

INDIA PERSPECTIVES

Volume 32 ■ Issue 3 ■ July-September 2018



INDO-AFRICA RELATIONSHIP 10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**THE PUSHKAR
CAMEL FAIR**

INDEPENDENCE DAY
71 YEARS OF FREEDOM

CALL OF THE HILLS
STUNNING MEGHALAYA

THALI FOR ALL
SIX INDIAN SPREADS

POTPOURRI

UPCOMING EVENTS ACROSS INDIA



NAVRATRI

Nine days of devotion and celebration in Hindu goddess Durga's honour culminate in Dussehra on the tenth day of this festival.

WHEN: October 10 to 18, 2018

WHERE: Across the country



JODHPUR RIFF

Against the stunning backdrop of Mehrangarh Fort, this annual event offers performances by the finest folk artistes of Rajasthan.

WHEN: October 24 to 28, 2018

WHERE: Jodhpur, Rajasthan

DIWALI

Also known as the festival of lights, Diwali celebrates the victory of good over evil with the lighting of *diyas*, and is one of India's most vibrant festivals.

WHEN: November 7, 2018

WHERE: Across the country



EID MILAD-UN-NABI

Marking the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, Eid Milad-un-Nabi is celebrated in the third month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

WHEN: November 21, 2018

WHERE: Across the world



HORNBILL FESTIVAL

Drawing all the tribes of Nagaland to the foothills of Mount Japfü, the 10-day festival presents cultural performances, indigenous games, a craft bazaar, music events and more.

WHEN: December 1 to 10, 2018

WHERE: Kohima, Nagaland



CHRISTMAS

Celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, this festival begins with a midnight mass and comprises feasting and merrymaking.

WHEN: December 25, 2018

WHERE: Across the world

FOREWORD

As Hindi scholars from across the world converged at the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre in Mauritius for the 11th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan (World Hindi Conference) from August 18-20 in Mauritius, the language was given a memorable tribute by the world. In this issue of *India Perspectives*, relive the significant international event and look ahead to the next edition to be held in Fiji.

The Government of India has had a busy diplomatic calendar over the past few months, and a series of important bilateral and multilateral interactions have ushered in notable outcomes. Read about Korean President Moon Jae-in and Russian President Vladimir Putin's official visits to India. Also gain insights into Prime Minister Narendra Modi's successful state visits to Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's official visits to Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan.

In our Sports section, be proud as you behold India's stellar performance at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta-Palembang, Indonesia. From young debutantes to senior players, members of the Indian contingent have together brought home the country's best medal haul at the Games this year: 15 gold, 24 silver and 30 bronze.

In our travel section, head to spectacular Meghalaya, with its rolling hills, cascading waterfalls and fascinating living root bridges. Experience its rich culture as we take you to the state capital Shillong and the nearby hill town of Cherrapunji.

In our photo feature section, experience the vibrant Pushkar Mela in Rajasthan. One of the largest animal fairs in the world, it is a bubbling cauldron of colours, culture and entertainment, and draws thousands of travellers every year.

From preachy sagas to nuanced narratives, let Indian films inspire you with their fresh take on issues of social and cultural relevance in our Cinema section. Be privy to how they participate in building the nation that is India today by telling the stories of ordinary people with extraordinary ideas. Finally, find more innovation in our Dance section, as we bring you insights into Euphonic Yoga, a novel dance form that combines yoga with Indian classical music and dance.



Raveesh Kumar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the Ugandan Parliament during his visit to the African nation



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A CELEBRATION OF HINDI

The 11th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan organised in Mauritius from August 18 to 20, 2018, was attended by representatives from 45 countries, earning the distinction of being the biggest event of its kind

BY DR HARISH NAVAL



The opening ceremony
of the 11th Vishwa
Hindi Sammelan

Jaishankar Prasad once used the phrase ‘post celebration sadness’ in one of his plays. Preparations for a celebration go on for a long time, the day of celebration arrives – aspirations, enthusiasm and happiness permeate the air and then, suddenly, the celebration comes to an end once the zenith of happiness has been attained. What follows is a phase of waiting, for the celebration to begin again with renewed fervour.

At the 11th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan (World Hindi Conference), a note of sadness appeared before the celebrations could begin, when news of the demise of former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee reached Mauritius. In her inaugural speech at the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre (SVICC), Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said: “There are two feelings rising together in this conference. The first is the feeling of mourning and the other, the feeling of contentment. The dark shadow of mourning rose because of the demise of former Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee, while the feeling of great contentment is also there as the whole Hindi world is assembled here to pay homage to Atal ji.”

A special homage session was organised to commemorate the former leader. The cultural programmes were cancelled and

the kavi sammelan (convention of poets) was converted to a kaavyanjali (poetic homage). Following this, the scheduled programmes of the conference began, bringing back a semblance of normalcy and taking the proceedings forward as planned. Over eight sessions held from August 18 to 20, the event was carried out successfully, with active participation from EAM Swaraj. Other ministers were also proactive in the discussions and meetings.

The topics of the sessions were as follows:

- The Relationship Between Language and Folk Culture
- Development of Indian Languages along with Hindi through Technology
- Indian Culture in Hindi Education
- Thoughts on Culture in Hindi Literature
- Protection of Indian Culture through the Medium of Films
- Communication Media and Indian Culture
- The Diasporic World: Language and Culture
- Hindi Literature for Children and Indian Culture

Renowned scholars from across the world participated in the discussions. To highlight the issues and recommendations made during the various sessions, a Recommendations Committee was constituted, like in the previous edition of the conference, during the meeting of the Consultative Committee on September 7, 2018, chaired by EAM Swaraj.

The Vishwa Hindi Sammelan organised this year was the biggest among the 11 editions organised so far. In the words of EAM Swaraj ‘the competition was with ourself’ because the 10th Vishwa

1,425 people registered for the Mauritius conference, out of which 1,416 participated. Among the latter, 887 participants were women

EAM Swaraj made the official announcement that the 12th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan will be organised in Fiji in 2021

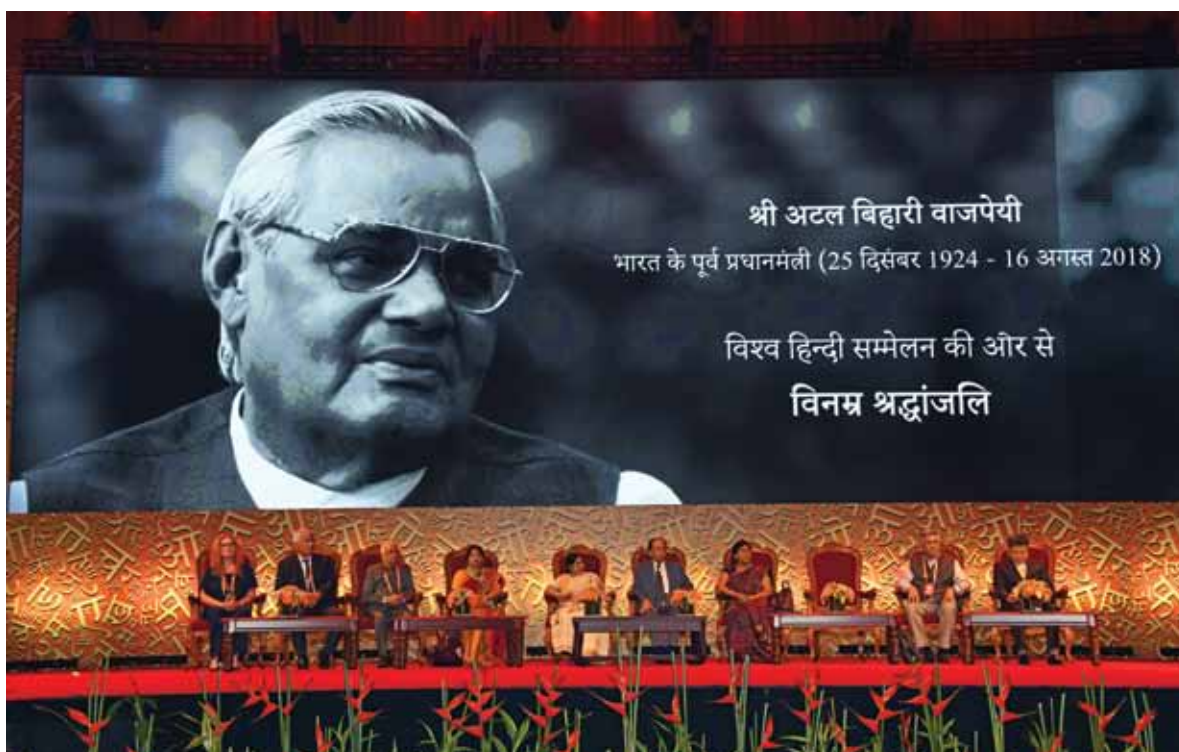
Hindi Sammelan held in Bhopal had thus far been considered the biggest one of its kind. Representatives of 39 countries had been present at the event in Bhopal, while representatives of 45 countries attended the 11th conference in Mauritius. While there had been more than 1,200 registrations in Bhopal, 1,425 people registered for the Mauritius conference, out of which 1,416 participated. Among the latter, 887 participants were women.

The government delegation that travelled to Mauritius for the event comprised 315

representatives. It included representatives from all 29 Indian states and three Union Territories. This is significant because never before has a conference involved participation from across the country at such a large scale.

Among the several activities held at the event, the setting up of a special exhibition proved very successful: 16 government organisations and five non-government organisations set up stalls related to literature and publication. It is also noteworthy that technological entities such as C-DAC, Microsoft, Web Duniya and MITY participated in this exhibition.

From Mauritius, 21 organisations participated in the exhibition, among whom were prominent the ministries of Human Resources, Higher-Secondary Education, Research and Development, and Arts and Culture, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute,



A parallel session was organised to pay tribute to former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee



Left to Right: Indian President Ram Nath Kovind and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj attending the “In continuation of the 11th World Hindi Conference” event in New Delhi on September 17; EAM Swaraj launched the book *Bhopal Se Mauritius Tak* at the opening ceremony of the 11th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan

Among the several activities held at the event, the setting up of a special exhibition proved very successful

Hindi Pracharini Sabha, Hindi Lekhak Sangh, Mauritius Hindi Sansthan, Arya Sabha, Ramayana Centre, Sanatan Dharma Parishad, and Government Hindi Shikshak Sangh.

Another noteworthy achievement of the 11th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan was the grand event titled “In continuation of the 11th World Hindi Conference” organised in New Delhi on September 17, 2018. Indian President Ram Nath Kovind was the chief guest for the evening. Several senior litterateurs and promoters of Hindi who had been unable to attend the

conference in Mauritius and were meant to have been presented with the ‘World Hindi Honour’ at the event, were felicitated.

At the New Delhi event, a video on six poems by former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was also an accomplished poet, was screened. On this occasion, the song and dance programme titled ‘Hindi Yatra’, which had been adjourned in Mauritius, was also presented. The concept and presentation of this event also featured the invaluable contribution of EAM Swaraj.

During the closing session of the Consultative Committee, the Indian External Affairs Minister made the official announcement that the 12th Vishwa Hindi Sammelan will be organised in Fiji in 2021. She affirmed that the upcoming edition is likely to be even more significant.

CULTURE OF COOPERATION

President of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in made a state visit to India from July 8 to 11, 2018, joining Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in articulating a vision for peace and prosperity in the region

Establishing a shared vision for mutual prosperity and peace, the President of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in, made a state visit to India from July 8 to 11, 2018. For India, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is a significant partner in its Act East policy; and for the Republic of Korea, India is an important pillar in its New Southern Policy. As such, both nations value this bilateral partnership tremendously, and recognise its contribution to peace, stability and security in the region. With an aim to foster global peace and

prosperity, the two leaders also discussed the exploration of tripartite partnerships, commencing with capacity building initiatives in Afghanistan.

Agreeing to enhance leadership-level interaction, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Jae-in affirmed their commitment towards expanding contact by exploring more areas of mutual cooperation and interest, as well as regularising the existing dialogue mechanisms.

The Special Strategic Partnership between India and the Republic of Korea is premised on the cultural and historical bonds shared by the two nations, and the universal values of democracy, rule of law, free market economy, as well as a commitment to a stable, peaceful, free, secure, inclusive, open and rules-based region. With eyes set on the future, both nations are committed to cooperation.

PM Modi and President Jae-in stressed the expansion of bilateral trade between India and the Republic of Korea



Above: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea, at Hyderabad House on July 10

Right: PM Modi and President Jae-in visit Gandhi Smriti in New Delhi





Top and bottom: President Jae-in and his wife visit Akshardham Temple in the national capital; PM Modi and President Jae-in at the India-ROK CEO's Roundtable Forum, which was held in New Delhi on July 10

The Special Strategic Partnership between India and the Republic of Korea is premised on the cultural and historical bonds shared by the two nations

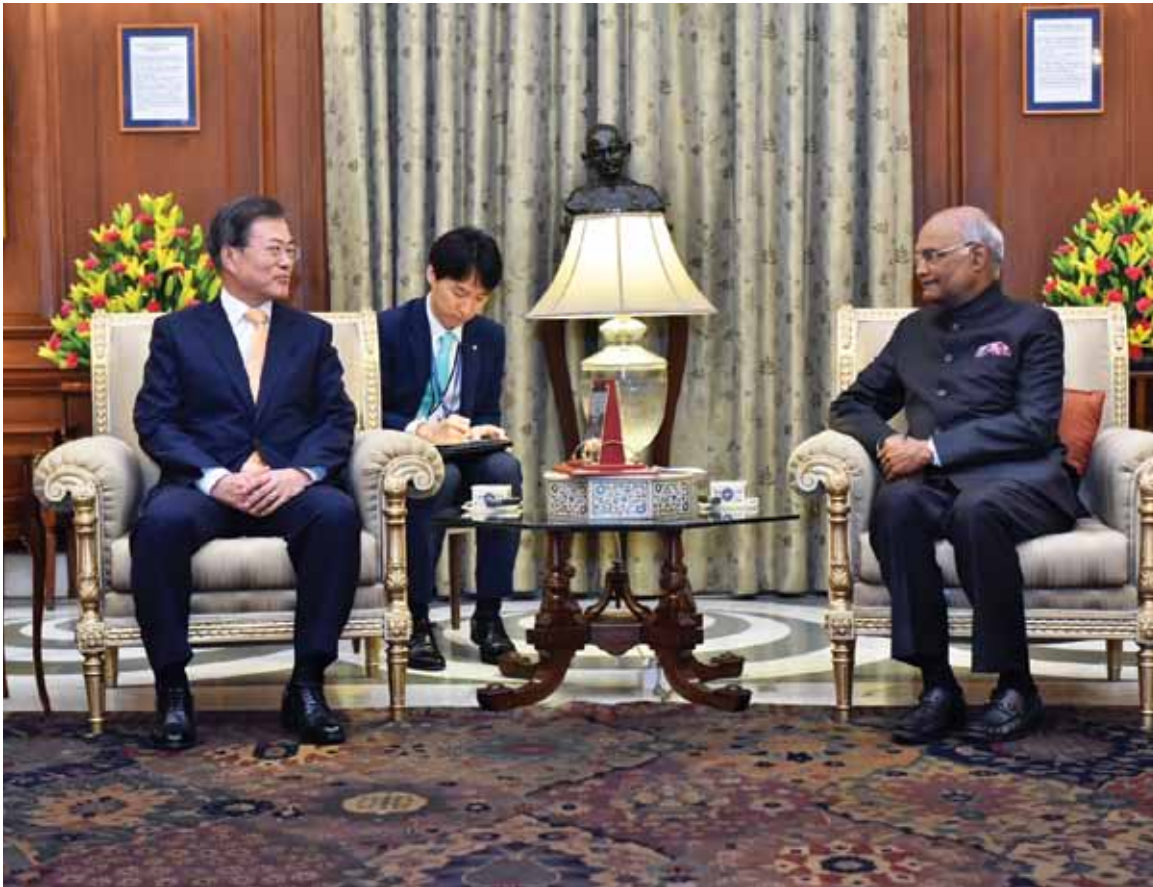
PEOPLE

The cultural and historical linkages between the two nations being so strong, people-to-people contact was emphasised by both leaders as a means of enhancing mutual understanding. Initiatives to bring the citizens of both countries closer were discussed, including internships, youth exchange programmes and simplified visa procedures in order to encourage tourism and business.

Acknowledging their shared heritage, the two nations agreed to expedite work on the upgradation of the monument of Queen Suriratna (Hur Hwang-ok) in Ayodhya as a joint initiative.

PROSPERITY

Emphasising mutual prosperity and well-being, PM Modi and President Jae-in stressed the expansion of bilateral trade between India and the Republic of Korea. They also discussed the early conclusion of the negotiations currently ongoing for the upgradation of the ROK-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). According to a press release by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, they also spoke about the finalisation of the elements of an Early Harvest Package that would lead to an upgraded CEPA. The



President Jae-in meets the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, at Rashtrapati Bhavan

PM Modi said that India being a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group will strengthen the global non-proliferation regime

two leaders urged the business community in both nations to ‘leverage opportunities arising from complementarities between the two economies’ in order to encourage joint ventures, enhance investment and work towards attaining the goal of increasing bilateral trade between India and the Republic of Korea to \$50 billion by 2030.

The Indian Prime Minister and Korean President also agreed to “partner with each other to secure mutual economic growth and contribute to global

economic development.” Towards this end, initiatives such as ‘Make in India’, ‘Digital India’, ‘Skill India’, ‘Start-up India’ and ‘Smart Cities’ welcomed the Republic of Korea’s willingness to partner in their implementation.

According to the MEA release, the two leaders also agreed to discuss potential EDCF (Korea’s Economic Development Cooperation Fund) projects, towards further development in India’s infrastructure sector.

PEACE

Emphasising the importance of peace and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region, PM Modi and President Jae-in welcomed the recent positive developments facilitated by the Republic of Korea, including the



US-DPRK summit as well as the inter-Korean summits. President Jae-in acknowledged India's contribution to global non-proliferation efforts and PM Modi affirmed that if India becomes a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, it will serve to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime. The Korean president also acknowledged India's

role in maintaining peace in the region through the years, including its peace efforts after the Korean War. According to the MEA release, the two nations agreed to "explore further possibilities to coordinate efforts in the defense and strategic spheres in order to benefit from each other's unique capabilities and experience." India and the Republic of Korea will, to this end, "enhance military exchanges, training and experience-sharing, and research and development, including innovative technologies for mutual benefit". Noting the relationship between prosperity and security, the two leaders also emphasised their commitment towards the freedom of

The two leaders agreed to discuss potential EDCF (Korea's Economic Development Cooperation Fund) projects



Left: PM Modi and President Jae-in jointly inaugurate a new manufacturing unit of an electronics company in Noida; **Above:** Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj calls on President Jae-in on July 9

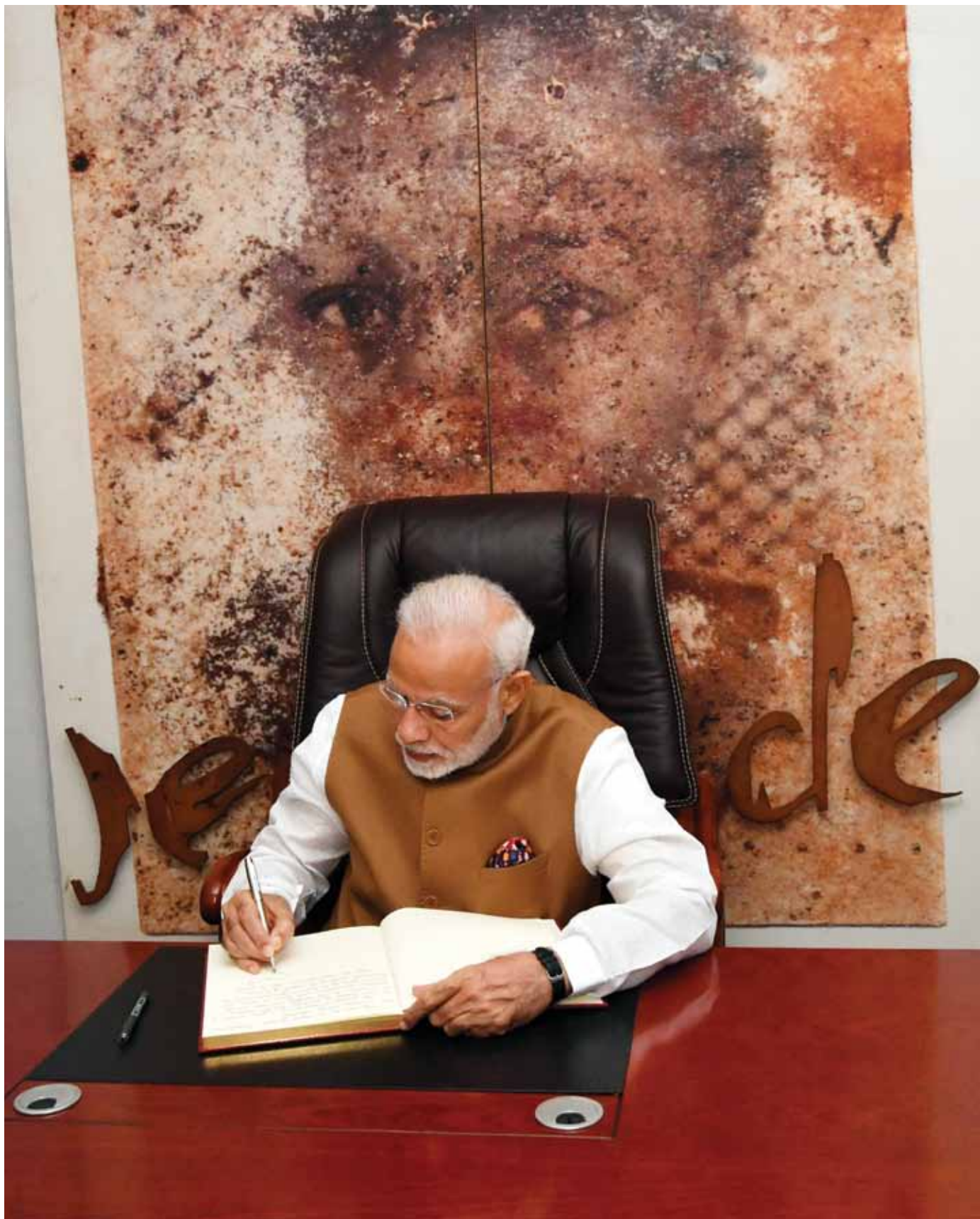
President Jae-in acknowledged India's role in maintaining peace in the region, including its peace efforts after the Korean War

navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce.

FUTURE

PM Modi expressed confidence in India's decision to establish the 'Korea-India Future Strategy Group' and the 'India-Korea Centre for Research and Innovation Cooperation',

noting that this, along with the various MoUs signed during the visit, will provide "an institutional framework for our future-oriented cooperation based on research, innovation and entrepreneurship". According to the MEA release, the two leaders also encouraged the scientific institutions, academic community and young professionals in both countries to engage in collaborations in research and development and experience-sharing. This would enable them to develop new technologies for symbiotic development, including in areas such as material science, renewable energy, robotics, health sciences and engineering.



INDIA FOR AFRICA

Making significant state visits to three African countries over five days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's commitment towards enhancing its cordial diplomatic relations with the continent

Cementing India's warm and friendly relations with African countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made state visits to Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa from July 23 to 27, 2018. The last few years have seen an intensified engagement between India and African countries in several fields such as trade and agriculture, and these visits reaffirmed this spirit of cooperation.

RWANDA

Marking the first visit by an Indian prime minister to Rwanda, PM Modi arrived in the country on July 23, accompanied by a high-level delegation. Primary on his agenda was a one-to-one interaction with Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, as well as bilateral delegation-level talks. During the meetings, the leaders reviewed the strategic partnership between the two countries.



Left: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Gisozi, Rwanda

Right: PM Modi and Rwanda's President Kagame (seventh from left) visiting Rweru Model Village

PM Modi visited the Rweru Model village in Rwanda, an initiative by President Kagame under the Girinka programme

PM Modi stressed the importance India attaches to its relations with Rwanda. According to a press release by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (MEA), he also announced the setting up of a Task Force in the field of digital education – something that will greatly benefit the education sector in Rwanda. Another important announcement was the gifting of 100,000 books from the National Council of

Education Research and Training (NCERT) in India to Rwanda, and the provision of support for digitisation of learning material.

Both leaders also reaffirmed their commitment towards enhancing the cooperation between India and Rwanda in the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, in order to effectively address global challenges like climate change, terrorism and sustainable development.

After the meetings, President Kagame hosted a special banquet, where Rwanda's top leadership and prominent members of the Indian community in the country were in attendance.

On the second day of his visit, the Indian Prime Minister paid a visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial, laying a wreath to



PM Modi with Uganda's President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni



Right: PM Modi at his ceremonial reception in Uganda

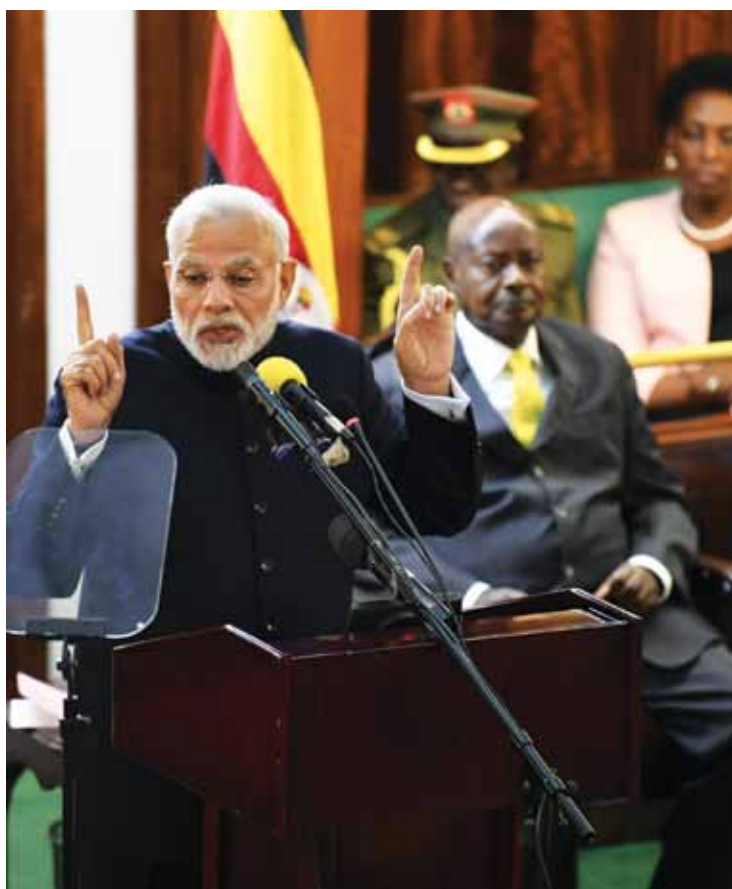
Below: PM Modi delivering his address at the Parliament of Uganda on July 25

honour the victims of the 1994 tragedy. He also visited Rweru Model Village, an initiative by President Kagame under the Girinka programme, a social protection scheme to uplift the economically underprivileged in Rwanda. Eight bilateral MoUs were signed during this visit, including agreements in the areas of defence, trade, dairy cooperation, culture and agriculture.

UGANDA

PM Modi made his maiden visit to Uganda from July 24 to 25, accompanied by senior government officials and a large business delegation. After being accorded a warm ceremonial welcome, he went to hold bilateral discussions with Uganda's President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

Both leaders affirmed their commitment towards strengthening the economic and commercial ties between India and Uganda.



India's engagement with Africa will continue to be guided by 10 principles:

- One, Africa will be at the top of our priorities. We will continue to intensify and deepen our engagement with Africa. As we have shown, it will be sustained and regular.
- Two, our development partnership will be guided by your priorities. It will be on terms that will be comfortable for you, that will liberate your potential and not constrain your future. We will rely on African talent and skills. We will build as much local capacity and create as many local opportunities as possible.
- Three, we will keep our markets open and make it easier and more attractive to trade with India. We will support our industry to invest in Africa.
- Four, we will harness India's experience with digital revolution to support Africa's development; improve delivery of public services; extend education and health; spread digital literacy; expand financial inclusion; and mainstream the marginalised. This will not just be our partnership to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but also to equip the youth of Africa for their place in the digital age.
- Five, Africa has 60 per cent of the world's arable land, but produces just 10 per cent of the global output. We will work with you to improve Africa's agriculture.
- Six, our partnership will address the challenges of climate change. We will work with Africa to ensure a just international climate order; to preserve our biodiversity; and, adopt clean and efficient energy sources.
- Seven, we will strengthen our cooperation and mutual capabilities in combating terrorism and extremism; keeping our cyberspace safe and secure; and, supporting the UN in advancing and keeping peace.
- Eight, we will work with African nations to keep the oceans open and free for the benefit of all nations. The world needs cooperation and not competition in the eastern shores of Africa and the eastern Indian Ocean. That is why India's vision of Indian Ocean Security is cooperative and inclusive, rooted in security and growth for all in the region.
- Nine, and, this is especially important to me: as global engagement in Africa increases, we must all work together to ensure that Africa does not once again turn into a theatre of rival ambitions, but becomes a nursery for the aspirations of Africa's youth.
- Ten, Just as India and Africa fought colonial rule together, we will work together for a just, representative and democratic global order that has a voice and a role for one-third of humanity that lives in Africa and India. India's own quest for reforms in the global institutions is incomplete without an equal place for Africa. That will be a key purpose of our foreign policy.



The leaders of the BRICS nations at the 10th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg

In particular, they spoke about working towards diversifying the trade basket and enhancing private sector investment to expand mutual trade relations.

A highlight of the visit was PM Modi's address to the Parliament of Uganda, which marked the first address of its kind by an Indian prime minister and was telecast live in India and Africa. "Today, India and Africa stand on the threshold of a future of great promise: as confident, secure, youthful, innovative and dynamic people. Uganda is an example of Africa on the move. It is witnessing increasing gender parity, rising educational and health standards, and expanding infrastructure and connectivity. It is a region with growing



trade and investment. We are seeing a surge of innovation. We in India rejoice in every African success, because of our deep bonds of friendships,” PM Modi stated.

During his two-day sojourn, PM Modi announced several areas of engagement with Uganda. The MEA release states that these included India’s contribution towards the establishment of a Mahatma Gandhi Convention/Heritage Centre at Jinja, where the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were immersed in the River Nile, as well as the training of Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) at various Indian Army training institutions. Acknowledging the importance of Uganda’s role in East Africa, the Indian prime minister announced financial support of USD

929,705 for the East African Community (EAC), currently chaired by Uganda. He also announced a donation of 88 vehicles to the country, 44 for use by EAC and 44 for civil use by the Ugandan government.

Before his departure, PM Modi extended an invitation to President Museveni to visit India, which the latter readily accepted.

SOUTH AFRICA

Foremost on PM Modi’s agenda during his visit to South Africa from July 25 to 27 was the 10th BRICS Summit. A bilateral interaction with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as well as bilateral meetings with participating countries along the sidelines of the summit were also planned.



BUILDING BRICS FOR PROSPERITY

The 10th BRICS Summit brought together the five BRICS nations in Johannesburg, South Africa. We give you an overview of what it addressed

Focussed on the theme of “BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution”, the 10th BRICS Summit was organised in Johannesburg, South Africa, from July 25 to 27, 2018. Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi along with the leaders of the other BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) converged at the Sandton Convention Centre in South Africa’s capital city to hold discussions on several significant subjects and issues of



The heads of the BRICS Nations Family at the BRICS Outreach Event in Johannesburg, South Africa

mutual concern. The latter included, among other things, the fourth industrial revolution, multilateralism and global governance, health and vaccines, sustainable development, peacekeeping, and the socio-economic empowerment of women. PM Modi, along with the rest of the leaders, was a part of the Restricted Session, Plenary Session, Leaders' Retreat, Outreach with Leaders from Africa and Outreach with Leaders from Global South.

JOHANNESBURG DECLARATION

Marking the progress made by BRICS over the last decade, with myriad achievements to its credit, the leaders of all member nations

reaffirmed their commitment towards the grouping. Honouring the principles of "mutual respect, sovereign equality, democracy, inclusiveness and strengthened collaboration" as part of the Johannesburg Declaration on the occasion, they emphasised that they are determined to "strengthen multilateralism and the rule of law in international relations, and to promote a fair, just, equitable, democratic and representative international order". The leaders also acknowledged the work being carried out to consider the establishment of a BRICS Women's Forum and a BRICS Women's Business Alliance. The 11th BRICS Summit will be held in 2019, in Brazil.

SALUTE TO FREEDOM

Marking its 72nd Independence Day on August 15, 2018, India celebrated with patriotic fervour and saluted the spirit of its heroes

BY VINAYAK SURYA SWAMI



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with children at the 72nd Independence Day celebrations



If we define freedom in narrow, political terms, then August 15, 1947, marks a closure. It was the day the political struggle against an imperial power culminated in success and in our Independence Day. But freedom is a broader concept. It is not fixed and finite. Freedom is a constant and relentless endeavour. Even decades after 1947, each one of us can contribute in the manner of a freedom fighter. We can do so if we expand the frontiers of freedom and of opportunity for our fellow Indians and our beloved India. Together we can help every citizen in our country. Together we can conserve our forests and natural heritage, we can safeguard our monuments for future generations, we can renew our rural and urban habitats. Together, we can eliminate poverty, illiteracy and inequality. We can and we must do this together.

As these words by Indian President Ram Nath Kovind affirm, the celebration of Independence Day in India is not only about commemorating a moment in the past, but also about celebrating the spirit of the nation in all its unity, diversity and sovereignty. It is a day that celebrates the progress the country has achieved through the years and honours its resolve to keep moving forward. This year, the festivities began in the national capital with PM Modi formally inspecting the Guard of Honour at the Red Fort, comprising one officer and 24 men each from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Delhi Police. The Army Contingent was drawn from the elite Fifth Battalion of the First Gorkha Rifles. This was followed by the ceremonial unfurling of the National Flag with the 21 Gun Salute by the 2281 Field Battery (Ceremonial). On August 15, 1947 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had become the first Indian Prime Minister



This Independence Day, so close to the 150th anniversary commemoration of Gandhiji, let each of us adapt his ideas and maxims

Ram Nath Kovind
President of India

”



We are celebrating Independence in a very positive environment, and amid a series of very positive incidents

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

”

CELEBRATIONS ACROSS INDIA



Guwahati, Assam

A girl smiles as she participates in a cultural programme celebrating Independence Day.



Attari, Punjab

Sweets are exchanged at the Attari-Wagah border on the occasion of Independence Day.



Puri, Odisha

Sand artist Sudarshan Patnaik created a masterpiece to mark the occasion.

to unfurl the National Flag atop the historic fortress, declaring to the world that India is now a free country. In 2018, 71 years later, PM Modi unfurled the Tricolour and delivered his address to the nation, paying homage to the great leaders and freedom fighters who helped India attain independence.

A highlight of the celebrations at Red Fort this year was that for the first time in history, an all-woman SWAT team was entrusted with the responsibility of guarding the premises.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS

Quoting poet Subramaniam Bharti to say that India can show the world the path to freedom from all shackles, the Indian Prime Minister affirmed that the nation is today brimming with confidence. He spoke about notable

PM Modi waves to the crowd after unfurling the National Flag at Red Fort





PM Modi inspecting the Guard of Honour during the celebrations

accomplishments such as the Navika Sagar Parikrama, the circumnavigation of the world aboard the *INSV Tarini* by six female officers of the Indian Navy, and the unfurling of the National Flag on Mount Everest. He also paid homage to the country's para-military and police forces, and recalled the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, which will complete 100 years in 2019, saluting those who lost their lives in the tragedy.

Noting that India has now become the sixth largest economy in the world, PM Modi

The Guard of Honour at the Red Fort comprised one officer and 24 men each from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Delhi Police

commended the pace of development in various fields. He also acknowledged the progress made in initiatives such as electricity reaching more villages, toilet construction, LPG connections, etc. He also went on to emphasise how the government has taken some significant decisions in the recent past, including GST, higher MSP for farmers and One Rank – One Pension, keeping national interest as its highest priority. A highlight of his address was the announcement of Gagan-Yaan, India's first manned space mission, to be undertaken in 2022, using the nation's own capabilities. PM Modi stressed that India would be the fourth nation in the world to do so.

Another highlight was the announcement of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyan, which was then launched on September 25

CELEBRATIONS ACROSS INDIA



Chennai, Tamil Nadu

A student gets her palms painted for the occasion, and promotes eco-friendly living.



Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir

A group of Kashmiri girls performs as part of the celebrations at the Sher-i-Kashmir stadium.



Jaipur, Rajasthan

Folk artistes perform at the Independence Day celebrations at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium.

this year. Under the scheme, 10 crore families will have access to health insurance benefits, receiving health coverage of INR 5,00,000 per year.

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind delivered his address to the nation on the eve of Independence Day in a televised format from Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. Like PM Modi, he also paid homage to India's freedom fighters, saying: "These were men and women of rare courage and foresight. They came from all regions of the country, all sections of society, all communities and all social and economic groups. They could easily have compromised and settled for some personal benefit, but they did not. Their commitment to India – to a free, sovereign, plural and egalitarian India – was absolute. It was my privilege to honour these freedom fighters on the anniversary of 'Quit India Day' on 9th August in Rashtrapati Bhavan."



Indian defense personnel arriving for PM Modi's inspection of the Guard of Honour



He also saluted the women of India, affirming that they have a special role to play in the nation's society. "The expansion of freedom in our country in many senses amounts to the expansion of freedom for women in our country. This is true whether we see them as mothers, sisters, daughters or simply as women who are entitled to a life of their choosing – and deserving of the opportunity and the security to fulfil their potential. They could do this as sheet-anchors of our families or as absolutely critical entrants to our institutions of higher learning and our workforce. The choice is theirs; as a nation and as a society we must ensure that they have the right and the ability to exercise that choice," he asserted.

He opined that the youth of the country represent "the hope and optimism of India". In encouraging and supporting young Indians today, he affirmed that the nation is honouring the principles of India's freedom struggle.

India's first all-woman SWAT team stood guard at the Red Fort during the celebrations

CELEBRATIONS ACROSS INDIA



Kolkata, West Bengal

Women police personnel march in the Independence Day parade dress rehearsal.



Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Uttar Pradesh

Students make a sand sculpture on the eve of Independence Day.



Agartala, Tripura

School students perform at an event celebrating the 72nd Independence Day.

TO THE HEART OF ASIA

Cementing India's diplomatic presence in Central Asia, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made three significant state visits from August 2 to 5, 2018



Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj arrives in Astana, Kazakhstan on August 2, 2018

Beginning with the Republic of Kazakhstan on August 2 and 3, moving on to the Kyrgyz Republic from August 3 to 4 and concluding at the Republic of Uzbekistan on August 4 and 5, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made her first set of official visits to Central Asia this year. These visits were intended to facilitate India's enhanced engagement with the region. Providing several opportunities for in-depth discussions on regional, global and bilateral matters of mutual concern, these visits served to bring about greater interaction between India and its extended neighbourhood.

KAZAKHSTAN

"India seeks to consolidate and further strengthen its friendly relations with

Kazakhstan," EAM Swaraj declared at a press meet during her visit to Kazakhstan. Having arrived in Astana, the national capital, she held a bilateral meeting with Kairat Abdrakhmanov, the country's minister of foreign affairs. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed, among other things, India's interest in partnering with Kazakhstan "to explore markets for new products, diversifying from the trade in traditional products to inject fresh impetus to the trade between the two

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's visits to Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan marked her first official visit to Central Asia



EAM Swaraj calls on Bakytzhan Sagintayev, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan

EAM Swaraj congratulated the Kyrgyz Republic for having become the Chair of SCO for the year 2018-19

countries". Increased engagement in sectors such as agriculture, chemicals, food processing, energy and pharmaceuticals was also discussed. During her press statement, EAM Swaraj also emphasised the importance of facilitating people-to-people contact between the two nations, pointing out that India has already taken a decisive step towards promoting tourism by providing Kazakh nationals with the electronic visa facility since February this year.

The two leaders also expressed their commitment towards enhancing cooperation between India and Kazakhstan in the defence and security sector, noting that the Kazakh Armed Forces Unit underwent training on peacekeeping operations in India recently, and that a mobile training team from the Indian Army is at present undergoing training in Almaty under Kazakh personnel.

EAM Swaraj stressed that the two countries have, over the years, developed a multifaceted approach towards cooperation in all areas of bilateral and multilateral relevance. India and Kazakhstan have been strategic partners since 2009.

During her visit, the Indian External Affairs Minister also interacted with members of



Left to right: EAM Swaraj meets the Kyrgyz Republic's foreign minister Erlan Abdyldaev; EAM Swaraj calls on Sooronbay Jeenbekov, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic



EAM Swaraj calls on the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulla Aripov, in Tashkent

the Indian community living in Kazakhstan, and later called on Kazakh Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Arriving in Cholpn Ata in the Issyk Kul region of the Kyrgyz Republic for her two-day visit, EAM Swaraj called on the nation's President Sooronbay Jeenbekov and also held a series of meetings with foreign minister Erlan Abdyldaev in "restricted and extended formats", according to a media release by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (MEA).

During the course of the meetings, an array of bilateral issues were discussed, and the leaders touched upon several areas of cooperation. According to the MEA release, these included "political and parliamentary exchanges, military and security, science and technology, economic, health and tourism [sectors]". The Indian External Affairs Minister also congratulated the Kyrgyz Republic for having become the Chair of SCO for 2018-19.

She went on to reaffirm India's commitment towards extending complete support for the successful organisation of the SCO Summit in 2019, to be hosted by the nation, as well as other meetings.

UZBEKISTAN

The Indian External Affairs Minister embarked on the last leg of her Central Asian sojourn as she arrived in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, on August 4. Primary on her agenda were in-depth discussions with Abdulaziz Kamilov, the nation's minister of foreign affairs, on several issues including trade, economy, security and defence, healthcare, agriculture, tourism, pharmaceuticals, culture and more.

While in Uzbekistan, EAM Swaraj also held interactions with indologists as well as members of the Indian community residing in the country. Later, she also made a tribute of flowers at the memorial of former Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

BUSINESS AND STRATEGY

Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to India from October 5 to 6 for the 19th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit, served to strengthen the enduring strategic as well as economic ties between the two nations



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Russian President Vladimir Putin at Hyderabad House in New Delhi

Giving a boost to the already cordial bilateral relations between India and Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin made an official visit to India from October 4 to 5 for the 19th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit. Also on his agenda were official talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a meeting with Indian President Ram Nath Kovind along with other official engagements.

After arriving in New Delhi on the evening of October 4, President Putin met PM Modi at Lok Kalyan Marg, followed by another one-to-one interaction the next morning at Hyderabad House.

STRATEGIC COOPERATION

The joint statement released by the Ministry

of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, states that during the course of the visit, the two nations reaffirmed their commitment towards the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between them. They affirmed that this partnership can play a significant role in maintaining global peace and stability and acknowledged their respective roles as major powers with a common responsibility of maintaining the same. “Our Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership has consistently received new energy and direction from the

India and Russia are unanimous in their commitment towards strengthening multilateralism



Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj greeting President Putin on arrival

The Indian government invited Russian companies to participate in the development of industrial corridors in India

continuous series of nineteen summits. And our cooperation on global issues has acquired new meaning and goals,” said PM Modi while delivering a press statement during President Putin’s visit.

In terms of cooperation, India and Russia have been unanimous in their commitment towards strengthening multilateralism. The Indian Prime Minister said in this context, “Our countries have common interests in cooperating on terrorism, developments in Afghanistan and [the] Indo-Pacific, climate change, regional organisations like SCO, BRICS

and multilateral organisations like the G20 and ASEAN. We have agreed to continue our beneficial cooperation and coordination in international institutions.”

ECONOMY AND TRADE

Welcoming the outcome of the 23rd meeting of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economy, Science, Technology and Cultural Cooperation held in Moscow in September, the two leaders noted that both nations are well on their way towards achieving the target of increasing two-way investment between them to USD 30 billion by 2025. According to the joint statement, both sides also welcomed the beginning of consultations on the Free Trade Agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and India. They called for expediting the negotiation process for the same. The joint statement further states that the two nations



PM Modi and President Putin holding delegation level talks



Right to left: PM Modi delivering his address at the India-Russia Business Summit held in New Delhi on October 5; President Putin meeting Indian President Ram Nath Kovind

Both sides welcomed the beginning of consultations on the Free Trade Agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and India

“appreciated the Joint Study commissioned to work out a Joint Strategy of Action for the development of trade and economic relations and investment cooperation”. To take this forward, they have nominated the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade and the All-Russian Academy of Foreign Trade.

During the course of their interactions, PM Modi and President Putin also appreciated the work done by the Indian government’s Invest India initiative to facilitate greater Russian investment in India. They also commended

the launch of a Single Window Service by the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation in order to facilitate Indian companies in Russia.

According to the joint statement, both sides also reviewed the progress made thus far in the implementation of Priority Investment Projects in spheres such as metallurgy, mining, power, information technology, railways, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automobiles, infrastructure, aviation, space and more. Additionally, India expressed its intention to increase the import of fertilizers from Russia and both sides acknowledged the significance of cooperation and collaboration in the aluminium sector.

Acknowledging how important the development of infrastructure is for both nations, the Indian government invited Russian companies to “participate in the



Left and below: PM Modi and President Putin meeting delegations of talented children at the AIM-SIRIUS Innovation Festival 2018 in New Delhi



The two nations also agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of information and communications technology

between the National Small Industries Corporation of India and the Russian Small and Medium Business Corporation.

development of industrial corridors in India, including in areas of road and rail infrastructure, smart cities, construction of wagons and creation of a joint transportation logistics company". Russia, in turn, offered its tax collection expertise for the realisation of joint projects in India and also expressed interest in participating in international competitive biddings for potential railway speed raising projects in India.

During the visit, an MoU was also signed

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Emphasising the importance of enhancing cooperation in the science and technology sector, the two sides welcomed the successful organisation of the 10th Indian-Russian Working Group on Science and Technology. The event was jointly supervised by India's Department of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, in February 2018. The leaders also commended the successful collaboration between India's Department



PM Modi delivering a press statement alongside President Putin

of Science and Technology and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, which completed 10 years of joint research in Basic and Applied Sciences in 2017.

According to the joint statement, the two nations also agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of information and communications technology, with special emphasis on “electronics system design and manufacturing, software development, supercomputing, e-government, public services delivery, network security, standardisation, radio control and regulation of radio frequency spectrum”, among other things.

An MoU was signed between the National Small Industries Corporation of India and the Russian Small and Medium Business Corporation

INDIA-RUSSIA BUSINESS SUMMIT

Organised on the sidelines of the 19th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit, the India-Russia Business Summit saw the participation of large business delegations from India as well as Russia. Representing significant areas of bilateral cooperation between the two nations, the summit sent “a strong signal of the willingness and capacity of the business sectors of both countries to further strengthen economic, trade and investment partnerships”.

Delivering his address at the summit, PM Modi pointed out that the relations between India and Russia are expanding in nearly every field. “It is a matter of great pleasure for all of us that the industrial world of both the countries is further strengthening this relationship,” he said and went on to add that India considers Russia an extremely important partner in its journey towards economic and social progress.

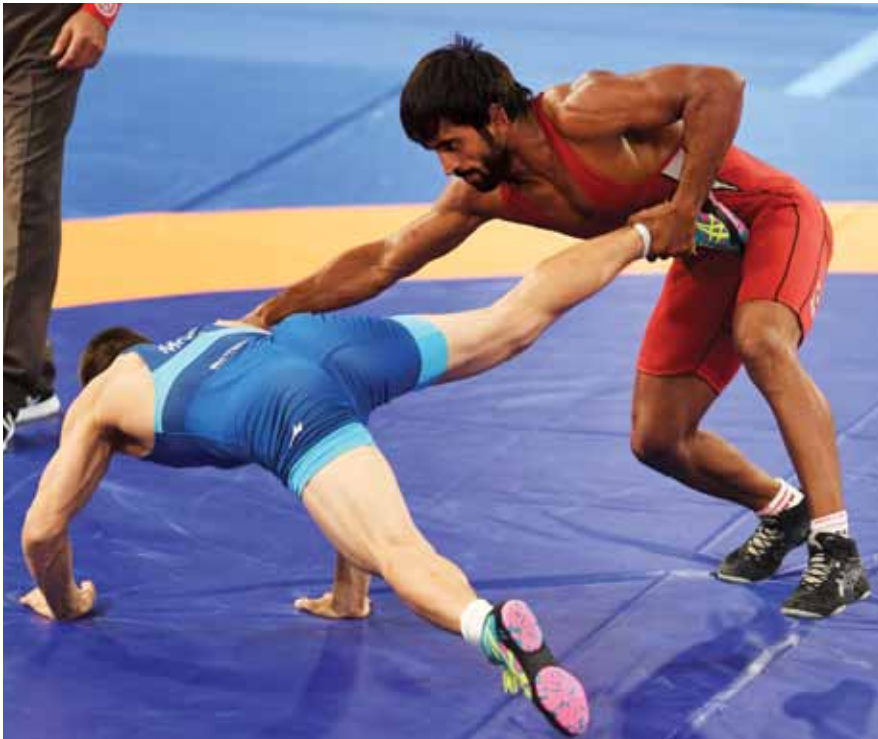


The Indian contingent at the opening ceremony of the 2018 Asian Games

ON TOP OF THE GAME

Indian sportspersons have brought the nation its highest ever Asian Games medal haul this year, with young sports stars making a mark

BY G RAJARAMAN



Indian wrestler
Bajrang Punia
during a match
at Jakarta-
Palembang 2018

Over the past few years, India has established itself as a sporting nation to reckon with. The Indian sports eco-system, government, National Sports Federations, and even some committed NGOs have empowered athletes to express their competitive selves in no uncertain terms, and the results of this attitudinal shift have been showing the world where we stand on the international sporting stage. At the 2018 Asian Games, held in Indonesia from August 18 to September 2, India's stellar performance has truly driven the point home.

In 2010, the Indian contingent had picked up 65 medals at the 16th edition of the Asian Games in Guangzhou, China, as a result of sustained training since the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi that year. At the 18th edition, the class of 2018 has delivered superb results with an unprecedented haul of 69 medals, including 15 gold, 24 silver and 30 bronze. The athletes' hard work, commitment and dedication, coupled with the focus and



India is delighted with the great performances [of all its athletes]. Congratulations for winning the medals

Ram Nath Kovind
President of India

”



The 2018 Games have been the best for India in the history of the Asian Games. Every athlete who took part in the Games is India's pride

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

”



Left to right: Neeraj Chopra won a gold medal in javelin throw at the 2018 Asian Games; Fouaad Mirza, during the Equestrian event at the Games

intensity of the support system helped India deliver its best ever performance at the Asian Games, with a number of young athletes bringing laurels to the nation.

Bajrang Punia's gold medal in men's freestyle wrestling 65 kg on the opening day in Jakarta was a sea change from India's performance at the Asian Games two decades ago in Bangkok, Thailand, where the first medal came after nearly a week of waiting. A different, and extremely heartening, picture was presented in 2018. Punia's gold was accompanied by Ravi Kumar and Apurvi

Neeraj Chopra's javelin throw gold was another highlight of India's performance at Jakarta–Palembang 2018

Chandela's bronze in shooting (10 m air rifle mixed team).

Indeed, we can draw delight in the sheer range of sports in which India won gold medals at the 18th Asian Games. While athletics accounted for nearly half of them, the Tricolour was in the central mast in as many as seven sports, six of which are Olympic disciplines. Shooting and wrestling sent out two winners each while boxing, rowing, tennis and bridge helped India claim a gold each.

There is also joy in the eclectic array of Indian medalists. If heptathlon gold medalist Swapna Barman's father made a living pulling rickshaws, equestrian double-silver medalist Fouaad Mirza was born in a family whose love for horses goes back several generations. Pistol shooter Saurabh Chaudhary is only 16 years old while bridge aces Pranab Bardhan and Shibnath Sarkar are well past 50. There is also Vinesh Phogat and the illustrious wrestling legacy she



INDIA'S MEDALLISTS AT ASIAN GAMES 2018

GOLD MEDALLISTS (15):

Bajrang Punia

Wrestling (Men's freestyle 65kg)

Vinesh Phogat

Wrestling (Women's freestyle 50 kg)

Saurabh Chaudhary

Shooting (Men's 10 metre air pistol)

Rahi Sarnobat

Shooting (Women's 25 metre pistol)

Sawarn Singh, Dattu Baban

Bhokanal, Om Prakash,

Sukhmeet Singh

Rowing (Men's quadruple sculls)

Rohan Bopannam, Divij Sharan

Tennis (Men's doubles)

Tajinderpal Singh Toor

Athletics (Men's shot put)

Neeraj Chopra – Athletics

(Men's javelin throw)

Manjit Singh – Athletics (Men's

800 metres)

Arpinder Singh – Athletics

(Men's triple jump)

Swapna Barman – Athletics

(Women's heptathlon)

Jinson Johnson – Athletics

(Men's 1500 metres)

M. R. Poovamma, Saritaben

Gaikwad, Hima Das, Vismaya

Athletics (Women's 4 x 400 m relay)

Amit Panghal

Boxing (Men's Light Fly 49kg)

India men's bridge team

SILVER MEDALLISTS (24):

Deepak Kumar

Shooting (Men's 10 metre air rifle)

Lakshay Sheoran

Shooting (Men's trap)

Sanjeev Rajput

Shooting (Men's 50 metre rifle three positions)

Shardul Vihan

Shooting (Men's double trap)

India women's national kabaddi team

Fouaad Mirza

Equestrian (Individual eventing)

Fouaad Mirza, Rakesh Kumar,

Ashish Malik, Jitender Singh

Equestrian (Team eventing)

Hima Das

Athletics (Women's 400 metres)

Muhammed Anas

Athletics (Men's 400 metres)

Dutee Chand

Athletics (Women's 100 metres)

Dharun Ayyasamy

Athletics (Men's 400 metres hurdles)

Sudha Singh

Athletics (Women's 3000 metres steeplechase)

Neena Varakil

Athletics (Women's long jump)

Muskan Kirar, Madhumita

Kumari, Jyothi Surekha Vennam

Archery (Women's team compound)

Abhishek Verma, Rajat

Chauhan, Aman Saini

Archery (Men's team compound)

PV Sindhu

Badminton (Women's singles)

Jinson Johnson

Athletics (Men's 800 metres)

Pincky Balhara

Kurash (Women's 52 kg)

Rajiv Arokia, Muhammed Anas,

Hima Das, M. R. Poovamma

Athletics (Mixed 4 x 400 metres)

Dutee Chand

Athletics (Women's 200 metres)

Dharun Ayyasamy, Kunhu

Mohammed, Rajiv Arokia,

Muhammed Anas

Athletics (Men's 4 x 400 m relay)

Shweta Shervegar, Varsha

Gautham

Sailing (49er FX Women)

India women's hockey team

India women's squash team

BRONZE MEDALLISTS (30):

Ravi Kumar, Apurvi Chandela

Shooting (10 metre air rifle mixed team)

Abhishek Verma

Shooting (Men's 10 metre air pistol)

India men's national sepak

takraw team

Divya Kakran

Wrestling (Women's freestyle 68 kg)

Roshibina Naorem

Wushu (Women's sanda 60 kg)

Santhosh Kumar

Wushu (Men's sanda 56 kg)

Surya Bhanu Pratap Singh

Wushu (Men's sanda 60 kg)

Narender Grewal

Wushu (Men's sanda 65 kg)

Ankita Raina

Tennis (Women's singles)

India men's national kabaddi

team

Dushyant Chauhan

Rowing (Men's lightweight

single sculls)

Rohit Kumar, Bhagwan Singh

Rowing (Men's lightweight double sculls)

Heena Sidhu

Shooting (Women's 10 metre air pistol)

Prajnesh Gunneswaran

Tennis (Men's singles)

Dipika Pallikal

Squash (Women's singles)

Joshna Chinappa

Squash (Women's singles)

Saurav Ghosal

Squash (Men's singles)

India men's Bridge Team

India mixed team Bridge

Saina Nehwal

Badminton (Women's singles)

India men's team table tennis

Malaprabha Jadhav

Kurash (Women's 52 kg)

Achanta Sharath Kamal, Manika

Batra

Table tennis (Mixed doubles)

PU Chitra

Athletics (Women's 1500 metres)

Seema Punia

Athletics (Women's Discus Throw)

Harshita Tomar

Sailing (Open Laser 4.7)

Varun Thakkar, Ganapathy

Chengappa

Sailing (49er Men)

India men's squash team squash

Vikas Krishan Yadav

Boxing (Men's Middleweight (75kg))

India men's hockey team



Congratulate Indian team for winning 5th consecutive gold medal in women's 4x400 m relay event at Jakarta Asian Games 2018

M Venkaiah Naidu
Vice President of India



Proud of our athletes, sportspersons, coaches and supporting crew. Their will to fight and win reflects the attitude of millions of young Indians

Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore
Union Minister of Sports,
Government of India

”

carried forward with her gold medal in women's freestyle 50 kg.

Gold medals aside, some silver medals are huge milestones in themselves. Equestrian star Fouaad Mirza's success in three-day eventing is likely to give the sport a massive fillip in India now. Though he missed a chance to claim the gold, his silver is the first medal to have been won in the discipline by an Indian since 1982. Along with teammates Rakesh Kumar, Ashish Malik and Jitender Singh, he is a fine ambassador for his sport. Neeraj Chopra's javelin throw gold was another highlight of India's performance at Jakarta-Palembang 2018. A few displays in the shooting range, notably by Manu Bhaker in the qualification round, boded well for future events. After winning the 49 kg men's boxing semifinal against Filipino Carlo Paalam, Amit Panghal was on top of his game during the final against Olympic champion

Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat celebrates her gold medal in women's freestyle 50 kg





Clockwise from top: Pranab Bardhan and Shibnath Sarkar after winning the gold in the men's bridge final; Heptathlon gold medal-winner Swapna Barman celebrates her victory; 16-year-old Saurabh Chaudhary takes aim during the men's 10 m air pistol shooting final at the Games

Shooting and wrestling sent out two winners each while boxing, rowing, tennis and bridge helped India claim a gold each

Hasanboy Dusmatov from Uzbekistan. The win has infused a great deal of confidence in the young pugilist, who will now take on the mantle of being an Olympic prospect alongside the likes of Shiva Thapa, Gaurav Solanki and Gaurav Bidhuri.

There were also some athletes who may not have won medals, but still managed to make a mark and inspire millions with their passion. Swimmers Virdhawal Khade and Srihari

Nataraj did not make it to the podium but broke national records and crossed individual milestones along their continuing journey to sporting success.

The delight and amazement brought about by the performances of India's champions at the 2018 Asian Games will resonate with the young and old around the country for many years to come. With many more milestones ahead and many more victories to be cherished, our sportspersons are charging forth with passion and the government is doing its best to support them in doing India proud on the global sporting arena.



TAKING BOLLYWOOD TO LATIN AMERICA

From a star-struck teenager in Bihar to the leading man of a Spanish blockbuster film in Costa Rica, Prabhakar Sharan's journey is an inspiring tale of determination, perseverance and victory

BY SHILLPI A SINGH

Prabhakar Sharan had stars in his eyes, and he hung the moon to make his dream come true in a faraway land, away from his home. He now holds the distinction of being the first Indian actor to make it big in the Latin American film industry, with a lead role. The small-town boy, hailing from a learned family

in Bihar, spent much of his early years in the bylanes of Saran, then moved to the state capital, Patna and finally to Hazaribagh (now in Jharkhand) to pursue his education. The next step was to seek a living, and his journey took him to Rohtak in Haryana. For a boy fascinated by all things cinema, however, this job was meant only to take care of his basic needs while

he attempted to make a place for himself in the Hindi film industry. “I grew up on a liberal dose of movies, watching works of all hues and genres. They were equal parts information, entertainment and inspiration for me,” he says. He went to Mumbai to try his luck, armed with nothing but his passion for acting. Things didn’t work out, and he had to return to Haryana. Not too long after, a chance meeting with businessman Pawan Morarka, who was then working as Honorary Consul for Costa Rica, changed the course of his life. “It was almost like a movie,” Sharan recalls, “I was playing my part, supported by many others including Rakesh Rathi who introduced me to Pawanji in my pursuit of happiness that was cinema.”

At that time, there was no Indian embassy in the beautiful country, and Sharan’s desire to shift base to San Jose in Costa Rica bewildered Morarka. The actor reveals, “He told me that living in a foreign country would be fraught with more challenges than I could imagine. I

knew what he meant, but by being forewarned I was also forearmed. I knew communication would be a major issue, but it’s like they say: where there’s a will, there’s a way. I told him that I would make India and Indians known in this part of the world one day.”

Once there, he enrolled himself in a course at the Panamerican University in 2000, and did odd jobs in between classes during the day to fend for himself, spending the nights working on realising his reel dream. “I was a lumberjack. Most of my spare time during college was spent slogging in the forest,” he shares. He spent a lot of the money he earned on buying Hindi film video CDs, and eventually joined hands with an acclaimed Latin American film critic, William

Sharan organised the first screening of a subtitled Hindi film in San Jose in 2005



Left to right: The official poster of *Enredados La Confusion*; Sharan receives the Best Director award at the New Delhi Film Festival; The actor with his trophy at JIFF



Clockwise from above: A still from *Enredados La Confusion*; A scene from a song sequence in the film; Sharan at a promotional event for the film



Venegas, to give them subtitles in Spanish. “Later, I started working with the cultural department of Costa Rica and the Indian embassies in the region,” he recalls. Organising the first screening of a subtitled Hindi film in San Jose in 2005, he has since then been at the helm of many cultural activities and Hindi film premieres throughout Central America, spreading awareness about Indian cinema and culture in the region. Today, he is also a distributor of Hindi films in Costa Rica.

All this while, he continuously attended acting classes to hone his talent and his dream

finally came true in 2017 with *Enredados la Confusion*, a Bollywood-style Latin American film that went on to become a blockbuster. Besides acting in it, Sharan also directed the film. “This was my way of bringing Bollywood closer to Latin America. I owe a lot to filmmaker Ashish R Mohan, without whose inputs I could not have realised this dream,” the actor says.

The film has also won him his first-ever Best Actor award at the Jharkhand International Film Festival (JIFF) held in Ranchi earlier this year, and the Best Director award at the New Delhi Film Festival. It has had an unbeaten run in the film festival circuit in general, with screenings at the Jaipur International Film Festival and the Dehradun International Film Festival too. As the first Spanish film of its kind, it has been making waves internationally. “Each of these awards has meant a lot to me. The best part was

A chance meeting with businessman Pawan Morarka changed Sharan’s life



Left to right: Sharan shooting for a fight sequence in *Enredados La Confusion*; The crew for the film comprised a mix of Latin American and Indian members

Sharan has been at the helm of many cultural activities and Hindi film premieres in Central America

receiving the JIFF honour from none other than the Consulate General of Costa Rica, Eduardo Salgado,” he recalls with pride. Today, as a leading actor, filmmaker and entrepreneur, he is a name to reckon with in Costa Rica and is doing his country proud.

The young man is yet to rest on his laurels. “I still have a long journey ahead, and many more exciting projects are keeping me busy,” he shares, adding, “Thanks to *Enredados La Confusion*, a huge new market has opened up with lots of opportunities for Indian producers. Many co-production deals have been signed recently to follow the same Bollywood recipe that worked so wonderfully with my film. All the Indian embassies supported the movie throughout Central America – Panama, Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Peru – and it was a truly humbling and overwhelming

experience.” The Indian ambassadors of each of these countries rallied around the film and participated enthusiastically in its premiere, leaving no stone unturned in making it a successful cultural venture. Sharan is now getting ready to release the movie in Hindi and other regional Indian languages this year.

The other projects keeping him on his toes include a film on human trafficking titled *Borders Without Life*. “The film is being supported by five countries – Colombia, Guatemala, Panama, Mexico and the US – and the ambassadors from India to each of them,” he reveals.

Besides films, the actor also has other interests, sports being prominent among them. He has been appointed a treasurer of the World Kabaddi Council in San Jose to develop the sport in Latin America. “The idea is to take *kabaddi* to the Olympics one day,” he affirms. As the brand ambassador of the Indo-Latin American Chamber of Commerce, he is also responsible for developing Latin American tie-ups with India in the spheres of culture, sports, movies and more.



FAIR PLAY

One of the largest animal fairs in the world, the annual Pushkar Mela is a bubbling cauldron of culture, colours and entertainment in the heart of Rajasthan





Camel traders arrive in Pushkar a week before the official fair, to begin conducting their business





Above: A man poses with his beautifully decked-up camel at the fair. Every year, the five-day Pushkar Mela also includes competitions for the best decorated camels.

Left: A camel trader with her camels at the fair. Pushkar Mela draws hundreds of camel and livestock traders from across the region.



Clockwise from left: A trader blows gently into the flames of a makeshift stove at the Pushkar Mela. Camel traders arrive a week before the official fair to begin conducting their business; A Rajasthani woman attending the fair, her face covered with a traditional veil; A Rajasthani man wearing a colourful traditional turban smiling at the fair.





Above and right: A highlight of the Pushkar Mela are the many cultural performances, which together embody a dazzling display of Rajasthan's folk music and dance traditions. The buzzing fair also includes a series of entertaining competitive activities for the people, such as a turban tying contest.

The Pushkar Mela features an array of entertaining competitive events, including a contest to determine the longest moustache!



SNAPSHOT





Clockwise from above: Pushkar is one of the oldest cities in India, and is considered to be among the most holy. It is home to the only temple dedicated to Lord Brahma in the world. Legends hold that the Pushkar Lake was created by the Hindu god, who is believed to be the creator of the Universe; A food stall at the fair, selling a vegetarian Rajasthani snack made using chickpeas and potatoes; A woman selling handmade utensils at the fair.





THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

Dense green forests, cascading waterfalls, living root bridges and rich tribal heritage make the state of Meghalaya in Northeast India a fascinating experience for every traveller

BY ANIL MULCHANDANI

Among the wettest regions on Earth, Meghalaya's lush forests, pine-clad hills and magnificent waterfalls make it a spectacular destination for a peaceful holiday away from the hustle and bustle of city life. This is the land of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribes, with distinct cultural identities and lifestyles, indigenous belief systems and a deep, enduring love and reverence for nature. Historians say that when the erstwhile tribal kingdoms were annexed by the British, the Khasi capital of Shillong was made the new capital of Assam as well as the headquarters of the entire northeastern region in 1874. The temperate climate, on account of its location at an altitude of approximately 1,500 m above sea level, made it the preferred city in the Northeast for British officials. It is said that the rolling hills and the profusion of lakes reminded them of Scotland. Even today, Shillong is home to Raj-era relics such as

A view of the
Nohkalikai Falls

Tudor style buildings, colonial cottages, a polo ground, a golf course and several exquisite churches. In 1904, the city was divided into a set of wards, and the European Ward was set near Ward's Lake, which is today Shillong's recreational heart – it boasts well laid-out gardens, a gorgeous lakeside promenade, ornamental bridges and boating facilities. A short distance away, Lady Hydari Park has a mini-zoo where you can admire indigenous fauna and visit the forest museum to learn about local pines.

Not too far from this garden are a number of colonial structures, including government buildings and hotels. The Tripura Castle is another must-visit: it is believed to have been built in the 1920s by Maharaja Bir Bikram, who came to Meghalaya for military training when he was 16 years old and fell in love with Shillong. The structure is not a castle in a literal sense, but does exude the grandeur

For a taste of the city's local life, explore Bara Bazar, where you will find members of the local communities selling fresh produce

of royalty with its tiered gardens, opulent interiors and marvellous collection of orchids. More colonial residential structures abound in areas like Oakland Road and Lumsophoh. Ornate churches such as the All Saints' Cathedral and the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians are also worth a visit. If you'd like a glimpse into the region's natural history, head to the Wankhar Memorial Museum of Entomology near Police Bazar, which has an enormous collection of butterfly and moth specimens dating back to the 1930s. To gain more insight into the region's archaeological,

Left to right:
Vendors selling flowers in Bara Bazar; A local fish market in Shillong; A living root bridge near Cherrapunji





SEE MORE



Cave Chronicles

Meghalaya's caves offer a fascinating experience for spelunking enthusiasts



Monkey Business

Selbagre Hoolock Gibbon Reserve is home to India's only ape species.



Floral Fantasy

The state boasts an array of rare flower species, including the wild citrus and pygmy lily



Clean Sweep

Mawlynnong in Meghalaya holds the title of being the cleanest village in Asia

A NEW ERA

The last 4,200 years in the Earth's history have now been classified as the Meghalayan Age

What It Means

The Earth's 4.6-billion-year history is divided up by geologists into slices of time, each slice corresponding to a significant occurrence – a dramatic climate shift, the emergence of a particular type of animal, or any event that lies at the heart of a major geological upheaval. At the moment, we are living in what is known as the Holocene Epoch, an era that began with the culmination of the last ice age and reflects the occurrences of the past 11,700 years.

The Holocene Epoch is further divided into three parts: the Greenlandian Age, the Northgrippian Age and the Meghalayan Age. The latter is the youngest and covers the last 4,200 years of the Earth's existence. It is said to have begun with a massive drought, that levelled several civilisations over two centuries.

Why Meghalayan

A stalagmite rock discovered in one of the caves in Meghalaya revealed chemical signatures that provided evidence for this classification in the planet's geological history.

cultural and artistic heritage, spend an afternoon at the Meghalaya State Museum or the Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures.

For a taste of the city's local life, explore Bara Bazar, where you will find members of the local communities selling fresh produce, spices and utensils. A weekly market known locally as *ieduh* is especially interesting: Khasi women dressed in their traditional tunics, called *jainsem*, greet you with warmth at stalls selling orange honey, pineapples, dried fish, black mushrooms, betel nuts, handwoven shawls, baskets and more.

One of Meghalaya's greatest highlights, aside from its exquisite caves, are its waterfalls. Elephant Falls, located on the outskirts of Shillong, is a top draw for tourists: a mountain stream descending playfully through two successive falls makes for a stunning sight. Also on the outskirts of Shillong is Spread Eagle Falls, a cascade that resembles an eagle with its wings spread out. Many more breathtaking waterfalls await as

Girls dressed in traditional costumes at an event in Shillong





Left: Local residents go about their day against the stunning backdrop of the Khasi hills in Meghalaya

Below: The cathedral of Mary Help of Christians in Shillong



you move farther away from the capital. A two-hour drive will take you to Cherrapunji, the erstwhile wettest place on earth before Mawsynram, also in Meghalaya, took the title. On your way, stop by at Shillong Peak for a stunning panoramic view of the city on a clear day. The road to Cherrapunji will take you along hills shrouded in clouds before you reach the quaint hill town. An absolute must-see here are the living root bridges, locally termed *jing kieng jri* – two trees have been planted on either side of a stream and the roots of both have been manually guided, over generations, to form pathways or bridges. Some of these are double-tiered structures that look straight out of an old fairytale. If you decide to drive to Mawsynram from here, more waterfalls await you, one of the most beautiful among them being the Nohkalikai Falls. Meghalaya's legendary caves are nearby too, featuring fascinating stalagmite and stalactite formations. As you finally bid adieu to this beautiful Northeastern state, make a note of its natural splendour and cultural richness and ask yourself: who wouldn't want to come here again!



Shruti Chaturlal Sharma (top right), the co-creator of Euphonic Yoga, and her team perform Euphonic Yoga postures

HEALING THROUGH MOVEMENT

Discover the art of Euphonic Yoga, a dance form that draws upon India's classical dance, music and yoga heritage to create a new means to holistic well-being

BY SHRUTI CHATURLAL SHARMA AND SUMAN KANAWAT SINGH

People with knowledge of dance and music know well that controlled and stable breathing complements graceful movement for practitioners of any Indian classical dance form, and soulful harmony for those engaged with Indian classical music. Euphonic Yoga, an amalgamation of Indian classical dance and yoga, connects the art form of yoga to the seven musical notes (*swara*) of Indian classical music while incorporating dance to narrate the essence, mood and characteristics of our seven *chakras*: believed to be the seven centres of the life force (*prana*) that moves within us. Euphonic Yoga may not be a classical dance form, but it draws upon India's classical dance heritage to provide a new avenue for fitness and aesthetic expression. It has several benefits for the human body and mind alike.

The creation of the *ragas* in Indian classical music is believed by some to have been premised on the deep knowledge of harmonious

consonance between the seven *swaras* and *chakras*. This is why classical compositions have been found to have a significant positive effect on our minds and bodies, also having the potential to awaken the otherwise dormant energies within us.

This journey of the seven musical notes (*sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni*) with yoga and dance lies at the heart of Euphonic Yoga. For instance, Raga Malhar is believed to pacify anger, excessive excitement and even mental instability. Raga Hindol is said to help sharpen the memory and enhance concentration. Similarly, Indian classical dance forms honour the human body as a sacred temple: the playhouse of the spirit.

Euphonic Yoga incorporates the aesthetic

Euphonic Yoga incorporates two of the eight classical dance forms of India: Kathak and Odissi



A Euphonic
Yoga workshop
in progress in
Sri Lanka

vocabulary of two of the eight classical dance forms of India: Kathak and Odissi. Every movement, every *mudra* and every posture also has a spiritual significance. Many of the *mudras* (hand gestures) used in these dance forms coincide with *mudras* used in yoga. Yoga states that the fingers of our hands represent the *pancha mahabhutas*, or the five elements: earth, air, fire, wind and water. Bringing one finger in contact with another, in different

Practising Euphonic Yoga regularly can help enhance your efficiency at work and reduce stress levels

combinations, is believed to complete circuits within our body through which energy is said to flow freely. This flow of energy allows the body to gain better blood-circulation, bringing about long-term health benefits. Different *mudras* are also used to communicate specific ideas, events, actions and beings. Each *mudra* is not just a representation, however - it has a very specific impact on our body. For example, *trishula hasta* in Odissi is a *mudra* depicting the *trishula* (trident) that matches with the *varun mudra* in yoga, believed to balance the water content in the body and prevent pain due to the inflammation or shrinkage of muscles. Apart from *mudras*, other elements within a dance form are significant too. For instance,



Right: Shruti Chaturlal Sharma interacts with inmates of Tihar Jail during a Euphonic Yoga workshop

Left: Children performing a Euphonic Yoga routine on stage



the *chakras* (spins) in Kathak complement the power and stability of the *muladhar chakra*, one of the energy centres in our legs. The stronger the *muladhar chakra*, the more powerful the *chakkar*, and vice versa. The practice of *chakras* with the stomping of your feet increases blood circulation and generates heat in the legs. It strengthens your core and also helps enhance concentration.

Since its launch in 2016, Euphonic Yoga has generated a lot of interest in India as well as beyond her borders. Workshops imparting the dance form are known for their innovative teaching techniques, and for honouring the essence of yoga, music and dance, which

together make up its foundation. Practising Euphonic Yoga regularly can help enhance your efficiency at work, reduce stress levels, heighten alertness, help you inculcate patience and positivity, improve your decision-making capability, enable you to multi-task, stimulate memory, control diabetes, arthritis, spondylitis, obesity and laziness, and also protect you from several major diseases. Each of the asanas incorporated into Euphonic Yoga have been reinterpreted in a way that helps us improve our listening skills and voice modulation, broaden our emotional range, stimulate innovative thinking and more.

Yoga, dance and music are founded on rhythm, and there is rhythm inside each of us, in the beating of our hearts and in the flow of oxygen through our lungs. Letting their rhythm complement the rhythm within us through Euphonic Yoga is an organic process that can bring joy and healing to our bodies and minds.

Each *mudra* is not just a representation - it has a very specific impact on our body

BETWEEN THE LINES

The drawing of *kolams* in Tamil Nadu is not simply an aesthetic tradition, but also an important symbol of the state's cultural heritage

BY SUPRIYA AGGARWAL

From a distance, a *kolam*, drawn by hand outside the entrance of most households in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, might look like a simple, traditional design. Look a little more carefully, however, and artistic complexities begin to emerge. Beyond the design, *kolams* are intrinsic to the region's culture: making a *kolam* is a daily ritual carried out by women in many households across the state. The threshold of a home is believed to hold immense significance as the meeting point between the internal and the external, and a *kolam* drawn immediately beyond it is a symbol of this meeting. My first tryst with this aspect of Tamil Nadu's cultural identity occurred during a visit to Swamimalai, a quaint town in the Thanjavur district of the state, and I was instantly intrigued by the various patterns as well as the ease with which the women drew them using powdered rice.

Traditionally created before dawn or

dusk, *kolams* are a symbol of well-being and also serve as a welcome sign. Synthetic colours are rarely, if ever, added to the rice. The latter is meant to double as food for insects, and the idea is to let it stay edible and safe for their consumption. Another popular belief is that a *kolam* can banish evil: the story goes that Mudevi, the Hindu goddess of misfortune, is a bringer of illness, poverty, sloth, sleep and bad luck, and that a *kolam* outside a house can keep her at bay. The absence of a *kolam* outside a Hindu household is sometimes indicative of the occurrence of a misfortune. In this sense, a *kolam* serves as a kind of visual mapping of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness within a community.

Before a *kolam* is begun, the area where it is to be drawn is thoroughly washed. Drawing begins while the surface is still damp, so that the lines hold their shape better. Every *kolam* design begins with a grid of dots, using which the pattern is

A street in Mylapore, Chennai is decorated with *kolams* by local residents during a festival



elaborated. Essentially, a *kolam* is a geometrical line drawing comprising curved loops. It is believed that the lines and curves must be completed in a *kolam*, preventing evil spirits from entering the space contained within the outline. Symbolically, these lines and curves also prevent evil spirits from entering the house.

As beautiful as they are, decoration is far from being a *kolam*'s primary purpose. Besides insects, the coarse rice powder used also invites other small creatures and birds to

eat it. This is considered a way of welcoming other beings into one's home and letting them become a part of one's everyday life. The drawing of a *kolam*, in this context, becomes a daily tribute to harmonious co-existence in nature as well as to ecological balance.

In terms of patterns, the design of a *kolam* can include an array of motifs and abstract symbols. Motifs such as birds, fish and other animal images are said to signify the unity between man and animals. The sun, the moon and other zodiac symbols are also used at times. In general, a downward-pointing triangle represents a woman while an upward-pointing triangle represents a man; a circle represents nature while a square represents culture; a lotus represents a womb and a pentagram represents the five elements. All of

Over the years, *kolams* have become a crucial part of South India's contemporary art scene



Clockwise from top left: Traditionally, the design of a *kolam* begins with a grid of dots; Women in a Chennai locality draw *kolams* on the street; The drawing of *kolams* is a daily ritual carried out by the women in Tamil households



Above: A group of women draws a colourful *kolam* at the Sangamam Festival in the township of Auroville



Right: Residents of Kuilapalayam draw *kolams* outside their homes during the festival of Pongal

The drawing of a *kolam* is a daily tribute to harmonious co-existence in nature

these are drawn with swift, expert movements of the hand – indeed, watching a *kolam* being made is one of the most fascinating experiences you can have in Tamil Nadu. Tiny little dots can transform within minutes into an ornate, spectacular pattern. It is no wonder, therefore, that a *kolam* is also a matter of pride for a household.

There are numerous interpretations of the ritual, and the symbolic and cultural significance of *kolams* has been the subject of much discussion among historians and sociologists for years. Lakshmi, a resident of Swamimalai, tells me, “We draw a *kolam* to

honour, invite, welcome, host and express our gratitude towards particular gods and goddesses, including Bhudevi (representing the Earth), Lakshmi (the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity), Surya (the sun god, representing good health and wisdom) and Ganesha (the elephant-headed god, known as the remover of obstacles).” The *kolam* also acts as a visual device to remember and ask for forgiveness for stepping on, walking and burdening the Earth.

Over the years, *kolams* have become a crucial part of South India’s contemporary art scene too, with many artists drawing upon their patterns and motifs for various art and craft forms. From ancient tradition to modern aesthetic, *kolams* remain as relevant today as they were hundreds of years ago, and are a cherished part of Tamil Nadu’s cultural and artistic heritage.

WEAVING A NEW REALITY

Hindi cinema is coming of age again, with a bevy of films that narrates the social realities of modern India with nuanced stories of realistic characters

BY AARTI KAPUR SINGH

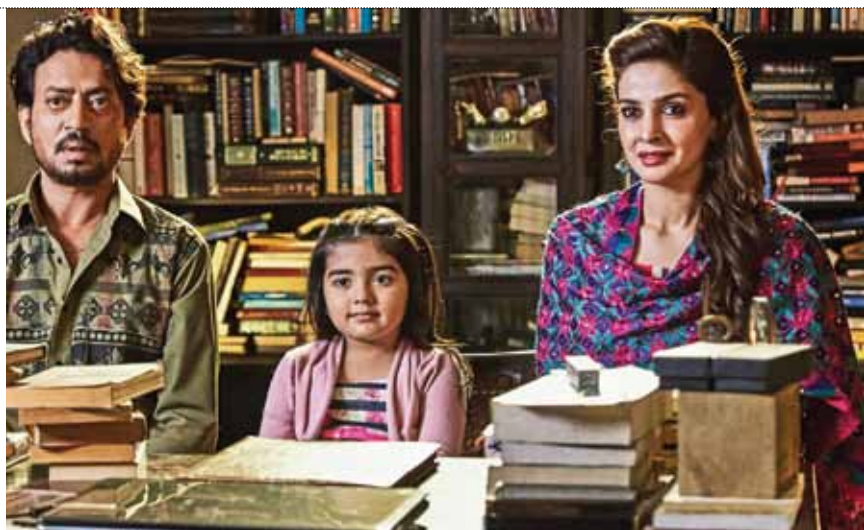
Over the past few years, Indian films have been looking to capture aspects of social reality that have been rarely touched upon, or explore talked-about issues with nuanced storytelling that veers far away from didacticism. This is even more noteworthy because no longer are only independent, 'art' films considered the audience's sole source of relevant food for thought, as big banners such as Yash Raj Films and Dharma Productions also dabble in more realistic, edgy fare.

Yash Raj Films has made films reflective of social realities in the past as well: *Daag*, *Kaala Patthar* and *Mashaal* count among some of its finest productions during the

1970s and '80s. The 90s in Bollywood marked a parallel transformation: the onset of the multiplex-viewing experience. Scriptwriters no longer had to fill 1,000-seater halls that compelled them to put a bit of everything — action, comedy, thrill — in the same film. Even with fewer numbers watching, the producers were now getting higher returns. The scripts responded to this change. Filmmakers began to delve into the lives of more affluent Indians, and international destinations began to appear on screen. Many films made at this time catered to the aspirations of the Indian neo-middle class, offering them respite from daily realities. This was, in some ways, globalisation on the celluloid.







Clockwise from above: Stills from *Hindi Medium*; *Sui Dhaaga - Made in India*; *Pink*

Today, the narrative is changing again. A new crop of filmmakers is bringing realism to Hindi cinema with a difference. *Sui Dhaaga*, the latest offering from the Yash Raj stable, examines the ethos of self-sufficiency and celebrates the spirit of 'Make In India', but without resorting to preachy monologues or a documentary-like depiction of reality. It remains a quintessential Bollywood film - there are songs, there is drama, there is romance, there is comedy. But there is more. The sunshine spirit of the film never overshadows the message at its heart, and it is a message that is as much about India as it is about the protagonists, Mauji and Mamta.

Several Hindi films are now also taking a more nuanced look at women's empowerment

The story traces the journey of a family of humble means towards establishing their own indigenous fashion label, Sui Dhaaga, armed with a sewing machine, dreams in their eyes and magic in their hands. In general, India's people are driving cinematic narratives like never before. Self-employment, such as in *Sui Dhaaga*, fraught with financial challenges and unforeseen obstacles that are sometimes simply the way of the world, is an aspiration a lot of Indians can identify with at this point in time. The film, as a heartwarming story of pride, perseverance and victory, offers an essentially optimistic worldview. India is standing tall on its own feet, and its people have the skills and potential to keep it rising higher. Taking the message of 'Make in India' forward, the film also brings traditional Indian craftsmanship into the spotlight, highlighting the skills and livelihoods of weavers and how much they mean to India's aesthetic identity.



A new crop of filmmakers is bringing realism to Hindi cinema with a difference

Writer-director Sharat Katariya goes for a beloved trope where the triumph of spirit and contests go hand in hand - very similar to his 2015 directorial, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, which focussed on a family sitting on the threshold between tradition and modernity. On a more serious note, Neeraj Ghaywan's *Masaan*, too, dwells on the tensions between modernity and traditionalism in India. In *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, audio cassettes being replaced by audio CDs became a metaphor for changing times. In *Sui Dhaaga*, a sewing machine is symbolic of the skills and tools using which India can establish, and is establishing, its artistic imprint on international platforms. With its feel-good fervour, the movie is an ode to the entrepreneurial spirit that is driving India's progress. It is also a realistic glimpse into the grassroots, affirming that

passion and determination can translate into empowerment.

Several films are now also taking a more nuanced look at women's empowerment. These comprise the more commercial projects like Amitabh Bachchan-starrer *Pink* as well as indie cinema like Radhika Apte-starrer *Parched*. The increased viewer interest in realistic themes is, perhaps, also due to greater social and political awareness among the younger generation in India. It is no surprise that there are several movies that dwell on specific government schemes too: *Hindi Medium* (2017) and *Hichki* (2018) revolve around the Right to Education Act while *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* connects to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Hindi cinema is coming of age again, and this time, the story in focus is the story of India, told through the lives of its people.

Clockwise from above: Stills from *Parched*; *Hichki*; *Masaan*





ART FOR HEART'S SAKE

One of South Asia's largest contemporary art events, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, to be held from December 12, 2018 to March 29, 2019, promises to bring together artists from across the world to create a platform of free expression while also doing its bit to support the residents of Kerala



Above: An artwork titled *Trapped, not defeated* by Insha Manzoor; **Top right:** *Descension* by artist Anish Kapoor



The fourth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) will see a congregation of iconic artists and works across the heritage venues in the city of Kochi along coastal Kerala. The exhibition, curated by eminent artist Anita Dube, will see works by around 90 artists from 31 countries, supported by a diverse range of public programming like film screenings, talks and performances. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is South Asia's largest contemporary art event.

Entitled 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life', this edition of the biennale explores the idea of listening to each other, using this as a means to come together, celebrate

a shared space and initiate dialogue. Dube, who has continuously pushed boundaries of political engagement throughout her career as an artist, has used the theme not only to choose participating artists, but also to inform the model of the biennale beyond the exhibition.

On her curatorial process, Dube notes that she soon "realised that the exhibition model was not sufficient — that something else was required. Perhaps the solution was a non-institutional public space for conversations, not only for programmed talks and lectures: where there would be no hierarchies of who could speak and what could be said and in which language, and where the freedoms of the Internet

could be used to listen to each other, whether it be a Malayalam film song or a Judith Butler lecture. This is why the biennale has been conceived in two parts: the exhibition and a discursive, performative, architectural space called the Pavilion, where, potentially, everyone can be a curator.”

This Pavilion, whose design was conceived by Delhi-based Anagram Architects, allows for anyone to publicly share their creative work, or works that they admire, opening up a space in the biennale that is actively shaped by participating visitors. The Pavilion space can also be used to expand the visitor’s knowledge about work displayed at the venues. For example, if a visitor is intrigued by the humorous, cutting billboards by canonical

American artist-activist group Guerrilla Girls, they can use the pavilion space to access more information on their history and practice, and share their findings with others.

As part of her research and curatorial process, Dube visited a total of 30 countries where she was hosted by a wide array of arts institutions and independent supporters of the biennale. The list of participating artists reflects the dynamic range of practices and conversations she shared along the way. For example, in contrast to the bold exclamations by Guerrilla Girls are the quiet, elegant paintings by Indian artist Nilima Sheikh titled *Salaam Chechi*, that pay homage to the Malayali nurses that work in hospitals all over the country and the world. Acclaimed artist William Kentridge of South Africa will present a full-room installation at the biennale, pondering on the passage of time in history through music and ritual. Kochi-based Vipin Dhanurdharan’s work, on the other hand, involves community-building through the regional food practices of migrant groups in his city and setting up an open community kitchen – a project

In addition to the main biennale exhibition and pavilion, Kochi will also host several parallel shows, including the Students’ Biennale



Left to right: Curator Anita Dube; A group of children visiting a gallery at an earlier edition of the biennale



An installation titled *Prime 2016* by Camille Norment at an earlier edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The sound installation included benches, on which members of the audience could sit and be a part of the artwork. Here we see four people engaging with the installation.

that develops slowly over the course of the biennale's 108 days.

In addition to the main biennale exhibition and pavilion, Kochi will also host several parallel shows, including the Students' Biennale and the Pepper House Residency Exhibition. The Students' Biennale is the largest of the Kochi Biennale Foundation's educational initiatives, running parallel to the biennale since 2014. Graduate and post-graduate students of fine arts from South Asia will display projects created around the theme "Making as Thinking", or centering art-production as a generative site of learning. The student projects will be curated by well-known academics, curators and art practitioners.

The Pepper House Residency, another programme organised by the foundation throughout the year, hosts international artists in Kochi, where they live and create a body

of work over two-month residencies. Vastly diverse in media and concept, their work is finished and re-installed in a parallel exhibition during the biennale.

The foundation hosts a therapeutic music show every Wednesday at a government hospital in downtown Ernakulam. Titled 'Art and Medicine', the series will cross its 250th performance this year. The artists at the 2018 edition have already begun onsite work.

The fourth Kochi-Muziris Biennale comes barely four months after the host state faced one of its worst natural calamities in a century. The organisers are going ahead with their schedule as it was, propagating a spirit of optimism in the face of all challenges. The foundation has even initiated a programme called ARK (Art Rises for Kerala) to bring together the regional and global art community in aiding those affected by the disaster.

THE GREAT INDIAN THALI

Based on the basic principles of nourishment and seasonality, the thalis of India pack a carefully-curated balance of nutrients and minerals within delicious spreads. We bring you six among them that you must try on your next visit to the country

BY MADHULIKA DASH

Arguably India's most loved culinary tradition, the thali, or platter of assorted dishes that together make a complete meal, is essentially the celebration of a region's cuisine and culture. Each thali is based on two basic principles, nourishment and seasonality, and the selection of dishes is never random: each item is rich in an essential nutrient. Here are six stellar spreads from different regions in India that are must-tries.

ASSAMESE THALI

If you ever wanted to explore Northeast India through its food, the Assamese thali is the perfect muse to begin your culinary journey from. Incorporating

influences from various tribes of the region, this thali is a balanced package of protection and nourishment for the body. The meal begins with a *khar* dish, so named because of its main ingredient, also called *khar*: an alkaline solution prepared using bananas. This is believed to be a conscious step towards preparing the gut for the rest of the meal, which incorporates elements of sourness to facilitate better digestion. An Assamese thali normally concludes with a *tenga* dish, the word '*tenga*' literally translating into 'sour'. This could be a fish curry, or a curry made using citrus fruits and vegetables. Other dishes served include *poitabhat* (fermented rice seasoned with mustard oil, onions and chillies), *pitika* (mashed vegetables, boiled or roasted) and pickle





A traditional Punjabi spread

(which contains probiotic elements). Low on spices and sodium, this thali is all about using local greens and naturally-occurring salty components.

PUNJABI THALI

Known best for its dal *makhani*, *sarso ka saag*, *bajre ki roti* and butter chicken, the beauty of the Punjabi thali lies in how it brings together the dishes best suited to the region's extreme climate: sweltering summers and cold winters. The Punjabi thali is believed to have been created around a community tradition called *sanjha chulha*, or community kitchen. A quintessential version would have a flatbread

— either made of wheat or *bajra* — dal, a bowl of greens, spinach (*sarson* during winter, *palak* during summer) and freshly chopped onion alongside a root vegetable such as radish or carrot. Made using ghee (clarified butter), this meal combines the goodness of carbohydrates in the flatbread with the power of protein in the dal, while delivering an array of nutrients and antioxidants with the vegetables. The fresh onion works as a palate cleanser while also being a good source of Vitamin C; the *lassi*, a typical summer drink made using milk and yoghurt, is often served with the thali during the hotter months of the year, its fermented characteristics aiding in digestion. In winter, the meal begins with *gur ka halwa*, a sweet preparation made using jaggery, that warms up the body from within. Meat is said to be integral to the Punjabi thali during the colder months of the year.

In winter, a Punjabi thali begins with *gur ka halwa*, a sweet preparation made using jaggery

One of the finest examples of sustainable consumption, the Rajasthani thali has several variants, believed to differ every 50 miles within the state! It can be broadly divided into two categories: the Mewari thali and the Marwari thali. While one is high on meat, the other is high on vegetables. Both will typically feature a *baati* or thick roti, dal, a vegetable preparation, a yoghurt-based gravy dish, pickle and an assortment of chutneys with the occasional addition of a meat dish. A highlight of this thali is that nearly all its components are slow-cooked and each delicacy has a distinct taste and texture. A popular dish that is a staple of nearly every Rajasthani thali is *ker sangri*, a preparation of dried black berries and twiggy beans made using mustard oil, whole red chillies and raw mango. With the texture of a pickle, this is believed to be good for digestion.



Right: A
Rajasthani thali



Left: *Dhoklas* are integral to a Gujarati thali

Below: Traditionally, *sadya* is served on a plantain leaf



GUJARATI THALI

If there is one thali that can boast the largest collection of dishes based on the clever use of yoghurt and gram flour, it is the Gujarati thali. Believed to have been conceptualised for a profession that involves long hours of sitting and working, a lot of the dishes in this thali work on two principles: nourishment and lightness. Take the famous *dhokla*, for instance. This steamed cake-like snack is simultaneously light and filling on account of its low glycemic index, and is also a good source of selenium, Omega 3 and magnesium. It is also a rich source of antioxidants, thanks to dishes such as *undhiyu* (a mixed vegetable preparation) and *kadhi*, chutneys and the fibre-rich *kachumber* (cubed onions and tomatoes). This thali also plays on the interaction of sweet and sour, the sweet being used to create an appetite and the sour helping digest the meal.

SADYA

A well-known celebratory spread served during the festival of Onam, this meal can incorporate as many as 28 dishes. Traditionally



A Bengali spread

served on a plantain leaf, a *sadya* spread includes par boiled red rice, side dishes, savouries, pickles and dessert. While the rice, rich in fibre and magnesium, is served first, the meal begins with *parippu*, a gram and ghee curry. This is followed by *sambar*, a stew-like preparation of mashed lentils and mixed vegetables. Other dishes include *avial* (a preparation of vegetables, coconut paste and green chillies), *thoran* (minced string beans, cabbage, radish and grated coconut) and *olan* (pumpkin and red grams cooked with coconut milk). For dessert, *payasam* (a pudding made using milk or sweet brown molasses) seals the deal. The meal doesn't end here, however. The final serving is of rice and *rasam* (a tamarind

juice-based liquid preparation) which aids in digestion by stimulating the metabolism.

BENGALI THALI

This thali is served in a series of courses, each course designed in pairs such that one dish aids in the digestion of the other. The meal begins with *shukto*, a mixed vegetable preparation. A great source of fibre, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, folate, magnesium, potassium, zinc and manganese, *shukto* not only delivers the daily requirement of minerals but also cleanses the palate. The next course is usually *luchi* (deep-fried flour flatbread) and dal or a meat preparation, followed by rice and *ghonto* (a curry made using seasonal vegetables and fish). The meal usually ends with sweet rice pudding called *paesh*. Other dishes can include a *bhaja* (stir fried vegetables), *mochar puff* (banana flower preparation) and a fish delicacy. Rich in Omega 3 and cod liver oil, a Bengali thali offers a truly balanced meal.

A well-known celebratory spread, Kerala's *sadya* can incorporate as many as 28 dishes

TUNNEL VISION

The Zojila tunnel project in Leh, Jammu and Kashmir, promises to transform lives in the region with Asia's longest strategic bi-directional tunnel

BY NB RAO



Image: sirfnews.com

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the under-construction Zojila tunnel in Leh

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the strategic Zojila tunnel in Leh, he marked the beginning of a process that will turn a revolutionary idea into a glorious reality. A unique and challenging project of epic proportions that promises to transform

thousands of lives in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Zojila tunnel project will, once complete, ensure all-weather connectivity between Leh, Kargil and Srinagar. It will also be Asia's longest bi-directional, single-tube tunnel.

The ambitious, INR 6,809-crore, 14.2-km-long structure being developed at Zojila pass, which is located at an altitude of 3,528 m, will drastically reduce travel time – driving from



Above: Zojila pass in Jammu and Kashmir is located at an altitude of 3,528 m above sea level; Below: The Srinagar-Leh highway was opened in April 2018 after being snowed in for six months. The Zojila tunnel, once built, will remain open throughout the year, ensuring sustained connectivity in the region.

Srinagar to Leh will take a mere 15 minutes once the tunnel is operational, an enormous decrease from the current travel time of three-and-a-half hours! It will also be a lifeline for people living in Kargil, located around 234 km to the east of Leh.

Most importantly, the tunnel will remain open throughout the year. At present, heavy snowfall results in the closure of roads in the region for six months in a year. Life in Kargil and Ladakh come to a standstill during winter months and essentials including food and medicines have to be airflown.

Besides the infrastructural and lifestyle benefits, the tunnel is also set to be of vital strategic importance for the Indian defence forces, enabling them to transport supplies through all 12 months of the year.

PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the tunnel at Zojila in May this year. “[The project] will be completed in five years, but I have asked the concerned ministry to look into ways [of reducing] the time [needed] for [the] completion of the project,” he said. “The tunnel will lead to all-round economic and socio-

cultural integration of these regions. It also has immense strategic importance,” he added.

Describing the proposed tunnel as “a modern day marvel,” the Indian Prime Minister shared that carbon dioxide would be removed from the tunnel through a tower, which will be seven times higher than the Qutab Minar in New Delhi!

Along with providing better connectivity in the region, this project will also bring with it enhanced employment opportunities for the





Image: indianinfrastructure.com, for representational purposes only

The Zojila tunnel will be Asia's longest bi-directional, single-tube tunnel

The Zojila tunnel is also set to be of vital strategic importance for the Indian defence forces

youth. According to Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, 90 per cent of the jobs generated in the construction of the tunnel will be for the local youth. PM Modi further affirmed, "Jammu and Kashmir will get development projects worth INR 25,000 crore and these will have a positive impact on the people."

The Zojila tunnel will also be a 'smart' one, with state-of-the-art safety features including a transverse ventilation system, uninterrupted power supply, tunnel emergency lighting, CCTV monitoring, variable message signs, traffic logging equipment, over height vehicle detection system and a tunnel radio system. It will also have pedestrian cross-passages

at every 250 m and motorable cross-passes and lay-bys after every 750 m. There will be emergency telephones and fire-fighting cabinets after every 125 m too.

This key project is being implemented by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways through the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation. India also has a few other similar projects under construction. The Rohtang tunnel, for instance, that is being built at a height of 3,000 m, will provide round-the-year connectivity to Lahaul valley in Himachal Pradesh. It will cut road distance by 46 km and save up to five hours of travel time between Manali and Keylong. Another important project in Jammu and Kashmir is the 6.5-km-long Z-Morh tunnel, which will ensure all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Kargil. With projects such as these, India is creating greater opportunities for employment as well as tourism in far-flung areas that were hitherto inaccessible for extended durations every year.



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