufficient and corrupt elements in the various organizations must be weeded out and Government should take stringent action against officers who seek to exert political pressure for securing postings and appointments of their choice.

From the above narrated analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn: On the basis of the extensive experience gained by our various concerned intelligence, investigative and enforcement agencies, it is apparent that crime syndicates and mafia organizations have established themselves in various parts of the country. The various crime syndicates/mafia organizations have developed significant muscle and money power and established linkages with governmental functionaries, political leaders and others to be able to operate with impunity (as recently exemplified by the activities

of the Memon Brothers and Dawood Ibrahim). While the CBI and IB and the various agencies under the Department of Revenue, in their normal course of functioning come across information relating to the linkages of crime syndicates/mafia organizations, there is presently no system under which they are expected to pass on such information to an identified nodal agency. Sharing of such information is presently of an occasional nature and no evidence is available of the same having been put to any operational use (the only mentionable exception perhaps relates to the recent investigations into the activities of Memon Brothers and the Dawood gang on which several of our agencies were put to work collectively). Even where an agency comes across certain information about the linkages of crime Syndicates, it has no mandate to immediately pass it on to one or more agencies. An agency which comes across information regarding linkages is also apprehensive that the sharing of such information may jeopardize its own functioning through premature leakage. In sum, the various agencies presently in the field take care to essentially focus on their respective character of duties, dealing with the infringement of laws relating to their organizations and consciously putting aside any information on linkages when they may come across. In the discussions in the committee, I asked each of the members as well as the Secretary (Revenue) and his principal officers about their views regarding the establishment of a Nodal Page 30 of 30 Agency for the collection, collation and operationalization of all information relating to the activities of crime Syndicates. Broadly, the following approaches have been mooted. The DIB has stated that while considering the establishment of any nodal mechanism, it must be appreciated that the problems have enormous impact on national security and is indeed highly political in nature. In this context, he has suggested that the nodal set up should be under the IB which is even otherwise engaged in monitoring various political activities having a bearing on national security. He has recommended that an exclusive Top-Secret Cell be established security in the IB to function as the Nodal Group for receipt of inputs from various operating difficulties could be sorted out their periodic meetings among the heads of these organization.

**Reported by Padma Bhushan
P. R. Dubhashi, IAS Retd.**



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Forward trajectory to disturb China

By Major General S.B. Asthana

The visit of US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin to India, along with Japan and South Korea within a week of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) Summit held on March 12, indicates a quick follow up. The Summit did not name China directly, but Beijing seemed nervous and rattled about the event, as its mouthpiece Global times accused the Quad members to be hyping the “China threat” before the event and expressed that India will not go US way due to its own ambition and economic dependency on China, after the visit. Apparently, China saw a major challenge to its dream of China Centric Asia Pacific, in Quad’s call for a free, open, inclusive, healthy, Indo-Pacific region that is “anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion”. China’s hope that the four-country group hasn’t formed a cohesive force from within, may need a revisit, after the Quad leaders agreed to give joint statement, committed to holding an in-person leaders’ summit by the end of 2021 and agreed to pursue important agendas through three focused working groups.

Benign agenda but clear trajectory

Besides unanimity in need for free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific, the key agenda which attracted global attention was collective response to Covid-19 pandemic in terms of synergizing the vaccination efforts for humanity, with India as manufacturing hub, assisted by others to roll out one billion vaccines by 2020. The other two issues of working groups being emerging critical technologies and climate change. The agenda seems benign, but Beijing did not miss the connection of freedom of navigation, overflight and the concerns over “aggression” and “coercion” against members of Quad by China in its first summit meeting. No-one during the Summit called out China directly, but China knows that it challenged rule-based order by junking PCA’s decision in South China Sea



(SCS) and continues to coerce countries in Indo-Pacific region.

The list of shared challenges to be addressed also includes cyber space, critical tech-nologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, and humanitarian-assis-tance and disaster-relief (HADR), some of which echo Chinese alleged involvement like cyber attacks and transparency of World Health Organization. The Quad’s assertion to

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support the rule of law, freedom of navigation, overflight, democratic values, and territorial integrity has added to frustration of Beijing, which has started firing salvo of propaganda through its mouthpiece Global Times, calling India (the only Non-NATO partner) as “Negative Asset for BRICS and SCO” failing to understand Chinese good-will! Quad’s announcement of forthcoming naval drills of Quad plus countries and willingness of some NATO members like the UK, France and Germany, to join in responding to challenges in Indo-Pacific, has further added to discomfort of China, indicating for-ward trajectory of Quad.

China overplays divergences in Quad

China will like the world to believe

that there are wide divergences in four democracies getting together, but in the evolution process, Quad seems to be getting over some of them. There is much more acceptability regarding divergent definitions and focus ar-eas within the Indo-Pacific region. With the series of foundational agreements like COMCASA, BECA, LEMOA and CISMOA signed between US and India, and naval exercises, the inter-operability of India with other Quad members, operating within NATO military alliance framework, has improved. The joint statements of Defence Ministers of the US and India on March 20 indicates convergence in approach and intention to have better defence cooperation between both countries in line with Quad commitments and strategic partnership.

India is the only country amongst Quad members, which has unsettled land border with China. After Doklam and Ladakh standoffs, it’s quite clear to Indians that China can’t be trusted, which has brought relatively better clarity in Indian position. The economic entanglement of each of the Quad members with China necessitates a resilient supply chain, digital and technological eco system, with minimal dependence on China. There has been consensus regarding support for ASEAN’s centrality in the Indo-Pacific as well, but their inclusion into it will be a debatable issue,

due to Chinese influence over them. China has always tried to deal with every country on bilateral terms, using its Comprehensive National Power (CNP) to its advantage and will continue to do so even with Quad members.

Countering Chinese Challenge? The 'Incremental Encroachment Strategy' of China exhibited in SCS, East China Sea (ECS) and Ladakh is a serious concern not only to the countries directly affected by overlapping EEZ or unsettled borders, but also to rest of the world, as China continues to convert features/atolls into military bases, expect others to accept them as islands and apply 'Baseline principle' under UNCLOS-III to claim its 200 nautical miles of EEZ thus converting SCS into 'Chinese lake' over a period of time. It poses threat to free-dom of navigation (FON) and flight along global Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and may lead to some restrictions like Air Defence Identification Zone in SCS. Any such action by any country to restrict FON/flight or violation of rule of law must be challenged in UN Security Council backed by Quad. All members of Quad except US have ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III); hence the US needs to ratify the same, to have a moral high ground to implement it.

China seems reasonably confident

that the US or any other country will not use military force to dismantle their infrastructure constructed in SCS. It is also increasing its naval capability at unprecedented pace. In this context it is necessary that Quad strengthens itself beyond Malabar exercises, gets some teeth in the form of maritime capacity building of its members and capacity to dominate choke points sensitive to China, as it's not a military alliance so far. Quad will therefore need a formal structure and a secretariat to take it forward.

Way ahead for Quad

Covid-19 vaccines will be manufactured in India, financed by the US and Japan with logistical support from Australia. The intention of Quad to synergize medical, scientific, financing, manufacturing, critical emerging-technology and developmental capabilities in future, is a step in right direction. Sharing of innovative technology and capacity building for climatic challenges will serve the interest of humanity and make Quad an effective grouping.

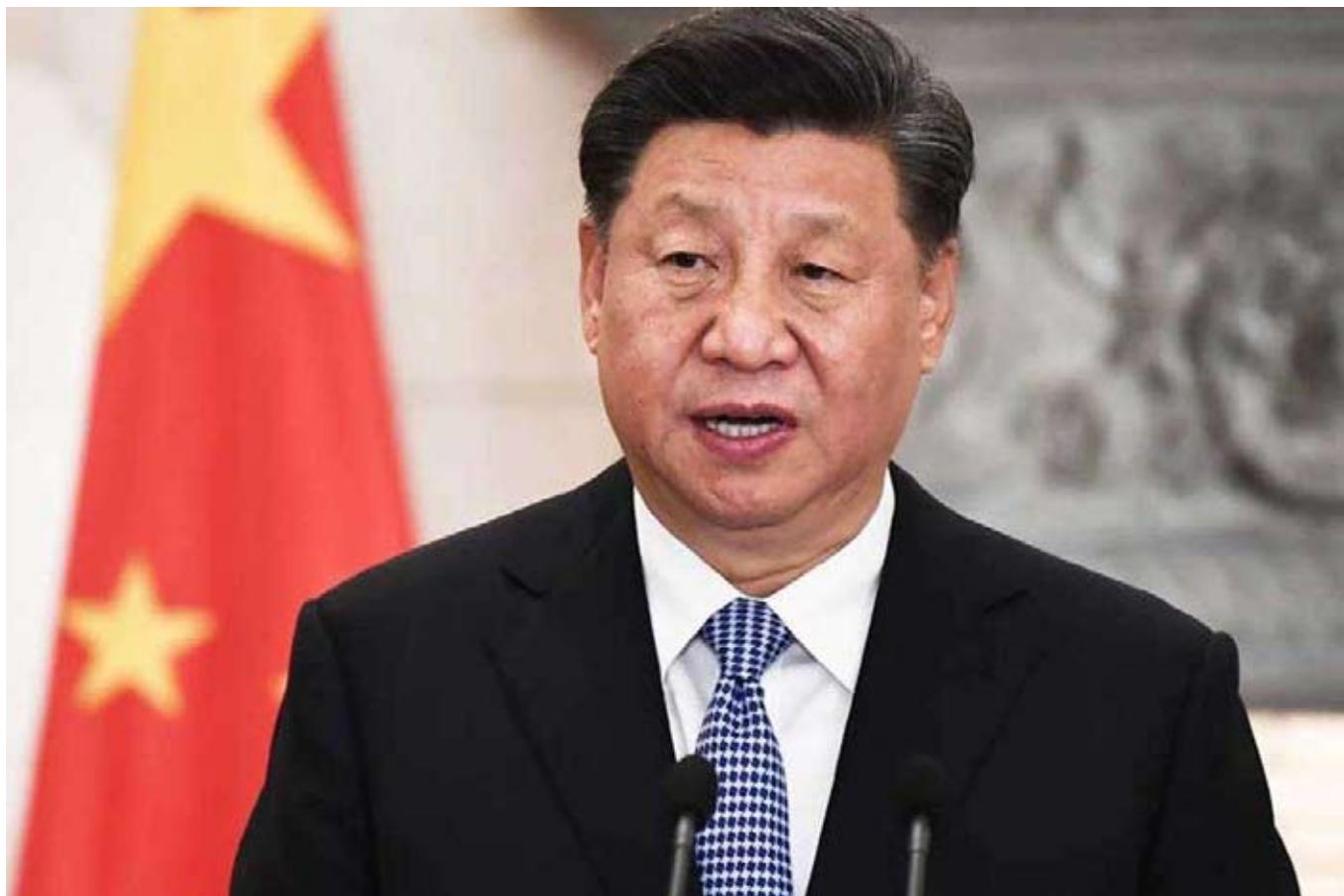
Quad members must continue freedom of navigation exercises and military posturing in Indo-Pacific, as China continues to do so. If the strategic situation worsens there may be a need to position 'UN Maritime Military Observers

Group', as prevention of accidental triggering of conflict is possible in a region having high density of combat ship on FON missions.

The Summit did not signal expansion, but it needs to have flexibility to incorporate like-minded democratic countries, as many would be keen to join Quad in future, because Indo-Pacific region is becoming the global economic centre of gravity and manufacturing hub. Support of other navies like France, UK, Germany and other NATO members will be good deterrence to peace spoilers. Quad in its present form may not be structured to check Chinese adventurism, but it seems to be on right trajectory to become one of the most effective instruments to do so. Chinese aggressive reactions during meeting of top officials of US and China indicates that Quad has put China on notice, without even naming it, forcing it to showcase its strong stance to domestic audience behind nervousness.

(Major General S.B. Asthana is a strategic and security analyst, a veteran Infantry General with 40 years experience in national & international fields and the UN. A globally acknowledged strategic & military writer/analyst authored over 350 publications.

The views expressed are personal)



CCP DIGITIZES ITS DICTATORSHIP

The Chinese Communist Party taken rapid strides in digitizing every conceivable sphere of its activity

Binay Kumar Singh

Having unveiled its ambition of emerging as the top Artificial Intelligence (AI) superpower by 2030, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has taken rapid strides in digitising every conceivable sphere of its activity, so much so even its dictatorial form of governance. With CCP ideology pervading the state-run and data driven Chinese economy, it is but natural that giant Chinese tech companies and foreign companies with significant pres-

ence in China, have been arm twisted by CCP into sharing sensitive consumer data. This helps the CCP to maintain an eagle eye vigil on its 1.4 billion citizenry through installation of a humongous number of surveillance devices throughout the country, implementation of the dubious Social Credit System and using digital media to indoctrinate people to its ideology while crushing any form of dissent within the country. The story of CCP's transformation from a traditionally repressive dictatorship since inception to the digital dictatorship of Presi-

dent Xi Jinping needs careful study, especially to safeguard nations from the pitfalls of the CCP's irredentist ambitions.

Historically in 1949, Mao Zedong had proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a single party state controlled by the Communist Party of China (CPC). He remained in power till his death in 1976, during which he slowly consolidated his control through suppression of landlords, targeting political opponents and capitalists with the 'Three-anti' and





'Five-anti' campaigns, enforcing his vision of a planned economy, purging rightists within the CPC and bringing in the infamous 'Cultural Revolution' to remove counter-revolutionary elements in a violent 10-year class struggle. While Chairman Mao set China on the path of growth and industrialisation, his regime will always be remembered as being 'autocratic' and 'totalitarian' and it had a terrible dark side, of bringing about mass repression and millions of deaths through starvation, persecution, prison labour and mass executions.

Fast forwarding to more recent

times, Xi's rise from being the Party Chief of the Zhejiang province of the Communist Party from 2002-2007 to his appointment as Vice President in 2008 to elevation as President in 2012, has been meteoric. By 2013, in true dictatorial style, Xi acquired all three leadership roles in China -- General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and President of the People's Republic of China. The first major policy introduced by Xi in 2013 was a far reaching anti-corruption policy against high ranking officials and local civil ser-

vants. What really cemented his Dictatorship was promulgation of CCP's official Political doctrine in 2018 called 'Xi Jinping Thought', which strengthened power at three levels namely, the nation, the CCP and Xi himself. If that was not enough, the National People's Congress (NPC) on December 26, 2020, amended the National Defence Law (NDL) expanding the power of its armed forces headed by Xi to mobilise military and civilian resources to defend its national interests both at home and abroad. 'Disruption' and protection of 'development interests' has been added as grounds for



mobilising and deploying troops and reserve forces. Such sweeping powers with a life long tenure give Xi a dictator's stature which even surpasses the Dictatorship of Chairman Mao.

In his first year as President, Xi announced the CCP's ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) Project, only to rename it as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) a few years later based on feedback from participating countries that the term OBOR sounded too authoritarian. The vision articulated by the CCP for the more inclusive sounding BRI was to undertake infrastructure development and investment in over 70 countries across the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe with likely investment of about \$1.3 trillion over the next 10 years. This was followed in 2017 by the release of Xi's 'New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan', which outlines development of a domestic AI industry worth \$150 billion in the next few years and to emerge as the leading AI power by 2030. Such is the importance accorded to AI by the CCP, that it has also been included as a national priority in the 'Xi Jinping Thought'. Therefore, the CCP's quest of achieving world dominance in AI perfectly complements the BRI. China has already invested about \$22 billion in the semi-conductor industry which makes chips to power AI systems. It is predicted that China's share in the AI market is likely to expand to about \$50 billion by 2022 with raw material

sourced from BRI countries.

In reality, AI has given rise to intensified societal surveillance and a clampdown on free expression. A shocking and chilling use of AI has been to quell the Uyghur-Han Chinese clashes in the north western autonomous Xinjiang province, which has caused widespread unrest. The CCP has used AI to incarcerate without trial over one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minority ethnic groups in 're-education camps' also referred to as Vocational Education and Training Centers, much like those in existence during Chairman Mao's 'Cultural Revolution'. Surveillance cameras, Facial Recognition software etc. have effectively been used to segregate, track and restrict the freedom of the Turkish Muslim minority in Xinjiang.

The same AI tools are also used to monitor the lives of innocent Chinese citizens through data mining of giant companies. CCP's intelligence agencies regularly use the data processing capabilities of private companies such as Alibaba, Tencents, Huawei, Bytedance, Baidu, ZTE etc. to derive actionable intelligence in quick time. This arrangement obviates duplication of expensive data-processing functions by CCP's Intelligence agencies. CCP has given legitimacy to this practice by enacting the Internet Security Law in 2017, which mandates all data collected in China to be stored within the country and bans transfer of data across the border without approval. It also mandates web

based businesses to share data which may affect the 'security of the nation', which grossly violates privacy of individuals. The Social Credit System introduced by CCP ostensibly aims to standardise the assessment of economic and social reputation of citizens and businesses. It goes without saying that the Social Credit System would reward pro-CCP activities and restrict the freedom to travel and also social liberties of the so called dissenting voices. It is due to this digital totalism that despite poor handling of the Covid-19 pandemic by the CCP administration, only highly sanitised reports came out from China.

The CCP Dictatorship has not restricted itself to using these 'virtues' of Digital Authoritarianism on its own citizens. Two recent global examples of adverse effects of Chinese AI systems can be seen in Zimbabwe and the Philippines. In Zimbabwe, Hikvision's facial recognition technology has been used for border security purposes and for creation of surveillance cameras enabled smart cities. The Chinese firm CloudWalk Technology, sanctioned by the US government for its human rights abuse against the Uyghur community, has also developed a facial recognition system for the Zimbabwean government. Similarly, the Philippines launched the 'Safe Philippines' project at Manila under which about 12000 surveillance cameras using AI tools would be installed in partnership with the Chinese companies Huawei and CITCC, with an amount of about US \$ 400 Million borrowed from the CCP government. Today, it is estimated that at least 18 countries are developing mass surveillance systems with CCP's assistance. Embracing the CCP AI Model could well mean the end of democracy and the rise of dictatorship in these countries.

One can only imagine the enormous destructive potential of the debt trap scheme of BRI coupled with the sinister facet of CCP AI dominance. We thus have a brilliantly conceived formula for modern day colonisation of weak democracies through Digital Dictatorship...and all this achieved without having to fire a single gunshot let alone fight a war!!! The only counter to this is to develop a democratic digital model which will, while enhancing security, still preserve the privacy and human rights of individuals and safeguard the sovereignty of nations.

(Binay Kumar Singh is an author and columnist, Courtesy IANS)



Trouble brewing over the Middle Kingdom

Xi Jinping's reckless and arrogant attitude has not helped China to achieve anything



The Fifth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was held between October 26 and 29 at Beijing's Jingxi Hotel; if one is to believe the Xinhua statement, China is doing very well.

A message the CCP wanted to convey: The 360 or so attendees wore no masks, an indication of confidence to show that the Middle Kingdom has tamed the homemade Covid-19.

One of the outcomes of the Plenum is that Xi Jinping vowed to build a fully modern army by 2027.

"The four-day plenum in Beijing wraps up with a statement that says it has entered a period of 'strategic opportu-



nity' for development," said the South China Morning Post, while plans for next 15 years "highlight key role for technological development and importance of boosting domestic markets."

Despite the usual rhetoric, mainly directed to the internal audience, one could ask what has President Xi Jinping achieved by hiding for weeks the spread of the deadly virus which originated in Wuhan and later by sending the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to grab Indian land in Ladakh.

To understand better, let us answer a few questions, including about the logic of the Chinese armed intervention in Ladakh.

Will India's strategic road Darbuk-Shyok-DBO Road, which seems to have greatly bothered the generals in the Western Theater Command in Chengdu, be stopped? The answer is 'no'; it will soon be completed allowing the Indian Army to bring reinforcement in a much shorter time to these remote areas.

Has the Chinese attack forced Delhi to drop its claim on Gilgit-Baltistan being India's territory? No.

Will Gen Zhao Zongqi, the big PLA boss who already was responsible for the Doklam episode in 2017, be rewarded by a seat in the over-powerful Central Military Commission? It is now extremely doubtful as Zhao has not achieved anything militarily, especially after the Tibetan/Indian commandos

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occupied the ridges South of the Pangong tso (lake).

Has the PLA gained any meaningful strategic advantages in Ladakh since May? Perhaps minimally in Depsang and in the Fingers area, but it is balanced by losses in South Pangong Tso.

India has been the target of an intense Information Warfare's firing by the specialized agencies in China, particularly the United Front Work Department; this has worked to some extent, with some Indian publications faithfully reporting the Communist version of the events, in exchange for some advertisements in their newspapers, but over-all it is limited and the Indian public has not been intimidated, on the contrary; President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan, has now become one the favorite Heads of State of the Indian public, due to China's aggressive tactics.

Has Chairman Xi's prestige been enhanced in India and elsewhere in the world? Not at all, once again on the contrary; in India, Xi has lost the goodwill earned after his encounters with Prime Minister Modi, i.e. the Wuhan Consensus and the Chennai Connect. There will be no such meetings for years to come.

Has the prestige of PLA, as a fighting Army, grown? Cer-



tainly not; despite its might (on paper at least), the PLA was unable to grab significant Indian territory.

Recently the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan think-tank working on issues and trends shaping the world, conducted a public opinion on China with 14 countries. It found that unfavorable views of China reach historic highs in most of the countries surveyed: "A majority in each of the surveyed countries has an unfavorable opinion of China. And in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States, South Korea, Spain and Canada, negative views have reached their highest points since the Center began polling on this topic more than a decade ago."

One can only conclude that the trend will continue with the belligerent attitude shown during the Fifth Plenum prevailing.

Has China made economic gains during the last one year? Again no; many flagship companies such as Huawei, the giant telecom company, are in difficulties in most Western countries; it is a question of time that its 5G services will also be banned in India.

It is clear that Xi Jinping has lost face all-over, with the exception of 'sponsored' nations like Pakistan.

The situation is so bad that Beijing does have much alternative to come out the self-created imbroglio; the Party is caught in a vicious circle, with the only way out being more repression towards Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Uyghurs or the Tibetans, or sponsoring rogue states.

Interestingly, for many Taiwan has become a model of a Chinese democratic system, which everyone hopes will

one day be adopted in the Mainland.

Further, Xi Jinping's main achievement has been to unite many nations against China.

After the last meeting of the Quad which took place on October 7 in Tokyo, Principal Deputy Spokesperson Cale Brown stated that the foreign ministers of US, Japan, Australia and India had reaffirmed their collective efforts towards a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific: "they pledged to continue regular consultations to implement their vision of a peaceful, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific."

Nations like France have already shown their interest to join.

More recently, the third India-US 2+2 Dialogue took place in Delhi. Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar observed: "The performance of our relationship in the last few years has been exceptionally positive. Political consultations and cooperation have grown, defence exchanges and trade too, economic interactions and commerce are up, the partnership in science, technology and innovation is stronger and our energy security clearly enhanced."

There are more examples of positive developments triggered by China's hegemonic attitude.

According to a report of the Yomiuri Shimbun, it was announced on October 30 that "the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force was planning to hold a large-scale exercise of 140,000 people next year; almost all Japanese troops will participate in response to the 'Taiwan affair' (Beijing's attitude towards Taiwan). The last time such a large-scale exercise was conducted in Hokkaido against a hypothetical Soviet

invasion in 1985."

After promising to 'stand with' India in its confrontation against China in Ladakh, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used strong words against China during his visit to the Maldives and Sri Lanka; during an encounter with President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, he announced the opening of an embassy in the archipelago.

It means that India's neighbours are slowly turning their back on Beijing.

A top Indian diplomatic source told The Print that Pompeo's visit to Sri Lanka is "obviously going to help in reducing China's influence in the region," the source added: "All these countries which Pompeo is visiting - Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia - are key for the success of Indo-Pacific. India is seeking to establish robust and resilient supply chains with them."

With or without the US, the pro-China equation is progressively changing in the region.

The forthcoming visit of General MM Naravane, the Indian Army Chief (COAS) to Nepal, even if it does not solve the border dispute planted by China, is bound to rekindle the ancient kinship and deep cultural, religious and economic closeness between India and Nepal.

There is no doubt that Xi Jinping's reckless and arrogant attitude has not helped China to achieve anything towards Beijing's declared objectives to work for the Community of Nations, on the contrary.

(Claude Arpi is Director, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture at Auroville. The views expressed are personal)

LIMITLESS POWER OF THE MIDDLEMEN

Of flourishing biz of men and women who operate below the radar

Prashant Tewari

Narendra Modi has successfully curb corruption at the highest within the legislative and bureaucratic power corridors. The surveillance sarkar fear has put fear in the people sitting at powerful positions to restrict open discussion on percentage-based commission that became rampant during Congress era. Of Course, complete elimination of corruption from the public life is impossible in India since there is vast difference of resources between the people with and without power. India remains most inequitable society with third largest concentration of billionaires in the world and perhaps the largest set of poor people on the planet.

In modern India, national interests are served by men and women who operate below the radar, ensuring that multi-billion-dollar deals in various sectors are not derailed, and that the Indian economy continues to spend and expand. Ensuring that a clean deal goes through is a difficult game and a corrupt deal is even more complex. This means that even the most transparent Western firms operating in sectors such as defence, construction, highways, power, oil and natural gas are forced to engage people who have a deep knowledge of the systems. These are the players who will deploy tactics, often illegal, to ensure that the company wins lucrative contracts.

Professional middlemen manage and manipulate huge contracts, run large offices, hire retired government officers and other such experts to manage the system, and are on a first-name basis with not just Indian leaders but many key players around the world. They have offices not just in India, but in cities around the globe. These are people who have sophisticated financial strategies to cover their tracks, who might be among the biggest account holders in many of the tax havens of the world.

They are also the least known play-



By 2012, India had displaced China as the world's biggest importer of arms.... India's share of the volume of international arms imports increased from 7 per cent to 14 per cent during 2009-13 compared to the previous five years....



ers in the Indian system—and the most important. They play a critical role in sustaining many Indian political parties by pumping them with black money, yet do not figure in the list of their donors. Even if criminal cases are registered against them, the most credible evidence will eventually just disappear into thin air. These are not the political fixers down the street or typists guarding their bosses but men, and occasionally women, who can swing multi-billion-dollar deals, manipulate files and procurements, throw governments out and swing global opinions. The most powerful middlemen in India... decide the very fate of the country's democracy.

At the highest levels, middlemen can make or break a company's prospects in the market. From the moment a contract proposal is prepared, the middleman's influence is visible. The parameters detailed in a bid are often tweaked to qualify their client; trials are manipulated to bring up their client to the list of winners; negotiations are deftly manoeuvred to the best possible situation for the client; and the final parameters ensure that political decisions go the right way. Not everyone involved in the selection is on the payrolls of the agent. However, at every stage, there are key people on the take. For those who do their bidding, the rewards are

Some of India's richest businessmen make their big profits playing the role of intermediaries. At the highest echelons of Indian decision making, it is hard to figure out who is a mere middleman and who is a mere industrialist.

huge—scholarships for their children in famous Western universities, sports coaching camps for children in foreign locales, a villa in Portugal, millions stashed in a secret account in a tax haven, and much else.

To understand these powerful middlemen, one must shed preconceived notions about intermediaries in a free market. This is not just someone doing quantifiable work, like assisting a client to make sense of the market or identify the best partners, help efficient transfer of technology, protect intellectual prop-

erties, complete legal requirements, or otherwise assist in navigating the system. In India, that aspect is only a small part of the intermediary's work—the key engagement is beyond it, and below the radar. He must ensure that the system keeps working, a contract is not scuttled, decisions are taken in time and a particular company wins a contract.

In short, he must ensure that the government keeps running in the sinister and corrupt way that has become the norm. It would be no exaggeration to say that these powerful intermediaries play a critical role in ensuring that the Indian government does not grind to a halt, its armed forces modernize regularly, that highways are constructed, and the economy keeps growing at a robust rate rather than stagnate. In a perverse way, these middlemen are the answer to an inept and stagnating government. The accusations of kick-backs in the Bofors deal caused a huge setback to Rajiv Gandhi

The middleman, or intermediary, is actually a legitimate function in any modern economy. The defence industry is a particularly good example to understand what differentiates an Indian middleman from his counterparts in most other economies. In this sector, the intermediary normally provides a set of legitimate and important

services, mostly to a foreign company that finds it difficult to navigate the procurement process of the host country. He could, for instance, be assisting a small firm which cannot afford to open a dedicated office in a country that is carrying out small-sized procurement. In most countries, offsets—stipulation to procure or spend a significant part of a contract in the buyer country—are integral to defence contracts, and a local intermediary plays an important role in executing them. These intermediaries are paid legitimate fees, and often a part of their fee is built into the contract making them offset or maintenance partners.

There is another critical function to be carried out in a fiercely competitive economy, which is to ensure that a company's views, not always wrong, are heard and understood by decision makers. For this function, the United States of America has a flourishing lobbying industry, and several economies officially permit lobbying with the government. Their task is not to pay bribes or manipulate, at least not officially.

In the Indian economy, middlemen play out their roles in the dingy back rooms of decision making. They carry

Some of India's richest businessmen make their big profits playing the role of intermediaries. It is not uncommon for a foreign diplomat or executive to ask one about a particular industrialist—quite likely, he has offered his services to help swing a mega deal. At the highest echelons of Indian decision making, it is hard to figure out who is a mere middleman and who is a mere industrialist.

bribes, pay whoever needs to be paid, intimidate someone if required, and ensure that their clients have insider information on a contract from the very beginning of the process. They provide undue and unfair advantage. India has no formally recognized lobbying industry, nor does it allow agents in government contracts. But influential middlemen are an essential ingredient in any major government contract.

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When I was ushered in to meet a senior official of a European military consortium on an afternoon in February 2009, he was already a little high on wine and a little low because of the Indian heat. We were an earshot away from the thunderous take-offs and landings of the world's leading fighter aircraft at Aero India, a biennial aviation exhibition in Bangalore, now called Bengaluru.





luru. All the major aircraft manufacturers were present to exhibit their latest to impress India, which had put out a Rs 60,000 crore contract to acquire 126 fighters for the Indian Air Force. Taking off and landing with fury were the finest and most expensive fighters in the world: F-18s and F-16s from the United States, MIG-35 jets from Russia and Euro fighters made by a European consortium. A host of business and transport jets were also vying for the attention of potential buyers. Aero India has become one of the world's largest aviation shows, thanks to the country's status as the largest importer of military-ware and its growing club of billionaires

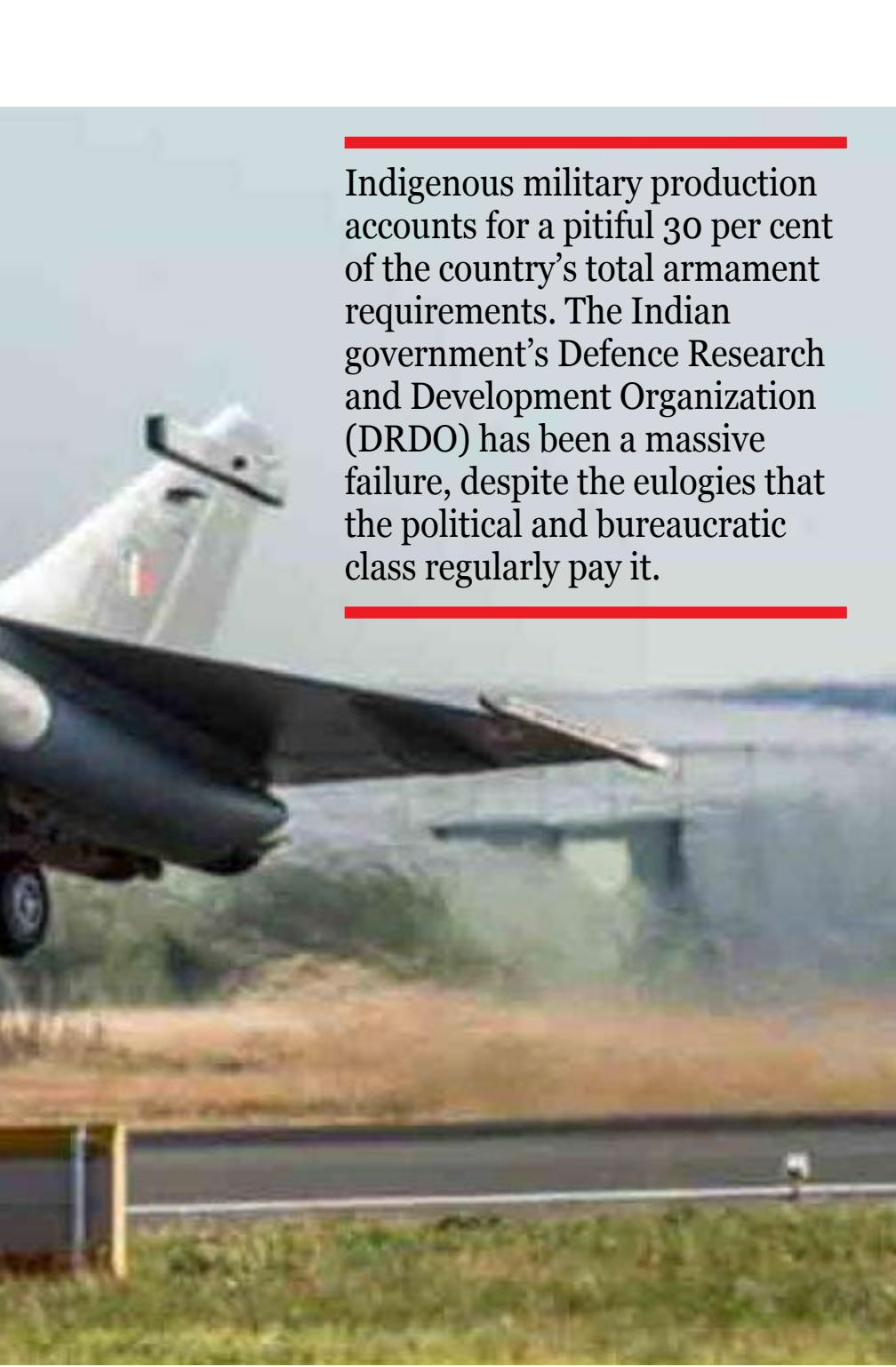
who prefer private transport in the sky.

The middlemen operating at the highest levels of the Indian economy enjoy monopoly, if not complete control, over the sectors they operate in. The huge resources at their command give them the power to prop up governments and political parties. Senior civil servants who are not corrupt say that all they can do is ensure that they remain clean personally. The CEO of a foreign defence firm told me once that he had to spend a million US dollars just to get an appointment with a defence minister some years ago. Every aspect of economy—and not the defence sector alone—where the government has a role

is trapped in the crushing embrace of high-level corruption. The defence sector, however, is most instructive in our attempt to understand the power, influence and growth of powerful middlemen like Hinduja Family, Choudhrie, Win Chadda etc.

Let's begin with a brief history of India's military modernization

Since Independence, India has been heavily import-dependent for defence equipment, and in the initial decades, up until it collapsed in the early 1990s, most of the purchases were from the Soviet Union. In the next decade, India



Indigenous military production accounts for a pitiful 30 per cent of the country's total armament requirements. The Indian government's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has been a massive failure, despite the eulogies that the political and bureaucratic class regularly pay it.

political upheaval that followed, the Congress party lost the 1989 election by a significant margin. However, it has had no visible impact on India's voracious appetite for foreign military-ware.

By 2012, India had displaced China as the world's biggest importer of arms, as the Middle Kingdom took a sharp turn towards self-reliance. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)—the most dependable assessment data available—India's share of the volume of international arms imports increased from 7 per cent to 14 per cent during 2009-13 compared to the previous five years. Informal estimates say that India could end up spending around Rs 6,70,000 crore on importing arms during this decade alone.

Indigenous military production accounts for a pitiful 30 per cent of the country's total armament requirements. The Indian government's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has been a massive failure, despite the eulogies that the political and bureaucratic class regularly pay it. It has not been able to successfully master a single major military platform, except missiles. India does not have an indigenous battle tank or a fighter aircraft, both mainstays of its military operations.

Military manufacturing here has insipid factories churning out crude products and working at the lowest end of the value chain. The few sophisticated systems that they make involve importing parts from abroad, assembling them into systems and stamping their tag on it. A few private players are now beginning to take baby steps in the weapons manufacturing industry, but it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

The abject failure of its indigenization efforts, combined with the recurring conflicts India has had to deal with—several with Pakistan, one with China, and the many insurgencies—is what has turned the country's military into a highly sought-after shopper in the international arms market. Many firms in the United States, Israel and Europe, including Russia, have come to depend on Indian orders to sustain their profits. These foreign companies, in turn, need deal makers to ensure that the procurement process stays on track and to provide them with the smoke-screen of deniability regarding the paying of bribes.

did not make many purchases. Then the Kargil conflict with Pakistan in 1999 churned things up. India went back to the global arms bazaar with such vengeance that, by 2012, it had become the world's largest importer of arms. Arms dealers flourished, weaving cosy relationships with political leaders, senior military and civil officials, as well as other stakeholders in the system. There has been much speculation about where they meet, how they benefit and how such huge kickbacks are moved around. To date, no Indian investigation agency has been able to nail a major arms dealer or senior official for paying bribes or accepting them. Many big names have

been dragged into public scandals in the defence sector, but none went so far as conviction.

This is surprising in a country where a single defence scandal dramatically changed the political landscape in the 1980s. On 16 April 1987, a Swedish newspaper broke a story alleging that artillery manufacturer Bofors had paid kickbacks to people in several countries, including Sweden and India, to secure a Rs 1,500 crore contract the previous year from the Indian Army to supply 410 155-mm calibre howitzer guns. Those close to the incumbent prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, were accused of receiving kickbacks. In the huge po-

Cryptocurrency Bill 2021: Shooting down the messenger?

Move may hit 342 companies and an estimated 5 million users

Srinath Sridharan

The Indian government is planning to ban all operations of cryptocurrencies in the country, except for a state-backed digital currency. The ban will be operationalised with a new law coming to effect. The Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill of 2021 is slated to be introduced in the budget session of the Parliament. In context of evolving digital finance globally, the Government of India should reconsider its thinking about these new financial systems that are being developed.

The move is expected to hit the nascent field in India and impact 342 companies and an estimated 5 million

users involved in trading and holding cryptocurrencies. Reports also suggest that users holding on to these cryptocurrencies could be fined, once the new law comes into effect, with probability of them being given time to liquidate their holdings.

Cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ethereum, Bitcoin Cash, Monero and Litecoin etc, are digital assets designed to function as a medium of exchange and records of ownership and transactions are kept on a decentralised-ledger called blockchain with strong cryptography. But these digital assets are known as tokens are not issued by a central monetary authority and are not backed by any physical asset. These tokens are "mined" by users who con-

tribute computer processing power and are rewarded for their efforts. The price of these tokens is simply ruled by the forces of demand and supply.

The genesis for the idea for cryptocurrencies is older than people believe. The 1980s saw the rise of the Internet and along with it the idea of a sovereign cyberspace, which would transcend borders and free from all controls of nation states. But this utopian vision of a cyberspace still needed a currency for people to carry out transactions and conduct commerce. Following numerous experiments to create this system, the first cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, was created in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. But its development was a culmination of various digi-



tal peer-to-peer payments experiments.

Bitcoin's enigmatic creator(s?) Satoshi Nakamoto noted a fundamental issue problem with fiat currency and the centralisation of finance. "The root problem with conventional currency is all the trust that's required to make it work. The central bank must be trusted not to debase the currency, but the history of fiat currencies is full of breaches of that trust," he (or they). The distrust of central banks by early adopters of Bitcoin was probably fuelled by the actions of central banks which ultimately bailed out the erring investment banks which caused the 2008 financial crisis.

India & CBDC

Contrast this with what the government is attempting to do with its virtual currency. Essentially, the government of India is looking to introduce the idea of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) where it acts as a digital representation of a country's fiat currency and will be backed by a suitable amount of monetary reserves like gold or foreign currency reserves. These digital fiats will be regulated by the country's monetary authority.

In India's case, this would fall in the jurisdiction of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Both CBDCs and cryptocurrencies use blockchain technology as

CBDCs are a 'virtual store of value' and they can be converted to cash in local currency at a fixed rate. CBDCs tokens also would bear interest on the central bank's balance sheet.

their backbone for maintaining an immutable ledger for the transactions that take place using these tokens. However, while the blockchain on cryptocurrencies are open to public where everyone can view and authenticate transactions, the blockchain on CBDCs are permissioned where limited entities can carry out the functions of authenticating and viewing transactions.

CBDCs are a 'virtual store of value' and they can be converted to cash in local currency at a fixed rate. CBDCs tokens also would bear interest on the central bank's balance sheet. Currently there are two modes of CBDCs being developed in the world – a retail token (meant for direct use by savers) and a

wholesale token (meant to be used by banks and lenders subject to central bank regulations).

The modalities are still being worked out, but it could also serve as an excellent vehicle to push the central bank's plan to increase retail investors participation in the Government Securities. However, there is a risk to them. The yield on government securities is a little higher than bank deposit interest rates and savers might find the returns on CBDCs more attractive than what banks are offering, thus banks could lose of their primary means of funding.

As more savers move their money from demand deposits, it will force them to rely on costlier means of funding. Central banks also would be on the risk on their balance sheet in the event of another financial crisis and will have to function as a crucial financial intermediary in those times. And if CBDCs also take shape as a viable payment system, it raises several privacy issues with the state being allowed to see all transactions by a user.

CBDCs do bring interesting potential uses for the Indian economy in general and it's heartening to see India join a growing list of countries like The Netherlands, China, Sweden, the United States, Canada and Norway are looking to introduce a digital version of their





currency. It is a worthwhile experiment to follow, but it doesn't make sense on why they cannot co-exist with existing cryptocurrencies.

“Money for nothing”

Reading of the proposed crypto ban indicates that the government might believe that there is no intrinsic value in cryptocurrencies; and also might not like the way its value is pegged to market mechanism. In its first attempt to eliminate cryptocurrencies was reactionary as many people fell prey to shady operators posing as cryptocurrency companies and the RBI issued a circular where it said that while cryptocurrencies were not banned, it did bar entities regulated by it, including banks, from providing services to any person or firm dealing with cryptocurrencies.

The Supreme Court of India had quashed the RBI's cryptocurrency order in March 2020 giving a brief respite to cryptocurrencies holders in the country and saw the resumption of services by different players.

Fundamentally, the Indian government thinking is ruled by the mantra that “Blockchain is good, but cryptocurrencies are bad.” It's evident by the bulletin it put on the Lok Sabha where it said that it would allow “certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses.” This seems contradictory statement

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when it is looking to stop all research into this space and innovations that it is creating.

This policy might have originated in protecting the interests of the common man. But this raises the question on who invests in cryptocurrencies? Is it the common man who buys Bitcoin or HNIs?

While it is true that few cryptocurrencies might be inflated and there could be few Ponzi schemes posing as crypto businesses, the Indian government can issue detailed signposts and guidelines for investors planning to invest in them, like what the Australian government has done. The Indian gov-

ernment's policy thinking to ban cryptocurrencies might also stem from the narrative that they are used for terror financing and money laundering. While during its inception, Bitcoin might have been used for conducting illicit deals on the dark-web, today the cryptocurrency-related crime is on the decline.

In 2020, the ‘criminal share’ of all cryptocurrency activity fell to just 0.34 per cent, or \$10.0 billion, in transaction volume, according to a report by Chainalysis, a company that specialises in cryptocurrency investigations for governments, exchanges and financial institutions. The report also shows that cryptocurrencies are almost never used for terror financing and most cryptocurrency-related crimes are scams, ransom ware, darknet market deals, and stolen funds.

It stands to reason of course. A malactor would have to be extremely stupid to conduct terror financing on an immutable ledger which can be seen and must be authenticated by all nodes on a blockchain. In India, traditional offline assets like real estate and gold still account for most money laundering operations and financing mal-actors.

Real estate is still not covered under the Money Laundering Act while purchasing gold does not even require KYC. Legitimate cryptocurrencies in India have been pushing for better KYC to open wallets for cryptocurrency trans-

actions. Government can extend these requirements formally to cryptocurrencies as well.

The paucity of understanding can also be seen in the language the government is using to describe non-CBDCs as “private cryptocurrencies” and not using established nomenclature. Cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Litecoin, Ethereum etc. are considered public cryptocurrencies as users can view and verify all transactions and their details using these tokens on a public ledger and the blockchain used is open-sourced.

Cryptocurrencies such as Monero, Dash and Zcash on the other hand are designed to be private where transaction details are hidden. However, these cryptocurrencies are still public in the sense that they have public open ledgers, but transaction information is obfuscated in varying degrees to protect the privacy of the end users. And then there are efforts like Facebook’s Libra, now re-named Diem, that use a private or permissioned blockchain where only a few trusted entities can keep a track of the ledger and allowed to mine the tokens for its transactions.

There are varying degrees of complexity and innovation that can be beneficial people in general, but the government is dismissing and banning all of

them by using a catch-all phrase called “private cryptocurrencies”.

Who should regulate Crypto in India ?

The reluctance to engage with cryptocurrencies in India could emanate from deciding on which regulator will have to deal with them. If it is treated as a currency, the burden of regulation would fall on the RBI. If it is considered a security or a commodity, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Contrary to misperception that there are no regulatory frameworks for them now, the way how cryptocur-

rencies are being used and traded, is more akin towards a digital commodity. Cryptocurrencies are traded directly through exchanges and even through financial derivatives like ETFs, options and futures, and contract for differences (CFDs). Indeed, with the uncertainties in the world right now, cryptocurrencies and decentralised finance were the best performing asset class, beating gold, stocks, and other global commodities in 2020.

Cryptocurrencies are unviable as a currency right now due to the massive changes in corrections and the time it takes for a transaction to get authenticated by the various nodes on the blockchain. Take for example the online games marketplace Steam’s decision to stop purchases using Bitcoin. The company explained that Bitcoin transaction fees to buy a game shot up to \$20 in 2017.

Also due to the price volatility, if the price of Bitcoin shot up at the time of transaction, Steam had to refund the difference to the user and conversely, if the price went down the users had to pay the difference again. There is also an engineering concern to consider as every transaction needs to be authenticated by every node on the blockchain thus the time for a transaction increase.

Cryptocurrencies are unviable as a currency right now due to the massive changes in corrections and the time it takes for a transaction to get authenticated by the various nodes on the blockchain.





Currently, the time for confirming a Bitcoin transaction is about 10 minutes. Though there are efforts being made by different cryptocurrencies to speed up the process of authentication for more real-life use cases. But still, it is nowhere close where users can buy a cup of coffee using a cryptocurrency.

With this in mind, the burden for regulating this new form of finance could fall in SEBI's court. Ideally, SEBI should strongly consider allowing cryptocurrencies as part of its regulatory sandbox and combine its learnings from jurisdictions like the United States, Japan and Australia.

Learnings from US, Japan, Australia

Though the United States does not consider cryptocurrencies as legal tender but recognizes crypto exchanges as money transmitters as the tokens are other value which substitutes currency. While the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) recognises them as securities and is working on enacting securities law on them. Meanwhile, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recognises them as property and have guidelines for the same.

The United States also takes a pragmatic approach to different offerings and takes a case-by-case approach. For example, the SEC cracked down on Facebook's Libra cryptocurrency project. As Libra used a private permissioned blockchain and controlled the number of nodes, it was able to drive down the time for a transaction and was also able to control its price volatility.

Essentially, it functioned more like a stable private currency which could rival the US Dollar and less like a security. Hence, the project did not take off. However, it clarified how it was treating Bitcoin and said that they are not treating it as a security but rather as a store of value and noted that its rise was driven by the inefficiencies of the payment systems in the country. But in both cases, it was made clear that they are not legal tender.

Japan takes a longer view of the ecosystem. It does not consider cryptocurrencies as a security, nor does it treat it on par with fiat currency. Considering the many use cases by different tokens, it defines them under the broader umbrella of Crypto Assets. Exchanges are required to register themselves as payment service providers under its Payment Services Act.

Further, it requires these exchanges to maintain strict Know-Your-Customer (KYC) records of investors and users and comply with all anti-money laundering and combating terror finance rules (AML/CFT). In addition, the property rights framework will apply on these crypto assets.

Australia stated particularly that Bitcoin and other tokens which share its characteristics are considered property and will be subject to Capital Gains Tax. In addition, it has now come out with detailed signposts and guidelines for investors planning to invest in Initial Coin Offerings (ICOs) with clear warnings about these risks along with case studies.

Don't be cryptic or critical of Crypto yet

The government's push to ban all cryptocurrencies in the country is simply throwing out the baby along with the bath water. It is ironic that the Indian government is following the same policy decisions as China, which banned all cryptocurrencies as well in favour of its digital fiat currency. The Indian government should in all manners should emulate the idea that it is an alternative to China and not follow the same policy prescriptions set by Beijing.

There is a risk that India will lose out in the billions of dollars in the new cryptocurrency-led world of finance by enforcing the ban. There might be another brain-drain as more minds who believe in crypto-finance will leave India to set up shop in friendlier countries.

Thus, the underlying asset of all cryptocurrencies is the failure of governments globally and central banks to provide better financial outcomes for citizens. Thus, the best way to handle the proliferation of private cryptocurrencies is to make sure that state institutions and fiat products work well for retail participants. The Indian government's ban on cryptocurrencies is overprotective at best and at its worst, it could be viewed as an attempt to maintain an iron grip on how its citizens use their money.

(Writer is an independent markets commentator and visiting fellow, Observer Research Foundation. Shashidhar K.J. is an associate fellow, Observer Research Foundation)

M&M is India's top utility vehicle company

Vishnu Makhijani

A US aircraft manufacturer coined the term KISS -- Keep It Simple Stupid -- as it churned out bombers by the dozens at the height of the Second World War. An Indian company in the 1940s adopted the mantra and "concentrated on one simple diet of doing what they started with" by assembling Willys jeeps to grow into one of the country's largest makers of SUVs, says a new book on the company and which is perhaps the first definite work on India's automobile industry.

"The most obvious fact is that M&M have concentrated on one simple diet of doing what they started with and improving that from time to time. This genetic link has been seen visually and functionally played out in the various models from 1945 to the present and it is this symbiotic aspect that no other manufacturer has in its arsenal," author Adil Jal Darukhanawala told IANS in an interview of his book "Timeless Mahin-

dra" (DJ Media).

"Whether it was from luck or design or such this has stood the test of time and since the last three decades at least I have seen the M&M management realise this, grudgingly at first, and now steadfastly to realise that the neo-retro theme is one that even an Indian OEM with legacy can play in modern day times. How has it been so

successful? The answer to that is in the sub-title of the book: 'Workhorse. Nation Builder. Heart-throb. Defender. Adventure Tool'. No other vehicle made by any Indian OEM can carry these attributes like the Mahindra vehicles have and continue to do so," Darukhanawala added.

To this end, the book is a celebration of the wide-reaching and multi-faceted





impact of Mahindra utility vehicles for every known application - and some which not many can think of! The 75-year journey of the company has gone hand-in-hand with the evolution of the early Willys vehicles - through their many forms, applications and roles - all as ingenious and innovative as the unique Indian spirit of making things work.

Brimming with insightful stuff masterfully written with so many hitherto unheard of stories woven into these pages and illustrated with never-seen-before photographs to illuminate the path, this journey of Mahindra & Mahindra from the first civilian 4x4 to the 21st century second-generation Thar also mirrors the rise of a nation, and the aspirations of its people!

How did this book come about?

"It came about thanks to the book I had penned on the history of Ideal Jawa to coincide with the re-launch of Jawa motorcycles in India by Classic Legends after a gap of nearly 20-22 years. It was the first time any book had been written on the history of an Indian automotive manufacturer and (M&M MD) Pawan Goenka saw this and was impressed enough by it to ask me to do the same for Mahindra & Mahindra," Darukhanawala said.

In a way, the book has been a life-time in the making.

"It was easy in a certain way for I had lived the period from my formative years as an automotive enthusiast in the 1970s to writing on cars and bikes from the 1980s onwards. My own accumulated one helped. But then there were the

blind spots from the earlier period from 1945 onwards till the late 1980s when not much was known as to how Indian industry functioned and there wasn't much chronicled stuff available.

"The easy and only thing was to get to meet and interview a lot of people associated with M&M (if they yet remained) from that era and luckily there were a handful who shared a lot of knowledge and threw a great deal of light on the subject. Then there were enthusiasts of the marque who had hands-on knowledge of these cars so these were another source of valuable technical information on the various models made by M&M," Darukhanawala explained.

There were also "hidden unheralded gems" within M&M itself who came to the fore with their own stories and experiences.

"A lot of information was gleaned from the firm's annual reports but you had to know what you were looking for and also where and when that happened. The hard graft was all about meeting people, pursuing leads, joining the dots, sifting folklore from reality, and pouring over the subject over and over again," the author added.

How did he get bitten by the automobile bug?

"There is way too much to say on this but then how can a Parsi bawaji not love bikes and cars? I was always surrounded by bikes and cars from as far as I can recollect (from about 6-7 months from my birth indicated by images of me with my father's Norton motorcycle and other cars in the family) and this love affair has raged and raged and doesn't see it ending at all.

"Learned my craft with motorcycle racing in my early years in Pune (we used to build our own bikes and cars for racing), started writing on motorsport in 1977 and was the first in the country to have my own weekly column in a mainstream Indian newspaper on automobiles from 1980 onwards," Darukhanawala said.

He conceptualised and started India's first automotive enthusiast (not trade) magazine Car & Bike International in June 1987. He helmed it till June 1998 when he stepped out to conceptualise and head Overdrive magazine from September 1998 till April 2005. He conceptualised the country's first 360-degree subject focussed media vehicle for automobiles for the Times of India Group with ZigWheels which he headed from November 2007 till March 2014. Thereafter, he was with the Zee Group till May 2016 and then on his own penning books and doing events.

He has penned 15 books to date and find the time to yet drive, ride and comment on the latest crop of motorcycles and cars.

What's his next project?

"There is a book on the centenary of an automobile association in the country which is in its final stages. Another book is on the history of motorsport in India and yet another one being discussed is on the history of another Indian automobile manufacturer. As you can see I have my hands full plus yes, my YouTube channel is one other detail that I am exploring," Darukhanawala concluded.

(Vishnu Makijani can be reached at vishnu.makijani@ians.in)

ĪŚĀNA YOGA THE NEW NORMAL

A pilgrim, Yoga Therapist, Aspirant of Samkhya (an eastern philosophy). Shilpa GM is a South Indian girl from Bengaluru. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Arts with an array of job and life experiences.

Here is a self-descriptive exciting story of an innovative entrepreneur with a passion to promote India's soft power of yoga globally.

I started my career at a very young age. I grew up with my grandparents. My Grandpa always assigned me with work and paid a few bucks for my job. That kind of boosted my self-confidence. I was a Y2K teenager. The concept of pocket money was already deteriorating with the boom in the Indian BPO industries, software companies back then. I took up part-time jobs to refill my wallet. These jobs literally were learning experiences of my life. I worked as a Receptionist, Office Assistant, a call center executive. And finally landed at a billion-dollar company Infosys. It definitely had an impact on my outlook to business and work etiquettes. Studying personality traits handling situations, people accordingly is a quality that has helped shape my professional life.

Decade ago, I moved to Mumbai, in pursuit of a creative life. I started working with the very first international modeling agency in Mumbai. To secure a first of its kind designation as a Head Booker in India itself was trailblazing experience. The job brought luxe, perks and more challenges each day, it was fun though. Having associated with Karl Lagerfeld fashion house models are special cherished moments.

Rewind: As a child, I had an enquiring mind. I would always be curious to learn the know-how of everything that interested me. I was a Volleyball captain in school. That's where I started taking my physical education seriously. Through times, my interest in physical fitness has only grown. Fitness freak, always a regular at the gym. I was physically fit but lacked mental wellness. That's when I turned to Yoga. My enquiring mind took me to right places and people. I have learnt the Art & Sci-



ence of Yoga from one of the oldest traditional schools. I have been religiously practicing and training Yoga for the last 9 years now.

With constant learning, practice and exploring the art of Yoga, I came up with an idea to start a one-of-a-kind Pop-up Yoga studio called *iśāna* Yoga in 2016. The aim is travel places and transform lives. Ever since I have traveled extensively and trained myriad yogic aspirants across the country and globe.

iśāna Yoga offers Yogic sessions accordingly studying the body type. It's more of a therapy than physical exercise. It's designed to enhance the body, mind and spirit.

It is a unique blend of Ashtanga and Hatha Yoga. The intense sessions are a combination of physical, mental and soul enhancing activities. The sessions caters all age group. Anyone willing to enhance their health and lifestyle are welcome. The response from the aspirants have been overwhelming. It's always a happy feeling to enrich lives.

We have a trained and certified team who share the same passion for Yoga and life. Through the pandemic we have been conducting online Yoga sessions for aspirants from New York, Sweden, Dubai, London, Indonesia, Thailand and more. In India, cosmopolitan cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Kerala, Goa, Pondicherry, Benaras, Kolkata form a major clientele.

2020 has been year of introspection globally. The times we have been through has realigned our choices in lifestyle. We had many turning to Yoga. I and my team members have constantly worked throughout the year remodeling mind and immune boosting yogic online sessions to our clientele.

A recent expedition to Hampi (corona free zone) in January this year marked my first physical Yoga session for a month with the aspirant's post covid times. Thoroughly enjoyed the one on one with the yogis. Look forward for many more. Hoping we sail through the pandemic times open up to the world again.

In a current scenario, we have learnt that Health is and will always be the greatest wealth for the mankind. A quick tip from *iśāna* Yoga would be "Inhale happiness and Exhale the madness."

In my spare time I contribute my Yogic learning and tips to one of the leading Yoga Magazine called *Yoga And Total Health* for The Yoga Institute in Mumbai.

Q&A

How to protect body and mind in today's stressed working scenario?

A. Like I mentioned above in my own story. Majority of the population thrive in building bodies and completely neglect the mind. We see people mindlessly running on a treadmill without even observing their bodies.

Yoga is the only form of exercise to teach mind, body coordination & synchronization. There are various Asanas, Pranayamas, Kriyas to protect the mind and body to beat the stress if taught and practiced correctly.

What does *iśāna* YOGA have as a final objective to offer for its followers?

A. Post pandemic times are crucial. Value for time and money and teaching the genuine art of Yoga is what we aim at. To gain one client is easy but to retain the one is where you speak for yourself. I'm proud that we have so far had retained our clients and numbers have only grown.

What not has been taught in the name Yoga?

A. I remember an instance, one of my clients from Stockholm, narrated her life-threatening experience in the name of Yoga. It's quite unfortunate.

There are major Do's & Don'ts. The principles of Yoga that should be strictly followed by its teachers and students. I have noticed how many schools wrongly teach Pranayama. Prana is subtle force in a loving being. You can't mess up with the breathing techniques.

This is what *iśāna* Yoga team offers to its followers, we believe in propagating the genuine form of Yoga. We carefully study the body type and personalize Yogic sessions to the clients. Yoga as it means is a beautiful blend of mind, body and spirit and we promise that very experience to our aspirants.





Shriram
P r o p e r t i e s

Homes that live in you

Time to have a **disaster** **plan** for your home

Geetika Khanna

Disasters never knock on doors before they arrive. A sudden cloudburst with the looming threat of a flood, a tremor which leaves us with the imminent danger of stronger aftershocks, unforeseen riots that rage through cities and neighbourhoods turning everything to dust in a wave of destruction, or now, the fact that a tiny invisible virus can change our lives almost overnight. Haven't we all felt that deep sense of dread in the pit of our stomachs when we think of these scenarios? This concern gets compounded when we are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our families. More often than we realise, we worry about the safety of our loved ones, aged parents, the young dependent on us and our pets more than our own selves. Studies show that physically, financially and emotionally, we as a society and individual units are ill prepared to deal with such disasters. While most large organisations spend a large part of their annual budgets in building and updating their business continuity and crisis plans, homes and households usually are bereft of such a plan.

Disasters cause disruptions to families, organisations and the community alike, the casualties being many - Social, environmental, economic, financial and loss of life, most of which seem beyond our control. The year gone by has shown without a doubt that as emergencies and disasters, along with their destructive effects rise all over the world, to be empowered with knowledge and applying it for safeguarding our lives, is the only effective way to prevent disasters and reduce their adverse impact. It goes without saying that trained people will be better prepared to face a disaster and what it brings in its aftermath. Disaster preparedness is an effective, functional, operational, and cost-effective tool for risk management. The ultimate aim is to create a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.

As pioneers in the field of security and crisis response Silver Lining, a team of global security experts, aims to fill that void. Not only is this an infor-



Disasters cause disruptions to families, organisations and the community alike, the casualties being many - Social, environmental, economic, financial and loss of life, most of which seem beyond our control.

mation, advisory and solutions portal dedicated to individual family units, it also provides curated disaster management plans tailored to suit a specific family. The plan for someone living in a high-rise building for example, would be completely different from someone who lives in an independent house, or for a family that has pets will have different parameters when compared to a family that has an individual with special needs. Silver Lining is committed to offering affordable detailed tailored plans and preparation checklists for all its members in order to safeguard themselves and their loved ones from

any form of natural or man-made disaster. Aiming to be the one stop knowledge centre for all those who seek help and advice to protect themselves from future disasters and to set a global standard in disaster preparedness for individuals, their families and their homes, Silver Lining is the first initiative of its kind in India.

Security experts with decades of experience of having worked with organisations like the UN provide personalised evacuation plans customised to the terrain, type of structure, number of family members, special vulnerability tests that include potential risk spots and a hazardous equipment and repair strategy if required, personalised mock drills for the chosen disaster, panic and anxiety relief exercise course, self-defence course, security audits, insurance and financial needs (Expert advice if required) and a bi-annual assessment of emergency preparedness (relief Kit and documents).

Silverlining-global.com is dedicated to providing on time and highly effective solutions for all your disaster related challenges ensuring that you are EMPOWERED, INFORMED and PREPARED the next time a disaster strikes. Reach out to an expert to book your plan now. Call +91 9141680287 or write in at info.silverlining-global@mynetsec.com

ON THE TRAIL OF 12 INDIAN FUGITIVES

Danish Khan & Ruhi Khan

At a time when a British court has ordered the extradition of diamantaire Nirav Modi to India to stand trial in a Rs 13,500 crore bank fraud after dismissing arguments of his “mental health concerns,” saying they are not unusual in a man in his circumstances, while that of billionaire Vijay Mallya, also accused of financial crimes, hangs in the balance, a new book delves into 12 extraordinary cases over seven decades that have seen London emerge as a safe haven for those who want to escape the law in India and unravels the legal quagmire that has caused much debate in Her Majesty’s courts - and consternation in New Delhi’s corridors of power.

In ‘Escaped: True Stories of Indian Fugitives in London’ (Penguin), Danish Khan and Ruhi Khan, through eyewitness accounts and archival records, delve into these 12 cases to decode why London is an irresistible siren for Indian fugitives.

More than throwing the spotlight on the ultra-luxe worlds of Modi and Mallya, the book also uncovers the complex ownership of their UK assets and brings to life the intense courtroom battles involving them.

The book also chronicles the saga of cricket bookie Sanjeev Chawla, now dispatched to India, and that of music director Nadeem Saifi, charged with the murder of music baron Gulshan Kumar. Saifi had fled to the UK in 2001 but the London High Court rejected the Indian government’s request for his extradition on the ground that there was no *prima facie* case against him. The request met a similar fate in the House of Lords while a sessions court in Mumbai exonerated him after a key prosecution witness turned hostile. Saifi chose not to return to India and eventually acquired British citizenship.

The book explores how drug lord Iqbal Mirchi and terror accused Hanif Patel evaded extradition, and investigates the loopholes that saved convicted paedophile Raymond Varley and NRI parents Arti Dhir and Kaval Kaval



Raijada, accused of murdering their adopted child.

Then, the book reveals the inside story of how Lt Commander Ravi Shankaran (retd), the alleged spy in what is known as the Navy War Room Leak Case, was set free.

On the plus side, the book takes a trip through history as it recounts how

a newly independent India managed to bring back two powerful industrialists, Dharmendra Teja, and Mubarak Ali Ahmed, who were involved in financial crimes.

(Danish Khan is a journalist and historian living in London. Ruhi Khan is a London-based independent journalist.)

Jewellery that suits modern women's sensibilities

Puja Gupta

There has been a significant rise in demand when it comes to purchasing jewellery in tier 2 and 3 cities, says **Dipu Mehta, Managing Director, ORRA -- a diamond jewellery brand**

ORRA has launched new category of jewellery for the growing base of young women consumers. The collection is called 'Desired' and is designed to suit the more modern sensibilities of the young woman who is confident and unafraid to carry off her individual style, says Mehta.

IANSlife spoke to him to know about how the industry will shape in 2021, and how demands are growing in tier 2 and 3 cities. Excerpts:

Tell us about the new collection and the inspiration behind it.

Mehta: 'Desired' collection has been designed to target the millennials who are far bolder and edgier in their style choice. This collection is crafted in 14kt rose gold with rings, earrings, pendants, lariats (layered necklaces) and bracelets in diamond studded as well as bold gold jewellery. For the first time, ORRA has launched even gold jewellery in 14kt gold. This collection has been designed to suit the more modern sensibilities of the young woman who is confident and unafraid to carry off her individual style.

Hence this collection is crafted to ensure that you can mix and match different jewellery to achieve any look you wish to, either for an evening out with your girls or a lounge date night. This collection focuses on layering and stackable jewellery.

The inspiration behind this collection has been Disha Patani whom we have signed on as our brand ambassador. Her style and confidence and the ease with which she carries herself, has been our biggest inspiration.

Has the pandemic changed the design philosophy?

Mehta: The pandemic has had no hand in changing our design philosophy as Disha has been our muse. This is the first time that we have specific-



cally designed a collection targeting the younger consumer.

How do you think the industry will do in 2021?

Mehta: We are optimistic about the growth in the industry. With the introduction of Covid-19 vaccines we expect the things to get normalized. The demand for jewellery will be existent since the desire for women to adorn jewellery is always going to be there.

Are sales steadily increasing, led by millennials & younger buyers?

Mehta: The sales have been more positive and getting back to normalcy. But our loyal customer base is large-

ly the older generations since we are primarily a diamond bridal jewellery brand. However, with the growing interest of youngsters in diamond jewellery across the country, we see a huge potential in catering to them and hence we have launched this collection. The youngsters need more trendy designs and lighter, edgier designs and that is exactly what 'Desired' is.

How do you see the demand from tier 2 and 3 cities? How have the choices and buying trends evolved in these areas?

Mehta: With our retail presence in tier 2 and 3 cities, we have seen a significant rise in demand when it comes to purchasing jewellery as exposure to brands is increasing over time. They are now unafraid to move from their local jewellers and are showing confidence in trusted national brands like ORRA.

What is ORRA's business strategy for the near future?

Mehta: We are very positive of growth post Covid and we will get back on track in terms of expansion plans that were in full throttle before the pandemic. Our focus will remain on innovation in diamond jewellery and customer service par excellence.



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