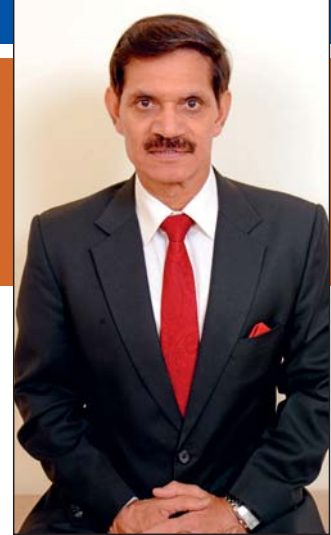


75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT75th Independence Day of India, August 15, 2021

Greetings from HC Dalbir Singh Suhag



Gen. Dalbir Singh Suhag (Retd.)
High Commissioner of India

On the historic occasion of the 75th Independence Day of India, I extend my greetings and best wishes to my fellow citizens, persons of Indian descent and to the friendly people and the Government of the Republic of Seychelles.

"At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom," former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had famously said on August 15, 1947, on the day India gained freedom from British rule.

India's independence was a momentous event in the history of the world that has had a huge impact on how the world has shaped up since. Never had a country the size of India achieved independence through peaceful means while maintaining a cordial relationship with its erstwhile colonisers. Never had a country as complex and diverse as India, with thousands of languages and dialects; hundreds of communities, castes, and

ethnicities; divided into hundreds of principalities come together to form one nation. No other country in the world with the size of population and the economic and literacy levels of India at the time of her independence had ever decided voluntarily to become a democracy with Universal Adult Franchise, ensuring equality of status to everyone. India's independence struggle and its democratic choices inspired several countries, especially in Asia and Africa in their struggle to form a nation based of democratic values. As Nelson Mandela himself said "We would not be talking victory today if the example set by the young Republic of India had not been followed by the rest of the world".

The unflinching democracy in India has shown to the world that humanity can be governed with freedom without compromising the values of pluralism and tolerance which are the core values of our society. With a population of more than 1.35 billion today, India is the largest democracy in the world. India has over 2500 registered political parties, 100,000 registered newspapers, 1000 TV channels, 1600 languages. It has a thriving media, an independent judiciary and strong set of constitutional bodies that are all elements of our democratic institutions.

Continued on page II



High Commission of India
Victoria, Seychelles

Join us live for the
FLAG HOISTING CEREMONY
75th Independence Day of India

on Sunday, the 15th August 2021

from 08:55 AM onwards
on our social media handles

75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Happy 75th Independence day of India

A happy Independence Day. Let us remember the golden heritage of INDIA and feel proud to be a part of India. Happy Independence Day. Let your heart bask in free spirit.

DEEPAM CINEMA

Greetings from HC Dalbir Singh Suhag

Continued from page I

Economically too, India has grown into a strong, robust, and remarkably resilient nation. It is the third largest economy in the world on purchasing power parity and is a proud member of the G20 group of large and powerful economies. Recent IMF World Economic Outlook report predicts that India is going to be the fastest growing major economy in the world for the near future. India has proven to the world that it is possible to achieve inclusive economic growth without sacrificing democracy and diversity.

India has grown from a country dependent of foreign food aid to among the largest exporters of agricultural products in the world. India is the largest producer of spices, pulses, milk, tea, cashew, and jute. She is one of the largest exporters of agricultural products and the total value of exported agricultural products stood at \$37.4 bn in 2019.

In the last 74 years, India has made many strides in the fields of science and technology and education. She has become a nuclear power and a space faring country reaching to the moon and Mars. India's capabilities in information technology and engineering services are well recognised globally. In the field of medicine, we are among the biggest producers of vaccines and generic medicines and have become an important destination for medical tourism and related services.

While like every country in the world, India too is a work in progress and has a great distance to travel, it is on occasions like these, that we can look back and celebrate our journey. Government of India has therefore launched the India@75 celebration – Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav – to celebrate the journey of India towards democracy, development, prosperity, and towards becoming a stable nation in the last 74 years. A series of cultural events and competitions will be held under the India@75 celebration up to August 15, 2023. These events will showcase the strong cultural and people to people ties between our two great nations.

The past year and a half have been difficult for the world with the Covid-19 pandemic ravaging the world, affecting normal life, and destroying global economies. India, too, has been impacted by the pandemic but the people of India have shown remarkable resilience in the face of the global threat. India has tried to convert the crisis into opportunity by striving to become self-reliant or 'Atmanirbhar' in various sectors. We have become one of the largest producers

of masks, PPE kits, ventilators, oxygen concentrators and have supplied medicines and vaccines to over 150 countries of the world.

Seychelles, too, was recipient of two tranches of medicines as gift from India early in the pandemic and 50,000 doses of Covishield vaccines manufactured in India by the world largest vaccine manufacturer, Serum Institute of India, were donated by the Government of India to Seychelles in January 2021. This has helped place Seychelles among the most vaccinated countries of the world. This is a testimony to the importance that India places on its relationship with the Republic of Seychelles and the wellbeing of the people of Seychelles.

Our two countries share a strong bilateral friendship as close maritime neighbours. India was the first country in the world to welcome and invite Seychelles to take its rightful place in the comity of nations, when it gained independence after centuries of colonial domination, with a large contingent of official delegation, a cultural troupe, and a flotilla of three Indian Naval ships to partake in the celebrations on June 29, 1976. Since then, India and Seychelles have shared a strong bond of friendship based on our close neighbourly ties that has become stronger over time.

Recent years have been particularly transformative in India-Seychelles relationship and have witnessed many dynamic developments in our strong, friendly, and time-tested relations. Today, both the countries are working closely at the bilateral, regional, and international forums on a variety of issues such as piracy, international terrorism, illegal and unauthorised fishing, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other white collar maritime crimes such as tax evasion which are posing constant challenges to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.

India has stood steadfast with Seychelles as a close friend and a reliable all-weather partner, be it assisting in securing its maritime borders or realising its developmental aspirations for the growth and prosperity of the Seychellois people.

Recently, Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi and H.E. President of the Republic of Seychelles Mr Wavel Ramkalwan participated in a virtual event where they jointly inaugurated the new Magistrates' Court building in Seychelles. The building is the first Indian assisted infrastructure project in Seychelles and has been completed with grant assistance of USD 3.5 million from the Government of India. Ten (10) In-

dian High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) done by India on grant in Seychelles were also e-inaugurated by the two dignitaries.

India also handed over a 48.9m Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) to Seychelles during the virtual event. The modern and state of the art vessel will significantly boost the capability of the Seychelles Coast Guard in effectively patrolling and protecting its vast marine estate and help in combating threats such as maritime piracy, drug and arms smuggling and illegal fishing in Seychelles' waters. The supply of the vessel is in line with time-tested and deep cooperation between India and Seychelles in the field of maritime security and India's role as a trusted and preferred security partner of Seychelles.

India and Seychelles are also at the forefront of the global efforts against climate change and global warming. Seychelles was the founding member of India led International Solar Alliance and the first to ratify the framework resolution. During the recent event, Prime Minister and the President of Seychelles also jointly e-inaugurated a 1MW ground mounted Solar Power Plant built with Indian grant assistance on Romainville Island.

The cooperation and the projects are in line with India's Security and Growth for All in Region (SAGAR) vision of Indian Ocean. We want to nurture our bilateral relationship based on mutual respect, due regard to sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, transparency, and sustainability. India is committed to assist Seychelles in all its security and developmental needs.

The people of India and Seychelles share between them strong cultural, emotional, and family relationships that go back centuries. Indians were among one of the earliest settlers who made the islands of Seychelles their home 248 years ago. The Indian Diaspora now forms an integral component of the Seychellois society and has made noteworthy contributions to the socio-economic development and cultural enrichment of Seychelles.

I am confident that the Indian Diaspora in Seychelles will continue to play a constructive role in forming important bridges of understanding between our two countries. I am also confident that our bilateral relations will continue to further strengthen as time goes by and both India and Seychelles will emerge stronger from the pandemic.

Long live India-Seychelles relationship! Thank you!

THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT ON Indian technology start-ups

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

We unobstacle.

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

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

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75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

The sun shines bright on Indian technology start-ups

Continued from page II

This shows that the Indian start-up ecosystem is not just innovative but also robust. The ability to scale up and demonstrate viable business models has set Indian start-ups apart. The 44 technology unicorns have been valued at more than USD 106 billion. To put this in perspective, the market capitalisation of the National Stock Exchange is USD 2.7 trillion. The top 44 technology firms are already valued worth four per cent of the old economy, some of them being global leaders in their own right.

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

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

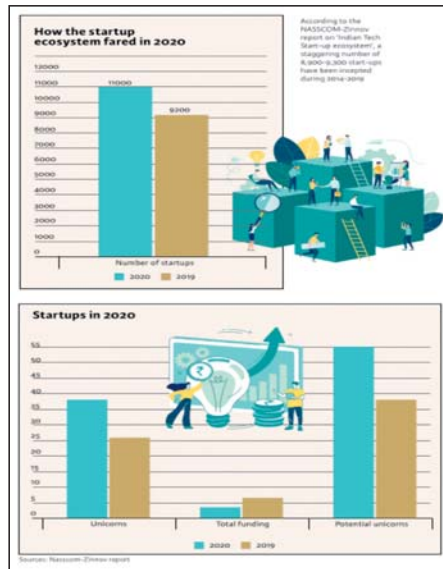
The access to capital for Indian start-ups is also rapidly improving. With the world awash with liquidity owing to loose monetary policies of global central banks, India has attracted large investments. This is reflected year after year in the burgeoning Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) figures, where India is one of the hottest destinations.

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

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

This two-day summit was attended by several participants from BIMSTEC countries. BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an economic platform that India has been actively participating in. This event attracted investors, scholars, policy makers and start-up professionals from various member nations in a first-of-its-kind exchange of ideas.

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



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

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

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

In the recent past, the technology start-ups have also diversified. While the initial wave of unicorns came from FinTech (finance and technology) and consumer apps in food and mobility aggregation businesses, the recent success stories go much beyond. Technology innovators are now making a dent in varied areas like commercial logistics, merchant automation, construction management and healthcare.

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

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



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



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

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15TH AUGUST 2021

75th Happy Independence Day INDIA

" This wonderful day is a reminder of the sacrifices *freedom fighters* made for the country. "

75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

On this auspicious day we wish
the Republic of India



HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY

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ART OF the gods

One of India's oldest forms of painting, pattachitra is said to have begun with the establishment of the Jagannath Temple in Puri (Odisha). Bhagyasri Sahoo and Sriramani Sumitra Malik explore the intricacies of this traditional art form that has its roots in the heritage village of Raghurajpur in the Puri district.



India's artistic heritage is rich and diverse with almost every region of the country steeped in its own distinct style of creative expression – from Bihar's Madhubani painting and Maharashtra's Warli art to Rajasthan's miniature painting. But one of the most ancient, indigenous and vibrant among them is Odisha's art form of pattachitra (patachitra) that found mention in one of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent radio addresses to the nation, Mann Ki Baat.

Pattachitra has its roots in the small village of Raghurajpur in Odisha's Puri district. Such is the passion of the villagers about this art form that they live by what they claim – "Painting nahi to kuch nahi (there is nothing more to life other than painting)." In fact, Raghurajpur is one of the few art pockets in the country where every village member is engaged in this traditional craft. Almost every house in the village is an art studio where artisans not only offer visitors a chance to see the work but also sell their craft. No wonder that the facade of every home in Raghurajpur appears like a mural displaying episodes from Hindu folklores. What sets the art of pattachitra apart is the immaculate depiction, attention to detail, vivid hues and a century-old heritage.



Lord Jagannatha is one of the most recurring themes in pattachitra paintings

Legend has it that the tradition of pattachitra art began with the establishment of the revered Jagannath Temple in Puri, a reason why one of the recurring themes in pattachitra painting is the portrayal of the Jagannath Temple or Thia Badhia. Brightly-coloured episodes from Hindu mythology and epics have always been the dominant themes of this art form – Lord Ganesha depicted as a five-headed God (Panchamukhi), scenes from the life of Lord Krishna (Krishna Leela), Goddess Kali and the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu (Dasabatar Patti) being some of the most popular ones.

This native art, which derives its name from the Sanskrit words 'patta', meaning cloth or canvas, and 'chitra', meaning painting, is a labour-intensive process and requires the unflinching focus of a chitrakar (as pattachitra artists are called). It begins with the making of the patta for which water-soaked tamarind seeds are pounded, blended with water and boiled in an earthen pot till the mixture reduces to a paste-like consistency. Chitrakars use this paste to bind two pieces of cotton cloth together and coat it with clay powder several times till it becomes stiff. The treated cloth is then given a final polish, first with a hard stone and then a soft one or wood, to render it smooth and ready to be painted upon. Depending upon the size of the patta and the narrative that a chitrakar has in mind, the entire process – right from the making of the patta to the completion of the painting – can take anywhere between a few days and a couple of months.

For chitrakars, it is imperative to stay true to the roots, which is why they try, as much as possible, to use colours derived from natural sources. White pigment is sourced from conch shell powder, black is obtained from the soot of a diya (earthen lamp), red is extracted from either hingula (a mineral) or guru (earth) and yellow from harital (a kind of stone). Even the brushes are made by the artisans. The root of the keya (screw pine) plant is used to make the brush and bristles are made of buffalo hair (for thick broad strokes) and mouse hair (for finer and minute lines).

As is with every style of painting, pattachitra's defining traits are prominent figures. According to an article titled "Patta Chitra – It's Past and Present" published by the Government of Odisha, "The human figures are generally presented frontally, and although the faces and legs are shown side-wise, the elongated eyes are drawn from the front. Sharp noses and round chins are prominently depicted. Typical hairstyle, clothing, ornamentation, beards and mustaches are used for different characters so that they are easily identifiable as either a king, a minister, a sage, a royal priest, a common man or deities of the Hindu pantheon." Attention is also paid to the expressions and appearances of the characters. The ornate and intricate patterns that are drawn along the borders of the patta are another distinct feature of the craft.

From being an art form traditionally done on treated cloth, pattachitra has come a long way. Today, this style of art finds application on such decorative objects as bottles, kettles, stones and light bulbs as well as on tussler silk fabric.

Pattachitra, in the truest sense, has stood the test of time, and Raghurajpur continues to serve as not just the custodian of the art but also its propagator. The Indian art community's new-found interest towards the nation's indigenous art-works is encouraging pattachitra artists to expand their expertise and cater to both the domestic and international markets, which, in turn, is furthering PM Modi's missions of Vocal for Local and Aatmanirbhar Bharat.



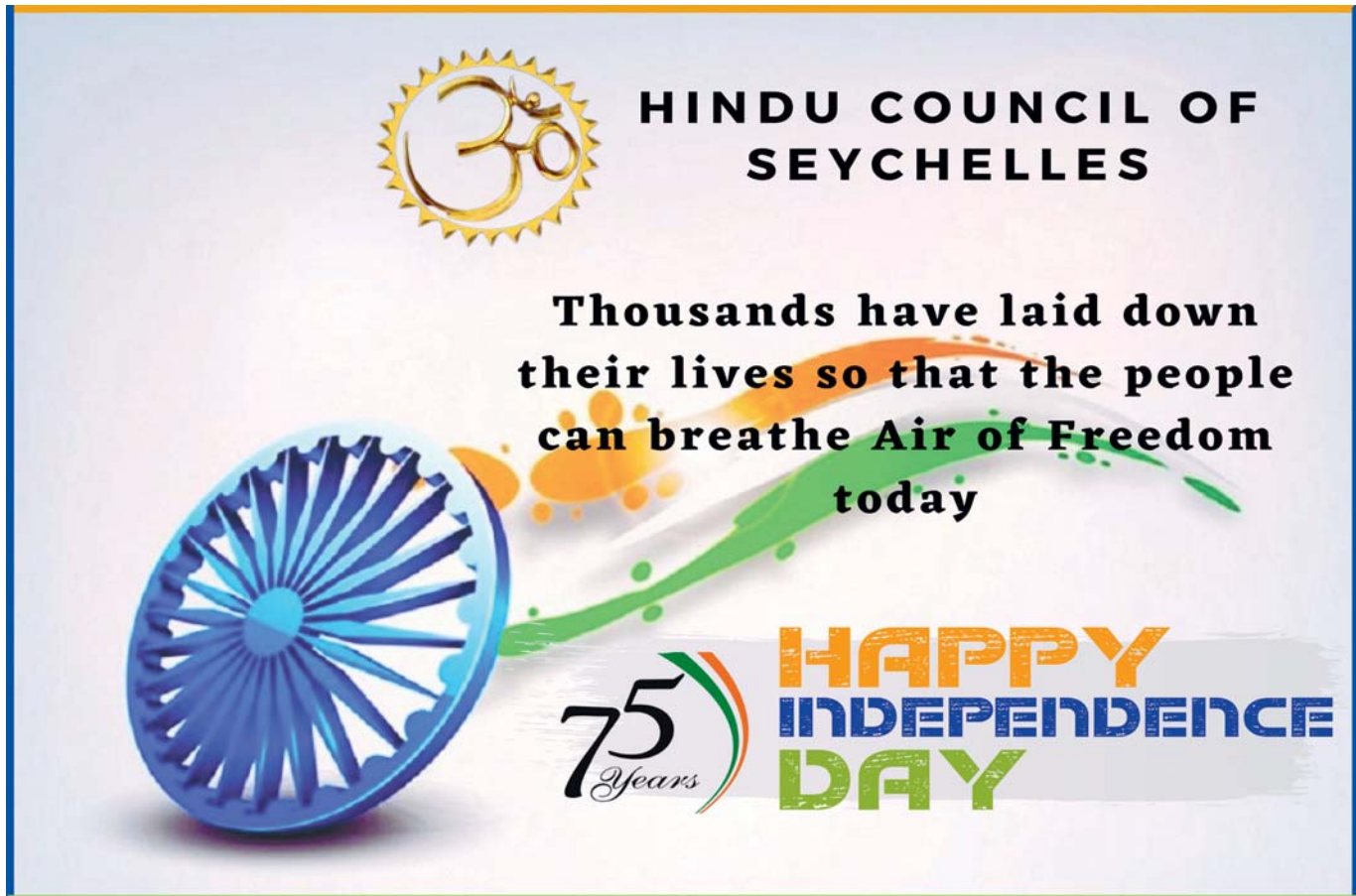
Traditionally, Raghurajpur chitrakars use coconut shells to store their colours while painting



Not just religious themes, chitrakars in Raghurajpur also depict traditional tribal motifs, daily lives or dance forms on plastic, glass or earthen bottles



Bhagyasri Sahoo is a self-taught pattachitra artist from Odisha, who was appreciated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during one of his monthly radio addresses. A resident of Rourkela, she is currently pursuing an Engineering degree from Dhenkanal and paints during her spare time.

75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT**Indian Diaspora: A Strategic Asset****Ashok Sajjanhar****Introduction**

The Indian diaspora spread throughout the world is a potent instrument of India's vibrant soft power. It is one of the most robust and influential strategic assets in the hands of Indian policy makers today. It is being used increasingly to leverage the success of the Indian diaspora around the world and its keen desire to contribute to India's economic development and enhance its status and prestige in the world.

People of Indian origin, non-resident Indians and overseas citizens of India have lived outside the country for centuries and millennia. In the initial years they went out for trade over the Silk Route to Central Asia and the Caucasus, to Southeast Asia as teachers, scholars and traders, and to African and Asian countries as indentured labour. In more recent years they have gone as students, as businessmen, professionals, entrepreneurs, scholars and for myriad other purposes. Their numbers, prosperity, profile and influence have continued to grow rapidly since India's independence more than 70 years ago. This has provided a unique opportunity to the Indian establishment and decision makers to utilise their standing and networks in different parts of the world to promote understanding and cooperation between India and their host countries.

Historical Evolution

Even as far back as the bronze age (3,300-1,200 BCE), evidence has been uncovered of "Indus periphery" population living in Central Asia. The modern Indian merchant diaspora in Central Asia and Arabia emerged in the mid-16th century and remained active for over four centuries. Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga was the first place in the Tsardom of Russia where an Indian merchant colony was established as early as 1610.

Another major emigration from the Indian subcontinent was to Southeast Asia. The first wave to this region appears to have occurred when Emperor

Ashoka embraced Buddhism in the aftermath of his conquest over Kalinga and sent his senior priests to Southeast Asia to preach the gospel of Lord Buddha. The influence of Indian culture is still strongly felt in Southeast Asia with the royal Brahmins of Thailand (Rajkru) performing all state functions of the palace, celebration of festivals like Songkran (Water Festival), Loy Krathong (Festival of Lights), presence of architectural master-pieces like the Angkor Wat, Borobudur and Yogyakarta temples, remnants of Champa civilization in Vietnam etc. These are just a few examples of Indian presence in Southeast Asia from 300 BCE onwards.

During the mid-19th century until the end of World War I, much of the migration that occurred was of Girmitya indentured workers to other British colonies. The major destinations were Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, other parts of the Caribbean, Fiji, Réunion islands, Seychelles, Malay Peninsula, East Africa and South Africa.

After Indian independence in 1947, Indian nationals travelled extensively to USA and other countries in the west to pursue higher studies as also to realise their dreams of a better future by participating in the rapid economic growth of America and the west in the post-World War II years. Following the oil boom in West Asia starting from the '70s, large numbers of Indian professionals as well as skilled and semi-skilled blue collar workers migrated in large numbers to countries in the Gulf region including UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and others.

Government Policy to Engage the Diaspora

The first concrete steps to positively leverage the potential of the Indian diaspora were taken by the government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee by establishing a High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora in September 2000. This committee was entrusted to prepare a comprehensive report on the Indian Diaspora, informing the Indian public of the achievements of the Indian origin nationals abroad, sensitizing it to their problems and their expectations from their mother country, proposing a new policy framework for creating a more conducive environment in India to leverage these invaluable human resources - and thus forging stronger ties between the Indian origin residents abroad and their mother land.

In pursuance of the extensive recommendations by this Committee, long and short term comprehensive policy measures were unveiled in subsequent years to engage India's diverse diaspora such as launching of PIO (Person of Indian Origins) card scheme, organizing annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on 9th January (the day on which Mahatma Gandhi returned to India in 1915 after his twenty-two year sojourn in South Africa), giving out Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards, offering OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) cards and so on. A separate Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs was established which took several new initiatives for engaging the diaspora.

The Fresh Impetus

Some of the most consequential and momentous steps to engage the Indian diaspora have been initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Prime Minister Modi, during his visit to the USA in September 2014, soon after assuming office, to address the UN General Assembly spoke to a crowd of more than 20,000 Indian Americans as well as Indian Passport holders at the historic Madison Square Garden in New York. No other foreign leader had addressed such a huge crowd in USA before this.

The 4.2 million strong Indian American community in America accounts for a little over 1% of the total US population of 330 million but its influence transcends far above this figure. It is the most highly educated and most prosperous immigrant community in the USA. Most Indian Americans in the US are professionals who have earned high respect for themselves in the society. They are also politically influential and are wooed and sought by both the major political parties. Because of the fact that most of them are prosperous, they also contribute significantly financially to the coffers of the two parties. Increasingly large numbers of them are also contesting and getting elected to the House of Representatives or Senate and even as Governors of States.

It is a matter of satisfaction that in addition to Kamala Harris who has created history by becoming the first woman, first African American and first Indian American to become the vice-president of America, about twenty Indian Americans have been tapped by President Joe Biden to be members of his team. It should of course be borne in mind that all of them will work to promote American interests and power. It would however be reasonable to expect that most of them will be able to bring a clearer understanding and better appreciation of the challenges, aspirations, achievements and opportunities offered by India.

The 8 million strong Indian diaspora in the Gulf countries is a treasured resource for enhancing collaboration with the host countries. Indians in the Gulf remit more than US\$ 40 billion annually to India out of the US\$ 80 billion received globally. These inflows go a long way to shore up India's current account deficit as also provide a significant economic impetus to States like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and others who are among major recipients of these funds. Some of these Indian nationals were repatriated back to India recently on account of the coronavirus pandemic, the recipient countries are keen to invite them back as the economic situation normalizes because of the important contribution they make to the economies and societies of the host countries. They act as effective bridges of friendship and cooperation between India and these countries.

During the last 6 years India has emerged as a caring and nurturing motherland of the Indian diaspora stationed overseas. Starting with the former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and extending to the current incumbent Dr S Jaishankar, the leaderships and the Indian embassies are ready and available to provide succor, help and relief to members of Indian diaspora in distress, whether in conflict zones as happened in Yemen or during natural disaster like earthquake of Nepal etc.

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75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT**A FEW SECRETS OF**

Ladakh

Ladakh's capital Leh, and its surrounding areas, is a land of vivid landscapes and an even more vibrant culture. Travel enthusiasts Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy take us on a trip to explore unknown facets of Leh's heritage and tradition with local residents.



Hemmed in by the Karakoram and the Himalayan ranges, the mountainous region of Ladakh was once a harsh no-man's-land visited only by nomadic tribes. Even today, this dramatic terrain has one of the lowest population densities in the world. During winter, the region remains enveloped in snow and it's only in summer that tourists arrive. Since the region was opened for visitors in 1974, Ladakh, especially Leh, the main city of the Union Territory, attracts large volumes of tourists (between the months of May and September), who are mesmerised by the unique landscape, the thrilling adventure options and the vibrant culture. From exploring the surreal mountainous landscape dotted with many Buddhist monasteries and high-altitude mountain passes to the region's unique culture – Ladakh offers varied experiences. However, one of the most enriching ways to travel is with the locals, who offer a glimpse of their life and also help explore unknown facets of the region. Here are a few off-the-beat-track experiences of Leh.

Old Town

In the early 15th century, the then ruler of the Kingdom of Ladakh, Drappa Bumdey, built the first fortifications in his capital Leh as well as the small Tseno castle. In the 17th century, King Senge Namgyal built the massive

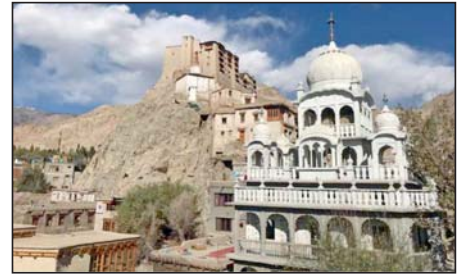
nine-storied Leh Palace or Lachen Palkar Palace. While the palace was abandoned by the royal family in the mid-19th century, even today, the impressive structure stands surrounded by remnants of the earth wall fortification that weaves through the Old Town, which was once where noblemen of the kingdom lived. While the palace is one of the must-see sites of Leh, the historic Old Town is often missed. It is locally called Kharyog, referring to the residential houses and community spaces. Earlier, the houses were located within the fortified wall that had five gates facing different directions. The wall has almost entirely disappeared, except for small portions hidden in the labyrinth of narrow alleyways and maze of buildings. The perfect introduction to Old Leh is a heritage walk. Guided by Sonam Gyatso, a former Economics teacher who is now dedicated to preserving Ladakh's cultural legacy, the walk takes tourists through the maze of alleys in the old city. Dating back to the 17th century, Leh's Old Town is a complex of around 200 residential dwellings made of mud, stone and timber enclosed within rammed earth walls at the base of Leh Palace. Despite years of decay, Leh's Old Town is one of the few surviving examples of an intact Tibeto-Himalayan urban settlement.

Of the 180 heritage houses in Old Town, 40 have been conserved, including Onpo (astrologer) House, Sofi (merchant) home and Hor Yarkandi house, which belongs to the descendants of a family that migrated to Ladakh from Yarkand in China over 100 years ago. The pilot project, a metal craftsman's house, won a UNESCO award for best conservation practice.

Central Asian Museum

Located at the crossroads of caravan routes from Central Asia, Ladakh was shaped by trade from the ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara from present-day Uzbekistan, Tibet, parts of China and Afghanistan with many of these routes converging at Leh. Over a period of time, Leh became a cultural cauldron. The Central Asian Museum Leh has been set up to commemorate and preserve this important facet of Ladakh's history. Supported by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, this four-storey museum is built in the Tsas Soma Gardens, which was once a camping ground for caravans. Designed in the shape of a Tibetan-Ladakhi fortress tower, it is built with traditional Ladakhi construction materials like stone, timber and mud.

Inside are housed relics from the caravan trade, old window frames, granaries and a Ladakhi kitchen - with its immaculate collection of gleaming vessels - where you can order lunch. The museum records Leh's role in the Silk Route trade and also houses in its precincts Leh's oldest mosque and a sacred tree known as the Datun Sahib, said to be 500 years old. It is said in 1517, on his journey to Tibet, Sikh Guru, Guru Nanakji passed through Leh and planted his miswak twig datun (toothbrush) at a spot near the current museum. The twig grew into a tree and offered shade to caravans. The site is marked by Gurudwara Sri Datun Sahib.



Gurudwara Sri Datun Sahib as viewed from the Central Asian Museum

Carpet Lane

Mostly overlooked by tourists is one of Leh's oldest lanes, Nausher Street, which is home to a profusion of carpet shops, a reason why it's also known as Carpet Lane. Local fashion designer Jigmat Norbu, who runs a Ladakhi couture store, says that there stood an old revenue gate here for tax collection, which no longer exists. However, you can visit the 120-year-old caravansera, the last surviving heritage building here.

Right next door, near the Polo Ground, is Jigmat's residence housing an impressive textile museum that took him five years to set up. Incorporating elements from Ladakhi architecture, it documents Ladakh's glorious couture through fashion mood boards. Visits are only by invitation, much like their private dining and curated trails.

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Held in the compounds of the Hemis monastery, the vibrant annual Hemis Festival attracts tourists from all over the world



A stunning image of Leh at sunset

Indian Diaspora: A Strategic Asset

Continued from page V

Conclusion

Nearly 2% of Fortune 500 companies are led by Indians eg, Mastercard, Adobe, Google, Microsoft, IBM and several others. The investment world is also spearheaded by famous Indian figures such as Vinod Khosla. Globally, Indian business figures like Piyush Gupta and Vasant Narasimhan head DBS Bank and Novartis respectively. The Indian government provides a welcoming environment to the Indian diaspora to invest in India. This is a win-win proposition for the investors, for India as well as for the countries where the diasporas are based. Going forward,

India should pro-actively reach out and provide all facilities to encourage increasing inflows of capital, technology and supply chains to India.

PM Modi has continued to reach out and connect with members of the Indian communities in all countries he has visited over the last six years. To each country he visited he carried special gifts in terms of providing OCI cards, e-visas, better facilities and privileges in India, and more opportunities to expand cooperation between India and its diaspora dispersed all over the globe. The Indian pravasis can play a pivotal role in the movement to make Bharat truly Atmanirbhar in the challenging global circumstances that we confront today.



Dialogue with Diaspora Business Leaders & CEOs - Targeting US\$ 5 Trillion Atmanirbhar Bharat. Economy by boosting MSMEs

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A few secrets of Ladakh



A group of Ladakhi women in traditional attire during the Naropa Festival. Held at the Hemis monastery, this event celebrates the life and teachings of Naropa, a revered saint and scholar

Continued from page VI

Chilling - a village of metal craftsmen

In Chilling, a village about an hour away from Leh, metal craftsmen have crafted musical instruments, statues and household utensils for centuries. In the 16th century, King Deldan Namgyal invited five skilled Newari metalsmiths from Nepal to build a two-storey copper statue of Lord Buddha for the Shey monastery located near Leh town. Greatly impressed by their skill, he offered them land to settle permanently. They chose a particular valley by the Zaskar river rich in copper deposits (zang is Tibetan for copper and skar means valley). The place where they settled was called 'Chilling' - chhi meaning foreign and ling meaning place - or 'Land of Foreigners'. Over the centuries, their descendants blended with the local community and today worship Lord Shiva, albeit in Buddhist style. Chilling's craftsmen fashioned statues and stupas across Ladakh, besides music instruments for Nubra and Hemis monasteries, and supplied brass and copper utensils to nearly every Ladakhi kitchen.

Tsewang, who hails from a family of metal craftsmen, takes tourists around his home-museum that showcases his family's heirloom utensils. Without modern tools or devices, using handmade implements and techniques since the 16th century, they churn out a dazzling array of metalware in combinations of copper, silver and brass. On display are various types of cutters, drills, hammers and zong (nails) besides thungbo (ladles), chang (pots), pheyphor (barley containers) and phang (weaving spindles). A closer look at the zomol (foundry) reveals an interesting process - the artisans pour water in a trough of apricot and submerge the utensils overnight; the resultant acid eats away the grime giving the products a shine.



An artisan from Chilling stands with her products
Clay pottery

Around 40 km away from Leh town is Basgo monastery (gompa), near which is Likir, where King Jamyang Namgyal encouraged pottery, as clay was readily available here. The hill on which the monastery stands is coil-shaped. Legends say that the gompa is guarded by two serpents (nagas) Nanda and Taksako, hence its name Klu-kkhyil or 'encircled by nagas'. Sixty-year-old Lamchung Tsepail, aided by his son Rigzin Namgyal, has been crafting clay-ware since he was 15 years old and is a lone crusader of the 350-year-old tradition. It's tedious work as dung must be collected from the mountains for firing his pots. "In the old days, lamas demanded bigger spouts for the tibril (kettle) so butter [used to prepare tea] wouldn't obstruct the brew from flowing easily," he chuckles.

Ladakh's culture has been shaped by the transmission of goods and ideas from across the neighbouring countries, connected by the various roads of the Silk Route. However, over the centuries, some of its cultural identities have been pushed into oblivion and heritage sites almost lost. Today, guided by the government, and with the effort of local residents and scholars, the region's history and tradition are being restored and preserved for the future.



Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy work closely with tourism boards and publications to help promote travel and tourism. They contribute to leading Indian publications - both newspapers and magazines



SPICE UP YOUR immunity

Since time immemorial, traditional spices and herbs have played a vital role as immuno-boosters in Indian cuisine. Here's a look at how these ingredients make our everyday food not just tasty, but also wholesome

By GITA HARI

According to ancient Indian texts, aushadham ucchyathe sarvam, which means food is the absolute cure and healer. Traditionally, in Indian cuisine, vegetables and spices are used in a dish according to their nutritional benefits and their ability to strengthen our immune system, which in turn, can protect us from ailments and infections. A reason why it is advised to include a balanced mix of spices and herbs in our daily meal plan to provide a regular boost to our immune system. Spices like

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75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Spice up your immunity

Continued from page VII

turmeric, saffron, cloves, cinnamon, carom seeds, ginger and garlic are known to have a plethora of beneficial properties. Herbs like mint, tulsi (Holy Basil), and leaves of neem and moringa trees are said to have several health benefits. In India, with diverse preparations being made from more or less the same ingredients, spices play a significant role in culinary preparations.

For instance, turmeric - the commonest of all Indian spices - is added in almost all dishes. It not only lends the dish a golden hue but is known for its antiseptic properties and in reducing existing metabolic syndromes. We have often heard our mothers urge us to drink warm milk mixed with turmeric to treat dry cough, sore throat and purify the blood of toxins, thereby upping the immunity quotient. Today, this drink is available at many upscale cafes as turmeric latte. Ginger too has similar health benefits.



Jaggery is a staple in traditional Indian kitchens. It is rich in antioxidants, aids digestion



A thepla (flatbread) made with fenugreek leaves, known to absorb sugar and reduce bad cholesterol

There are many such examples of beneficial herbs and spices being added to dishes to lend a distinct flavour and also to make them healthier. For example, moringa leaves and fruits (drumsticks) are used in curries across north India to help fight bacterial afflictions. Neem too is used in meals and brewed into a thick concoction called kadha. A special neem leaves chutney is prepared in Maharashtra during the festival of Gudi Padwa. Neem has proven remedy to cure loss of appetite, fever and also boost cardiac strength. Curry leaves, the staple garnish in Indian cooking across states, is a popular natural anti-oxidant. "Almost all parts of a *Azadirachta indica* or neem tree have beneficial properties - the leaves had raw or cooked, purify blood and aid digestion; the bark extract has been found to cure stomach and intestinal ulcers and neem oil reduces skin blemishes. The oil is also a cure to breathing problems," says nutritionist Kavita Devgan.

According to Dr Pooja Thacker, Head of Department Dietetics at Bhatia Hospital, Mumbai, "The clinical trials of tulsi on humans have shown it to be a unique combination of anti-viral, anti-microbial, anti-fungal, anti-malarial. It can reduce hypertension, arthritic pain and depression. It acts as anti-epileptic, anti-inflammatory, hepato protective, anti-ulcer, and anti-asthmatic."



Azadirachta indica or neem leaves have unbelievable and numerous health benefits. It can be enjoyed as a juice, a spicy chutney with chillies or as a roughly ground powder



A traditional fish curry in mustard sauce. Mustard seeds are rich in a nutrient called selenium, known for its high anti-inflammatory effects

Asafoetida relieves bloating, flatulence and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) while fenugreek is known to control long standing ailments like diabetes. Cumin and bishop's weed, the culinary equivalents of modern indigestion drugs, help digestion and check food-borne disorders. Pepper improves absorption of essential nutrients and promotes gut health. A pepper drink is often the go-to cure in many Indian homes to fight a flu.

Asafoetida, fenugreek, black pepper, coriander and cumin seeds have anti-inflammatory properties, and are extensively used in Indian cuisine. Quintessential South Indian dishes like sambhar (lentil curry with vegetables), rasam (a clear sour soup) and even curries are flavoured with these spices. Bisibele Bhat of Karnataka is another classic rice and lentil preparation using various spices and nutritious vegetables to avert deficiencies.

If dishes like pongal from the South uses crushed pepper and cumin, Gujarat finds its comfort food in khichdi - wholesome rice and lentil dish prepared with minimal spices like cumin and ginger. While restoring digestive enzymes, this one-dish meal builds up energy and resistance levels in the body to fight infections. Khichdi is often the remedy to dietary distress and is used to reset the digestive system with its simple albeit healthy ingredients. Various dried and powdered spices and herbs in traditional Marwari preparations from Rajasthan like ker sangri and pitod ka saag ensure physical strength. These dishes, often heavy in the use of garlic and onion, ensure that the body is prepared against the heat in most parts of the desert state. Maharashtra has its share of wholesome meal in usal/misal, consisting of multiple sprouts in a spice-rich gravy that has loads of ginger and garlic and ensures essential nutrients like proteins. The liberal use of lemons and citrus fruits, which do not allow for thick gravy preparation, ensure the adequate dosage of Vitamin C and a strong defense against the hot and humid environs around Maharashtra.

Punjabi cuisine is hugely popular for the intoxicating aromas of spices and herbs used generously in its recipes. Just as the fragranced waft of garam masala (a rich mix of spices like cardamom, clove, star anise and cinnamon) from North Indian kitchens are simply irresistible they also burst with vigour. Cinnamon and cloves can be counted as immunity-warriors for their anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties. These dishes often include or end with a generous portion of fenel, ensuring that there is no acidity.

Plenty of star anise, bay leaves and saffron can be found in the dishes from Kashmir. Dr Thacker throws light on saffron's benefits. "It helps in curbing asthma by reducing inflammation. Tests have proven that having saffron regularly can reduce Immunoglobulin M and Immunoglobulin G, which directly reduce asthma." The star among the Valley's contribution to India's spice treasure is the Kashmiri red chilli, full of minerals besides black cumin (shah jeera), black cardamom and white pepper. The signature lamb dish, rogan Josh with curd and a variety of spices is a robust low-cholesterol delicacy. Embracing mindfulness while eating and fresh, home-cooked meals can help you kick off stress, discomfort, and depression. Experts say that ingestion of food within four to five hours of cooking is the best.

It's interesting that even today, the ancient concept of a balanced Sattvik meal, cooked fresh with a bouquet of spices, is considered one of the healthiest in the world.



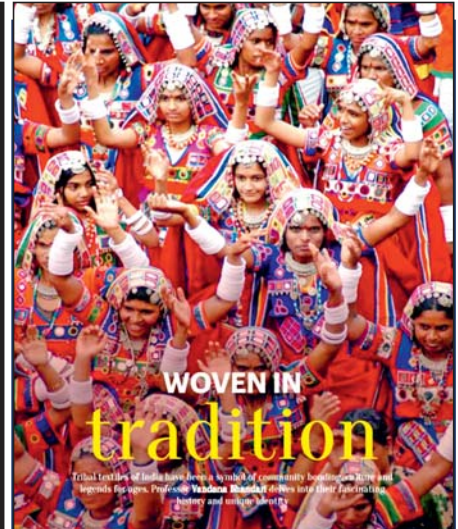
A Sattvik meal of cottage cheese fritters deep-fried with a layer of buckwheat flour (kuttu ka aata)

Sattvik cuisine

- Depending on its character and effect, food can create a balance or imbalance in one's state of living.
- Sattvik cuisine, in essence, embraces the nutrients that cultivate a positive outlook in a healthy body to enhance spiritual and physical progress.
- It is intrinsically good and in total accord with nature. It comprises of pure foods such as vegetables, grains, fruits and dairy products like milk, curd, white butter and ghee (clarified butter).
- This type of cuisine is free from artificial ingredients and desists from spreading disease. It maintains and focuses on stamina, serenity and mental clarity.



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



WOVEN IN tradition

Be it the eponymous textile of Sikkim's Lepcha tribe, the Muga weaves of Assam or the Bonkai textile woven in Odisha's Bonkai village - indigenous textiles are not just an integral part of the demography they hail from but also find a place in modern fashion sensibilities. Today, with Indian designers turning to the vast repertoire of the country's unexplored traditional fabrics for inspiration, many of the nation's lesser-known materials and weaving techniques from remote tribal communities are being brought into the limelight. Adding to the impetus has been Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constant encouragement to weavers and craftspeople from rural areas, both through policies and personal appeal. He has often donned indigenous garments, including the Assamese gamosa (traditional white cloth with red borders and motifs) and the Himachali topi (cap) during his public appearances, giving these pieces of clothing their much-deserved recognition.

In India, textiles of a community are a part of its social fabric, culture and everyday life. This becomes even more pronounced in tribal villages, where the communities are closely knit even today. Fabric patterns symbolise the socio-cultural identities of tribes across India - from Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and other North-eastern states. Often, the motifs and embroideries created on such textiles depict the profession a particular tribe is engaged in. For example, the bhalka (spear or arrowhead) motif of the Gadia (or Gadulia) Lohar, a community of blacksmiths from Rajasthan, who travel from one village to another on bullock carts to repair farming and household equipment. The design prominently features in the costumes worn by the community.

Weaves of the Northeast

The Northeastern region of India is home to several tribal communities and each tribe has its unique weaving tradition, set of motifs and even colours. The weaving skills are handed down through generations and is mostly practiced by women, primarily using the traditional backstrap loom.

The textiles of the Northeastern region thrive on a web of stories and legends drawn from folk traditions, customs like marriages, and festivals. For instance, the legend of Tejimola, a popular Assamese folk tale of a young girl, mirrors the symbolism of Assam's iconic handwoven drape, the mekhela chador (saador). The story references Tejimola's paat mekhela - riha (mulberry silk garment), a precious gold brocade saador (or drape), and the protagonist's sentimental relationship with the garment. Similarly, the traditional attire of Assam's Karbi women, pe-kok (an upper body drape pinned above the right shoulder), which is worn with pini-camflak (donned from waist to knee), is dotted with colourful motifs and patterns representing their marital status.

For women of the Tripuri community, one of the largest tribes in Tripura, the traditional garment riha, which is draped on the upper body, showcases their culture and tells stories of their lives. In Arunachal Pradesh's Adi community, women weave their traditional textiles on the gekong-galong (an indigenous bamboo loin loom). The gale fabric, the signature wrap-around skirts the women wear, are produced on this loom. According to legend, spiders taught these women how to weave.

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Ceremonial costumes as mekhela saador, worn by women, and gamosa, donned by men, form an integral part of Assamese festivals

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Continued from page VIII



Women of Arunachal Pradesh's Singpho tribe wearing a special dress adorned with silver pieces known as kumphong plong

The Mishing (Misin) tribe from Assam's Majuli island weave on peddle bamboo frame looms, and the fabric's identity are the patterns of sun (doyni) and the moon (polo) – said to be the mother and father of the tribe, respectively. A recurring design on a Mishing weave is the diamond that represents the chang gar, a house that is built on a raised platform, to protect the inhabitants from floods.

Designs inspired from daily life are also found on the Assamese gamosa (gamcha), which is gifted within the community as a mark of respect. It is also used as hand towels, turbans or often draped around the neck.

Embroidering Tradition

Embroidery practised among tribal groups is a part of the diverse needlework tradition of India. Vibrant colours and intricate techniques combined with environment-inspired motifs narrate the tales of people whose lives are in sync with nature. Beadwork is popular among the Bhil and Rabari tribes of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Rabaris generously use mirrors of various shapes and sizes in their embroidery and incorporate thread fringes, glass beads and plastic buttons to edge corners.

Embroidery is also a speciality of Andhra Pradesh's Lambadi tribe residing in tandas or thandias (settlement of the tribe). It is said the Lambadis originally belonged to Rajasthan but eventually spread out to Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The women of the tribe ornament themselves and their costumes extensively and often embroider on old and used pieces of cloth with decorative stitches.

For the Toda tribe from Tamil Nadu's Nilgiri Hills, embroidery is a work of pride. Known as pugur in the Toda language, this tradition is passed down

Woven in tradition

Men of Rajasthan's Rabari tribe in their traditional cotton garment, which helps in keeping them cool in the hot desert summer. They can also be seen sporting bright turbans and indigenous jewellery

generations, and uses a darning stitch (rows of adjacent straight lines). Patterns like the sun, moon, stars, peacocks, butterflies and flowers, stitched in mostly crimson and black, feature prominently in their fabric. Their traditional embroidered shawl called puthukuli holds immense significance as it stands for both aesthetics and dignity.



Men of Tamil Nadu's Toda tribe wearing the traditional puthukuli shawl adorned with Toda embroidery, which received the Geographical Indications (GI) certificate in 2013

The tribal communities of Bastar in Chhattisgarh and the neighbouring Koraput region of Odisha use a natural dye called aal to colour cotton cloth. Weavers of the Tokapal, Nagarnar and Kondagaon villages of Bastar are well known for their weaving skills. They work on pit looms with unbleached cotton yarns to create a fabric called pata, whose borders are dyed with aal. These fabrics are predominantly worn by women of the Muria and Maria communities and showcase their social status.

Aal is also used in the mirigan sai (weaver's section) of Kotpad, a small town in Odisha's Koraput district. Here, bundles of yarn, treated with castor oil and dung, are immersed in aal to yield vibrant red, rusty maroon and brown shades. Often pieces of iron sulphate are added to the dye baths for darker hues. The process of treating, dying and drying the yarn is a labour-intensive process and takes about a month to complete. Weavers then weave these yarns on pit looms into resplendent saris that have moved on from being sold in the bazaars of Koraput to international markets and e-commerce sites. The Kotpad handloom fabric received a Geographical Indications (GI) certificate in 2005.

Recently, speaking at an international webinar on Indian textiles, PM Modi said that naturally-coloured cotton and silk have a long and glorious history, and the diversity in textiles shows the richness of the country's culture. He added there is something unique about the textile traditions in every community, every village and every state, highlighting the rich textile traditions of the nation's tribal communities.

The story of tribal textiles is not necessarily only that of history and tradition but also one of resurgence and progress. Today, many of these lesser-known fabrics are coming to light. The craftsmanship of these indigenous fabrics not only contribute to the Prime Minister's Make in India campaign but also provide impetus to the artisans and encourage sustainable fashion.



Vandana Bhandari is a professor at National Institute of Fashion Technology. She brings new dimensions to the research of textile traditions and sustainability of crafts in India. Her teaching focusses on traditional Indian textiles, Indian dresses and craft studies, and encompasses economic sustainability for artisans.

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75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

A brand new normal

By Akshat Jain

Following the global pandemic of novel Coronavirus, India has been at the forefront of digital conferences both within and outside the country. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is leading and adapting to the new way of reaching out to people, turning the adversity into an opportunity.

As the world changes rapidly around us, the diplomacy at the highest end and the way it is conducted is evolving as well. Events are unfolding around the world every minute and the flow of information is constant, regardless of time zones and lockdowns enforced by countries to fight the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Ensuring swift, effective and sustained channels of communication becomes even more critical in the world of global diplomacy, especially during times like these.



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (C), External Affairs Minister of India Dr S Jaishankar (far left) and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval (far right) at the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit in New Delhi on June 4

As countries around the world continue being in lockdowns and social distancing becoming the new norm, diplomatic visits too have come to a halt. But diplomacy hasn't. Under the aegis of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is turning this adversity into an opportunity, by conducting routine diplomatic engagements online and reaching out to nations and leaders, particularly as the situation demands better coordination among world leaders to work out an effective global response to the unprecedented spread of the pandemic. With positive diplomatic outreach becoming more important than ever at this point, virtual meetings and online summits have emerged as the new tool for communication.

Virtual diplomacy, Real Results

The Indian government has led and been part of multiple virtual conferences and summits during these tough times. India took the lead in getting South Asian leaders to meet through a video conference to explore cooperation in combating the corona crisis and galvanise SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) member nations into action. New Delhi also pressed for a G20 video meeting which was convened on March 26 last year. Since then the UNSC, EU and NATO have all adapted and connected through video conferencing.

On May 4, PM Modi took part in the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) online summit, along with 30 other heads of states and governments, the President of the United Nations and the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO). In his first address to the grouping since assuming office in 2014, PM Modi reiterated the importance of reforms aimed towards inclusive global engagements and the need for a united front against the global pandemic of Covid-19.



The ambassadors and high commissioners of Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Senegal, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, Australia, Côte d'Ivoire and Rwanda present their credentials to the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, through video conference

On June 04, PM Modi held the first-ever bilateral 'virtual summit' when he met his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison through video conference, making it their fourth meeting in the last eighteen months.

India and Australia announced that they shall be raising their diplomatic relations further by elevating the bilateral Strategic Partnership concluded in 2009, to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) and promoting "2+2" engagements at the defence and foreign ministry level. Apart from this, there were a host of other declarations and MOUs being agreed upon for supply chain management, cyberspace and agriculture. A new joint fund was also set up



PM Modi participating in the G20 Virtual Summit to discuss the global response to Covid-19 on March 26

which would enable Indian and Australian researchers to develop an antiviral drug for Covid-19.

Another important aspect of the meeting was the arrangement for increased Maritime Security coordination between the two countries. PM Modi stressed on the importance of the Indo-Pacific region's security as a worldwide concern with PM Morrison acknowledging a growing role for India to ensure harmony and prosperity in the region.


Not just the Prime Minister, India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S. Jaishankar also participated in a virtual foreign ministers' meeting for BRICS and a virtual meeting of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) foreign ministers through a video conference.

Apart from high-level diplomatic engagements, communication with Indian missions across the world is also being conducted through digital means. The MEA has been regularly engaging with Indian ambassadors in various regions and sub-regions in recent days. On April 23, 2020, EAM Dr S. Jaishankar tweeted "The changing world of corona era diplomacy. Strong friendships thrive even virtually", referring to his regular virtual conversations with Indian ambassadors abroad as well as with other foreign ministers across the globe. The EAM has held detailed virtual discussions with his counterparts from several countries.

Continued from page XI

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அனைவருக்கும்
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75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

A brand new normal



Continued from page X

The Digital Era

Of course with virtual conferences a new set of challenges will come in place for the leaders around the world. For example, face-to-face meetings, gaining trust of the other side and reading between the lines are some of the key components of diplomacy which will be replaced with video conferencing.

But despite this, the benefits of the virtual diplomacy far outweigh its costs. As economies shrink and the world battles with recession and austerity, virtual conferences and summits are going to be not only time efficient but also a cost efficient way of diplomacy.

In order to develop a comprehensive video conferencing solution for India and to push the Digital India reforms, the government launched an innovation challenge last month. According to the National Policy on Software Products,

this innovation is aimed at developing an Indian tool for video conferencing to enhance local expertise.

As India takes to the virtual space to conduct business, the government is taking strong cyber security measures not only when it comes to official government and public sector dealings but also for private citizens. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has set out detailed instructions for citizens using various conferencing apps and about the challenges of data security as well as standard operating practices.

In the current volatile situation, international virtual summits and conferences have successfully bridged the communication gap between the countries. For the foreseeable future, as nations around the globe struggle with the unprecedented challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic and worldwide travel restrictions continue to be in place, it may be necessary for diplomacy to be conducted largely through virtual means, and this may become the new way of diplomacy going forward.

The Game is on

By Abhishek Dubey

From board games that sharpen the brain's strategic prowess, to those which build memory, Indian traditional games are not just for enjoyment. Abhishek Dubey looks at some of these games which are making a comeback in contemporary avatars, captivating the attention of even the modern day gamers.

Ancient Indian epics are rife with descriptions of entertaining games that kept people of that time entertained through fictional yet strategic challenges. Be it indoor or outdoor games, there are several examples of hours spent by the elite and the masses alike indulging in sporty challenges. Take for example the game of chausar, often called the ancestor of the immensely popular board game we now call Ludo. Played by four players on a cross-shaped board, the game involves the strategic movement of markers - four of which are allotted to every player. This is the game that finds a mention even in the Indian epic, Mahabharata. The modern avatar, Ludo, is now one of the most popularly enjoyed game on online platforms with thousands of games being hosted online. Historians say similar dice games were popular across India during ancient times. Remnants of oblong dices have been excavated at several Harappan-era sites. The dice is mentioned in the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda too.

Another popular game, chess, is believed to have been invented in India. Experts say it was originally known as ashtapada (64 squares) and the game used to be played with a dice on a checkered board, but without black and white squares. Some say chaturanga (quadrupartite) was the original chess game. In Sanskrit, chatur means four and anga means limbs, that were symbolic of the four branches of an army. Just like an army from the ancient times, the game used pieces shaped like elephants, chariots, horses and soldiers, and was mostly played to sharpen war strategies. The game spread to the Persian kingdom in the 600 CE as Shatranj. Another similar game was chauka bara, which was played with cowries shells and coins to strategise for

wars and also to help children learn counting of numbers. While it was originally played on squares stitched on silk fabric, a simpler version of the game is played in Southern India with chalk lines drawn on the floor. A similar traditional board game that is played even today is kattam vilayattu. A variation of tic-tac-toe, the game used to be played with shells, coins or even stones!

Card games too were popular in India during the medieval era. An example is ganjifa, which was immensely popular in Mughal courts. Mentioned in historical records beginning around 1300 AD, these hand-painted cards are precursors to today's playing cards. The circular or square ganjifa cards, intricately painted in vibrant colours and motifs inspired by nature, mythology or life, were played in groups. While the game may have been lost to time, the art of ganjifa making is still alive in pockets of the country. These games were mostly developed to sharpen the brain or skills. A few local games of Tamil Nadu are, in fact, aimed towards strengthening memory and observation skills - pallankulli attam and aadu puli attam (also known as huli gatta in Karnataka and puli joodam in Andhra Pradesh) being two of them. The first, which requires two columns of boards with seven shallow cups and objects to resemble coins (pebbles, seeds or shells), is played by two or four players, while the second, boasts a rather interesting set of rules involving coins representing goats and tigers! Interestingly, many of these ancient indoor games are being reborn on online gaming platforms.

Local flavour

India is also the birthplace of several outdoor games that are known across the world by different names. What the rest of the world calls catch-and-throw, the residents of Assam's Karbi Anglong district call dhop-khel. But the key element that sets the two apart is the object being thrown and caught - a fabric ball.

It is one of the more popular games among local women.

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INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF SEYCHELLES
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The Game is on



A referee initiating a game of insuknawr in Mizoram. The game is related to modern day tug of war and involves one team pushing the other out of bounds with a bamboo stick

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Lore says originally, women used to wrap cloth around a vegetable and use it as a ball! It has often been seen that traditional games used ingredients found locally.

An apt example is the game of gilli-danda, which is popular across rural India even today. Played with two pieces of sticks and a stone or a rounded object, it can be played between two or more players. History says this game was popular in the region around 2000 years ago. The beauty of these sports is that, while such modern games as football and boxing exist, traditional ones are still intrinsic to everyday life across the country. Take for example Mizoram's insuknawr, a sport where participants try to push each other out by holding a bamboo or a wooden staff. Such is the importance of this indigenous game that its representation can be found on the emblem of the state sports council.


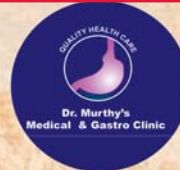
In Northern India we see such traditional games as kusti (pehelwani or wrestling), which is also popularly and extensively practised in South India as gushti; surr (an outdoor game of tag played in the areas around Ayodhya in northern India) and sqay (a form of martial art originating in Kashmir). There are examples of such tra-

ditional games from every region of the country. Today, as we look to the past to find solutions for our present, these traditional games and their relevance become very important.

Government and private organisations are taking steps to preserve these games. While board games are being reborn in digital formats, schools have been asked to train children in ancient outdoor games like silambam, mallakhamb, and gatka.



Abhishek Dubey is India's foremost sports journalist, who has covered international sports for over 15 years now. He plunged headlong into sports journalism, at a very young age and ended up leading cross functional teams. He is the author of three critically acclaimed books and is currently, National Advisor, at Prasar Bharati Sports, India's state broadcaster.








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