

# 13 EXPLAINED

## Mining Punjab for sand: demand 2 cr tonnes a year, business Rs 3,000 cr

KANCHAN VASDEV looks at what's legal and what isn't in a thriving business that is driven by construction in Punjab and has brought the interests of a minister under the scanner

### What is the sand mining business?

Sand is an essential ingredient in the construction business and is also used as an abrasive across several manufacturing industries. In Punjab, sand is mined mainly from riverbeds in the dry months, when the water is a trickle in most of the rivers and tributaries, and vast portions of the bed are dry. Sand is mined in 14 districts of Punjab.

### What is the government's role?

Sand mining causes degradation of the river basin and has other environmentally hazardous consequences. Due to the high demand for sand, and the tendency to overmine, the practice is regulated by the state government in Punjab.

### How huge is it in Punjab?

Punjab's estimated demand for sand is said to be 2 crore tonnes annually. Officials estimate the business in Punjab to be worth Rs 3,000 crore annually. A tipper truckload of 35 tonnes fetches anywhere between Rs 10,000 and Rs 25,000, depending on supply. When construction activity picked up in Punjab in the post-terrorism era, so did the sand mining business. But it was only in 2005-2006, with the real estate boom and new residential developments, that there was new spurt in demand for sand.

### What is the process by which mines and quarries are allotted to miners, and what does the government earn out of it?

The state government is expected to make Rs 500-600 crore from the sand mining business this time. Last year the revenue was Rs 35 crore as the previous government had opted for a system of reverse bidding, in which the lowest bidder gets the mine. This time, the new government adopted a system of progressive bidding, giving the contract to the highest bidder. The government put one-auction 97 sand and gravel quarries on May 19 and 20, and going by the high bids, announced it would net Rs 1,026 crore. But when it came to putting down the money, contractors deposited the security amount for only 50 mines. Still the government was able to make Rs 310 crore from the auction. The rest of the mines will be re-auctioned on June 11.

### Who are the people engaged in the sand mining business?

Over the years, the regulation and licensing of mines has spawned a system of political patronage and rent-seeking. The sand mining business in Punjab is seen as dominated by those who have strong political contacts. It goes hand in hand with the trans-

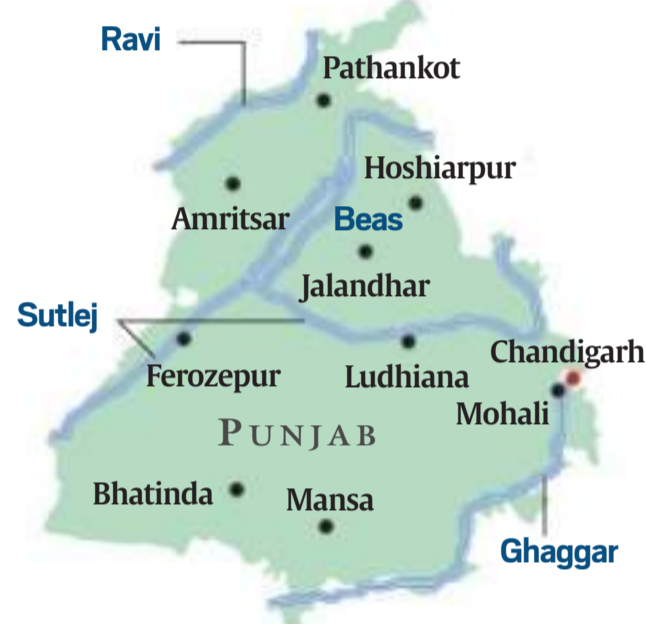


Sand being mined from a dry riverbed in Amritsar district. File

port and trucking business. Several politicians are known to have links with those in the sand mining business; some are even said to own sand businesses through family members or relatives. The existence of "the politician-sand mafia nexus" has been enough of a political issue for political parties to promise they will break it.

### What "sand mafia"?

Those in the business are known to have formed cartels to preempt competitive bids for mines while arriving at arrangements among themselves on the price at which sand will be sold in the market. During the two terms that the SAD-BJP was in power, the annual revenue from the allocation of sand mines was not more than Rs 40 crore in any year. Under the auctioning system prevalent then, the mines would be allotted to the lowest bidder, ostensibly to keep the market price of sand low. But the prices skyrocketed as cartels determined both the supply and the rates. On the other hand, the Congress regime decided to introduce e-auctioning of mines, and a system of "progressive bidding" through which mines would be allotted to the highest bidder. The system netted the government Rs 200 crore, but there are concerns that because of the high auction prices, those in the business will have to charge high prices in the market to recover their money. The government says it will ensure that there is a supply of 3 crore tonnes of sand, more than the demand, so that the



### MINING ZONES

**RAVI:** Pathankot, Amritsar, Gurdaspur

**BEAS:** Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Nawanshahar, Tarn Taran

**SUTLEJ:** Ludhiana, Moga, Ropar, Ferozepur

**GHAGGAR:** Mohali

**LAND QUARRIES:** Faridkot, Fazilka

price remains reasonable. There are also concerns that the high auction prices will incentivise illegal mining.

### How does illegal mining take place?

The department of mines auctions 102 spots. These are notified by the Ministry of Environment keeping in mind the effect on the flow of the river when there is water in it, on the river banks and the depth of river. But it is well known that sand miners do not restrict themselves to their allotted mines or notified areas. There have been instances of expanding the area of the mine, or tapping riverbeds that are not included among the "auctionable" mines, and of mining during the monsoon months, when the activity is officially banned.

### What is the recent row around the sand mining auction about?

The government had promised its e-auction system would ensure transparency and weed out cartels and break the nexus between politicians and the sand mafia. But after the auction, it emerged that individuals linked to Power and Irrigation Minister Rana Gurjit Singh had won at least three mines. One of them, who was formerly employed as a cook in Rana Sugars Pvt Ltd, won a contract by bidding Rs 26 crore, another put up Rs 9.21 crore. Rana Gurjit has denied any links to these individuals, and says they were associated with him in the past but now have their own businesses. His poll affidavit displays transactions between his businesses and those in which his former employees are now "directors". Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has set up a judicial inquiry into the allegations of "impropriety" against the minister.



### SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Dear World Leaders: Do not call @realDonaldTrump on his cell phone unless you want conversation monitored. Look up "SS7 flaw" in networks.

**TED LIEU**, @tedlieu, US Congressman, 236K followers, pointed out a flaw in cellphone networks that can give hackers access to calls after reports that Trump has been asking world leaders to call him on his cellphone

## Directive principle, not right: How cow protection became part of Constitution

SEEMA CHISHTI traces history of Constituent Assembly debates leading to Article 48

### Where does cow slaughter figure in the Constitution?

Prohibition of cow slaughter is part of the Constitution, under Article 48, "Organisation of agriculture and animal husbandry", which reads: "The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle."

### So is it a right?

No. It features in the Directive Principles of State Policy. Rather than a right, these are seen as high ideals or broad guidelines that governments should bear in mind while framing policy.

Another Directive Principle, for example, is Article 47: "The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties."

### What kind of debates in the Constituent Assembly led to this Article being inserted in the Constitution?

While the Constitution itself is acknowledged to have a rational and secular tone, the debate on cow slaughter in the Constituent Assembly often took on majoritarian and religious overtones. In the shadow of Partition, on November 24, 1948, the amendment to protect cows was made by a member from East Punjab, Pandit Thakur Dass Bhargava. To begin with, he argued from an economic point of view that was essential for a rational approach: "How can you improve your health and food position, if you do not produce full quota of cereals and milk? This amendment is divided into three parts. Firstly, the agriculture should be improved on scientific and modern lines. Secondly, the cattle breed should be improved; and thirdly, the cow and other cattle should be protected from slaughter. To grow more food and to improve agriculture and the cattle breed are all inter-dependent and are two sides of the same coin."

Others, mostly leaders seen in the Hindu-conservative camp of the Congress, such as Seth Govind Das, Shibban Lal Saxena, Ram Sahai and Raghu Vira argued in the same vein.

### How did the debate assume religious overtones?

Gradually, participants in the debate drew in the religion angle. RV Dhulekar said: "And our Hindu society, or our Indian society, has included the cow in our fold. It is just like our mother. In fact, it is more than our mother. I can declare from this platform that there are thousands of persons who will not run at a man to kill that man for their mother or wife or children, but they will run at a man if that man does not want to protect the cow or wants to kill her."

Pandit Thakur Dass also spoke of Muslim emperors having banned the practice, when he said: "Babur, the first Mughal Emperor, told Humayun... 'Refrain from cow slaughter to win the hearts of the people of Hindustan.'"

This drew a reaction from Muslim members, who were keen that this should not be seen as drawing a cleavage between so-called "cow-eating Muslims" and Hindus "who don't". Mohammed Saadullah from

Assam and ZA Lari sought that the law should not leave it in the grey zone but should spell out clearly if slaughter was being banned for religious reasons and not economic ones. Sadullah said it must be made explicit that: "This is part of our religion. The cow should be protected from slaughter. I know that the vast majority of the Hindu nation revere the cow as their goddess and therefore they cannot brook the idea of seeing it slaughtered. I am a Muslim as everyone knows. In my religious book, the Holy Quran, there is an injunction to the Muslims saying - 'La Ikraha fid Din', or, there ought to be no compulsion in the name of religion."

The Muslim members agreed to this being a Directive Principle. It is noteworthy that those advocating a ban did not want it to be a right. Ram Sahai of Madhya Bharat stated explicitly: "I also do not like, on my part, to make any proposal that may not receive the unanimous acceptance of the House nor a proposal which may lead to the curtailment of the freedom of the Provinces in this matter. Under the Directive Principles of State Policy, Provinces will have the power to stop cow slaughter totally or partially."

### What was the view on bullocks and bulls?

During the course of the voting on this amendment, which stated that bulls and bullocks too should be named explicitly, the amendment was "negatived". It was only when it was not made explicit and limited to cows that the amendment was passed.

### What about MK Gandhi's views on cow protection?

Gandhi is invoked frequently in the course of the debate but his musings on cows and cow slaughter were nuanced and evolved over time. He asked people to focus on gau 'seva' or serving cows and not on protection or gau 'raksha'. In 1921, he reflected: "I would not kill a human being for protecting a cow, as I will not kill a cow for saving a human life, be it ever so precious." By 1946, Gandhi was clear that, "Cow slaughter can never be stopped by law. Knowledge, education, and the spirit of kindness towards her alone can put an end to it."

### Were cows not the reason for the attack on Parliament by sadhus?

Yes. The MP from Karnal, Swami Rameshwaranand of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, led a march of sadhus to Parliament on November 7, 1966, asking for a blanket, nationwide ban on cow slaughter. The siege on Parliament led to mayhem for the first time after Partition, with at least seven people killed in police firing.

Indira Gandhi, new as Prime Minister, sacked then home minister Gulzarilal Nanda, who was also affiliated with the Bharat Sadhu Samaj. After she won the Lok Sabha polls the following year, Indira Gandhi constituted a committee to look into the proposal for a national law to ban cow slaughter. It was headed by Justice AK Sarkar, then recently retired as Chief Justice of India.

Incidentally, then RSS chief M S Golwalkar too was a member of that committee, which was given six months to submit its recommendations. The committee never submitted its recommendations and was eventually wound up in 1979 when Morarji Desai was Prime Minister.

## A sponge that sops up and releases glucose, as needed



PAPER CLIP

FLAGGING INTERESTING RESEARCH

### FIGHTING DIABETES

SUGAR SPONGE  
Published in *Journal of the American Chemical Society*

AUTHORS: Jianzhong Du & colleagues

MANY DIABETES patients must inject themselves with insulin, sometimes several times a day, while others take medications orally to control blood sugar. The injections, as well as the side effects from both regimens, can be painful.

Now, a team has reported progress toward an insulin-free diabetes treatment that requires fewer injections. Their research has been published in the *Journal of the American Chemical Society*.

Jianzhong Du of Tongji University, Shanghai, and his colleagues wanted to develop a method that would be easy to use and that would avoid side effects.

The researchers nicknamed their treatment the "sugar sponge". The sugar sponge functions as a glucose storage unit. It's an injected lectin-coated polymer vesicle; the lectin in the sugar sponge will bind and store the glucose from its surrounding solution when the glucose concentration is too



### Insulin injections are painful.

high and will release the glucose when the glucose concentration is too low.

The researchers also tested the sponge in mice with type-I diabetes, and within

two days, they saw antidiabetic effects. The researchers say that the sponge could one day serve as a treatment for either type-I or type-II diabetes.

Non-invasive insulin-dependent systems that include hydrogels and polymers have been developed in the laboratory, the American Chemical Society says in a release, but these too can trigger the same complications as insulin injections do. In addition to pain, insulin injections can involve different types of insulin - a slow-acting one before bed or a fast-acting one before meals - which can be confusing. Pills are not much better, as patients sometimes forget to take them. Both drugs and injections can have various side effects, including nerve damage, infections and insulin resistance.

**PRESS RELEASE BY THE AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY; ABSTRACT OF RESEARCH IN THE JOURNAL OF THE ACS**

## When 2 rivers are legally living persons: some rights, some questions

### SOWMIYA ASHOK

ON MARCH 20 this year, Uttarakhand High Court declared that the rivers Ganga and Yamuna would be legally treated as "living people," and as such, would enjoy "all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person."

Five days earlier, for the first time in the world, a river in New Zealand, the Whanganui, was granted legal rights as a human being. It was a culmination of over a decade-long effort by the local Maori tribe. "The reason we have taken this approach is because we consider the river as an ancestor and always have," the lead negotiator for the Whanganui iwi (tribe) told *The Guardian*.

In India, a division bench comprising Justice Alok Singh and Justice Rajiv Sharma, while adjudicating on a land acquisition case, observed that apart from a spiritual connect that Hindus share with the two rivers, the Ganga and Yamuna are central to the existence of half of the Indian population.

"The rivers have provided both physical and spiritual sustenance to all of us from time immemorial... They support and assist both the life and natural resources and health and

well-being of the entire community. Rivers Ganga and Yamuna are breathing, living and sustaining communities from mountains to sea," the bench opined.

For judicial purposes, living persons are "juristic persons" - any subject matter other than a human being - to which the law attributes personality for good and sufficient reasons. In other words, "for a bigger thrust of socio-political-scientific development, evolution of a fictional personality to be a juristic person becomes inevitable."

Citing precedents [1969 (1) SCC 555 of *Yogendra Nath Naskar v Commission of Income Tax, Calcutta*] in which Hindu idols have been considered as a "juristic entity capable of holding property and of being taxed," the division bench of Uttarakhand High Court, noted that with the development of society where the "interactions of individuals fell short to upsurge the social development, the concept of juristic person was devised and created by human laws for the purposes of the society."

The bench cited Articles 48 (A) - the state's responsibility with respect to environment protection - and Article 51 A (g) - the fundamental duties of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environ-



ment - as grounds to pass such a judgment.

There is though a fundamental difference between New Zealand's recognition of their third largest river as a living entity and that of Uttarakhand High Court according to the status to two of India's prominent rivers. It has led to questions being raised by various stakeholders here.

It pertains to the custodians appointed to act on behalf of the rivers. New Zealand has appointed two guardians - one from the

crown and one from the Whanganui iwi tribe itself. In India, the three custodians are solely government authorities: the chief secretary of the state of Uttarakhand, the advocate general of the state of Uttarakhand and the director of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).

These three, the bench noted, will serve as "the human face to protect, conserve and preserve the rivers and their tributaries" and the advocate general will represent all legal pro-



(Left) The Ganga, one of two rivers accorded legal status as living persons; (above) the Whanganui river is sacred to the Maori tribe. File/Neeraj Priyadarshi; Wikimedia

ceedings to protect the interest of the rivers.

Simply put, the conceptual and practical implication of the judgment is that it makes it easier for the three chosen authorities to take action against those who pollute the river.

Activists point to the the lack of local representatives as custodians of the rivers and say that the judgment instead allows the polluter - which in several instances is the government itself - to act as custodians.

"We think the judgment is actually directed just at policymakers and not the larger public," Mallika Bhanot from Ganga Avahan, an NGO working for the conservation of Ganga, said. "The state of Uttarakhand should not be made custodians, they should be held responsible."

The Uttarakhand government too is seeking clarity on the March 20 order. It recently said that it plans to approach the Supreme Court in this regard. The state government contends that since the river flows through five states, it could lead to "technical, geographical and administrative issues" in the implementation of the order. How can the chief secretary of Uttarakhand be held accountable if the river is polluted in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand or Uttar Pradesh, the state wants to know.

And two months after the order, the office of another of the custodians, the National Mission for Clean Ganga, has sought legal advice from the law ministry. "We want to know what implications it has for us?" an NMCG official said, adding the file has been stalled since the matter is sub-judice. The Ministry of Water Resources might extend this order to examine all other rivers in India too, he added.

**The Indian EXPRESS**

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Us & Them, the farmers



HARISH DAMODARAN

GM mustard exposes our double standards when it comes to technology for farmers

THE CAR WE DRIVE has hundreds of patents on the components and systems — from the internal combustion engine, fuel injection, drivetrain, suspension and steering/brake controls, to electricals and air-conditioning — that work together to run it. The smartphone we use is nothing but an assemblage of patents numbering over 2,50,000, whether these relate to its operating system, processor, wireless local area networking, camera, display screen or protective glass. The aircraft we fly in are made by Boeing or Airbus.

Yet, monopolies/duopolies in airplanes, mobile operating systems (Google Android/iOS) and baseband processors (Qualcomm/MediaTek), or royalties on their components and technologies, do not deter us from driving, flying and using smartphones. Rather, we wait with bated breath for the launch of the next iPhone 8 or the latest Maruti Dzire variant.

But strangely, this absence of guilt, or being deterred by corporate dominance with regard to consuming things “we” want, does not apply to technologies in agriculture. There, the focus suddenly shifts to preventing a corporate agribusiness takeover of food production and ensuring our farmers don’t turn into slaves of Bayer-Monsanto or Dow-DuPont. Further, all that’s traditional and organically grown, without the use of any chemical fertilisers, pesticides, tractors and combine harvesters, becomes the ideal standard. Farmers are expected to conform — because “we” know what’s best for “them”.

Nowhere is this hypocrisy — double standards as far as technologies for “us” and “them” go — more apparent than in our hostility to genetically modified (GM) mustard, now awaiting regulatory clearance. This is fundamentally a technology to make a self-pollinating plant — mustard flowers contain both female and male reproductive organs — amenable to hybridisation and exploit the potential yield gains from crossing genetically diverse parents from even within the same species. To facilitate it, a “Barnase” gene coding for a protein that impairs pollen production is introduced into one of the parents. The resultant male-sterile line can then receive pollen from another parent, which has, in turn, been introgressed with a separate “Barstar” gene that blocks the action of the Barnase gene.

The progeny from cross-pollination is a hybrid plant having a higher yield than either

of the parents and also fertile, that is, capable of producing seed/grain.

Now, why should “we” object to this technology? One reason is because the alien Barnase and Barstar genes are both isolated from a soil bacterium, making for a mustard that is transgenic or GM. But India is importing nearly four lakh tonnes (1t) of rapeseed/canola oil every year, a lot of it being GM and based on the same Barnase-Barstar technology. This is apart from the 40 lt-plus of imported soyabean oil, which is entirely GM. If imported edible oil can be GM, why should our farmers be stopped from planting mustard that is GM? The country is, moreover, producing some 13 lt of cottonseed oil, now the second-largest indigenous edible oil after mustard, at 19 lt. This oil is again GM, derived from domestically grown Bt cotton. If roughly a quarter of our annual vegetable oil consumption of 220 lt is already GM, how does transgenic mustard radically alter the picture?

A second objection could have to do with the presence of a third “Bar” gene in GM mustard, making the plant resistant to the herbicide, glufosinate ammonium. This is basically a marker gene, used to identify those plants that have been genetically modified — the non-GM ones can’t withstand applications of this herbicide — and necessary especially for large-scale hybrid seed production. The naysayers’ contention, however, is that it will also enable farmers to spray the herbicide and hence displace rural labour engaged in manual weeding. But by that logic, shouldn’t we junk washing machines that take away work from domestic helps? Does the responsibility of job creation lie with the farmer alone?

A third allegation is about the yield gains from DMH-11, the GM mustard hybrid developed by Delhi University’s Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP). These, it is said, aren’t spectacular and are lower than yields from CGMCP’s own mustard hybrids bred through non-transgenic methods. The argument misses the point. DMH-11 is just the start. More important is the Barnase-Barstar-Bar (BBB) technology itself, which is a far more robust and viable system for hybrid breeding. It allows for crossing a wider range of Indian and even East European origin mustard lines, to breed for both higher yields as well as disease resistance. Conventional hybridisation techniques such as cytoplasmic male techniques do not per-

mit this level of flexibility, which also explains why CGMCP’s scientists chose BBB.

That brings us to the central point: Why is there so much opposition to a technology developed, after all, by Indian scientists in the public sector? Yes, the original patent for the BBB system was filed by Plant Genetics Systems (now part of Bayer CropScience), but the CGMCP scientists improved upon it, for which they obtained patents (three US, two Canadian, one European Union and Australian each). Yet, we see no value in their work. The opponents — from the so-called Left or the Right — haven’t even bothered to visit the CGMCP, most accessibly located in Delhi University’s South Campus, while taking time out for anti-GMO jamborees in Brussels and The Hague.

All this opposition is reflective of a unique Us and Them syndrome. For “us”, nothing but the latest would do. But farmers will have no right to grow GM mustard and assess its performance on the field. This, even after toxicity and allergenicity studies conducted by the National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, have shown no adverse effects. But that apparently isn’t good enough; we want conclusive evidence. Well, was such irrefutable proof of zero-risk for all times a consideration in mobile towers, Viagra or human insulin that’s also GMO? No, because these concern “us”.

The Kerala legislative assembly has passed a resolution opposing the commercialisation of GM mustard, stating it endangered the “purity of farming”. Holding farmers to “pure” standards is not limited to a denial of the right to use or reject a technology. It extends to their obligation to safeguard Bharatiya Sanskriti and conserve gauvansh as per “our” noble desire, even if this entails maintaining cattle that are of no use to them. Will we keep these animals in our homes? New Environment Ministry rules prevent farmers from even taking spent bovines to livestock markets without furnishing written declarations that the intended sale isn’t for slaughter purposes. The Ease of Doing Business, it seems, applies only to “us”.

The Left and the Right are seldom known to come together. But when they do — whether, in this case, to protect the Purity of Farming or Bharatiya Sanskriti — one can be sure it will, to paraphrase Adam Smith, end in a conspiracy against the Indian farmer.

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## DELHI TO BERLIN

Current turmoil in Eurasian politics demands that India and Germany reconnect. The ball is in India’s court

IF YOU WANT to describe the relations between independent India and post-War Germany, the phrase “benign neglect” readily comes to mind. Before the Second World War, though, there was a lot more going on between Indian and German nationalists united by their hostility towards Britain. After the War, India and Germany had a correct but inconsequential relationship. The current turmoil in Eurasian geopolitics — the prospects of an American retrenchment under Donald Trump and the growing assertion of Russia under Vladimir Putin and China under Xi Jinping — demands that Delhi and Berlin reconnect and revitalise their relationship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chancellor Angela Merkel have promised precisely that — that they will deepen their political, economic and security cooperation on the basis of shared values and offer responsible leadership on regional and global problems, ranging from maritime order to climate change.

Sceptics would say the words from India and Germany on building a strategic relationship have not been matched by deeds. One major constraint has been India’s legacy of non-alignment and Germany’s deference to American leadership. Both nations were hesitant powers — India is tied down by a pretentious moralpolitik and Germany by the genuine expiation of the guilt from World War II. That is changing now. Under Modi, India’s aspirations to become a leading power have become more pronounced. Meanwhile, Merkel is under a growing compulsion to take a larger share of global burdens. As Britain walks out of the European project and “America First” isolationism threatens the global economic and political order, there are growing expectations of the German leadership. Merkel’s remark, that Europe can no longer rely on the Anglo-American leadership and must take charge of its own destiny, resonates in India. Modi had every reason to cheer Chancellor Merkel in building a globally engaged Germany and a more cohesive Europe that could partner India in structuring a stable balance of power in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific theatres.

So far, so good. But the problem begins when it comes to concrete issues relating to India’s economic and security cooperation with Germany and Europe. If the prickliness of Delhi’s Commerce Ministry alienates India’s trade partners, the Defence Ministry relishes slamming the door on the face of all those seeking strategic engagement with India. Despite the massive centralisation of power in the last three years, the PM seems unable to force his trade and defence negotiators to follow through on his expansive internationalist rhetoric. In his talks with Merkel, Modi has promised to renew the conversation on free trade and investment protection with Europe and on defence industrial collaboration. Germany and Europe will not hold their breath for too long. For, the pace of Eurasian tectonic movement may be much faster than the response time of the Indian bureaucracy.

## OVER TO CAPTAIN

CM must ask Minister Gurjit Singh to step down in order to ensure a fair probe into allegations of corruption against him

LESS THAN A week after assuming office as Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh announced that his government would follow a “zero tolerance” policy on corruption. On Tuesday, he vowed to clamp down on corruption with an “iron hand”. In the past six days, when his government has been embarrassed with allegations of corruption against the state’s irrigation and power minister, Rana Gurjit Singh, the Punjab CM has had a chance to put his strong words into practice. But, disappointingly, he has not been up to the task. The Punjab government has asked retired high court judge, Justice J.S. Narang, to probe the allegations of impropriety against the minister in last week’s multi-crore sand mining auctions. If the Punjab CM is indeed serious about curbing corruption, he should remove his colleague from his position in order to facilitate a fair probe.

Opposition parties, the Aam Aadmi Party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have been demanding the sacking of Gurjit Singh for allegedly acquiring sand and gravel mines through benami transactions in the name of his former cook, Amit Bahadur. Gurjit Singh has denied links with Bahadur, who was formerly employed with Rana Sugar, the outfit which successfully bid for a Rs 26.5 crore sand mine in Nawanshahr. The charges against the minister are too serious to be addressed by such disclaimers. The sand mines in question are in the rivers whose upkeep Gurjit Singh is responsible for as the irrigation minister. And in his election affidavit, the minister had disclosed financial transactions with three companies headed by Bahadur. This conflict of interest should have been apparent to the Punjab CM in the first place. It is unfortunate that he has chosen to maintain a guarded silence even after these facts have come to public light.

During the SAD-BJP’s stint in office, Amarinder Singh accused the Badal family of letting the “mining mafia” have a free run, leading to a drain of the state’s resources. The Congress manifesto in the elections, which brought it to office in Punjab, promised to get rid of nepotism in the state’s administration. After taking over as CM, Amarinder Singh has often emphasised transparency in governance as the key to raising the state’s growth rate, much below the national average. Such lofty words will mean nothing if the Punjab CM cannot ensure a fair investigation into the allegations against Minister Gurjit Singh.

## CRA CONSECT MSAN

Dear reader, we were there before Trump. This is the dummy headline used for years by the edit page designers

THAT WOMAN WHO broke the internet with her posterior started it. Sensing competition, President Donald Trump has broken it in his sleep. On Tuesday night, he tweeted, “Despite the constant negative press covfefe”. Then he rolled over, and the rest was silence. That tantalisingly incomplete tweet was the lull heralding a meme-storm. The Beeb is running an opinion poll on the pronunciation of “covfefe”, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* is doubtless making room for it. Meanwhile, how did it happen? And, could it happen to the nuclear button, too?

Between the nightcap and the first of forty winks is the witching hour, when one must not operate dangerous machinery like Twitter. But Trump is incaution personified — he has invited world leaders to call on his unsecured mobile to discuss state secrets. Or, since the tweet is devoid of signature Trumpspeak like “big”, “great”, “massive” and “yuge”, was he hacked by a freshly irritated foreign power? The Germans would love to, you know. Or is this a sly bid for the literature Nobel?

Why didn’t Trump’s minders alert him about that half-tweet? Such naïvete! Trump does not have minders. The minders have Trump. But every day, minders at *The Indian Express* do battle with our own version of “covfefe”, the nonsense phrase “Cra Consect Msan”. That’s what all the headlines on this page say when we start work. This “dummy text” is flotsam from the first edit page ever made. Every night, unsung *Express* minders overwrite the nonsense with real headlines before the presses roll. Someone in Trump’s entourage should have done likewise about “covfefe”. Instead, they have opened a literary floodgate. Truman Capote disparaged Jack Kerouac and the Beatniks with a casually lethal put-down: “That’s not writing. That’s typing.” Now, a US president may find literary fame, for mis-typing. And then, sleeping.



APOORVANAND

AMARINDER SINGH IS part of the “mob” Pratap Bhanu Mehta wants the army to be wary of (“The march to spectacle”, IE, May 29). That he has been heard by the army and the government is not surprising. Singh wanted a special medal for Major Nitin Leetul Gogoi, the army chief has obliged him.

There is also no irony in Defence Minister Arun Jaitley seconding Singh in advocating a free hand to the army, said to be fighting a war in Kashmir. It is also not shocking that a chief minister, who swears by the Constitution and belongs to a “secular” party, places the army above the people when he says, “the Indian army should have an upper hand to be able to negotiate peace on terms that are favourable to the country”. He forgets that it is for the elected government, not the army, to negotiate peace.

This is the message we must read: Making the army supreme, unanswerable to parliament and the judiciary. The government recently moved the Supreme Court asking it to quash its order to investigate excesses committed by the armed forces in Manipur. This is not just about Kashmir — it is about a new India where the army would deal with people independently. We should have seen it coming when the army chief ad-

## NEW ARMY FOR NEW INDIA

Relationship between government, army and us is being rewritten, disturbingly so

dressed the nation directly through AIR and Doordarshan on Army Day this year. This, a journalist friend felt, should be marked as a turning point for India. A new narrative is emerging in which the army is not only an institution known for its professionalism, but feared by the people, as a guardian is by potentially delinquent children.

Major Gogoi, in this new narrative, is a creative genius. He provides India with a spectacle of the humiliation of Kashmiris. The image of Dar was symbolic: Both hands of Kashmir tied by a brutal power. No bullets fired, no blood shed, but we have not seen a more brutal picture of the humiliation of a human being in recent times. It was an act of double violence, on the man and his fellow villagers, turned into subjugated spectators.

That it did not shock us when Gogoi addressed the nation through the media after being decorated is a disturbing sign. Before him, and the current army chief, we do not remember any army officer addressing a press conference, not even after Pakistan’s surrender in 1971, Operation Blue Star, Kargil. The army was the main actor there. But it refrained from being seen as the director.

The present government is invoking nationalism to legitimise itself. It is trying to show it is the first government which backs the army. The latter is obliging by making the government’s nationalist agenda its own. Recently, the army vice chief and an air marshal participated in a government programme where offerings were made to the image of Bharat Mata, holding a saffron flag. They saluted and stood at attention when *Vande Mataram* was sung.

The army has been seen as a non-partisan force. In violent situations, people always sought it. But now, by allowing itself to align with a particular ideological version of nationalism, it is losing that neutrality. It suits the BJP to turn the army into a nationalist army. It is not for nothing that the image of dying soldiers is slammed onto students, artists or workers fighting for their rights.

Amarinder Singh is creating an atmosphere which legitimises a militarist, nationalist India, where the rights of the people are suspended perpetually as there would not be a time when the state is in absolute peace with all sections of its population. It is not only about Kashmir. Kashmir is only a cover.

The writer teaches at Delhi University

## JUNE 1, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

### PM DESAI ON J&K

PRIME MINISTER MORARJI Desai declared in Lucknow that Article 370 of the Constitution which provides for special status to Jammu and Kashmir would not be altered unless this was desired by the people of the state themselves. The PM promised prosperity for the country after 10 years as a result of sustained efforts to be made by the Janata Party government by putting the economy on an even keel, removing unemployment through a network of cottage industries in rural areas and ensuring price stability. Desai clarified that nationals and multinationals would be invited to invest only in those industries which could not be

established by the public sector. Industries which could be established by the government would be barred from private or foreign investments. He offered to withdraw cases against Naxalites if it was brought to his notice that they had been falsely implicated. However, their cases could not be equated with the Baroda dynamite case which was a total fabrication, he said.

### MUJIB FAMILY IN DELHI

SOME CLOSE RELATIVES of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were in Delhi. This was stated by PM Morarji Desai at a news conference in Lucknow. Asked whether the government of India will grant political asy-

lum to the relatives of the assassinated leader, he said: “They are already in New Delhi and nobody is asking them to go away.”

### HEGDE VS URS

JANATA PARTY GENERAL secretary Ramakrishna Hegde said that the Karnataka Chief Minister Devraj Urs had no “moral right” to appoint the state-level commission of inquiry when he himself had been put in the dock. He said though there were 36 allegations against Urs, the CM had not referred all these to the commission appointed by him. It was clear the institution of the state-level inquiry by Urs was preemptive action to prevent a central probe.



# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Mentoring young India

Tinkering Laboratories — Niti Aayog-promoted open-innovation workspaces in high schools — has the potential to ignite entrepreneurship from below



TARUN KHANNA

RECENTLY, I RECALLED a conversation I had with the much-loved late President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, when he visited Harvard, about a book he had written, *Ignited Minds*, a paean to creativity and its unbounded possibilities. I thought of this in the context of the current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attempts to jump-start entrepreneurship in India, to induce the creativity-for-incremental-job creation needed to absorb the net addition of over 10 million people annually (for the next decade) to the country's workforce.

So, how does one ignite minds, and spur a movement towards entrepreneurship? We can learn from a list of attempts to spur grassroots movements surely. Among my favourites in the US are the Peace Corps — not without controversy on occasion, but generally aligned to do good all over the world — and Teach for All, an ensemble in multiple countries that grew out of Teach for America, where volunteer college graduates intern for a couple of years, teaching in under-resourced primary schools. Related to entrepreneurship, there's TiE, The Indus Entrepreneurs, emanating from Silicon Valley, a movement of sorts to inspire entrepreneurs globally.

We are at a salubrious moment in the Indian entrepreneurship journey. Of course there are problems aplenty, but I'm optimistic because of the foundations that are coming into place. There are entrepreneurial clusters with creative ferment — Koramangla in Bangalore, Powai in Mumbai, Gurgaon. There is a business-friendly tone from the government in New Delhi, and a conceptual plan I had the good fortune to work on, as chair of a committee on entrepreneurship and innovation pulled together at the Niti Aayog's behest in 2015. Our report's insights — the creation of a time-based plan ranging from short-term actions to longer-term initiatives — have been incorporated into the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM, within the Niti Aayog), the apex body shepherding this journey.

Now, it's time to layer atop this a grassroots movement to ignite young minds.

Recently, AIM announced a network of 457 Tinkering Laboratories that seems to me to offer a perfect opportunity to do just this. What are these tinkering labs? They're carefully curated open-innovation workspaces within existing high schools (targeting classes 6 through 12), selected from a careful competitive process run over past few months, that have simple equipment with which school children can play (think of measuring instruments, simple robots, a 3D printer). The notion is that individuals or groups of students can come together to work on simple ideas. In Tinkering Labs, imagination playfully meets science.

I remember my 13-year-old son working with a classmate in his Boston area school on a project to make a toy solar-powered car where they learned — viscerally, not through book learning — the physics of how energy is transmitted to enable forward motion in a car, the material science of a tiny solar panel, and the design and aesthetics of a chassis that could be supported by whatever minimal power the panel was able to generate. A high school kid from Panipat is working on a device to help convert breath into speech for the disabled.

Such efforts need minimal resources,



Manali Ghosh

though trained teacher support is vital, something I want to come back to.

The labs in urban areas will likely be better resourced, perhaps have trained teachers who can act as coaches for the kids using the labs. Even urban tinkering labs though will need much more support than that provided by the best-intentioned teachers, and those outside Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities — and there are rightly several in such areas — will surely lack sufficient mentorship.

This is where our AIM committee report's recommendation for a National Action Brigade is relevant. AIM will soon launch a Mentor India movement. If we have thousands of adult experienced volunteers agreeing to spend whatever time they're able to with a Tinkering Lab in their vicinity, it could be a real boost to the kids, teachers and the overall movement. These mentors will be identified from the public at large, though I hope our corporates, universities and large non-profits play a major role in this by making it feasible for their personnel to participate. Mentors will bring simple but profound skills to the table — technical skills, but also the ability to work in teams, problem-solve, negotiate and resolve conflicts, all handmaidens of creativity-in-practice.

Of course many details will need to be ironed out by the labs, schools, mentors, and by the AIM. The selection of mentors, a basic training regimen to prepare and equip them, and a monitoring network to ensure that their intervention and behaviours are appropriate and effective, a reward system

AIM will soon launch a Mentor India movement. If we have thousands of adult volunteers spending time with Tinkering Labs, it could be a real boost to kids. These mentors will be identified from the public, though I hope corporates, universities, non-profits play a major role. Mentors will share simple but profound skills — technical skills, but also the ability to work in teams, negotiate, resolve conflicts, all handmaidens of creativity-in-practice.

to recognise particularly successful mentoring, a technology-enabled platform through which mentors can communicate with a central entity and with each other within certain protocols, and so on. We will have to pay special attention to incentives for mentors — likely not monetary but recognition-based — as the initial euphoria of a "new" project will otherwise simply fade away.

The same Mentor India network structures can thereafter also be used to provide support for the networks of incubators — entities that allow adults to brainstorm and develop business ideas — that the AIM has supported across the nation. Those too lack adequate mentoring support, as my experience with the Bangalore-based incubator that I co-founded, Axilor, can attest.

The AIM report emphasised the bedrock foundations of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. A key piece of this is a groundswell of enthusiasm among youth at the grassroots, ideally technology-enabled. Catalysing the nation's high school children to believe in their creative potential, and re-energising adults to help the children thus enthused, is a vital piece of these foundations.

Overall, as an adult professional, I think of participation in Mentor India to be a privilege, perhaps even a civic duty.

*The writer is a professor at Harvard University, co-founder of the Bangalore-based incubator, Axilor, and chairman of the NITI Aayog committee on entrepreneurship and innovation*

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is now the conventional wisdom in Germany that the US can no longer be wholly relied on. This is bad news for everyone." —THE GUARDIAN

## Curb your scepticism

From providing minute digital records to seeding out fake claims, the targeted public distribution system is visibly reforming



BIBEK DEBROY

THERE IS A tendency to be skeptical about everything government does. Hence, even when something deserves to be applauded, it is discounted and not disseminated. I will focus on the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, and subsequent reforms in the targeted public distribution system (TPDS). Everything stated in this column is public domain information from the website of the Department of Food and Public Distribution. More specifically, there is the National Informatics Centre (NIC)'s PDS portal (the Anna Vitaran Portal).

There is no need to revisit the NFSA's provisions. That's a separate debate, let's take the NFSA as a given. Broadly, with 2011-12 National Sample Survey (NSS) data, two-thirds of the population (75 per cent rural, 50 per cent urban) is entitled to subsidised foodgrain through the Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Households (PHH) schemes. (There are other provisions on the Integrated Child Development Services, ICDS, Mid Day Meal Scheme, MDMS, and maternity benefits). Though the NFSA came into force on July 5, 2013, because states needed to evolve criteria and identify beneficiaries, its adoption by states was staggered, with Nagaland, Kerala and Tamil Nadu the last to join, in 2016. All states and/or Union Territories (UTs) are now part of the NFSA.

Let me quote Section 12 of the NFSA to highlight the TPDS reforms I have in mind. "(1) The Central and State Governments shall endeavour to progressively undertake necessary reforms in the Targeted Public Distribution System in consonance with the role envisaged for them in this Act. (2) The reforms shall, inter alia, include — (a) doorstep delivery of foodgrains to the Targeted Public Distribution System outlets; (b) application of information and communication technology tools including end-to-end computerisation in order to ensure transparent recording of transactions at all levels, and to prevent diversion; (c) leveraging "Aadhaar" for unique identification, with biometric information of entitled beneficiaries for proper targeting of benefits under this Act; (d) full transparency of records; (e) preference to public institutions or public bodies such as panchayats, self-help groups, co-operatives, in licensing of fair price shops and management of fair price shops by women or their collectives; (f) diversification of commodities distributed under the Public Distribution System over a period of time; (g) support to local public distribution models and grains banks; (h) introducing schemes, such as cash transfer, food coupons, or other schemes, to the targeted beneficiaries in order to ensure their foodgrain entitlements specified in Chapter II, in such area and manner as may be prescribed by the Central Government."

For subsidised grain, there are 186.6 million ration cards, 23 million AAY and 163.5 million PHH. If these are digitised and

seeded with Aadhaar numbers, duplication is reduced; ghost ration cards are eliminated. All 36 states and UTs have digitised ration cards now. (Since some ration card holders are not entitled to AAY or PHH, the total number of ration cards is 232 million). For some states, there are live links or reports on digitisation. As of March 31, 2017, 77.04 per cent of ration cards (178.2 million) have been seeded with Aadhaar numbers. Between 2013 and 2016, 23.3 million bogus ration cards were identified and removed.

Once records and databases have been fixed, one moves to the online allocation of foodgrains, down to the FPS (fair price shop) level — 30 states/UTs have done this. Some have live links and reports on online allocation. Since Chandigarh and Puducherry (and partly Dadra and Nagar Haveli, in urban areas) opted for direct benefit transfers (DBTs), with an equivalent cash transfer into seeded bank accounts, online allocation is irrelevant for these. Now, 2,33,520 households are covered by such cash transfers, the bulk in Puducherry. The "equivalence" is worked out by multiplying the minimum support price (MSP) by a factor of 1.25 and subtracting the central issue price (CIP).

The next step is the automation of the supply chain management (delivery orders, release orders, truck chalangos, gate passes, receipts and issuance of foodgrains, monitoring of stock positions, payments and SMS alerts when opted for). As of now, 20 states and/or UTs have done this, some featuring live links. All have transparency portals and toll-free helplines. Except for Arunachal Pradesh and J&K, all have online grievance registration facilities.

The last step in this end-to-end computerisation of the TPDS is the most difficult — this is the automation of fair price shops, through handheld devices or computers. Let's call these EPOS (electronic point of sale) devices. One shouldn't be too sceptical; this process has already started in 22 states/UTs. These 22 have 5,26,000 FPSs and 1,86,726 of these already have such EPOS devices. When the EPOS device is owned by the FPS dealer, there is a provision for purchase and operation costs to be included in dealer margins. Several states/UTs have live links and/or reports on FPS automation.

Figures on the PDS portal are a revelation. I am not suggesting everything is perfect; for instance, portability and migrant populations remain an issue. However, since 1991, every once in a while, people spoke about reforming the TPDS — nothing significant happened. Compared to that, what's occurred since 2013 is remarkable.

Visit the portal and see for yourself. I clicked on Rajasthan — details on the category and number of each type of ration card were available for each of 33 districts. Pick a district and click on "urban". That will take you to the Nagar Palika, then the ward, the name of the FPS shop, and finally, to details of a household's ration card (names, ages, address and photograph of the head of the household). If you click on "rural", you reach the same destination, via block, panchayat and village. All public domain information.

I did click on Delhi too, but that site was perpetually down.

*The writer is member, Niti Aayog. Views are personal*

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### SELF-GOALS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Stepping on toes" (IE, May 31). In its misplaced over-enthusiasm on cow protection, the BJP-led government at the Centre made a self-goal by issuing the order banning the sale of farm animals for slaughter at cattle markets. Meanwhile, the Kerala Youth Congress made its own self-goal by slaughtering a calf in public, an action which even the embarrassed Congress party failed to defend. Passing an interim order, the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court has now stayed the Central government's move. This was the correct approach to oppose the ban — not the cruel, public killing of an hapless animal.

M.C. Joshi, Lucknow

#### UNTENABLE LINKS

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Illegal and senseless" (IE, May 31). While Arvind P. Datar's legal arguments are sound, it is pertinent to point out that Kashmiri separatism and the Maoist insurgency cannot be connected with any cow bans. Also, the links to economic issues like slowing growth in manufacturing, exports and employment need to be substantiated.

Aaditya Gore, Mumbai

#### A SERIOUS CARTOON

THIS REFERS TO the cartoon by E.P. Unny (IE, May 31). Hats off to Unny for his thought-provoking visual which shows Charlie Chaplin eating a shoe, appropriately captioned "While PM is

#### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to [editpage@expressindia.com](mailto:editpage@expressindia.com) or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

winning European hearts, don't ban Chaplin eating leather product". I fervently hope that someone will bring this visual to the notice of the top leadership in the current government and request them to ponder over recent announcements and, hopefully, engage in some course correction as well. Let our leaders understand that in order to save the cow, you also have to be more practical.

Arjan Thadani, Pune



TELESCOPE

BY SHAILAJA BAJPAI

## Back to Ayodhya

A Babri test for the BJP — and news TV

BREAKING SUPER EXCLUSIVE News: Did Amab G (as in "ji") get a haircut? And has it affected him like it did Samson (of Delilah fame)? Well, that would account for the change in him: For the first time in recorded memory, the Republic anchor questioned the BJP — perhaps he had been listening to the prime minister on Sunday's *Mann Ki Baat* when he said that critical feedback was welcome and government accountability was important in a democracy.

"#Babri test for BJP", screamed the headlines on Tuesday's *Burning Question*, "Will BJP oust the charged or admit a duplicitous agenda? Sudhanshu Mittal...", thundered Goswami in the angry voice he normally reserves for "anti-national" obstructionist, sorry (!), opposition parties. It's been six hours, fifty-something minutes, thirty one and a half seconds and five-fifths of a nanosecond since "12 charged 25 years later" in the Babri Masjid case and the BJP has taken not one "action" against the "fringe elements" — would that be L.K. Advani, M.M.

Joshi and Uma Bharti? Fringe elements? Well, really!

Republic said it was a moment of "reckoning for BJP" which sent a 7.2 quake on the Richter scale through the LED screen as it is not accustomed to Goswami & Co even suggesting such an earth-shattering possibility. Blame it on the barber and be careful when you go for a haircut.

While most of the other news channels in Hindi and English joined Republic in revisiting the Babri case, Times Now first caught the UPA snooping on Muslims (India Upfront), if you please, and then got into a #BeefRage over "violence for votes?" (*The Newshour*, 9 pm). It was only at 10 pm that the news channel went to Ayodhya and asked: "Who derailed justice?"

Ayodhya was very much on ABP's agenda Tuesday, but for other reasons: "Yogi ki Ram Leela" played on the screen as Ayodhya prepared for UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath's visit on Wednesday. Mahant Nriyaya Gopal Das told the channel that once

the ruling dispensation had enough seats in the Rajya Sabha, the Ram mandir would be built in Ayodhya. Hmmm.

Between the Babri case and the UP CM, Ayodhya will remain in the news, gain increasing currency and perhaps, in the process, however inadvertently or otherwise, even whip up support for the construction of a "Ram mandir". Just the way the "beef" narrative over the last 24 months has led to the Centre's ban on the sale of cattle for slaughter at animal markets and the violent agitations we have been watching on TV in the last few days.

And the AAP will keep us interested in its self-destruction if it continues to assault its own members in public, on live TV. The latest incident took place on Wednesday afternoon when Kapil Mishra was mobbed and attacked in the state assembly. Why does the party indulge in activity that makes great television but can only harm its image? Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi really wants to know. In other TV news, a Times Now poll gives

the BJP a resounding victory in the next general elections, which might explain why party president Amit Shah and Home Minister Rajnath Singh (India Today/Aaj Tak) looked pleased as punch during the NDA's third anniversary interviews.

Zee's Hindustan news channel with the tagline, "states make the nation", joins Republic and all the channels beginning with "India" in exploiting the notion of the nation for their brand. It carries news from across the country but so do other Hindi channels in their 200-in-2-minutes news capsules, so not sure yet how this will be different.

Meanwhile, a reminder: If there is anyone who hasn't watched *Friends* at some stage of their lives, well, you can still do so before age and ailments lead to the only certainty in life, on Zee Café. Also, anyone who hasn't swooned over *Castle* can now ogle him in a complete rerun from season one of the series (Zee Café).

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