



**AMIT SHAH**  
Can he sink Modi?

# OUTLOOK

Virat  
Kohli

# Ace of the Future

The Delhi boy exemplifies the aggression and aspiration of New India as he steps into the giant shoes of Sachin, Dravid and Laxman.

**The next captain?**



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Printed and published by Maheshwari Peri on

behalf of Outlook Publishing (India) Pvt. Ltd.

Editor: Krishna Prasad. Printed at IPP Limited,

C-4-C-11, Phase-II, Noida and published

from AB-10, S.J. Enclave, New Delhi-110 029

Published for the week of October 09-15, 2012

Released on October 08, 2012  
Total no. of pages 72 + Covers

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MADHU KAPPARATH

**Cloud in a glass** A toddy shack in Kochi

# Evening of the Brew?

## The HC wants toddy shops to close shop

by **Minu Ittyipe**

**T**HE roads winding through rural Kerala are largely unnamed, but marked intermittently by boards bearing the seductive word 'kallu', Malayalam for toddy. Little wooden shacks serving the sweet-sour brew—fermented from sap drawn from the inflorescence of the coconut palm—have been part of the rural landscape and social fabric of the state for centuries. So people were surprised when the Kerala High Court opined that toddy brewing and sale should stop and urged the state government to bring its wish into effect by the next fiscal year. A division bench of Justices C.N. Ramachandran Nair and Bhabani Prasad Ray wants the state liberated from the “disgraceful business”: it says very little toddy is brewed, and considering Kerala’s high liquor consumption, toddy shops are a guise for selling spurious liquor.

Most parties, barring the Indian

Union Muslim League (IUML), oppose a ban and the political chorus of protest has reached a crescendo. For the court’s view threatens the livelihood of about 1 lakh toddy-tappers, registered and unregistered, who clamber up coconut palms to cut for sap and gather it in pots. Also that of those who run, or work at, the 5,900 toddy shops in the state. Santosh V.P., manager at the Mullapanthal toddy shop in Udaympoor, says, “Toddyp-tapping is a hereditary profession. My father and grandfather were toddy-tappers, and I have been a manager here for the past 10 years. Every toddy shop has 20-30 people dependent on it for employment. There are some misconceptions about toddy. In Kerala, the word ‘kallu’ is used loosely for all kinds of liquor, so toddy ends up getting a bad name. Unfermented

**A division bench of the court wants the government to end the ‘disgraceful business’. Most parties think otherwise.**

toddy is sweet and turns sourish on fermentation. A person can drink up to two litres a day and, unlike other alcoholic drinks, his health will not be affected. A local drink is being sacrificed to promote foreign-made liquor.”

In the court’s view, the government needn’t bother about providing a low-alcohol drink: the beer sold by the state beverages corporation is substitute enough, with an alcohol content lower than toddy. But after a hard day’s work, labourers, who find toddy soothing, don’t find beer a comparable tipple. “Beer is meant for those who like to sit in air-conditioned bars and it has to be chilled before one can drink it,” says George, a granite cutter from Kanjiramattom. “I’ve been drinking 2-3 litres of pure toddy after a hard day’s work and I find it very relaxing. It soothes my muscles and nerves. Any other liquor will ruin my health. I don’t get drunk on toddy either. I think it’s essential for labourers like me. There is a group of us who drink it every day.”

Supporting George’s view is the Madya Vyavasya Thozhilali Federation, a union of those employed in the liquor trade. K.M. Sudhakaran, its state-level president, thinks the court made its observations without conducting a scientific study. “The alcohol content in toddy is very low—about eight per cent, on average—and it’s a natural drink,” he says. “A commission headed by A.P. Udayabhanu had conducted a study and said that toddy should be encouraged. The commission had concluded that bans would be dangerous because the consumption of spurious and illicit liquor would rise. Instead, awareness should be created about the bad effects of liquor. And as for the IUML supporting the ban, I think it has a political agenda to destroy a caste-based profession.” Anil Kumar, leader of a toddy-tappers’ union based in Trippunithara, thinks the political noises in support of the ban are aimed at breaking toddy-tappers’ unions, most of which are affiliated to Communist parties.

What will hurt many even more is the break with an age-old Kerala tradition. ▣

# IF THE POSE

An *Outlook*-IBN investigation, conducted over several months, catches beans on the shoddy investigation into the disappearance of Swami

*"I have taken some loan from you for this trust but I couldn't repay you. Please forgive me. I am leaving."*

by **Pushp Sharma**

**T**HESE 21 words in three selective lines (the police wouldn't part with the original or a copy) indicate that the author 'left' of his own accord, even provides a plausible motive.

But five years after Baba Ramdev's guru, Swami Shankardev, went missing from the Divya Yog ashram in Haridwar in July

2007, the mystery behind his disappearance has not been lifted; in fact, more intrigue has unravelled after an *Outlook*-IBN undercover investigation. And not only because someone tampered with the date of the letter and sought to make it July 14 from July 11; or because the police was informed by Ramdev's Man Friday, Acharya Balkrishna, only on July 16, a full two days or more after his disappearance.

The investigation, which recorded conversations with six police officers (besides ashram inmates, doctors and others), reveals a strange, even shocking, indifference to the disappearance of the 78-year-old founder and helmsman of the ashram. Equally strangely, the ashram showed no interest in tracing the whereabouts of the missing guru—a man who once held veto power over the Divya Yog Trust. And stranger still, the police displayed no urgency to investigate till "something or someone" decided earlier this year that the case had to be formally closed.

The policeman who filed the final report (FR) this April admits on camera that he was "forced" to file it. He says he was reluctant to do so because of the sensitivity of the case but was bluntly told that

he would have to close the case if he valued his job. Now, who would be interested in bringing such pressure on the police and why? That too after the file had gathered dust for five years?

It remains unclear what really hap-

kardev was reduced to selling cardboard and styrofoam boxes of medicines to foot his medical bills during his last few months at the ashram.

How much money could Swami Shankardev have taken as loan, when, and for what purpose? At the time of his disappearance, he held two bank accounts: one (a/c 0251000-100-100-172) at the Punjab National Bank, which had a balance of ₹2,420, and the other at the Indian Overseas Bank (a/c 51879), which had a balance of ₹1,881. But with the ashram expanding and thriving (its 2007 turnover was ₹50 crore), why would he find it difficult to repay any loan? What is more, the people to whom he ostensibly owed money were also inmates of the ashram and hardly cash rich.

Strangely, the police seem to have no clue about most things concerning the case—about how much money the missing guru owed, whether the guru is merely missing or whether he committed suicide or was eliminated. Some of the investigating officers have been candid in confessing on record that a proper investigation is carried out only when they are prodded into action. In this case, neither the senior officers nor the complainant evinced much interest in tracking the missing guru. So virtually no investigation

was done. "*Hum log kaam, sahi bataoon, toh tabhi karte hain jab pressure hota hai...hamare upar toh koi aisa pressure thha bhi nahin! Maine bahut zyada kaam isme, frankly, kiya bhi nahin* (Frankly, I didn't do much on this case because there was no pressure of any kind)," said an investigating officer on camera.

Surprisingly, Baba Ramdev did not meet the investigators even once regard-



SANJAY RAWAT

Ramdev, Balkrishna during his Delhi fast, June 3, '12

opened in July 2007—or in the run-up to it. Ramdev, the present head, was himself out of the country at the time. Swami Shankardev's 'final letter'—addressed to Ramdev's brother-in-law Yash Dev Shastri—would have people believe that the guru, who suffered from tuberculosis of the spinal cord and possibly of the lungs, "left" because he could not repay his "loans". One inmate alleges that Shan-

# HOLDS

hes policemen and others spilling the  
Shankardev, Baba Ramdev's guru



**R.B. CHAMOLA** Group Sub-inspector, Haridwar  
“Not even once during the investigation did the complainant enquire about the progress made. The senior officers too never showed any interest. There was no pressure on us to pursue the case; so, frankly, I did not carry out much of an investigation.”



**SURENDRA BISHT** Sub-inspector, Bhagwanpur  
“The case wasn't treated with the seriousness it deserved. The file gathered dust for three years before it came to me. No investigation was ever done on the conspiracy angle.... I was forced to file the Final Report (FR), I was bluntly asked whether I valued my job.”



**S.S. SAMANT** SHO, Bhagwanpur  
“I was the first investigating officer of the case but I could never meet Baba Ramdev. I did meet Acharya Balkrishna once or twice but soon I was transferred. Shankardev was a forlorn figure, who would normally be found seated outside the ashram.”



**PRADEEP CHAUHAN** Senior SI, Vasant Vihar  
“In 2007, nobody would have suspected any foul play. They was no reason to. The ashram was doing well. Neither the ashram nor the Baba was embroiled in any controversy. There were no disputes.... It's possible the officials were carried away by the aura.”

# A Whole Lotta Loot Going On?

Ajit Pawar isn't the only one, an entire roster of NCP biggies are facing charges

by **Toral Varia-Deshpande**

**P**ERHAPS, people are saying, it's time the Nationalist Congress Party is rechristened the 'national corrupt party'. The high drama that followed the resignation of deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar last week turned the focus from allegations of his involvement in a ₹70,000 crore irrigation scam

to the power struggle within the NCP. But look closely at the party of which Sharad Pawar is the fountainhead, and you discover that its current crop of leaders offers a full litany of those facing equally serious charges.

While the state anti-corruption bureau (ACB) has launched a full-fledged investigation against NCP ministers Chhagan Bhujbal and Sunil Tatkare for alleged corruption and amassing assets disproportionate to their known sources of income, several other leaders of the party are also under the scanner of various investigating agencies. A rough roster:



**Sunil Tatkare**  
Minister for water resources

A close aide of Ajit Pawar, Tatkare took over the reins of the irrigation department from him in 2009. His tenure has been marked by controversies ever since. Tatkare reportedly significantly escalated the cost of irrigation projects in Maharashtra both during his own and his predecessor's

tenure. For instance, he is said to have dubiously increased costs by up to 150 per cent and 500 per cent for the Balganga and Kondhane dam projects in the state. What has, however, really put the minister in the dock is a petition filed by Kirit Somaiya of the BJP before the Bombay High Court. Based on over 2,000 pages of documentary evidence he has submitted, the ACB is currently investigating Tatkare and his family for allegedly acquiring 7,500 acres of farmland illegally by creating a web of over 100 front companies. And one of the 'directors' in one of the many Tatkare companies is none other than the son of a gardener who's in his employ!



**Chhagan Bhujbal**  
Minister for public works and special assistance

Bhujbal is another minister currently being investigated by the ACB for his alleged corruption in the construction of the Maharashtra Sadan in New Delhi. Bhujbal is alleged to have misused his official position to



**Channel of corruption? NCP's Ajit Pawar**

ensure that contracts were awarded to firms owned by his relatives and friends. The BJP in Maharashtra has alleged that Bhujbal was instrumental in escalating the cost of renovating Maharashtra Sadan thrice over from the original ₹52 crore to a more juicy ₹152 crore! Even though the government was not paying for the construction, the benefit of this cost escalation is said to have been passed on to the companies or sub-contractors having direct or indirect links with Bhujbal or his family. The contract to provide furniture for the 16,000 square feet guesthouse, for instance, was awarded to a firm called Ideen, which has Bhujbal's daughters-in-law as directors. Political and industry circles were also abuzz with news of a ₹2.5 crore donation by leading industrial group IndiaBulls to the Bhujbal Foundation in lieu of contracts in Nashik. In addition, the minister is alleged to have misused the trust property and misappropriated trust money to the tune of over ₹100 crore.



**Gulabrao Deokar**  
Transport minister

This NCP strongman from Jalgaon is under the scanner for two scams. He has been arrested and chargesheeted along with Shiv Sena MLA Sureshdada Jain in a ₹40 crore-plus Jalgaon housing scam related to the construction of 11,000 low-cost houses in that northern Maharashtra town. Investigations are also under way for his alleged role in the ₹42-crore Waghur drinking water supply plan fraud. Deokar was a member of the Jalgaon Municipal Council between 1995 and 2000, when it floated construction tenders for the housing scheme in 1997. The council promised to provide nine plots for the project, of which it did not own five while the remaining four were reserved for a school, public garden or hospital. Deokar allegedly altered tender conditions to enable Khandesh Builders, a front company of Sena's Sureshdada, to secure the contract. The project never took off, but Khandesh Builders were allegedly given massive funds.



**Jaydutt Kshirsagar**  
PWD minister in charge of Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Ltd

This NCP minister is believed to have diverted funds meant for the infrastructure development of Mumbai for the construction of a flyover in his hometown Beed despite the lack of mandatory clearances. He also reportedly bent rules for the project despite repeated objections from bureaucrats and other agencies. The minister is said to have sanctioned the project in 2010 in the name of easing traffic congestion. As per rules, MSRDC needed permission from the public works department, the cabinet infrastructure subcommittee and the NHAI. Not only did the PWD reportedly not give its approval for the project, it also 'warned' MSRDC against it. As for the cabinet subcommittee, its permission was not even sought, while the NHAI had asked MSRDC to put the project on hold till the completion of the Beed bypass road. Not just that, according to a petition filed in the

Bombay High Court, the Beed flyover is being financed by diverting a part of the ₹2,100 crore MSRDC had got originally for Mumbai's infrastructure development.



**Jitendra Ahwad**  
NCP spokesperson

The CBI questioned him in 2011 regarding the source of funds for the purchase of Flat No. 601 in the controversial Adarsh Housing Society. In his statement before the judicial commission inquiring into the Adarsh scam, Ahwad confirmed having paid up to ₹79 lakh to the society. The payments were routed via Jitnat Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, a company whose director Ahwad was till early 2012.



**Ganesh Naik**  
Minister for excise, environment and labour

Accused of misappropriating ₹2.38 crore from the Kalwa Belapur Sahkari Bank in Navi Mumbai between 1995 and 1998, he is said to have misused his official position to get loans sanctioned to parties directly or indirectly related to him.

Given this swirl of corruption charges around its ministers, talks are rife that a cabinet reshuffle is in the offing in Maharashtra and that the NCP chief is keen on replacing the tainted ministers. However, Girish Kuber, the executive editor of the Loksatta group, feels that the NCP, despite the allegations, may manage to escape the voters' anger "because in their respective constituencies, each of these reportedly corrupt ministers are like Robin Hoods. They are more concerned with their own constituency and not the state as a whole".

However, Kumar Ketkar, a senior journalist and political analyst from Maharashtra, thinks otherwise. "The NCP," he says, "cannot pretend these scams never happened because these are well-known scams and well-known scammers. I am not sure how strongly they will be proved in a court of law. So will the NCP be answerable at any point in time? Who will they answer to? These are the same people who set up committees and give nods for investigations." There is, indeed, no answer. ■