

FAITH, CASTE, PROGENY

In Punjab Parkash Singh Badal harnessed faith to prolong his reign, in Haryana caste cast a shadow, and in Himachal a son rose

By Raveen Thukral

WITH the real action — the 2G and the CWG scams, the agitations of Anna Hazare and Baba Ramdev, the arrest of ministers and corporate honchos, the rise of Didi and Anna and the fall of the Left and the DMK and the frequent stalling of the Parliament — happening elsewhere, this region, comprising Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, literally struggled to be in the headlines of national dailies in 2011. Even in a pulsating state like Punjab, things remained rather quiet, both on the political and the social fronts. In May 2011, the state witnessed the emergence of the homegrown Peoples' Party of Punjab (PPP), led by Manpreet Singh Badal, the estranged nephew of Chief Minister and veteran Akali leader, Parkash Singh Badal. Manpreet's forays into the political arena, as the leader of the third front has added a new twist to the state's politics, as for the first time an alternative appears to be in sight. Though it remains to be seen as to how he fits into the political scene post-2012 elections, observers see Manpreet as a "marathon runner", who actually has his eyes set on 2017 elections. Talking about runners, Punjabis all across the globe were disappointed when in October 2011 the Guinness World Record denied the UK-based century marathon sprinter, Faja Singh, entry into their hall of fame because he didn't have a birth certificate.

Another high in sports during the year, amid the July doping scandal at the NIS, Patiala, was the off-field friendly engagement of Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Yousuf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of the India-Pakistan semifinals in the World Cup at Mohali's PCA Stadium on March 30. Though nothing major was achieved with the cricket bonhomie, it did see Gopal Dass, an Indian farmer from the border, returning home from Pakistan after 27 years of incarceration. A low in the state's politics was the arrest of BJP legislator and Chief Parliamentary Secretary (CPS), Raj Khurana, who was arrested by the CBI in May on allegations of accepting bribe for the settlement of a case. The names of two BJP ministers, Manoranjan Kalra and Swarna Ram, had also figured in the case, dubbed as political vendetta by the party, and they were also questioned. The two were later dropped from the Cabinet.

It was just a coincidence that four months later in Haryana, a minister, Om Prakash Jain, and a CPS, Zile Ram Sharma, had to quit after their names figured in the murder of a former sarpanch, Karam Singh. The deceased had earlier accused the minister and the CPS of duping him of Rs 13 lakh on the pretext of getting a job for a relative.

Despite the landmark judgment of the Karnal District Court that sentenced five persons to death in the infamous Babi-Manoj murder case, honour killings continued to keep Haryana in the news. The Punjab and Haryana High Court kept receiving applications from young couples in love, and they were provided security in the 'safe houses' set up by the administration.

On the political front, Haryana lost last of the living Lals, Bhajan Lal, on June 3, necessitating a bye-election in Hisar. The October bypoll turned out to be a huge embarrassment for the ruling Congress as its candidate, Jai Prakash, lost his deposit. Bhajan Lal's son, Kuldeep Bishnoi, who is striving to become the face of non-Jats in the state, won the seat. The November bypoll of Ratta Assembly constituency, however, redeemed the lost pride for the Congress, as it wrested the seat from the INLD after a gap of 29 years.

In October, a Delhi court sentenced three persons to life imprisonment in the Minchpur killings in which a Dalit and his handicapped daughter were burnt alive in April 2010. Of the 97 people, who were arrested in the case, the court let off 85.

Ironically, Jais, who have ruled Haryana, took to streets in March



TOP HONOUR: Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal being bestowed 'Fakhr-e-Qaum Parth Rattan' at the Akal Takht in Amritsar

demanding reservation. They disrupted rail traffic on the Hisar-Delhi route for two weeks. One person was killed in the police firing during the agitation.

On the sports front, Haryana's Virender Sehwag, broke Sachin Tendulkar's world record by scoring 219 in the One-Day International against the West Indies on December 8.

Thanks to events in Dharmasala, the hill state of Himachal Pradesh made it to national headlines a few times. The seizure of foreign currency of more than Rs 6

core from Karmapa's monastery in January made headlines. The Dalai Lama's decision to quit active politics in March, and his endorsement of the amendments relinquishing his powers as the political head of the Tibetan Government-in-exile in favour of a democratically elected leadership in May, was also significant.

On the political front, factionalism continued to plague both the BJP and the Congress. Both the parties also saw 'son rise' — the emergence of P. K. Dhumal's son, Anurag Thakur, on the national scene

with his January Tiranga Yatra. Virbhada Singh's son, Vikramaditya Singh, was launched into politics in October.

The year ended on a good note for the Congress as it managed to wrest the traditional BJP seat, Nalgarkh, while losing the Renka seat in the October bypoll. As curtains draw on 2011, all eyes are on Punjab that goes to polls in February. Assembly elections are also due in Himachal Pradesh later next year, so Punjab poll outcome will be significant for the region.

Return of a war horse

The General returns to Uttarakhand after Pokhriyal is forced to put in his papers



BACK IN THE SADDLE: BC Khairudi holds the reins again

By S. M. A. Kazmi & Rajeev Khanna

THE year has left mixed memories in the young hill state. It witnessed its worst communal riots in Rudrapur, and Swami Ramdev and his Patanjali Yogpeeth suffered a setback after the iconic yoga guru tried to escape in the garb of a woman from the Ramtila Ground in Delhi, where his supporters were dispersed by the police. Heavy rainfall and landslides caused considerable hardship for the second successive year but relief, repairs, restoration and construction left much to be desired.

The foundation was laid for the Rishikesh-Karnaprayag railway line, the first railway line in Garhwal while the Jim Corbett National Park celebrated its platinum jubilee during the year and the state's first Indian Institute of Management (IIM) began functioning at Kashipur in Udham Singh Nagar district. The state's first 'Ayush Gram' was launched near Nainital but the annual Autumn Festival, continuing since pre-Independence days, was stopped for the first time due to the paucity of funds. The Uttarakhand Raj Bhawan took a green initiative by opting for solar lighting and rain harvesting.

Politics dominated the discourse as a beleaguered Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was forced to replace Chief Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank with the old war horse, Maj-Gen Bhuvan Chandra Khairudi in September, barely six months before the Assembly elections. Khairudi rushed through the Lokayukta Bill, Right to Services Bill and Government Employees' Transfer Bill and launched the 'Atal Khadyana Yojana' to steal the thunder from the Centre's Food Security Bill.

Even as political one-upmanship continued and politics dominated life, rampant corruption emerged as the most popular issue, prompting the popular Garhwali folk singer, Narendra Singh Negi, to come out with a fresh album, titled Aab Kaatiga Khado! (How much are you going to eat anyway?) and lamented at the staple of "Commission ki meat-bhaat, Rishwat ko raiton" (rich food sourced from commission and corruption).



MAKING WAY: Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank



NEWSPICK

The sons rise

The political debuts of Prem Kumar Dhumal's son Anurag Thakur, who undertook the much-hyped 'Tiranga Yatra', and Virbhada Singh's son, Vikramaditya Singh, who was elected the state Youth Congress president, ensured 'son rise' in the hill state.

The Bishnoi factor

It was Bhajan Lal's son Kuldeep Bishnoi who caused a huge discomfort to the ruling Congress when he won the Hisar bypoll. Bishnoi is striving to become the face of non-Jats in the state.

