

IMPACT TEAM

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& Operations)

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M. Krishna Kiran, General Manager (South); Rakesh
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From the Editor

“There is always time to add a word, never to withdraw one,” said Baltasar Gracian, a 17th Century Spanish Jesuit monk.

More of us could benefit by learning to speak little and be heard when we do speak – characteristics of Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi and Kumar Mangalam Birla. Both were born with silver spoons in their mouths. Both had greatness thrust upon them by unexpected events – Pataudi by Nari Contractor’s incapacitation, Birla by the sudden death of his father. Both were very young in their leadership roles, and both grew to be adroit, adaptable, and adulated. Pataudi died just as this issue of *Business Today* went to press, and Birla says comparisons are odious, but the truth is that the young captain of the Aditya Birla Group evokes the same sort of loyalty and commitment from the 133,000 people of 42 nationalities that he leads as “Tiger” did from our cricketers. Over the past 16 years, Kumar Birla has brought down the average age of his teammates to 36 from 56, and built an ethical meritocracy in what used to be a patriarchal, jobs-for-life organisation. In two lengthy conversations that bracketed individual meetings with each member of his senior management team, Birla was friendly, candid and interested in feedback. The second interview took place just after he had spoken to an audience of young people. He told them that in the past five years the Gen-Y ratio in his companies had trebled to 28 per cent and asked, rhetorically: “Gotta Good Guru?” He said he himself had two: Partap Sharma taught him the art of public speaking, and Ram Charan the art of management. Kumar Mangalam aims to nearly double group turnover over the next four years. Along the way, he has made 22 acquisitions (including the audacious Novelis buy), charged into new arenas like telecom, branded apparel, retail, and aerospace alloys, and exited several “old” industries ranging from sea water magnesia and industrial gases to fatty acids and sponge iron. Suman Layak has pieced together this fascinating jigsaw starting on page 46.



As India’s leading business magazine, we believe we have a responsibility to not just report the workings of our nation’s companies and its economy, but also let some disinfecting sunshine fall on some of our darker corners. Anusha Subramanian spent several weeks pursuing the shoddy manner in which Environmental Impact Assessments are commissioned and produced. Former Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh called EIAs a “joke”. Go to page 80 and find out why spruce and birch forests have suddenly sprung up in Ratnagiri.

We have more powerful journalism coiled up inside this fortnight’s edition. When Standard and Poor’s downgraded the United States, Rajiv Bhuva was in the midst of an investigation of our own ratings agencies. Jostling competitors and a shallow market have triggered an “alphabet war” – India is the only country where even IPOs are rated – and the poor investor potentially stands to lose. For this triple-A thriller, flip to page 64 – and don’t say we didn’t warn you.

Our Policy team, led by Sanjiv Shankaran, meanwhile, drilled down into the Comptroller and Auditor General’s blistering reports on Air India’s decision to buy 50 Boeing aircraft, and the government’s Production Sharing Contract with Reliance Industries for oil and gas exploration in the Krishna-Godavari basin in Andhra Pradesh. You will wonder whose interests our government is protecting when you read the unsavoury tale starting page 34.

Chaitanya Kalbag

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