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NOVEMBER 24, 2025 ₹100

OC

**INDIA  
TODAY**

The alleged  
conspirators of  
the 10/11 blast

**THE NEW WHITE  
COLLAR TERROR**

**THE CAR BOMB ATTACK IN DELHI EXPOSES A DANGEROUS TURN  
AS RADICALISED PROFESSIONALS TARGET INDIAN CITIES**

**HOW INDIA CAN RESPOND TO THIS THREAT**



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## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**T**error had not touched Delhi for over 14 years. The last major incident was the 2011 bomb blast outside the Delhi High Court that left 12 dead and 91 injured. Even other big Indian cities have been incident-free since the Hyderabad blasts of 2013. That long lull was shattered on November 10, 6:55 pm. A surveillance camera captured the moment: a busy Monday evening, traffic crawling through the smog, then a fireball engulfing the screen. An explosive-laden Hyundai i20 had detonated in front of the iconic Red Fort. Preliminary scans found no shrapnel, timer or wiring. Instead, as investigators put together the pieces, what took shape was a different sort of circuitry. They are calling it the White Collar Terror network. A new infrastructure of radicalised professionals, doctors in this case, highly educated and equally highly committed to the path of violence. The lines, troublingly, trace back to Kashmir. And, even if investigators were chary of saying it plainly, to one of India's chief tormentors: Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The immediate chain of causation linked the blast to a security operation a few days before. A 'Faridabad module' had been busted, with nearly 3,000 kg of explosives and bomb-making material, enough to set off several deadly explosions. Equally striking were the characters caught in the dragnet: a full panel of terror doctors, as it were. It was an alert Senior Superintendent of Police in the J&K Police, coincidentally also a doctor in Andhra Pradesh before he joined the IPS, who averted the bigger peril. The unravelling started around October 18, when warning posters from Jaish appeared on walls in Nowgam, uptown Srinagar. CCTV footage led, via the footsoldiers, to a radical imam. He spilled the beans on an interstate network: indoctrinated doctors, serving in satellite towns around Delhi, communicating on encrypted channels like Telegram, plotting asymmetric war.

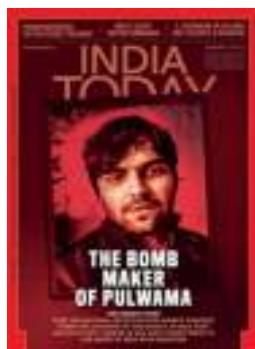
Things moved swiftly; arrests and seizures between November 6-10 neutralised much of the network. But there was one missing link: Dr Umar un-Nabi. It was he who triggered the car bomb outside Red Fort, killing himself along with 12 civilians and injuring 20 others. CCTV footage suggests design rather than accident. He had parked nearby for three hours, come out to join peak hour traffic, passed a metro station and two temples, sites with potential for far greater havoc, and taken a U-turn back to a site of high symbolic value.

The incident leaves plenty for India's security bosses to rethink. After the April massacre at Pahalgam, India launched Operation Sindoor, hitting directly at terror infrastructure in Pakistan. One of its high-profile targets was the Jaish headquarters in Bahawalpur. Even through the triumphalism seen during the summer conflict,

there had been apprehensions. The Jaish was bound to be smarting from the humiliation. Moreover, many family members of supremo Masood Azhar had been killed in the attacks. As videos of Jaish commanders made evident, revenge was a clear and present danger. Even before Op Sindoor, they had been quietly indoctrinating, raising and training this new white-collar terror army. October's Nowgam raids unearthed a vital collateral clue: an internal Jaish letter dated October 17, full of dire warnings to local operatives against leaking information. Clearly, the counter-insurgency pressure was high in Kashmir.

All the clues converge on a few key inferences. Pakistan has shifted its strategy from brazen Pahalgam-style attacks, using infiltrators trained on its soil. By fostering and radicalising educated professionals in the Valley to act as its sword-arm, Pakistan achieves three aims. It

gets much higher plausible deniability. Pointing to 'homegrown' actors helps its global narrative of Kashmir's disillusionment with the Indian state. Besides, their professional roles confer a beguiling cover that helps throw off security agencies. It's not unusual for intellectuals or the well-to-do to be indoctrinated. What's different this time is that they have gone beyond being ideologues or sponsors. They are hands-on executors of terror and, as Nabi has shown, even willing to be fidayeen.



▲ Sept. 14, 2020

India, too, has altered its strategy post Pahalgam, when it found that global support for Op Sindoor, particularly from America, was lukewarm. So, instead of proclaiming on the first day that it saw Islamabad's hand, it has gone about quietly investigating the case to build up hard evidence to prove it. To nail Pakistan's complicity, building an indisputable chain of evidence is essential. Show rather than tell, especially to the international community. That's what will sanctify the punishment, the promise the Modi government had made after Pahalgam that every new act of terror would invite a military response.

In the days ahead, it is imperative that a nationwide hunt roots out all such white-collar modules. Internal security must be beefed up, particularly in major metros. Our cover story this week unmasks this chilling new face of terror, examining how educated professionals have been weaponised and what it means for our security apparatus. It also gives New Delhi an occasion to review its Kashmir policy and plug gaps. Clarity of purpose demands tactical awareness of when and where hard action is required, or not. Terror, like history, has a way of returning when least expected. This time, it wears a white coat.

(Aroon Purie)

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# CONTENTS

**UPFRONT: AUTO SALES IN TOP GEAR PG 6**

**STATE SCAN: BHUBANESWAR 2.0 PG 16**



COVER STORY

28

HINDUSTAN TIMES

## THE NEW WHITE COLLAR TERROR

The car bomb attack in Delhi exposes a dangerous turn as radicalised professionals target Indian cities. How India can respond to this threat

### ► HIGHWAYS

### 40 No Place to Take a Break

India's highway network is expanding at breakneck speed, but wayside amenities have failed to keep pace

### ► RAJASTHAN

### 44 Inside the Fraud Factory

Cheating networks hijack Rajasthan's recruitment tests, eroding trust and crushing the hopes of genuine aspirants

### ► ROBOTICS & AI CONCLAVE

### 48 Making India AI-Ready

A range of experts deliberate on how advances in technology are reshaping health, manufacturing and agriculture

### ► ENTERTAINMENT

### 54 The Young Romance Craze

With foreign films and shows about young adults gaining traction, Indian creators are serving up local versions

### ► LEISURE 59 Making Vegetables Great Again

Culinary legend Camellia Panjabi has penned a new cookbook after three decades

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Cover by NILANJAN DAS / AI

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The most recent University Impact Rankings for 2025, released by Times Higher Education, show that Unisa's performance on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) rose to 66.3% compared to 65.3% in 2024. On the three SDGs in which it provided evidence (Decent Work and Economic Growth, Quality Education, and Gender Equality), Unisa scored in the top quartile worldwide. It was also ranked seventh amongst the thirteen South African universities included in the rankings.

Furthermore, in the Times Higher Education rankings, Unisa has risen from 13.8 to 17.8 for its research environment and from 48.1 to 51.0 for its research quality, and moved from eighth to sixth place between 2022 and 2023 in terms of its publication output units.

Released in August, the 2025 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) ranks Unisa among the top eight universities in the country and the world's top 1,000 universities.

Unisa's continued good performance on the global stage is very much an indicator of the university's focus on ten catalytic niche areas that reaffirm the university's excellence in the areas of teaching and learning, research and innovation, and engaged scholarship, as well as the global impact of the institution.

Covering a broad spectrum, the niches range from the high-technology area of Space Studies and the Square Kilometre Array to the African-born and bred Feminist, Womanist, and Bosadi Theorisations. The catalytic niche areas reaffirm the university's excellence in the areas of teaching and learning, research and innovation, and engaged scholarship, as well as the institution's global impact.

Speaking recently at the Unisa Catalytic Niche Area Research Symposium, Professor Puleng LenkaBula, Unisa Principal and Vice-Chancellor, lauded leaders in the research portfolio for institutionalizing research that supports catalytic niches. "These areas," she said, "contribute to rethinking and reclaiming Africa's futures. Unisa's roots are embedded in African knowledge, social justice, and academic excellence, enabling us to remain steady, even as we navigate the shifting global dynamics."

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# UPFRONT

GLASSHOUSE: A VERY LOOSE CANNON PG 10

SATELLITE INTERNET: WIRED VIA SPACE PG 12



HARDIK CHHABRA

► TURN KEY A customer takes delivery of his SUV in Noida, UP

► BUSINESS

## AUTO SALES IN TOP GEAR

**Pent-up demand, GST cuts and the festival season combine to give the automotive industry a record boost, with customers flocking to showrooms**

By M.G. ARUN

**T**HE FESTIVE SEASON HAS BROUGHT CHEER to the automotive industry, the record sales a combination of pent-up demand, rationalisation of the goods and services tax (GST) in September, and the auspicious nature of the season itself. With the start of the wedding season (November–December), auto-makers expect sustained demand which could spill over to January next year. Data released by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) for the 42-day festive season (September 22–November 2) showed that passenger vehicles (PVs) sales grew 23.4 per cent year-on-year. Two-wheelers, meanwhile, grew by 22 per cent, while commercial vehicles (CVs) saw a 15 per cent growth (see *Vroooming Ahead*).

October, on a standalone basis, saw high sales, too, with PVs growing 11.4 per cent compared to the same month in 2024. Two-wheelers grew by



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**Metropolitan Commissioner  
HMDA**

51.8 per cent, while CVs saw a 17.7 per cent growth. "This is the highest-ever festive season sales, with overall retail auto sales crossing half a million units in October," says Gaurav Vaangal, associate director at S&P Global Mobility. "The GST cuts were specifically targeted at the auspicious period, and the sales reflected this. The other factor has been the pent-up demand...many buyers had postponed purchases in anticipation of the GST cut."

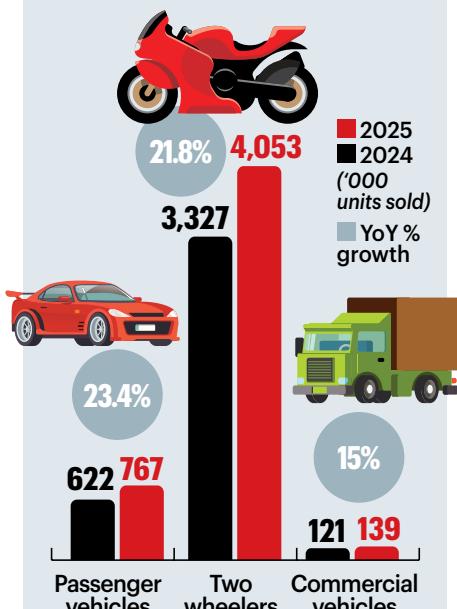
Maruti Suzuki sold the most PVs in October (239,000) with a market share of 43 per cent, followed by Tata Motors which sold 75,352 units (13.5 per cent), and Mahindra with 67,918 (12 per cent). Hero MotoCorp was the leader in two-wheelers, selling 994,000 units in October with a 31.5 per cent share, followed by Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (822,000 units and a 26 per cent share) and TVS Motor Co. (558,000 units for 17.7 per cent). A research note from Bank of Baroda also observed that "...more than 60 per cent total auto sales were seen during this specific (Navratri) period, which itself speaks of the positive influence emanating from GST rate cuts targeted towards this sector, amongst others".

#### HURRAY FOR GST CUTS

The Centre announced the GST rationalisation in September in a bid to boost demand and make taxation more transparent. This saw a shift to a two-slab system of 5 per cent and 18 per cent, removing the additional 12 per cent and 28 per cent rates that existed earlier. Also, a 40 per cent tax was imposed on luxury and 'sin goods' such as pan masala, tobacco and aerated drinks. With the GST cuts, small cars (under 4 metres in length and displacement less than 1,200 cubic centimetres (cc) in their petrol guise or 1,500 cc in diesel) which were taxed earlier at 28 per cent, saw taxes being reduced to 18 per cent. Similarly, motorcycles up to 350 cc have seen GST on them reduced from 28 per cent to 18 per cent.

Although the GST restructuring was first announced by Prime Minis-

## VROOMING AHEAD



**Source:** FADA Research; figures for all-India festive season (Sept. 22-Nov. 2)

## RURAL PV SALES GREW OVER THREE TIMES FASTER THAN URBAN... MARKING A STRUCTURAL SHIFT IN AUTO SECTOR'S DEMAND MAP

ter Narendra Modi during his I-Day speech, the policy announcement came on September 4 and the revised rates came into effect on the 22nd. This led to prospective buyers holding back their purchases in anticipation of the GST cuts and the quantum jump in sales in October. PV sales saw over 86 per cent growth compared to September, while CV sales grew nearly 50 per cent and two-wheelers grew nearly 145 per cent. The auto sector will need a longer wait, possibly post-January 2026, before the actual impact of the GST cut can be ascertained and help one see whether the tweaks have indeed revived consumption.

FADA says the GST rate cuts, especially for entry-level two-wheelers and small cars, spurred the affordabil-

ity factor and first-time buying. Rural India became the growth engine, aided by a strong monsoon, higher farm incomes and infrastructure spending, it said. "October 2025 will be remembered as a landmark month for India's auto retail, where reforms, festivities, and rural resurgence came together to deliver record-breaking results," C.S. Vigneshwar, FADA president, said. "Overall retail sales grew by a robust 40.5 per cent year-on-year, as both passenger vehicles and two-wheelers achieved lifetime highs, signalling renewed consumer confidence and strong economic undercurrents." Rural PV sales grew over three times faster than urban, while rural two-wheeler growth was nearly double urban rates, marking a structural shift in the demand map of India's auto sector.

#### EVs DON'T SHARE THE JOY

Meanwhile, the share of electric vehicles (EVs) in two-wheelers nearly halved to 4.6 per cent in October compared to over 8 per cent in September and 6.8 per cent a year ago. For cars, the share fell from 5.1 per cent in September to 3.2 per cent in October. Compared to October 2024, this was a marginal rise of 1 per cent. The GST on EVs was kept unchanged at 5 per cent, and the status quo could have acted as a disincentive, say analysts.

Looking ahead, S&P's Vaangal says the spillover effect will continue through November and December. "The trend of premiumisation continues, with the market moving towards compact sports utility vehicles (SUVs) like Maruti Fronx and Tata Punch. Sub four-metre SUVs will have a better sales traction, going forward," he adds.

Auto dealers expect the marriage season, harvest cash flows and new launches to sustain the momentum through the year-end. Dealers are expecting a growth in November, compared to the 8 per cent de-growth last year. Upcoming new model launches, healthier financing conditions and stable fuel prices will further reinforce a supportive ecosystem for continued growth. ■



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## A VERY LOOSE CANNON

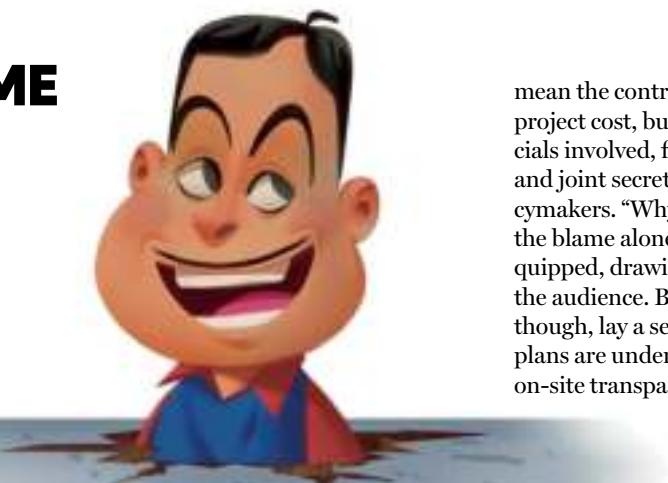
Congress MP and CWC member **Shashi Tharoor** has once again set the cat among the pigeons in the party. The latest is his praise for BJP nonagenarian and “true statesman” L.K. Advani, whose long public career, he argued, should not be reduced to one event—the 1990 Rath Yatra that led to the Babri Masjid demolition. The Advani affirmation follows an essay he had written the previous week describing India’s dynastic political culture as a “serious threat to democracy” and, horror of horrors, saying the Nehru-Gandhi family’s dominance had entrenched the idea of political leadership as birthright. The BJP gleefully hailed the “insightful” article, while the Congress almost went apoplectic. Earlier this year, the Thiruvananthapuram MP’s praise for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s public schemes had provoked the party’s Kerala unit into disowning him, saying he “was not one of us”. That sentiment has possibly taken a life of its own now.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

### ▼ DEVILS IN THE DETAIL

## SHARING BLAME

There’s never a dull moment when **Nitin Gadkari** takes the mike. Speaking at a recent CII meet on smart roads in Delhi, the Union minister was at his humorous best, explaining why he wants every detail about road projects displayed on signboards right on the highways. And by “every detail”, he didn’t just



mean the contractor’s name or project cost, but also the list of officials involved, from the secretary and joint secretary to other policymakers. “Why should I shoulder the blame alone for bad roads?” he quipped, drawing laughter from the audience. Behind the humour, though, lay a serious message: plans are under way to ensure such on-site transparency is the norm.

## JAMMU-SIZED WELCOME

In a remarkable turnaround in Hindu-majority Jammu, locals, including the traders, are showering CM **Omar Abdullah** with praise for restoring a centuries-old practice—the traditional winter darbar move when the government shifts from Srinagar to Jammu. It was scrapped in 2021 by L-G Manoj Sinha, leaving the winter economy gasping. For decades, Jammu had viewed the annual shift with resentment, seeing it as a symbol of Kashmir's political dominance. But this revival, and the growing influence of Abdullah's deputy from Jammu, Surinder Choudhary, have changed the mood.



## LADIES FIRST

The Ladli Behna Yojana, a monthly dole programme for women in MP, proved such a poll bonanza for the BJP that it was replicated in a number of states. Now Madhya Pradesh CM **Mohan Yadav**—who hiked the payout from Rs 1,250 to Rs 1,500—is considering renaming it

Devi Subhadra Yojana, the second renaming of a Shivraj Chouhan-era scheme after CM Rise Schools became Sandipani Schools. Both names draw from Krishna lore—Subhadra was Krishna's sister, and Sandipani his guru—signalling a deliberate Yadav-centric symbolic shift.

## SOLO VOYAGE

After the Karur rally tragedy involving his Thamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), rumours had swirled that superstar **Vijay** was inching toward the AIADMK-BJP alliance. Both parties had reportedly sent “multiple feelers”, but now with TVK’s categorical declaration of Vijay as its CM candidate, the door has been slammed shut. The message is clear: the TVK supremo is neither leaning toward a Dravidian heavyweight nor bowing to saffron pressure.



## SCIENCE WATCH

By **Jumana Shah**

## FROM DNA TO DIAGNOSIS MAPPING THE TRIBAL GENE

**I**n a national first, Gujarat has announced a large-scale genome sequencing project focused on its tribal population to enhance healthcare outcomes. Led by the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre, the ‘Creation of Reference Genome Database for Tribal Population in Gujarat’

forests in the south to the tribal belts of Sabarkantha in the north. About half the samples will undergo whole genome sequencing, building a reference database of around 2,000 genomes. Alongside, health profiles, age, sex, and hereditary disease data will be gathered to study genetic links to conditions such as sickle cell anaemia,



**CELL TO CELL**  
Rathwa tribals  
at the annual  
'Kawant' festival

is a state initiative to complement the national Genome India Project launched in 2020 by the Dept of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology. The broader goal is to map India’s genetic diversity by sequencing genomes of 10,000 healthy individuals across major ethnic groups.

Starting in early 2026, researchers will collect biological samples from over 4,000 tribals across 17 districts and 31 communities—from the Dang

thalassemia, G6PD (an enzyme vital for protecting red blood cells) deficiency, and certain cancers prevalent among tribal groups.

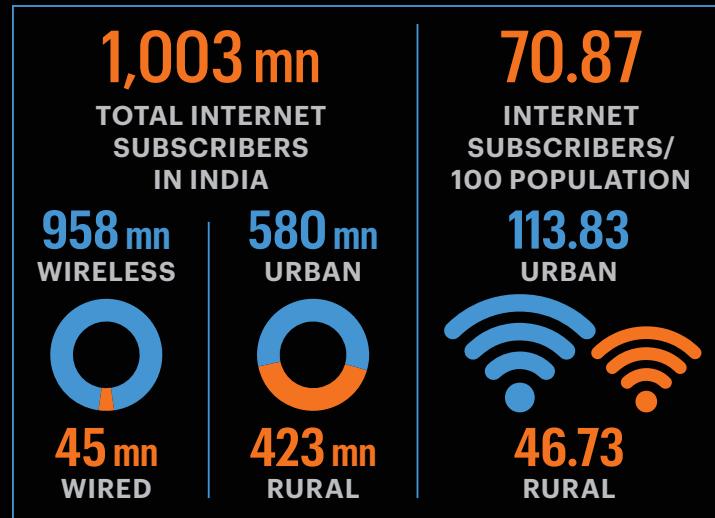
By identifying mutations and carriers, genome sequencing can also reduce diagnostic costs—from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1,000-1,500—enable early detection, and allow preventive care. It can also guide doctors to choose effective drugs and avoid adverse reactions, ultimately advancing precision medicine for underserved populations.

## ► SATELLITE INTERNET

# WIRED VIA SPACE

**Text by AJAY SUKUMARAN**  
**Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY**

India has over a billion internet subscribers, second only to China. But this number hides a stark gap: rural India has barely 46 connections per 100 people, leaving millions offline. The fix may lie above—literally. Satellite internet is being hailed as the bridge to universal connectivity. On Nov. 5, Maharashtra became the first state to sign up with Starlink—the world's largest satellite internet provider—to bring connectivity to schools, healthcare facilities and critical public infrastructure in remote areas, ahead of the company's India launch pending final approvals. Here's a snapshot of the technology that could reshape India's digital map.



## HOW IT WORKS

- Traditional broadband thrives in cities, but rural and remote areas often lag; satellite internet can bridge this gap
- It relies on constellations of hundreds to thousands of **small satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** to relay data between a user antenna and ground station
- Their **low altitude** keeps latency minimal, enabling smooth video calls, streaming and real-time connectivity
- In contrast, Geostationary (GEO) satellites, fixed 36,000 km above Earth, support communications, but their distance creates noticeable lag
- Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) satellites sit in between, powering systems like GPS



## THE COST FACTOR



**\$80-120**

(₹7,000-10,500)  
PER MONTH

Cost of Starlink's residential plans in the **US** (50-250 Mbps). There is also a one-time equipment fee of **\$349** (₹30,600) for the user dish, Wi-Fi router and other hardware



**R\$236**

(₹3,850)  
PER MONTH

Starlink's residential plan in **Brazil**, with the same hardware cost as in the US



► In **India**, discussions on satellite spectrum pricing and allocation are currently under way

► Residential fibre broadband plans range from ₹400 (30 Mbps) to ₹4,000 (1 Gbps), often with router cost & OTT access

► Yet satellite broadband offers reliability that outweighs its cost for businesses and critical services

## THE GLOBAL PLAYERS



**STARLINK:** A division of

Elon Musk's SpaceX, with 6,750+ LEO satellites—each equipped with three optical inter-satellite links, forming a global mesh network that delivers high-speed connectivity anywhere



**ONEWEB:** A subsidiary of

French group Eutelsat, of which Bharti Airtel is a key investor, operates 650+ LEO satellites across 12 orbital planes



**PROJECT KUIPER**

Amazon's planned 3,200-satellite LEO constellation; first launches began in April 2025



**TELESAT LIGHTSPEED**

Canadian firm deploying a 198-satellite constellation to deliver broadband, broadcast and telecom services



**AST SPACEMOBILE**

US firm that launched BlueWalker 3 in 2022 as a prototype for direct-to-phone broadband began deploying BlueBird constellation in 2024



**QIANFAN:** Being

developed by Chinese firm Spacesail to rival Starlink

## INDIA'S TOP INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS

**SUBSCRIBERS:** Market Share in (%)

**RELIANCE JIO**

**497 mn**  
(49.6%)

**BHARTI AIRTEL**

**317 mn**  
(31.6%)

**VODAFONE IDEA**

**135 mn**  
(13.4%)

**BSNL**

**37 mn**  
(3.7%)

**OTHERS**

**17 mn**  
(1.7%)

Source: TRAI's  
The Indian Telecom  
Services Performance  
Indicators April-June,  
2025 report





**RP - Sanjiv Goenka  
Group**

Growing Legacies



Nature's Basket



Naturali



**Esquire**

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# 200

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# STATE SCAN



UP: TRIANGLE WITH A SIDE PAIN PG 18

J&K: HEAVEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE VANISHES PG 20



► ODISHA

'Bhubaneswar 2.0' plan by MoHUA and an enhanced image of the model (above)



## BHUBANESWAR 2.0

If it happens, the 'New City' could be a template for our urban sprawls

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

**I**N TALK OF INDIA'S MODERN URBAN PLANNING, most of the fawning is reserved for Corbusier's city. But Chandigarh was still only an idea without a body when modern Bhubaneswar came up. In 1948, Odisha's capital had already shifted to German architect Otto Königsberger's wide-avenued city, dotted with gardens and parks. But nearly eight decades of haphazard growth have wrought the usual havoc. And so, there is to be a Bhubaneswar 2.0, or 'The New City', on the outskirts

of the old one, a project that may become a model for the rest of India. If one goes by the official version, that is, ignoring the discordant voices.

So, what does the formal blueprint have? The basic idea is kosher enough. Coming up over 324 hectares will be not just buildings and roads. The recipe aims to create the right kind of 'smart' blend—innovation, ecology and inclusivity. A balance of nature and modernity: 182.05 ha developable land, flanked by a 48.18 ha restricted development zone and 92.30 ha

reserved forest. Picture a "people's street" with pop-up cafés, a central green vista, cyclists gliding through shaded lanes, pathways overlooking the forest edge. Post-modern human bustle in sync with ecological calm.

A primary innovation node is to host MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) facilities, IT campuses and research hubs. A secondary node will have residences, retail and leisure zones. And a green hub will offer eco-resorts, staycations and forest trails. Nearly 47 per cent of

the entire area will remain green and open. The city plans to have only 60,000 residents—200 people per hectare—while creating 100,000+ jobs. Unlike latter-day boomtowns with their virtual class apartheid, a quarter of its 16,000 homes will be affordable. Singapore-based Subarna Jurong will prepare the detailed project report.

### Takeaways

- The city is to have an innovation hub, inclusive housing, 47% green area
- Private investors will be roped in to fund half of the Rs 8,179 crore project



Setting up 10.4 million sq. ft of housing, 6.5 million sq. ft of commercial area and 2.4 million sq. ft of MICE infra is projected to cost about Rs 8,179 crore. The guidelines have yet to be inked, but a three-way cost-sharing is planned: 25 per cent from the Centre, 25 per cent from the state, 50 per cent from private investors whom Odisha plans to seduce with attractive clauses. “If hospitality or business investments come in, the land can

be cross-subsidised,” explains a senior official. “The idea is, the government builds the core infrastructure—roads, lighting, utilities—and private partners handle long-term maintenance and services. That way, the city doesn’t just get built; it sustains itself.” The Odisha cabinet has approved a five-year funding window for the project, laying the foundation for its first phase.

### SYMBIOTICALLY LINKED

Complementing the new city will be redevelopment in the old one, says Usha Padhee, principal secretary, housing and urban development. “Bhubaneswar is a heritage city; we have to be very careful with it. Every city grows—more people, more commerce, more movement. It’s better to plan a solution before problems arrive.” One plan centres around the railway station, which is itself being modernised. The idea is to have a commercial hub enveloping the station area.

All this sounds picture-perfect—on paper. In reality, nothing starts from a pristine blank slate. An existing order has to be disturbed. “The proposed town borders the city’s vital green buffer—the Chandaka forest. Bhubaneswar, India’s first planned capital, was designed to coexist with nature. This project risks that harmony,” says urban planner Piyush Ranjan Rout.

He raises a basic question. “Globally, new cities like Incheon or Putrajaya once symbolised ambition, but often they become escapes from fixing existing urban issues, as also seen in Egypt and Indonesia’s new capitals. For Bhubaneswar, the question is: has it truly reached saturation, or are we ignoring its revival?” Königsberger, too, worked on an old site. A city with a 2,000-year past thus ponders its futures. ■

### ► TAMIL NADU

## Saffron’s Southern Paradox

**DMK aims arrows at BJP’s ‘love-hate’ relation with TN**

By Kavitha Muralidharan

**A**S INDIA’S POLITY NAVIGATES YET ANOTHER cycle of electoral rhetoric, Tamil Nadu has acquired a curious duality for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP): it is a name, an idea, an entity that’s at once desired and demonised. To be more precise, Tamil Nadu is mocked outside its borders, and courted at home. This split in the saffron political imagination has not gone unnoticed within the ruling DMK, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent campaign speeches supplied fresh evidence. While the Dravidian party is his primary target, it’s swooping down on remarks that have a strain of generalisation in order to poison-tip its own arrows.

Modi’s barbs have been sharp too. In Bihar, for instance, he accused the DMK government of mistreating Bihari migrant

■ **TOTEM AND TABOO?** The PM invokes the *sengol* as a national symbol



workers. In Odisha, during its elections last year, Modi told a rally that the missing keys to the Jagannath temple's treasury had "gone to Tamil Nadu". This was a veiled reference to a Tamil bureaucrat considered close to the then ruling party. In Uttar Pradesh during the Lok Sabha poll last year, the prime minister said the southern allies of the Congress insulted *sanatana dharma*.

The DMK has reacted forcefully to each of these accusations. Chief minister M.K. Stalin has even asked if Modi

Stalin, meanwhile, frames his counter within an idea of "respect for federal unity". This also syncs well with the needs of larger Opposition unity, he points out. There's now a force that affects all states, a common cause that bands them together rather than splitting them apart: the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. In August, Stalin had visited Bihar to take part in the INDIA rally, where he was vocal against the SIR exercise in Bihar. That's a suitably federal-minded solution to a

ANI



● NATIVIST LINE  
Modi at a rally in  
Saharsa, Bihar

### Takeaways

■ In a poll speech, PM said TN mistreats Bihari migrants; he has ribbed TN in Odisha, UP too

■ Stalin takes umbrage, dares Modi to say it while in TN; being used as a punching bag: DMK

has the "guts" to say the same thing in Tamil Nadu. Observers also note how the tone of his references to Tamil Nadu change depending on whether he's addressing audiences elsewhere or tailoring them to Tamil voters. Outside, they inevitably play on local pride and regional suspicions, says an observer. "It's clear enough. Tamil Nadu serves as a punching bag if it helps consolidate votes in other states," he says.

strategy that, as a senior DMK leader puts it, relies on "polarising voters by turning linguistic and regional diversity into electoral fault lines".

The BJP rebalances this within Tamil Nadu. Here, the party's tone is markedly different. Tamil language, heritage and pride are invoked repeatedly; the PM quotes Tamil poets and praises the state's contribution to national culture. Outside, it becomes a troubling 'other'. The Dravidian bugbear—distant, defiant, culturally alien.

This duality perhaps holds down the BJP's southern experiment. In their defence, Tamil Nadu BJP leaders argue the PM's comments are aimed at the DMK, not the state or its people. Yet the question remains: can caricaturing Tamil Nadu outside, as a charged rhetorical weapon, ever sit well with attempts to win them over within? ■

ANI



By Avaneesh Mishra

### WHEN ALL THE BIG NAMES ASSEMBLED

in Ayodhya on Diwali-eve last month for the grand Deepotsav celebrations, the spotlight fell not on the ghats illuminated with over 2.6 million diyas, but on two empty chairs—figuratively speaking. Deputy chief ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak were conspicuously missing. The episode, which made public a long-speculated schism in the upper echelons of the Yogi Adityanath government, has catalysed debate over its future shape.

Their absence, insiders admit, was no coincidence. Both had reportedly cancelled their visit at the last moment after noticing their names missing from the official advertisements; they had not even been assigned a



► UTTAR PRADESH

## TRIANGLE WITH A SLIGHT SIDE PAIN

**Upper storeys upset in UP? There have been signs for a while, but the absence of Yogi's two deputy CMs from a high-profile event in Ayodhya made it conspicuous. How will balance be restored?**

place in the programme run sheet. The ads, issued by the state information department and published in all major newspapers, featured photos of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the CM, along with state tourism minister Jaiveer Singh and Ayodhya's minister-in-charge Surya Pratap Shahi.

Even Governor Anandiben Patel's name was left out. Some sought to explain it away as "administrative oversight", but most aren't buying that, and insid-

ers say the omissions have touched a raw nerve. Both deputy CMs are said to have conveyed their displeasure to the party's top leadership.

### INVERTED PYRAMID

As it stands, the episode has deepened perceptions of strain and asymmetry in the state's power pyramid—between CM Adityanath, his ministers and a bureaucracy that many of them privately accuse of running the government with little political con-

sultation. Murmurs about differences between the government and the party's state unit had grown audible after the BJP's below-par performance in last year's Lok Sabha election. Just a month after that, Maurya had flung a none-too-veiled swipe at Yogi's style of functioning, saying "the party is bigger than the government". Around then, he also skipped several cabinet meetings chaired by the CM—before later praising him publicly that August.

Maurya's recent appointment as Bihar's poll co-incharge, and the public endorsement he got from Union home minister Amit

textbook political journey: beginning in the 1980s, he has expended his labour in the RSS, Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He was among the karsevaks who mobilised during the Ram temple movement, and in a way his rise mirrored the BJP's own expansion across the Hindi heartland.

### THE OBC FACTOR

On top of that, the caste factor favours Maurya—it was his appointment as state BJP chief in 2016, at the relatively young age of 46, that signalled his arrival as one of the party's most prominent OBC faces. He was still in his first flush then, having debuted in the assembly from Sirathu in 2012 and then won the Phulpur Lok Sabha seat in 2014.

Confirmation of his rising stature came when he was named as a deputy CM in 2022 though he had lost the assembly contest from home base Sirathu. That signalled his core value: as a non-Yadav OBC with a grassroots connect, he taps a crucial segment of the BJP's social base in UP. But more than an organisational bridge, his tacit role was as a political counterweight within the Yogi government.

Talk of tension between Yogi and Maurya persists, but just days after the Deepotsav snafu, the CM and Pathak were seen together at a Chhath Puja in Lucknow—smiling, exchanging courtesies, projecting unity.

Pathak ticks a different box in the BJP's UP equation. With an eclectic political background—first Congress, then twice a BSP

parliamentarian—he joined the BJP only in 2016. His elevation as deputy CM in 2022 showed he had secured his niche as one of the party's most recognisable Brahmin leaders, vital to balancing the BJP's recent OBC-ward tilt.

But the situation has not been without hints of lobby politics. Deepotsav was no isolated instance; Yogi's current term has seen recurring signs of unrest and division. One episode played out in Kanpur in June, when a feud between a district magistrate (DM) and chief medical officer (CMO) over corruption allegations spiralled into a larger political fracas

#### Takeaways

► Deputy CMs Keshav Maurya, Brajesh Pathak absent from key event

► Episode reignites talk of divisions within the Yogi administration

that exposed rifts within the BJP. One section, including Speaker Satish Mahana, backed the CMO; the support of Pathak, who's also the health minister, was implied. Another group, supporting the DM, escalated the matter to the CM's office. The Samajwadi Party, watching from the sidelines, lost no time suggesting that it reflected friction between Yogi and Pathak.

In the past two years, at least half a dozen ministers—including Pathak as well as Ashish Patel, husband of Union minister Anupriya Patel—have also clashed or publicly voiced frustration with the state bureaucracy. As the BJP looks ahead to the 2027 assembly election, much will depend on how Yogi manages his deputies and ministers, and whether his authority unites the organisation or begins to stretch it. ■

► PLAY CALLED OFF Broadcasters pack their bags at Bakshi stadium; below, Muslims and Pandits play a friendly after 35 years in August



► KASHMIR

# Heaven's Premier League Vanishes Into the Blue

**Match interruptions have never been so shambolic. A whole tournament gets run out as organisers scoot**

By **Kaleem Geelani**

**K**ASHMIR'S GOLDEN CHINAR FALL, flecked with chrysanthemum, was getting some flamboyant cricket colours too this season. But a whole league—a copy of the prized IPL packaged as the Indian Heaven Premier League (IHPL)—vanished overnight into the autumn on November 2. A motley crew of dumbfounded international stars like Chris Gayle and Jesse Ryder, umpires and match officials were stuck in their hotel rooms, at the high-end Radisson Collection, due to unpaid bills. And Srinagar's Bakshi stadium saw an empty ground and stands, clueless broadcasters packing

their equipment, shocked catering agencies wrapping their goodies with tarpaulin to ship them out.

Why? The organisers of the private league, a non-profit called the Yuva Society of Mohali from Punjab, ditched Srinagar half-way through a 15-day tournament, a week ahead of the scheduled November 8 final.

Slow to ignite on tinglingly cold evenings, the T20 league was beginning to generate some steam—or so it seemed. After all, there were the likes of Gayle, Ryder, Thisara Perera and Devon Smith playing alongside local talent. Like the IPL, there were eight teams slugging it out, with cheering



Photographs by ABID BHAT

ing agencies were also left in the lurch with unpaid dues worth lakhs.

Notes of scepticism had not been lacking even before. The league offered a valuation of Rs 2.5 crore each to its eight teams, with payment contracts to international players and some key faces. But most of the local players got no formal commitments, triggering hostility among a few. But a huge ad blitz featuring global stars like Gayle meant a majority of the local cricketers couldn't resist. They, too, are going back home with egg on their face.

Former India player Parvez



crowds huddled under the tall flood-lights. But the final overs didn't come. Instead, fate bowled a disaster that has shaken up Kashmir's sports world.

"Players haven't been paid, staff hasn't been paid, the hotel hasn't been paid. The league management is nowhere to be seen, they haven't been answering anyone's calls. It's just us guys on the ground trying to find a way out of the situation," a harried Melissa Juniper, an umpire of the England Cricket Board officiating in the IHPL, told media. She and her fellow umpires and all the players, stars and locals, were left with no option but to negotiate with the hotel management to walk out freely. Over Rs 51 lakh went unpaid. The local food and broadcast-

### Takeaways

■ **'Indian Heaven Premium League' collapses mid-way as organisers ditch Kashmir**

■ **International players, staff and umpires stuck; local players unpaid too**

Rasool, who took Kashmir to cricket's main stage, got only 10 per cent of his contract fee. "That was during the contract-signing, nothing later. We continued playing matches on hollow assurances," he told INDIA TODAY. Gayle et al, too, are believed to have got part of their fees. "Who would have doubted

them?" asks Rasool. "The league had credible names of Indian cricket, like Surinder Khanna and Ashu Dani."

Kashmir's nearly four-decade-long international cricket jinx was broken in October 2024, when the Legends League Cricket saw matches in Srinagar: a lineup of global stars, thousands of spectators. IHPL, expected to be a replay, fetched poor response from the outset. Unsold tickets forced organisers to go for promotion and discounts tactics with local content creators. Many point to the poor revenue generation as the reason for the fiasco, which has led to a loss of crores for stakeholders.

### THE SLOG OVERS

It's like a startup flopping amidst a gold rush that always had its fair share of hustlers. With a government push post 2019, cricket emerged as an industry in Kashmir. Big businessmen swaggered in, funding leagues and tourneys, earning rich dividends. In August, south Kashmir's Pulwama hosted its first ever day-night cricket gala. Proof of Kashmir's rampant unemployment is right there, said wags, as crowds swarmed the venue for the finals, bringing traffic to a total halt in the district for hours.

But it's an uneven windfall. Promises are getting broken, though nervous local players do not complain. Rural talent is unable to access the big league. "We can't pay thousands as entry fees. Even a basic tournament goes for Rs 10,000. We stick to village-level events," says Arif Hussain Bhat, a passionate cricketer from Zamalgam, a village in picturesque Verinag. The government has been spiffing up sports infra, but it's virtually off limits for the locals as they remain booked for major events.

The IHPL is a fruit of this skewed boom. Sports minister Satish Sharma, who inaugurated it, promises strict action, but the BJP is bowling beamers at the Omar Abdullah regime, saying the scam has "brought shame". The organisers, Parminder and Manpreet Singh, have ducked out of sight. ■

► RAJASTHAN

# SHARMA HITS RESET BUTTON FOR TOP BRASS

**Bhajan Lal Sharma goes in for an overhaul of his police setup—all eyes on the moving Lego blocks**

By Rohit Parihar

**P**OLITICS IS NEVER ENTIRELY ABSENT from anything in India—bureaucratic reshuffles are hardly immune. So, an unstated fact fills out the context: Bhajan Lal Sharma is nearly two years into his chief ministership, and still engaged in a quest for greater authority. Still, the structural reset he has imparted to the Rajasthan Police's top echelons appears driven more by operational logic than anything else.

Given its eye-catching scale—with as many as 34 IPS officers put on new assignments—it's inevitable that some wonder whether vested interests were quietly at work. Especially since a few transfers did appear puzzling. But, overall, the visible hand is that of a professional, Director General of Police Rajeev Sharma, with the CM's approval. A tangible change from the norm, where the ruling party's top brass dictates the terms.

## WHO'S ON TOP?

Notably, Director General (DG)-rank officers have been fielded to head crucial wings previously under Additional DGs. And a new post has been created—Special Commissioner (Operations) in the Jaipur Police Commissionerate—reflecting an intent to modernise policing at the top.

The new structure places DG



Sanjay Kumar Agarwal in charge of law and order, with V.K. Singh, former chief of the Special Operations Group (SOG) and Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), returning as his ADG. DG Anand Kumar Srivastava, known for his deft handling of crises—including during the infamous attempt to topple the Ashok Gehlot government—has been brought

► **GAME OF SKILL** CM Bhajan Lal Sharma with DGP Rajeev Sharma, to whom he delegated most choices

and cyber crime, drugs, gangsters and terrorism," DGP Sharma told INDIA TODAY. IG Vikas Kumar, known for his strong record against drug traffickers in western Rajasthan, heads the unit. Also, the SOG has been separated from the ATS, an operational distinction long demanded.

ADG Vishal Bansal has been tasked with handling economic offences and modernising cybercrime capabilities. Rajasthan has emerged as a hotspot for digital frauds, with cybercriminals devising new ways to divert government subsidies and grants into mule accounts.

Perhaps the most visible change came in Jaipur Police, with the commissioner's post naturally a coveted and politically sensitive one. In a surprise decision, Congress-era appointee Biju G. Joseph was replaced with ADG Sachin Mittal, a low-profile officer. IG Rahul Prakash comes into the new post alongside: Commissioner (Special Operations). Besides the usual heartburn among officers who missed out on prime assignments, overall, it's gone down as a matter of bringing sharper operational focus. ■

## Takeaways

- **34 IPS officers given new assignments, DG-ranked cops to head crucial wings**
- **ATS strengthened anticipating terror activities; there is buzz around a few exits**

back to the mainstream to head both the SOG and the ATS.

A much-discussed transfer is that of ADG Dinesh M.N. from Crime to the ATS. Dinesh, known for his pursuit of hardened criminals, will now oversee an area where narcotics, terrorism and organised crime overlap. His exit from Crime, which handles politically sensitive cases, signals a reordering of priorities. "Our focus areas have been white-collar



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 • 12. SHARIQ KAIFI • 13. ZUBAIR ALI TABISH • 14. VARUN ANAND • 15. MANU VAISHALI • 16. KAYNAT SHAHIDA  
 • 17. MADAN MOHAN • 18. KAVITA TIWARI • 19. VINEET CHAUHAN

# Electric Vigilantes

**Stealing power from the neighbourhood line? Take care. Your neighbour may get rich!**

By **Rahul Noronha**

**C**ALL IT DECEN-TRALISATION OF POWER by other means. Like many public sector distribution companies in the country, the East Zone Power Distribution Company (EZPDC) of Madhya Pradesh has for long bled from losses. Or, again not atypically, been forced to fall back on government bailout packages to bankroll populist but fiscally imprudent decisions. But now it's come up with a novel way to reduce its aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses. As a brainwave, it's surely the child of a voltage surge.

On July 1, the company rolled out an app-based reporting mechanism that keeps the whistleblower's identity anonymous. Its backronym, V-MITRA, is as spiffy as its full form is clunky: Mitigation of Irregularities Through Resource Audit.

## BUMPER RESPONSE

Its USP? As a first in India, those who report irregularities get rewarded directly—after due verification, of course. Other schemes pay out rewards only when bills or fine are paid by offenders. Developed in-house by EZPDC, the app also has provision for imposing a fine on staff in case they



### Takeaways

➲ **MP discom hits upon a novel cure for power irregularities in state**

➲ **A reward scheme for citizen complainants lands a jackpot**

are found linked to the reported malfeasance.

The results have been striking. In the past 100 days, 30,000 complaints have flooded the app! Of these, 17,000 have been investigated. Against those numbers, the strike rate seems modest: only 4,000 complaints identified as

genuine. But it's no zero sum game: a bill of Rs 5 crore has been raised against offenders; Rs 25 lakh recovered; rewards of Rs 15 lakh distributed. A particularly civic-minded individual has earned over Rs 50,000 by way of rewards. The company even had to deduct TDS from his earnings!

Overall, it's a jackpot. Earlier, vigilance teams received only an average of 50 complaints in a year. That's shot up to 300 a day. Lofty terms are being used for this citizen vigilantism, for which the company first geotagged all its 6.8 million consumers, spread over 25 districts. They're calling it an experiment in "partici-

patory e-governance" and an "exercise in social audit".

Any citizen can register on the app via a mobile phone, generate an identity and share bank details (for the reward money). Eleven types of irregularities are listed, including plain-vanilla power theft and under-reporting of load (which enables subsidised billing). The complainant has to choose one, upload a photo of the site, and geo-tag the errant consumer by location or IVRS (interactive voice response system).

If found genuine, the reward—set at a 1:50 ratio with the billing amount—is paid in a week. To prevent frivolous complaints, the app allows only one complaint to be registered per IVRS in 15 days. A consumer wrongly targeted gets compensation. "We also rectify the root cause," says Anay Dwivedi, MD, EZPDC. "New connections are given immediately in cases of direct diversion of power. Weeding out non-genuine subsidy recipients leads to higher tariffs."

The company has also laid off some 2,000 outsourced staff for 'under-performance' and 'faulty meter reading'. You know what that means: they're now being retrained as whistleblowers! ■



# INDIA'S UNDIAGNOSED HEART

## HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY IS MORE COMMON THAN WE THINK

**N**ew Delhi, October 12, 2025 — As cardiovascular diseases continue to dominate India's health burden, experts at **BEAT 2025: Cardiovascular Summit & Awards** turned their focus to one of the country's most overlooked and underdiagnosed cardiac conditions — **Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM)**.

Organized by **Voice of Healthcare (VOH)** in collaboration with partners and supported by **Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS)**, the session titled "India's Undiagnosed Heart: Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Is More Common Than We Think" convened leading clinicians, researchers, policymakers, and patient advocates to raise awareness about early detection, diagnosis, and management of this complex heart disease.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy is characterized by an abnormal thickening of the heart muscle. Despite being among the most common inherited cardiac conditions globally—with an estimated prevalence of one in 200 to one in 500 individuals—nearly **80–90% of patients remain undiagnosed**. Its symptoms—fatigue, shortness of breath, chest pain, and dizziness—are often mistaken for lifestyle issues or stress, delaying detection and treatment.

The session was moderated by **Dr. K. Madan Gopal**, Advisor and Head of Public Health Administration (NHSRC), and featured a distinguished panel including **Dr. Upendra Kaul**, Chairman – Cardiology & Dean (Academics & Research), Batra Hospital & Medical Research Institute; **Dr. Anil Saxena**, Director, Cardiac Patient Program & Lecturer, Fortis Escorts Heart Institute; **Prof. N. N. Khanna**, Founder & Chairman, Asia Pacific Vascular Society and Senior Consultant, Apollo Hospitals; and **Mr. Ram Khandelwal**, CEO & Founder, Heart Health India Foundation.

Opening the discussion, **Dr. Upendra Kaul** described HCM as "one of the most common yet least recognized cardiac conditions," emphasizing that most patients live with it unknowingly until complications arise. "It is estimated that one in 200 to one in 500 people may have hypertrophic cardiomyopathy; yet 80 to 90 percent remain undiagnosed," he said. Dr. Kaul called for **routine cardiac screening, imaging, and genetic testing** among at-risk individuals to prevent severe outcomes such as arrhythmias, heart failure, and sudden cardiac death.

Placing the issue within a **public health framework**, **Dr. K. Madan Gopal** underscored that awareness and early diagnosis are the weakest links in India's cardiac ecosystem. "Many cases go unnoticed until middle age because of a lack of standardized screening and diagnostic pathways. If you don't suspect, you won't see — suspicion remains the cornerstone of early detection," he remarked. He also advocated for the development of **standardized ECHO protocols, genetic counseling, family screening**, and integration of awareness programs into public health initiatives.

From a clinical standpoint, **Dr. Anil Saxena** highlighted the importance of differentiating between **obstructive and non-obstructive HCM** and the need for advanced imaging to detect subtle abnormalities. "Many patients with mild breathlessness or fatigue undergo multiple tests but miss a simple ECHO that could reveal the real issue," he noted. Dr. Saxena also pointed out disparities in diagnostic quality between urban and rural areas, leading to delayed or missed diagnoses.

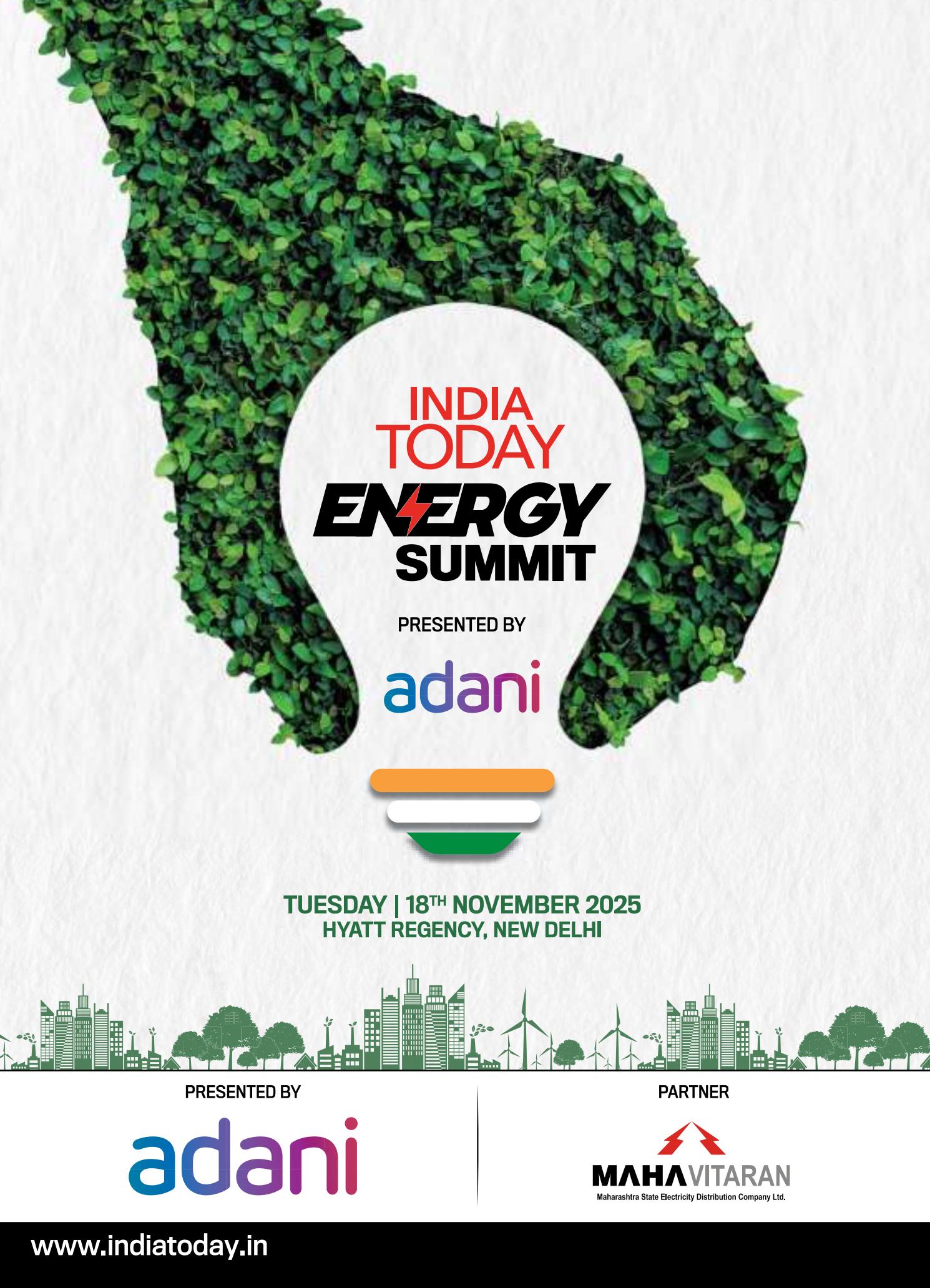
**Prof. N. N. Khanna** addressed systemic gaps such as limited physician awareness and fragmented care pathways. He emphasized the need to establish

**dedicated HCM centers of excellence** supported by a hub-and-spoke model to ensure accessibility and continuity of care. "Once we identify HCM, distinguishing between obstructive and non-obstructive variants is critical. This requires a multidisciplinary approach across diagnosis, screening, and treatment," he said.

Bringing the patient's voice to the fore, **Mr. Ram Khandelwal**, a heart patient and advocate, shared his personal journey. He recounted how early symptoms like dizziness and fatigue were dismissed as minor issues. "Only about 5% of global HCM cases are diagnosed. Early screening and awareness could save lives. Storytelling is not just education—it's learning through shared experiences that can prevent another person's tragedy," he stated.

The panel concluded with a unified call for **early suspicion, standardized diagnostic protocols, multidisciplinary collaboration, and patient advocacy** to reduce the diagnostic gap. Experts also urged the establishment of **national HCM registries**, continuous medical education, and structured patient support systems to improve long-term management and outcomes.

Summarizing the discussion, the experts emphasized that initiatives like **BEAT 2025** are vital in bridging the awareness gap between medical science, policy, and patient engagement. Collaboration among clinicians, policymakers, researchers, and advocacy groups will be key to how India addresses its **silent cardiac challenge**—ensuring that no heart goes undiagnosed.



# INDIA TODAY **ENERGY** **SUMMIT**

PRESENTED BY

**adani**



TUESDAY | 18<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2025  
HYATT REGENCY, NEW DELHI



PRESENTED BY

**adani**

PARTNER

**MAHA VITARAN**  
Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd.

# SHAPING THE TRAJECTORY OF INDIA'S ENERGY ECOSYSTEM



**RAVI B GROVER**

MEMBER, INDIAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION



**PRALHAD JOSHI**

UNION MINISTER OF NEW & RENEWABLE ENERGY



**GHANSHYAM PRASAD**

CHAIRMAN, CENTRAL ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY



**ROOPWANT SINGH**

MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
GUJARAT MINERAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



**SHRIKANT MADHAV VAIDYA**

FORMER CHAIRMAN,  
INDIAN OIL CORPORATION LTD.



**GYANESH CHAUDHARY**

CMD, VIKRAM SOLAR POWER LTD



**MILIND KULKARNI**

CEO,  
ADANI WIND



**JP CHALASANI**

GROUP CEO,  
SUZLON GROUP



**SRIVATSAN IYER**

GLOBAL CEO,  
HERO FUTURE ENERGIES



**ALOK MISHRA**

COUNTRY DIRECTOR,  
WESTINGHOUSE INDIA



**ARUN SHARMA**

CEO,  
RESONIA LTD



**VARCHASVI GAGAL**

CEO,  
DATTA INFRA

\*Entry by Invite Only



## ASSOCIATE SPONSORS





1

DR UMAR  
UN-NABI



2

DR SHAHEEN  
SAYEED



3

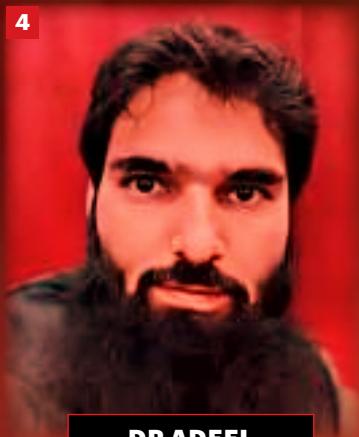
DR MUZAMMIL  
SHAKEEL GANAI

# NEW WHITE C TERROR



## TONGUE OF FLAMES

A screengrab shows the immediate aftermath of the blast near Red Fort in Delhi, Nov. 10



**DR ADEEL  
MAJEED RATHER**

# OLLAR

**THE CAR BOMB ATTACK IN DELHI  
EXPOSES A DANGEROUS TURN,  
AS RADICALISED PROFESSIONALS  
TARGET INDIAN CITIES**

**BY RAJ CHENGAPPA & PRADIP R. SAGAR**

T

**THE MESSAGE THE JAMMU & KASHMIR POLICE POSTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITE X AT 6:10 PM ON NOVEMBER 10 WAS SHORT AND TERSE: "YOU CAN RUN BUT CAN'T HIDE!"**

It was directed at Umar un-Nabi, a 32-year-old doctor at Al-Falah Hospital in Faridabad. He was among the last key members of a white-collar terror module they had been cracking down on—one suspected of planning major strikes in the National Capital Region and elsewhere. In the preceding two weeks, the J&K Police had arrested key members of the module, mainly doctors like Umar, but he himself had proved elusive, and they had hoped to nab him that fateful Monday morning. Having got wind of his impending arrest, Umar fled his Faridabad house in an explosives-laden white Hyundai i20 at 7:30 am. The J&K Police had reportedly asked their Delhi counterparts to issue a BOLO (Be On Look Out) notice for him.

Public CCTV cameras would later reveal Umar entering Delhi at 8:13 am and driving around the capital, even stopping at Connaught Place for 10 minutes around 2 pm and then at the Faiz-e-Ilahi Masjid opposite Turkman Gate to offer prayers around 2:30 pm. From there, he'd drive to Sunehri Masjid, not far from the historic Red Fort, and leave his vehicle at the parking lot there at 3:19 pm. Three and a half hours later, at 6:48 pm, just 38 minutes after the J&K Police's message on X, Umar would exit the parking area and head to the Red Fort, making a U-turn to come close to its main gate. At 6:55 pm, he seems to have detonated the explosives, which blew the car itself into smithereens, killed 12 others and injured another 20 people who were either bystanders or in vehicles nearby.

DELHI BLAST

# THE BOMB TRAIL

Tracking the death-dealing i20 driven by prime suspect Dr Umar un-Nabi through Delhi for 11 hours on Nov. 10, before he detonated the bomb in his car near Red Fort, killing himself and 12 others, apart from injuring another 20

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS / AI



1:36 am

White Hyundai i20, driven by prime suspect Dr Umar un-Nabi, spotted at Nuh toll gate. Nabi had stayed in Nuh the night before



8:13 am

The car enters Delhi from Faridabad via the Badarpur toll booth



8:20 am

Spotted at a petrol pump near Okhla Industrial Area

8

Reaches Chatta Rail Cut and takes a U-turn

9

Metro Station

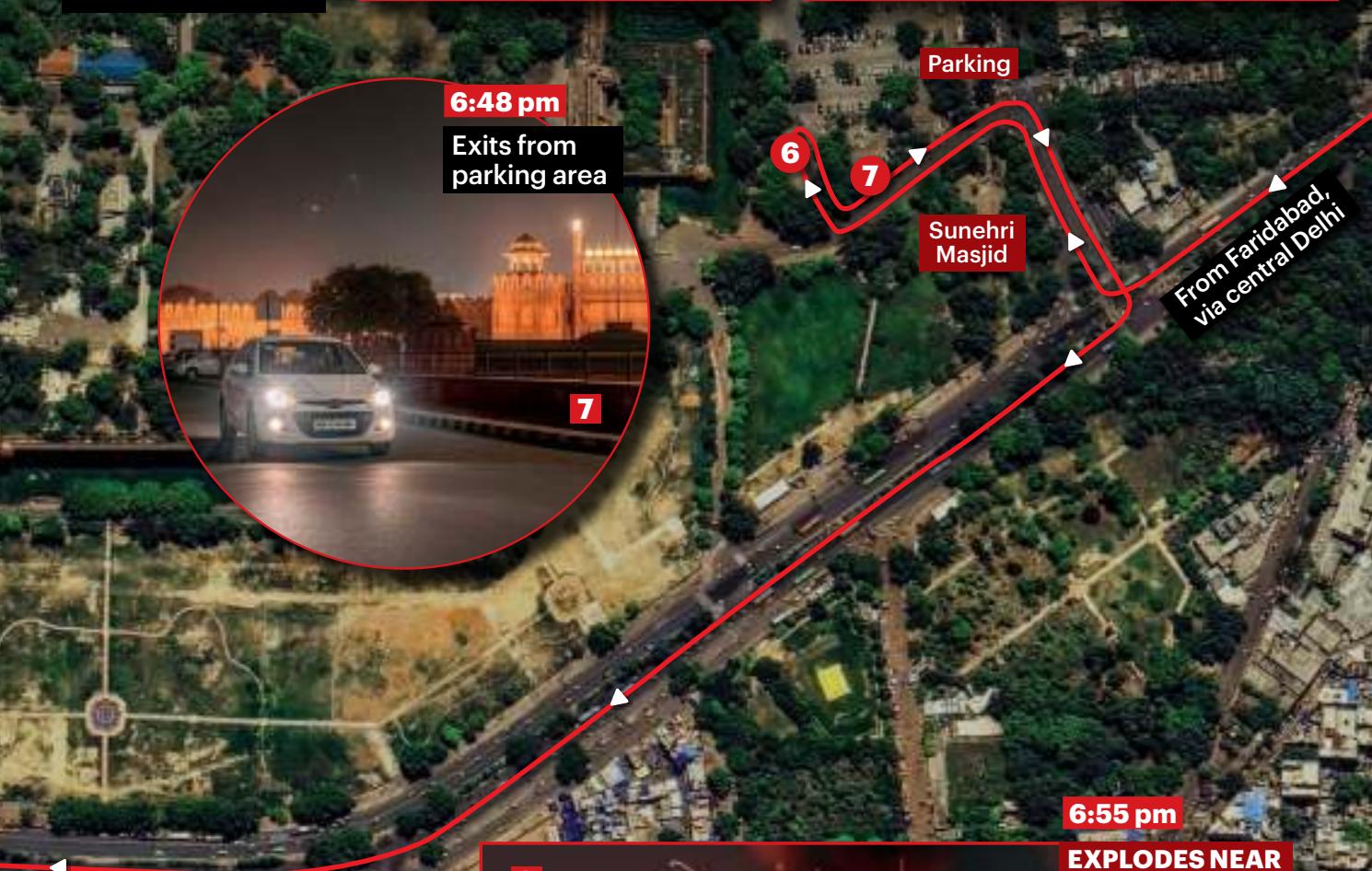
Jain Mandir

## Unanswered Questions

► How did Dr Umar un-Nabi's explosives-laden car go through multiple checkposts and not get stopped despite Delhi Police having been alerted about it?

► Umar was in the car in a parking area for three hours. Was he getting instructions from his handlers?

► Traces of the explosive ammonium nitrate were



found at the site but no detonator or battery to trigger an IED. Why did the explosion not leave a crater either?

➥ Was the bomb triggered accidentally or did Umar intend it to go off in front of the Red Fort?

# CAPITAL'S SCARS

Prominent terror attacks in Delhi since 1996.  
The Red Fort and its immediate surroundings  
have been targeted three times previously

The Delhi blast shook India's security establishment, as it signalled a new, dangerous turn that reopened a terror paradigm: terror attacks by educated professionals targeting India's big cities and planning major strikes similar to 26/11 in Mumbai in 2008. Says Shesh Paul Vaid, a former director general of J&K Police, "Umar became a suicide bomber even after qualifying as a doctor—the most sought-after profession in the Valley—and he was assisted in this act by other doctors. If you are ready to kill your own countrymen, imagine the kind of radicalisation that is taking place. This is a big challenge, and our security establishment needs to work on this front."

Especially as it was the first major terror attack in the capital in 14 years, the last one being in 2011 when a powerful explosion outside the Delhi High Court killed 12 and injured 91. The only other major terror attack outside of J&K in the following years was the twin blasts in Hyderabad in February 2013 that killed at least 16 and injured over 150 others. Then came the storming of the Pathankot air base in January 2016, but its target was military personnel, not civilians. Executed by the Pakistani terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), the Pathankot attack was carried out a month after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Pakistan in December 2015.

Unlike before, Indian investigating agencies this time were circumspect about making their findings public, opting instead for a quiet investigation to identify the possible masterminds and perpetrators of the operation. Preliminary investigations did suggest a JeM hand, as its bases were the prime target of India's Operation Sindoor, launched after a terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22 this year killed 26 civilians. As part of the operation, the Indian armed forces bombed the JeM headquarters at Markaz Subhanallah in Bahawalpur, killing 10 members of chief Masood Azhar's family, including his elder sister Hawa Bibi. Four JeM terror training camps—Markaz Bilal, Markaz Abbas, Mahmona Joya and Sargal—were attacked, too, killing several cadres.

## Unravelling the Conspiracy

**M**onths after Op Sindoor, intelligence agencies found JeM handlers using encrypted messaging apps like Telegram to issue calls to avenge the deaths of Masood's kin. A threatening poster campaign in Srinagar's Nowgam village on October 18 alerted the J&K Police that mischief was afoot. Sustained efforts by the investigating team, led by SSP Sundeep Chakravarty (interestingly a qualified doctor himself who gave it up to join the police force), unravelled a network of doctors who wanted to execute deadly terror attacks across India, seemingly to avenge the JeM's losses in Op Sindoor.



GETTY IMAGES

**Nov. 10, 2025**

13 killed, over 20 injured as explosives-laden car explodes in front of Red Fort

**Sept. 7, 2011**

12 killed and 91 injured in a powerful blast at the Delhi High Court

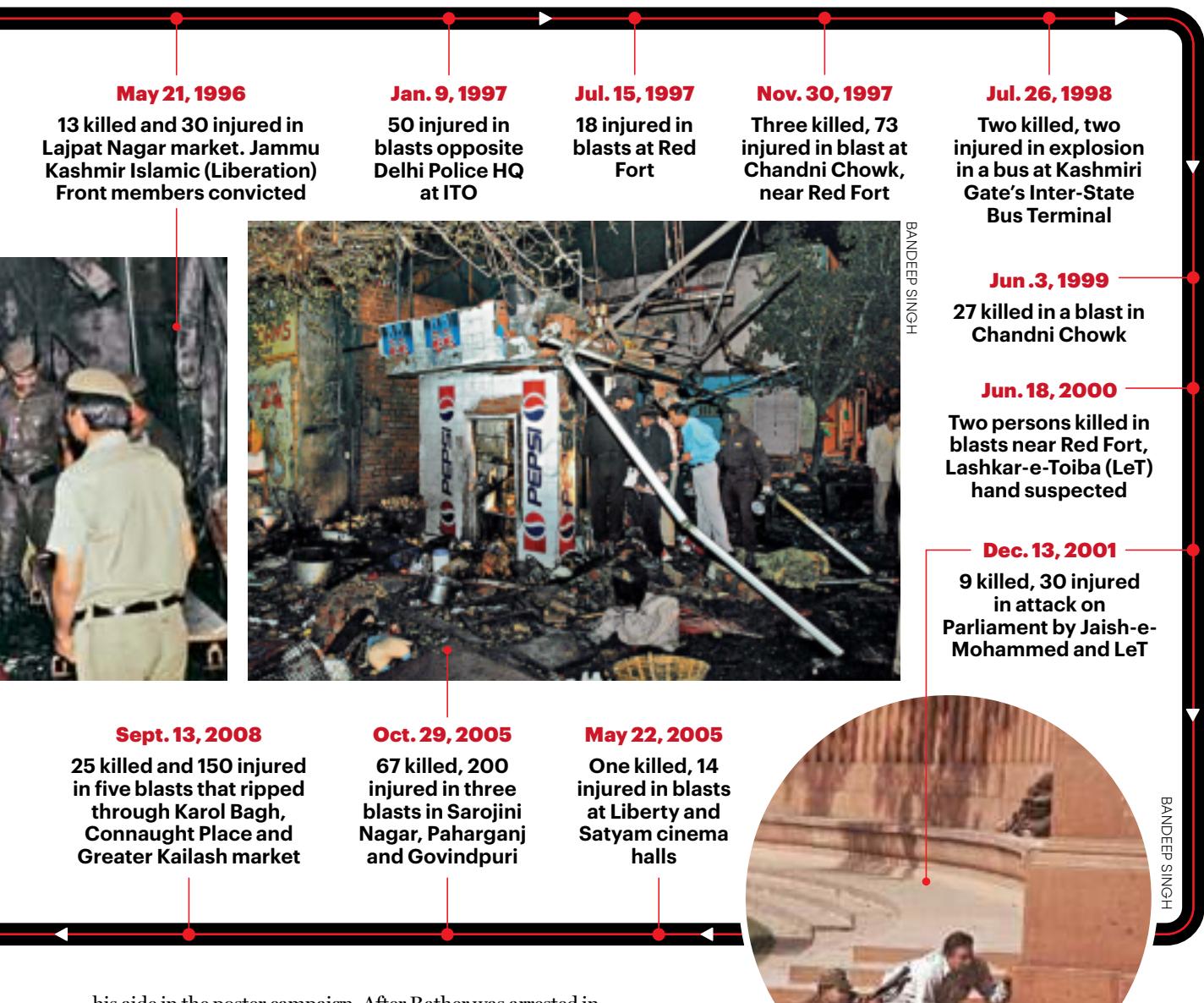
**Sept. 27, 2008**

Three killed, 21 others injured in a blast at the Mehrauli flower market

**IT IS THE FIRST MAJOR TERROR ATTACK IN DELHI IN 14 YEARS AND IT SIGNALS THE RISE OF WHITE-COLLAR TERROR THAT HAS SHAKEN INDIA'S SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT**

After the posters came up, Chakravarty and his team did a rigorous scan of the CCTV footage to narrow down on three youths pasting them—Arif Nisar Dar alias Sahil, Yasir-ul-Ashraf and Maqsood Ahmed Dar, all Nowgam residents with a history of stone-pelting. Their arrest and interrogation revealed that their instruction had come from a cleric, Maulvi Irfan Ahmad Wagay, from Shopian in south Kashmir who served as the imam at a mosque in Nowgam in outer Srinagar. Irfan allegedly had a history of supplying weapons to terrorists, sending Kashmiri youth to Pakistan for training and inciting stone-pelting against the armed forces.

That past history established Irfan's involvement in peddling terrorist narratives among local youth. After the police nabbed him, a chain of confessions followed, beginning with his naming Adeel Majeed Rather, a doctor from Qazigund in south Kashmir who was working at the Famous Medical Super Specialty Hospital in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, as



his aide in the poster campaign. After Rather was arrested in Saharanpur, an AK-47 rifle was found in his personal locker at his previous workplace, Government Medical College (GMC), Anantnag. Rather's grilling also threw up the name of another doctor, Muzammil Shakeel Ganai, a resident of Koil in Pulwama and Umar's colleague at Al-Falah.

In a joint operation, the J&K and Faridabad police nabbed Ganai in an overnight raid in Faridabad. His questioning led them to a hideout stocked with IED-making materials and equipment—358 kg of explosives, mostly ammonium nitrate, detonators and devices. Ganai also told the police about his associate, Dr Shaheen Sayeed, a native of Lucknow and also working at Al-Falah, and with whom he had stashed an AK-47 rifle. The Haryana Police, assisting J&K forces, pursued Shaheen, who, hearing of Ganai's arrest, panicked

and dumped the AK-47 behind Al-Falah. After her arrest, the police recovered the rifle from the site she had indicated.

Ganai also named Maulana Ishtiyaq, a cleric from the Singar-Punhiana village in Mewat, who was a close ideological ally and also suspected to be behind the plot to bomb Indian cities. A raid at a house in Faridabad, rented out by Ishtiyaq to Ganai—also near Al-Falah—led the police to discover 88 sacks containing an astounding 2,563 kg of explosives, including ammonium nitrate, potassium, fuel oil, detonators, batteries and timers. Finally, Ganai named Umar, his medical college classmate in Srinagar, a key co-conspirator.

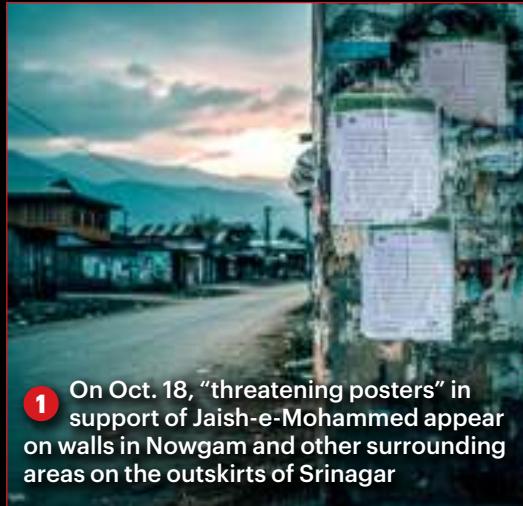
While a hunt was launched for Umar, hours before the blast, the J&K Police said it had cracked down on an 'inter-state and transnational terror module', which, it said, was linked to the banned terrorist organisations, the JeM and the Ansar Ghazwat-ul Hind, a splinter faction of the Hizbul

**THE DELHI ATTACK WAS TO AVENGE OPSINDOOR'S TARGETING OF JEM BASES IN PAKISTAN AND THE KILLING OF CHIEF MASOOD AZHAR'S KIN**

# THE TERROR DOCTORS

From J&K to Haryana and UP... How the police uncovered a sinister plot driven by radicalised doctors—too late, though, to avert the lethal blast in the heart of Delhi

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS / AI



1 On Oct. 18, “threatening posters” in support of Jaish-e-Mohammed appear on walls in Nowgam and other surrounding areas on the outskirts of Srinagar



2. After inspecting CCTV images and arresting some of the locals, including Maulvi Irfan Ahmad Wagay of Shopian—a known organiser of stone-pelting and a radicaliser of youths—J&K Police arrest Dr Adeel Majeed Rather of Qazigund, from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh on Nov. 6



3. An AK-47 is later recovered from Rather’s locker at the government hospital in Anantnag, where he worked earlier

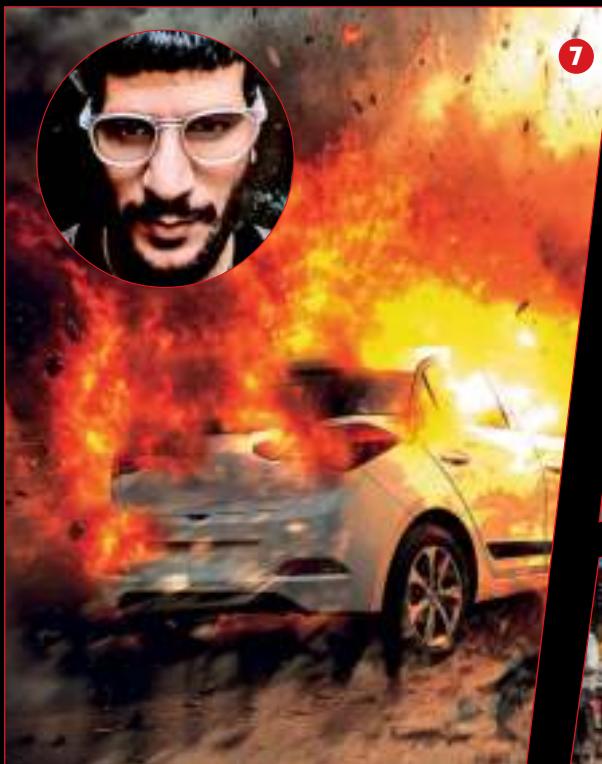


4. On interrogation, Rather names an accomplice, Dr Muzammil Shakeel Ganai of Koil village in Pulpwama, a doctor at Al-Falah University’s medical college & hospital in Faridabad



5. From Ganai’s rented rooms in Faridabad’s Dhauj village, police recover 358 kg of ammonium nitrate, an assault rifle, ammunition, timers, batteries and remote controls

6. Raids on Nov. 10 on another house rented by Ganai in Faridabad’s Dehar Colony lead to the discovery of 2,563 kg of explosives, two pistols and an AK-56 rifle. The owner, Maulana Ishtiyaq, a cleric from Dhauj, arrested as well



7

**7.** A third doctor, **Dr Umar un-Nabi**, also from Koil and an employee at Al-Falah, allegedly tries to make a getaway in the explosives-laden Hyundai i20 that explodes near the Red Fort on the evening of Nov. 10. A part of the Faridabad terror module, Nabi had worked with Rather earlier at Government Medical College in Anantnag



8

**8.** The i20 (HR 26 CE 7674) was registered in Haryana in the name of Mohammad Salman from Gurugram and changed hands several times



9

**9.** It was first re-sold to Nadeem, then to a used car dealer Royal Car Zone in Faridabad, and then bought successively by Aamir, Tariq Ahmad from Pulwama (allegedly a part of the Faridabad cell) and finally passed on to Umar



**10.** The fourth doctor to be arrested, on Nov. 10, **Dr Shaheen Sayeed** from Lucknow, is an employee at Al-Falah and an associate of Ganai

She was allegedly tasked with setting up the women's wing of the JeM—Jamaat-ul-Mominat—in India. Police recover an assault rifle, used by Ganai, from a nearby site where she dumped it



10

**11.** Soon after the Delhi blast, J&K, Haryana, Delhi and UP police conduct several raids and make multiple arrests



11

**12.** The operation is termed a "major counter-terrorism success" as it thwarts the white-collar module's plans to unleash mayhem across Indian cities even if it could not avert the Delhi blast

Mujahideen, claiming affiliation with Al Qaeda. Convinced that they had cornered Umar, they posted the “You can run but you can’t hide!” taunt on X. What they didn’t anticipate was that Umar had already loaded his i20 with explosives and would execute a fidayeen attack near the crowded Red Fort area.

## Pakistan's New Gameplan

**W**ith the case now handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), investigators have begun to sift through mountains of intelligence records and CCTV footage to determine how the terror doctors hatched the conspiracy and to find proof of Pakistan’s involvement in the attack. Counter-terror experts are convinced that Pakistan has adopted a new strategy of recruiting professionals, especially doctors in the Valley, to carry out strikes on Indian soil. This is in sharp contrast to the spectacular attacks, like the one in Pahalgam, carried out by highly-trained Pakistan-based terrorists sent out by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency.

This change may have come about after Pahalgam and Op Sindoor, to help Pakistan achieve the aim of plausible deniability. By employing homegrown terrorists, and educated professionals at that, to execute terror strikes, Pakistan wants to demonstrate how Kashmiris in general are disgruntled with the way the Indian state is handling affairs in the Valley. As Colonel Vivek Chadha (retd), a counter-terrorism expert and senior fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), points out, “By picking highly qualified professionals like doctors, who are unlikely to be suspected of undertaking tasks of this kind, and instead of targeting Kashmir, as in the past, choosing to attack a symbol of Indian power like the Red Fort, Pakistan has employed a unique combination to gain both psychological advantage and a narrative that helps them internationally to deter India from resorting to punitive action as it did with Op Sindoor.”

Other experts like R.R. Swain, former director general of J&K Police, agree that the most striking feature of the current module is the use of professionals. This has raised the threshold level to a new high, especially, as he points out, they were rarely used in the past to carry out suicide bombings. “People with higher and professional education from well-to-do families getting into bombs and bullets only vindicates the understanding that it is not an unemployment and poverty issue but indoctrination and propaganda,” says Swain.

Umar, Ganai and Rather, the key members of the Faridabad module, are prime examples of such radicalisation. Umar, a native of Koil village in Pulwama, completed his MBBS and MD from GMC, Srinagar, and worked at the city’s premier Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) hospital and GMC, Anantnag,

AP



### LEFT WITH THE PAIN

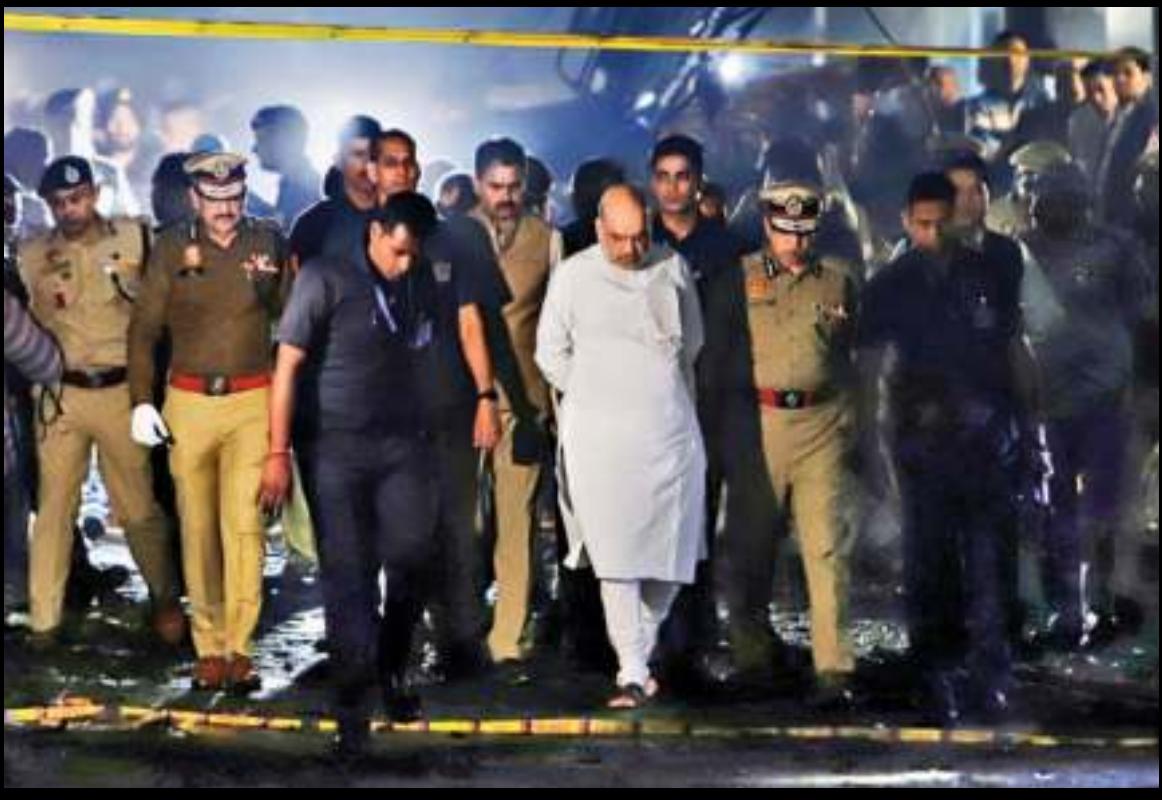
Grieving relatives of a blast victim at a hospital mortuary; right, Union home minister Amit Shah at the explosion spot, Nov. 10

before moving to work at Al-Falah. “He was an inspiration for the whole area. We struggled to make him a doctor,” Umar’s sister-in-law Muzamil said. J&K Police say that among the doctors in the module, Umar was a first among equals because of his charisma and commitment to radical Islamisation. But he was also known to be impulsive and prone to angry outbursts. Ganai, who like Umar was from Koil village, did his MBBS from Acharya Shri Chander College of Medical Sciences and Hospital in Jammu and, again like Umar, practised in Kashmir’s hospitals before coming to Al-Falah. Back home, he was known to be a brilliant, industrious student. “Neither police nor army ever entered our house,” Ganai’s younger brother Azad said. “We are Indians and law-abiding citizens, Muzammil always focused on studies and nothing else.” Qazigund resident Rather came from a modest family background; his father, now retired, was a tehsildar. He did his MBBS and MD from GMC, Anantnag, where he got to know Umar. He worked as a resident till October 2024 before shifting to the Saharanpur hospital.

**THE USE OF PROFESSIONALS HAS RAISED THE THRESHOLD LEVEL TO A NEW HIGH, ESPECIALLY AS THEY WERE RARELY USED IN THE PAST TO CARRY OUT SUICIDE BOMBINGS**

### The Modus Operandi of Radicalisation

**H**ow did Pakistan manage to radicalise doctors in the Valley to carry out fidayeen attacks? During the course of their investigation, J&K Police learnt how two Telegram channels became the core of the radicalisation network—the first, run by Farzandan-e-Darul Uloom (Deoband), and the second operated by Umar bin Khattab, a Pakistan-based JeM terrorist. Both Umar and Maulvi Irfan were



## **EMPLOYING PROFESSIONALS AND HOMEGROWN TERRORISTS GIVES PAKISTAN PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY, AS IT PORTRAYS A LARGER KASHMIRI DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE INDIAN STATE**

reportedly radicalised through these groups. Early conversations focused on “aazaadi” for Kashmir and the suppression of Kashmiris, then shifted to a global jihad narrative and calls to avenge injustice. The police also point to a strong degree of self-radicalisation among the doctors.

Their Pakistani handlers, whom Indian agencies are trying to identify, are also said to have met Umar and Irfan during a trip to Turkiye in 2022, a visit that marked the module’s formal consolidation. On returning, the group resolved to expand operations across India. Ganai was asked to join Al-Fatah, where Umar was working; Rather sought the Saharanpur posting. Other members were deployed to various states for recruitment and logistics. Agencies are now mapping every individual who interacted with the module’s key members. They will also analyse a mobile tower dump around the Red Fort to trace Umar’s communication between 3 pm and 6:30 pm, the critical window before he drove the explosives-laden car out of the parking lot. The data is expected to reveal last-minute instructions and handler contacts.

Security agencies say the plan to carry out strikes gathered pace after Op Sindoar. Key terrorist organisations like the JeM, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen, hit by the Indian armed forces, are being moved to new bases deep inside Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, near the Afghan frontier.

Moreover, the JeM was found to be openly seeking donations through digital banking transaction platforms to rebuild the terror infrastructure Op Sindoar destroyed. Officials believe the involvement of educated professionals, including doctors, indicates a shift in JeM’s strategy to rebuild its networks within India through new channels of recruitment and radicalisation.

Radicalising women seems to be another part of JEM’s new strategy. Intelligence sources have tracked down a 21-minute audio recording of Masood Azhar, delivered recently at Markaz Usman o Ali in Bahawalpur, which reveals an elaborate plan to indoctrinate, train and deploy women under a newly-formed wing called the Jamaat-ul-Mominat led by his sister Sadiya. Shaheen, the woman doctor arrested from Faridabad, is alleged to be part of it as well. In the core group is Afeera Farooq, widow of Umar Farooq, the mastermind of the Pulwama bombing. These women are reportedly conducting daily online indoctrination sessions, recruiting and motivating new female adherents under what JeM describes as its “Shoba-e-Dawat” campaign.

### **How India Should Respond**

**I**ndian security experts are viewing these developments with growing concern. Says Lt Gen. D.P. Pandey, former commander of the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps, “The big challenge lies in tackling the ‘white-collar terrorists’ who create and sustain the network of militancy in J&K. They will become the real factories of terrorism. They identify vulnerable youth, groom and radicalise them and, under directions from handlers abroad, ensure they are armed and ready to strike.” Security forces are focusing on neutralising armed terrorists, and not on those who operate behind the scenes and perpetuate the ideology of violence, he adds.



**HEALING TOUCH**  
PM Narendra Modi visits injured victims at the LNJP Hospital in Delhi, Nov. 12

Pandey believes they should now focus on beefing up intelligence and conducting nationwide operations to crack down on Faridabad-like modules that may have sprouted in and around major cities. The Delhi blast has put Kashmiri doctors under the security lens, especially those working in different places. Several states and Delhi have reportedly begun such profiling. The managements of the GMCs in Srinagar and Anantnag have ordered doctors to identify and label their lockers within three days. “Radicalisation, brainwashing or extremist drift are often discussed in the context of various professions, but it is difficult to reconcile such outcomes with someone who has spent years in rigorous medical training, dedicated to saving lives,” says Aaqib Ali Khan, a GMC doctor.

While both PM Modi and home minister Amit Shah said the perpetrators and masterminds of the heinous Delhi attack would be brought to book, the Indian government has avoided jumping the gun to point fingers immediately at Pakistan. Though it has said it will treat every terror attack as an act of war, the government has wisely decided to piece together all evidence before taking any action. Says MP-IDSA’s counter-terrorism expert Adil Rasheed, “They are handling the Delhi blast investigation very methodically, which is reassuring. We don’t know just how deep the rabbit hole goes and investigators are trying to get a full picture of Pakistan’s involvement and then sharing the findings with the international community. They seem to have learnt from Op Sindoor where India

## **WITH DONALD TRUMP WARMING UP TO PAKISTAN, INDIA THIS TIME IS FIRST GATHERING PROOF BEFORE CONTEMPLATING AN OPERATION SINDOOR-LIKE RETALIATION**

did not seem prepared for the international response, which, despite decades of Pakistan’s terror record, treated it like a two-sided affair, with even the US response being mixed.”

Moreover, with US president Donald Trump enhancing US-Pak relations for larger geopolitical gains, India may find itself isolated if it takes punitive action across the border akin to Op Sindoor. With Asim Munir consolidating his position by getting Parliament to pass a constitutional amendment making him chief of defence forces overseeing all the three armed forces, he has emerged even more powerful and beyond rational bounds. He seems ready to go higher in the escalation curve to invite American intervention which is why India, experts say, should play its cards carefully and ensure the international narrative is strongly on its side. “Munir is clearly trying to provoke India and getting us to come hammer and tongs at him so that he can cry wolf again to the international community,” says Rasheed. “I am sure India understands his game plan and is doing its homework before retaliating.” Rather than resort to what security experts call “performative militarism”, including spectacular cross-border strikes, they advocate a long-term policy of “escalation dominance” that employs credible, repeatable ways including kinetic options to impose heavy costs on Pakistan, while staying below nuclear thresholds.

Another imperative for the Indian government is to plug governance gaps and make it difficult for Pakistan to radicalise professionals in Kashmir. As Swain says, “The attack reiterates that if you offer, and maintain, peace and an enabling environment to the common man in the Valley, he would get busy earning a livelihood that gives him self-worth and dignity and not allow himself to become cannon fodder for Pakistan’s nefarious games.” This requires India to step up its development plans for the state besides keeping a tight vigil on attempts from across the border to pull them into terror activities. In an interview to India Today TV, J&K chief minister Omar Abdullah pointed out how even three days after the strike, the central government did not think it fit to brief him or elicit his views. Whatever the reason, it’s important for India to build the right narrative, especially in the Valley. Restoring statehood has been a long-pending demand. While experts like Rasheed caution against doing so immediately, others say the government would do well to lay down a roadmap. In tough times like these, what is needed is clarity of purpose and unity in action. ■

—with Kaleem Geelani in Srinagar



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**CLOCKWISE • 1. PRAGYA SHARMA • 2. HIMANSHU BAJPAI • 3. SHACHI PATHAK • 4. LAKSH MAHESHWARI • 5. DIVYA BATRA**

- 6. DIVYA PRAKASH DUBEY • 7. SMRITI NAUTIYAL • 8. PRIYA MALIK • 9. SEEMA KAPOOR • 10. AMOL PALEKAR • 11. SADHVI BHAGAWATI SARASWATI
- 12. SANDHYA GOKHALE • 13. VIJENDRA CHAUHAN • 14. RUCHIKA LOHIYA • 15. ABHI MUNDE PSYCHO SHAYAR
- 16. FOUZIA • 17. PARITOSH TRIPATHI • 18. SOUMYADEEP DASGUPTA

# NO PLACE TO TAKE A BREAK

**INDIA'S NETWORK OF HIGHWAYS EXPANDS AT BREAKNECK SPEED, BUT  
WAYSIDE AMENITIES FAIL TO KEEP PACE, MAKING ROAD JOURNEYS A  
FRAUGHT EXPERIENCE. THE GOVERNMENT HOPES TO CHANGE THAT SOON**

By AVISHEK G. DASTIDAR

Photograph by RAJWANT RAWAT



#### HALFWAY HOME ▶

A rest stop under construction on the Delhi-Mumbai highway



**URUGRAM-BASED CYRIL NAIR**, a senior software executive, was en route to Jaisalmer with family when, just an hour along the new access-controlled highway, his toddler son piped up with some urgency: "Daddy, I need to pee." They were in the middle of what seemed like nowhere, ominous clouds thundering overhead and heavy rain lashing the windshield. All 44-year-old Nair could see through the persevering wipers were a few metres of asphalt. No sign of a rest stop anywhere. "I had to tell my family that we couldn't stop... We had to drive another 30 km to find a place with a decent wash room."

And therein lies the paradox of India's highway boom—146,200 km of gleaming expressways criss-crossing the country, built to power tourism and industry, but only 94 operational wayside amenities (WSAs)—government-regulated rest facilities that include fuel stations, food courts, toilets, medical rooms and so on—along them. Roughly put, that is an average gap of 1,553 km between each rest stop. The ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH) is now trying to rectify the situation through a policy pivot that aims to install such facilities every 30-40 km along national highways, in



India



UK



USA



China

Highway Length (km)	<b>146,000</b>	<b>3,700</b>	<b>*78,680</b>	<b>190,700</b>
No. of Rest Areas	<b>94</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>1,840</b>	<b>5,800</b>
Average Spacing (km)	<b>1553.2</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>42.8</b>	<b>32.9</b>

\*Interstate only

Sources: Federal Highway Administration, USA; Department for Transport, UK; NDRC and MoT annual reports and highway statistics, China



line with international standards: the United States (every 43 km), the United Kingdom (35 km) and China (33 km).

The new policy, a draft version of which has been circulated for shareholder views, details a template for WSAs to be opened on private land, which will help them achieve an eventual target of 5,000 WSAs, 700 by 2030. The government also aims to exert tighter control, enforced via the National Highways Logistics Management Ltd (NHLML) and also share some of the financial burden. Earlier attempts by the government, with a variety of incentives given to oil companies and F&B operators, failed due to low investor interest, dodgy traffic projections, competition from local facilities and the bureaucratic nightmare of

bids and delayed clearances. Landmark attempts include a government policy in 2021 that translated to a risky investment of Rs 5-10 crore per site from the private sector without guarantees of footfall or revenue, and last year's Humsafar policy that aimed to standardise existing and upcoming facilities under the purview of MoRTH, but failed to take off due to little interest and enforcement. The government is now making a renewed effort after taking each of these into consideration.

## A NEW APPROACH

Here's how the policy might work. The draft document says that if you have land, you can open a WSA and run it as a franchise of the NHLML. Or you can lease it to the body, which will bid it out to operators. The franchise fee of Rs 100 a month for the first three years and Rs 25,000 thereafter (paid to NHLML) will be indexed annually. If you meet affordability and quality metrics for the truckers' facility, you get a 25 per cent discount. Revenue must be within tight bounds: high markups for profit are not allowed.

"Unfortunately, there's a misconception that everything must generate revenue," says Nitin Gadkari, Union minister of road transport and highways. "We have a duty to provide quality services—clean toilets, restaurants, rest areas and access to local handicrafts and produce. But this social angle is often lost in the tender process. They are floated, responses are poor, some companies back out."



**NITIN GADKARI**  
Union Minister of  
Road Transport  
and Highways

WE'RE REVIEWING POLICIES. SOME DEVELOPERS CLAIM PROJECTED TRAFFIC HASN'T MATERIALISED. THAT'S A SEPARATE ISSUE BUT WE MUST KEEP TRYING TO IMPROVE

This mindset has to change...."

The government also hopes for realtime feedback from consumers. For instance, it's mandatory for WSAs to be listed on RajmargYatra, an NHAI app where upkeep targets—for toilets, lighting, fuelling stations and sanitation—will be published regularly. The app will have provision for user ratings to help discerning travellers.

There are other requirements as well. WSAs must be on a national highway or within a kilometre of an access point, the landowner must have a clear title, the plot lease will be for 30 years, 60 per cent of the site must have free parking. Apart from the usual facilities, a first-aid facility, baby-care room, driver dorm, children's play space

and vehicle washing station are compulsory. Two ODOP (One District, One Product) kiosks must rotate annually on regulated rents to ensure local producers a foothold. Other facilities like electric vehicle charging stations, ATMs and full-fledged clinics will be optional.

### A NOTE OF CAUTION

**L**ike with everything else, the success of this policy, too, say experts, will depend on implementation. Ensuring that contractual obligations—especially with regard to land, infrastructure and utilities—are met is essential, says Anjali Nathwani, director, Crisil Market Intelligence & Analytics. She adds oil marketing and food safety approvals

tractors, which means service lanes make better sense than widening the road to a six-lane highway. On NH-60 (Nashik-Ahmednagar-Solapur-Akkalkot), the body and the department of expenditure were circumspect about daily traffic more than doubling from 17,000 to 38,000 vehicles. MoRTH, in its defence, cited surveys that showed traffic would shift from NH-48 and NH-52.

That shift, however, is unlikely to happen if there are no WSAs. Truckers, especially, are likely to avoid such routes. “Where will a driver go if they don’t get food and drink?” asks J.P. Singla, CEO of the All India Transporters Welfare Association (AITWA). “And who will open WSAs if the cost is so high that truckers cannot afford the services?” AITWA has

also red-flagged the link between the absence of amenities and highway accidents—it estimates that 40 per cent of accidents are due to driver fatigue.

It all boils down to footfall, says Zafar Khan, president of the Highways Operators’ Association and head of Vertis Infrastructure Trust. “In areas with good footfall, major roads like Delhi-Jaipur, Delhi-Dehradun, Mumbai-Pune, facilities are developing fast. But where there’s nothing, for example, in UP, you can go 200 km at a stretch and see absolutely nothing... you feel unsafe. If something happens at 2 am, your only option is to call 1033 and be taken to the toll plaza.”

Drivers, though, are availing workarounds. Rest-stops known as ‘Apna Ghar’ have popped up in 368 locations around the country, set up by oil marketing companies. The night resting facility is cheap—it currently offers 4,611 beds—but CCTVs often don’t work, which is a major flaw as trucks often carry goods worth lakhs of rupees. But Jitendra Kushwaha, a driver who threads three states a week, does not mind: “Give me a clean bed, shower, cheap thali, tyre repair service and place to wash my clothes. Price it fairly and keep it open all night. I’ll plan my run around that.”

For what it’s worth, Gadkari is candid about past missteps. “We’re reviewing policies, correcting shortcomings and aiming to deliver world-class services. Some developers claim projected traffic hasn’t materialised; that’s a separate issue, but we must keep trying to improve.” That promise is what Indian travellers are banking on—a dignified, safe and comfortable space that gives them a welcome break after hours on the road. ■

## NEW POLICY, NEW GOALS

The 2025 draft policy on Wayside Amenities aims to set up **5,000 rest facilities** nationally with speedy private investment

### RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITY & MODEL

The new policy introduces a new franchise model, managed by National Highway Logistics Management Limited (NHLML), exclusively for development on private land

### LAND OWNERSHIP & LEASE

Private landowners must now form a company to act as a franchisee of NHLML. Or they can lease their land to the body for 30 years for an annual Rs 100 fee

### LOCATION

Aims for amenities every 30-40 km instead of 40-60 km earlier, with land area varying from 0.2 acres, 2.5 acres or more than 5 acres. The land must have a frontage of 100 metres (50 m in hilly areas). It cannot be within 5 km of a city or town

### FINANCES

The franchisee is responsible for financing. A nominal franchise fee of Rs 100 per month is charged by NHLML for the first three years, increasing to Rs 25,000 monthly with annual inflation adjustment

### DESIGN

Requires a minimum of 60 per cent open space, but the maximum covered area is capped at 35 per cent. The franchisee must adhere to NHLML’s standard layout and design

### TERMINATION & LEASE END

Franchise can be terminated for non-compliance with design, poor operation or payment defaults. The lease can be extended after 30 years, else assets handed over to the landowner

to the list, saying, “Resolving bottlenecks will maintain the interest of private investors and ensure long-term success.”

Another point of concern is the government’s traffic projections. The NITI Aayog, for instance, flagged traffic estimates for two proposed highways this June. On the Mukama to Munger stretch of NH-33 in Bihar, it noted that nearly three-quarters of the vehicles are bikes, auto-rickshaws and



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 • 6. YATINDRA MISHRA • 7. NEERJA CHOWDHURY • 8. ANAMIKA • 9. NIDHI AGARWAL • 10. SAVITA SINGH • 11. PROF. PURUSHOTTAM AGRAWAL  
 • 12. MANISHA KULSHRESHTHA • 13. SUMAN KESARI • 14. MANISH MADHKAR • 15. ASHUTOSH AGNIHOTRI • 16. DR. REETIKA KHERA

# INSIDE THE FRAUD FACT

CHEATING NETWORKS HIJACK RAJASTHAN'S RECRUITMENT SYSTEM,  
ERODING TRUST AND CRUSHING THE HOPES OF GENUINE ASPIRANTS

By ROHIT PARIHAR

Illustrations by NILANJAN DAS /AI



## FAKING DOCUMENTS

- 1. The Quota Con**  
Candidates fake disability certificates for blindness or deafness, often with doctors' help



- 4. Sporting Lies**  
Bogus Taekwondo 'champions' and fake 'ex-servicemen' grab jobs under special quotas

## 3. Degrees of Deceit

Forged or backdated degrees are bought from inter-state rackets

4

- 5. Promotion by Fraud**  
Officials falsify eligibility documents like PG degrees to claim salary hikes and promotions

# ORY



## TECH-ASSISTED TRICKS



### 1. Bluetooth Brigade

Hidden earpieces and transmitters relay answers from outside exam halls

### 2. Remote-control Exams

In online tests, engineers run 'solver labs' via screen-sharing; candidates sit idle, outsiders answer for them



For countless young aspirants, a government job is the ultimate prize—a ticket to stability, respect and a secure future. But in Rajasthan, that dream has curdled into a marketplace of deceit. Leaked papers, Bluetooth-aided cheating, dummy candidates, forged certificates and quota scams have riddled the very recruitment process. Desperation has bred collusion, where aspirants, middlemen and insiders come together to con the system. The cost has been high—for honest aspirants and for the credibility of public service itself.

In August, the Rajasthan High Court scrapped the 2021 police sub-inspector (SI) recruitment after widespread evidence of paper leaks and proxy candidates. Nearly 797,000 aspirants had competed for just 859 posts, making it one of the state's most emblematic scandals. "There are thousands of cases where candidates have used fraudulent means," an investigating officer of the Special Operations Group (SOG) tells INDIA TODAY. "If there's any department not under the scanner, it's only because its cases haven't come to light yet. *Kuen mein bhang hai* (everyone's intoxicated)."

## THE PAPER LEAK ECONOMY



### RIGGING THE SYSTEM

#### 1. Proxy Players

Paid 'solvers', or dummy candidates, sit exams for others

#### 2. Paper Leak Mafia

Insiders sell question papers for lakhs before exams

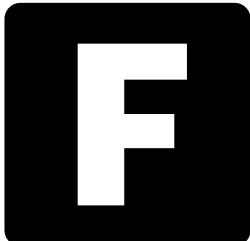
#### 3. Bribes for Ranks

From inflated marks to paid placements, bribe-for-merit manipulation thrives post-exam



Rajasthan's biggest recruitment scams often begin long before a single question is answered. Question papers for teacher, constable and Rajasthan Administrative Service (RAS) examinations are leaked hours or even days ahead—often by insiders at printing presses or corrupt officials. Copies sell for lakhs, and candidates who buy them are coached in hotel rooms or even on buses en route to exam centres.

The high court, while cancelling the 2021 SI exam, cited evidence suggesting that both serving and former members of the Rajasthan Public Service Commission (RPSC) may have been involved. Over 50 trainee SIs were arrested and many more



lost lakhs they had paid for question papers. Among them, constable Radhika Singh, posted with Jaipur rural police, was held for buying the papers for Rs 14 lakh. She then read them out to fellow aspirant Praveen Kumar Kharadi outside the exam hall. She cleared the written exam, but failed in the interview; Kharadi got selected, but now faces prosecution.

Investigators have also found that at least 15 of those selected had already cleared the tougher RAS exam, highlighting how the cancellation of the SI exam penalised deserving candidates.

## RESERVATION RUSE

**W**hen BJP MLA Shankar Singh Rawat from Beawar was accused of helping his daughter-in-law Sunita Devi secure a teacher's job under the divorced women quota—despite living with her husband—more such cases surfaced. Constable Kavita was found to have used false divorce papers to get her post. Over 50 women employees are now under investigation, many of whom are either still living with, or have remarried, the husbands they claimed to have divorced. Police say such forgeries are difficult to prosecute because they require proving cohabitation.

The allegations against the four-term MLA don't end here. His daughter, Kanchan Chauhan, who became a naib tehsildar in 2024 under the disability quota, was later found to have falsely claimed over 40 per cent deafness when she was only 8 per cent hard of hearing. Rawat claims his political rivals have filed false complaints against his family.

The government has now ordered the re-examination of all employees recruited under the disability quota. Of the 44 verified so far, 38 were found to have wrong certifications. Some papers carried fake doctor signatures; in others, doctors themselves were complicit. In Sirohi, a probe found that a former chief medical and health officer had issued 5,177 disability certificates between 2019 and 2025 using a single doctor's name across multiple specialties, and even citing the doctors who were never posted there.

# CRACKING THE CHEAT CODE

How authorities are unravelling recruitment exam fraud



**1. Digital Sleuth:** The Special Operations Group and Anti-Terrorism Squad now use AI, biometrics and data analytics to trace impersonators and forged records

**2. The Big Re-check:** The Education Department has begun re-verifying medical and academic certificates

**IN AUGUST, THE HIGH COURT CANCELLED THE 2021 POLICE SI RECRUITMENT PROCESS AFTER WIDESPREAD EVIDENCE OF PAPER LEAKS AND PROXY CANDIDATES; NEARLY 797,000 CANDIDATES HAD COMPETED FOR 859 POSTS**

## FAKING DEGREES

**T**he education department is investigating 4,500 Physical Training Instructors (PTIs) recruited after the 2022 exam following complaints that many had submitted forged or backdated degrees. So far, over 300 FIRs have been registered and 134 employees dismissed. The SOG has arrested PTI Suman Kumar posted in Rajsamand district and her husband, and another recruit, Saurav Kalal, from Banswara district, for using fake backdated degrees to qualify for selection.

The fraud goes even deeper. Aditya Yadav from Tijara, who never studied beyond Class 12, was arrested for using a

fake B.Tech degree to obtain an assistant engineer's post in the 2022 RPSC recruitment, where he even ranked seventh. His 'degree', arranged from Ahmedabad by a middleman, was part of a wider racket involving multiple universities across Rajasthan, Haryana and Gujarat.

In another case, one Saurabh Singh from Haryana was arrested for supplying forged mark-sheets and certificates. His e-Mitra centre in Rewari produced fake documents complete with forged QR codes and university seals, and sold those to jobless youths through local agents. The racket spanned Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh.

The probe has revealed newer layers of forgery. In September, the Anti-



3

### 3. Tech Meets Truth

Cross-verifying Aadhaar data, real-time photos and forensics of question paper leaks have led to hundreds of arrests

### 4. Encrypted Evidence

Investigators retrieve WhatsApp and Telegram chats between candidates and middlemen



4



5

**5. Judicial Watch:** The Rajasthan High Court has ordered independent monitoring of recruitment exams to restore credibility

Terrorism Squad (ATS) busted a fake ex-servicemen racket in Jaipur; 28 people were arrested for securing Food Corporation of India (FCI) security guard jobs using forged discharge papers and pension papers. The investigators had verified all guards at 31 FCI depots—private security agencies had created fake ID cards, canteen passes and discharge certificates, for Rs 30,000–50,000 per candidate.

In the same month, the SOG uncovered a racket of bogus ‘sports quota’ credentials with the arrest of Hemlata Gurjar from Karauli district, who used a fake Taekwondo certificate to secure a Grade III teacher post. The investigators found that fake emails purportedly from the Taekwondo Federation of India were created to send forged verifications. At least half a dozen people, including Dinesh Jagarwal, general secretary of the Rajasthan Taekwondo Association, are accused of facilitating false entries into national championship rosters. Two others, Madhusudan from Ajmer district and Siya Ram from Karauli, both teachers, have been dismissed for using similar

certificates to claim quota benefits.

Fraud has continued into promotions too—41 officers of the Rajasthan Apex Bank are under investigation for using fake PG degrees to gain two salary increments. Some of the universities cited had no campuses in the state; others claimed they never issued such degrees.

### DIGITAL DECEIT

**W**ith recruitment going online, cheating followed it there too. During the National Seeds Corporation exam in Jaipur, the SOG found ‘solvers’ answering questions remotely through screen-sharing software installed in computer labs, as candidates sat idle. Two engineers, Jogendra Kumar Singh and Paramjit Kadiyan, who had themselves failed earlier recruitment exams, were arrested for running such labs. Investigators are still determining how many exams this network infiltrated.

Bluetooth-aided cheating has become one of the most sophisticated methods. Candidates enter exam halls with

micro earpieces or masks and receivers stitched into vests or dupattas. Handlers outside the hall dictate answers using Wi-Fi hotspots or smartphones. In September, four high court junior clerks—Ram Prakash Jat, Sunil Bishnoi, Rakesh Jakhar and Om Prakash Jat—were arrested for allegedly using Bluetooth devices during the 2022 exam. Each reportedly paid Rs 5 lakh to the alleged mastermind of the scam, Paurav Kalar. Similarly, Manju Kumari Bishnoi was arrested from Bikaner in September for securing a women empowerment supervisor’s post by using a Bluetooth device to receive answers during the 2018 exam.

### PHANTOM CANDIDATES

Impersonation is another recurring modus operandi. Paid ‘solvers’ appear for others using forged IDs or tampered biometrics. In recent months, AI-based biometric systems have helped the SOG and ATS detect repeat offenders. The same 13 individuals were found impersonating candidates in two separate exams—for constable recruitment and for the diploma in elementary education.

One Dalu Ram Meena, a native of Dausa district and the first trainee SI to be arrested for using a dummy candidate in Jaipur last year, was rearrested this August along with his wife, Mausam, who allegedly impersonated a candidate in the 2022 senior teacher exam. Meena is accused of appearing in as many as eight exams on behalf of others, including for his relatives.

In Jaipur, SI Bhanwar Lal Bishnoi was arrested in September after a promotion exam for inspector; his handwriting was found to match that of a constable selected in 2013. In another case, Sagar Meena, a patwari in Ajmer district, had used one Roshan Lal Meena as his proxy in 2021; both were arrested. In Jodhpur, teacher Varsha was dismissed for taking the 2021 SI exam on behalf of three women; all were selected. Another teacher, Chammi Bai from Sanchore, was arrested for taking an exam for Manju Bishnoi, who later became an SI.

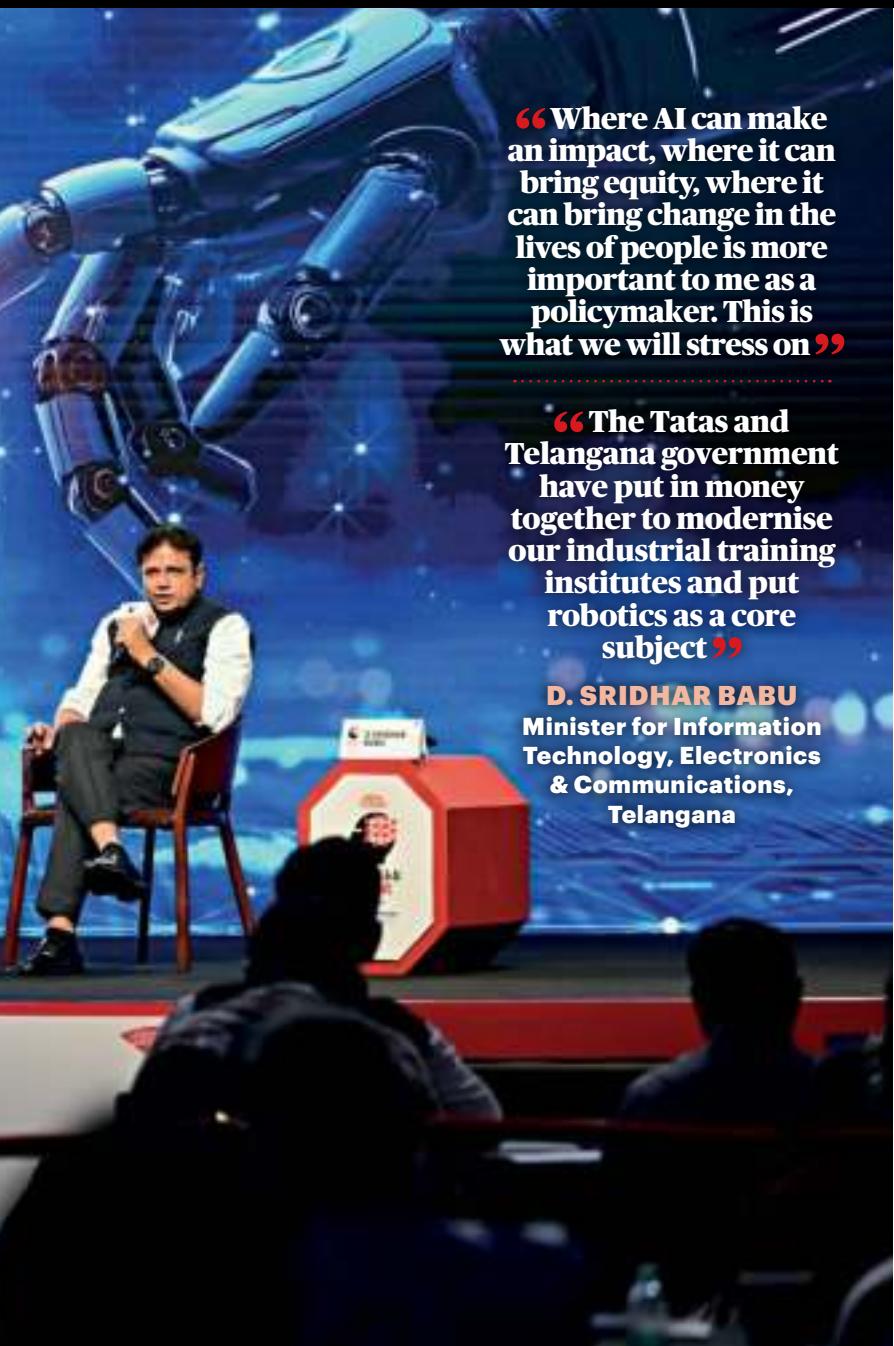
The crackdowns are encouraging, but meaningless without real change. Restoring credibility will require airtight systems, transparent evaluation and strong deterrence. ■



# MAKING INDIA AI-READY

HEALTH, MANUFACTURING AND AGRICULTURE ARE SEEING A SEA  
CHANGE WITH ADVANCEMENTS IN THE TECH SECTOR. THE INDIA TODAY  
ROBOTICS AND AI CONCLAVE CAPTURED SOME OF THE ACTION

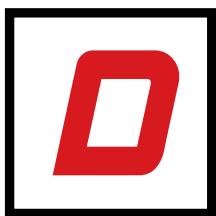
By AJAY SUKUMARAN / Photographs by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



**“Where AI can make an impact, where it can bring equity, where it can bring change in the lives of people is more important to me as a policymaker. This is what we will stress on”**

**“The Tatas and Telangana government have put in money together to modernise our industrial training institutes and put robotics as a core subject”**

**D. SRIDHAR BABU**  
Minister for Information  
Technology, Electronics  
& Communications,  
Telangana



Did you know that up to 113 unique components go into making a bionic hand that can replicate the functions of a human hand? Or that robotic systems in Indian factories can make up to eight cars on a single assembly line?

Or that 250 robotic systems across Indian hospitals are currently assisting in surgeries? The INDIA TODAY Robotics and AI Conclave in Hyderabad on November 6 covered such fascinating developments in the tech space, and united policymakers, innovators and academics who shared their insights on the sweeping changes this is set to bring in the health, manufacturing and agriculture sectors.

“We are entering a world of hyper specialisation,” Rajiv Gupta, managing director and senior partner at

Boston Consulting Group, said. “You are almost certain that 1.5 million-odd jobs out of [India’s 8 million-strong tech workforce] will get displaced,” he said. “But there are new jobs getting created already... in tech companies, banks, consumer good companies, manufacturing,” he added, referring to roles that involve prompting and operating AI programs. Jaspreet Bindra, managing director and founder, Tech Whisperer, added, “All of us don’t need to be AI experts, but we all need to be literate in it, the same way you become literate in English to become a successful professional.” Dr John Bruce, director of placements & corporate affairs at the Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology, said a collaborative workflow between humans and machines will soon emerge.

One Indian state leading the charge is Telangana. According to D. Sridhar Babu, the state’s minister for IT and Industries, 65 industrial training institutes in Telangana are being upgraded with a focus on robotics. Two arenas in which it is already proving useful are health and manufacturing. According to Dr Sanjay Addla, senior consultant in uro-oncology and robotic surgery at Apollo Hospitals, while robot-assisted surgeries have been around for decades, innovations could deliver medical services to under-served regions. Pointing to dark factories—manufacturing units run entirely with robots—Gopalakrishnan C.S., chief manufacturing officer of Hyundai Motor India, remarked on the incoming paradigm shift. Two startups hailing it are Makers Hive, with a cost-effective prosthetic arm, and Harvested Robotics, with its tractor-mounted weed-zapping laser.

Autonomous systems are already in use in defence. “Tomorrow, the most difficult job of soldiers will be taken away,” said Dr Narayan Panigrahi, Scientist ‘H’ and group head, GIS, of the Centre for Artificial Intelligence & Robotics. Transparency will be important as more sophisticated machines emerge, according to Dr L. Lakshmanan, professor at Sathyabama. Policy, incentives and greater R&D must align, as Kissshan P.S.V., chairman of the All India Robotics Association, pointed out. The future’s bright, it needs to be safer too. ■



## THE ROADMAP FOR JOB CREATION IN THE AI ECONOMY

**“On the ground, AI use is leading to a 15-20% increase in productivity, and we’re also seeing a way to reach 30-40% by 2030, as adoption improves and processes evolve”**

**“While some jobs are being disrupted, many AI-related roles are being created, including positions like prompt engineer, AI solutions engineer, AI operations engineer”**

**RAJIV GUPTA**

Managing Director and Senior Partner,  
Boston Consulting Group



## HUMAN-CENTRED INTELLIGENCE IN ROBOTICS: MOVING BEYOND AUTOMATION

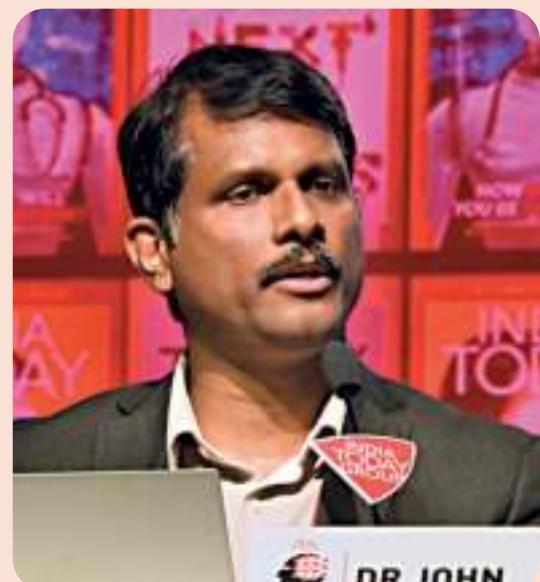


**“The next phase of AI innovation should focus on augmenting human intelligence and creativity—enabling people to make better decisions, solve complex problems and express empathy—not automating humans out of the equation”**

**DR L. LAKSHMANAN**

Professor, CSE, Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A JOB-CREATOR OR A JOB-DESTROYER?



## THE NEXT BIG THING IN DEFENCE: ROBOTICS IN WARFARE

**“Future warfare will be dominated by robotic-centered, autonomous systems—an ‘army of none’, where AI fights AI”**



**“AI is enabling high-endurance autonomous platforms in land, sea, air and underwater to perform precise operations”**

**“The primary objective of war has shifted to cognitive warfare, impacting the cognition of human beings rather than just territorial gains”**

**DR NARAYAN PANIGRAHI**

Scientist 'H', Group Head GIS, Centre for Artificial Intelligence & Robotics, Bengaluru



HARDIK CHHABRA

## HEALING WITH PRECISION: THE NEW ERA OF ROBOTIC-ASSISTED CARE

**“Robotic surgeries can democratise healthcare, letting doctors operate on a patient from anywhere”**

**DR SANJAI ADDLA**

Senior Consultant, Uro-Oncologist & Robotic Surgeon, Apollo Hospitals

**“AI opens up new categories of employment, from data ethics and algorithm auditing to AI-driven product innovation. The focus should shift from job loss to job evolution”**

**“Upskilling is the only sustainable response to AI-driven change. Workers and students must update their competencies in digital tools, data literacy, creativity, critical thinking”**

**DR JOHN BRUCE**

Director-Placements & Corporate Affairs, Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology

## TRENDS IN ROBOTICS: MAKING MANUFACTURING INTELLIGENT, FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE



**“At Hyundai, we have been committed to making manufacturing more flexible, intelligent and responsive, at the same time responsible. Flexibility is a necessity”**

**“Customers are becoming more aspirational. They want more features, high-technology products. In 2021, the penetration of connected cars was over 14%. In 2024, it doubled to 29%. Our success is in understanding these aspirations”**

**“We want to become a software-defined factory in the future, where our focus will be to be flexible in automation and implement smart systems which are human-friendly”**

**GOPALAKRISHNAN C.S.**

Whole-time Director and Chief Manufacturing Officer, Hyundai Motor India Limited



HARDIK CHHABRA



### AI AND THE PRODUCTIVITY PROMISE

**“**We are now standing at the cusp of an intelligence revolution led by AI and robotics that will make intelligence free, and that will change everything **”**

**“**Literacy will no longer be just about reading, writing and arithmetic. It's going to be all this and also about how we use AI in everything we do—at work or at play—naturally, instinctively, innately **”**

**JASPREET BINDRA**

Managing Director and Founder,  
Tech Whisperers

### BREAKTHROUGH ROBOTICS INNOVATIONS FOR COMMON GOOD

**KALARM**, a 3D-printed bionic hand, has been developed by the Hyderabad-based startup Makers Hive. Named after India's former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the device took 31-year-old Pranav Vempati and his team six and a half years to build. Typically, bionic hands are priced between Rs 15 lakh and Rs 60 lakh. KalArm is India's first, and one of the world's most affordable ones, priced between Rs 4.5 lakh and Rs 7.2 lakh.

**“ Until we make technology affordable, it isn't truly accessible to anyone. Our bionic arm is already being used by the ministries of defence, railways, home affairs and others **”****

**PRANAV VEMPATI**

Founder & CEO, Makers Hive

**RAHUL AREPAKA**, co-founder of Harvested Robotics in Hyderabad, is behind the AI-powered laser weeding machine named Rakshak. Recognising that weeds account for large cultivation losses in India and traditional manual or chemical methods are costly and harmful, Rahul and his engineering-student team began developing the tool in late 2022 and have now raised Rs 5 crore to advance pilots, development and commercialisation.

**“ Currently, India doesn't have any agri or crop data unlike other countries. So, we have decided to collect our own data and create a data bank from different states **”****

**RAHUL AREPAKA**

Co-founder, Harvested Robotics



### CREATING THE RIGHT ECOSYSTEM FOR INDIGENOUS ROBOT MANUFACTURING



**“ There's a lot of dependence on China for robots and components. We need firms focusing on making motors or chips **”****

**KISSSHAN P.S.V.**

Chairman—All India Robotics Association, Founder, H-Bots Robotics; CEO, Anvi Robotics



# Your Liver Matters -Know It. Protect It.

**Dr. Chandragouda Dodagoudar**

Senior Director & HOD Medical oncology  
Delhi

Imagine a bustling factory inside your body, quietly processing nutrients, filtering toxins, managing energy, and supporting your immune defences. That's your liver, the unsung powerhouse that keeps you thriving, often without you noticing.

## The Mighty Role of Your Liver

Your liver is your body's largest internal organ and a multitasking marvel, performing over 500 vital functions ranging from waste removal, digestion, immune defence to even blood clotting!

It filters your entire blood supply, breaking down toxins like medications, alcohol, and metabolism byproducts so they can be safely eliminated. It produces bile, which helps digest and absorb fats and fat-soluble vitamins

It stores vitamins (A, D, E, K, B<sub>12</sub>), minerals (iron, copper), and energy reserves in the form of glycogen and releases them as needed to keep your body fuelled. It manufactures essential proteins like albumin and life-saving clotting factors that prevent excessive bleeding. It houses immune cells (like Kupffer cells) that detect and remove pathogens acting like an internal immune watchdog.

In short, your liver is the silent, behind-the-scenes hero in almost

every bodily process.

## Why This Matters—and What Can Go Wrong

Despite its resilience, the liver often fails quietly. Conditions like fatty liver, viral hepatitis, or toxin overload can develop with few symptoms until damage is advanced. If neglected, this can lead to inflammation, scarring (cirrhosis), or even liver failure.

Early changes may be invisible, but the consequences aren't. That's why awareness and preventive action are key.

## How to Nurture Your Liver—Every Day

Here are expert-endorsed, practical ways to keep your liver strong:

### Eat Smart, Eat Whole

Embrace a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats like olive oil, fatty fish, nuts, and leafy greens.

### Stay Physically Active & Maintain a Healthy Weight

Aim for 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly. Even a 5–10% weight loss can significantly reduce fat and inflammation in the liver.

### Avoid alcohol and smoking

Completely avoid alcohol your liver can metabolize only so much

safely. Stay well-hydrated water helps flush toxins and supports liver function

### Be Mindful of Liver-Burdening Habits

Reduce consumption of excessive oil, salt, processed and high-sugar foods, they slowly burden the liver over time. Choose whole, fresh ingredients instead.

### Vaccinate, Practice Safe Hygiene

Protect yourself against hepatitis A and B and observe safe food, medication, and hygiene practices to keep infections at bay

### Know When to Get Checked

If you have risk factors, monitor your liver via routine blood tests (LFTs) and screenings like ultrasound. Early detection dramatically improves outcomes.

Your liver is your metabolism manager, detox champion, energy storehouse, and immune guardian, all wrapped into one powerhouse. Yet it thrives in silence, often ignored until it's not. By eating thoughtfully, staying active, avoiding toxins, hydrating, getting vaccinated, and seeking early checks, you give your liver the care and attention it deserves.

### References:

Kalra A, Yetiskul E, Wehrle CJ, et al. Physiology, Liver. [Updated 2023 May 1]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2025 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK535438/>



1

ENTERTAINMENT  
YOUNG ADULT

# THE YOUNG ROMANCE WAVE

WITH A SPATE OF FOREIGN FILMS AND SHOWS ABOUT YOUNG ADULTS GAINING TRACTION, PRODUCERS ARE SPOTLIGHTING LOCAL VARIANTS THAT TELL THE STORY OF INDIA'S YOUTH

By Suhani Singh



# In

**September, hundreds showed up at The Nines**, a spacious restaurant in Mumbai, to find out which one of the Fisher brothers Isabel Conklin aka Belly would pick to be her bae. The trio, projected in all their bronzy glitz above the seated viewers, are the leads of *The Summer I Turned Pretty (TSITP)*, a show about school crushes, love triangles, heartbreaks, yearning and other experiences that apparently make teenagers swoon helplessly. And so it was that its 75-minute season finale was screened with all the pomp and aplomb its dedicated fan base deserved. The Nines was dressed to the nines—mirroring the beachside setting of the show, while a DIY charm bracelet stall was set up to echo the one given to Belly by a loving mother figure. The centrepiece was a two-tier dark chocolate cake with a raspberry coulis filling and glossy mirror glaze made from 70 per cent cacao—to reflect the precise wed-

ding cake that the younger Fisher brother, Jeremiah, wanted for himself. Some viewers hoped that Belly would choose him (team Jeremiah/ #Jellyfishers) and others that she'd go for the elder one, Conrad (team Conrad/ #Bonrad). Gasps, cheers, awws and screams filled The Nines through the episode and viewers walked away reassured that they need not say goodbye just yet—the characters will return in a newly announced movie.

*TSITP* is not the only young adult (YA) show generating waves. The genre, showcasing youngsters and their coming-of-age hopes and obstacles, has seen a surge in pop-

## A TEMPTING SLATE

- 1:** *The Summer I Turned Pretty*
- 2:** *Call Me Bae*
- 3:** *Mismatched*
- 4:** *Kota Factory*



ularity as a whole, and studios are jumping on the bandwagon. The success of films like *Saiyaara*—about two awkward youngsters trying to make their relationship work—and the *Culpa* trilogy—a Spanish drama about stepsiblings-turned-lovers—has helped. So have shows like *Maxton Hall* (an interclass romance set in an elite German school), *Wednesday* (a horror comedy about a young psychic), *Heartstopper* (a classic romance between two teen boys) and *Kota Factory* (about young IIT aspirants). Netflix has announced new seasons of *Mismatched* (a romantic drama set in Jaipur) and *Class* (a crime thriller focused on student life in a posh school). Amazon Prime has greenlit season two of the Ananya Panday-led *Call Me Bae* (about a rich girl who falls from grace) and is developing two more shows to woo the youth, including *Lukha*, featuring rapper and songwriter King (of 'Tu Maan Meri Jaan' fame) and a musical by Ankur Tiwari.

## WHY YA WORKS

If there's one defining feature that makes the genre addictive, it's the emphasis on idyllic, often saccharine, romances with a central couple to rally behind. *Mismatched*, with a successful run of three seasons and another on its way, taps into this formula. "It has been one of those rare shows that




**COLLEGE  
ROMANCE**  
(SonyLIV)

This show by The Viral Fever about three friends and their adventures in the classroom was picked up by SonyLIV where it has had a run of three more seasons.

# DESI YA SHOWS TO WATCH

Recent productions that made a splash, some of which have ongoing seasons

**BIG GIRLS DONT CRY**  
(Prime Video)

Aneet Padda may be known as *Saiyaara*'s Vaani now, but this coming-of-age drama set in an all-girls boarding school first made her visible.


**FLAMES** (Prime Video)

Rajjo (Ritvik Sahore) & Ishita (Tanya Manitkala) have kept audiences hooked, anchoring a romance blooming in a Delhi tuition centre.


**HOSTEL DAZE** (Prime Video)

Before Adarsh Gourav broke through with *The White Tiger*, he was already a familiar face for playing Ankit in this *The Viral Fever* show, about a small group of hostellers navigating college life.


**CLASS** (Netflix)

Season one was hailed for its bold depiction of life in a posh private school, portrayed through a talented cast of newcomers.

captured a generation's mood and managed to stay relevant over time," says Tanya Bami, series head, Netflix India. "At its heart, it's a simple, feel-good story about young people trying to find their place in the world where careers, romance and technology come at you at the same time." That it has made stars out of Prajakta Koli and Rohit Saraf, who are now synonymous with their characters Dimple and Rishi, is proof of the show's enduring appeal.

The larger media landscape has a role to play too. Nikhil Madhok, director & head of originals, Prime Video, India, admits that he didn't anticipate *TSITP*'s love triangle between a 21-year-old woman and two brothers drawing such a strong following in India. But once the show took off, he understood why the audience—mostly Gen Z and millennial women—were taking to it. "If you look at the choices the YA audience is presented with, from a storytelling perspective, our movies have largely focused on hyper masculine stories targeted primarily at men and TV tends to focus on family drama and what happens to a woman after marriage," he says. "Not enough stories are being created for the 16-25

years group. For them relatability is very important. Is it authentic to the experience they are having? Are the stories reflective of the same complexes and challenges they are facing?"

## THE NEED FOR INDIAN STORIES

**T**hat's an area in which Indian productions have been sorely lacking. While there have been offerings with varying success like *Mismatched*, *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan* (a social media-centred romantic drama) and *CTRL* (about an influencer couple and their breakup), few ventures have found the monumental success of foreign productions. Sonal Kabi, director & head of marketing, Prime Video, India, notes that for Indian youth, "YA content is more than entertainment, it's a window into global youth culture, one they're not just consuming, but co-creating. When young audiences connect, they don't just watch—they participate, share and make it their own. We've seen it first-hand: the 'Team Conrad vs Team Jeremiah' frenzy didn't stop at the finale, it sparked thriving fandom communities."

Like 30-year-old Divya Gupta, a content creator who attended the

*TSITP* finale screening. "There are love triangles, these OMG [oh my god] and will-it-happen moments, feelings and chemistry that keep you hooked," she says about the appeal of shows like *TSITP* and K-dramas. "I don't see any Indian shows able to replicate that."

Part of the problem is that despite the demand, there's little supply by Indian screenwriters. "We have been actively looking for ideas, but we don't get enough YA pitches," says Madhok. There's also the fear of producing scripts that seem out of touch. He adds, "We have to make sure that when these stories come to us, they are not a 40-year-old's vision of what Gen Z is like." One way to plug the gap could be finding India's own answer to YA author Jenny Han, whose books have spawned hugely successful adaptations, including *TSITP*.

It's anyone's guess as to when more local stories will dominate the YA genre on TV and film, but in the meantime, Indian viewers have plenty to choose from, with *Maxton Hall* being the choice of the season (trending at #6 on Amazon Prime India) and the final season of *Stranger Things* just around the corner. ■

# TEJASHWI YADAV'S BIG BATTLE CAN HE SHED THE 'JUNGLE RAJ' LEGACY?



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# LE! SURE

LISTICLE: UPCOMING THEATRICAL RELEASES PG 62

ART: FELINE FRAMES PG 64

BOOKS ▶

## MAKING VEGETABLES GREAT AGAIN

CULINARY LEGEND  
**CAMELLIA PANJABI** HAS  
PENNED A NEW COOKBOOK  
AFTER THREE DECADES



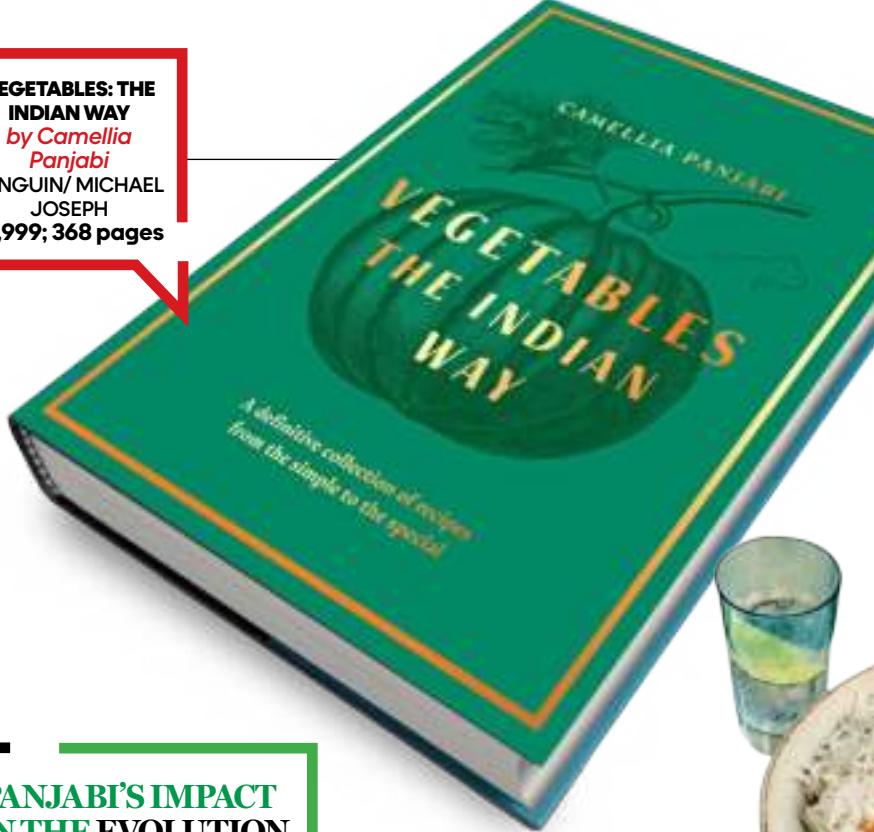
# F

Few can rival Camellia Panjabi's deep understanding of Indian food, so when she has something to say about it, people sit up and listen. In 1994, she published *50 Great Curries of India*, a landmark cookbook that has sold over two million copies. Of course, she was already a gastronomic tour de force by then—as marketing director of Taj Hotels, she had overseen the opening of countless restaurants as the hotel group expanded across India. Now, Panjabi—who runs a slew of celebrated Indian restaurants in London with her sister and brother-in-law, Namita and Ranjit Mathrani—is back with another banger of a book. Don't be fooled by the understated look of *Vegetables: The Indian Way*—this is decades of wisdom, distilled like a fine spirit, and served up with impeccable taste and restraint.

None of this was ever part of the plan. But that's getting ahead of the story. Panjabi was born in 1941 in a Sindhi family in Bombay. Her father—"a great romantic"—named her Camellia after watching the Greta Garbo-starrer *Camille* (1936), based on Alexandre Dumas fils' 1848 novel *La Dame aux Camélias*. Her interest in food was kindled early, thanks to the *jugalbandi* between her Anglophilic father who had studied at LSE—Panjabi herself has an economics degree from Cambridge—and wanted all his food to be perfectly plated and presented, whether Indian or not, and her mother, a doctor, who came from a traditional Sindhi family where the food had to be cooked in ghee and only in a kadhai.

On a call from her home in Central London, Panjabi sounds excited about the new book, and genuinely curious about my assessment. "I only write a cookbook when I have something very

**VEGETABLES: THE INDIAN WAY**  
*by Camellia Panjabi*  
PENGUIN/ MICHAEL JOSEPH  
₹1,999; 368 pages



## PANJABI'S IMPACT ON THE EVOLUTION OF INDIAN RESTAURANTS IS IMMENSE—AND IT CONTINUES TO SHAPE THE DNA OF INDIA'S FOOD LANDSCAPE

important and different to say, and which hasn't been said before," she says. Panjabi felt that even though there was a wealth of vegetarian food in India, it wasn't known widely enough.

The research took around 20 years as it was done alongside professional commitments. "The process was so enjoyable. I kept stumbling upon new dishes. Or I talked to some hostess and she said, 'Ooh, have you eaten this karela in so-and-so's house?' I collected maybe over 200 recipes," she says. It was only when COVID struck that she was able to settle down and sift through the material.

It's an unconventional cookbook, beginning with the classification of the vegetables, arranged by the way they are grown: under the ground, under water, on the ground, on shrubs

and vines, and so on. The more you think about it, the more it makes sense. Secondly, it does not gatekeep culinary secrets. For example, how do you get the bitterness out of radish for a raita? The solution is to tie the grated radish in a muslin cloth and hang it over the kitchen sink overnight.

Interesting dishes include a Popped Water Lily Seed Pudding (Makhana Kheer), the Water Chestnut Flour Halwa (Singhara Atta Halwa) and a Gujarati-style Guava Stir-Fry (Peru nu shaak). There are beloved family recipes galore, including Buttery Textured Mung Dal (Makhmi dal), Cauliflower Pulao and Stuffed Karela.

The recipes featured are lighter than the rich curries we associate with Indian food, what Panjabi calls "concocted restaurant food". The presentation, too, was critical. "Vegetarian Indian food is always kind of dumpy," she says. "So I decided to re-look at it as an attractive product by itself. I mean, if some *bisi bele bath* is wonderful as a risotto, let's show some wine."

In 1965, Panjabi joined the Tata Administrative Service, the first woman to do so. When she moved to the Taj Mahal Hotel as the sales and market-

FOOD ▶

# Indian Pizza Rising

TWO DELHI-BASED PIZZERIAS EARN GLOBAL RECOGNITION, PUTTING INDIA FIRMLY ON THE INTERNATIONAL PIZZA MAP

ing manager, her job was to bump up the revenue in any way she could. The hotel only had a French restaurant, and the Sea Lounge which served tea. Panjabi opened Shamiana, India's first coffee shop there, followed by Golden Dragon, India's first Sichuan restaurant. The rest is culinary history. Panjabi's



impact on the evolution of Indian restaurants is immense—and it continues to shape the very DNA of India's food landscape even today.

Panjabi takes it easy these days—but only a bit. She gets up late, then reads four newspapers, an old habit—"I like to know what people are thinking in general"—before heading to the office. Thrice a week, she visits her restaurants, to get customer feedback first-hand. Asked if she has plans of hanging up her apron anytime soon, she says, unexpectedly, "Yes, I would like to." But not before she's written another cookbook, we think. ■

**—Amit Dixit**

YASH KALRA



India's food landscape is steadily making its mark on the global stage, with pizza being in the spotlight this time. The recently released 50 Top Pizza World 2025 rankings saw Gurugram's Pizzeria da Susy secure a position, adding to its earlier achievement of 71st place among the Top 100 at the Best Pizza Awards 2025 in Milan.

For Susanna "Susy" Di Cosimo, the journey began almost by accident. A native of Naples, she moved to India in 2013 and ran a travel agency for eight years before exploring what she calls the "white art" of baking. Starting with bread, she gradually moved to Neapolitan pizza. "What began as a pastime quickly turned into an obsession," she recalls.

Encouraged by the response, Di Cosimo opened her first Pizzeria da Susy in 2021 in Gurugram. Today, she runs two prime outlets in the city and enjoys recognition worldwide.

Her approach combines long-fermented doughs made from high-quality Italian flour. Classic pizzas like *salsiccia e friarielli* are adapted using Indian mustard leaves, while innovations such as a Palak Paneer-inspired pizza with spinach cream and buffalo ricotta reinterpret Indian flavours through an Italian lens. "I just put out what I believe in," she says. "Some like it, some don't." Her creations

have not only won awards but also cultivated a loyal following across India.

Delhi's Leo's Pizzeria, another contender on the global stage, ranked 99th in the Best Pizza Awards 2025. Founder Amol Kumar started it in December 2016, driven by personal craving rather than business strategy. "I wanted to eat this style of pizza and couldn't find it anywhere," he recalls. To master it, he travelled to Italy.

Over time, Leo's has built a reputation for consistency and restraint. Each dough follows a 48-hour fermentation cycle, combining imported and local ingredients. The pizzeria prioritises Italian techniques, including the preparation of sauce. To cater to local tastes, chicken is added as a topping, otherwise a rare practice in Italy.

Kumar emphasises rigorous training, standardised processes, and careful sourcing to maintain quality. "Global recognition is a massive validation for India's artisanal pizza movement," he says. "We always believed we made pizza of a global standard. To represent India on that stage is an honour." ■

**—Geetika Sachdev**



**HEAVENLY CRUSTS** Susanna Di Cosimo and, left, a wood-fired oven at Pizzeria da Susy; below, a pepperoni pizza at Leo's



# In

2019, it was the Nirbhaya case; in 2022, the Kachchha Baniyan robbery case. In season three of *Delhi Crime*, Vartika Chaturvedi (Shefali Shah) and her team have their hands full and their hearts shaken as they contend with a case inspired by Baby Falak. As if that's not hard enough, there's also a sex trafficking ring to break. Given the weight of the issues, Shah is confident when she declares the latest season to be "emotionally far stronger" than the first two. "I personally believe every case is personal for Vartika," she adds. "She's a mother, she's always going to think and feel like that."

If season two was a battle royal between Madam Sir a.k.a. Vartika and Lata Solanki/Karishma (Tillotama Shome), this one has Badi Didi (Huma Qureshi) as the fearless traf-



## CAT AND MOUSE

Shefali Shah reprises her role as DCP Vartika Chaturvedi, joined by (bottom, right) Sayani Gupta and Huma Qureshi

OTT ▼

## COMBATING CAPITAL CRIME

NETFLIX'S POPULAR POLICE PROCEDURAL, *DELHI CRIME*, RETURNS FOR A THIRD SEASON WITH ANOTHER GUT-WRENCHING CASE



## The Listicle

Upcoming **theatrical** releases to look out for

▼ DECEMBER 5

### DHURANDHAR



**T**estosterone, gunpowder and geopolitics galore in the most awaited Hindi film of the year. *Uri* (2019) director Aditya Dhar's second feature is a cross between an Indian spy thriller and a Pakistani gangster drama. The ensemble cast has Ranveer Singh, Madhavan, Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna and Arjun Rampal.



▲ NOVEMBER 14

### DE DE PYAAR DE 2

**P**art one ended with Ajay Devgn and the much younger Rakul Preet Singh entering a relationship. Now, Devgn, 56, has to convince the heroine's parents, as old as him, that he is the perfect groom. The comedy spun around age-gap relationships also stars Madhavan and Jaaved Jaaferi.

ficker who gives the khaki warrior a run for her money. For director Tanuj Chopra, having two women centre stage was his way of delivering “a female version of” the iconic film *Heat*. “Men get to do it all the time,” he says. “My dream was to have this face-off where women take the stage. It’s like a dance between the two. One part

of the show is social and rooted in the case; in the other, I get to show the cinematic side.” If season two addressed fear, in three, Chopra taps into emotions.

For Chopra, it was also an opportunity to flex his filmmaking talent after taking over the reins from Richie Mehta, who delivered a banger of a season one and then chose to move on to other projects. Says Chopra, “Richie Mehta did such a good job of casting and creating the concept. It is easier for me to pick up what’s working and take it to another place. I see it as a privilege.” He knew that to succeed, he’d have to avoid falling into the trap of building a legacy. “You can’t create trying to match something that’s happened before; it’s not

fair to the performers who need to be in the moment.”

Season three also sees a hardened Vartika who is transferred to Assam and returns to the capital to investigate a case with a nexus beyond India. For Shah, it’s not just the growth of the character but also of her as a performer, the fact that she doesn’t have to indulge in “*sheropanti*”. “There was a need to prove her bravado in season one, but there’s no need to do that here,” she says.

“[In the first], I didn’t know where it was going to go,” says Shah of her career-defining role. “And, in the second, I was terrified—it’s only when the reviews came out, I was like, ‘We did it.’ Here we are yet again. I’m so proud to be a part of the show and so possessive of her and who she is, but I am also terrified as f\*\*k.” ■

—Suhani Singh

**Director  
TANUJ CHOPRA**  
says it was his  
dream to have this  
face-off where  
women take the  
centre stage



► NOVEMBER 28

## Tere Ishq Mein

Described by its makers as a spiritual successor to the 2013 superhit *Raanjhanaa*, the film marks Dhanush’s return to Varanasi with a tale of toxic romance. The heroine is Kriti Sanon. Expect much screaming, crying and throwing things around, set to A.R. Rahman’s tunes.



▼ NOVEMBER 14

## KAANTHA



A star actor clashes with his mentor filmmaker, with an actress caught in the middle, in this 1950s Chennai-set Tamil drama. The cast is loaded: Dulquer Salmaan, Samuthirakani, Bhagyashri Borse and Rana Daggubati. Co-written by acclaimed novelist Tamizh Prabha.



▲ NOVEMBER 21

## 120 BAHADUR

Farhan Akhtar stars as Major Shaitan Singh, who led a small regiment defending their post against a 3,000-strong Chinese contingent during the 1962 war. The Major was awarded a posthumous Param Vir Chakra. The trailer promises realistic war sequences reminiscent of Akhtar-directed *Lakshya* (2004).

ART ▼

# FELINE FRAMES

A NEW EXHIBITION AT BENGALURU'S MUSEUM OF ART & PHOTOGRAPHY TRACES THE CAT'S ELUSIVE CHARM THROUGH CENTURIES OF INDIAN ART AND CRAFT

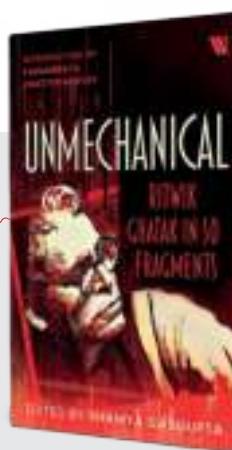
**F**or centuries, the cat has occupied a unique place in the human imagination. Revered, mistrusted, adored and immortalised in art and literature, this enigmatic creature has long inspired artists and storytellers. The Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) in Bengaluru traces this fascination in its newest exhibition, *The Many Lives of the Cat*, on view until March 29, 2026.

The exhibition opens with a verse by Asadullah Khan Ghalib, translated by the late B.N. Goswamy, capturing the cat's graceful, otherworldly air. This establishes an experience traversing miniature paintings, sculptures, matchbox labels, sketchbooks and contemporary works. The exhibition draws from Goswamy's book *The Indian Cat*, which traces the animal's presence in

proverbs, poetry and art. Curator Khushi Bansal notes the book's influence on MAP's own collection. "Professor Goswamy shows how cats have quietly slipped into countless stories and sayings across India, and that perspective encouraged us to look at our collection with fresh eyes," she says. "We realised we had a surprising number of works featuring cats, and that this could be the starting point for a larger narrative."



THE CAT EMBODIES MANY IDENTITIES: PLAYFUL, POLITICAL, LOVING, MISCHIEVOUS. THE EXHIBIT HIGHLIGHTS THOSE SHIFTING MEANINGS



UNMECHANICAL  
Ritwik Ghatak  
Edited by Shamsa Dasgupta  
WESTLAND  
₹899; 488 pages

What emerged was a story not just about cats in art, but about their ability to shift meaning. The exhibition places historical and contemporary works side by side. Featuring works by artists such as Jamini Roy, K.G. Subramanyan, Chandana Hore and Bhupendra Baghel, the show traces the cat's many incarnations across materials and moments in Indian art.

Through the displayed works, the cat embodies multiple identities: playful, political, loving,

mischiefous. True to MAP's focus on accessibility, the exhibition includes interactive and multi-sensory elements, including AR games, tactile works and audio stories. "The aim is to create a space where everyone feels welcome and where they can find something for themselves," Bansal shares.

Inviting warmth, curiosity and a touch of mischief, *The Many Lives of the Cat* makes visitors see this familiar creature anew. ■

—Nikhil Sardana

BOOKS ▶

## A MULTI-FACETED MAVERICK

A centenary tribute, this collection frames **Ritwik Ghatak's tempestuous genius** into a vivid portrait beyond myth and melancholy

**A**s a non-Bengali lover of Ritwik Ghatak's cinema, I can safely say I'd been waiting for this book for decades. Many of us have glimpsed Ghatak

through the mists of Ghatak mythology: genius, maverick, alcoholic, failure, traumatised forever by the partition of Bengal.... In his centenary year, this beautiful book reveals

him through voices of family, students, collaborators, scholars—and Ghatak himself. Including interviews and articles, these 50 'fragments' reveal Ghatak as he plays the



CBS artist Joe Alvares and the Indian All stars; Girish and the Chronicles

MUSIC ▼

## Songs for a Suburb

A new music festival in Mumbai aims to take the neighbourhood of Bandra back in time

**R**ock music fans bemoan-ing that they won't be able to get their fix of clas-sics at Mumbai's annual Independence Rock (I-Rock) festival, which won't take place this year, have an alternative in the form of the Olly Fest. Long-running band Indus Creed, one of the mainstays of I-Rock, will play the inaugural edition of Olly Fest, held from November 14-16 at the amphitheatre of the 17th-century Bandra Fort.

The idea behind Olly Fest—christened after the nickname of its founder, events organiser Allwyn Saldanha—is to recreate the feeling Bandraites experienced in earlier decades when instead of the cacophony of construction work and traffic, “you used to hear music blasting out from people’s houses”.

The line-up comprises acts that specialise in genres that were being played in those homes: a mix of classic rock from the likes of veteran singer-songwriters Gary Lawyer and Joe Alvares; jazz and jazz-fusion from guitarist Sanjay Divecha and vocalist Vasundhara Vee’s band Merkaba, the Sonia Saigal-led The S-Experience, and the Isheet Chakravarty Collective; and pop covers by the groups Black In White and Shannon and the Silent Riot.

Lawyer will deliver a set dedicated to The Doors, while the Retro Legendary Act will play a tribute to Pink Floyd. Indus Creed will head-

line on Saturday, and hard rock and heavy metal heroes Girish and the Chronicles—who recently reached the quarter-finals of *America’s Got Talent*’s twentieth season—will close on Sunday.

Saldanha says he’s sure that attendees “will go home with a good vibe of what Bandra was like originally”. The former merchant navy captain also plans to stage festivals of jazz and blues music as well as stand-alone concerts by more contemporary rock bands, at outdoor venues in the suburb, over the next two years. ■

**THE LINE-UP HAS GENRES FAMILIAR TO OLD BANDRA, PLAYING CLASSIC ROCK, JAZZ, POP AND HEAVY METAL**

**—Amit Gurbaxani**  
Tickets for Olly Fest are being sold on BookMyShow.com

**sarod and flute; acts in theatre; writes short stories, plays, poems; starts a magazine; loves Buñuel and Fellini; teaches; and writes on film theory. There are loving letters to his wife; a nascent film idea about**

**Vietnam; a play produced with the inmates of the asylum in which he was institutionalised; Eisenstein declared the Kalidas of cinema, Bergman a fake, and Ray a giraffe whose films must be seen! A real, living**

**Ghatak emerges for the English-speaking readers in all his volatile and exasperating glory. So associated is Ghatak with his sense of failure that it is a joy to see him live, albeit in his own frenetic way: loving, abusing, defending melodrama, reciting King Lear, trying out unconventional sounds from musical instruments at 3:30 am, breaking film convention**

**by jumping from long shot to extreme close up, glad after getting the famous last shot of Jukti... having poured country liquor on the lens. The book details his filmmaking—especially the main films—well, from their all-important sound design to the lighting, use of lenses and directing of actors, and a lovely essay on plants in his cinema. ■**

**—Juhi Saklani**

**The book features loving letters to his wife, nascent film ideas and untimely musical experiments—a frenetic artist’s life**

## Q+A

# A NEW TUNE

*As he hints his current tour may be his last, veteran musician **Lucky Ali** opens up about the deep connection he shares with his band and audiences*

**Q. In a press release, you said “this tour is where I think I’ll have my last connection publicly with people”. Is this the last tour?**

It could be. Who can predict the future? I have done this for a while now and really enjoyed performing live. The musicians who play in the band have been together for a really long time, so there is a deep connection between us on stage. And, for me, the mark of a great performance is when the audience also feels that connection.



**Q. Will we still be getting new music?**

There will be two new tracks soon. They are the last of the songs that have been recorded and need to be released. This concert tour feels like the end of an era. I don’t know what comes next, but I am excited to explore.

**Q. Larger stadium performances or smaller intimate gatherings—which do you prefer?**

Honestly, I prefer smaller venues where I can have a conversation with the audience. We’ve done large venues, a lot of them for corporates, and had a lot of fun. In a smaller setting, the vibe is very laid-back, so it’s possible to riff more than you would in a stadium.

**Q. Your most memorable concert?**

I’d pick the ones that we did in Australia and New Zealand in October this year, those were very special. We performed in four cities, but the high point was performing at the Sydney Opera House. Not only is it a special venue but the interaction with the audience was indescribable.

—with Karishma Upadhyay



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