

the next

Anna Effect ▼

Ayodhya Film Festival ▼

Football Season ▼

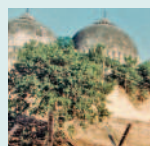
Cool gadget ▼

Sound Track ▼

DAYS



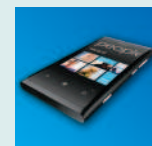
The government, that is anxious to blunt ANNA HAZARE'S ANTI-GRIFT CAMPAIGN, has decided to introduce the Lokpal Bill in Lok Sabha on Tuesday



On the death anniversary of freedom fighter ASHFAQULLAH KHAN, a three-day film festival will begin in Faizabad-Ayodhya on Monday



The ball has started rolling for a season of football at the Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium in Kochi. The national football league, I-League, will kick off on Friday



Lumia 800 is hitting the markets this week. Result of Nokia's partnership with Microsoft, the phone is an attempt by the two companies to wrest back some mojo from iPhone and Android



The audio of Tamil flick '3', which has generated tremendous hype with the track KOLAVERI DI, crooned by actor Dhanush, will be released on Friday at a grand function in Chennai

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister will kickstart the 150 year celebrations of the Archaeological Survey of India. As the custodian of the country's heritage gets set to enter a new phase, Sunday Times tracks the challenges it faces

Atul Sethi | TNN

A FUTURE for the PAST



Anindya Chattopadhyay

The headquarter of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) — on New Delhi's Janpath — is buzzing with activity. The organisation, which has the mandate of protecting the country's vast archaeological heritage, is preparing to celebrate 150 years of its existence. A string of events starting December 20 have been planned. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will inaugurate the celebrations that'll include international conferences, lectures by distinguished archaeologists and outreach programmes.

The man coordinating the celebrations, the agency's director general Gautam Sengupta, says he is excited at the prospect of taking the ASI to the next phase. But he's also aware of the monumental challenges he faces (see interview), which are many.

Even after a century-and-a-half of its existence, the ASI has struggled to live up to the premise on which it was started. Instead of emerging as an organisation of excellence that sets world standards in preserving and showcasing India's rich historical past, it has functioned as yet another sarkari department, caught in bureaucratic sluggishness and operating at an antiquated pace.

"ASI's biggest problem is bad management," says OP Jain, convener of the Indian National Trust For Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and founder of the Delhi-based Sanskriti Foundation. "It



IN SAFE HANDS? A damaged structural panel at an ASI-protected site in Karnataka, depicting Ashoka with his two wives

doesn't run like a professional organization, with clear goals and accountability. There's little initiative to get things done, since it would mean more work, which nobody wants to do."

It's not as if the ASI isn't aware of its problems. It admitted its shortcomings to a committee set up by the PM under the chairmanship of former Union law minister Veerappa Moily. The biggest issue, it claimed, was manpower, pointing out that its current staff strength does not permit deployment of even a single person on full-time basis at more than two-thirds of its monuments. With 3,676 monuments under its care, this means that virtually 75% of its monuments are unguarded. In order to augment its manpower, the agency told the committee, it will need to create additional posts of 10,000 monument attendants.

Hiring this additional manpower would mean an expense of a few hundred crores. Then there's need for specialists — apart from the attendants — who can help in conservation.

But would merely getting in additional staff solve the agency's problems? Chances are that they might simply end up as a burden on the exchequer unless they are trained properly and develop a love for heritage. For instance, when Sunday Times visited the Rani Kamalapati Mahal in Bhopal recently, the scant disregard for the monument was evident even as there were plenty of workers and ASI staff. The top two floors of the 18th century palace was a makeshift home for the workers, while the rest of what was earlier a seven-storeyed structure was a bath and wash area.

Historian Nayanjot Lahiri, a member of the Moily committee, says the ASI's record in preservation and conservation is far from inspiring. She cites the instance of the Buddhist stupa site at Kanganahalli in Karnataka as a case in point. "The state of the conservation here makes one cry. This is a site where the sculptures of

Ashoka are of the highest quality, but they have been kept in a pathetic state."

It's not as if the agency is not capable of doing good work in restoration. Heritage management consultant Amita Baig points out several cases where the ASI has done a world-class job. "One only has to look at archival pictures to see the appalling state of most of our heritage, when the ASI came into existence. They have done seminal work in bringing these back from the edge of extinction," she says.

But over the past few decades, battling its myriad problems seems to have taken its toll. According to the ASI's own submission last year, 249 of its protected monuments were encroached or physically occupied by squatters. At Chennai's Fort St George, for instance — the first British settlement in India — the agency has been struggling for years to secure the fortress and clear traders who have set up shops tucked into the inner walls.

Training and staff morale are other major issues. An archaeologist working with the agency says there aren't enough avenues for in-house training. Also, promotions are sporadic. "The career path within the ASI is not clearly defined, which often leads to loss of enthusiasm among promising archaeologists," says KN Dikshit of the Indian Archaeological Society.

Morale is also low at the ASI's Institute of Archaeology, once considered a premier centre for learning the craft. "The quality of the faculty as well as students graduat-

HISTORY KEEPER

ASI is the world's biggest state-run archaeology body

- It functions under Ministry of Culture, Government of India
- It takes care of 3,676 monuments spread across 24 circles within the country
- 116 of its monuments are ticketed
- It earned Rs 87.8 crore in ticket sales last year

ing from it have gone down considerably," points out Jain.

Sengupta says he is aware the agency needs to invest in its manpower urgently and also reach out to people more in order to showcase their work — an area where they have been woefully inadequate. But many feel that good intentions should be followed up with a time-bound action plan. "Being the largest government organisation doing archaeology anywhere in the world, the ASI is an important part of the country," says Lahiri. "What it needs is less celebration and more introspection. It needs a route map to rejuvenate the legacy it seems largely to have abandoned."

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With reports from Sandhya Soman in Chennai, and Jamal Ayub in Bhopal

'Encroachment of monuments is a law & order issue'

The first professional archaeologist to head ASI after almost 17 years of bureaucrats at its helm, Gautam Sengupta, who took charge as DG in 2010, talks about the roadmap ahead with Atul Sethi

Lack of sufficient manpower is often cited by the ASI as the reason it's not able to function to its optimum. How is it being addressed?

We are in the process of augmenting that. The government has sanctioned senior-level positions as well as posts of monument attendants. But we also want to promote people from within the organisation so that there is vertical mobility at all levels. A number of monuments have been encroached. There are allegations that the ASI simply turns a blind eye to it. That's not true. Encroachment is a very serious

matter for us. The ASI is greatly concerned that heritage structures are protected, but ultimately, encroachment is a law and order issue. The support of law enforcement agencies — police, district administration etc, is required.

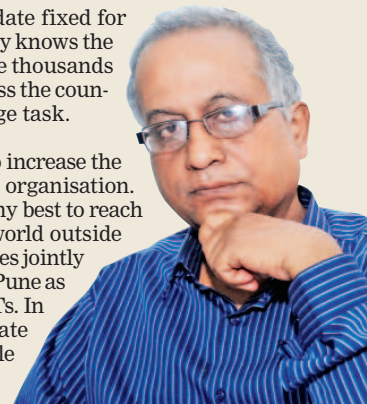
The ASI is perceived as being too slow. Excavation reports like the Harappan site of Dholavira have not been published. There is also no update on when a database of India's monuments will be made available by the National Mission that was set up for this purpose.

I am aware of the backlog. But much of it will be cleared during the 150-year celebrations. Many excavation reports are being released during this time. We've also revived our prestigious journal 'Ancient India' after 40 years. As for the National database of monuments, it is an ongoing

exercise. There is no date fixed for its completion, since nobody knows the range of data yet. There are thousands of monuments spread across the country. Collating them is a huge task.

What is your focus currently?

My immediate priority is to increase the professional content of the organisation. In this process, I'm trying my best to reach out to the archaeological world outside the ASI. We're excavating sites jointly with the Deccan College in Pune as well as tying up with the IITs. In the process, I want to create more opportunities for people within the ASI.



Both politicians and ordinary people of north Bihar are protesting the tag of 'New Azamgarh' given to the state by the IB. But police officers are sure the area is turning into a nursery of terror groups

Pooja Kashyap | TNN

It has taken Bihar some real hard work to change from a basket case of lawlessness to one of the fastest-growing states in India. In the past five years or so, Bihar has got used to good news. But bad news shook the state last week. After the Special Cell of Delhi Police bagged five men from north Bihar for their alleged involvement in multiple blasts across the country, an Intelligence Bureau (IB) official reportedly said that the area was turning into "another Azamgarh" — a reference to the eastern UP town which security agencies like to call the "terror nursery" of India.

Though the people of Azamgarh, who maintain they are innocent as "no one from the district has been convicted for terrorism", kept quiet, it was north Bihar — from ordinary folks to politicians, who protested the IB's alleged premise. The claim was met with disbelief. "Every place has some black sheep. For a few people's fault, it is incorrect to see the whole state as nursing terrorists," says Nusrat Jahan, a teacher from Purnea.

It's not just people who are upset with the terror tag, politicians, too, even from the BJP, have objected. "Those making such remarks should understand that men who have been caught from Bihar were involved in activities outside the state, over which the local administration has no control," says state's deputy chief minister Sushil Kumar Modi.

The country's premier intelligence agency, says politicians, has made undue haste in calling the region the "new Azamgarh", if they have called it so. "It is a sensitive issue and even targeting one district in UP as a hub of terrorists is condemnable," says Shivanand Tiwari, the national general secretary of JD(U). Even Bihar's top cop, Abhyanand calls the arrests a "routine exercise". "The Delhi police got a tip off from IB and they just followed it up," says the DGP, adding that the whole episode was blown out of proportion.

There can, however, be no denying the fact that Bihar is an easy target for the terror groups and ISI, being on the border. Poverty and unemployment among the youth does feed the movement, who can be lured to work as couri-

'Azamgarh' and anxiety in Bihar



IMAGE ISSUE: Politicians, even BJP's Sushil Kumar Modi, say the the country's premier intelligence agency made undue haste in calling north Bihar the "new Azamgarh"

'Intelligence agencies have got it all wrong'

Anisur Rahman Quasmi of Imarat Shariah, an NGO, says there are no terrorists in Bihar

How active are terror cells in Bihar?

There are other states where Indian Mujahideen operatives, named in the home ministry's list, figure prominently. Then, why are investigating agencies singling out Bihar? There are powers that do not want to see a progressive Bihar. These are means of creating fear among the Muslims as its youth now want to surge ahead in every field. But investigating agencies have traced a terror network to Bihar? We have lost faith in such agencies. It clearly proves the inefficiency of the police department and central investigating agencies, which make false accusations and arrests people to hide their own incompetence. Look at what happened in the Mumbai, Jaipur and Hyderabad blasts cases. Many of the accused have been acquitted because there was no evidence against them. So, there is no terror network? The recent arrests in Bihar seem to be fake. If all the terror operatives belong to Bihar, why aren't any violent incidents occurring here? — PK

ers of intelligence, arms and money, agrees Amit Lodha, SP Purnea. "Bihar's location does make it a suitable transit point," says Lodha.

Investigators who cracked the Indian Mujahideen (IM) network in Chennai, Delhi and elsewhere are convinced that north Bihar is now an important point in the nationwide terror network. Additional DCP Sanjeev Kumar Yadav of Delhi Police Special Cell who led the raids in Bihar, says, "We have information that IM has established its base amongst youths in the state. Terrorist outfits are known to scout religious places and educational institutions in the bordering districts for recruits."

The network, according to the officer, is built around "kinship ties" rather than a binding ideology. "It's not only difficult to detect them but also helps them command immense resources of their people who have migrated to other parts of the country. They can shack up with one of their kins, who may not even realize what purpose they are there for," says Yadav. "Suspects now in police custody for Delhi's Jama Masjid shooting, Bangalore's Chinnaswamy Stadium blasts and Pune's German Bakery blast last year had stayed in different cities but all had a Bihar connection."

This, the cops add, indicates IM may have established more than seven sleeper cells in the area. But it's a 'fact' and 'evidence' the people of north Bihar are not yet ready to accept.

Kids would like to flee urban jungles to nature

One of India's most loved writers, Ruskin Bond attracted robust crowds to his session at the recently-concluded Sharjah Book Fair: The 77-year-old author speaks to Archana Khare Ghose about The Kashmiri Storyteller, and why everyone in India is writing books these days

Most of your books are based in the hills around Mussorie, but this is the first time that your story has gone to Kashmir. Are these stories based on real experience?

This is the first time that I've written about Kashmir and the stories are based on a real person, a Kashmiri shopkeeper in the Landour bazaar. I've put the folk tales of Kashmir in his mouth. But I had written these stories many years ago. They didn't get published as the publisher wanted me to just tell folk tales and do away with the shopkeeper. I refused those changes and this manuscript lay in my drawer for a long time. Not too long ago, I pulled it out again and this time, it managed to get published along with the shopkeeper. Even an author of your stature has to toe the line of the publisher...

It happens sometimes, though getting published your way is easier now. Publishers, too, have to follow trends and they expect concomitant writing. I've

been sparring with publishers for the past 50-60 years, and can very well do a book on them now.

Your stories for children continue to be redolent of the smells of pristine nature which is not the reality of the lives of children today, especially in urban areas. Yet, you appeal to these young readers.

I think that if given a chance, most of the children who are growing up in concrete buildings in the cities would escape to nature. My stories, perhaps, give them a taste of that escape. But I must confess that not all children who are brought to the hills seem to enjoy being there; I've seen quite a few of them run off to the nearest video

parlour. Of course, parents also have a role to play in getting their children to read my books.

The world of books is in a churn these days with almost everybody writing a book. Then there are numerous literary events. At the same time, this generation is widely accused of not reading enough. What explains the contrast?

There is this strong desire, especially in India, to express oneself

and quite a bit of that is being channelled into writing. Even children are taking up writing in a big way despite distractions. During my school days, I don't recall any boy except me who was into writing. This churn is a healthy sign for all those interested in books. At least it has made celebrities out of writers, which wasn't the case when I set out to be a writer

Three of my books, *The Flight of Pigeons*, *The Blue Umbrella* and *Susanna's Seven Husbands*, have been made into films though I've never written a story with a film in mind. That's a different technique altogether. The last one, which was made into *7 Khoon Maaf* by Vishal Bhardwaj, was actually a short story that I expanded into a novella for him to make a film. I've been lucky that my stories have been treated with sensitivity by the filmmakers though quite a few famous books have been made into bad films and authors can have reservations about that. Right now, there is no film project in the pipeline.

Quite a few of your stories have been adapted for TV or the big screen. How touchy are you about filmmakers handling your stories?

There is this strong desire, especially in India, to express oneself

A cold evening in the bazaar

One day, towards the end of December, the sky became overcast and a light drizzle set in. Young Kamal stood before the chemist's shop in Landour, watching the thermometer, which had fallen considerably since morning. "It might snow tonight," said the chemist, greeting him from the door.

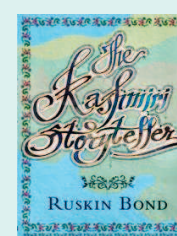
Kamal agreed, for in spite of the drizzle and his warm coat and scarf, the cold was becoming more intense every minute.

"Good night," he called to the chemist, and, taking the road down through the bazaar, sat off at a brisk pace. In the bazaar stood several Kashmiri and Tibetan shops, the Tibetans selling brassware and painted scrolls and semi-precious stones, and the Kashmiris

selling carpets and curios. Kamal was passing these shops, when Javed Khan hailed him. "It's bad weather to be out in," called the elderly Kashmiri shopkeeper. "Perhaps the rain will stop in half an hour. Till then,

come sit by the brazier and warm yourself."

Kamal looked in and saw that there were already several boys and girls sitting around



The Kashmiri Storyteller by Ruskin Bond, Penguin Books

Exclusive Extract