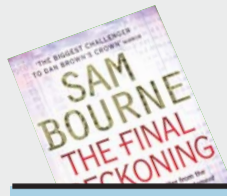


Section 2

i.witness



The Final Reckoning

By Sam Bourne
 Publisher: Harper
 Pages: 552
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last great secret of the 2nd world war

Sam Bourne's *The Final Reckoning* takes the reader on an absorbing journey from the holocaust to the UN, writes G K Rao

The story begins with a murder. It is after 9/11, and terrorist alerts are all part of the day's work for security agencies. A man is shot in the United Nations plaza in New York by a security guard after one such alert. To their horror the bosses discover that the dead man is in his seventies, too old to be a terrorist. So begins the damage control.

The man called in is Tom Byrne, a former UN lawyer and now a mafia mouthpiece brokering shady but lucrative property deals in various parts of the world. He's given the job of explaining away the death to the bereaved family, paying compensation if necessary, somehow getting them to keep silent on the matter. As Gerald Merton was a British citizen, Byrne has to go to England to do his hand-holding.

In London, Byrne discovers to his consternation that Merton is Jewish, though not circumcised. More, he is a survivor of the holocaust, a hero, in fact, from Kaunas in Lithuania. It's very different from what he had thought. How different, he realises when he meets the daughter, Rebecca. The only child of Gerald's old age, she is consumed by rage and grief at the loss. Byrne understands that he has his work cut out. He really will earn his fat fee.

In New York, meanwhile, the police investigation turns up some curious stuff. Merton had met 'the Russian', an arms merchant, as the alert had warned. Moreover, a search of his hotel room turns up a state-of-the-art plastic revolver, an assassin's gun that can't be scanned by metal detectors. There are other little troubling pointers, all prompting the question, who was Gerald Merton, and what was he doing in New York? He's not so innocent after all, it seems.

In Rebecca's house Byrne is told to get out, as she has nothing to say. For some obscure reason he can't explain, Byrne picks up a small, worn book that turns out to be a diary written by Merton. He starts reading it, the story of a holocaust survivor who saw it all happen as a small boy of 11, and who became part of the small Jewish resistance to the Nazi onslaught.

There's enough to chill the senses in the tale of horrors casually inflicted on a helpless, uncomprehending people, but no more



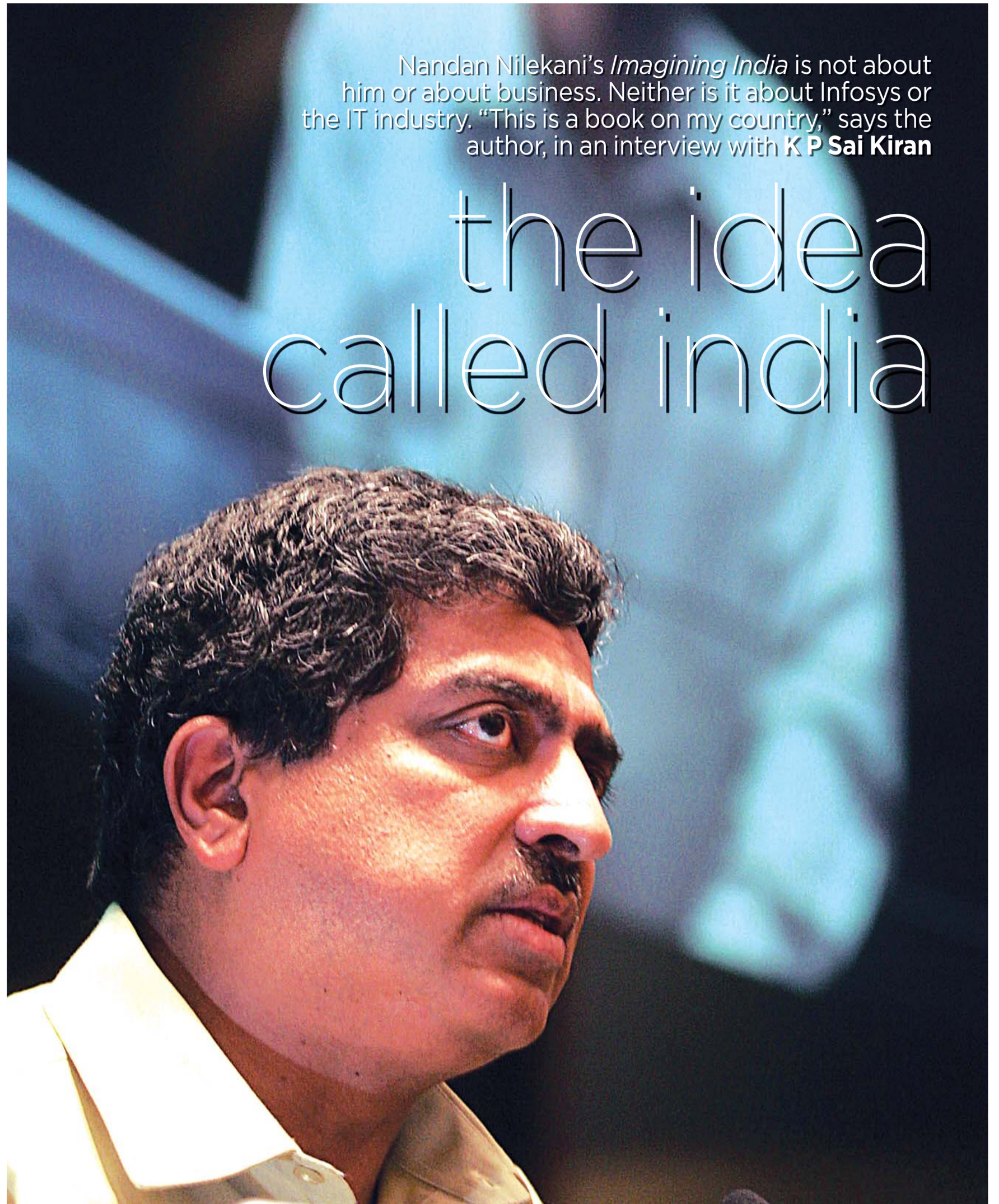
It turns out that Merton is at heart of the resistance, because of one special quality; he doesn't look Jewish. He's blond, blue-eyed and uncircumcised, and the Jewish resistance in Kaunas chooses him to bear the dire warning of the storm that is going to burst upon European Jewry. He sets out on his unending travels to the Jewish ghettos of the continent. The message is always the same: "Aunt Esther has turned up again and is at Megilla Street 7, apartment 4." It's a simple cryptogram, but it carries the message that the Jews are to be hunted down and killed wherever they can be found.

The years of the war pass like a nightmare, but when they're over, he still cannot find any rest. His family is gone, all dead, his town is lost to him, and most of the comrades of the war are also gone. Outwardly at least, the horror is over, but it lives on in the survivors. "Those of us who survived were the only ones who understood each other. We could look into each other's eyes and see the same darkness."

Anyone touched by the holocaust, the Nazi-engineered one, or any other, can never be the same. One's centre of gravity shifts, and even the sunniest of natures is touched by a winter bleakness. Bourne calculates this well as he tells the story of Gershorn Matzkin, or Gerald Merton, in the form of a diary. There's enough to chill the senses in the tale of horrors casually inflicted on a helpless, uncomprehending people, but no more.

He makes the dead man the centre of his story, because the others try to pry apart the secrets that Merton keeps in an effort to find out what he is doing in New York. The answer comes near the end and, as in all such stories, there's a "secret buried for more than sixty years — the last great secret of the Second World War." It's not quite that, but the route to the answer is both engrossing and engaging.

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Nandan Nilekani's *Imagining India* is not about him or about business. Neither is it about Infosys or the IT industry. "This is a book on my country," says the author, in an interview with K P Sai Kiran

the idea called india

Q & A

Nandan Nilekani

Q Only rarely do we see a technocrat-turned-entrepreneur with a hawk-eyed vision for the future of a nation. Normally, they're too focused on their own respective universes. But Nandan Nilekani, co-founder and chairman of Infosys, one of India's super brands, belongs to this small elite. He discusses his ideas for the country's development in his recently released book, *Imagining India*. Excerpts from the interview.

Why did you feel impelled to compile your ideas for India?

My interaction with people around the world helped me understand where we stand and where we should be heading. As part of my job, I go around the world meeting a lot of people. Often I have to explain India, why there are so many contradictions in our society, why there are so many highly qualified people on one hand and so many illiterate on the other. I found myself falling short on that. I could not explain things very well. I thought that I had to put together all my ideas about what was happening in our country today. That was the driver for my pen.

It is something unique to compile ideas for all fronts....

People write on events, people write on people, but I thought that I would write on ideas. And the ideas flowed as a beautiful way of looking at future India.

How did you equip yourself for *Imagining India*?

Over the last seven years, when I travelled a lot around the world, I happened to meet economists, demographers, environmentalists, and many others. I spoke to more than 120 people in preparation for this book. One part is devoted to explaining India, another to education, and another to making some plans for the future.

How did your experience as a successful entrepreneur help you?

You see, the important thing is that this book is not about me or about business.

Neither is it about Infosys or the IT industry. This is a book on my country. But wherever I found my experience was relevant, I have given examples. For example, while discussing higher education, reforms, entrepreneurship, languages, IT, I have quoted my experiences. But I had to cover many more topics. So on those subjects where I am not an expert, I read and talked to experts who helped me put these ideas together.

You have talked about the political leadership and governance. Do you think IT would better help governance?

I think when you go through some sections of the book, it makes the point that India needs to make fundamental reforms on governance. When we create opportunities, it boosts aspirations. The aspirations of people will bring in the necessary changes in politics. Also, I spoke about how technology could be used to improve governance. Our country has a huge background in IT, and our problems can be solved by leapfrogging in IT.

One of your major ideas was about the population being an asset for us. At the same time, aren't there huge problems associated with it?

Of course there are. But when you start thinking about population as capital, you start thinking in a different way — how

to make your human capital productive. You think about how to educate them, how to provide medical facilities, how to make sure they are provided with education and infrastructure for a decent life. My whole point in the book, to sum up, is about changing the mindset.

How have you correlated your various ideas about urbanisation, population and literacy in the growth of the country?

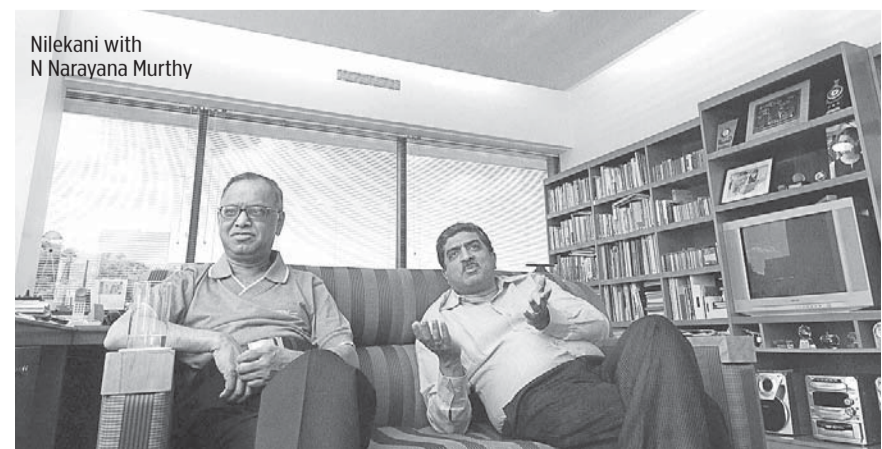
India has a huge population of youngsters who have their own expectations and dreams. Their aspirations have been unleashed. The literacy rate is going up. By 2020, we expect it to touch 90 per cent. There's more urbanisation. The combination of urbanisation, youngsters, aspirations and literacy is bringing about a huge change in ground realities every day. But it will take years to materialise fully.

You spoke about urbanisation in detail in the book....

Yes, because I think that fundamentally, urbanisation increases productivity, drives economic growth, acts as a solvent for many social evils and becomes an engine of innovation. But we have to make sure it is well planned.

Why do you think our diversity is a bane for us?

I think when you go through some sections of the book, it makes the point that India needs to make fundamental reforms on governance



Nilekani with N Narayana Murthy

What I have put across is a question. Do we want to be divided by our divisions or united by our aspirations? The aspirations would urge the political leadership to do better things for the country. The problem is complex and the solution is very tactical. Our politics is extremely complicated because of the nature of the government.

How does Infosys contribute to our social sector?

In many ways...we have a programme on education. We are working with many colleges as part of our college connect programme, we are actively doing social service through the Infosys Foundation.

The world economy is experiencing turbulence. Do you think this country can regain its pace of growth?

Our fundamentals are always high. But a short-term economic crisis may affect India too, as we are also part of the interdependent world. But since the fundamentals are strong, once the crisis is over, we will pick up soon.

Now that there has been a regime change in the US, do you think it would adversely affect outsourcing in IT?

I don't really think so. Outsourcing is a win-win situation for both countries.

Every day we hear about job cuts and layoffs world over. What about the situation at Infosys?

Infosys is not planning job cuts. In fact, we are hiring people.

How would you sum up what you've said in your book?

I have divided my book into four sections. The first section speaks about where we are now. In the next one, I have tried to discuss ideas not yet implemented, but agreed upon. The third section speaks about the ideas that we argue about, and the fourth the ideas which we anticipate. We have to start with understanding where we are, then start implementing the ideas we have agreed upon. We have to stop arguing about the ideas that we are arguing about and we should anticipate ideas. Ultimately crux of the whole book is about implementing ideas.

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