

Around Town

BLUE CHEESE AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Jawhar Sircar is a man of many interests. But making Prasar Bharati tick is what does it for him these days

PROMITA MUKHERJEE

JAWHAR SIRCAR is a relieved man these days. The civil servant, who claims he can live off blue cheese, has managed to untangle two important knots that had been bothering Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) for years now. For one, he has managed to solve a problem that had been dogging the public service broadcaster for 10 years.

So now, Prasar Bharati has finally officially been exempt from paying income tax, a privilege that was given to it when it started and then suddenly taken away.

'When Prasar Bharati came up as a public service broadcaster it was meant to be an autonomous body at a little distance from the government and carry out functions assigned to the Information & Broadcasting Ministry in coordinating Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR). It is a public service body because the work is not like normal private channels,' he says.

'While a private channel, for example, would report a crime in the manner in which it needs to be presented and could be sensationalising an issue. On the other hand a public service broadcaster needs to harp on penalty, punishment and retribution so as to send a warning down the line,' Sircar explains.

So for this, he says, the organisation needs to travel along 'unprofitable routes' and 'incur



PIC: SHAZID CHAUHAN

losses. If it went on the profit mode then it would contradict its role, he further states.

So when Prasar Bharati was set up the original act (Section 22) stated that the public service broadcaster was exempt from taxes. But the facility was taken away almost overnight within 4-5 years.

'That meant nearly 600 offices of Doordarshan and AIR became exposed to questions regarding

income and taxation. End of the day, we might not have had to pay taxes, but went through the entire rigmarole to prove that we don't have to pay taxes. And all this, at public expense,' he explains.

'This has been sorted out just seven days back thanks to the Finance minister (P. Chidambaram) and I&B minister (Ambika Soni). The Group of Ministers had also recommended

the same,' says an ecstatic Sircar, who took over as Prasar Bharati CEO in late February.

And how did he manage this? 'Well, by packaging the logic in a way you can't refuse,' he says, laughing, sitting in his Parliament Street office.

An ex-student of St Xavier's School, Kolkata and a Presidency College alumnus, Sircar has had a long stint with the government. He joined the Indian Adminis-

trative Services in 1975 in West Bengal and has served several roles including the Director of Industries. He also helped set up the Food Processing Industries Department in the state and then moved to the Finance Department as Special Secretary. He is also the youngest Principal Secretary of Commerce & Industries Department in the state.

Sircar joined the Government of India (GOI) as Additional

Culture is a subject that deeply interests Sircar. He is quite fascinated by the idea of India which is 'built on alliances, mergers and acquisitions' and tries to read up on the subject as much as he can. Everyday there is something new to learn, he says

Secretary and development Commissioner for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises on May 2006 and was promoted as Secretary to GOI in September 2008 and then moved to head the Ministry of Culture.

In his new role, Sircar plans to turn around Prasar Bharati. He has managed to get the nod to set up the Prasar Bharati recruitment Board which means that the organisation, where hiring had virtually come to a standstill in the last 15 years, will be able to recruit fresh blood.

'No attempt is being spared to change Prasar Bharati. We have a wonderful new team in position,' says Sircar when asked about his vision for the public service broadcaster. In his long years with the government, which of his various roles did he

enjoy most? 'The mind is always focused on sharp subjects like finance, banking, industry etc but the heart lies in different cultural expressions,' he says.

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So what does he read? Sircar says he avoids fiction if he can help it. 'There is so much reality to learn. Also, I read anything that brings me closer to how the concept of India came together,' Sircar says. He focuses on three subjects — anthropology, history and popular studies.

He is currently fascinated by the largest Islamic group in the east of Indus and is reading Richard Eaton's *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier* to find out more on the subject. 'Everyday is Christopher Columbus, you discover something new,' he says, smiling.

Does he travel? Hardly, says Sircar. His last holiday was in 2003. 'The most interesting vacation was when I stayed in a wooden cottage in Chail,' he says.

Between work, Sircar also enjoys food and can rattle off names of cheese from across the world and claims to tell one cheese from another, blue cheese being his favourite. 'I am strictly carnivorous and enjoy red meat,' he says.

A plateful of Avial in the city

The band from Kerala that blends Malayalam poetry with contemporary rock music, performed on Wednesday

OUR CORRESPONDENT

FOR THE city's music lovers, Wednesday saw a new band take the stage at Blue Frog. What made the band stand apart from the crowd was that they blended Malayalam poetry with contemporary alternative rock music.

The band, hailing from Kerala, got together 10 years back. 'Before Avial, we were all parts of different bands singing in English. But we all knew each other because we were all based in Kerala,' says Tony John, the lead vocalist of the band.

Before Avial happened, some of the members were actually a part of a dance company called Daksha Dance Company. After getting together, the band released their first album *Avial*, in 2008.

Avial is actually a mixed vegetable delicacy in Kerala. What was the idea behind such a name? 'Avial is just a fun name. We wanted something very Malayali and light sounding,' explains John.

It was while working with the Daksha Dance Company and travelling all over the place did the band members (Tony on vocals, Rex Vijayan on guitars and synth, Binny



Issac on bass and Mithun Puthanveetil on drums) realise that they needed to do something more. 'We wanted to do something that will connect people and only way to do that is in your mother tongue. Our lyrics is just not normal/everyday Malayalam that we speak, it's folk Malayalam which is more poetic,' adds John.

Their first song *Nada nada* (which means 'keep walking') came out in 2003. 'It did really well. That's when we decided to do the whole album which took us three years,' says John.

Apart from cutting albums, the band has also

done music for movies. The first movie they did was *Salt and Pepper* for which they composed the promo song which was one of the biggest hits last year.

How do they compose their music? 'Sometimes it's lyrics first and then we give the tune. Sometimes we make a tune and then add the lyrics. On one side there is instrumentation and a lot of rock. The music is basically a mix of styles — jazz, funk, folk. We are a folk rock band,' he says.

So what next for them? 'The next album. We hope to finish in the next six months,' he signs off.

DAY IN DAY OUT

What's on Around Town

Art

MOTHERS — A TRIBUTE TO MOTHERHOOD ON MOTHER'S DAY:

An exhibition of paintings and sculptures by Sheila Thadani. The artist has tried to portray the sense of serenity and dignity of a woman.

AT: Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre, 1/A, Janpath WHEN: 3 May to 31 May TIMINGS: 10 am to 4 pm PHONE: 2301 4992

WITHIN REACH III: This is a group show featuring established and upcoming artists. There will be works of different styles and mediums which can be purchased. AT: Gallerie Nyva, 101-103 Square One Designer Arcade, C-2, District Centre, Saket WHEN: 3 May to 7 July TIMINGS: 11 am to 7 pm

COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES: It is a group show by Banoo Batliboi, Muktinath Mondal, Nandan Ghiya and Sachin George Sebastian. This exhibit is presented by Exhibit 320 & Apparao Galleries.

AT: Aman New Delhi, Lodhi Road ON TILL: 31 May

TIMINGS: 11 am to 7 pm PHONE: 47859251

RAMAYANA: It is calligraphy by Parameshwar Raju presented by ICCR as part of the Horizon Series.

AT: Azad Bhavan Art Gallery, Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), Azad Bhavan, I.P. Estate WHEN: 18 May to 23 May

TIMINGS: 11 am to 6 pm PHONE: 23379310



Daring to be different

POONAM GOEL



WHEN Meena Verma opened Arts of the Earth, a gallery dedicated solely to folk and tribal art about a year ago, she would not have probably foreseen that specialising in a medium would soon become a trend for gallerists in the city's emerging artscape. While earlier, galleries would pride themselves on being able to provide a diverse range of art — be it different media or artists from across genres — the new generation of art gallerists are happy to restrict themselves to a specialised theme or even a niche medium.

'It is important to create a brand value for oneself as there's so much competition these days,' says Suruchi Saraf, owner of Art Perspective, the latest entrant in Lado Sarai's art street. A sprawling space at 2,200 sq feet, the gallery has launched itself with an inaugural show of black and white works, evocatively titled *Ebony & Ivory*, with each of the participating artists stepping out of the usual ambit of their practice and explor-



An untitled work by Jyoti Bhatt and (right) A Dhiraj Choudhury drawing



ing the monochromatic possibilities of their distinctive forms.

'We chose to show black and white works of even those artists who do not usually work in this colour palette, and that has made

people sit up and take notice,' says the 29-year-old, whose vision is to build up Art Perspective as a space for collaboration between two genres. 'The niche we hope to create for the gallery is blending two art

forms like our forthcoming show will bring together tribal and contemporary artists to create art together,' she says.

In close proximity to Art Perspective is the slightly older Wonderwall gallery that opened doors in April this year and is owned by Ajay Rajgharia. The medium he has chosen to work with is photography. 'We existed as an online entity since 2007 and even then I was doing more than three shows in a year. Since then, I have studied the market trends and believe that a gallery dedicated to photography made great business sense. Moreover, no other gallery in the vicinity works exclusively in this genre,' he says.

The young entrepreneur duo Mandira Lamba and Ridhi Bhalla, who are currently working out the logistics of their new gallery Blueprint 12, while preparing to have their first art outing with a group show in September, are convinced that their USP would lie in showing emerging talent.

Then there is Must Art Gallery which specialises in Gond Art, Engendered Gallery which will promote art on gender issues and Ojas Art which has consistently taken up social issues as the theme for art shows. And we are still counting.

Food

TAPAS AND SANGRIA: If you have a romantic evening in mind, check out this unlimited tapas and Sangria festival.

Choose from an array of vegetarian and non-vegetarian tapas (which are basically Spanish snacks like Squid rings, Fried doughnuts of fish served with canarian mojo. Pair them with Sangria.

AT: Sevilla, The Claridges, 12, Aurangzeb Road ON TILL: All month TIMINGS: 7.30 pm to 9 pm COST: Rs 1,930 plus taxes (per person) PHONE: 3955 5082

Music

SHRILEKTRIC INDIA TOUR: ShriLeKtric is coming to India for the first time

and is India's first acoustic, electric, electronic and computing based live performance. The result is impromptu, never-heard-before sounds. The artists performing are Shri along with Gayatri Iyer (Ganjawalla) on vocals and Finix Ramdas on violin.

AT: Delhi Grill and Bar, QBA, Chanakyapuri WHEN: 24 May TIMINGS: 8pm onwards PHONE: 47378800

