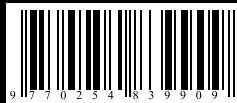


**WILD ANIMAL ATTACKS
THE NEW CONFLICT ZONES**

www.indiatoday.in



**DIGITAL CRIME RESCUING
INDIAN CYBER SLAVES**

MARCH 10, 2025 ₹100

INDIA TODAY

LIVER DISEASE

THE HIDDEN DANGER

THE DEADLY NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE IS REACHING EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS IN INDIA WITH 3 OUT OF 10 ADULTS AND CHILDREN AFFLICTED. WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF



NURTURE
TO EXCEL,
LEAD TO
EMPOWER.



RP Goenka International School (RPGIS), a part of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group, stands as the first IB PYP school in Eastern India. RPGIS promotes high academic standards through state-of-the-art infrastructure and synergises emerging digital technologies with the latest educational research to prepare resilient leaders who are ready for the future.

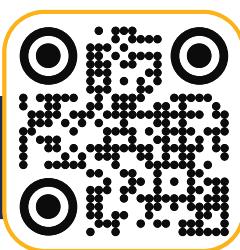
UNLEASHING CREATIVE MINDS



At RPGIS, creativity thrives in our dedicated Art Studio – a dynamic space where imagination meets mastery. Under the guidance of renowned artists **Krishnamachari Bose** and **Paresh Maity**, students explore diverse artistic techniques, transforming every brushstroke into a journey of self-expression and innovation. Here, art is more than a subject – it's a gateway to limitless possibilities.

RPGIS – Where Creativity Meets Leadership.

To know more, visit www.rpgis.in  @rpgis.india



Considering the significance of the liver in a person's health, it is often treated as the step-child to all the other organs of the body. The heart, the flamboyant workhorse of the body, gets its full share of attention, but the liver is not talked about enough. That's odd, for it is the only regenerative organ in the body. It is also the source of many ailments. A malfunctioning liver is detrimental to metabolic health, putting the person at risk of a cascading set of mutually reinforcing ailments, including diabetes, poor gut health, obstructive sleep apnea and gastroesophageal reflux disease, many of which can be fatal.

The liver is the body's largest organ and immune gland. A normal liver weighs only 1.5 kg in an adult, but at any given point, it holds at least 13 per cent of the body's blood supply. All the blood leaving the digestive tract passes through this organic sorting house; it's here that the nutrients get broken down, repackaged and dispatched to different parts of the body, with toxic byproducts packed off to waste disposal. And that's only one of its roles. What this complex organ performs is akin to a whole one-piece symphony orchestra, with a part in over 500 vital functions: metabolic, immunological and purificatory. For all that, this powerhouse works silently in the back office, efficiently multi-tasking and not even letting us know. But it turns out that liver disorders in India are reaching epidemic proportions.

Earlier, barring hepatitis cases, liver ailments were linked purely to those who had an excessive fondness for alcohol. Cirrhosis, the chronic liver disease that destroys its healthy tissues and replaces them with scars that prevent normal functioning, was seen as a consequence of alcoholism. But no more. A new scourge is upon us: non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). It is caused by multiple factors that include obesity and poor dietary habits. Without most of us being aware of this hidden danger, its prevalence in India has crept up uncomfortably close to 40 per cent of the population. Alarmingly, even among Indian children, studies reveal over 35 per cent prevalence.

So serious is the issue that, in 2021, India became the first country to declare NAFLD a non-communicable disease, putting us at the forefront of the global fight against it. That year, India topped the global charts for all-cause liver mortality rates: 277,130 deaths, nearly double that of runner-up China. All the enemies of the liver tend to hunt in packs, and NAFLD is now a leading part of the army that lays a siege on this crucial organ.

The tricky part is that its symptoms don't manifest very quickly; NAFLD is a stealth weapon, striking even people

who seem otherwise healthy. A person is designated as suffering from it if the liver has accumulated over 5 per cent of fat. However, even when diagnosed, patients tend to take it lightly because the liver can grow back to its original size even if over 90 per cent has been removed or damaged. But a fatty liver is sluggish and, ultimately, a curse on itself.

The key thing to remember is expressed best by Dr S.K. Sarin, chairman of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in Delhi and one of India's top hepatologists: "Though it's much more common in overweight and obese people, you don't need to be fat or eat fat to have a fatty liver." In fact, a 2021 study published in *Clinical Liver Disease* found 10-15 per cent of Indian NAFLD patients to be lean, with a standard body mass index. Eventually, some of them may experience fatigue, a feeling of fullness, nausea, jaundice, dark urine, or mild liver enlargement. But by the time they are diagnosed, they have lived with fat in the liver long enough for it to have suffered its corrosive effects. Experts say ignoring NAFLD, even for a short duration, can have serious consequences.

For our cover story this week, Senior Editor Sonali Acharjee spoke to eminent doctors and confused patients for a 360-degree scan. She found that much of NAFLD is caused by what we eat. When we consume excess calories, the surplus gets converted into body fat. The liver is the primary site for de novo lipogenesis, or the production of new fat from excess carbohydrates. Some of it settles right there, as part of dangerous visceral fat. So, with the carbohydrate-reliant diet of Indians, we are the most vulnerable. Screening and early detection are crucial because untreated NAFLD can lead to more complicated disorders,

proceeding from steatohepatitis (liver inflammation caused by fat) to cirrhosis and even liver cancer. Luckily, diagnostic procedures are becoming more sophisticated, with newer tests like transient elastography. There is no specific medication; the usual recommendation is permanent lifestyle changes—diet, exercise and weight loss. Losing even 10 per cent of your body weight is seen to have a powerful effect in reducing liver fat. 'Central obesity' was found to be the common risk factor in 84 per cent of Indian patients, so shedding abdominal fat is key. We give you the entire lowdown, from liver-friendly food to treatment options.

But most of all, this is a wake-up call. There was a time when we could live without thinking much about the liver. These are deadlier times. To live well, treat your liver well.



December 16, 2024

(Aroon Purie)

CHAIRMAN AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Aroon Purie
VICE CHAIRPERSON AND EXECUTIVE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Kalli Purie
GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dinesh Bhatia
GROUP EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: Raj Chengappa
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Manoj Sharma
GROUP CREATIVE EDITOR: Nilanjan Das; **GROUP PHOTO EDITOR:** Bandeep Singh
EDITOR (FEATURES): Kai Jabin Frieser
MANAGING EDITORS: Sunil Menon, S. Sahaya Ranjith; **MUMBAI:** M.G. Arun
EXECUTIVE EDITORS: Manisha Saroop, Kaushik Deka
SENIOR DEPUTY EDITORS: Sangram K. Parhi, Sasi Nair;
HYDERABAD: Amarnath K. Menon
DEPUTY EDITORS: Anilesh S. Mahajan, Pradip R. Sagar;
JAPUR: Rohit Parihar; **MUMBAI:** Suhanu Singh
SENIOR EDITORS: Sonali Acharjee, Ashish Mukherjee, Saikat Niyogi;
PATNA: Amitabh Srivastava
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Sonal Khetarpal; **MUMBAI:** Dhaval. S. Kulkarni;
AHMEDABAD: Jumana Shah; **BHOPAL:** Rahul Noronha
ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Avishek G. Dastidar; **VIPUL GROVER:** Bengaluru; Ajay Sukumaran
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT: KOLKATA: Arkamoy Datta Majumdar
PHOTO DEPARTMENT: Chandra Deep Kumar, Rajivant Singh Rawat (Deputy Chief Photographers), Arun Kumar (Principal Photographer);
MUMBAI: Mandar Suresh Deodhar (Chief Photographer)
PHOTO RESEARCHERS: Prabhakar Tiwari (Deputy Visual Research Editor),
 Saloni Vaid (Chief Photo Researcher),
 Jodha Singh Adhikari (Principal Photo Researcher)
CHIEF OF GRAPHICS: Tanmoy Chakraborty
ART DEPARTMENT: Sanjay Piplani (Creative Editor),
 Angshuman De (Senior Art Director), Rajesh Kumar Angira, Bhoomesh Dutt
 Sharma (Associate Art Directors), Santosh Kumar Sharma (Assistant Art Director), Praveen Kumar Gummadi (Chief Designer),
 Siddhant Jumde (Chief Illustrator)
PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT: Harish Agarwal (Chief of Production),
 Naveen Gupta (Chief Coordinator)

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
 Suparna Kumar

IMPACT TEAM
 Senior General Managers: Jitendra Lad (West), Syed Naveed (Chennai)
GROUP CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER: Vivek Malhotra
SALES AND OPERATIONS
 Deepak Bhatt, National Head (Distribution)
 Vipin Bagga, General Manager (Operations)
 Rajeev Gandhi, General Manager (North)
 Yogesh Godhanlal Gautam, Regional Sales Manager (West)



Volume 50-Number 10: For the week
March 4-10, 2025, published on every Friday

• Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group
 Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100
 • Subscriptions: For assistance contact, Customer Care, India Today Group,
 C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP) - 201301, email: wecare@intoday.com;
 Phone / WhatsApp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Friday, 10 am - 6 pm).
 • Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP).
 • Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
 • Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indubells Centre, (Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013;
 Phone: 022 69193355; Fax: 66063226
 • E-1, Ground Floor, Videocon Towers, Jhandewalan Extn, New Delhi.
 • Door No: 610, 610A, 612, 5th Floor, Block A, Imperial Chaitanya Building, Anna Salai, Tynimond Towers, 2nd Floor, Anna Salai, 600018.
 • 201-Suit, Tynimond Towers, 2nd Floor, Behind White House, Panchwati, Office C.G. Road, Ahmedabad-380006; Phone: 26560393,
 26560929; Fax: 26565293 • Copyright Living Media India Ltd. All rights reserved throughout the world. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited.
 Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana) and at Rajhans Enterprises, 134, Industrial Town, 4th Main Road, Rajajinagar, Bengaluru-560044, (Karnataka).
 Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
 Editor: Raj Chengappa.

• INDIA TODAY does not take the responsibility for returning unsolicited publication material.

All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only



For reprint rights and syndication enquiries, contact syndications@intoday.com or call +91 810-4078000

www.syndicationtoday.in

UPFRONT
SHINDE'S SQUABBLING PG 6

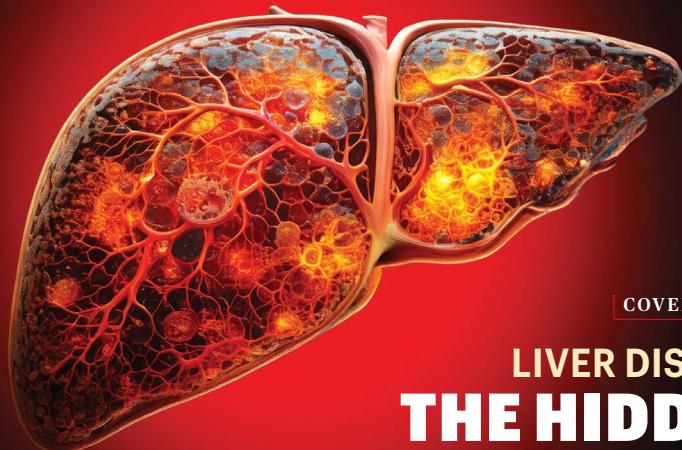
**VADODARA:
 DELUGE OF DOUBTS PG 10**

INSIDE

LEISURE
SMALL TOWN HEROES PG 51

Q&A WITH SHAAN PG 60

20



COVER STORY

LIVER DISEASE THE HIDDEN DANGER

The deadly non-alcoholic fatty liver disease is reaching epidemic proportions in India with 3 out of 10 adults and children afflicted. What you can do to protect yourself

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

BHOPAL

28 A ROYAL PROPERTY WRANGLE

A court order on a petition filed by Saif Ali Khan and his relatives has reignited the debate on the Enemy Property Act

WILD ANIMAL ATTACKS

38 THE NEW CONFLICT ZONES

Loss of habitat has led to an alarming rise in incidents of human-animal encounters with even urban areas not immune to the threat

DIGITAL CRIME

32 RESCUING THE CYBER SLAVES

Lured by promises of lucrative jobs, Indian youths are being trafficked to scam compounds in Southeast Asia

INFRASTRUCTURE CONCLAVE

42 PUTTING INDIA ON FAST TRACK

The spotlight was on aviation, ports and sustainable infra as experts deliberated on India's achievements and challenges

Note to the reader : From time to time, you will see pages titled 'An Impact Feature' or 'Focus' in INDIA TODAY. These are no different from advertisements, and the magazine's editorial staff is not involved in their creation in any way

Cover by NILANJAN DAS



Readers are recommended to make appropriate enquiries before sending money, incurring expenses or entering into commitments in relation to any advertisement appearing in this publication. The India Today Group does not vouch for any claims made by the advertisers of products and services. The printer, publisher, editor-in-chief and the editor of the India Today Group publications shall not be held liable for any consequences in the event of such claims not being honoured by the advertisers.

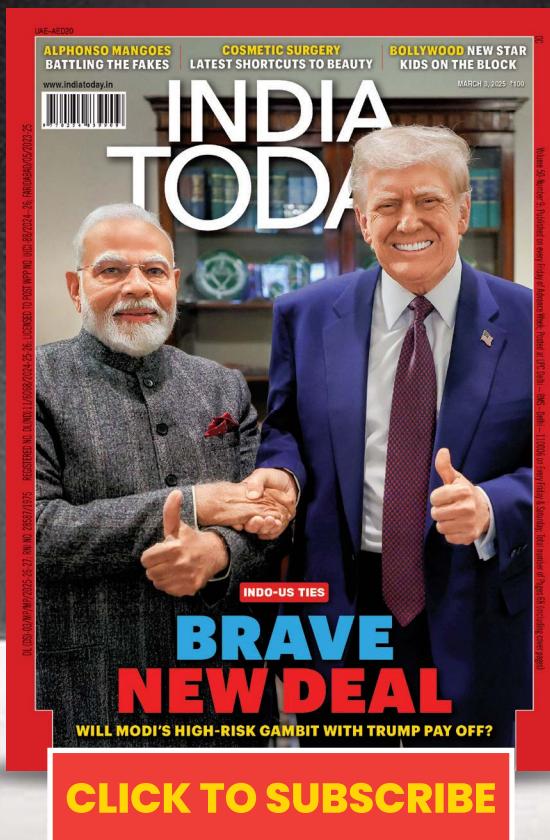


SCAN HERE TO SUBSCRIBE

FOR SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANCE, CONTACT: Customer Care, India Today Group, C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP) - 201301. email: wecare@intoday.com | Phone / WhatsApp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Friday, 10 am - 6 pm)

E-MAIL to: letters.editor@intoday.com or log on to www.indiatoday.in

MAGA PLUS MIGA BECOMES A 'MEGA' PARTNERSHIP!



1 YEAR UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS JUST FOR ₹999!

SUBSCRIBER BENEFITS

- 1 year unlimited access to all digital issues
 - Daily newsletter
- Ad-Lite access to premium web content
 - Access to 48 years of archives
 - Multiple device access

INDIA
TODAY
MAKING SENSE OF INDIA

ENVIRONMENT: NOW,
PRIVATE SECTOR
FORESTS PG 9

BENGAL: FAITH
HEALING FOR
FRACTURE PG 12

VADODARA:
DELUGE OF
DOUBTS PG 10

KERALA: THE
BIG SEA SNAFU
PG 16

UPFRONT



MAHARASHTRA

QUITE A SHINDIG

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

Awarning shot has been fired. Maharashtra deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde's comment about people who "took him lightly" suffering after the fact was no less than that. The reference was clear enough: the 2022 palace coup in the state, where he pulled the rug from under then-united Shiv Sena chief and CM Uddhav Thackeray.

No one missed its dire resonance in the present context. Shinde's disgruntlement at being denied another shot at the CM's chair has been evident. He has skipped meetings chaired by the new man in the hot seat, the BJP's Devendra Fadnavis, and has also been holding parallel meetings to review the functioning of various departments.

Fadnavis, meanwhile, has rolled

back many decisions taken during Shinde's chief ministerial tenure, and even ordered investigations into some of them. For instance, the Rs 900 crore Kharpudi housing project in Jalna district, approved in February 2023, faces a probe; as does the move to take 1,310 buses on rent for the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC), reportedly at higher rates.

FUELLED BY INNOVATION

The third edition of the dialogue reaffirmed India's momentous role in the rapidly evolving global energy landscape.

The recently concluded India Energy Week (IEW) 2025, held from February 11-14 at Yashashbhoomi, New Delhi, saw a confluence of energy leaders, policymakers, industry captains, researchers and innovators from across the world, deliberating on pressing challenges, and exploring emerging opportunities in energy security, affordability, and sustainability. With a record 80,000+ attendees, 700 exhibitors across 120+ countries, and 9 international pavilions, this highly anticipated first major global energy event of the calendar emerged as the world's second-largest energy conclave revolving around technological advancements, strategic collaborations, high-level discussions, and knowledge sharing, driving collaboration across the energy sector.

Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi's inaugural remarks highlighting growth and investments opportunities in India as well as the strides that India is making in development of various types of energy sources, set the tone for the transformative dialogue.

Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri lauded the event's rapid ascent in prominence within just three editions, emphasising its unique ability to drive tangible business transactions rather than merely serving as a networking forum. Unlike other global energy events, IEW 2025 facilitated practical innovations and commercial agreements, including the introduction of HPCL's cost-effective biofuel conversion kit for two-and three-wheelers and the showcasing of flex-fuel vehicles as well as AI driven solutions. "India Energy Week reflects our commitment to a balanced energy transition, ensuring energy security while accelerating the adoption of cleaner fuels. Our government is focused on facilitating investments, promoting

green energy, and ensuring affordable energy access for all," he said.

KEY DEALS AND INNOVATIONS AT IEW 2025

The event offered an unparalleled opportunity to discover innovations, forge strategic partnerships and shape the future of energy on a global scale. It witnessed renewed commitments towards joint ventures in renewable energy, refining, and natural gas infrastructure, with key agreements signed between Indian and global energy firms including supply agreements for crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), technology partnerships focused on digital refinery solutions, biofuels technology and enhanced exploration services, leveraging global expertise to tap into India's hydrocarbon reserves. The event highlighted India's success in ethanol blending, with a production capacity of 1,700 crore litres. Significantly, the government aims to exceed the 20 per cent blending target by 2025. There was also an emphasis on achieving the 5 MMT annual production target for green hydrogen by 2030 and advancing Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) development. The conclave also witnessed launch of the Open Acreage Licensing Program (OALP) Round X, which covers 25 blocks across 200,000 square kilometres for exploration, drawing increased investor interest due to regulatory reforms transitioning from a production-sharing to a revenue-sharing model. Discussions were also held on using the Oil Industry Development Fund to support deep-water exploration projects.

Petroleum & Natural Gas Secretary Pankaj Jain noted, "India's focus is on ensuring an affordable and stable energy supply while leading the way in clean energy solutions. We are rapidly expanding our biofuel and hydrogen capabilities, aligning with the

government's vision of energy self-sufficiency."

Fostering the spirit of startup competitions, with participation over 500 entrepreneurs, Avinya 25-Energy Startup Challenge recognised innovations in carbon capture, renewable energy, and ESG compliance, while Vasudha - Oil and Gas Startup Challenge awarded international startups, and a hackathon involving premier Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) focused on carbon capture and renewable energy solutions.

One of the key takeaways from the event was India's expanding energy cooperation with the United States, particularly in the natural gas sector. The country aims to increase its natural gas consumption from 6 per cent to 15 per cent of its energy mix, with significant contributions expected from US LNG supplies. Amid discussions on global energy supply chains, the Petroleum Minister acknowledged the US administration's efforts to increase oil supplies, benefiting major energy-consuming nations like India. He pointed out emerging oil sources from Brazil, Argentina, Suriname, Canada, the US, and Guyana, which will contribute to diversifying India's energy portfolio. Global investors showed keen interest in India's investor friendly policy framework, which encourages foreign direct investment (FDI) in the energy sector. Industry experts acknowledged India's potential as a manufacturing hub for green technologies, given its favourable policy environment and skilled workforce.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The discussions at the event charted a strategic roadmap for India's energy sector, focusing on scaling up renewable energy capacity, enhancing grid modernisation, expanding the biofuels ecosystem, accelerating hydrogen adoption, and leveraging digital technologies to optimise energy efficiency. With India being the third-largest energy consumer globally, the emphasis was on a just and equitable energy transition that balances economic growth with environmental sustainability. The event reaffirmed the country's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

As India strengthens its role in the global energy ecosystem, IEW 2026, set to take place in Goa, promises to build on the momentum of the third edition's success. With a continued focus on energy security, sustainability, innovation, collaboration and increasing public private partnership, the coming years are set to further boost India's growing stature in the global energy sector.



The decision to centrally procure uniforms for students in state-run schools, taken by Shinde's schools minister (and partyman) Deepak Kesarkar, also stands annulled. Sources say the process was marred by glitches and complaints of poor quality.

A senior bureaucrat says Fadnavis, after taking over as CM in December 2024, has moved quickly to impose his control and authority over the state administration, posting hand-picked officials in crucial positions. In particular, the CM's secretariat is said to be closely monitoring the functioning of departments controlled by ministers of the two Mahayuti allies, the Shinde Shiv Sena and NCP. 'Monitoring', in fact, is an understatement. Earlier in February, industries minister Uday Samant (Shinde Sena) had even written to the principal secretary (industries) and CEO of the Maharashtra Industries Development Corporation (MIDC) about policy decisions being taken without keeping him in the loop.

The three parties in the Mahayuti are also ranged against each other over the contentious appointment of 'guardian ministers' for districts. Fadnavis has been forced to keep on hold the appointment of the NCP's Aditi Tatkare and the BJP's Girish Mahajan as the guardian ministers of Raigad and Nashik respectively, after the Shinde Sena took umbrage to it.

Meanwhile, in what is seen as a direct challenge to Shinde on his home ground Thane, the BJP's forest minister Ganesh Naik has begun organising 'janata darbars' here. Naik, a former Shiv Sainik, has hinted that the BJP can contest and win the municipal elections in Thane on its own, sans an alliance with the Sena, a sentiment that senior BJP leaders have also been echoing for the Mumbai civic polls.

A senior NCP leader feels Shinde's initial reluctance to back the BJP's claim for the chief minister's post may have affected his position in the Mahayuti. In contrast, the NCP's deputy CM Ajit Pawar immediately

• OTHER FLASHPOINTS •

► **CM's office vetting appointments of personal secretaries, PAs and OSDs of ministers of Mahayuti allies**

► **Shinde not in State Disaster Management Committee initially, but Ajit Pawar is. Finds a place later**

► **CMO opens a medical aid cell for indigent patients; Shinde starts separate cell controlled by close aide Mangesh Chiwate**

► **CM Fadnavis creates a war room to monitor flagship projects. Shinde and Pawar start copycat project monitoring centres**

► **Security downgrade for ministers/netas purportedly targets Sena MLAs, who feel upstaged by NCP/BJP counterparts**

we have no party apparatus to speak of. We are now more of a group of MLAs who have coalesced around Shinde and the power that he wields," he says.

Amidst all this, Shinde's move to accept an award from Sharad Pawar, head of the Opposition NCP(SP) faction, has created ripples in both the Mahayuti and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). Pawar Sr is seen as the glue holding together the MVA, which includes the politically disparate Congress and the Sena (UBT). NCP(SP) spokesperson Anish Gawande, though, brushes aside the incident, saying that Pawar has "always maintained that it is the culture of Maharashtra to treat political opponents as ideological opponents and not as enemies".

Analyst Abhay Deshpande says that in 2022, Fadnavis too had accepted the deputy CM's post despite being the chief minister from 2014-19. "The difference is that Fadnavis had to accept his party's diktat, and Shinde had to swallow this bitter pill as the chief of his party to ensure its future," he adds. He describes Shinde's aggression as an attempt at underlining his identity and that of his party in the coalition, to prevent it from being subsumed by the BJP. He attributes Ajit's nimbleness in supporting the BJP and Fadnavis to his old political DNA, which derives from that of the Congress. The Sena's culture lacks that flexibility, claims Deshpande. The Mahayuti has also been unable to counter the narrative about the dissonance in the alliance, he points out.

The Shinde Sena is also trying to shore up its ranks with the hush-hush 'Project Tiger', trying to wean away leaders from MVA parties, especially the rival Shiv Sena (UBT). A major catch has been former three-term Sena (UBT) legislator Rajan Salvi. His move to join Shinde instead of the BJP, as was being speculated earlier, will also serve as a counter-balance to the influence of industries minister Uday Samant and his brother Kiran aka Bhaiyya (who defeated Salvi in the assembly election from Rajapur in Ratnagiri district). MVA leaders have claimed in the past

supported Fadnavis, and is seen as being in a much more comfortable position. The NCP leader says the cash-strapped state government's moves to scrutinise the beneficiaries of the flagship 'Ladki Bahin Yojana,' in which over 23 million indigent women were given monthly doles of Rs 1,500 under the Shinde regime, and the rethink on schemes like the free pilgrimage for senior citizens, has eroded the latter's political capital. Power relations between "us and the BJP have changed", admits a Shiv Sena leader, "our problem now is that

NEW CM FADNAVIS HAS ROLLED BACK MANY DECISIONS TAKEN IN SHINDE'S TENURE, AND ALSO ORDERED A PROBE INTO SOME OF THEM

that Samant, who has represented Ratnagiri in the assembly since 2004, was being wooed by the BJP.

All in all, it's apparent to all stakeholders that things are in a flux. As a senior Congress leader notes, the MVA parties may be "in the fire" but the Sena and NCP too are "in the frying pan...the BJP will soon seek to grow at their expense". Shinde Sena spokesperson and MLC Manisha Kayande, though, denies any rift in the Mahayuti. "Every party has the right to expand its



“They are taking me lightly...but I am a worker of Balasaheb and Dighe saheb (late Shiv Sena leaders). It'd be better if everyone understood this....”

EKNATH SHINDE

Deputy CM, Maharashtra

base. He (Shinde) is not upset and is working hard for the state," she says.

For now, it looks like Shinde will have to grin and bear it for the nature of the mandate is such. The BJP has 132 seats in the 288-member assembly, just 13 short of a majority, which doesn't leave much room for the allies to flex their muscles. Still, as Ajit Pawar commented at the Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan on February 23, it's still a "mystery" what Shinde meant when he talked about not being taken lightly. The latter will be hoping some of that mystery holds if he and the Shinde Sena is to hold their own in the Mahayuti vortex. ■



MUJEEB FARUQUI

DEGRADED? An open forest in Madhya Pradesh

ENVIRONMENT

NOW, PRIVATE SECTOR FORESTS

By Rahul Noronha

Is Madhya Pradesh planning to hand out its forests to private investors? A draft document, 'Policy for Forest Restoration Using CSR, CER and Non-Governmental Funds', suggests precisely that. Placed for comments in the public domain by the state forest department ahead of the February 24-25 investor summit in Bhopal, it proposes to allow private investment for 'restoration of forest lands'—offering the investor the right to sell minor forest produce and earn carbon credits.

Madhya Pradesh has some 9.5 million hectares of land classified as forests, the biggest for any state. Of this, some 3.7 million ha has been

classified as 'degraded'. The MP forest department estimates the cost of restoring these degraded forests at around Rs 5-8 lakh a hectare; the state pleads a paucity of funds to commit to this cause. Hence this policy, which has two parts: to get private investment in forestry, and to get corporates to support forest restoration through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Environment Responsibility (CER) budgets. Investors would have to take up a minimum forest area of 25 ha and a maximum of 1,000 ha, in consultation with the MP Forest Development Corporation (MPFDC). The latter would invite EOIs (expression of interests)

MADHYA PRADESH PROPOSES TO LET THE PRIVATE SECTOR INTO FORESTS, BUT ACTIVISTS WORRY IT WILL BLOCK LOCALS' ACCESS TO THEM

twice a year. The land parcel would be given for a period of 60 years. The plantation—which cannot violate the Indian Forest Act 1927, the Forest Conservation Act 1980 or the Forest Rights Act 2006—can be done by the investor directly or via the MPFDC on payment of a fee. Care has to be taken to ensure that adequate land is left around villages to meet the local community's needs in the form of grazing or collection of firewood.

The policy claims to have built in local consent to protect community rights. But activists are worried. "The moment a private company is brought in, it will safeguard its interests. It would not allow unhindered access to the community. In tribal areas, where there are traditional forest rights related to faith, that may come in conflict with private interests too," cautions social activist Sachin Jain, founder, Vikas Samvad.

Structural shifts in ownership are certainly built in. The investor would have the right to sell half the minor forest produce (MFP), like tendu leaves, mahua and chironji; the MPFDC would get 30 per cent and 20 per cent would be left for the local communities. Presently, communities dwelling in and around forests have rights over all MFPs. The investor, who will get green credits for afforestation as per the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023, would also have the first right to buy the MFP allocated to the MPFDC.

The afforestation norms are laid rationally—on paper. Preference would be for local species; exotic plant species will not be allowed. A 75 per cent survival rate would have to be ensured after three years. In case of a deficit, the executing agency will bridge the gap. If the survival rate in a plantation executed by the MPFDC falls below 40 per cent, the entire cost would be reimbursed to the investor. Crucially, after three years, the investor would be responsible for protecting the plantation.

Jain says granting greater rights to the community over forests would have sufficed to protect them, rather than bringing in private investors. "The government should tread cautiously on this front," he counsels. ■

THAT SINKING FEELING A flooded neighbourhood in Vadodara after the Vishwamitri river breached its banks due to heavy rain in Aug. 2024



VADODARA

DELUGE OF DOUBTS

By Jumana Shah

Six months after Vadodara witnessed one of its worst floods in recent history, the Rs 1,200 crore Vishwamitri River Rejuvenation Project—anounced by the Gujarat government to restore the river's carrying capacity and mitigate future flooding—is finally inching forward, but on a somewhat contentious course.

Once the city's lifeline, the Vishwamitri has now become a symbol of its struggle to balance development and ecological preservation. Last August, 9.4 inches of rain over 24 hours left 40 per cent of the city submerged in up to 11 feet of water for three days. As the Ajwa and Pratapgarh reservoirs overflowed, water poured into the Vishwamitri, which once had floodplains,

wetlands and lakes connected by natural waterways—now largely replaced by concrete structures. With the river breaching its banks, marsh crocodiles wandered into kitchens and streets, while residents were stranded in posh bungalows and apartment buildings.

A study by IIT Gandhinagar found the flood was "likely exacerbated by extensive urban development in flood-prone areas, altered elevations, and drainage patterns compromised due to rapid urbanisation and clogged drainage systems". The tragedy, many argue, was a foretold one.

Two citizen groups—the Community Science Centre (CSC), led by scientist Dr M.H. Mehta, and the Concerned Citizens of Vadodara



(CCV), comprising 20 environmental experts—had proposed detailed solutions to rejuvenate the river. The CSC's plan, which received in-principle government approval in 2008, included cleaning debris and creating a “bioshield” to prevent water from breaching the banks.

The Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) even proposed a riverfront project inspired by Ahmedabad's Sabarmati Riverfront. However, environmentalist Rohit Prajapati, a CCV member, challenged the plan in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2016, arguing for a holistic approach that wouldn't relocate reptiles and turtles. In 2021, the NGT ordered the restoration of the river's ecology and traditional waterways without disturbing aquatic life.

Bureaucratic red tape delayed progress until the 2024 flood forced action. A day after the floodwaters receded, chief minister Bhupendra Patel announced the ambitious Vishwamitri River Rejuvenation Project. The initiative aims to dredge and deepen the river, increase its carrying capacity by 1,100 cumecs, and reduce flooding risk by 51 per cent.

CITIZENS' CONCERN

➤ **Encroachments, including construction debris at eight locations, remain unaddressed despite the NGT's directive to clear floodplains**

➤ **The river rejuvenation project prioritises flood mitigation over ecological restoration, ignoring NGT's emphasis on reconnecting lakes and wetlands**

➤ **Experts oppose uniform widening and excessive dredging, stressing the need to retain natural silt and restore flora and fauna**

CCV member Neha Sarwate highlights the gap between the NGT's order, on the basis of which the SEIAA approval was granted, and the current project. “The NGT emphasised restoring the river's meanders, reconnecting lakes and wetlands, and reinstating its ecology. This plan focuses on resectioning, dredging and desilting,” she says.

The NGT also called for demarcating floodplains and removing unauthorised structures. “Eight locations that have been mapped with construction and demolition waste encroaching on the water body must be cleared. Restoring the entire stretch's flora, fauna and aquatic life is crucial. This is a river, not a canal,” she adds. Prajapati, meanwhile, finds the approach to widen the river uniformly “flawed”. “There's no need to remove natural silt to deepen the river, only remove debris...don't change its course,” he asserts.

But VMC commissioner Dilip Kumar Rana maintains that the river is not being widened, while assuring that 66 waterways to drain rainwater will be restored, the river's natural course will be kept intact and the meander will not be disturbed beyond 3-5 per cent. “I don't find any unauthorised structures that need to be removed. Whichever such structures are there, we will remove them,” he told INDIA TODAY.

Sameer Khera, president of the Heritage Trust Baroda, sees Vadodara's plight as symptomatic of India's unplanned urban development. “It's unfortunate that the locals had to withstand a flood for the obvious to be done. Vadodara is a city with active citizen participation in governance issues. It is a challenge to bring all stakeholders on board, but the cleanup must begin now,” he says. For now, the people of Vadodara can only wait and hope the delays won't lead to another deluge. The clock is ticking, and the river's future—and alongside, the city's—seems to be flowing forward in trickles of grey. ■

The VMC has to clean up a 24 km stretch of the river, while the state irrigation department will clean up another 24 km around the city. In January, the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) approved the project while the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change gave its nod for the temporary relocation of crocodiles and turtles.

But both citizen groups remain dissatisfied. “The VMC commissioner assured me the holistic plan would be taken up, but the focus seems limited to flood mitigation in the city alone,” says Dr Mehta, who also leads the Vaho Vishwamitri Abhiyan, a people's movement to revive the river's entire 134 km stretch from Pavagadh to the Gulf of Khambhat.

A STUDY BY IIT GANDHINAGAR FOUND THE 2024 FLOOD WAS 'LIKELY EXACERBATED BY EXTENSIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN FLOOD-PRONE AREAS'

PARRY AND RIPOSTE BJP leaders Suvendu Adhikari and Agnimitra Paul after being suspended from the assembly; February 17



HINDUSTAN TIMES

WEST BENGAL

FAITH HEALING FOR FRACTURE

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

As West Bengal politics warms up for the upcoming assembly elections in 2026, the state unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party finds itself in a precarious position. Racked by factionalism and a floundering organisational structure, it is struggling to maintain its hard-won foothold in the state. To extricate itself from this mess, the BJP has doubled down on its Hindutva narrative to consolidate its core base and counter the formidable Trinamool Congress.

The BJP's bid to emphasise religious issues was witnessed during the controversy surrounding Saraswati

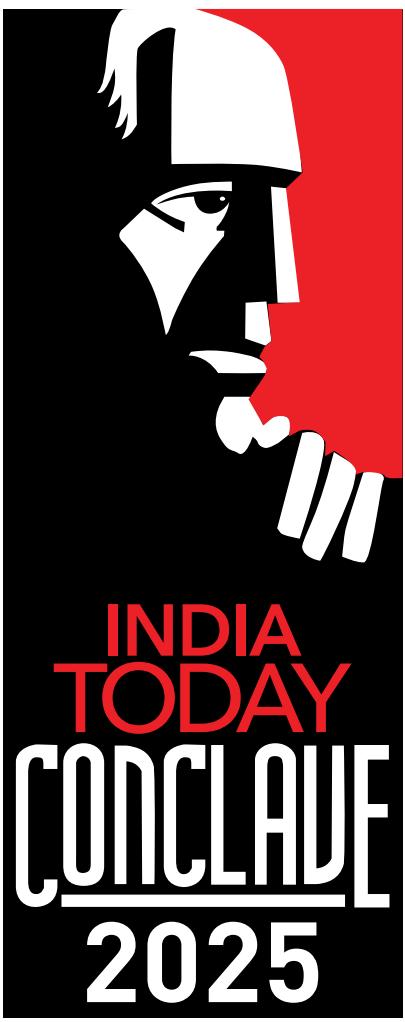
Puja at Kolkata's Jogesh Chandra Law College in early February. What started as an internal feud over control of puja arrangements within the Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP)—the TMC student's wing—soon turned into a full-blown political

crisis. Students alleged that TMCP-affiliated 'outsiders' led by one Shabbir Ali had attempted to stop the puja and threatened students. The matter reached the Calcutta High Court, which provided police protection and allowed only students to attend the event on February 2. While the BJP attempted to frame the incident as religious persecution, students and authorities rejected any communal angle.

Nonetheless, BJP leaders, including leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari and state unit chief Sukanta Majumdar, have drawn parallels between the Saraswati Puja controversy and attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh,

THE SARASWATI PUJA ROW CAME AS A SALVE FOR THE BENGAL BJP. IT WAS BATTLED TO QUELL PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF ITS INTERNAL SPLITS

THE AGE OF ACCELERATION



7 & 8 MARCH 2025
NEW DELHI

BOOK YOUR SEAT NOW
www.indiatodayconclave.com

PRESENTING



**RP-Sanjiv Goenka
Group**

Growing Legacies



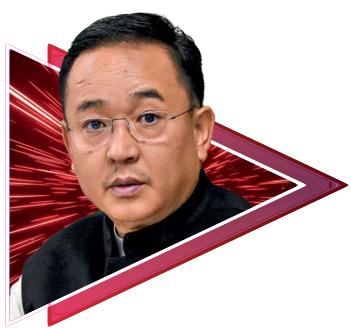
KIREN RIJUJU
UNION MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY
AFFAIRS & MINORITY AFFAIRS



JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA
UNION MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS
& DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION



ANUMULA REVANTH REDDY
CHIEF MINISTER, TELANGANA



PREM SINGH TAMANG
CHIEF MINISTER, SIKKIM



NARA LOKESH
MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES
DEVELOPMENT; IT ELECTRONICS &
COMMUNICATION; RTG, ANDHRA PRADESH



PUSHPENDRA SAROJ
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
(LOK SABHA)

POWERED BY



Haq, ek behtar zindagi ka.

PARTNER



CO PRESENTING



BNW DEVELOPMENTS
بی ان دبلیو للتنمیة العقاری

CONCLAVE PARTNER



KNOWLEDGE PARTNER



PARTNER



HEALTH PARTNER



ASSOCIATE SPONSOR



CELEBRATION PARTNER



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL PARTNER





ANI

aiming for a narrative of Hindu victimisation. They trotted out the old, twin charge of ‘minority appeasement’ and neglect of ‘Hindu traditions’ against the TMC. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee fiercely countered the BJP, accusing the party of “distorting facts to create communal divisions”.

On February 17, things came to a head at the assembly, as BJP legislators dredged up the Saraswati Puja charges and threw papers at the Speaker when their demand for a discussion on the topic was rejected. It ended with four BJP MLAs, including Adhikari and party state general secretary Agnimitra Paul, being suspended for 30 days.

The next day, an irate Mamata dared the BJP to prove their accusation that she had links to terrorists and the Muslim League. “If you can prove it, I will resign immediately,” she declared. Her remarks that day on the Mahakumbh mela in Prayagraj, referring to it as “mrityu Kumbh” due to the reported stampede deaths, triggered fresh protests from BJP leaders, who accused her of disrespecting Hindu traditions. Adhikari responded

A DIVIDED HOUSE IN BENGAL

► **Charges of coercion and vote manipulation in election of mandal presidents exposes fissures in West Bengal BJP**

► **CBI names Bengal BJP leaders in teacher recruitment scam, among them brother of Suvendu Adhikari. A public spat shows up rift between BJP's old guard and newer entrants**

► **The BJP's much-vaunted membership drive in Bengal has enrolled only 4.1 million, against the 10 million target**

sharply, saying Mamata was undermining Hindu faith and disrespecting the sentiments of millions of devotees.

The BJP is falling back on saffron politics for multiple reasons. The party’s organisational elections have exposed deep fissures within its Bengal unit. The process of electing presidents for 1,400 mandals—compara-

tively a small unit—should have been a routine affair. However, complaints of coercion and vote manipulation painted a picture of pandemonium. Incumbent mandal presidents, it is alleged, prevented opposing factions from voting. These leaders, nominated by district presidents—who were in turn appointed by Sukanta Majumdar—have reportedly formed a self-serving nexus.

The situation was so bad that Sunil Bansal, the central BJP leader overseeing Bengal, was compelled to intervene. Although results were announced on February 16, insiders suggest Bansal remains unhappy with the fairness of the process. The BJP must now conduct elections for its district offices—a process likely to deepen internal tensions.

Adding to the BJP’s troubles, the Central Bureau of Investigation has named several of its leaders, including Dibyendu Adhikari and Bharati Ghosh, in the primary teacher recruitment scam. Dibyendu, the brother of Suvendu, was associated with the TMC at the time of the alleged scam. The issue escalated when BJP state general secretary Jagannath Chatto-padhyay publicly listed the accused on social media, prompting Dibyendu to send him a legal notice. The very public fight has underscored the growing rift between the BJP’s old guard and newer entrants, many of whom are from the TMC. Faith-based controversies, such as that on the Saraswati Puja, have a utility then: they also deflect focus from all-too-public displays of the BJP’s inner chaos.

Mamata’s deployment of faith is no less calculated. That her big adversary is presently the BJP has only ensured those lavish gestures now encompass Hindu symbols. Take the development of pilgrimage sites; it’s her bid to wrest back the Hindu devotional space. The showpiece comes in April: the inauguration of a Jagannath temple in Digha. Of such components will be manufactured the public consent in present-day Bengal. ■



**7 & 8 MARCH 2025
NEW DELHI**

THE AGE OF ACCELERATION



MIKE POMPEO
70TH U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE (2018-2021), FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE CIA (2017-2018)



ANA IRENE DELGADO
AMBASSADOR OF PANAMA TO THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



ERIC GARCETTI
FORMER US AMBASSADOR TO INDIA



ARUN K. SINGH
FORMER AMBASSADOR OF INDIA TO THE UNITED STATES



DR ZEINA JALLAD
DIRECTOR, PALESTINE LAND STUDIES CENTER; ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT



ANUP WADHAWAN
FORMER COMMERCE SECRETARY, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



SMRITI RANA
HEAD, POLICY AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, PALLIUM INDIA;
HEAD, WHO COLLABORATING CENTRE FOR TRAINING AND POLICY ON ACCESS TO PAIN RELIEF



ASHOK MALIK
PARTNER, THE ASIA GROUP



D. GUKESH
WORLD CHESS CHAMPION

BOOK YOUR SEAT NOW
www.indiatodayconclave.com

PRESENTING



**RP-Sanjiv Goenka
Group**

Growing Legacies

POWERED BY



BUILT FOR GENERATIONS

PARTNER



Haq, ek behtar zindagi ka.

CO PRESENTING



BNW DEVELOPMENTS
بی ان دبلیو للتنمية العقاری

CONCLAVE PARTNER



KNOWLEDGE PARTNER



PARTNER



HEALTH PARTNER



ASSOCIATE SPONSOR



CELEBRATION PARTNER



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL PARTNER



KERALA

A BIG SEA SNAFU



SHUAIB PAZHAKULAM

UNDER CURRENTS
The Congress's relay protest in Kollam

By Jeemon Jacob

The December 2004 tsunami took the lives of 171 people in Kerala, with one panchayat, Alappad in Kollam district, taking the brunt of it—132 lives lost in a single day. Situated on a narrow 16 km-long strip of land, and sandwiched between the Arabian Sea and the Thiruvananthapuram-Shoranur water canal built in 1880, the coastal village has been protesting against the scourge of offshore black sand mining for over five decades now. But to no avail. In 1955, Alappad covered an area of 89.5 sq. km, today it is a whittled down 8.9 sq. km, the rest of the land taken by the tides.

Now another deadly threat looms on the horizon. As per a new amendment, the Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023, the Centre now has control of the state's coastal waters. The bill has brought several 'reforms', including auctioning of offshore mineral zones to private players through competitive bidding. Three zones are on the block in Kerala; the tender

SAND 'N STORM

► **Centre opens up offshore mining to private players. Kerala's fragile coast up for grabs, protests erupt**

► **A year left for assembly poll, issue could see blow-back for Left Front and BJP**

process for mining minerals in 242 sq. km off the Kollam coast was finalised on February 27.

The Kerala coastline is some 590 km long and studies by the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has found reserves of 745 million tonnes of construction-grade sand. This is at various locations off Ponnani, Chavakkad, Kochi, Alappuzha and Kollam, at water depths ranging from 22 to 50 metres. The first locations for the mining is the offshore Parappu in Kollam district. Incidentally, 'Kollam Parappu' or 'Quilon Bank' is a unique deep-sea fishing hub

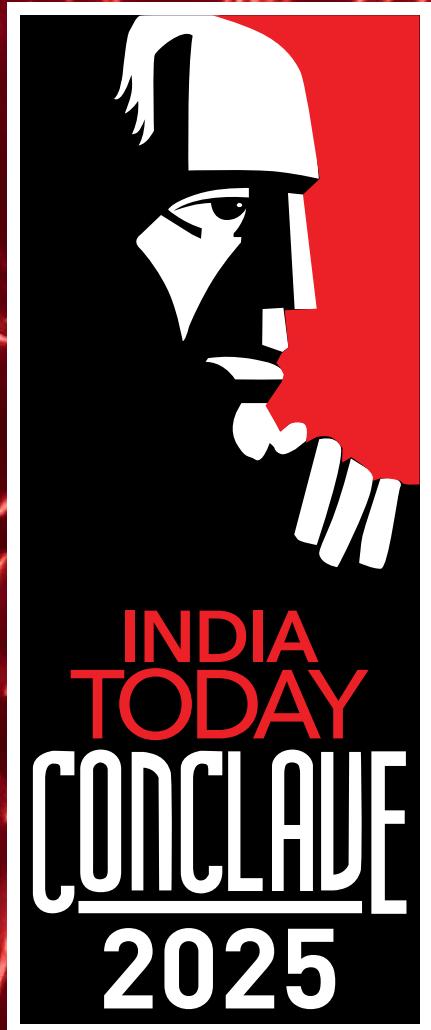
between Kollam and Alappuzha which has been the subject of various studies by the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies.

Protests against the Centre's move have been building up since November when the first e-auction was launched. Fishermen, local communities, environmentalists and politicians cutting across party lines are on the warpath. "Enough is enough. The Kerala coastline is fragile and without a credible environmental impact study how can the Centre initiate offshore sand mining?" asks activist and retired professor E. Kunhikrishnan. The Opposition Congress has got a relay protest going in Neendakara in Kollam district. "The Modi government is trying to loot Kerala. Offshore mining will destroy our marine resources and our local communities," Congress leader K.C. Venugopal told INDIA TODAY. The AICC general secretary has much at stake—he represents neighbouring Alappuzha, and its long coast, in Parliament.

The ruling Left Front government is taking flak for "doing nothing, not even passing an assembly resolution to protest the seabed mining move". Experts say the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government has not even ensured enough returns for the state. "In its current form, Kerala will only get the GST from the operations but no share of the revenues from the resources mined off its coast," says a senior official.

With just a year to go for the assembly election, the issue has the potential to kick sand in the faces of both the ruling CPI(M) and the BJP. The Latin Catholic community, which both parties are pursuing for support and whose numbers come in just under a million, are already agitated.

Meanwhile, at Ground Zero, Alappad panchayat president U. Ullas almost seems resigned to his village's fate. "We have tried every possible way to fight the sand 'mafia' in the past but our resistance was brutally crushed by the [state] government. Now the Centre seems to be looking to finish the job," he says. ■



**7 & 8 MARCH 2025
NEW DELHI**

THE AGE OF ACCELERATION



**GENERAL
UPENDRA DWIVEDI**
CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF



**AIR CHIEF MARSHAL
A.P. SINGH**
CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF



**ADMIRAL
DINESH K. TRIPATHI**
CHIEF OF THE NAVAL STAFF

BOOK YOUR SEAT NOW
www.indiatodayconclave.com

PRESENTING



**RP-Sanjiv Goenka
Group**

Growing Legacies

POWERED BY



BUILT FOR GENERATIONS

PARTNER



Haq, ek behtar zindagi ka.

CO PRESENTING



BNW DEVELOPMENTS
بی ان دبلیو للتنمیة العقاری

CONCLAVE PARTNER



KNOWLEDGE PARTNER



PARTNER



HEALTH PARTNER



INDIRAPURAM

ASSOCIATE SPONSOR



Celebrating
40 years of NIFT

CELEBRATION PARTNER



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
PARTNER



WAR FOR THE WIVES

It's a battle for the better halves in Assam. CM **Himanta Biswa Sarma**, whose wife **Riniki Bhuyan Sharma** has been targeted in the past, fired the first shot, launching a social media blitz against Congressman **Gaurav Gogoi** and his British wife **Elizabeth Colburn**. The charge? Anti-national! Sarma not only roasted Elizabeth for not having an Indian passport even after 12 years of marriage, but also alleged that she had links to alleged ISI spy Ali Tauqeer Sheikh. He also offered some unsolicited marital advice: if Gaurav was a patriot, he would divorce his wife. The latter hit back with the old corruption allegations against Riniki, accusing her of land-grab and disproportionate assets. But by then, Sarma had moved on to his next target—old college rival and now MLA **Akhil Gogoi**, whose wife, the CM claimed, landed a college job through shady means. The pattern is clear: mess with Sarma's wife, and yours gets dragged into the ring.



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

Policy Priest

Former advisor to the Gujarat CM, **Hasmukh Adhia**, was expected to step into K. Kailash-nathan's shoes in the state government's power hub once the latter—who was PM Modi's "eyes and ears" in Gujarat for a long, long time—moved out as Puducherry L-G last year. But Adhia is charting his own course. In 2025, the ex-Union finance secretary takes on two new roles—chairing the state's Administrative Reforms Commission and serving as vice-chairperson of Modi's latest passion project, SOUL (School of Ultimate Learning), aimed at shaping future leaders across business, governance and tech. All this while helming innovation hub, GIFT City, another marquee state initiative.



HARDIK CHHABRA

Pahadi Pariah



Uttarakhand minister **Premchand Aggarwal** just can't seem to stay out of trouble. During the assembly budget session, he allegedly made derogatory remarks about the Pahadi community, suggesting the hill state wasn't created solely for them. Naturally, it triggered widespread outrage, with the Congress and various others leading protests. Aggarwal did express remorse, saying all Uttarakhand residents are his "family" and a wary BJP also publicly rapped his knuckles, but to no avail. Aggarwal is in, so to speak, very rough waters right now.

SPEEDING TICKET

Maharashtra legislative council deputy chairperson and recent defector from Shiv Sena (UBT) to Eknath Shinde's camp **Neelam Gorhe** stirred up a controversy at the Marathi Sahitya Sammelan (literary meet) with a bold allegation—positions in the UBT Sena could be secured with the gift of two luxury cars to the right people. Her remarks didn't sit well with Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, who fired back with a letter to the event organisers, asking how political mudslinging had found a place in a literary gathering. Adding a sarcastic twist, he quipped that by Gorhe's logic, she must have shelled out at least Rs 50 lakh and a luxury car to land a speaking slot at the event.

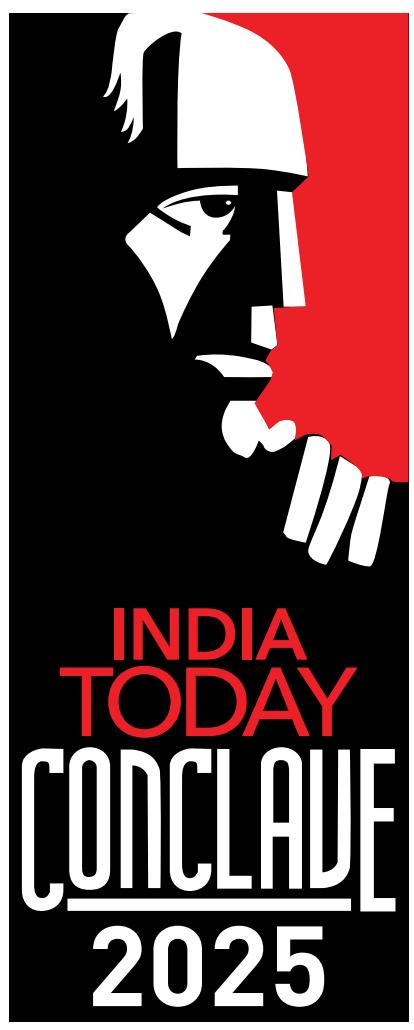


Whither Garlands

In 2020, RJD leader **Tejashwi Yadav** fell just 12 seats short of Bihar's top job—or, as some might put it, claiming those marigold victory garlands. Now, with elections on the horizon, he's shared a video of himself strolling through a marigold field in Raghpur, admiring the blooms...almost as if reclaiming what had slipped away five years ago. He insists he was the one who encouraged farmers there to grow the blooms, but the only question is—was that before or after he realised just how hard it is to win a marigold garland in Bihar?



ANI



7 & 8 MARCH 2025
NEW DELHI

BOOK YOUR SEAT NOW
www.indiatodayconclave.com

THE AGE OF ACCELERATION



AAMIR KHAN
ACTOR, PRODUCER



SHABANA AZMI
ACTOR



JYOTIKA
ACTOR



SHIBANI AKHTAR
CREATOR & EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,
DABBA CARTEL



GURU GAURANGA DAS
ISKCON MONK, SPIRITUAL TEACHER
AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER



WALTER K. ANDERSEN
AMERICAN ACADEMIC & AUTHOR



WILLIAM DALRYMPLE
AUTHOR



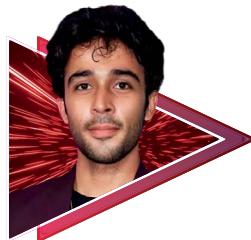
RAHUL MISHRA
DESIGNER



RISHAB SHARMA
SITAR PLAYER



JOSEPH RADHIK
PHOTOGRAPHER



ZAHAN KAPOOR
ACTOR



**RP-Sanjiv Goenka
Group**
Growing Legacies

PRESENTING

POWERED BY

PARTNER

CO PRESENTING



BUILT FOR GENERATIONS



Haq, ek behtar zindagi ka.



BNW DEVELOPMENTS
بی ان دبلیو للتطوير العقاري

CONCLAVE PARTNER
HINDUSTAN POWER

KNOWLEDGE PARTNER
REVA UNIVERSITY
Bengaluru, India

PARTNER



HEALTH PARTNER



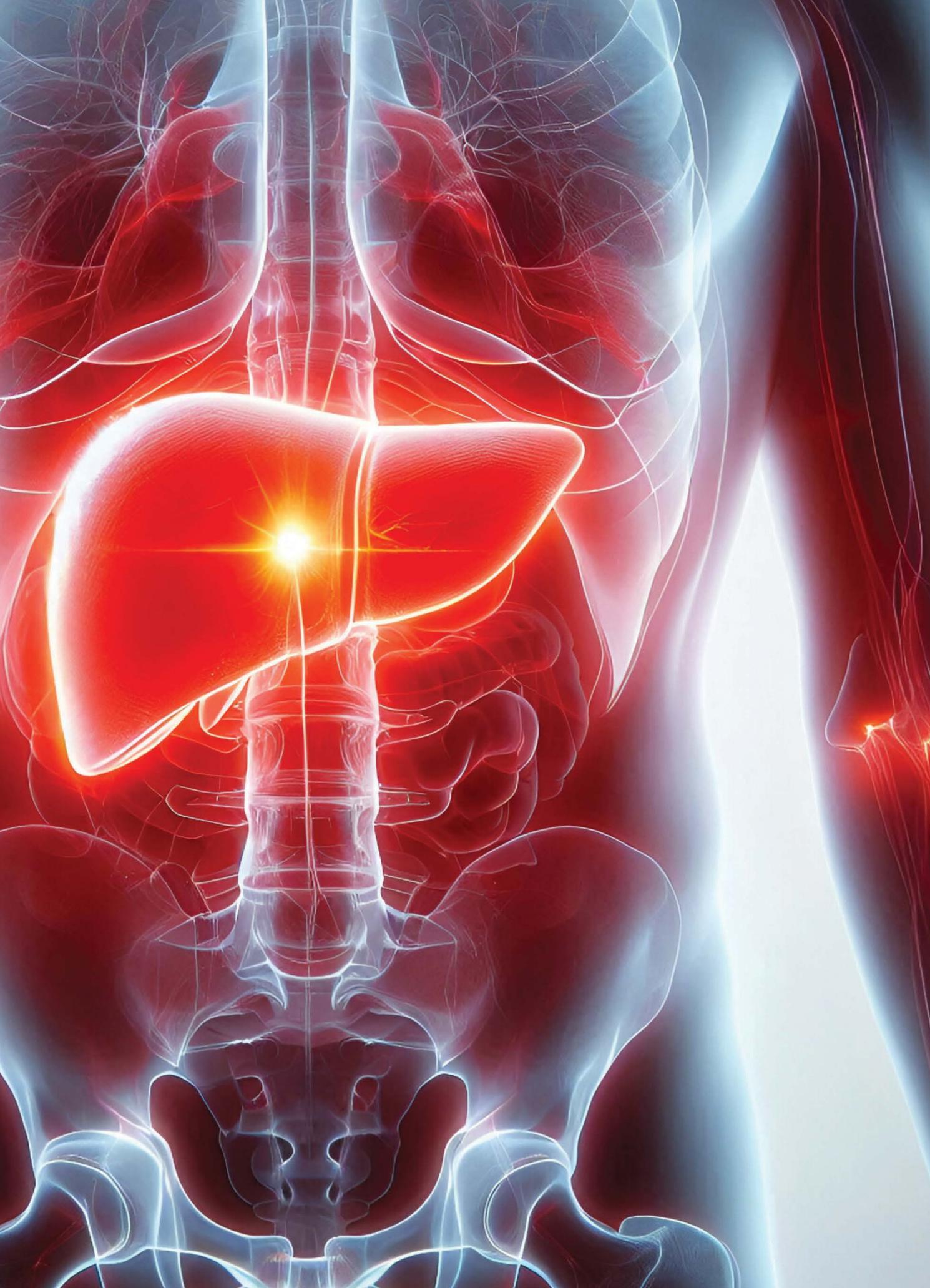
INDIRAPURAM

ASSOCIATE SPONSOR



CELEBRATION PARTNER
Radico
SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
PARTNER
SSVM INSTITUTIONS
COIMBATORE



LIVER DISEASE THE HIDDEN DANGER

THE DEADLY NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE IS REACHING EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS IN INDIA WITH 3 OUT OF 10 ADULTS AND CHILDREN AFFLICTED.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

By **SONALI ACHARJEE**

It was a rib scan that 39-year-old Abhirup Bhalla, a banking executive in Gurugram, had gone for following a small car accident. But it threw up a surprise that had nothing to do with Bhalla's ribs. Rather, it revealed an enlarged liver. Enough for his doctor to recommend further tests and conclude that Bhalla had stage 1 fatty liver disease. The diagnosis left Bhalla shocked. He did not have a weight issue, thanks to his regular jogs at the Aravalli Biodiversity Park. "I don't drink or smoke either," he says. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) does come as a rude shock to lean people like Bhalla. He may not have been an alcoholic but Bhalla's diet was loaded with added sugar and junk food. So while the jogging kept his overall weight in check, the excess calories wreaked havoc on his liver.

Like Alcoholic Liver Disease, NAFLD, too, is most commonly diagnosed when the liver shows more than 5 per cent of fat. In 2021, a meta analysis of 62 data sets from 50 studies on NAFLD published in the *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hepatology* found 38 per cent of adults in India to have NAFLD, with Chandigarh having the largest share at 53.5 per cent. The prevalence among children was 35 per cent. "The incidence of NAFLD is on the rise in India," says Dr Tom Cherian, liver transplant surgeon at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central. "In fact, it is a global pandemic. However, unlike previous pandemics, this one is hitting India hard because we are the world's centre for diabetes and central obesity, particularly fat around the abdomen."

But you don't have to be fat to have NAFLD. It was a question, in fact, Bhalla kept asking himself: if I am not fat, how can my liver be? A 2021 study in the journal *Clinical Liver Disease* found 10-15 per cent of Indian NAFLD patients to be lean, with a normal body mass index (BMI). "Even though it is much more common in overweight and obese people," says Dr S.K. Sarin, noted hepatologist and chairman of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in Delhi, "you don't need to be fat or eat fat to have a fatty liver." Consuming excess calories—beyond the WHO-recommended 2,500 for men and 2,000 for women—raises blood glucose, which is converted into fat and stored in the body. The liver also stores glucose, so a high-calorie diet contributes to fat buildup in the organ. Additionally, a diet rich in saturated or trans fats, frequent alcohol consumption, and excess abdominal fat (over 90 cm for men, 80 cm for women) further promote fat accumulation in and around the liver.

People usually discover they have NAFLD by accident. It does not show up in blood tests in the initial stages. In fact, Dr Cherian points out that liver function tests do not always

"Fatty liver is the cause of a number of health issues such as **hypertension, diabetes, thyroid issues, cancers; they can even cause heart attacks.**

It is crucial to maintain a healthy liver"

-DR S.K. SARIN

Hepatologist and Chairman, Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, Delhi



THE NAFLD EPIDEMIC

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) has few symptoms in the early stages. It is a disease that gradually creeps up on you without your realising it. A few things to watch out for

WHAT IS NAFLD?

It is the accumulation of fat in the liver in people who do not drink alcohol. Like its counterpart, alcoholic liver disease, NAFLD is diagnosed when the liver has more than 5 per cent fat

SYMPTOMS OF NAFLD

In the early stages, there are very few symptoms; nor does its traces show up initially in blood work. Later, these symptoms may present themselves:

- ➔ Fatigue
- ➔ Pain in the upper right abdomen area
- ➔ Weakness
- ➔ Sudden weight loss

DIAGNOSTICS FOR NAFLD

These are the tests used to diagnose NAFLD at different stages:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ➔ Abdominal ultrasound, MRI or CT scan:
These help visualise the appearance of the liver. It is usually the ultrasound that is first recommended | ➔ Transient elastography: This helps measure the amount of fat or stiffness in the organ
➔ Liver biopsy: Performed if there is suspicion of advanced liver disease or some other cause |
|--|---|

MASLD: THE NEW NAME FOR NAFLD

MASLD (metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease) is the new term for NAFLD. MASLD refers to patients with hepatic steatosis and at least one of five risk factors: high BP, high blood sugar, abdominal obesity, low HDL cholesterol or high triglycerides. The renaming aims to eliminate stigmatising and exclusionary terms such as 'alcoholic' and 'fatty'

BURDEN OF NAFLD IN INDIA

38%

ADULTS IN
INDIA HAVE
NAFLD

35%

OF CHILDREN
HAVE IT – A
SHOCKING
PREVALENCE



TYPES OF NAFLD

➤ **Simple fatty liver:** Also called steatosis, it is the first sign of fat accumulation, which can be reversed

➤ **NASH:** Non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) occurs when the liver starts to get inflamed, responding to overaccumulation of fat cells inside or around it. At this stage, it is reversible

➤ **Fibrosis:** The gradual process of liver cells getting destroyed. Thin bands of scar tissues start to build up, reducing blood flow through the liver, and limiting its access to oxygen and nutrients

➤ **Cirrhosis:** Left untreated, the liver can get severe, permanent scarring. It then does not have enough healthy cells and can no longer regenerate. Eventually, it may lead to liver failure and require transplant, without which it can prove fatal

WHAT CAUSES NAFLD?

The mere consumption of fat does not cause NAFLD. An unbalanced diet, poor exercise, poor sleep and even stress can cause it



OBESITY: The most common risk factor, particularly central obesity found in 84% of Indian patients with NAFLD. But you don't always have to be overweight to have NAFLD, about 10-15% of afflicted Indians are lean with normal BMI



HIGH-CALORIE DIET: A diet high in starch, sweets, processed food



HYPERTENSION: High blood pressure can contribute to systemic inflammation, a common cause of NAFLD



HIGH TRIGLYCERIDES: Triglycerides are fat molecules, which often accumulate in the liver—the primary characteristic of NAFLD



DIABETES: Insulin resistance and NAFLD are linked to one another



GENETIC PREDISPOSITION: There is a genetic component to risk but also to other metabolic diseases, including those with family history of obesity, high BP and diabetes



SLEEP APNEA: It deprives the body of oxygen and triggers inflammation, oxidative stress, and metabolic dysregulation in the liver which can then lead to fat accumulation and potential liver damage



CERTAIN MEDICATIONS: Medicines such as Corticosteroids, Tamoxifen, Amiodarone, anti-depressants and Methotrexate run the risk of causing the body to store fat improperly, or can worsen existing fatty liver disease

TREATMENTS

➤ **WEIGHT LOSS:** Typically, losing 10% of your body weight or more is recommended

➤ **ANTI-FIBROTIC DRUGS:** These can reverse fibrosis though not cirrhosis

➤ **CELL AND GENE THERAPY:** The first can help regenerate damaged liver tissue, the second can modify genetic liver defects

➤ **LIVER TRANSPLANT:** This is the last option once a liver is damaged. Currently, the one-year survival rate of a liver transplant is more than 90 per cent in India

accurately reflect liver health. "Ten per cent of liver transplants are performed on individuals who have had over 70 per cent of their liver destroyed, yet their liver function tests remain normal," he says. Thus, many have a fatty liver without being aware of it. And any measure of fat above 5 per cent, even for a short duration, can be harmful to your health. "Fatty liver is the cause of a number of health issues such as hypertension, diabetes, thyroid issues, cancers; they can even cause heart attacks. It is crucial to maintain a healthy liver," says Dr Sarin.

In 2021, India became the first country to declare NAFLD a non-communicable disease. Three years later, in October 2024, the Union ministry of health and family welfare introduced fresh guidelines for preventing and treating the disease. "NAFLD is rapidly emerging as a major public health concern, closely linked with metabolic disorders such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Three out of 10 people can have NAFLD, which highlights the impact of the disease," says Apurva Chandra, former Union health secretary.

WHY A HEALTHY LIVER MATTERS

While the liver is most commonly known for filtering impurities from our blood, there are in fact more than 500 vital functions that have been linked with the organ. All the blood leaving the digestive tract passes through the liver, which breaks down, balances and produces nutrients for the body to use. The liver also either throws out toxins or metabolises them into a form that the body can use. At any given point of time, the liver holds at least 13 per cent of the body's blood supply.

Among some of its lesser-known functions is its ability to regulate blood clotting, conversion of excess glucose in our blood to glycogen for storage and flushing out cholesterol from the body. "The liver is actually the largest immune gland in our body," says Dr Sarin. According to varying studies, the organ

"Run an awareness campaign every 15 days: eat when hungry; **snacking is not a solution for loneliness or insecurity; choose whole foods; stop when 80% full; start meal with a glass of water followed by raw salads; drink water first whenever you feel hungry, false hunger disappears"**

-DR YOGESH CHAWLA Former Director and Head, Department of Hepatology, PGIMER, Chandigarh



MIND YOUR LIVER

It can withstand much damage and still regenerate itself. But pushed beyond all limit, this vital organ just might start to give up

WHAT IS THE LIVER?

► A crucial part of our digestive system, this one gland performs more than 500 biological functions. All the blood leaving our stomach and intestines passes through it to be purified and detoxified; it holds about 13% of our blood supply at any given time. With an amazing ability to repair and regenerate itself, the liver can regrow anywhere up to its normal size even after up to 90% of it has been removed or damaged

WHAT DOES IT DO?

► Helps produce bile, which breaks down fats in the small intestine during digestion. Bile byproducts exit the body in the form of faeces

► Aids production of cholesterol and special proteins to carry fats through our body

► Converts excess glucose into glycogen for storage and later use. Also balances level of blood glucose in the body

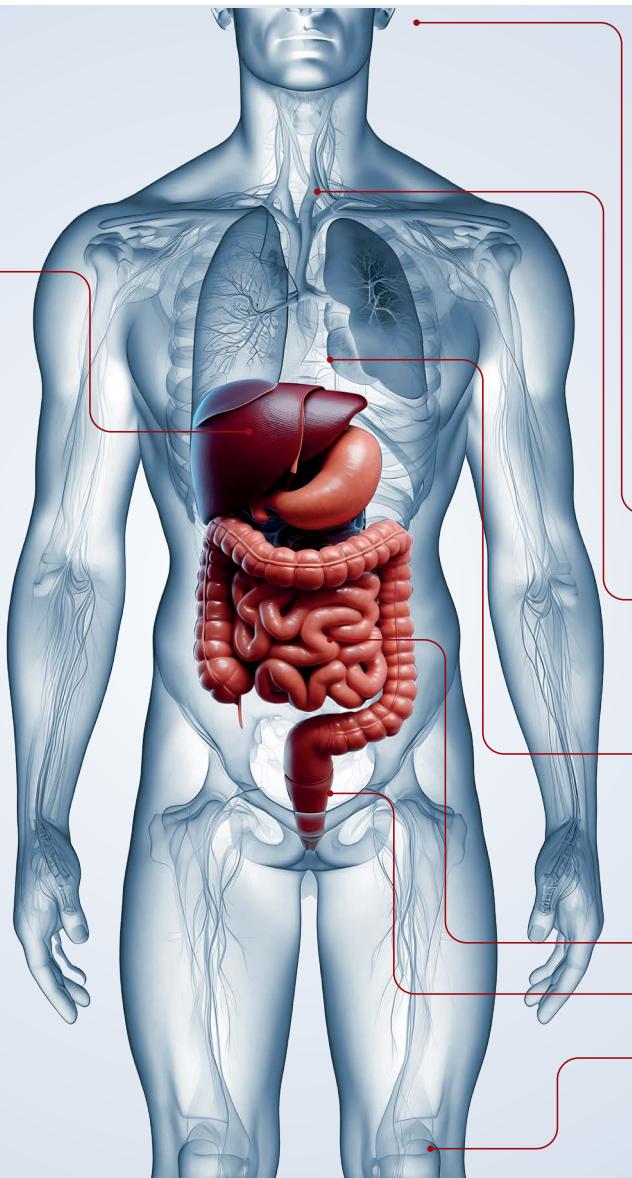
► Clears the blood of drugs, poisonous substances, breaking them down into non-toxic forms. The kidneys filter the blood byproducts which leave the body in the form of urine

► Regulates blood clotting

► Removes bacteria from the body and helps us resist infections. The liver is the largest immune gland in our body

accounts for nearly 25-50 per cent of the lymph which passes through the lymphatic system—a part of the immune system that keeps the body fluid level in check and defends against infections. The liver also directly produces immune cells. "The liver is an immunologically complex organ, responsible for the production of acute phase proteins, complement components, cytokines and chemokines, and contains large, diverse populations of resident immune cells," explains Dr Rajesh Chandra, consultant, gastroenterology, Manipal Hospital, Vijayawada. In short, it is an organ that multi-tasks tirelessly.

The liver is also a unique organ because of its capacity to repair and regenerate itself. It can actually regrow to its normal size even after up to 90 per cent of it has been removed or damaged. This is also the reason why insults to the organ, such as alcohol, disease, certain toxic drugs and excess or unbalanced dietary calories, take longer to manifest as the liver keeps repairing itself. "The liver is constantly bombarded by a stream of dietary and commensal bacterial products with inflammatory potential in healthy individuals. Inflamma-



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR LIVER IS UNHEALTHY

The first impact is directly on your body's insulin sensitivity. NAFLD increases by at least twofold the risk of having type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. It has also been linked to:

- ➔ Loss of brain function
- ➔ Obstructive sleep apnea
- ➔ Lowered immunity
- ➔ Gastroesophageal reflux disease which causes heart burn, acid reflux and regurgitation
- ➔ Poor gut health
- ➔ Cancer
- ➔ Osteoporosis

HOW YOU CAN SAFEGUARD YOUR LIVER

➔ The food you eat plays a huge role. For good liver health, it is important to include omega 3 fatty acids, antioxidants, Vitamin E. The American Liver Association recommends good amount of fibre, monosaturated fats and hydration. New research suggests a role for dairy fats

➔ Make sure your weight is within the normal BMI range

➔ Ensure your blood sugar, blood pressure and blood cholesterol are in the safe range

➔ Exercise regularly

➔ Practise safe sex to reduce risk of hepatitis B and C

➔ Follow directions when on medications

➔ Avoid alcohol

tory processes act in a tightly controlled fashion. Failure to clear such dangerous stimuli and resolve inflammation leads to chronic pathological inflammation and disrupted tissue homeostasis, which can progress to fibrosis, cirrhosis and liver failure," says Dr Chandra.

Fatty liver usually starts off as a simple, harmless stage-designated steatosis. It is revealed in other imaging tests, like an abdomen scan. The second stage is non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) when the liver starts to get inflamed, in response to overaccumulation of fat cells inside or around it. "In NAFLD, fat accumulates inside the hepatocytes, or the liver cells. This fat causes functional deficits by physically displacing cellular components. Additionally, it acts as an irritant, triggering the body's immune response, which slowly damages the cells, eventually leading to cell death," explains Dr Cherian. This gradual process of liver cells getting destroyed is what we know as fibrosis. Thin bands of scar tissues start to build up, reducing blood flow through the liver and thus its access to oxygen and nutrients needed

for its wellbeing. Until this stage, the damage is still reversible. Beyond this, though, it can proceed to cirrhosis, a severe, permanent scarring in your liver. In its advanced stages, your liver no longer has enough healthy cells left to work with and can no longer regenerate. Eventually, this can lead to liver failure, the point when the organ is unable to function to meet your body's needs. The only chance of survival at this stage is a liver transplant.

Unfortunately, most people with Stage 1 or 2 NAFLD treat it lightly as the damage is reversible. But, as Dr Sarin says, "Too much fat in your liver, whether early or advanced stage, reversible or not, is dangerous for your health in multiple ways." The first impact is directly on your body's insulin sensitivity. NAFLD increases by at least twofold the risk of having type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, according to a 2020 study in the journal *Current Opinion in Lipidology*. In fact, so high is the link between fatty liver and metabolic diseases that

a new term was coined for it in 2020—MAFLD, or metabolic dysfunction-associated fatty liver disease. It signifies not just fat accumulation in the liver but gestures at the whole cluster of conditions contingent upon each other, like obesity, insulin resistance or diabetes. A worsening of liver, then, can cause or worsen metabolic diseases, and also be affected by them.

And it's not just the metabolic system that suffers on account of an ailing liver. "The liver purifies your blood. If it isn't working properly, it can impact a variety of organs, from your heart to your brain to your gut," says Dr Sarin. A 2023 study in the journal *Frontiers in Endocrinology* found loss of brain function when the liver is unable to remove blood toxins. Another 2019 study in the *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* found a link between fatty liver and gastroesophageal reflux disease, which causes heartburn, acid reflux and regurgitation. It also noted that a fatty liver leads to poor health of the gut microbiome.

HOW TO PREVENT AND TREAT FATTY LIVER

Contrary to popular perception, a low-fat diet is not enough to prevent NAFLD. You don't need to eat fat for fat to be created in your body; excess calories, regardless of their source, are enough. And while excess saturated fats and trans fats are harmful to the liver, recent studies indicate the essential fatty acid C15:0 (found in cow's milk) may actually have a beneficial effect--and that its deficiency may be a contributing factor in NAFLD. But experts are worried about the rise in internet-guided fad diets for health or weight loss, like high-fat ketogenic diets, which, in the absence of professional supervision, can lead to a huge increase in dietary fat without commensurate effort to burn it in the body.

Interlinked metabolic conditions can also predispose a person to NAFLD. Diabetes, for instance, worsens fatty liver, as does high cholesterol. The reverse is also true. "Type 2 diabetes is often accompanied by insulin resistance, which can exacerbate fat accumulation in the liver. Elevated blood glucose levels can lead to increased lipogenesis (fat production) and decreased fatty acid oxidation in the liver," says Dr Deepak Lahoti, senior director, gastroenterology, hepatology and endoscopy, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Patparganj, Delhi. Similarly, excess body fat, particularly visceral fat, can harm the liver thanks to the pro-inflammatory compounds released by adipose cells. PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome) and sleep apnea are also risk factors for NAFLD. "Women with PCOS often experience insulin resistance, leading to elevated insulin levels, which is a risk factor for fatty liver," says Dr Lahoti. "As for sleep apnea, the intermittent hypoxia may lead to oxidative stress and inflammation, further exacerbating liver damage. Overall, these conditions create a cycle of metabolic dysregulation, leading to increased fat deposition in the liver, inflammation and potential progression to more severe liver diseases."

Prevention, of course, is better than cure but so is diagnosing a health condition early enough. "Regular check-ups

THE LIVER'S BEST DIET

Support your liver with foods that naturally promote health and balance



Water:
Drinking water before meals prevents overeating and supports liver function



Black Coffee:
Moderate consumption may lower the risk of liver disease



Oats & Whole Grains: Rich in beta-glucans, a soluble dietary fibre, they help reduce obesity and diabetes risks



Raw Garlic:
May lower liver cancer risk and reduce fat accumulation



Onion: Helps limit fat storage, potentially preventing fatty liver



Dark Leafy Greens: Provide glutathione, a key antioxidant for liver health



Berries: Dark berries such as blueberries, raspberries and cranberries contain polyphenols that protect against liver damage



Plant-based foods: Low-calorie, plant-based diets support optimal liver function

Compiled from various studies

and being proactive about liver health can make a significant difference," says Dr Lahoti. But NAFLD symptoms take a long time to show up. Eventually, some people may experience fatigue, a feeling of fullness, nausea, jaundice, dark urine, or mild liver enlargement, by which time they have lived with fat in the liver long enough for it to have an impact on other metabolic and organ functions, particularly diabetes. It is therefore recommended that those with risk factors go for preventive testing. "If you have obesity, diabetes, any other metabolic issue, drink alcohol or a family history of liver disease, then it is important to screen your liver regularly," says Dr Sarin.

Two types of tests can diagnose whether you have NAFLD. The first is an abdominal ultrasound, which is first recommended to avoid needless exposure to radiation and more expensive imaging tests like a CT scan or an MRI. These help visualise the appearance of the liver. Newer tests, such as a transient elastography, are then added for further investigations which include measuring the amount of fat or stiffness in the organ. If advanced liver disease or some other cause for liver issues is suspected, a liver biopsy could be recommended.

Once diagnosed, there is no specific medication for treatment. The usual recommendation is permanent lifestyle

“Techniques like focused ultrasound or radiofrequency ablation are non-invasive and can be used to reduce liver fibrosis”

-DR S. CHATTOPADHYAY Consultant and Head of Department, Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgery and Liver Transplant, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai



changes—increased physical activity, improved diet and, in some cases, weight-loss surgery. Weight loss, in particular, has been shown to have a powerful effect on reducing liver fat. Typically, losing 10 per cent of your body weight or more is recommended. In a 2015 study in the *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hepatology*, central obesity was found to be the most common risk factor in 84 per cent of the Indian patients with NAFLD. Doctors, therefore, recommend not just overall but abdominal weight loss for Indians to reverse NAFLD.

The food you eat plays a huge role in treatment. For good liver health, it is important to include Omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, Vitamin E and enough fibre in your diet, says Twincy Ann Sunil, clinical dietitian at Apollo Spectra, Koramangala, Bengaluru. Good sources of Omega-3 fatty acids are walnuts, flax seeds, salmon and mackerel fish; nuts and oilseeds for Vitamin E; and (carefully chosen) fruits and vegetables for fibre. “Use cold-pressed oil for cooking, as some refined oil might have higher amount of transfat due to the processing methods used. Instead of snacking on chips and bakery items, snack on veggie salads or a chia seed pudding made with yoghurt and topped with fruits, salted nuts,” she adds.

Dr Yogesh Chawla, former director and head, department of hepatology, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, suggests running a media campaign every 15 days for public awareness of causes of fatty liver. The campaign, he emphasises, should focus on key dietary habits: “Eat only when hungry; snacking is not a solution for loneliness or insecurity; choose whole foods rather than processed foods; eat according to yogic wisdom—stop when 80 per cent full; start your meal with a glass of water followed by a bowl of raw salads; drink water first whenever you have a feeling of hunger. False hunger disappears. Real hunger stays.”

However, when fatty liver progresses to an advanced stage or presents with other complications, medications or procedures may be recommended. “Medications are given for management of diabetes or cholesterol, diuretics to manage fluid build-up in the body, beta blockers to reduce hypertension in

the portal vein (that leads to the liver) and antibiotics if there is liver disease,” says Dr Somnath Chattpadhyay, consultant and head of department, hepato-pancreato-biliary surgery and liver transplant, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai. If needed, procedures at this stage can include draining excess fluid from the abdomen, and stopping bleeding from enlarged blood vessels in the oesophagus.

While liver cirrhosis, the final stage of liver damage, is irreversible, newer treatment options can reverse the stage before it: liver fibrosis, or when scar tissues form on the liver. “Some promising areas include anti-fibrotic drugs that target specific molecules involved in the scarring process. Although many drugs are still under development, some like Saroglitazar are available in India,” says Dr Chattpadhyay. Cell therapy to regenerate damaged liver tissue, gene therapy to modify genetic liver defects or non-invasive therapies are also becoming common. “Techniques like focused ultrasound or radiofrequency ablation are non-invasive and can be used to reduce liver fibrosis,” adds Dr Chattpadhyay.

However, once the liver is damaged, patients have no option but to go for a transplant. Currently, the one-year survival rate of a liver transplant is above 90 per cent in many hospitals, compared to 50 per cent in the 1980s. Technology and advanced surgical techniques have played a very important role in this. “We have improved surgical techniques, including minimally invasive approaches, better anaesthesia equipment, which reduce complications and mortality. Additionally, the development of more effective and less toxic immunosuppressive medications has helped prevent organ rejection. Advances in organ preservation and allocation have led to the use of higher-quality donor organs,” says Dr Chattpadhyay. According to various estimates, the annual demand for liver transplants is between 25,000 and 30,000 in India. In 2022, some 2,900 living donor liver transplants and 760 deceased donor liver transplants were performed in India. In that same year, India became the third largest liver transplant-performing country in the world after the US and China. Doctors, however, say there is still a very large unmet need.

And while improved organ donation and transplant surgeries for the liver may be good news, the fact that the need for them is rising is not a good sign, say doctors. In India, nearly 66 per cent of all deaths are on account of non-communicable diseases, and fatty liver is both a high-risk factor for them as well as their victim. The real good news will be a reduction in the figures for the disease, particularly among young children, for whom it can spell a lifetime sentence of poor health. Public awareness of the signs and risks of liver disease can help diagnose the condition in time, but only a complete overhaul of lifestyle, where we take ownership of and prioritise our health through exercise, a healthy balanced diet and regular preventive screenings can bring about significant change. ■

HERITAGE UNDER CLOUD

The Flag Staff House and its surroundings in Bhopal



THE NATION | ENEMY PROPERTY

A ROYAL PROPERTY WRANGLE

A COURT ORDER ON PROPERTIES LINKED TO THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BHOPAL INVOKES THE CONTROVERSIAL ENEMY PROPERTY ACT, AND SPOTLIGHTS A DECADES-LONG LEGAL TANGLE

By Rahul Noronha



PROPERTIES TO FIGHT FOR

Some of the properties of the Bhopal royal family marked 'Enemy Property'

■ **Riyaz Manzil**, covering **8.39 acres**, of which less than half is owned by Sajida Sultan; the rest is under different names

■ **310 hectares** in the Koh-e-Fiza area in Bhopal, of which 270 hectares are under the Upper Lake. Remaining 40 hectares have houses on it

■ **6.72 hectares** in village Nayapura

■ **6.14 hectares** in the name of Aftab Jahan Begum, the second wife of Hamidullah Khan

■ **9.76 hectares** at village Laukhedi near Bhopal

■ **Also under the scanner** are Flag Staff House, Noor-Us-Sabah palace, Dar-Us-Salam property, bungalow of Habibi and Ahmedabad palace

Source: DM office, Bhopal

Photographs by MUJEEB FARUQUI



Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan is going through a tumultuous time. But even before the January 16 knife attack on him by an intruder at his Mumbai home, a Madhya Pradesh High Court order reignited a dispute over property pertaining to the erstwhile royal family of Bhopal, of which Saif is a prominent member. While no official estimate of the value of the royal properties that

BHOPAL ROYAL FAMILY



Hamidullah Khan
(1894-1960)
Last Nawab of Bhopal



Abida Sultan

(1913-2002)
Migrated to Pakistan in 1950, mother of Shahryar Khan, former Pakistan foreign secretary



Sajida Sultan
(1915-1995) m.
Iftikhar Ali Khan
(1910-1952)
Nawab of Pataudi, former cricketer

Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi
(1941-2011)
Former cricketer



Sharmila Tagore
(1944-) Actress



Saba Ali Khan **Saif Ali Khan** **Soha Ali Khan**

m.: Married to



Saif and his relatives have laid claim to as inheritor has been declared, it is estimated to be over Rs 10,000 crore. Other than land in various areas, the properties under the scanner include prominent Bhopal landmarks like the Flag Staff House, the luxury hotel Noor-Us-Sabah Palace, the Dar-Us-Salam residential property, bungalow of Habibi and the Ahmedabad Palace.

So how did the case of the Bhopal royal properties land up in court? While there have been several disputes among members of the Bhopal royal family over property, in December 2014, the Custodian of Enemy Property, a Central government department based in Mumbai,

sent a letter citing section 11 of the Enemy Property Act 1968—which allows the Central government to claim properties or businesses belonging to individuals who migrated to Pakistan after Partition or adopted the citizenship of China—to Saif. The Centre's legal focus lay on the migration of Abida Sultan, the eldest daughter of Hamidullah Khan, the last nawab of Bhopal, to Pakistan in 1950. Abida is the sister of Saif's grandmother, Sajida Sultan, the second daughter of the nawab, who inherited the properties after his death. Sajida married the Nawab of Pataudi, cricketer Iftikhar Ali Khan, and was the mother of the iconic Indian cricket captain

**IN FEBRUARY 2015,
THE CUSTODIAN
CATEGORISED ALL
PROPERTIES OWNED
BY HAMIDULLAH
KHAN AS 'ENEMY
PROPERTY' AND
ASKED THE STATE TO
TAKE POSSESSION**

Mansur Ali Khan 'Tiger' Pataudi, Saif's father.

The letter informed Saif that since Nawab Hamidullah Khan's eldest daughter Abida had migrated to Pakistan and was the heir apparent, all of the Bhopal properties would be liable to be declared Enemy Properties. The Custodian asked Saif to furnish the details of the properties, but before Saif could do that, the Custodian issued a certificate in February 2015 under section 5 of the Act, categorising all the properties owned by Hamidullah Khan as 'Enemy Properties'. Many of these properties have either been sold or are not in possession of members of the erstwhile ruling family. The Custodian also asked the MP government to take possession of these properties. The same year, Saif, his mother, actress Sharmila Tagore, and his aunt Sabiha Sultan filed a writ appeal in the MP High Court, challenging the Custodian's order and obtained a stay on it.

On December 13, 2024, the MP High Court, while disposing of a bunch of writ appeals filed by members of the erstwhile royalty, lifted that 2015 stay, thus potentially clearing the way for their acquisition under the Enemy Property Act. In his order, Justice Vivek Agarwal stated that the amended Enemy Property Act 2017 provides a statutory mechanism for addressing disputes and asked

ENEMY OR RIGHTFUL OWNER

How two sides argue over the Bhopal royal properties

THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

Since Abida Sultan, eldest daughter and heir apparent of the last nawab of Bhopal Hamidullah Khan, had migrated to Pakistan in 1950, all the Bhopal properties can be declared 'enemy properties'

Such properties can be taken over by the Custodian of Enemy Property, and heirs can't inherit them under the Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act 2017

Abida's sister Sajida Sultan, who owned the properties, is Saif Ali Khan's grandmother

A 2015 certificate by the Custodian listing the properties as 'enemy properties' was contested in court by Saif and his relatives, and a stay obtained

That stay was lifted in December 2024 and the royals have filed an appeal

SAIF & OTHERS' ARGUMENT

Saif and his relatives contend that as Union government had recognised Sajida as 'ruler' in 1960, Abida Sultan had no claim over the properties

the petitioners to approach the joint secretary, Union ministry of home affairs—designated as an appellate authority (who is empowered by the Centre to deal with appeals) in such cases—within 30 days. Informed sources said that Saif Ali Khan filed an application on January 8. When contacted by INDIA TODAY, Saif's advocate Aishvary Vikram refused to comment on the matter.

ROYAL COUNTERPOINT

The high-profile Bhopal state was second in status only to Hyderabad among Muslim princely states and was accorded a 19-gun salute by the British. The last Nawab of Bhopal, Hamidullah Khan, had three daughters. The eldest daughter, Abida Sultan, migrated to Pakistan in 1950 while her father was the designated Nawab. She continued to stay there and when Hamidullah died in February 1960, her younger sister, Sajida, was recognised by the Union government as the 'ruler of Bhopal'. This was because even after independence in 1947, erstwhile rulers of princely states enjoyed general privi-

leges such as a privy purse, vehicles without registration plates and no cap on the number of firearms they could possess. Some erstwhile rulers also had specific privileges which they had negotiated with the Union of India and had them included in the merger agreement—a unique document signed by each ruler by which they surrendered their sovereignty to the Union after independence. These privileges continued till 1971, when they were abolished by then prime minister Indira Gandhi's government.

In the writ petition filed by Saif, his mother and his aunt, it is stated that the Custodian was unaware of the facts of the case. In their defence, the petitioners said that since the Union government had recognised Sajida Sultan as the ruler, Abida had no claim over the Bhopal properties. Further, the petition claimed that the Custodian's order amounted to a violation of the merger agreement signed between the Union government and the Nawab, which stated that the personal property of the ruler would never be questioned and not attract even revenue and forest laws.

PRIMEST PROPERTY

The Noor-us-Sabah
Palace in Bhopal



► The Custodian's order, they say, amounted to a violation of the merger agreement between the Union of India and Nawab Hamidullah Khan

► The agreement and a 1999 SC order say the Nawab's personal property would be solely inherited by the successor, that is Sajida Sultan

POINTING AT A 2019 SC ORDER ON THE RAMPUR STATE, A SECTION OF THE BHOPAL ROYALTY DEMANDS THAT THE PROPERTIES BE DIVIDED ON THE BASIS OF PERSONAL LAWS

Specifically, the agreement mentions that the Firdaus and Rizwan farms, measuring 829.28 acres and 139.75 acres respectively, would remain unaffected by the abolition of jagirs. Under the merger agreement, the privileges extended to the then ruler were to be extended to his successors too.

To buttress their claims, the petitioners cited a case filed by the cousins and sister of Sajida in 1999, through which they demanded a distribution of properties of Nawab Hamidullah Khan as per Muslim personal law. The Bhopal district court had ruled in favour of Sajida's heirs, stating that the personal property of the last nawab would be inherited solely by Sajida Sultan, who was recognised by the GoI as his successor. Lastly, Saif and the others said that the order by the Custodian was a violation of the Bhopal Succession Act 1947, under which Sajida was declared ruler.

DIFFERENT ANGLE

A section of the erstwhile Bhopal royalty, however, has embarked on a different path on the matter. They cite a July 2019 order by the Supreme Court which said that properties of erstwhile rulers were to be considered as personal properties and divided on the basis of relevant personal laws. They were not to be regarded as properties attached to the "gaddi" or rulership itself—that is, 'ruler's property' owned by a former ruler that is to be wholly transferred to his/ her designated heir. The SC order relates to Rampur, another Muslim princely state, and it could add a new dimension to matter regarding the Bhopal properties.

Like in Bhopal, the last Rampur Nawab, Reza Ali Khan, was granted certain privileges as part of the merger agreement with the Union of India, under which his personal property would be transferred wholly to his successor as

per usual practice. When Reza died in 1966, his eldest son Murtaza Ali Khan was recognised by the Central government as his successor. But Murtaza's brother challenged this in court. The case finally reached the SC which ruled in 2019 that personal property of the ruler was to be divided among all his legal heirs as per Muslim personal law. In 2021, the district court of Rampur decided on a partition suit based on the ruling. One of the Nawab's heirs, Syeda Mehrunnisa, had migrated to Pakistan and so her share was placed with the Custodian of Enemy Property.

Based on this, some of the Bhopal royals have also filed a case at the MP High Court demanding that the Bhopal properties be divided as per Shariat law too. If their plea is upheld, a share would also be marked for Abida, and which would then be placed with the Custodian by dint of her migration. "The Supreme Court ruling in the Rampur case has made it clear that the division of property is to take place as per civil law granting legitimate share to all legal heirs. Our case pertaining to the Bhopal state properties has been reserved for judgment at the MP High Court," says advocate Aadil Singh Booparai, who represents the descendants of Rashid-uz-Zafar Khan, the nephew of Hamidullah Khan.

Meanwhile, the Bhopal district administration has not yet moved to secure the properties declared by the Custodian as enemy properties. "We are examining the court order and would act accordingly," says Bhopal district magistrate Kaushlendra Vikram Singh. Sources say there are many properties in Bhopal that still show the late Sajida Sultan as the owner. All eyes are now on the MHA joint secretary, the appellate authority, who has to decide whether the Custodian's order is tenable or not. The state government, too, is not divulging much. The clock is ticking for the former royals. ■

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE An alleged scam compound in Myawaddy, located next to the Moei river on the Myanmar-Thailand border; (bottom-right) Raushan Ali of Bihar's Gopalganj district, whose son Wahid is trapped at one such fraud factory



THE BIG STORY DIGITAL CRIME

RESCUING THE CYBER SLAVES

LURED BY PROMISES OF LUCRATIVE JOBS, INDIAN YOUTHS ARE BEING TRAFFICKED TO SCAM COMPOUNDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND FORCED INTO DUPING PEOPLE BACK HOME. A CONCERTED EFFORT IS NEEDED TO DISMANTLE THIS MODERN-DAY SLAVERY NETWORK

By AMITABH SRIVASTAVA



\$37

BILLION

ESTIMATED AMOUNT RAISED IN BY SCAM SYNDICATES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN 2023, AS PER UN

29,466

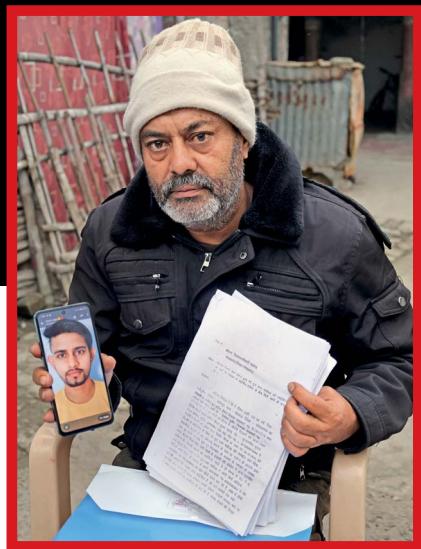
NUMBER OF INDIANS

WHO WENT MISSING AFTER TRAVELLING TO CAMBODIA, THAILAND, MYANMAR AND VIETNAM ON VISITOR VISAS FROM JAN. 2022 TO MAY 2024

3,111

UNREGISTERED AGENTS

NOTIFIED BY THE MEA ON ITS eMIGRATE PORTAL—TO WARN THOSE SEEKING OVERSEAS JOBS—TILL DEC. 2024



RANJAN RAHI

In

a modest home at Fatehpur village in Bihar's Gopalganj district, 52-year-old Raushan Ali sits distraught. His 23-year-old son, Wahid, and nephew, Saud, 28, are trapped in Myanmar's lawless Myawaddy region. Lured by the promise of data entry jobs in Thailand that they were told would pay Rs 1 lakh a month, they were instead trafficked across the border and forced into cybercrime at a fraudulent call centre.

In a shaky video sent home, Wahid pans the camera across their grim reality—clothes strung up to dry, a makeshift curtain shielding the room, and dense forest beyond the compound walls. His voice trembles: "We're forced to work in a scam call centre. Armed guards watch us. If we refuse, they threaten to shoot. Seventeen-hour shifts, no rest, no holidays. And to leave, they demand \$7,000 (Rs 6 lakh) ransom. Impossible!"

It was their maternal uncle who had introduced Wahid and Saud to a Dubai-based agent. Having pooled Rs 2.5 lakh, they finally left for Thailand

in October 2024, hoping for a better future. But on reaching there, they were smuggled across the Moei river into Myanmar, entering a war-torn region notorious for sprawling scam compounds where powerful syndicates operate with impunity. For Raushan Ali, a driver, the nightmare is endless. "I've emailed the Indian Embassy, paid Rs 1.2 lakh more to the Dubai agent, and filed a police complaint.... My son begs for help, and we are powerless."

Sadly, their plight is far from unique.

A United Nations (UN) report from October 2024 reveals that organised crime syndicates are trafficking thousands of young men and women, luring them with fake job offers, often through social media, before coercing them into working at illegal scam compounds. Initially concentrated in Cambodia, these cyber slavery hubs have proliferated in Laos and Myanmar, where criminal networks exploit casino infrastructure, special economic zones and weak law enforcement to run their operations. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), finan-

during which the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), a division of the MHA, noted a significant rise in cybercrimes originating from Southeast Asia. Bihar's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) alone has identified 374 individuals who went missing after travelling to Southeast Asian countries on tourist visas. "Many of them have been coerced into working in cybercrime," an EOW officer told INDIA TODAY. The agency has meticulously verified this list and interviewed 69 men who managed to escape, often after their families were forced to pay ransom for their release.

RANJAN RAHI



"The mission was explicit: target Indian nationals and systematically swindle them. Refusal invited severe consequences"

-SHUBHAM KUMAR, 28-year-old
Bihar native who was trapped at a scam compound in Cambodia

cial losses from scams in Southeast Asia reached between \$18 billion (Rs 1.6 lakh crore) and \$37 billion (Rs 3.2 lakh crore) in 2023, much of it linked to organised crime in these three countries.

These operations follow a common playbook: trafficked individuals are forced to defraud people using advanced tools like AI-driven face-swapping and voice replication. The crisis spans a global scale—victims are recruited from Asia, Africa and South America, while the digital scams target populations in Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania.

INDIA'S BIG CONCERN

India, too, has found itself at the receiving end of this disturbing trend. According to data compiled by the Bureau of Immigration in the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) last year, 29,466 Indians who had travelled on visitor visas to Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia between January 2022 and May 2024 never returned. This was also the period

On February 13, Kirti Vardhan Singh, minister of state for external affairs, acknowledged the issue in response to a Rajya Sabha query. Emphasising that the government "accords utmost priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indian nationals proceeding for employment abroad", he said that 3,111 unregistered domestic agents have been notified on the ministry's eMigrate portal—meant for overseas jobs—till December 2024. While the precise number of Indian victims remains unclear, the nation's diplomatic missions in Southeast Asia have successfully extracted at least 1,091 citizens from Cambodia, 770 from Laos and 497 from Myanmar in the past three years. In one of the latest transnational efforts in mid-February, 250 such people from 20 countries, including 23 from the Indian subcontinent, were brought to Thailand after they were released by an ethnic armed group in Myanmar.

Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, former Indian ambassador to Myanmar,

THE VICIOUS JOB CON

The line between perpetrators and victims of online frauds grows thin as criminal syndicates exploit vulnerable populations, turning job-seeking youths into cyber slaves

MODUS OPERANDI

How victims are tricked



Fake Job Offers
Ads on Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp or local fraudulent agents promise high-paying IT or customer service jobs in Southeast Asia



Visa & Travel Arranged
Scammers offer flights, accommodation and work permits to make the job seem legitimate

highlights how the insurgency-ridden situation in Myanmar has complicated India's efforts to rescue its stranded citizens. "The Myawaddy region is under the control of the Border Guarding Forces, comprising former insurgent groups," he says. "At some point, these groups were co-opted by the government and became an affiliate of the state apparatus. Today, the scam centres function under their patronage, which is why such operations have proliferated along the borders."

HUBS OF CYBER SLAVERY

Compounds where trafficked workers are forced into online fraud have mushroomed in Southeast Asia

MYANMAR

Borderlands controlled by criminal gangs, who run scam hubs such as **Myawaddy** on the border with Thailand

CAMBODIA

Scam compounds in **Sihanoukville** and other regions operate with impunity

LAOS

Golden Triangle SEZ in **Bokeo** province houses large-scale scam operations

THAILAND

Many victims are trafficked via Thailand to reach scam compounds in neighbouring countries

WHAT INDIA IS DOING TO SAVE ITS CITIZENS

Rescue Operations

Indian embassies have helped rescue over 2,300 trafficked citizens from scam compounds in last three years. But the government does not know how many are still trapped



Nationwide Crackdown

Since May 2024, the NIA has carried out over 40 raids across multiple states, arresting 11 key operatives and filing at least four chargesheets against individuals suspected of luring victims with fraudulent overseas job offers



Visa Screening

Stricter verification of job-related visa applications to high-risk countries



Public Awareness

Government campaigns to educate job seekers about such global frauds, warnings issued on social media platforms



Bait & Switch

Upon arrival, passports are confiscated and victims are moved to 'fraud factories', forced into cyber scams instead of real jobs



Threats & Violence

Those who resist are beaten, starved, kept in isolation or even sold to other scam operations



Ransom Demands

As a last resort, families are pressured to pay huge sums for the release of their loved ones



THE LUCKY FEW

A group of trafficked Indians brought back from Cambodia at the Visakhapatnam airport in May 2024

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

THE HUMAN COST

Those who have made it back consider themselves lucky, yet they remain haunted by their ordeals. Take the case of Shubham Kumar, 28, from Hathua Bazar in Gopalganj, who was deceived by a trusted acquaintance—his friend's father. Promised a salary of Rs 1 lakh per month in Cambodia, Shubham paid Rs 1.5 lakh commission upfront. In November 2023, he took off from Kolkata, travelling to Ho Chi

Minh City in Vietnam on a tourist visa. Upon arrival, his cash and passport were confiscated and he was handed over to a Chinese syndicate, known as the DG Group, based in Cambodia's Sihanoukville—a city now synonymous with cyber slavery.

Here, Shubham encountered individuals from multiple nationalities, all first trained in the "art of deception" and then coerced into conducting meticulously orchestrated online

scams—often working in gruelling 12-16 hours shifts. "The mission was explicit: target Indian nationals and systematically swindle them," recalls Shubham. The criminal syndicates employed a vast array of schemes to fleece victims, from romance fraud and fictitious investment opportunities to fraudulent e-commerce ventures. Among these, investment scams proved to be the most effective. Initial investments yielded genuine returns,

fostering trust and confidence. Once victims felt secure, they invested larger sums—only to be systematically defrauded in a process chillingly known as ‘pig butchering’, where the target is ‘fattened’ with false success before being financially ‘slaughtered’.

Shubham's specific role was to lure individuals into such fraudulent investment ventures. When he refused, he was subjected to confinement, beatings and electrocution. “I met hundreds of Indians, including those from my home state, alongside Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans. Most complied under duress; a handful, however, became willing enforcers of the criminal enterprise. We were housed in fortified compounds, enclosed by towering walls crowned with spiked fences. Escape was unthinkable.” After days of torture, Shubham's family paid Rs 2 lakh for his release. On December 25, 2023, he returned to India and filed a complaint against his friend's father and other perpetrators. Shubham's story is one of the few with a happy ending. Many remain trapped, their families navigating an endless maze of officials and intermediaries, searching for a lifeline that may never come.

THE NIA CRACKDOWN

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which is spearheading India's efforts to dismantle this transnational trafficking network, has intensified its crackdown since May 2024. That month, the agency arrested five individuals, a Gopalganj native among them, in coordinated raids across six states in collaboration with local police forces. By June, the agency had filed chargesheets against five people, including two foreign nationals, for targeting Indian youths proficient in English and computer skills. In July, four key suspects were held in Delhi in a related case of human trafficking and cyber fraud linked to Laos and other Southeast Asian nations. The crackdown escalated further in November, with extensive searches targeting travel agents in Bihar,

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra and Punjab.

In December, the agency achieved a significant breakthrough, apprehending Kamran Haider—alleged linchpin of the cyber slavery syndicate—who carried a cash reward of Rs 2 lakh. Haider, who operated under the guise of a consultancy firm, had been instrumental in arranging flight tickets and facilitating illegal border crossings for trafficked youth. Earlier, in September, the NIA



“India must exert diplomatic pressure on the Myanmar and Thai governments to crack down on these illegal operations. Domestically, immigration authorities need to adopt stricter scrutiny”

-GAUTAM MUKHOPADHYAYA
Former Indian ambassador to Myanmar

had charge-sheeted Sudarshan Darade, CEO of a Laos-based firm, which masquerading as an employment agency was allegedly trafficking gullible Indian youths to the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Laos via Bangkok. Upon arrival, they were forced to participate in cryptocurrency fraud.

With the NIA investigation illuminating the sheer scale and brutality of this modern-day slavery, the urgent need for global cooperation, stricter enforcement and greater public awareness has never been more

evident. On its part, the Indian government has intensified targeted awareness campaigns. Initiatives like SMS alerts, radio campaigns and digital safety weeks, in collaboration with state governments, aim to educate the public about scams, including fake job offers. Notices in newspapers and public spaces further warn citizens.

THE WAY AHEAD

However, challenges persist, particularly in smaller towns like those in Bihar, where unregistered agents facilitate human trafficking, fuelled by high demand for overseas jobs and a lack of strict regulations. The NIA may have made some strides in dismantling such domestic networks, but it has no direct mandate to free those already trapped. Securing their release is a long and arduous process that falls on India's diplomatic channels, requiring backdoor negotiations and sustained efforts. The delays and lack in cooperation have only allowed these scams to continue adapting and evolving.

Mukhopadhyaya underscores the need for a comprehensive strategy to tackle the crisis. “India must exert diplomatic pressure on the Myanmar authorities to crack down on these illegal operations,” he says. “It's equally important to put pressure on the Thai government, as these activities extend across their borders. Domestically, immigration authorities need to adopt stricter scrutiny—thoroughly questioning individuals travelling to these regions and encouraging them to verify the job offers.”

Meanwhile, for those still trapped, like Wahid and Saud, each day deepens their despair, their fates hanging on the whims of the captors. Even for those who return, like Shubham, freedom comes at a cost. The trauma of their ordeal is compounded by financial devastation—savings drained, debts piled high and stability sacrificed to secure their release. The scars of this nightmare extend far beyond the compounds in Myawaddy, haunting homes, futures, and the fragile dreams of those who sought a better life. ■

संकल्प से



38वें राष्ट्रीय खेल
उत्तराखण्ड 25

संकल्प से शिखर तक
26 नवंबर से 14 दिसंबर 2023



Grand Conclusion of the 38th National Games

Uttarakhand gains recognition not only as the land of gods but also as the land of sports:

Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Successful hosting of the National Games marks the beginning of new opportunities and hopes in Uttarakhand:

CM Pushkar Singh Dhami, Chief Minister Uttarakhand

The closing ceremony of the 38th National Games was held at the International Sports Stadium, Golapar, Haldwani, in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami. Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha officially declared the conclusion of the 38th National Games. On this occasion, the Union Home Minister honored the top three teams—Services, Maharashtra, and Haryana.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah saluted the deities of Uttarakhand's four holy shrines and stated that Chief Minister Dhami has successfully developed sports infrastructure in every district of the state. He acknowledged that under Dhami's leadership, Uttarakhand has risen from the 25th to the 7th position on the national sports map. The state's winning athletes have transformed the land of gods into a land of sports.

Praising the organizing committee and sports bodies of Uttarakhand, Shah said that the state has been widely appreciated across the country for its exceptional arrangements for the National Games. Despite geographical challenges, Uttarakhand successfully hosted the event under the leadership of CM Dhami.

Shah noted that under CM Dhami's leadership, the 38th National Games implemented eco-friendly practices. Trees were planted in honor of the athletes, and several national records were set during the event, raising hopes for India's success

in international competitions. He announced that the National Games torch would now pass from Uttarakhand to Meghalaya,

Shah credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for fostering a positive sporting environment in India. He highlighted the government's efforts in developing sports infrastructure, providing coaching, and ensuring a transparent selection process, which has enhanced India's global sports reputation. He affirmed that India's sporting future is bright and that new records will be set continuously. Under the "Fit India" and "Khelo India" initiatives, PM Modi has encouraged youth to actively participate in sports, teaching them resilience and determination.



Shah emphasized that success in sports comes not just from physical ability but also from determination and perseverance. Athletes can achieve their goals through relentless effort. He mentioned that PM Modi has taken significant steps to promote youth in sports, leading athletes to regard him as their "sports companion." He noted that India's sports budget has increased from ₹800 crores in 2014 to ₹3,800 crores for 2025-26, enabling better sports infrastructure and fostering a hunger for victory.

CM Pushkar Singh Dhami remarked that Uttarakhand received PM Modi's blessings at the inauguration of the National Games, and now, at the closing ceremony, they were honored by the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He expressed pride in Uttarakhand hosting the National Games for the first time in its silver jubilee year. Several national records were set, and many emerging champions showcased their potential for future international competitions.

For the first time, traditional sports like yoga and Mallakhamb were included in the National Games. Additionally, a world record was set by organizing a nighttime river rafting competition.

CM Dhami highlighted that the National Games in Uttarakhand were themed as "Green Games," promoting minimal plastic use and utilizing solar energy. The medals were made from e-waste, and sports kits were crafted from recycled materials. A 2.77-hectare "Sports Forest" was established, where Rudraksha trees were planted in the name of medal-winning athletes.

The competitions were held across both urban and remote areas, including Dehradun, Haridwar, Rudrapur, Haldwani, Rishikesh, Almora, Pithoragarh, and Tehri. Even a small town like Chakarpur hosted a major event. Water sports were conducted in high-altitude lakes and rivers of Uttarakhand. Instead of temporary arrangements, permanent sports infrastructure was developed at various locations.

CM Dhami proudly announced that Uttarakhand won a record 103 medals, including 24 golds, at the National Games. He expressed confidence that this achievement would inspire young athletes. He assured that Uttarakhand followed the ancient tradition of "Atithi Devo Bhava" (Guests are God) by ensuring the comfort and convenience of visiting athletes and support staff, hoping they would return with their families to experience the state's natural beauty.

He emphasized that the closing of the National Games is not an end but a new beginning of opportunities, aspirations, and commitments. CM Dhami thanked PM Modi and Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya for entrusting Uttarakhand with the responsibility of hosting the National Games. He also expressed gratitude to the Indian Olympic Association, Uttarakhand Olympic Association, the sports department, and all volunteers for their contributions. He extended best wishes to Meghalaya for the successful hosting of the 39th National Games.

SPECIAL REPORT

WILD ANIMAL
ATTACKS

THE NEW CONFLICT ZONES

**LOSS OF HABITAT HAS LED TO AN ALARMING RISE IN INCIDENTS
OF HUMAN-ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS—AND CASUALTIES—with
EVEN URBAN AREAS NOT IMMUNE TO THE THREAT**

By Jumana Shah

AP

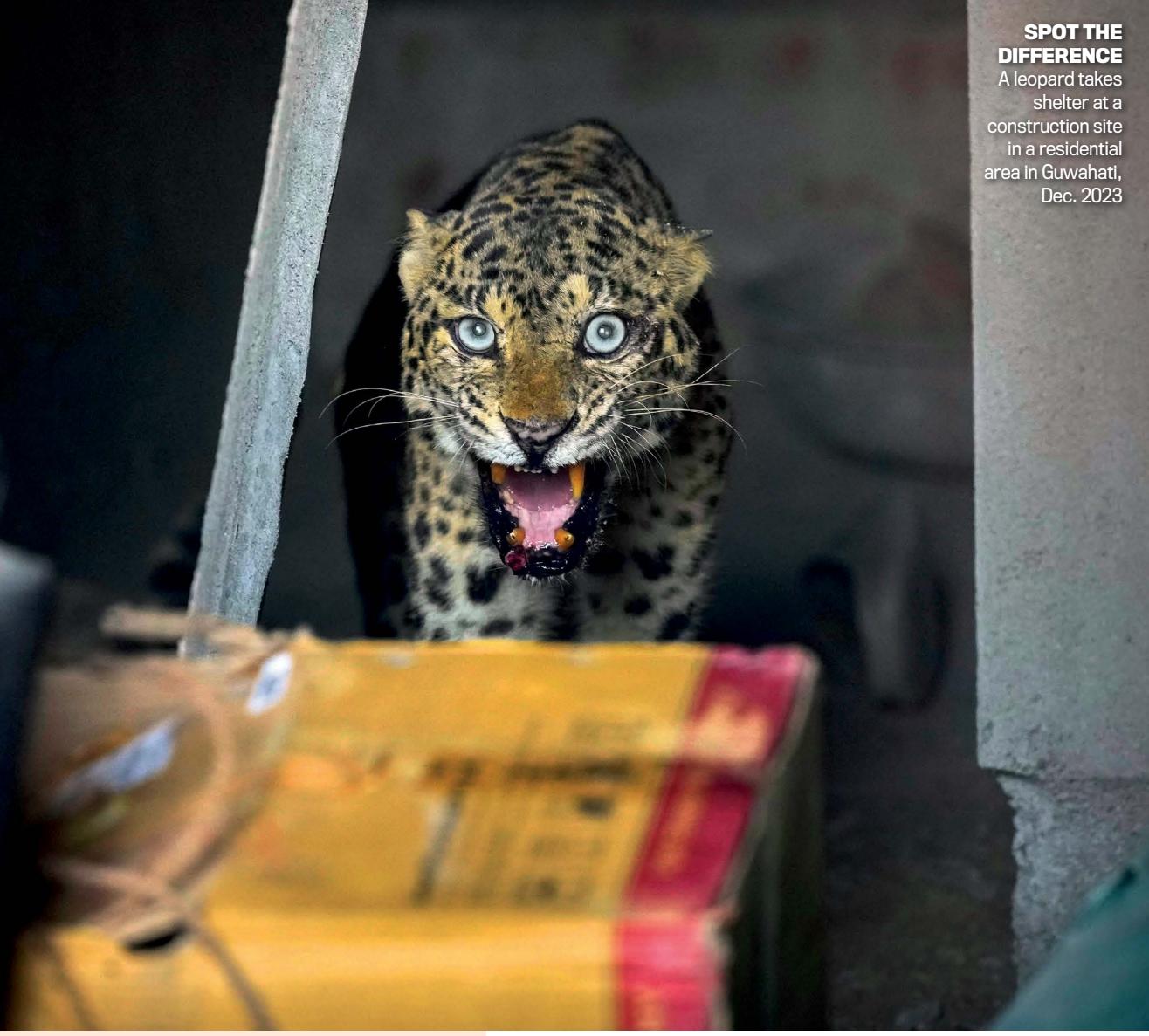
T

he stories pounce at you suddenly, from the edges of our dense forests of news. But with such regularity that we have ceased to care, and accept it as a fact of life, like pollution. Still, most of these are rather odd happenings, come to

think of it. Tiger sightings—not on safaris but by the roadside. Like the ‘urban tigers of Bhopal’, who have claimed their piece of real estate around the open forests near Kaliasot Dam, creating panic on the highways just 10 km out of town. With big cats in such proximity to humankind, the inevitable happens. And the rare ones drawn to human flesh get pride of place. ‘Man-eater’ is a misnomer—the latest victim, consigned to the headlines on January 24 in Kerala’s Wayanad, was a 47-year-old tribal woman on her way to a coffee estate. Since Wayanad is a hotspot in

both ecological and political senses, the event raised a bit of dust. After local protests, orders went out to get the errant tiger, but it died on its own—its dietary choice would imply it was already ailing. Not to miss the woods for the trees, we must go for the big picture. Patterns that recur with disturbingly increasing frequency, each built out of individual tragedy, for both human and animal. But also entirely novel patterns.

The Western Ghats, where human footprints have for decades trespassed on the most pristine tropical rainforests India possesses, deliver a buzzing news ticker when it comes to what’s inadequately described as ‘human-animal conflict’. On February 4, a 77-year-old German tourist on a motorbike rode out his luck after catching a sight to die for: a wild tusker in a bad mood at Tiger Valley, in Coimbatore’s Valparai Range. Across the border, just between February 7-11, Wayanad and Idukki accounted for four human lives in separate wild tusker attacks. The actors and stage props were roughly similar: tribals, wildlife enthusiasts, tea plantations or villages on the border of



THE BODY COUNT

■ A tribal woman was attacked and killed by a tiger in Wayanad on January 24, sparking protests. The 'man-eater' was later found dead

■ In one week in early February, encounters with wild elephants left five people dead in Kerala-Tamil Nadu's ghats section

■ Tamil Nadu alone lost 80 lives to wild animal attacks in 2024-25. The state's 4,235 crop damage incidents and 259 livestock deaths are also typical for the forested trijunction of TN, Kerala and Karnataka

■ Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich district saw several villages terrorised by wolf attacks in 2024, killing 10 and leaving over 30 injured; a large area around MP's Khandwa and Sehore towns saw jackal attacks

■ Kerala reported 11 deaths in 2023-24 and eight in 2024-25 owing to wild boar attacks

■ Maharashtra had an astounding 117 human deaths due to tiger attacks in 2022 and '23, mostly around Tadoba

jungles, with mountain streams flowing past. Tamil Nadu has had 80 human deaths in 2024-25 already, the highest in five fiscal years, in encounters with wildlife; not counting 4,235 incidents of crop damage, 259 livestock deaths. Imagine each number as a moment of terror unfolding in real life, and you get a measure of just how and how much human economies are encroaching on the jungle all over India. And producing new interactions.

But that common framing misses a new and unpredictable pattern, one that may seem nightmarish at first. Call it a kind of animal revanchism: reclaiming of old territory, which may include long-urbanised spaces. Between March and September 2024, a pack of wolves set upon humans, mostly children, in Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich town. Toll: 10 killed, over 30 injured. As the attacks intensified, six wolves were captured. Around the same time, Madhya Pradesh towns like Salkanpur, Khandwa and Sehore, just outside Bhopal—a large area with a radius of 200 km—came alive with jackal attacks. The distinguishing feature: increasing



RAJAN JOSHI

EVENING WALKERS A wild elephant goes shopping for trouble in a Guwahati market; a lioness in Amreli, Gujarat

DEADLY ENCOUNTERS

BHOPAL

'Urban tigers of Bhopal' have made open forests of Kaliasot dam their home

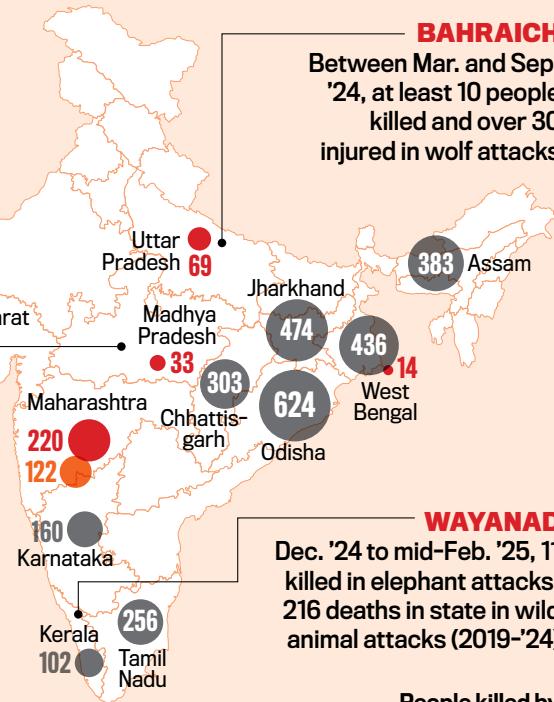
AMRELI

At least one lion pride have made Pipavav Port their home. Over three dozen people killed in Gujarat in lion/leopard attacks (2021-'24)

Source: MoEFCC data

BAHRAICH

Between Mar. and Sep. '24, at least 10 people killed and over 30 injured in wolf attacks



WAYANAD

Dec. '24 to mid-Feb. '25, 11 killed in elephant attacks; 216 deaths in state in wild animal attacks (2019-'24)

● Elephant ● Tiger ● Leopard
between 2019-'24

animal familiarity with human habitats, including urban and peri-urban zones. Recently, the attention of biologists has been drawn to videos of wild elephants waiting calmly for vehicles to pass before crossing a highway near the Raimona National Park in Assam. An odd turn, for all behavioural studies have hitherto marked elephants as immensely human-shy creatures, not exactly obedient citizens with civic sense. And at least one pride of Asiatic lions is known to jay-walk around highways, jetties and railway yards around Gujarat's Pipavav Port, leisurely inspecting the gigantic containers—on odd occasions, a lioness even rests with her cubs in an open container.

For centuries, human beings have invaded the habitats of the wild, felling forests for timber, clearing thick canopies for farmlands and urban sprawls; mined the earth for minerals and oil; broken mountains for quarries and highways; invaded the seas with trawlers, toxic discharges and what have you. The 2024 report of Living Planet, WWF, reveals an average 73 per cent decline, between 1970 and 2020, in the population sizes of over 5,000 vertebrate species. Several have perished. But many more have survived—and adapted. It's a large-scale behavioural shift where, as scientists are observing, they are increasingly shedding their shy, reclusive nature, which entails aggression upon encounter. Instead, they are showing up at our doorstep—looking for food, shelter and safe

breeding spots. With humankind pretty much colonising all of the planet, scientists are even speaking of a new phase of animal evolution. The old abhorrence of our two-legged presence may be gradually, grudgingly perhaps, yielding to coexistence. Aritra Kshettry, National Lead for Elephant Conservation, WWF-India, calls it "co-adaptation between humans and non-humans in shared spaces". While reptiles, birds, primates and small mammals were always known to thrive in urban spaces, "even large mammals like leopards, elephants and tigers have adapted to living in peri-urban spaces", he says.

Is it good news? No. The answer is deeply layered and complicated. A quick primer. Scientists classify wild species into two: 'K-selected' and 'R-selected'. The first are large, produce fewer offspring, and are prone to extinction if their ecosystems change. Exhibit A: elephants, whales. 'R-selected' species birth more progeny, and more often. As long as they get

food and undisturbed space to rest and reproduce, they will adapt and survive. The leopard, a skulking presence just off our city limits, is such a versatile big cat. Its broad diet spectrum has enabled this shy, elusive feline to survive around densely populated zones such as Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru and Shimla. What the recent incidents and studies demonstrate is that the R-selected fauna are really reclaiming territory that's now human habitation—paradoxically, owing to wildlife conservation efforts.

The K-selected species face more un-

**SCIENTISTS SEE
A LARGE-SCALE
BEHAVIOURAL SHIFT
WHERE EVEN BIG
FAUNA ARE
SHEDDING THEIR
SHY, RECLUSIVE
NATURE AND EVOLVING
MODES OF CO-EXISTENCE**

certainty. Don't count Assam's civic-minded elephants as a case of permanent adaptation. "They have no choice," says Y.V. Jhala, wildlife biologist and former dean of Wildlife Institute of India. "Elephants live long lives, say 70 years. A habitat change won't kill the present generation. There will be friction but it will adapt and survive, even eating crops to stave off starvation. But the next generation will not flourish," he says. It's an impending tragedy. WWF estimates that no more than 15 per cent of the historical roaming range of Asia's elephants exists today. Consequently, 80 per cent of them live outside protected areas. In India, a mid-2023 estimate put their numbers at 30,000. But the findings of the first scientific elephant census, wrapped up by October 2024, have been mysteriously kept under wraps by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). The elephant in the room, perhaps?

Tigers, meanwhile, are a famous conservation success story: a healthy annual population growth rate of 6 per cent, pugmarks across India, poaching largely controlled. But, while 65 per cent of India's tigers are ordinarily resident in reserves, a 2020 study found nearly 60 per cent of their habitat to be less than five kilometres from a road, which drives down their prey base by over 20 per cent. In fact, extirpated from over 90 per cent of their historical range, today, as per Jhala's latest study published in the *Science* journal in February 2025, tigers co-exist with 66 million people in India. Are they getting 'tolerant' of human presence? "Big cats are adaptable. Tigers are being found living amidst humans, at low densities. Lions are found even at high densities," says Jhala. Another conservationist names the phenomenon, saying India's wild Asiatic lions are actually not 'wild' anymore. Just one gene pool, zooted into just one landscape, with overarching human presence in and around, the Asiatic lion has embarked on an evolution bus that has made them relatively docile, to the point of being dependent on human presence. A study co-authored by Jhala, published in *Conservation Biology* in November 2024, records the 'taming' of Asiatic lions. "Locals offer their livestock as bait to conduct illegal lion shows," it says. The government compensates them for the loss of livestock, and the tourism money is good.

Everyone heard of the vulture's shocking drop from a few millions in the early '90s to the verge of extinction. But the easy urbanisation of its close cousin, the black kite, has fascinated researchers. Nishant Kumar of the Wildlife Institute of India

has studied a dense population of the Black Kite Milvus breeding within Delhi. "The species managed to exploit an extreme urban environment, customising their behaviour to human behaviour. Black kite populations, for instance, were stable over five decades in Muslim settlements where feeding meat was a religious ritual. Hence, rather than a nuisance to avoid, humans were a keenly targeted foraging resource," Kumar says. They dwindled in tree-less areas with no feed, though. Even some of the lakhs of migratory birds that arrive in India in winter are showing signs of adaptation. Among them, the Greater and Lesser flamingos are tagged as about the most shy. But in 2021, behind Bhavnagar airport, Lesser Flamingos made a nesting attempt in a shallow wetland by the highway, with vehicles passing by. An attempt that's given hope to conservationists. This was 300 km away from its traditional nesting

grounds—"itself a record, except for a 1994 sighting in Porbandar", say researchers Kandarp and Prashant Andharia.



AT HOME A flock of Lesser Flamingos in Surat

EVEN SOME OF THE LAKHS OF MIGRATORY BIRDS THAT ARRIVE IN INDIA EVERY WINTER ARE SHOWING SIGNS OF ADAPTATION

A NEW EVOLUTION?

Are we then looking at a phase of coexistence? "Countries like India cannot really stop human-wildlife conflict. Barring some places, wildlife is thriving—because of the resources humans have made available," says conservation biologist Abi Tamim Vanak of ATREE. "Jackals and jungle cats thrive in agricultural fields; they feed on poultry. Scavengers like hyenas, wolves and leopards throng on human refuse. They appear to have adapted. They have no choice."

Wildlife has always lived with humans in rural areas. The coexistence of humans and leopards in Jawai, Pali district of Rajasthan, is part of local folklore. They live in caves in the rocky scrub forests, stroll around temples and highways, without any incidents of human attacks.

Of course, expecting such idyllic charm across the board is too preposterous an idea. The present moment is decidedly not one of utopia but of conflict, with fatalities on both sides. For the fauna, there's accidental mortality due to electrocution, road and rail collisions—not to speak of deliberate killings by poisoning, lynching and even crude bombs, the last being Kerala's answer to wild boars. Disease transmission from livestock and dogs to wildlife is another threat. The losses faced by human communities, often for no fault of theirs, adds a razor's edge to the equation. But if the animals are adapting, a quotient of evolution in human thinking too is warranted, especially at policy levels. The answer may lie in India's old cultural ethos. ■

SARBARANANDA SONOWAL

Union Minister of Ports,
Shipping and Waterways

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ The Sagarmala Programme is more than a port development initiative—it is driving economic expansion by integrating industrial clusters, economic zones
- ▶ With 49 per cent government participation in the Maritime Development Fund, India is inviting global investors to accelerate port modernisation
- ▶ Plans to unify major rivers like the Ganga and Brahmaputra into an inland water transport network will bring economic benefits to remote areas
- ▶ Drawing on India's maritime legacy, the government has positioned port development as a step towards reclaiming India's status as a global shipping leader



PUTTING INDIA ON FAST TRACK

The India Today Infrastructure Conclave deliberated on India's achievements in various sectors and looked at the challenges ahead, with the spotlight on aviation, ports, sustainable infrastructure and financing

Photographs by RAJWANT RAWAT

K. RAMMOHAN NAIDU

Union Minister of Civil Aviation



KEY TAKEAWAYS

► High airfares, price surges are sensitive issues—demand is greater than available aircraft. So once planes are increased, prices will go down

► Delhi is to be an aviation hub—connected to important cities, following a hub and spoke model

► Digi Yatra has been a success; passports are being brought into it to make international travel easier

► More investors are being encouraged to enter the Flight Training Organisation sector

This year's edition of the India Today Infrastructure Conclave came at a time when the Modi government reiterated its commitment to infrastructure as a catalyst for Viksit Bharat by 2047. But the challenge, as usual, comes from implementation. Experts not only discussed the milestones

the country covered in its quest to boost infrastructure, but also the areas where we fell short and the remedies.

The tone for the conclave was set by Union civil aviation minister K. Rammohan Naidu, who highlighted the Centre's major reforms, ranging from developing aviation hubs—in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad—to digital technology that's made flying a lot easier. "We are up to the mark when it comes to Asian countries.... But by global standards, we have to make a lot more progress," he said.

Meanwhile, Pieter Elbers, CEO of IndiGo Airlines, out-

lined his vision for the airline. He said that international travel presented a great opportunity, and India needed to start building on that. On competition from Air India, Elbers said the country needed multiple airlines. "The issue is not, 'I have 400 and you have 200'. The issue is if you want to compete with them (international carriers), you need a global footprint. You need to partner with others.... Indigo is building that," he said.

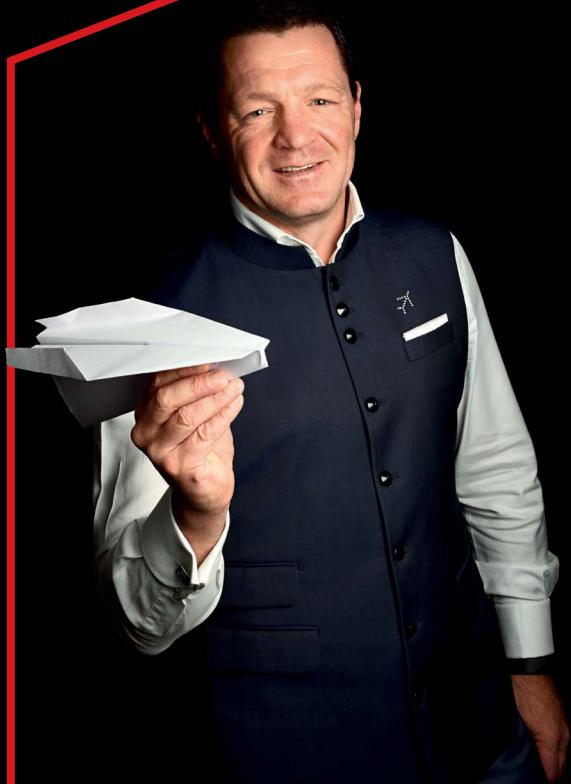
Sarbananda Sonowal, Union minister of ports, shipping and waterways, said Indian ports are competing with global leaders, with turnaround times surpassing Australia, the US and Germany. Modernisation through AI-driven logistics and digital integration is making them more competitive, he said.

Experts from the aviation and shipping sectors discussed specific issues. Other sessions on removing financial roadblocks, tenacity of India's growth story and the need to maintain sustainable infrastructure contributed to the comprehensive character of the conclave. ■ - M.G. Arun

T

INDIA'S EMERGENCE AS A GLOBAL AVIATION LEADER: ASPIRATIONS AND REALITIES

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



PIETER ELBERS CEO, IndiGo

“With 65 per cent of the world population living within a range of a 5-6 hour flight from India, there is an opportunity to start building on that”

“Confronted with a global supply chain challenge, IndiGo took mitigating measures like extending leases. Plus, new planes are coming in every week”

“I think 2025 is incredibly important for Indian aviation as Delhi and Mumbai are finally getting their second airports”

MAKING PORTS FUTURE READY: FUELING

P.L. HARANADH

Chairman,
Paradip Port Authority

“Ship-building is a \$150 billion market worldwide, with 64 million gross tonnes of capacity available. India's capacity is just 0.1 million gross tonnes. So there is a huge room to improve. Last year, Paradip port became the number one cargo handling port by clocking 145 million tonnes. This year, it will touch 150 million tonnes”



REMOVING THE FINANCIAL BARRIERS

A.R. SONI

Executive Vice President, L&T

“THE MODE OF FINANCING IS NOT THAT IMPORTANT, BUT WE HAVE TO DE-RISK THE PROJECTS. A LOT OF EFFORTS WERE PUT IN PLACE, YET WE NEED TO MAKE EFFORTS FOR RISK MITIGATION”



THE \$10 TRILLION INDIAN DREAM



DR MADHAIYAAN ANGAMUTHU

*Chairperson,
Visakhapatnam Port Authority*

“ Indian ports export 45 per cent of its cargo and import 55 per cent. That should be reversed for better value. To complement efforts in infrastructure, we need to give importance to ship building, ship repairing and ship recycling. For this, we need to improve maritime skill development”

IAL ROADBLOCKS



P.R. JAISHANKAR, MD, India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd

“ WE HAVE TO HAVE SEPARATE REGULATION FOR INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE. TODAY, INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS ARE REGULATED THE SAME WAY AS RETAIL NBFCS WHO HAVE UNSECURED RETAIL ASSETS”

FIRESIDE CHAT: INDIA'S GROWTH STORY-THE ESSENTIAL CHAPTERS



SHISHIR PRIYADARSHI
Chairman, Chintan Research Foundation

“ ONE THING IN OUR HANDS IN THE ECOSYSTEM GOVERNING GLOBAL COMPETITIVE MARKETS IS TO LOWER THE LOGISTICAL COST OF MANUFACTURING”



AKHILESH SRIVASTAVA
President, ITS India Forum

“ INDIA HAS DEVELOPED COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS LIKE DIGI YATRA. IT HAS GONE FROM A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER TO A DIGITAL PLATFORM PROVIDER”

FIRESIDE CHAT: THE NEXT INDUSTRIAL PUSH



RAJAT SAINI
CEO, NICDC

“ Approving 12 industrial parks with a cost outlay of Rs 28,000 crore last year in one go was a historic decision ”

CIVIL AVIATION: BUILDING WORLD CLASS AIRPORTS



AMBER DUBEY
Senior Advisor,
McKinsey & Company



KAPIL KAUL
Chief Executive
Officer and Direc-
tor, CAPA India



V.P. AGRAWAL
Former Chair-
man, Airports
Authority of India

“ GAGAN (GPS Aided GEO Augmented Navigation), created by AAI and ISRO, can take flying to places that do not have instrument landing systems and can also cut down flying time ”

“ Indian airport privatisation has been a successful story. Once you privatise, you can build world-class airports. The next step is to have one mission and one purpose, where the government will be involved ”

“ You can create a great airport infrastructure, but if it lies unutilised, it will be a waste of public money. The skill gap among airport staff also has to be effectively addressed ”

SUSTAINABLE INFRA, CLIMATE CHANGE AND FACTORING RISKS



JAGJEET SINGH SAREEN
Partner, Global Climate
Change, Dalberg Advisors

“ RESEARCH SHOWS CLIMATE RISKS LEADING TO DISASTERS WOULD CAUSE \$30 BILLION ANNUAL INFRASTRUCTURE LOSSES IN INDIA ”

RANJINI MUKHERJEE
Director, Research and Knowledge Management, CDRI

“ GLOBAL ASSET LEVEL LOSS DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE IS \$763 BILLION. BUT LOSS DUE TO DISRUPTION OF SERVICES IS YET TO BE ASSESSED ”

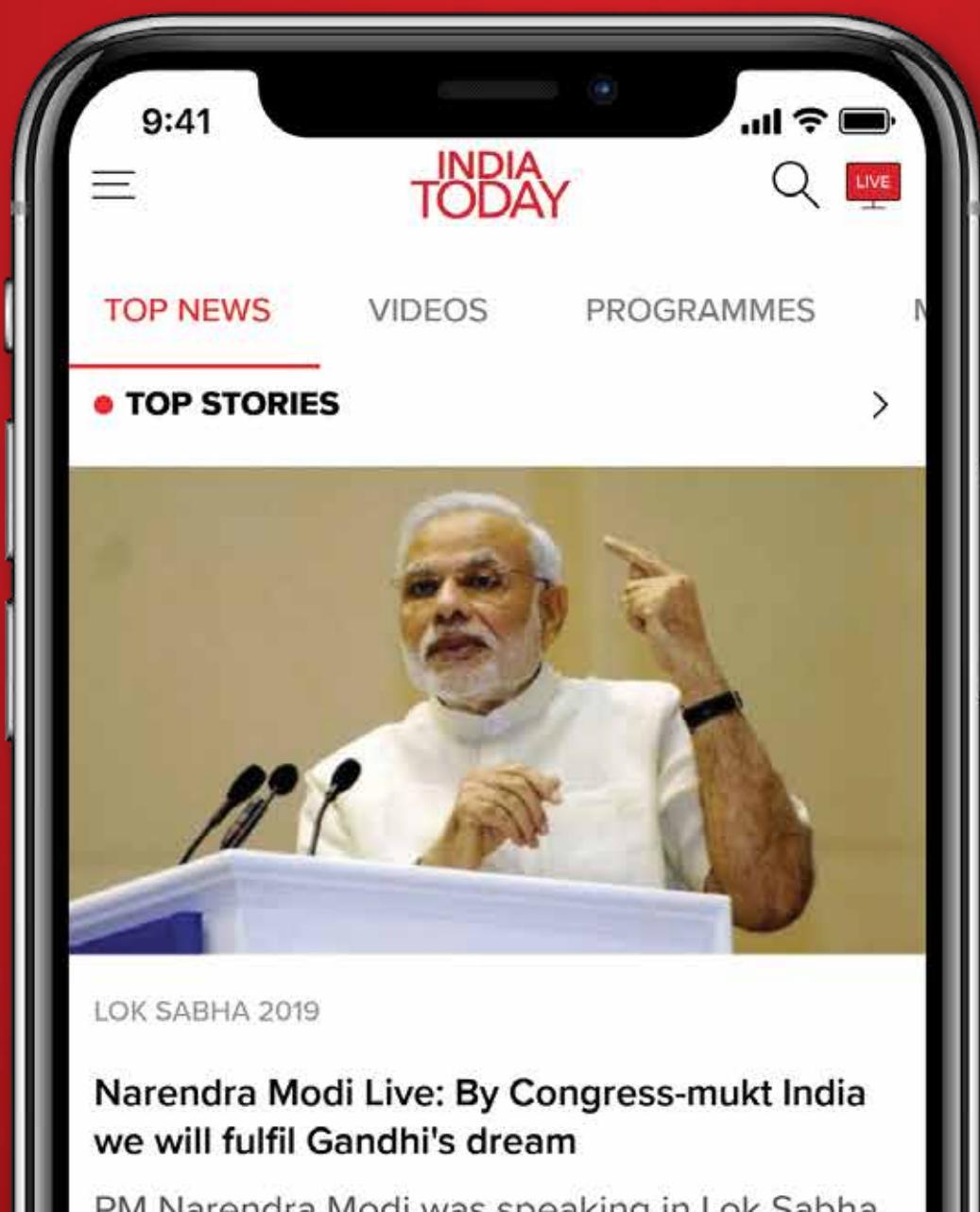
NEHA KUMAR
Head, South Asia Programme,
Climate Bonds

“ WE HAVE COME OUT WITH A CLIMATE BOND RESILIENCE TAXONOMY ACROSS SECTORS, INCLUDING INFRASTRUCTURE ”

INDIA
TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

JUST A TAP AWAY



DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

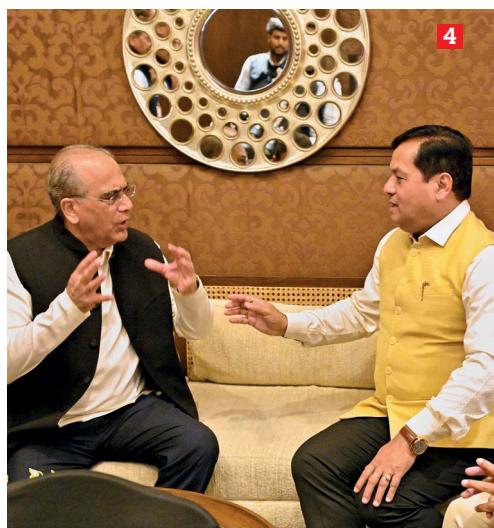
AVAILABLE ON





NEW BUILDING BLOCKS

UNION MINISTERS, TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERTS AND INDUSTRY LEADERS MADE THE INFRASTRUCTURE CONCLAVE A VIBRANT MEETING POINT OF OPINIONS



1. Union minister K. Rammohan Naidu with INDIA TODAY's Raj Chengappa and Avishek Ghosh Dastidar

2. (From left) Madhaiyaan Angamuthu, Union ministers K. Rammohan Naidu and Sarbananda Sonowal, and P.L. Haranadh (extreme right) having a chat during a break

3. (From left) Neha Kumar, Jagjit Singh Sareen and Ranjini Mukherjee

4. Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of India Today Group, Aroon Purie, with Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal

5. CEO of CAPA India Kapil Kaul with CEO of IndiGo, Pieter Elbers

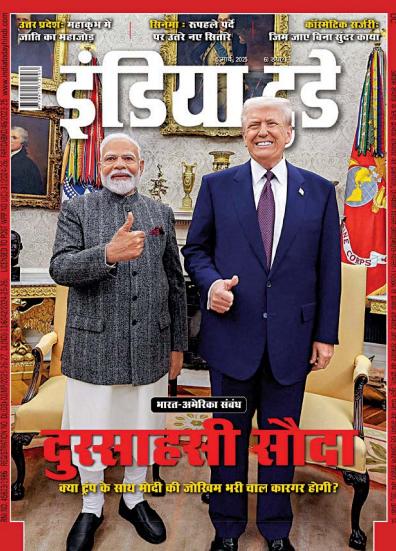
IndiaContent

**SEARCH FOR
EDITORIAL IMAGES
ENDS HERE**



इंडिया टुडे

देश की भाषा में देश की धड़कन



सबसे भरोसेमंद खोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

मध्य पर्व के दौरान में भारी रियायत मिली, अर्थव्यवस्था को ख्याप बढ़ाने की घुसाक
और जागरातयोग्य कई सुधार भी, लेकिन केवल यह के लिए भी योद्धा समझा
को इन्हें तेजी से लागू करना होगा। तभी बदेगी बात

हाँ! मैं इंडिया टुडे को सब्सक्राइब करना चाहता/चाहती हूँ

अपनी पसंद के सब्सक्रिप्शन को टिक करें और फॉर्म को इस पते पर भेज दें— वी केअर, लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लि. सी-९, सेक्टर-१०, नोएडा २०१३०१ (भारत)

टिक करें	अवधि	कुल अंक	कवर प्राइस (₹)	ऑफर प्राइस (₹)	प्लान	डिस्काउंट
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 वर्ष	52	3120	999	डिजिटल	68%
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 वर्ष	52	3120	2699	डिजिटल+प्रिंट	14%

कृपया फॉर्म को ब्लॉकलेटर में भरें

मैं चेक/डीडी जमा कर रहा/रही हूँ, जिसकी संख्या..... है और इसे दिनांक.....
को लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लिमिटेड के पक्ष में (बैंक का नाम)..... रुपये
की धनराशि (दिल्ली से बाहर के चेक के लिए ₹ 50 रुपये अतिरिक्त जोड़, समान मूल्य के
चेक मान्य नहीं होंगे) के लिए बनवाया गया है।

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहाँ स्कैन करें।

ऑफर के विषय में विशेष जानकारी के लिए निम्न माध्यमों से संपर्क भी कर सकते हैं

कॉल और Whatsapp के लिए
+91 8597778778

ईमेल भेजें
wecare@intoday.com

लॉग ऑन करें
subscriptions.intoday.in/intoday-hindi

BOMAN IRANI: GOING
BEHIND THE CAMERA
PG 54

BOOKS: RISE AND
FALL OF AN EMPIRE
PG 58

MUSICAL
THEATRE: GHOST
WHO SINGS PG 56

Q&A WITH
SINGER SHAAN
PG 60

LEISURE

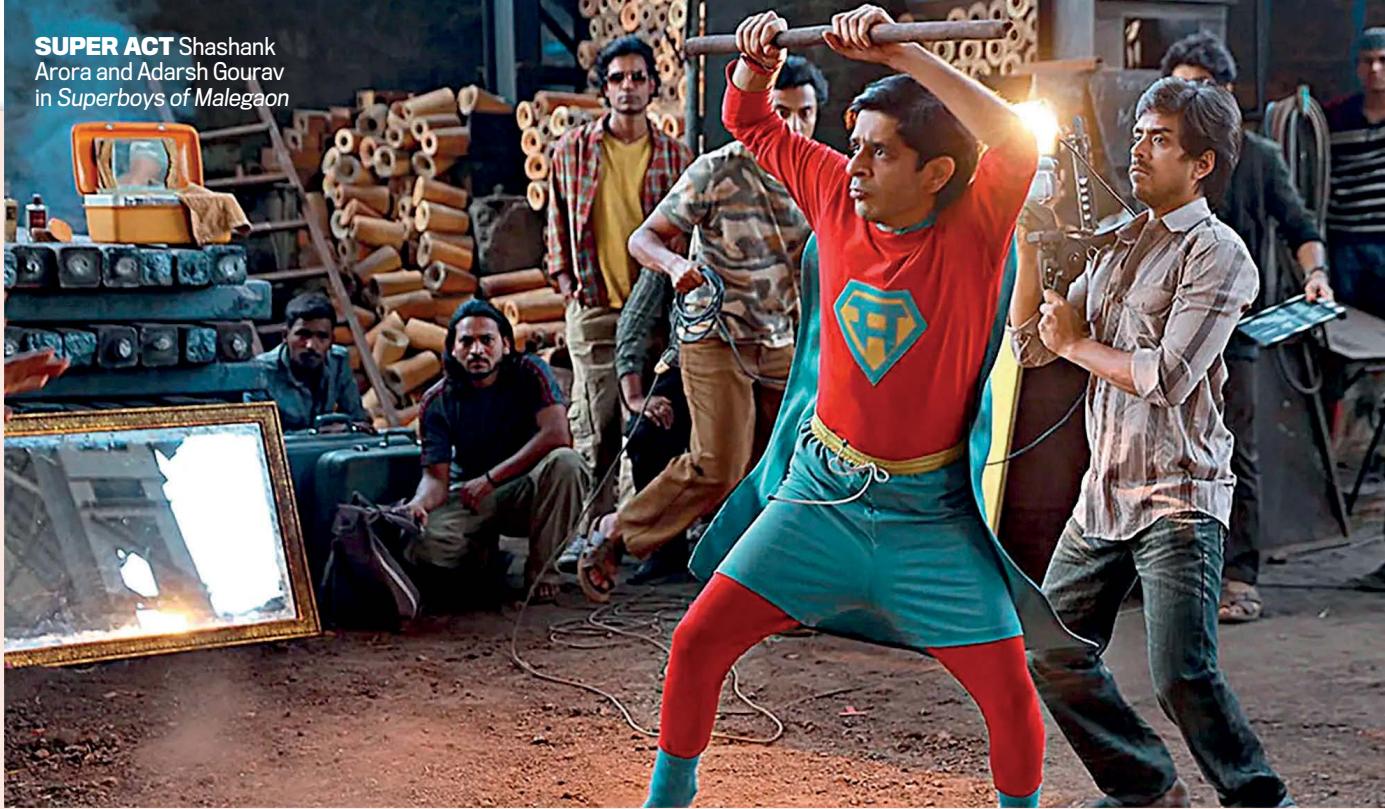


CINEMA

SMALL TOWN HEROES

Reema Kagti's *Superboys* of *Malegaon* is a tribute to filmmaker Shaikh Nasir and his wacky spoofs of Bollywood films

SUPER ACT Shashank Arora and Adarsh Gourav in *Superboys of Malegaon*



At

the Osian Film Festival in New Delhi in 2010, Zoya Akhtar had a fan moment of her own as she approached Shaikh Nasir, the Malegaon-based director of wacky spoof films like *Malegaon ke Sholay*, *Malegaon ka James Bond*, *Malegaon ke Shaan* and *Malegaon ka Superman*. It's the making of the latter which would be immortalised in Faiza Ahmed Khan's beloved documentary *Supermen of Malegaon*, which both Akhtar and Reema Kagti watched and loved. "When he met Zoya he was like 'I am a big fan of your father [screenwriter Javed Akhtar] and I have copied all his work,'" recalls Kagti with a smile. "As we started getting to know more about his family and friends, we realised there's a feature film in here." The result is *Superboys of Malegaon* featuring Adarsh Gourav as Nasir with Vineet Kumar Singh as the writer-friend Farogh Jafri and Shashank Arora as the actor-friend Shafique.

Kagti knew she wanted to be the one to direct it for she saw many parallels between her and Nasir. In her formative years spent in the small town of Digboi,

Assam, Kagti too would frequent small cinemas "to have a larger-than-life vicarious experience" and watched pirated VHS and VCDs to get access to a magical world. Her cinematic influences—Bruce Lee, Amitabh Bachchan, Charlie Chaplin—were the same as Nasir's. "I realised for a director, regardless of wherever you are functioning, there's always the hustle, the *jugaad*, the need to inspire and not order people around to rise to the occasion, and be a bit of a manipulator." What makes Shaikh's story incredible for Kagti is the purity of his pursuit and his decision to stay put in Malegaon which resulted in a parallel filmmaking industry blossoming. Or as Nasir proclaims in the film: "*Bambai ko idhar laana padega* [We will bring Mumbai here]."

Within Zoya-Reema's oeuvre which has resulted in features like *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* and *Dil Dhadakne Do*, *Superboys of Malegaon* stands closest to *Gully Boy* as it zooms in on a minority community on the fringes and one man's devotion to his craft against all odds. There's also some likeness to *Luck*

By Chance as here too there's a homage to cinema by shining a light on those who find ingenuity amidst adversities. More than anything though, the film is about how it takes a village to make a film—in Nasir's case most of the cast and crew are friends from diverse professions—a loom worker, a dry-fruits seller, a tea-stall owner and a photo-studio owner. Central to *Superboys...* are his late friends, Farogh and Shafique, also his biggest cheerleaders.

**WHAT MAKES
SHAIKH'S STORY
INCREDIBLE FOR
KAGTI IS THE
PURITY OF HIS
PURSUIT AND HIS
DECISION TO STAY
PUT IN MALEGAON**

With *Superboys...*, Reema-Zoya's production banner, Tiger Baby, continues on its quest to broaden their worldview by roping in new writers. In this case, they both settled on stand-up comic-author-lyricist-screenwriter Varun Grover. "We were lucky he was free to do it," adds Kagti. Grover travelled to Malegaon to research the film and spent time talking to those involved in its industry. He also found a treasure trove of information courtesy Nasir himself, who has meticulously assembled an archive documenting his own life. "He has maintained two to three sets of newspaper clippings. If there was a picnic

A TAUT DRAMA

Baksho Bondi was a cathartic experience for husband-wife director duo **Tanushree Das** and **Saumyananda Sahi** as well as for Tillotama Shome who stars in it

Cinema for husband-wife director duo Tanushree Das and Saumyananda Sahi is a therapeutic exercise. Their debut feature *Baksho Bondi* (*Shadowbox*), which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival recently, came as a "ladder" for both of them as well as its leading lady, Tillotama Shome.

For Das, developing the story was a means to cope with postpartum depression and the loss of her father; for Sahi, also a renowned cinematographer, it gave him the opportunity to be by his wife's side during her lows and help give shape to her dreams and stories by writing the script. As for Shome, reading emailed drafts of the script "helped her emotionally" during the pandemic as she cared for her ailing mother. "I met these two wonderful people [Das and Sahi] and I wanted to hold on to this friendship," she says. "The fiction of the film was my reality, I felt grown up enough, I felt the need to expand my film knowledge." It was the first film Shome was offered after earning widespread acclaim



DIRECTOR DUO Saumyananda Sahi and Tanushree Das; (bottom) Tillotama Shome in a still from the movie

for her performance in the independent film, *Sir*. Much like *Sir*, *Baksho Bondi* makes optimum use of her thespian talent. It centres around Maya (Shome), mother to a troubled teen, wife to a retired army officer husband who struggles to hold onto a job, and sole breadwinner of the house.

Amidst the portrait of a resilient woman trying to keep her family together, Das and Sahi subtly touch on PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and caste and class disparity. "We didn't want to make it a clinical case but look at it from an emotional standpoint," says Sahi, who consulted therapists. "Maya is also on the verge of a breakdown. We don't pause to talk about the strain [of caring for someone]. Mental distress is a spectrum, it is not suffered by one person alone."

Adversity lurks at every corner but the filmmakers never lose sight of the love and tenderness especially evident in Maya's concern for her husband. "With art you can explore and engage and understand things which are

painful, look at your own darknesses in a safe way," says Das, who also edited the film. "It is a safe space where you can engage." For Sahi, who was born and brought up in a village outside Bengaluru, the film allowed him to engage with his wife's culture. Says Sahi, "We'd collect scenes, write on postcards, shuffle them and give them shape later. Certain elements of the story like the middle were fixed."

What changed was the ending and the couple has their son, Ahaan, to thank for it. In fact, it was his birth in 2016 which made them realise the power of the story that had been brewing in their head for a while. Present throughout the shoot in Barrackpur, West Bengal, Ahaan ended up picking up his mother tongue. "He brought an innocence and asked a question and he had a point, so we went back to the drawing board," says Das. As the family soak in the success of the Berlin screenings, they look forward to sharing the film with audiences back home. ■

after the shoot, there's a record of it," adds Kagti.

Nasir also introduced Kagti to his crew, many of whom were cast in smaller parts in *Superboys....* "The people in Malegaon are different," says Kagti. "There is a swag that comes from being a film buff." Besides Malegaon, the movie is shot in Nashik, Deolali and Mumbai. Kagti found a key collaborator in production designer Sally White who recreated the video parlours and screening halls. "I like building sets in live locations as it gives a sense of realism," says Kagti. Much like Nasir, Kagti also dabbed in a bit of guerrilla filmmaking by placing a camera in the middle of the road in Dharavi.

Kagti and Grover take nifty cinematic liberties such as using the making-of-a-film-within-the-film device to explore the conflict that stems from a screenwriter's pride and a director's ego. There's also drama around how respect and success are vital attributes for creators. It's fitting then that the real superheroes of Malegaon find happiness in what they do, which is making films. And it's what Kagti hopes will be the impact of her film on the audience. "I really hope this film will end up inspiring anybody who aspires to do something and it's not easy for them." ■

-Suhani Singh



-Suhani Singh

Going Behind the CAMERA

Actor Boman Irani talks about learning new skills before making his directorial debut with *The Mehta Boys*

Through his career spanning over two decades, Boman Irani has worked with some of the best directors in the Hindi film industry. And, every one of them has taught him something. “While on a film set, I’d spend time with them to understand why they choose to shoot a particular scene before others, or why the set was built in a certain way. From Raju Hirani to Raj & DK, they have all taught me something, whether it’s a filmmaking technique or people management,” says Irani, who after two decades in front of the camera made his directorial debut with *The Mehta Boys* recently.

The Mehta Boys, which premiered on Prime Video, is

an intimate family portrait of a feuding father and son. Irani stars as the newly widowed and perpetually grumpy septuagenarian Mehta, while Avinash Tiwary plays his mopey architect son, Amay. Apart from directing and acting in the film, the 65-year-old has also written the film’s script, along with Oscar-winning writer Alexander Dinelaris Jr. “Without Alex knowing, I made him my Guru. I met him in New York years ago and he really helped me sharpen the screenplay.”

During this phase, Irani was also “reading books on cinema, biographies of directors and doing workshops”. Irani understood that to direct, he would need to learn new skills. “You can’t say ‘I have 35 years of acting experience, so I automatically know how to make a film.’ It helped that before his film

Not only has Irani acted in **THE MEHTA BOYS** and directed it, he is a co-producer and has written the film’s script along with Oscar-winning writer Alexander Dinelaris Jr.



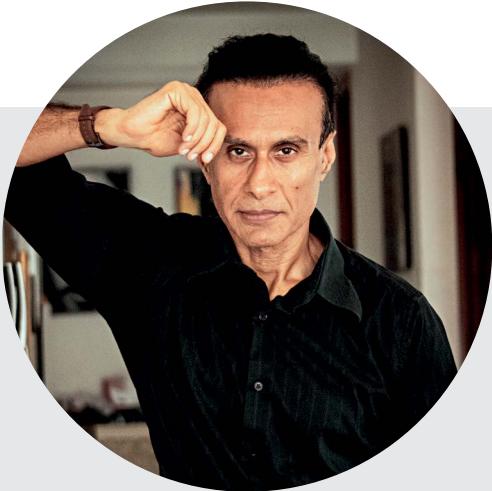
debut (*Everybody Says I am Fine*, 2001), Irani had been a professional photographer and a theatre actor.

While he was acquiring the skills to become a director, Irani came across the idea that triggered *The Mehta Boys*, thanks to director Sujoy Ghosh. "He told me a one-liner about a father and son who have to spend 48 hours together. At the airport when they are saying goodbye to each other, they realise their follies. He wanted to make the film with me but there was something about the idea I wanted to explore myself. I told him I wanted to direct this story and he very graciously gave it to me."

Irani, who has also produced the film through his Irani Movietone LLP banner alongside his son Danesh Irani, Vikesh Bhutai and Shujaat Saudagar, calls himself "a producer only in name". "I didn't want to complicate my life, so when I had to make decisions as a director, I didn't think like a producer. I wanted to shoot at a real airport but we couldn't. We had very little time at an old convention centre. I told my actor that we had to do the scene in one take simply because we had no time." While directing oneself is never easy, Irani found a method that worked for him. "Once the scene was done, I'd ask my co-actors, 'Should we go and ask the old man what he thought?' I'd sit in the director's chair behind the monitor and become the 'old man' and tell them what I needed," he says with a laugh.

Stepping behind the camera has fulfilled a childhood dream for Irani. And, now that he's directed his first, he can't wait to experience the rush again. "I have four or five ideas and I want to get cracking on them." ■

— Karishma Upadhyay



MASTER OF MANY HATS

Arif Zakaria, who is basking in the success of *Freedom at Midnight*, opens up about playing the historical character of Jinnah, and his upcoming projects



mission, with my character at the centre of it! It's a high-octane show with its trademark twists and turns.

Your portrayal of Mohammad Ali Jinnah in *Freedom at Midnight* has received critical acclaim. How was it getting under the skin of the character?

The preparation was laborious, exciting and gratifying. We were given scripts in advance, so the preparation was structured around readings and getting the tone and physicality right. The director, Nikkhil Advani, was crystal clear about what the characters should embody and enact.

What is your character arc in Neeraj Pandey's upcoming *Special Ops 2.0*?

With a great run in the first season, there is much anticipation for *Special Ops 2.0*. The special task force on behalf of the government undertakes a rescue

What was it like being a part of *Bollywood Masala*—a funky musical parody on Bollywood that showed in Paris?

The show, conceived by writer-director Toby Gough, is told through the eyes of a celebrity chef who recounts his experiences feeding some of the biggest stars in Bollywood. It used humour, storytelling and elements of dance to further the narrative. The Parisians loved this unique presentation.

Any other projects in the pipeline?

Besides *Special Ops 2.0*, there's *Freedom at Midnight Season 2* and *The Socho Project* by Abhigyan Jha. I also have two films on the cards—*Heer Sara Aur Pondicherry* by Kartik Chaudhry and *Faraar* by Kushagra Sharma.

—with Geetika Sachdev

GHOST WHO SI

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA WILL BE HAUNTING AUDIENCES IN MUMBAI THIS MARCH



MUSIC

Tribute to a Legend

The third edition of the **Mahindra Percussion Festival** will honour the legacy of late tabla maestro **Zakir Hussain**

T

The third edition of the Mahindra Percussion Festival will once again put the drumroll in the spotlight, while paying tribute to the one who did it best. "The goal of the festival is to put percussion centre-stage, which is what Zakir Hussain did his entire life. Zakir bhai expanded the legacy of his father Ustad Alla Rakha and spent a lifetime enthraling audiences. So, naturally, we dedicated this edition of the festival to him," says

Jay Shah, vice-president, Cultural Outreach, at Mahindra Group.

Sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Chary is one of the artistes performing at the festival this year. Incidentally, the name of his band, Ravi Chary Crossing, was given by Zakir Hussain, inspired by his vision of

One of the acts, the Thrillana Project, reimagines the traditional Thrillana with contemporary threads woven into it



NGS

The Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) is set to make history, bringing *The Phantom of the Opera*, to India for the first time (March 5-30). This follows the success of *The Sound of Music*, *Mamma Mia!*, and *Matilda the Musical*, reinforcing NMACC's mission to present world-class productions to Indian audiences.

Founder and chairperson Nita Ambani describes *Phantom...* as a story that "unveils the beauty in vulnerability and the power of love that transcends barriers". She emphasises that NMACC's vision has always been to bring the finest performances to India, and as the centre approaches its second anniversary, this production is another extraordinary milestone.

Since its premiere in 1986, *The Phantom of the Opera* has captivated over 160 million people in 195 cities worldwide. Now, Indian audiences will experience the haunting tale of the Phantom, his obsession with soprano Christine Daaé, and the grandeur of the Paris Opera House brought to life on stage.

Jonathan Roxmouth, who plays the Phantom, acknowledges the weight of taking on such an iconic role. "So many people have ownership of the character because of their love for the show and its music. The expectation is enormous," he says. "For me, the Phantom is a wounded child who never grew up after being abandoned. His intentions are pure, but his execution is tragic."

Associate director Rainer Fried, who has been instru-

mental in adapting the show for Mumbai, believes this marks a defining moment for musical theatre in India. "It's hard to believe that after all these years, *The Phantom...* is still making history," he says. "No other musical has defied cultural and sociological change the way Phantom has. We are confident it will capture the hearts of Indian audiences as it has done worldwide."

With its state-of-the-art facilities, the Grand Theatre at NMACC provides an ideal setting for the show's lavish production. "We don't expect to make any major changes," Fried explains. "The theatre is beautifully designed, and Phantom will look magnificent in this space."

Music supervisor Kristen Blodgette and associate choreographer Denny Berry have worked tirelessly to ensure the production seamlessly inhabits the Grand Theatre's stage. "We will transform the space into the Paris Opera House of the 1860s," they share. "Maria Björnson's gold proscenium blends every theatre into the period of the story. The opulent drapes, detailed costumes and intricate props bring the era alive."

At the heart of the story is Christine Daaé, a young singer navigating love, ambition and fear. Grace Roberts, who plays Christine, finds the character inspiring. "She is complex, and her journey—dealing with loss, sudden success and personal growth—is something audiences connect with," she says.

Though set in the Victorian era, Roberts believes Christine embodies timeless values. "In our production, she is stronger and more ahead of her time than ever before. I hope Indian audiences relate to her growth, compassion and the way she moves people with her story."

With its breath-taking set design, unforgettable music and timeless story, *The Phantom of the Opera* at NMACC promises to be a landmark cultural event in India. ■

—Nikhil Sardana

THE PHANTOM
OF THE OPERA
will be playing
at the NMACC's
Grand Theatre in
Mumbai from
March 5-30



THE LINE-UP
(From left
clockwise) Aruna
Sairam; Ranjit
Barot; Ravi Chary
Crossing; Trilok
Gurtu; SNAX



MALLIKARJUN KATAKOL

blending western jazz with Indian classical music. "Zakirji's influence remains a constant source of inspiration. This fusion represents his idea of seamlessly combining different musical traditions to create a rich, dynamic experience," says Chary.

The Thrillana Project, an ensemble of artistes along with Aruna Sairam, is also part of this year's edition. Conceived as a conversation across time, it aims to reimagine the

traditional Thillana, exploring its inherent structure and rhythmic complexity, and weaving contemporary threads into it. "It is a delicate balance, honouring the sanctity of the classical form while allowing for the expression of modern sensibilities. It is, in a sense, a dialogue between the past and the present, a concept that resonates deeply with Zakir Hussain's own musical philosophy," explains Sairam.

Further, compo-

ser Ranjit Barot and theatre director Roysten Abel will stage their musical production, Beat-Route. Other artistes performing at the festival include globally renowned virtuoso percussionist Trilok Gurtu and Chennai-based duo SNAX (Ramkumar Kanakarajan and Sumesh Narayanan). ■

—Neha Kirpal

(Mahindra Percussion Festival 2025 is on at the Prestige Centre of Performing Arts, Bengaluru, March 1-2)



BOOKS

RISE AND FALL OF AN EMPIRE

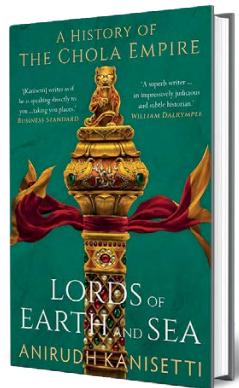
Anirudh Kanisetti's monumental history of the Cholas is here

T

The Cholas stand out amongst numerous dynasties who jostle for our attention in ancient and medieval India. Starting from their core in the Kaveri delta, their empire at its peak covered a large chunk of peninsular India, both its coasts and also expanded into the Deccan.

Their campaigns extended much further to the north to reach the Ganges in Bengal; Rajendra Chola bore the title 'Conqueror of the Ganges'. Their maritime excursions and ambitions also mark them out as one of the very few who breached the continental confines of most Indian dynasties. The Cholas had a long-standing presence in Lanka and campaigned there frequently. Rajendra Chola, even more spectacularly, raided the coasts of the Malay peninsula

LEISURE



LORDS OF EARTH AND SEA: A History of the Chola Empire
by Anirudh Kanisetti
JUGGERNAUT
₹899; 376 pages

for their grand temples as for their conquests.

The Chola story in Kanisetti's narrative is one of how piety, faith and monumental temple building fused with military prowess and geopolitical ambition. Their maritime footprint owed much to their links with powerful Tamil merchant corporations; trade and flag fused, but it was largely trade that led the way.

Yet not all Chola rulers were entirely convinced that war and conquest were the best way to ensure their prosperity and longevity. A number of them favoured a more inward-looking agrarian stabilisation. Both approaches, Kanisetti's analysis suggests, faced an intrinsic drawback. The problem the later Cholas faced was one which their own success was partially responsible for: the growth of local magnates who in time became alternative centres of power that ended up eroding Chola rule and legitimacy.

Those who enjoyed Kanisetti's earlier work on the Deccan will not be disappointed with the Cholas. He writes with dramatic force but is respectful about the empirical evidence. Some, and not just the purists, may cavil at his frequent resort to the fly-on-the-wall technique of depicting historical events as they unfold. The Cholas are after all sufficiently dramatic not to require extra flourishes. But Kanisetti's speculations are generally well-informed and usually derived from some primary source. His narration brings this dynasty to life, cutting a firm narrative thread through a thick jungle. ■

- T.C.A. Raghavan

across the Bay of Bengal. But their greatest feuds were with their neighbours—the Pandyas, the Chalukyas, the Hoysalas—whom they first regularly defeated but were, in the end, vanquished by.

The rise and ebb of the Cholas is the story of Kanisetti's book. His treatment covers many other aspects beyond the military and political to give us more rounded and granular perspectives. Thus, the Cholas stand out also because they were master builders. During their reign, the entire aesthetic of South Indian architecture changed and arguably their greatest emperors, Rajaraja and Rajendra, stand out as much

Kanisetti's treatment covers many other aspects BEYOND THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL to give us more rounded and granular perspectives

Southern Saga

The Tamils by **Nirmala Lakshman** is a detailed look at the making of a community



How can we say where any English-language text stands in the literature on the Tamil people, history and language? If every Tamil patriot is to be believed, it has all been written much better in Tamil before. Still, Nirmala Lakshman's *The Tamils: A Portrait of a Community* is a book every dutiful native will read. Though her introduction hints at a personal and anecdotal approach, the narrative is grounded in the solid research of earlier scholars and mostly follows a conventional path. The author begins with prehistoric artefacts and goes on to the rise, fall and conflicts of the great dynasties. She covers religious movements, military forays, social policies and literary and cultural flowering, and she keeps her tone fair. She points out, for example, that social oppression was not incidental or anomalous, though the just conduct of the ancient Tamil

rulers was legendary. The seeds of disparity were sown in town fortifications that left tribal and rural populations prey to rival chieftains and marauders, or land endowments to Brahmins, which remained untaxed while the rulers burdened farmers and traders.

Later chapters cover the entry of the Delhi Sultanate, which left Tamilakam fragmented and impoverished, and the rule of the Vijayanagaras, Nayakas and Marathas. The abiding presence of Christianity and Islam is covered, as well as the impact of

THE NARRATIVE IS GROUNDED IN THE SOLID RESEARCH OF EARLIER SCHOLARS AND MOSTLY FOLLOWS A CONVENTIONAL PATH

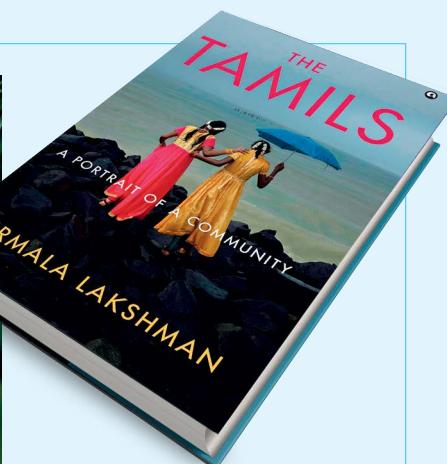


many colonial powers, peaking in the unrelenting predation of the East India Company and the British Raj. The text surveys resistance and revolts against the Raj from Marudu Pandyan of the rebel proclamation up to V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Bharati, who almost lived to see their cause prevail. The self-respect movement is a matter of pride for Tamils, but the author does not shy away from exploring the pressure of persistent caste loyalties post-Independence.

Aleph was savvy in handing this huge task to a writer from Indian journalism's first family—a book by Dr Lakshman will undoubtedly sell itself. But having done that, the publisher has left her to soldier on by herself. The book contains absolutely everything, and a project of that scope deserved the support of rigorous editing and supplementary graphics. To a reader attempting to absorb the interwoven trajectories of the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras over 2,000 years, a few maps, timelines and genealogical charts would have been helpful. The photographs are closely connected to the text, but too few for a 400-page book.

In any case, a historian's work is never done. Shortly after this book was launched, archaeologists announced that the earliest evidence of the Iron Age was recorded from what is now Tamil Nadu. Even the ancient past of Tamilakam, it appears, is not yet past, and another book will come along soon. ■

—Latha Anantharaman



THE TAMILS
A Portrait of a Community
by Nirmala Lakshman
ALEPH
₹999; 464 pages

THE MUSIC NEVER STOPS

Having completed 25 years in the music business, Shaan has a spate of new releases and live concerts planned for 2025



Q. Tell us about some of your new film songs to look out for.

I have sung songs in the recently released *Kuch Sapney Apne*. Another recent release I'm really excited about is a duet with Akriti Kakar, 'Koi Koi', which I have composed to the lyrics of iconic director Kunal Kohli for his upcoming project *Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story*.

Q. Your musical journey goes back almost 47 years. How does it feel?

It's been 25 years since I sang my first Bollywood song, 30 years since my first Indipop release and 47 years since I became a professional singer. It's been a long journey but still feels like I've just begun. Over the years, I have tried to reinvent myself to align with changing trends without losing my authenticity.

-with Neha Kirpal

What is your new song *Ishq Qubool Kar* all about?

It marks the 200th video on my Shaan Music YouTube channel. The next single after that was *Tera Ho Raha*, a Valentine's Day special. Most of these songs are conceived and composed by me. The music label is my attempt to connect with my core audience, explore my compositional skills and put out music I believe in.

Q. What do you feel about performing live?

The live concert scene, though hectic, has been very rewarding and I have already clocked several shows this year. Performing at the Udaipur World Music Festival in February—my 15th show this year—was definitely a highlight.



Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited

Corporate Office: Kaveri Bhavan, Kempegowda Road, Bengaluru - 560 009.
CIN: U40109KA1999SGC025521



Achievements of KPTCL

- Installed Generation Capacity: 32895 MW
- KPTCL manages 1384 Substations of 66KV and higher voltage with total installed transformer capacity of 87969MVA
- In the last five years 194 Substations have been established
- Total energy handled during 2023-24 was 94982MU
- Is the highest consumption in a day during 2023-24: 329.53 MU
- KPTCL has fulfilled the peak demand of 17220 MW during 2023-24
- For the first time in India, the entire transmission network of the State has been covered by SCADA network
- 13,450 crores invested for strengthening the Transmission network during last five years
- Transmission Loss during 2023-24 was 2.970%
- Transmission system availability during 2023-24 was 99.89 % (Prov).

Mission Statement of KPTCL

- Encouraging best Practices in Transmission.
- Ensuring high order maintenance of all its technical facilities.
- Emphasizing the best standards in customer service.



SAEEE 2025

ALL INDIA ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

ENGINEERING ARCHITECTURE



SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

CATEGORY - 1 UNIVERSITY BY UGC

Accredited with 'A++' grade by NAAC



LAST DATE TO APPLY: 20TH APRIL, 2025



For Details, Contact: 96000 38122 | 044-2450 0600 | 044-2450 2436

Toll-Free Number: 1800 425 1770 www.sathyabama.ac.in