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# INDIA TODAY

**DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS**

## **FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL**

**AS THE BJP COMES OUT ALL GUNS BLAZING, ARVIND KEJRIWAL FINDS  
HIMSELF WITH HIS BACK TO THE WALL IN HIS BID FOR A FOURTH TERM**



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# EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**E**ven in the colourful and diverse gallery of Indian leadership, Arvind Kejriwal, national convenor of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), is one of a kind. Not your typical neta, he emerged from within the wombs of the urban citizenry. Promising to answer their call for ending corrupt politics and ensuring pro-people governance, Kejriwal activated the ‘aam Aadmi’ or common man as never before. He was closer to their needs, articulated their frustration with a rotten system, and spoke their everyday language. Stacked on top of his original image as an anti-corruption crusader that won him his first brief stint in office in 2013, Kejriwal soon positioned himself as the messiah of the lower middle class and saviour of the poor. Despite the best efforts of arch rivals Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Kejriwal led AAP to landslide wins in both the 2015 and 2020 Delhi assembly polls. The mint-new party won 67 and 62 seats, respectively, out of Delhi’s total of 70, leaving the BJP with only three and eight seats (the Congress score was 0-0). These impressive wins were built on a remarkable set of welfarist giveaways for the underclass, meant to take care of their bare necessities. Among them, free electricity and water, vastly improved government schools and neighbourhood clinics. That pro-poor reputation still stands as the foundation of Kejriwal’s electoral chances as he seeks a fourth term as chief minister.

Twelve years of immersion in politics have left their stains on Kejriwal. His persona now includes bruises earned from his bitter war with the BJP, which attacked his fortress from every flank. Its primary battle offensive: an ongoing money-laundering case filed against him by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). This led to a five-month jail stint for Kejriwal before the Supreme Court gave him bail. The ED also paraded to prison much of AAP’s second rung on similar charges, including deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, before they, too, got bail. Kejriwal finally gave up his office in September 2024 and made the Oxford-educated Atishi Marlena, who fits AAP’s original prototype of the earnest activist-turned-politician, a stop-gap CM. For all the stout denials (and lack of clinching prosecutable evidence till now), the controversy sullied his original USP as an anti-corruption messiah. The BJP kept at its image demolition project with the ‘sheesh mahal’ jibe, highlighting how Kejriwal’s official residence was plushly renovated for a reported Rs 33.66 crore, at odds with his ‘aam Aadmi’ self-projection. Its regular poaching, meanwhile, denuded the second and third rungs of AAP.

Kejriwal, though, is the ultimate Jack-in-the-box, as unputdownable as they come. Of late, he has led AAP to significant gains outside Delhi, taking Punjab by storm and even threatening to open up Gujarat and Goa. The AAP-BJP duel on the streets of Delhi, therefore, is about

much more than ‘half a state’. For Kejriwal, it’s a battle of survival. His political future is at stake, as also of the party he built. Bail finds him back doing what he’s best at: working the crowds with plainspeak that cuts through the political smog. And of course, raising freebie culture to all-new levels to retain his base among the underprivileged, who account for over half of Delhi’s 34 million citizens. Kejriwal is promising to expand the ambit of AAP’s freebies to include a cash dole of Rs 2,100 a month for poor women. Already beneficiaries of free bus rides, women constitute a crucial 45 per cent of the electorate, which support Kejriwal hopes to retain.

**F**or the BJP, power in India’s capital as a city-state has ironically eluded it for the past 27 years. Winning Delhi, therefore, is a prestige battle, so the party is throwing its entire big artillery to mortally injure its nemesis. Besides its top brass, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing rallies, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is diligently at work on a door-to-door campaign. Following on its recent path, the BJP has embraced the ‘revdi’ culture by seeking to wean away the poorer voter with an even bigger gift box than Kejriwal’s, including a monthly Rs 2,500 in cash to women. The BJP is also aiming to maximise its natural hold over the middle class. Estimated at 45 per cent of the electorate, this segment tends to alternate between AAP for the assembly polls and the BJP for Lok Sabha elections. The middle class has expressed concerns over

civic issues, such as the poor condition of roads, garbage clearance and the polluted Yamuna, and the BJP hopes to win them over by promising a better Delhi.

The third leg of the triangle, the Congress, is the smallest, but its exact length will be of crucial importance finally. The two INDIA partners are fighting separately. In 2020, AAP’s continuing ingress on its turf left the Congress with just 4.2 per cent votes. Part of the BJP’s strategy is ironically to ensure the Congress recovers its near-10 per cent vote from 2015 so that it dents AAP’s vote share. But the Congress is also aware that an AAP demise in Delhi would pretty much write the obituary for the INDIA bloc, so it remains on the horns of a dilemma. Our cover story this week catches all the complex strategic games in play. At the centre of the chessboard stands Kejriwal, who rose to power as a common man but is now an uncommon politician fighting a do-or-die battle.



  
(Aroon Purie)

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Arvind Kejriwal on his way to file his nomination for the Delhi election, Jan. 15



ARUN KUMAR

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# UPFRONT

[ UNIFORM CIVIL CODE/ UTTARAKHAND ]

## MAKING A BEGINNING

By Avaneesh Mishra

In the crisp mountain air of Uttarakhand, the unsettling sense of being on the frontier blends with a more rooted conviction in its status as a safehouse for ancient civilisational ideals. The two contraries got entwined on January 27, when Uttarakhand was taken to the very frontline of a contentious constitutional experiment—one that seeks nothing less than to legislate ways of living. Putting into active mode a proposed code drafted by the Pushkar Singh Dhami government, it became the first Indian state to implement a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). This legal step, which comes on the back of one of the most polarising debates in India's history, aims to standardise personal laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, live-in relationships and succession, cutting across religious lines.

As such, the law aligns seamlessly with the Directive Principles of State Policy listed in the Constitution and also the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's larger political narrative of Hindutva and uniformity. But its practical and societal implications have always sparked considerable debate—while the government hails it as a tool for empowerment and gender equality, critics argue it infringes on personal freedoms and risks alienating certain communities.

The journey to the UCC began in 2022, when Dhami promised to implement it during his election campaign. The UCC of Uttarakhand Act was finally passed in February 2024. Its reformist provisions include equal property rights for sons and daughters, legitimacy for children born from live-in relationships, and equal grounds for divorce (see *Key Provisions of UCC*). Citizens with a



## KEY PROVISIONS OF UCC

mobile phone and Aadhaar number can now avoid navigating cumbersome bureaucratic hurdles. The state government has introduced an online portal to streamline the registration of marriage, divorce and inheritance. For those in remote areas and villages, Common Service Centre agents and Gram Panchayat Development Officers have been tasked with bringing these services to their doorsteps. Additionally, the introduction of Tatkal Seva offers fast-track registration for a nominal fee.

**W**hile the government touts these measures as progressive, criticism has proceeded on several fronts. One relates to whether the state's infrastructure can handle the scale. The mandatory registration of live-in relationships has drawn particular ire. Couples must register within a month of cohabitation, with non-compliance leading to penalties, including fines or imprisonment. This requirement has been labelled by many as an intrusion into personal lives. "If I continue to live in Uttarakhand, I will have to register under the UCC. They cannot enter our bedrooms," a 33-year-old businesswoman in a live-in relationship in Dehradun told INDIA TODAY. She is considering leaving the state. Many live-in couples share her concerns, perceiving the provision as moral policing under the guise of legal reform. In response, Uttarakhand's home secretary Shailesh Bagauli emphasised the law's role in safeguarding women's rights while assuring that their privacy would not be violated. "Sometimes untoward incidents happen in such relationships. This law will ensure the safety of women," he said.

Amid the controversy, there also emerged stories of citizens embracing the change and finding its digitised processes positive. Dhami himself was the first to register his marriage on the new portal, followed by ordinary citizens like Nikita Negi Rawat, 42, and Anjali Verma, 26. For Rawat, a state I-T official, the streamlined process



X/@pushkardhami

▲ CM Pushkar Singh Dhami announces the UCC rollout, Jan. 27

■ **Marriage**  
**Mandatory registration within six months; ban on polygamy and child marriage (minimum marriageable age of 18 for women and 21 for men)**

■ **Divorce**  
**Uniform divorce grounds across communities; practices such as triple talaq, iddat and halala criminalised**

■ **Live-in relationships**  
**Mandates registration to provide legal recognition, thus ensuring rights of partners and children. But penal provisions raise questions over the right to privacy**

■ **Inheritance**  
**Equal property rights for sons and daughters; children born out of live-in**

**relationships, surrogacy and adoption are treated as legitimate heirs**

■ **Applicability**  
**It applies not only to state residents but also its natives living elsewhere**

■ **Exemption**  
**Scheduled Tribes are exempted, allowing them to continue following their customs**

was a revelation. "The normal process involves a lot of hassle. With this portal, I got my marriage registered quite easily," she said. Verma, who opted for the Tatkal service, echoed similar sentiments, calling it a "game-changer".

For the BJP, Uttarakhand's UCC is both a calculated risk and a strategic experiment. The state's religious and cultural identity adds symbolic weight to the law, positioning it as a test case for the party's national ambitions. In fact, the day the new law was rolled out, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar predicted it will set the stage for nationwide adoption. Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini joined the chorus, expressing his intent to introduce it in his state "at an appropriate time". That also showcased how the law's

internal contradictions can create a quagmire. Already, Uttarakhand's Scheduled Tribes are excluded from its ambit—the idea of tribals being allowed to preserve their cultural autonomy is likely to be extended nationally. Essentially, therefore, even in its first iteration, the uniform code is not exactly uniform. In Haryana, on January 17, representatives of a dozen khap panchayats had met Saini and urged him to ban live-in relationships and even same-gotra marriages. Will there then be two UCCs that are also not uniform across states? Back in Uttarakhand, Muslim bodies have vowed to move the courts against the infringement on their personal law. All this presages a complex journey ahead for the UCC. ■



OIL IMPORTS

# Caught in an Oily Situation

By M.G. Arun

The world may be reeling under new US president Donald Trump's 'one-policy-change-a-day' regime, but it's one of his predecessor Joe Biden's parting shots that have shaken up oil markets. It's a new clampdown on Russian oil trade, and taking the worst hit will be the world's biggest oil importers—China and India. India sources cheaper crude from Russia and if supplies are hit, an inflated oil import bill could hurt the margins of its refining companies. That won't be good news for the Modi government, already battling high inflation and slow domestic growth.

On Jan. 10, the outgoing Biden

administration announced sanctions, against 183 vessels, mostly oil tankers allegedly part of a "shadow fleet" that it said participates in "high-risk shipping practices to facilitate illicit or sanctionable activity". Also sanctioned were Russian oil companies

Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas and their subsidiaries, and two Russian maritime insurance providers—Ingosstrakh Insurance Company and Alfastrakhovanie Group, which the UK had previously sanctioned.

Media reports quoted commodity freight analytics firm Kpler as saying 102 of these sanctioned 183 tankers transported Russian crude either to India or China or both at least once in 2024. Of the 530 million-plus barrels of Russian crude exported last year, some 300 million went to China; most of the rest came to India. The US move is likely to impact some 1.5 million barrels per day

## TOP CRUDE SUPPLIERS TO INDIA (April - November 2024)



Source: ICRA

**THE US CURBS ON RUSSIAN OIL COULD SEE IRAQ OR SAUDI ARABIA BECOMING OUR LARGEST CRUDE SUPPLIERS**

of Russian oil supplies to India.

The "shadow fleet" comprises ships that allegedly skirted the price cap on Russian oil exports the G7 had imposed in December 2022. Under this, western shipping and insurance companies were barred from dealing with Russian oil, which cost over \$60 a barrel, in order to squeeze the revenues of Russian oil firms.

The curbs on Russia could see Iraq or Saudi Arabia becoming our largest crude suppliers. Of the 158 MT of crude India imported between April and November 2024, 61 MT came from Russia, followed by Iraq (31.7 MT), Saudi Arabia (20 MT) and the UAE (13.3 MT).

### OIL SPILL

► American sanctions on Russian oil could affect supplies to India, and inflate the country's import bill

► The refining margins of Indian refining and marketing companies will also take a hit, affecting their profitability

Indian refining and marketing companies like Reliance Industries, Indian Oil Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum may see their margins suffer. "Discounted crude has buoyed the margins of refining companies," says Prashant Vasisht, senior VP and co-group head, corporate ratings, ICRA. "Margins are \$4–5 per barrel, of which almost 40 per cent is discounted crude." Russian discount on crude is certain to go up, taking cost to sub-\$60 a barrel, at least for inferior grades. Others are convinced that Russia will continue to maintain a shadow fleet and find ways to reach its crude to other parts of the world. And the show would go on. ■



WEST BENGAL / RG KAR VERDICT

# DEBATE OVER QUANTUM OF PUNISHMENT

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

The verdict in the RG Kar rape and murder case was delivered on January 20 as additional sessions judge Anirban Das pronounced life imprisonment for the main accused, Sanjay Roy. While his order ruled out capital punishment, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Bengal government moved the Calcutta High Court, seeking a harsher penalty. After an initial hearing on January 27, the HC reserved its judgment. The victim's grieving parents allege evidence-tampering and misuse of power, but have submitted in the HC that they don't seek Roy's death. The court, while critical of investigative lapses, upheld the

prosecution's evidence, which did not align with the more dramatic narratives in the air from the start.

Initially, assumptions of gang rape and a chaotic crime scene dominated public perception, but the investigators—Kolkata Police and the CBI—parsed the postmortem report, CCTV footage, video and photographic evidence and witness testimonies to conclude that the crime was committed by a single individual. Roy was a civic volunteer tasked to look after police personnel and their families and had access to government hospitals. On the night of August 9, 2024, an inebriated Roy chanced upon the sleeping junior doctor, whom he did not know, and com-

◀ **BLAMING THE POWERS** Protesters demand justice for the RG Kar victim in Kolkata, Jan. 18; inset, Sanjay Roy after hearing his punishment in court; Jan. 20



GETTY IMAGES

mitted the gruesome crime. He had no prior motive, the probe found.

The autopsy concluded that the victim died from "manual strangulation associated with smothering". Das emphasised "associated", indicating throttling as the primary cause and smothering as a concurrent factor. Marks of pressure from a thumb and fingertips suggested strangulation through the perpetrator's right hand, while abrasions on the victim's lips—caused by friction against her dental braces—corroborated smothering. Defence arguments that throttling and smothering could not occur simultaneously were refuted, with experts clarifying that they could logically overlap. The lack of injuries on the victim's back supported the conclusion of a frontal assault. Evidence of asphyxial death—such as bleeding from the eyes and nose—and its co-occurrence with multiple nail marks from one individual is consistent with the idea of manual strangulation by a single person, rather than the

popular theory of it being a gang rape.

Roy's culpability was established through a combination of forensic evidence, CCTV footage and his contradictory statements. Footage captured Roy entering the third floor of the Emergency Building, where the seminar room was located, between 4:03 and 4:31 a.m. on August 9. He was seen carrying a helmet and Bluetooth earphone, though the latter was missing upon his exit. Investigators found Roy's Bluetooth earphone at the crime scene. Metadata confirmed continuous pairing of the device with his phone, which Roy failed to explain. Photographs of the mattress and dais suggested the earphone had slipped beneath the mattress during the assault.

Forensic evidence also implicated Roy. Bloodstains on his jeans and footwear matched the victim's DNA, and strands of hair linked them. Abrasions on his face, thighs and fingers were consistent with the victim's struggle.

Although many believed the seminar room was not the scene of the crime, this too was not upheld. The victim's father had cited an inspection report that found no biological stains on the floor or signs of struggle on the mattress, but the court noted that key evidence had been collected earlier. Crucial material, including bed sheets, blankets and mattress samples, had been seized on the day of the crime—by the police. Photographs and videos from the inquest showed marks of struggle on

the victim's bed sheet, bolstering the conclusion of the seminar room being the crime scene. Also, the forensic team tested samples from an adjacent room that also attracted some contentious attention: located a few feet away from the seminar room, this area had started being "renovated" on August 13, three days after the rape-murder. As part of this, a wall in front of the seminar room was demolished. It was alleged that this was done to tamper with the evidence, but no biological trace related to the crime was found from the area.

**T**he assault's brutality was underscored by injuries that indicated the victim was alive during much of her ordeal. Experts confirmed rape, describing injuries caused by the insertion of an unknown blunt object. The absence of semen or male pubic hair meant penile penetration could not be established, but the evidence left no doubt about the victim's suffering. One of the most contentious issues was a claim that 151 grams of semen had been recovered from the victim. But tests on some white, thick liquid found in the victim confirmed it was not semen, though its exact nature remains undetermined. The accumulated evidence—ranging from DNA matches and injuries to the weak defence—left no doubt about Roy's guilt.

The victim's parents rejected the court-directed Rs 17 lakh compensation, asserting that chief minister Mamata Banerjee cannot "disown responsibilities". It drew criticism from the Trinamool Congress, which accused them of being "the voice of conspiracy against the West Bengal government". The verdict severely criticised the state administration—Tala Police station in Kolkata, which first probed the crime, the poor forensic infrastructure and RG Kar Medical College and Hospital principal Sandip Ghosh and others, who were accused of hiding the truth. But allegations directly linking Mamata and her administration with the crime ultimately stood discarded. Politically, Mamata has not merely weathered the severest storm of public outrage she has faced—she has emerged with a striking piece of external validation. ■

## THEORY AND PROOF

➲ **The prime accused in the RG Kar rape-murder case, Sanjay Roy, sentenced to life imprisonment**

➲ **In contrast to the popular narrative of gang rape, the CBI probe concluded that Roy had acted alone**

➲ **The seminar room was scene of crime; no semen found in victim—both contrary to what many were led to believe**

Odisha Chief Minister Shri Mohan Charan Majhi welcomed President Shri Shanmugaratnam and his delegation at the Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar.

# SINGAPORE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO ODISHA

## EMBARKING ON A NEW JOURNEY FOR ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT OF SKILL AND INDUSTRY OF ODISHA

In January 2025, the President of Singapore **Shri Tharman Shanmugaratnam** made a significant two-day visit to Odisha, marking a pivotal moment in enhancing bilateral relations between Singapore and India. This visit, occurring on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, aimed to strengthen economic ties, explore new investment opportunities, and promote cultural exchange between the two regions. The itinerary during these two days was crafted to foster deeper collaboration, particularly in key sectors such as trade, technology, and education.

The visit commenced with the President's arrival at the Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar, where he was warmly welcomed by Odisha's Chief Minister **Shri Mohan Charan Majhi**, dignitaries, higher government officials and members of the business community. The ceremonial reception included vibrant cultural performances that showcased Odisha's rich

heritage, setting a positive tone for the ensuing discussions. This reception highlighted the significance of cultural diplomacy in building strong international relations.

Following the welcome ceremony, the President engaged in a closed-door meeting with the Chief Minister of Odisha. During this meeting, they discussed a range of critical issues concerning economic cooperation and infrastructure development. The Chief Minister outlined Odisha's potential as a key investment destination, particularly in sectors such as

renewable energy, information technology, and tourism. The President expressed keen interest in collaborating on various projects, emphasizing Singapore's expertise in sustainable urban development and smart city initiatives. Both leaders recognized that enhanced cooperation could yield mutual benefits, paving the way for Singaporean businesses to tap into Odisha's growing market. On the first day, the President also participated in a business forum aimed at fostering dialogue between Singaporean and Indian entrepreneurs.

### The visit of the SINGAPORE PRESIDENT SHRI THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM'S TO ODISHA, is largely centered around strengthening bilateral relations between Singapore and India, particularly in the context of Odisha. Key points of interaction between Honorable President and Honorable CM :

- **Economic Cooperation:** Exploring investment opportunities in various sectors such as infrastructure, technology, and renewable energy.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Promoting cultural ties and understanding between Singapore and Odisha, possibly through initiatives in tourism and education.
- **Trade Relations:** Discussing ways to enhance trade between Singapore and India, focusing on Odisha as a strategic partner.
- **Sustainable Development:** Collaborating on sustainability initiatives, especially in urban development and environmental conservation.
- **Diplomatic Engagement:** Strengthening diplomatic ties and discussing regional security and cooperation in multilateral forums.



**This visit was symbolic, as it underscored the importance of cultural heritage preservation and tourism. During his tour, the President interacted with local tour guides and stakeholders in the tourism industry, discussing strategies to enhance the tourist experience while promoting sustainable tourism practices**

The forum served as a platform for networking and exploring investment prospects in Odisha. The President delivered a keynote address that underscored the importance of innovation and collaboration in driving economic growth. He encouraged Singaporean investors to consider partnerships with local companies, particularly in technology and agriculture. This message resonated well with attendees, many of whom were eager to explore potential joint ventures.

The evening of January 17 saw the President attending a cultural event that showcased Odia art and cuisine. The event was an important aspect of the visit, as it provided an opportunity to strengthen people-to-people connections. The President interacted with local artists, expressing admiration for their creativity and craftsmanship, which further emphasized the importance of cultural exchange as a means of enhancing bilateral ties.

The second day of the visit, January 18, continued with a focus on education and skills development. The President visited several educational institutions where he announced a new joint initiative aimed at promoting skill development programs in Odisha. The initiative,



set to involve partnerships with Singaporean universities and training institutes, aims to enhance STEM education and entrepreneurial skills among youth in the region. The President highlighted that investing in education and vocational training is crucial for empowering the younger generation and stimulating future economic growth.

**"Collaboration with Singapore in multiple sectors has given us the confidence that the steps taken by our government within a short span of only seven months have started showing results. We are quite hopeful of bringing a rapid economic growth to the state through industrialisation and achieve the goal of a Viksit Odisha by 2036,"**

**- Shri Mohan Charan Majhi  
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Odisha**

In addition to his engagement with educational institutions, the President toured the Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves, significant historical sites in Odisha. This visit was symbolic, as it underscored the importance of cultural heritage preservation and tourism. During his tour, the President interacted with local tour guides and stakeholders in the tourism industry, discussing strategies to enhance the tourist experience while promoting sustainable tourism practices. The discussions centered around leveraging Singapore's experience in developing world-class tourist destinations.

As the visit drew to a close, wrap-up meetings were held with business and government leaders. These meetings provided an opportunity to summarize the outcomes of the engagements that took place over the two days. The President and the Chief Minister presided over the signing of several memorandums of understanding (MoUs), aimed at promoting collaborative ventures in trade, tourism, and education. These agreements are expected to lay the groundwork for a more robust partnership between Singapore and Odisha.

In conclusion, the Singapore Presidential visit to Odisha on January 17th and 18th, 2025, marked a significant step forward in enhancing bilateral relations between Singapore and India. The visit successfully fostered discussions on economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and education, creating a solid foundation for future collaborations. As both nations continue to explore synergies in various sectors, the potential for growth and innovation appears promising. The outcomes of this visit will likely strengthen ties and lead to substantial mutual benefits in the years to come.



KERALA

# REBUILDING WAYANAD

**By Jeemon Jacob**

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan has always had a knack of finding form when crisis is upon the state, especially in the face of natural disasters. The 2018 mega floods tested his abilities as captain of Kerala, followed by the Coronavirus outbreak in 2020. His steady hand then had much to do with him earning a second innings in 2021.

Now another challenge awaits—rehabilitation of the survivors of the Wayanad landslide that officially killed 359 people and led to the loss of two whole villages—Mundakkai and Chooralmalai—in the hilly Western Ghats in July 2024. Kerala had requested a Rs 2,219

crore special package for Wayanad's rehabilitation in August, but after five months, the Union Government finally classified the landslides as a "disaster of severe nature for all practical purposes" and offered little else extra. The Centre's rationale was that Kerala has enough funds in its State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) allotment for 2024-25—some Rs 388 crore, out of which Rs 291.2 crore was the central share. The state also reported an SDRF balance of Rs 395 crore from previous years, New Delhi said, arguing that the corpus of nearly Rs 800 crore was enough to manage the relief efforts.

Kerala is now going ahead with the

reconstruction process on its own, and plans to complete the projects before March 2026, when the state is due for assembly polls. Pinarayi's appeal for funds through the 'Stand with Wayanad' campaign had collected a healthy Rs 708.2 crore till January 6. The state revenue department has published the list of beneficiaries who are eligible for new houses and the government estimates the cost of reconstruction to be around Rs 1,100 crore. The affected region officially had some 2,007 housing units spread across three wards in Meppadi panchayat. Considering the hilly terrain, the state estimates the average cost of a 1,000 sq. ft housing unit to be around Rs 30 lakh.

"We will not compromise on the quality of houses," CM Pinarayi told INDIA TODAY. "An MoU has been signed with a reputed construction company, Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society, and a website will be set up to give updates. Each sponsor will get a unique ID, so that they can monitor the progress."

The state says the cost was estimated by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) but there is some confu-



# INDIA'S E-WASTE GENERATION SURGED 72.54%

## WHAT'S CAUSING THIS SURGE?



**Urban E-waste Hubs:  
More Gadgets, More Waste**



**Weak Recycling Infrastructure:  
Limited Recovery Systems**



**Poor Disposal Practices:  
Inefficient Waste Management**

### SHIFTING EARTH

► **Centre refuses extra funds, says Kerala has enough in its state relief kitty to manage Wayanad rebuilding**

► **CPI(M)-led state govt to rehabilitate survivors by itself. Some early pledgers baulk at high costs**

**IT'S TIME TO RETHINK, REDUCE, AND RECYCLE.**



**4TH FEBRUARY, 2025**  
TAJ WEST END, BANGALORE

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**BETTER ENVIRONMENT, BETTER TOMORROW.**

sion over it among the sponsors. Apart from the cash donations, many of the early pledges after the disaster had been for houses for the displaced. Some of them have now baulked at the relatively high costs involved.

The state cabinet has approved two new townships, to be built on 58.5 ha. and 49 ha. of the Nedumbala Estate in Kottapadi village and Elstone Estate in Kalpetta village respectively. That too had gone into litigation owing to land issues but the Kerala High Court has now cleared the acquisition.

The relief efforts have also led to a war of words between the CPI(M) and the Opposition. "We are committed to setting up model villages for the victims. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the victims for his PR shows but didn't give Wayanad a penny," says CPI(M) politburo member A. Vijayaraghavan. BJP state president K. Surendran refutes the allegations. "The Left government has escalated the costs to loot the money. As for rehabilitation funds, the Centre will provide whatever is necessary," he says.

For sure, the reconstruction efforts will be a hot potato issue in the next assembly poll. Besides the BJP, Pinarayi knows he has a chance to show up the Congress—what with Wayanad having a high-profile MP in Priyanka Gandhi. But it could also blow up in his face. The CPI(M) has seen a rash of scandals in the recent past, and this may be the CM's last chance to redeem himself and the party after two terms in power. Any missteps and voters will be unforgiving in 2026. ■

# INDORE'S BATTLE AGAINST BEGGING

By Rahul Noronha

Indore, seven-time winner of India's cleanest city honour, has in the past year been on another clean-up mission—eliminating beggary. Launched in February 2024, the anti-begging initiative has shown promising results, offering a model that could potentially be replicated nationwide. Spearheaded by the district administration and the women and child development (WCD) department, it is a three-phase programme that combines counselling, rescue and enforcement.

In the first phase, WCD officials counselled 3,500 beggars and their families—children in the case of elderly beggars and parents in the case of minors—advising them to give up begging. The second phase involved rescue and rehabilitation. Those who persisted despite counselling were taken to the Sewa Dham Ashram in the city. Here, they received medical care besides Aadhaar and Ayushman Bharat health insurance cards, as well as food coupons. Physically challenged beggars without family support were offered permanent residence at the ashram. By December 2024, 470 individuals had been rescued and rehabilitated.

For at least some beggars in Indore, begging seemed more a lucrative habit than a need. One beggar, for instance, had travelled from Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh by train in an AC

three-tier coach, while another had Rs 2 lakh in a bank account. A third owned a house worth Rs 50 lakh in the city. "We found 22 beggars who had travelled to Indore by bus and

**The city's three-phase anti-beggary initiative combines counselling, rescue and enforcement**



▲ **SOCIAL SWEEP** Indore district administration officials rescuing a beggar in the city to rehabilitate her, Jan. 12

regularly stayed in a hotel near a bus stand, paying Rs 450 a night," says Dinesh Mishra, project officer, WCD department, and nodal officer for the programme. Religious sites, he added, were a significant lure for beggars, among them groups of youth travelling from nearby Ratlam to collect alms in the name of Shani Dev. Some beggars reported daily earnings of Rs 1,000-1,500, far more than they'd earn in any labour-intensive work.

This month, the programme entered its third phase, focusing on enforcement. District magistrate Asheesh

# DOES BENGALURU NEED A RESET?

## ALMS CONTROL

- For some, begging more habit than need. Indore has beggars with bank savings, luxury travel and housing
- Cash rewards encourage citizens to report beggars and almsgivers alike
- 3,500 beggars counselled, 470 rehabilitated by Dec. 2024. The Indore model sets blueprint for nationwide adoption

Singh issued prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), under which beggars and almsgivers can be booked and face up to six months in jail. Citizens who report beggars or those giving alms can earn a cash reward of Rs 1,000. “A total of Rs 25,000 has been given out by the administration as reward in the first two weeks of the order being promulgated,” says Mishra.

Begging or promoting begging is a crime under the state’s Bhikshavriti Nishedh (Sanshodhan) Adhiniyam, 2018, originally a 1973 legislation. “There were many complaints from citizens and the police that begging had become a menace and was linked to crimes, especially those involving drugs and child labour. Begging is also to be stopped under the central government’s SMILE [Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise] programme,” says Singh.

The exact number of the transient beggar population in Indore is difficult to come by. But the programme has reportedly made significant progress with widespread public support, setting a new standard for urban social reform. ■



12 Mn Registered Vehicles in a Population of 14 Mn in Bengaluru



Time lost in traffic  
117 hours per year

Bengaluru's pollution is on the rise!



Rampant encroachment on lakes



## IT'S TIME WE BUILD A NEW BANGALORE



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TAMIL NADU

# GRAVEYARD OF OLIVE RIDLEY'S

By Jumana Shah

**O**n January 10, 2025, nature enthusiast Rajiv Rai, who stays near Injambakkam beach, 16km from Chennai's Marina Beach, had a sighting he wished he hadn't seen: three large Olive Ridley carcasses on the sand. Next day, he found 11 carcasses; the day after, another 10. Though he alerted the Tamil Nadu forest department and fellow naturalists, he learnt later that the dismal carousel of 70-80 carcasses he kept encountering almost every day till the end of January were amongst the over 1,000 that had washed ashore Chennai's Marina, Kovalam and Chengalpattu beaches. An alarming situation because Olive Ridley, an endangered species, is crucial in maintaining the healthy balance of the marine ecosystem.

Though the Tamil Nadu forest department is awaiting post-mortem reports, naturalists claim the turtles drowned after getting entangled as 'bycatch'—the collateral capture of non-target species like dolphins and turtles—in fishing nets, particularly the banned trawling nets and gillnets used by large, mechanised fishing boats. Turtles need to surface every 40 to 45 minutes to breathe; trapped turtles drown due to prolonged entanglement. "In a typical year, 100 to 200 turtle deaths might be recorded along this stretch of the coastline," says Dr Supraja Dharini, chairperson of TREE Foundation and a member of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) of the International Union for

## THE WAY TO SANDY DEATH

Dead Olive Ridley turtles litter the beach at Injambakkam, near Chennai



RAJIV RAI

## MAYHEM AT MARINA

➲ **Olive Ridley turtles travel from the Pacific Ocean to breed and nest on India's shores, especially in Odisha, Andhra and Tamil Nadu**

➲ **This January, over 1,000 turtle carcasses have been found on Tamil Nadu beaches**

➲ **They drowned after being caught in nets of fishing trawlers, which are accused of flouting laws in place to avoid such mishaps**

➲ **The Tamil Nadu government has formed a task force of all stakeholders to protect the turtles**

Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Olive Ridley turtles travel 9,000 km from the Pacific Ocean to breed and nest on Indian shores, including swathes of the coast in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Between December and March, females lay their eggs on beaches. During this time, they stay in shallow waters close to the shore. Mechanised fishing is prohibited for up to five nautical miles by the Tamil Nadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act. "This year, dozens of trawlers had cast banned gillnets and ray nets along the coast, which appears to have resulted in the catastrophe," says Dharini. Large nets remain in the water for up to six hours—enough to ensnare and asphyxiate turtles. The surge in death toll seems to be a result of a large number of turtles caught during mass migration to their most favoured nesting beaches at the Gahirmatha and Rushikulya river mouths in Odisha.

In mid-January, the TN forest department, the fisheries department, the Coastal Security Group and the Coast Guard in a joint exercise apprehended 24

# DOES ECONOMIC GROWTH COME AT THE COST OF NATURE?

RAPID DEVELOPMENT BOOSTS ECONOMY BUT STRAINS ECOLOGY

fishing trawlers over two days. "They will be penalised according to procedures," Manish Meena, the Wildlife Warden of Chennai, tells INDIA TODAY. "Now that the culprits have been caught, the issue should be resolved," he adds. But turtle carcasses continue to show up. Though fishermen have been given Turtle Excluder Devices (TED) that ensure the creatures can escape when entangled in nets, they hardly utilise them as doing so results in lower yields.

**F**aced with the outrage of activists, the state government formed a task force on January 22 comprising the four agencies with fishermen's associations and local NGOs to protect the turtles. The fishermen claim it is not wholly their fault. "We revere turtles and are equally concerned," says M. Vijesh, president of the Chennai Fishermen's Association. "Another reason for the deaths is pollution in the sea by plastics and industries," Vijesh claims. Using specific coloured lights to keep turtles at bay were among measures discussed in the first task force meeting on January 27.

"During the current nesting season, we have agreed to pull back nets after keeping them for less than an hour in the waters in order to save the turtles," says K. Vinod, another fishing body leader. South Indian Fishermen Welfare Association president K. Bharathi urges the government to take a firm stand against the practice of bottom trawling, which involves dragging large nets along the ocean floor. Additionally, Dharini says, all mechanised boats should mandatorily turn on their vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and suggests regular inspections at fish landing areas.

Taking stock of the alarming situation, the Chennai-based southern regional bench of the National Green Tribunal has threatened to impose a ban on fishing during the turtle nesting season if regulations are flouted. The body count surely warrants some action on mission mode. ■



Habitat Loss & Biodiversity Decline



Pollution (Air, Water, Waste)



Climate Change & Heat Islands



Overuse of Resources

**PROGRESS AT AN UNAFFORDABLE PRICE?  
IT'S TIME TO RETHINK, REDUCE, AND RECYCLE.**



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# ENVIRONMENT CONCLAVE 2025

CONSERVATION | CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE

**KARNATAKA**

PRESENTED BY



**4<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2025**

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# BETTER ENVIRONMENT, BETTER TOMORROW.



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CHIEF MINISTER, KARNATAKA



**D K SHIVAKUMAR**  
DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER, KARNATAKA



**ESHWAR KHADRE**  
MINISTER OF FOREST, ECOLOGY  
& ENVIRONMENT, KARNATAKA



**ARITRA KSHETTRY**  
PHD, NATIONAL LEAD FOR ELEPHANT  
CONSERVATION, WWF-INDIA



**RAMAN SUKUMAR**  
ECOLOGIST



**JOSEPH VATTAKAVEN**  
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GLASSHOUSE

## WOMEN AT HOME

This Republic Day, the At Home event at Rashtrapati Bhavan was a showcase of southern charm. President **Droupadi Murmu** and her secretary, IAS officer **Deepti Umashankar**, assisted by a core team, ensured that the evening seamlessly combined creativity and finesse. The invitation itself was a keepsake: a pencil pouch in Pochampally ikat (Telangana), Etikoppaka toys (Andhra Pradesh), a Ganjifa fridge magnet (Karnataka), a Kancheepuram silk pouch (Tamil Nadu) and a screw-pine woven bookmark (Kerala), all nestled in a bamboo box with Kalamkari motifs. The distinguished invitees, including the 'drone didis' and natural farming pioneers, were welcomed by couples from the southern states in traditional attire. The cuisine was south Indian but with innovative twists. From the decor to the dishes, this At Home was an ode to women's ability to blend tradition, innovation and flair.



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

## KERALA CEASEFIRE

**S**tate governor **Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar** seems intent on patching up with the Left Front government, the same that was engaged in a bitter battle with his predecessor, Arif Mohammed Khan. On January 23, Arlekar visited V.S.

Achuthanandan, the 101-year-old Communist veteran and ex-CM. "I regard him as someone who led an exemplary public life," Arlekar told the media later, adding that he has been a fan since his student days. In his R-Day speech, the guv spoke of "working together", even praising CM Pinarayi Vijayan's development vision. But it's not all sweetness and light, sources in both camps say they are in wait-and-watch mode to see if the peace holds.

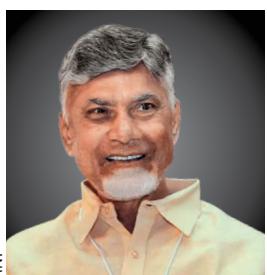


## A Door to the Future

**F**ormer Union minister and BJP leader **John Barla** was at a public event in Alipurduar when he got tongues wagging by cosying up to West Bengal CM and Trinamool Congress boss **Mamata Banerjee**. Barla insists he was merely honouring a "cordial invite" from the state government, but then came the plot twist—he took a swipe at his own party, lamenting his lack of freedom in the BJP. "Look at the CM—she's been here for days... she's done so much," he said, practically fawning over "the guardian of Bengal". Asked whether he was jumping ship, Barla played coy, leaving the door open for "the future".



## SWISS AUDIT



ANI

**I**t was that time of the year again when chief ministers of all hues were jetting off to Davos and the World Economic Forum to reel in investments. Among this year's attendees were **N. Chandrababu Naidu** (Andhra Pradesh), Devendra Fadnavis (Maharashtra) and A. Revanth Reddy (Telangana), but it was the latter who scored bragging rights after snagging pledges for Rs 1.78 lakh crore in investments. Naidu, a former Davos regular, threw some serious shade into proceedings, calling the MoU frenzy pointless, and insisting the WEF is all about networking and tuning into global trends. Maybe it's time we audited the Rol on these Swiss soirees.

## A Late Winter Son Rise

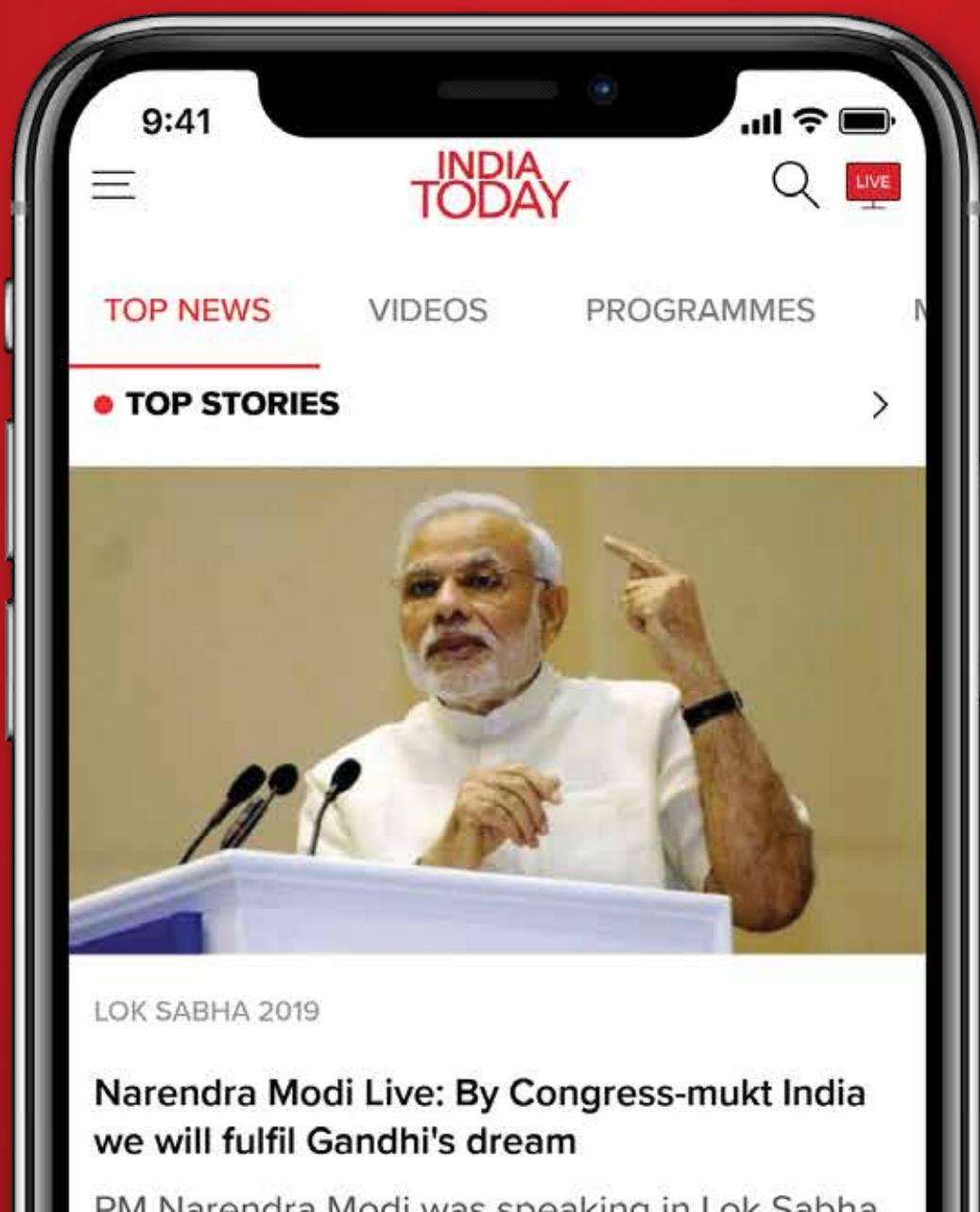
**I**s Bihar's anti-dynasty crusader finally succumbing to *parivarvaad* (nepotism)? Rumours are rife that Chief Minister **Nitish Kumar**, 73, a long-time critic of dynastic politics, might be warming up to the idea of keeping it in the family. Enter **Nishant Kumar**, his 48-year-old famously low-profile son, who could be gearing up for a political curtain call just in time for the 2025 assembly polls. Party circles are abuzz with talk of Nishant's debut, with the engineer-turned-reluctant-heir adding fuel to the fire with a public appeal on January 8, urging voters to back dear old Dad. Irony much? Bihar's anti-dynasty poster-boy might well be crowning a new prince.



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# BREAKING NEWS

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**THE BIG BATTLE**  
AAP chief Arvind  
Kejriwal at a public  
meeting in Dwarka,  
Delhi, Jan. 24

# FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

A BESIEGED ARVIND KEJRIWAL LAUNCHES A DESPERATE BATTLE TO REGAIN HIS CROWN AS DELHI CM IN THE FACE OF AN AGGRESSIVE BJP CAMPAIGN TARGETING HIS TARNISHED IMAGE AND THE FATIGUE OF AAP'S DECADE-LONG ANTI-INCUMBENCY

By AVISHEK G. DASTIDAR

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

D

UST COVERS THE PARTY'S ELECTION SYMBOL, THE BROOM, ON its election posters pasted on the walls, a testament to the weeks of political mobilisation. It's evening on a weekday. The location is charged with historical significance. Trilokpuri in East Delhi is where the 2014 communal riots took place, leaving 50 people injured. The venue, Block 27 market, overlooks a Mohalla Clinic, one of the key emblems of the welfarism model of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the ruling dispensation in the national capital. It's mostly houses owned by Muslims that surround the venue, though the more than one-third Dalits in the constituency make it one reserved for Scheduled Castes. It's a caste, class and community mix that AAP considers its bastion. Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of Delhi thrice and currently AAP's national convenor, takes the stage—the dais is draped in the party's trademark blue and yellow—surrounded by a sea of supporters. "We will form the government again," he declares, his voice cutting through January's chilly winter. With a tone that is a mixture of assertion and subtle acknowledgment of the challenges ahead, he adds, "*Haan seatein thodi si upar-neeche ho sakti hain* (the number of seats may go up or down a bit)."

The stakes have never been higher for Kejriwal than in 2025. The AAP supremo is the prime focus of the current assembly election in Delhi. Much has changed since he broke into the political scene in 2013. The man who was then seen as the very embodiment of the 'aam aadmi' is today being projected as anything but. The trademark muffler that had become the stuff of many a Kejriwal meme and parody has been replaced by a green puffer jacket, which he says you can buy for Rs 2,500 in Chandni Chowk but which his critics allege is a branded one worth ten times the amount. The arch-rival Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is also accusing him of having converted the chief minister's residence into a "Sheesh Mahal",

or a gilded glass palace. Internal rifts, high-profile defections and criticism over its governance model have shaken AAP's foundation, making Kejriwal's a fight not just against his opponents but also one for his very political survival. The AAP leader has to battle not just the ghost of anti-incumbency but also the severe dent to his old image as an anti-corruption crusader. The hardest blow came when the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested him in March 2024 for his alleged involvement in a multi-crore money-laundering liquor policy scam and sent to judicial custody, the first ever sitting chief minister to face that fate. When the Supreme Court granted him bail in September 2024 after he spent more than five months in jail, he resigned as chief minister, saying, "I got justice from the legal court, now I will get justice from the people's court."

## THE KEJRIWAL FACTOR

When AAP first came to power on the back of the anti-corruption movement in 2013, Kejriwal was seen as the messiah of the common man who would drain the bloated swamp of corruption that had enveloped Indian politics. After a short 49-day stint as chief minister in alliance with the Congress party, Kejriwal resigned, citing resistance against the radical anti-corruption legislation he had proposed. Plotting his return in the 2015 assembly polls, he projected himself as the saviour of the poor, reducing the electricity per unit charges by half and providing 20,000 litres of water free of cost in addition to improving health and education facilities. AAP swept that election, winning 67 out of Delhi's 70 assembly seats with a vote share of 54 per cent, decimating both the BJP and the Congress in the process. Kejriwal's commitment to cleanse politics and bring more accountability to governance had appealed to the elite and the upper middle class, while his pro-people agenda, including a quasi-universal basic income via freebies, attracted the lower middle class and the poorer population of Delhi. In the 2020 assembly polls, AAP did an encore, with a marginally reduced tally of 62 seats but retaining the vote share. This



### HOME GROUND

Kejriwal addresses the media, flanked by Delhi CM Atishi and other senior leaders, Jan. 13

## AAP GAME PLAN

**Key features of the party's electoral strategy**

► **SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY:** Tailored welfare benefits for all, from women, youth and senior citizens to auto-rickshaw drivers, slum-dwellers and sanitation workers to 'Purvanchalis' and Dalits

► **FOCUSED CAMPAIGN:** Concentration on seats won or lost with narrow margins (<5,000-10,000 votes) with sustained, granular, door-to-door campaigns, padayatras, rallies and roadshows

### ► HIGHLIGHT THE BJP'S

**SHORTCOMINGS:** The lack of a CM face for one. Use Union budget to highlight party's political pain-points—from jobs, tax slabs for middle class to GST

► **NO OVERT MUSLIM MESSAGING:** Peddling soft Hindutva instead, from chanting the 'Hanuman Chalisa' to visiting temples

► **DATA ANALYTICS:** Ground surveys and reports deployed to fine-tune campaign tactics. Shifted focus to middle-class voters towards the latter half of the campaign, for instance, based on ground surveys

► **CLEVER USE OF MULTIMEDIA:** From movies to books to social media, constant attempt to set record straight on Opposition allegations like Liquorgate or Sheesh Mahal, and to highlight AAP's signature welfare programmes

was despite the BJP winning all seven parliamentary seats in Delhi in the 2019 Lok Sabha election like it had in 2014.

And while Kejriwal's bid to extend his unique model of governance beyond the national capital may have come a cropper in Goa, AAP did create some ripples in Gujarat and reached its zenith in Punjab, when it won 92 of its 117 assembly seats in the March 2022 assembly polls.

Having scaled these peaks, however, AAP's aura has only been diminishing, especially in Delhi, after the BJP went hammer and tongs at it to puncture its growing national acceptability. The ED brought charges of corruption against Kejriwal and his deputy, Manish Sisodia, which saw the duo spend time in jail before getting bail. Other senior leaders, including former transport minister Kailash

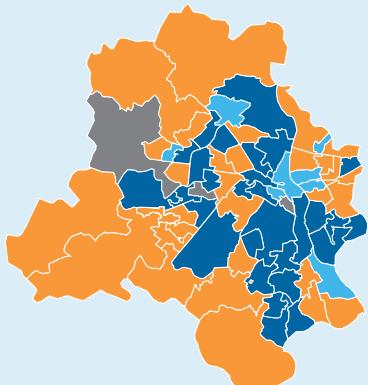
# CAPITAL STAKES

While the BJP's Lok Sabha supremacy remains unchallenged, AAP may find it difficult to replicate its spectacular success of the past two assembly polls

**TOTAL SEATS ASSEMBLY: 70 / LOK SABHA: 7**

■ BJP ■ AAP ■ INC ■ Others

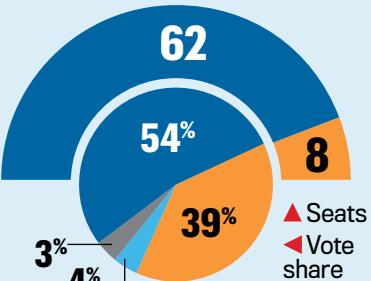
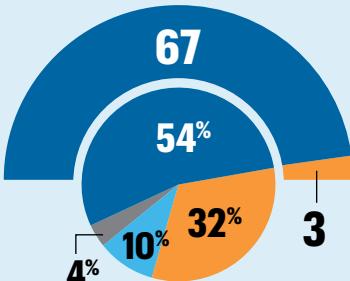
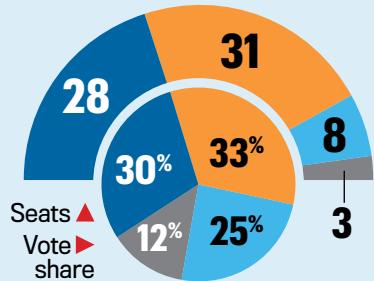
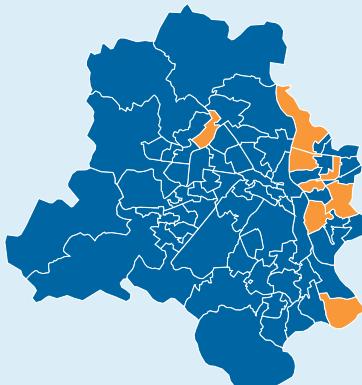
ASSEMBLY 2013



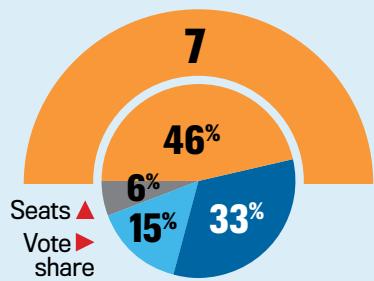
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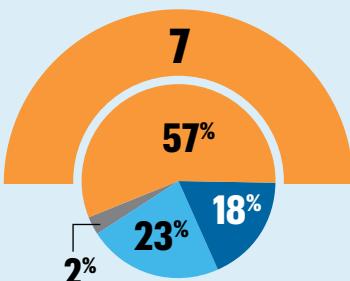
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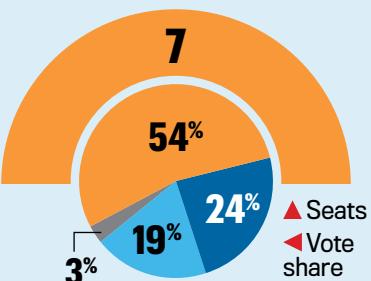
LOK SABHA 2014



LOK SABHA 2019



LOK SABHA 2024

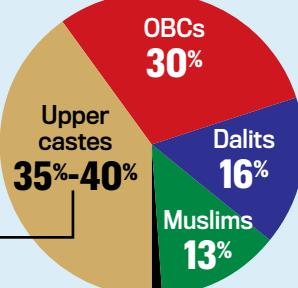


## THE CASTE CALCULUS

Community-wise break-up of the Delhi electorate

Brahmins 13%  
Rajputs 8%  
Vaishyas 7%  
Punjabi Khatri 5%

Total population  
**34,666,000**



**In 2020, AAP got about 68 per cent of the votes of the lower middle and poorer classes, who form nearly 60 per cent of the total population of Delhi**

Figures have been rounded off

lash Gehlot, defected to the BJP. Meanwhile, the Centre thwarted a Supreme Court judgment that restored control of the bureaucracy to the chief minister by issuing a new ordinance in May 2023 that made the lieutenant governor all-powerful. Though Atishi Marlena, the Oxford-educated activist and cabinet member, became chief minister after Kejriwal resigned in September 2024, the onslaught against its leaders took a toll on governance, which may now cost AAP dear.

## THE UNDERPRIVILEGED BASTION OF AAP

Delhi's electoral history reveals a pattern of stark shifts, with voters overwhelmingly favouring AAP in assembly elections and decisively backing the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls. Around 30 per cent of Delhi's voters alternate their support depending on which type of election it is. This includes 15 per cent swing voters for the BJP in the Lok Sabha election and 30 per cent for AAP in the state polls. Psephologists describe the upcoming assembly election as a bipolar contest between AAP and the BJP, with AAP retaining the edge at

**Psephologists describe the upcoming assembly election as a bipolar contest between AAP and the BJP, with the Congress likely to play spoiler**

the start of the campaign. Sanjay Kumar, co-director, Lokniti programme, at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), says, "The 2025 Delhi election will be vastly different from the 2020 one in which AAP had won votes from all sections of society in different proportions. The euphoria for Kejriwal and his leadership among all classes was evident. But in 2025, the middle class is now seen as being disenchanted with Kejriwal. So, to win, he must retain his hold over the lower middle class and poor sections of society apart from the minorities." Yashwant Deshmukh, founder-director of C-Voter, agrees. "Kejriwal's image as an anti-corruption crusader has gone for a toss. In our tracker, his popularity ratings have dropped from the stratospheric heights of 60 per cent as compared to his nearest CM rival to around 48 per cent—a 12 percentage point drop," he says, only to add, "but these are still high

# POLLPOURRI FOR DELHIITES

**What AAP, BJP and Congress each have promised in a bid to woo different sections of the electorate—women, youth, elderly—in their respective manifestos**



### WOMEN

**AAP:** Rs 2,100 a month allowance under Mahila Samman Yojana

**BJP:** Rs 2,500 monthly payout under Mahila Samriddhi Yojana

**Congress:** Rs 2,500 per month under Pyari Didi Yojana



### COOKING GAS

**AAP:** Rs 500 subsidy per cylinder

**BJP:** Subsidised cylinders at Rs 500, free cylinders on Holi and Diwali

**Congress:** Subsidised cylinders for Rs 500



### YOUTH

**AAP:** Employment focus, free bus rides and metro concessions for students, scholarships under Dr Ambedkar Yojana

**BJP:** 50,000 government jobs, 2 million self-employment opportunities, Rs 15,000 aid for competitive exams

**Congress:** Rs 8,500/year under Yuva Udaan Yojana + apprenticeships



### HEALTHCARE

**AAP:** Free treatment for senior citizens, continuation of Mohalla Clinics. Sanjeevani Yojana provides free treatment in addition

**BJP:** Rs 5 lakh Ayushman Bharat cover + Rs 5 lakh state cover, free diagnostics for all

**Congress:** Health insurance coverage up to Rs 25 lakh under Jeevan Raksha Yojana



## ENVIRONMENT

**AAP:** Yamuna cleaning and pollution control drives

**BJP:** Clean Yamuna under Jal Jeevan Mission, clean and green Delhi initiatives

**Congress:** Focus on urban greenery and air quality improvement



## ELECTRICITY

**AAP:** Free power up to 200 units for households

**BJP:** Continuation of free electricity for poor households under PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

**Congress:** 300 units of free electricity for households



## EDUCATION

**AAP:** Improved schools, scholarships

**BJP:** Free KG to PG education for the underprivileged, Smart Schools Mission, free laptops for meritorious students

**Congress:** Support for schools and higher education scholarships



## TRANSPORT

**AAP:** Free bus rides for women/students, better connectivity

**BJP:** 100% e-bus city by 2027, last-mile connectivity improvements

**Congress:** Free bus ride for students, smaller buses for the interiors



## EMPLOYMENT

**AAP:** Address unemployment, facilitate private sector jobs

**BJP:** Seed funding for startups under Arun Jaitley Startup Scheme, skill development programmes

**Congress:** Skill training programmes for youth



## LAW & ORDER

**AAP:** Funds for RWAs to hire security guards, improved surveillance systems

**BJP:** Women's safety via Jhalkari Bai Battalion, expanded CCTV network

**Congress:** Support for community policing initiatives

# STATUS OF AAP'S 2020 PROMISES

## FREE ELECTRICITY (UP TO 200 UNITS)

- **Fulfilled** (Significant reduction in electricity bills for households)
- 3.6 million households

## DOORSTEP DELIVERY OF RATION

- **Partially fulfilled** (Limited coverage and logistical challenges hindered reach)
- Approximately 500,000 families

## DESHBHAKTI CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS

- **Fulfilled** (Introduced across government schools, enhancing patriotism)
- Over 1 million students

## FREE WATER

- **Fulfilled** (Consumers receive 20 kilolitres of water free per month)
- Around 2.4 million households

## PREMIUM QUALITY ROADS

- **Not fulfilled** (Some progress, but work remains incomplete)
- N/A

## YAMUNA RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT

- **Not fulfilled** (Minimal progress; major issues remain)
- N/A

## REGULARISATION OF UNAUTHORISED COLONIES

- **Partially fulfilled** (Substantial progress, not yet at target)
- 400,000+ residents

## METRO NETWORK EXPANSION TO 500KM

- **In progress** (Efforts underway, but large-scale progress pending)
- Additional 5 million commuters

## EXPANSION OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES

- **Partially fulfilled** (Some facilities expanded but not citywide)
- Varies by facility; specifics unavailable

● Status ● Estimated beneficiaries

and Kejriwal retains the edge." That said, Deshmukh maintains, "It will not be a one-way traffic for AAP as in the previous two elections."

Meanwhile, CSDS surveys of the past two elections revealed that AAP gets about 68 per cent of the votes of the lower middle and poorer classes, who constitute over 60 per cent of Delhi's 34 million-strong population and are a decisive voting bloc. Kejriwal had carefully built this voter base in the past two terms—a constituency of beneficiaries of government freebies in a city of migrants, cutting across caste and religion. He did this by promising them free power and water supply, free high-quality education in government schools, expansion of hospitals and mohalla clinics, with continued free healthcare for all, free bus travel for women and free pilgrimage trips for the elderly. In all, Kejriwal estimates, each household saves around Rs 25,000 through these schemes. Others contest the figures and put it at around

ter Covid-19 claimed her husband's factory job and upended the family finances, Nazma decided she had to step out to work. In this crucible of challenge, the free bus ride became her lifeline. "Eight hundred rupees saved every month," she says. "It's a lot. Why wouldn't we vote for him?"

**K**or Krishna Das, originally from Malda in West Bengal who now works as an office help in Nehru Place, changes in Delhi government schools have brought dignity to her as a parent. "Before Kejriwal, teachers didn't really treat us like parents," she says. "Now I get invited to school to sit with the teacher and get feedback about my son. That's a big deal." For the Lok Sabha election, her vote goes to Modi but it is Kejriwal she has voted for in the past two state elections.

For Election 2025, Kejriwal has doubled the monthly honorarium of Rs 1,000 for every woman above 18 years that he

## To win, Kejriwal must retain his hold over the lower middle class and poorer sections as well as secure the minority votes

Rs 5,000 per month, but even they admit it is substantial. Prof. Tanvir Aijaz of the political science department in Ramjas College, Delhi, says, "What other political parties call freebies are something that have, at the end of the day, given some savings to the lower middle classes. That's why Kejriwal has that base of supporters. There is no reason for that support base to shift significantly."

### THE SHE VOTER

Perhaps the most critical demographic in Kejriwal's electoral calculus are the women voters, who make up nearly 46 per cent of Delhi's electorate. Targeted welfare schemes like free public transport have elicited significant female support for AAP. Ask 34-year-old Nazma Khatoon, one of the many residents of the Chirag Dilli urban village where city dreams meet blue-collar resilience. Af-

had introduced in last year's Delhi budget to Rs 2,100. Deshmukh says, "While there appears a statistical tie between AAP and BJP for male voters, when it comes to the female voters, AAP is ahead by at least eight percentage points over the BJP. That could prove decisive."

But Kejriwal's bonanza is not restricted to women alone. He is also tapping the young voters by promising free bus travel to all students and 50 per cent concession in metro tickets. For the elderly, he will launch the Sanjeevani Yojana that will ensure free medical services to all citizens above 60 years of age at both government and private hospitals.

Along with these promised benefits, Kejriwal also evokes fear against the BJP in his rallies, saying they will withdraw all welfare measures once they come to power. "If you press the wrong button," he tells the crowd at a well-

► **TRUMP CARD**  
PM Narendra Modi during a BJP rally at Kartar Nagar in Northeast Delhi, Jan. 29



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

## THE BJP OFFENSIVE

**The BJP's focus is on Arvind Kejriwal's failures, keeping the cadre rejuvenated and cashing in on the anti-incumbency vote**

► **LABELLING AAP AND KEJRIWAL AS CORRUPT:** From calling the party 'AAP-da' (catastrophe) and 'Awaidh Aamdaniali Party' (party with an illegal income), as well as raking up 'Liquorgate' and 'Sheesh Mahal', the BJP is painting Kejriwal as corrupt and accusing AAP of misgovernance. It is also highlighting specific issues, such as the condition of roads, sewerage, cleaning Yamuna



#### ► MATCHING FREEBIE

**FOR FREEBIE:** The BJP is announcing parallel welfare benefits while promising to improve the delivery mechanism for existing ones

#### ► DEPLOYING RSS

**MACHINERY:** RSS teams of five volunteers each are reaching out to voters, regularly meeting them in groups of 25. Its foot-soldiers on the ground are also striving to ensure that their supporters come out and vote on February 5

#### ► HEEDING LOCAL

**OPINION:** Local satraps like Ramvir Singh Bidhuri,

**Parvesh Verma, Bansuri Swaraj, Yogender Chandoliya and Manoj Tiwari have been given say in ticket distribution. RSS workers are also working overtime to appease rebels as well those unhappy with ticket distribution**

**► STEERING CLEAR OF POLARISING AGENDA:** The BJP leadership is being careful not to push communal issues so that the Muslim vote does not get consolidated

**► BANKING ON CONGRESS:** The BJP is hoping that the rival national party will split the Muslim and the slum/Jhuggi Jhopri (JJ) cluster vote, which will work to its advantage

**The BJP is hoping to win over the middle class voter disenchanted by the poor quality of roads, garbage collection and unclean Yamuna**

attended meeting in a park in a crowded colony in Dwarka, “they will take away your free schools, free medical treatment, free bus rides, free water, electricity. Don’t you press the wrong button by mistake.” The gathering at Dwarka is a mix of young first-time voters, middle-aged blue-collar workers, elderly residents and an overwhelming number of women wearing the ‘Aam Aadmi’ caps, all responding to him with measured enthusiasm and laughing at his jokes. Street-corner-style meetings like these are Kejriwal’s forte. The party has long found them more effective than the BJP’s mega rallies.

#### THE BJP'S COUNTERATTACK

The doubling down on freebies, though, has become the central election issue around which even the BJP, the AAP’s main rival, seems to be fighting. It has led even Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assure that they won’t be stopped if BJP comes to power. Addressing a rally in Northwest Delhi in early January, Modi, who coined the phrase *AAPda* (catastrophe) to describe Kejriwal’s party, said: “Seeing their defeat in the Delhi election, they (AAP) have started spreading the lie that if the BJP comes, this would be stopped, that would be stopped. But I want to assure the people of Delhi that no schemes of people’s welfare would be stopped in the BJP government... In schemes where *AAPda* people have looted people’s money, those schemes would also be run with full honesty by putting honest people.” In doing so, Modi is playing Kejriwal’s game, feels Rahul Verma, head of Politics Initiative of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR). “The BJP had a chance to set the narrative by offering something beyond freebies. But between December

and January, they seem to have missed that bus," he says.

The BJP, after its sweep of all seven Delhi seats in the 2024 general election, believes 2025 is its best chance to win Delhi, but as a party insider puts it, "it's also our toughest one." The party is banking on ten years of anti-incumbency as well as what it hopes is Kejriwal's tainted anti-corruption image from the excise policy scandal. Add to that the exit of many loyal leaders from AAP, weakening its position in several constituencies. The BJP's strategy is multifaceted: field heavyweight candidates, challenge AAP's welfare model and outpromise AAP on freebies. The party released its manifesto in three volumes two weeks before the polling date of February 5. First, BJP chief J.P.

## Reviving fortunes in the 2025 Delhi election is crucial for the Congress not just for survival but also to regain its credibility within the Opposition bloc

Nadda and former Union minister Anurag Thakur released two volumes with the themes of Garib (poor), Yuva (youth) and Naari (women). In these, the BJP committed a raft of freebies, including Rs 2,500 for every adult woman in poor families, an additional Rs 5 lakh as health insurance cover apart from the Rs 5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat, subsidy amounts of Rs 500 on LPG cylinders and one free cylinder each during Holi and Diwali. Then, Union home minister Amit Shah released the third and final volume listing commitments to create 50,000 government jobs and two million self-employment opportunities, provide 100 per cent e-buses by 2027, cleaning up the Yamuna and a blueprint for the capital to become a hub for entrepreneurship and industry.

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

## SAFFRON'S SURGICAL STRIKES

The BJP has been surgical in its approach to candidate selection. By nominating prominent leaders like two-time MPs Parvesh Verma to take on Kejriwal in New Delhi and Ramesh Bidhuri to take on Atishi in Kalkaji, the party is signalling serious intent designed to challenge AAP's strongholds. "There is no fight," says a confident Parvesh Verma, while campaigning in Ansari Nagar AI-IMS campus. Son of former Delhi chief minister and Jat strongman Sahib Singh Verma, Parvesh, by virtue of fighting Kejriwal directly, is widely believed to be a frontrunner for the CM's post should his party win. In an election where the BJP has characteristically not projected a CM face, "Aashirwad dijiyega (please bless me)," he tells residents of Ansari Nagar,



**FINDING SPACE**  
Rahul Gandhi leads the Congress campaign in Delhi's Patparganj neighbourhood, Jan. 28

as he goes door to door in the company of local BJP workers. They tear down Kejriwal posters and replace them with Verma's as they walk. The quiet of the evening is punctured by drumbeats and slogans. Women peek out of windows and balconies as Parvesh waves. A cutout of Kejriwal stands at the entrance of his house in Windsor Place. "Don't vote for me, I failed to clean the Yamuna," it says, mocking a promise Kejriwal has not kept. "I will be immersing this cutout in the Yamuna," Verma says, proceeding to do exactly that the next day.

The BJP is hoping to make a dent in Kejriwal's core base and is focusing on lower middle class areas, JJ clusters and slums, where the local units of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have become active. Spread across 675 slums and over 1,700 jhuggi-jhopri (JJ) clus-

## CONGRESS'S COMEBACK STRATEGY

**The Congress's Delhi election strategy focuses on reclaiming the Muslim and Dalit vote, attacking AAP's governance, introducing targeted welfare schemes and fielding strategic candidates**

### ► REBUILDING VOTER

**BASE:** The Congress aims to regain the lost Muslim and Dalit support through micro-campaigns, emphasising historical commitments to minority welfare, secularism and social justice, while highlighting AAP's perceived failures in these areas

**► GOING SOLO:** Breaking ties with AAP to contest independently reflects the party's plan to reclaim its voter base, targeting key constituencies and rejuvenating the morale of the grassroots Congress worker

**► FOCUSED FREEBIES:** Welfare programmes such as the Pyari Didi Yojana and Jeevan Raksha Yojana, along with targeted finan-

cial and healthcare benefits, form the cornerstone of the Congress's promises to woo Delhi voters

**► ATTACKING AAP ON CORRUPTION:** The Congress is leveraging high-profile controversies like the 'Liquorgate' scandal, the 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy and resource mismanagement allegations to undermine AAP's governance narrative and challenge its credibility

**► STRATEGIC CANDIDATE SELECTION:** The early announcement of candidates, fielding experienced leaders and selectively including defectors aim to project strength, though internal dissent over these choices could pose challenges

position narrative. With rising questions about its relevance within the INDIA Opposition bloc, the stakes are higher than ever. Once the unchallenged ruler of Delhi for three consecutive terms under Sheila Dikshit from 1998 to 2013, the party has since experienced a precipitous decline. The past three assembly elections have been disastrous, with the Congress failing to win even a single seat in both 2015 and 2020. The party's vote share plunged to 9.68 per cent in 2015 and to a mere 4.26 per cent in 2020.

**S**andeep Dikshit, the Congress candidate fighting Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency, often invokes his mother Sheila Dikshit's reign in his campaign, portraying it as a model era of development. "People still remember how good things were during Sheila Dikshit's time," he says. During one of his door-to-door outreaches in the constituency, Dikshit is accompanied by a handful of party loyalists, their enthusiasm unable to mask the painfully underwhelming nature of the exercise. Energy or crowds, they are conspicuous by their absence. The residents, he claims, are disillusioned with the current state of affairs. "People want change," Dikshit insists. The Congress has also joined the freebie bandwagon. Dikshit is unfazed by the allegation that the Congress is the BJP's "B-team". "Was AAP BJP's B-team in Haryana, Uttarakhand, Gujarat?" he retorts.

## THE I.N.D.I.A DIVIDE

Despite being part of the INDIA coalition, the Congress and AAP have decided to contest independently in Delhi. This decision has created a triangular battle, with the BJP as the third major contender. Several INDIA partners, including the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), have thrown their weight behind AAP, deepening the existential crisis for the Congress. A poor showing could further diminish its influence within the coalition and weaken its national standing.

The decision to sever ties with AAP reflects a calculated move by the Congress, which sees regaining its lost voter

## Severing ties with AAP is a calculated move by the Congress, which sees regaining its lost voter base from AAP as essential for a comeback in Delhi

ters, Delhi has around 1.5 million slum voters who account for a substantial 10 per cent of the total vote. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll surveys in Delhi showed that 61 per cent of the poorest voted for AAP in the 2020 elections. The BJP has got the RSS to send out teams for a door-to-door appeal to all voters in these areas. The party's game plan is to gain 15-20 per cent in these clusters. It is also banking on bagging a substantial percentage of the votes of the middle class, which constitutes 45 per cent of the electorate. The middle-class vot-

ers, especially in the more well-to-do colonies, are upset with Kejriwal for the poor quality of roads, garbage collection and for failing to clean up the Yamuna, lapses that the BJP is tom-tomming across the town.

## THE CONGRESS'S DILEMMA

The 2025 Delhi election is a critical moment for the Congress, especially after recent defeats in Haryana and Maharashtra. Reviving its fortunes in Delhi is not only crucial for the party's revival, but also for reclaiming its place in the Op-

base from AAP as essential for a comeback in Delhi. Describing the 2024 Lok Sabha alliance with AAP as a major misstep, Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav says, "Had we avoided attempting coalition rule with AAP in 2013, our decline wouldn't have been this steep. The 2024 decision was an even bigger mistake, and we've paid the price." Congress leaders cite past experiences to justify their stance. "Senior leaders of our state units in Gujarat, Goa, Delhi and Punjab have strongly opposed any alliance with AAP. They have witnessed firsthand how the AAP indirectly aids the BJP," claims Ajay Maken, Congress treasurer and former Union minister.

## THE MUSLIM-DALIT VOTE

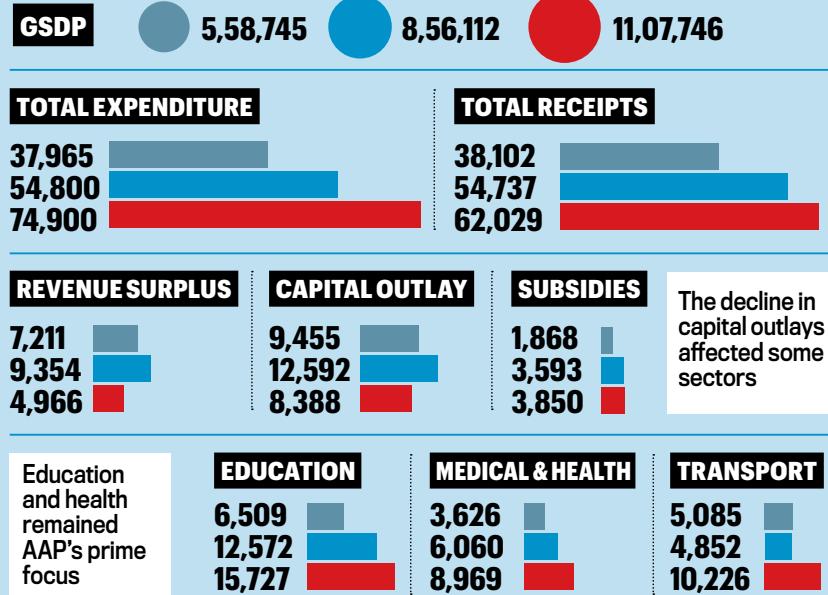
Internally, the Congress faces both challenges and opportunities. A weak grassroots network and factionalism remain hurdles, but the party is focusing its strategy on consolidating Muslim and Dalit votes through candidate-centric campaigns in around 20 winnable constituencies. Muslims, who make up 12.9 per cent of Delhi's population, hold significant sway in seven constituencies and are a substantial force in 15 others. AAP's grassroots outreach and largely secular stance have historically resonated with the Muslim community. The party had secured all six seats in the 2020 assembly polls. Despite its subtle shifts towards soft Hindutva, 69 per cent of Muslims supported AAP in 2020, while the Congress secured only 15 per cent, according to the India Today-Axis My India exit poll at the time.

The Congress now highlights instances of AAP's soft Hindutva approach, such as Arvind Kejriwal's recitation of the Hanuman Chalisa and endorsement of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, as signs of ideological inconsistency. These actions, argues the Congress, have eroded minority trust in AAP. While some believe the Congress has a chance to regain Muslim support, political analysts believe that Muslim voters may strategically lean towards AAP if the BJP intensifies its campaign. "As the election date approaches, the minority community might perceive the

## HOW AAP HANDLED DELHI'S BUDGET

While the size of the economy doubled in the 10 years of AAP rule, its revenue surplus halved with mounting subsidies

● 2015-16 ● 2019-20 ● 2023-24 (figures in Rs crore)



Source: Revised Estimates, Delhi Budget Analysis, PRS Legislative Research

Congress as a vote-splitter inadvertently aiding the BJP's agenda—a narrative the AAP is likely to amplify through WhatsApp groups," says political analyst Amitabh Tiwari.

The Dalits, who comprise 16.7 per cent of Delhi's population, are a crucial electoral bloc. Historically loyal to the Congress, Dalit support has shifted to AAP in recent years due to welfare schemes like free power and water. AAP swept all the 12 SC-reserved constituencies in both 2015 and 2020, with the Congress's vote share plummeting to just 3.97 per cent in the latter. The Congress is now attempting to reclaim Dalit support by addressing grievances and promising tangible benefits such as increased representation and welfare programmes. Party leader Rahul Gandhi's focus on protecting the Constitution and social justice is meant to resonate with Dalit voters, by projecting the Congress as a defender of their rights.

## THE BATTLE OVER MODELS

The Congress has structured its campaign around a pointed critique of AAP's governance, highlighting issues like the alleged corruption in the "Liquorgate" scandal and the erosion of public infrastructure. Rahul has used social media to draw attention to problems such as

garbage accumulation in Delhi, mocking Kejriwal's claim of transforming the city into a "Paris". The "Sheesh Mahal" controversy, concerning Kejriwal's renovation of the chief ministerial residence, has become a cornerstone of the Congress attack. The party has rolled out a suite of welfare initiatives to address economic and social inequities in Delhi, positioning them as practical solutions to everyday challenges. As part of its outreach, the party plans to distribute guarantee cards across Delhi, a strategy that proved successful in Karnataka.

Kejriwal, though, remains the all-too-stable eye of the storm for both the BJP and the Congress. The AAP supremo dismisses talk of this being a battle for his political survival. Instead, he says Delhi voters are being asked to choose between two models of governance—the AAP one where state or national finances and resources get distributed equitably to the common man, especially the underprivileged, and the BJP model that favours arapatis, or billionaires. That's a classic Kejriwal binary that has fetched him handsome electoral returns in the past. Whether it will carve out a future for him, the results on February 8 will tell. ■

**—with Anilesh S. Mahajan and Kaushik Deka**



# देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज ऐप

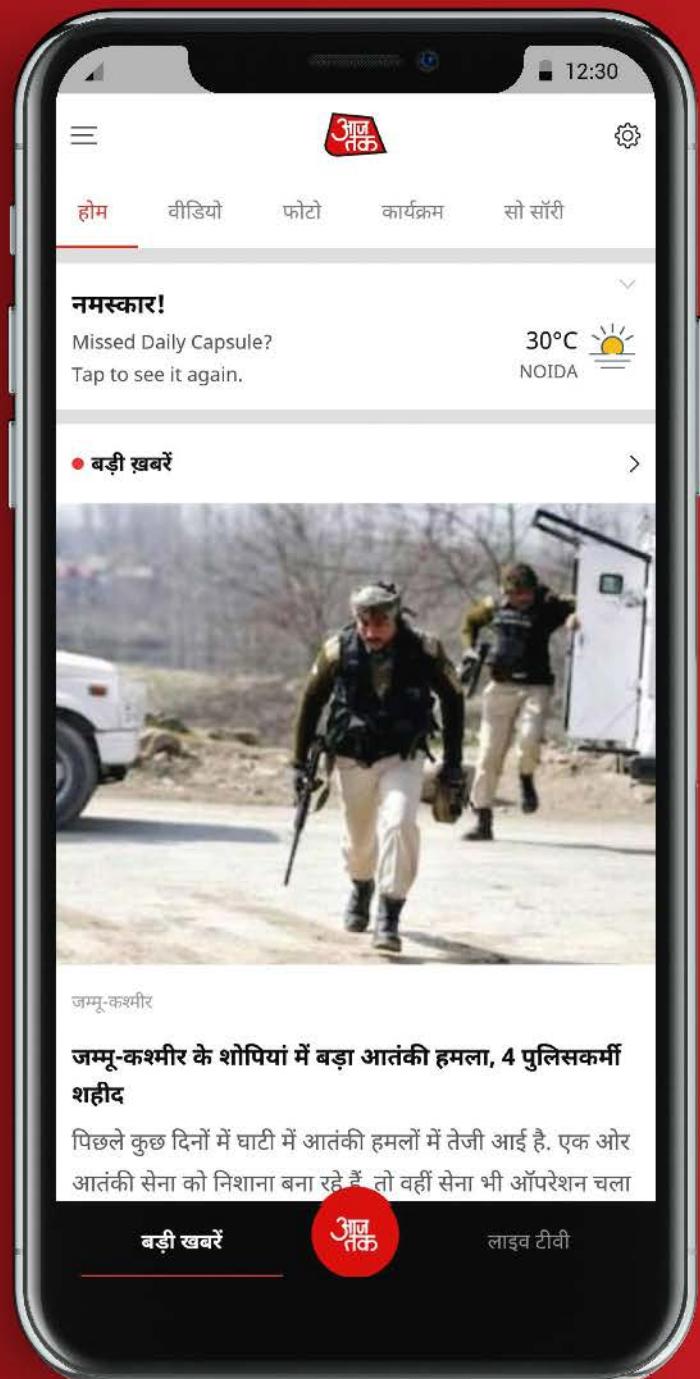
जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,  
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

[aajtak.in/app](http://aajtak.in/app)



उपलब्ध है



# CHINESE THREAT IN INDIAN DRONES

**The use of Chinese-made components in Indian drones being supplied to the army runs the risk of compromising national security through the hacking of data. A concerned military is now tightening regulations**

By PRADIP R. SAGAR

S

Sometimes, it takes a glaring mishap to lay bare a festering problem. For the Indian Army, that happened a few months ago, when a tactical drone—used for covert intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) activities—along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir veered off course, crossing into Pakistani territory. According to army sources, what initially seemed like a technical glitch turned into a chilling revelation: the “Make in India” drone had actually been hacked, its Chinese components exploited to wrest control from Indian operators. This wasn’t just a technical failure, it was a breach of national security. There had been a previous warning too—in early 2024, similar hacking was reported at a location near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China in eastern Ladakh, when two tactical drones had failed to take off.

These revelations sent shock waves through India’s military establishment, which is scaling up drone usage for criti-



cal ISR missions as well as preparing an armed fleet of Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs) and, following government policy, mostly procuring them from Indian manufacturers. “We were on a procurement spree. But the LoC incident exposed our vulnerability when we learnt that our bird was hacked by people operating across the border. It raises questions not only about cybersecurity but also supply chain issues in case of wartime,” says a defence official. It’s time to address these issues first before modernising the unarmed wing, he adds.

The discovery of the compromised

RAMAN RAINA



**EAGLE ON HIS SHOULDER\**

An Indian Army soldier accompanied by a drone on LoC patrol in Poonch, J&K

drones forced the army to suspend multiple procurement orders. Among these was one for 200 medium-altitude logistics drones, intended for deployment along the LAC. Following the LoC incident, when the ministry of defence (MoD) demanded information about the quantum of Chinese components in military drones—a known threat—it opened an ill-disguised can of worms: several Indian drone-makers were found to rely heavily on Chinese parts.

Experts have long warned about cybersecurity vulnerabilities that Chinese components in Indian drones pose. The greatest danger lies in data leaks and unauthorised access to sensitive military operations. Backdoors—mechanisms that bypass security features—embedded in Chinese electronics, particularly within communication modules, cameras and control systems, could be exploited to extract intelligence and sensitive military information,

ing to eliminate potential malware threats. This was hardly surprising, given that a law passed by Beijing in 2017 mandated that all Chinese tech firms share data with government agencies. In 2019, a cautious US banned the usage of drones and their components made in China.

**D**uring the military stand-off with China along the LAC in Ladakh following the Galwan clash in June 2020, the restrictions were expanded to include equipment and spares from all countries sharing land borders with India. However, deliberate obfuscation by some domestic manufacturers and laxity in compliance measures have led to the current situation.

The threat, moreover, isn’t limited to military drones; the burgeoning civilian drone market is equally at risk. Recognising the urgency of the threat, the ministry of electronics and information



**“WITH SUPPLY CHAINS HEAVILY RELIANT ON CHINESE COMPONENTS, THE FOCUS IS ON FINDING SOLUTIONS TO ELIMINATE THEIR PRESENCE. A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK WILL SOON BE DEVELOPED”**

**MAJOR GENERAL C.S. MANN**

*Additional Director General, Army Design Bureau*

disrupt military operations, hinder operational readiness or even seize control of drones mid-operation.

The Director General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) had in the past issued repeated directives barring the use of Chinese-origin components in sensitive security equipment. The directives mandated that hardware and software in such systems must not come from China. Manufacturers were also instructed to ensure rigorous test-

technology (MeitY) has now expanded its cybersecurity initiatives to include civilian drones.

“We have been moving too quickly on drone adoption, both military and civilian, without adequately addressing their vulnerabilities,” admits a senior defence official. He reveals that there is still no mechanism in place to verify the origin of components in ‘Make in India’ drones.

The military is contemplating a

# DANGER IN THE SKIES

**Chinese components used in some Indian military drones that could potentially be compromised**

## NAVIGATION SYSTEMS

Systems, including GPS and inertial navigation systems, can be corrupted by, say, false coordinates.

**Firms:** Beijing BDStar Navigation, Huace Navigation

## SENSORS AND CAMERAS

Some Indian drones use Chinese sensors and cameras that are ripe for illegal transmission of data through malicious firmware

**Firms:** Hangzhou Hikvision, Zhejiang Dahua

few remedial measures. After the eye-opener at the LoC, Major General C.S. Mann, additional director general with the Army Design Bureau (ADB), has been framing a methodology to block the use of Chinese equipment in the military and has been meeting all stakeholders, including UAV manufacturers. Once finalised, the framework will be submitted to the MoD. The finalised drone procurement framework will be applied to the Indian Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard too.

Maj. Gen. Mann says that any electronic part has the potential for data transfer. "With supply chains heavily reliant on Chinese components, the focus is on finding solutions to eliminate their presence. Various strategies are under deliberation, and a comprehensive framework will soon be developed," he says.

## THREATS AND LOOPHOLES

Experts classify Chinese components in drones into two types—active and passive. Active components, which include processors, communication modules, sensors, flight control units and memory storage devices are critical to drone operations and highly vulnerable to cyber threats. For example, processors with malicious firmware (microcode or program) can help adversaries intercept surveillance data or manipulate drone functions; communication modules and sensors can transmit sensitive reconnaissance data to foreign servers. Passive components like printed circuit boards (PCBs), motors and power systems also carry risks. PCBs can conceal spyware or sabotage mechanisms, compromised motors and power systems can lead to premature failures and sub-standard resistors or capacitors increase system failure risks during missions.

Defence analysts identify specific threats too. Injection of malware, where components are embedded with malicious programs during manufacturing, disrupting operations and compromising data security, is one. Components like cameras, LiDAR (Light Detection

and Ranging) sensors and communication modules can also be rigged with malware to transmit information to adversaries. Furthermore, a dependency on Chinese systems limits India's ability to customise drones for defence needs. Given its domination in drone components, Beijing can manipulate their supply chain to disrupt Indian drone production and operational readiness.

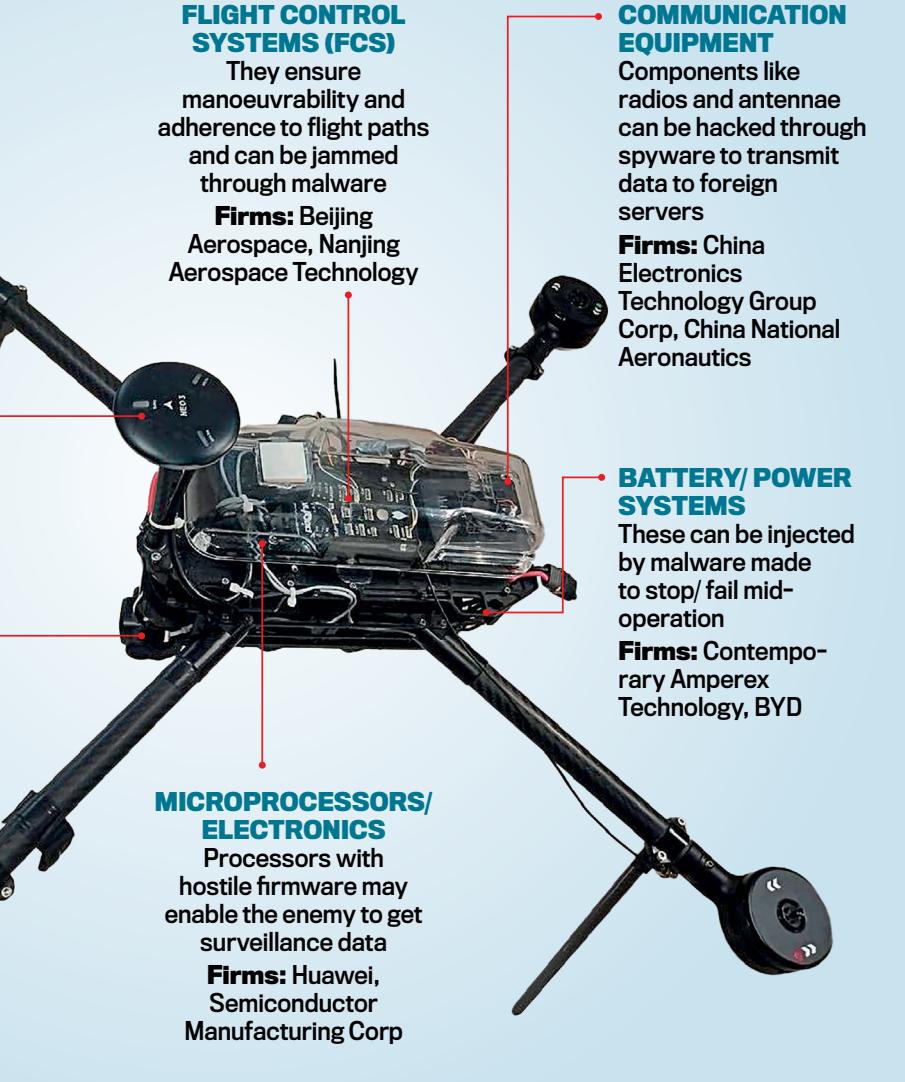
**T**he primary reason for the hijacking of Indian assembled drones is the use of vulnerable open source material whose survivability is poor because it was never intended to be used for commercial and security applications," says Sai Pattabiram, founder and MD of Chennai-based ZUPPA Geo Navigation Technologies Pvt. Ltd. His company works closely with the Indian Army to provide it with hacking-proof drones. He adds that the rise of drone swarms, loitering munitions (armed drones that 'loiter' in the sky before locating the target) and autonomous UCAVs means that defence forces must adapt to the growing cyber threats that accompany these technologies. He also points out that the rampant use of COTS (commercial off-the-shelf) civilian drones in recent conflicts means that both civilian and defence drones require similar levels of cybersecurity measures.

Addressing the vulnerabilities posed by Chinese components in drones will be crucial to maintaining operational security and national sovereignty, says another MoD official. "The government is expected to ex-

## FOREIGN COMPONENTS IN INDIAN DRONES COULD ENABLE FUNCTION MANIPULATION, EXTRACTION OF SENSITIVE MILITARY INFORMATION, OR SYSTEM FAILURE DURING MISSIONS

pedite programmes aimed at indigenous development of UAVs," he adds, claiming that a pilot project is going to be launched soon to check how supply chain issues can be addressed.

Group Captain R.K. Narang, a drone expert who has worked extensively with Indian drone manufacturers, blames flawed government policy. He says that the Defence Acquisition Procedure-2020 (DAP-2020) mandates that Indigenous Designed, Developed, and Manufactured (IDDM) products with more than 50 per cent Indigenous Content (IC) be given preference in procurement to promote Indian firms. However, due to loopholes, assembled products with negligible indigenous content could qualify as IDDM. A few manufacturers also get cheap Chinese equipment allegedly by routing them through their subsidiary firms based



## A CRACKDOWN ON CHINESE COMPONENTS CAN RAISE COSTS, WITH DRONE MAKERS FORCED TO BUY MORE EXPENSIVE FOREIGN PARTS

outside China to avoid detection.

In view of that possibility, the MoD narrowed its procurement norms, decreeing on November 30, 2023, that a minimum 50 per cent of the value of material, components and software of military drones must be of indigenous origin. However, monitoring that is challenging, as no entity in India has the mandate to certify IC percentages of defence equipment.

"Most Indian UAV manufacturers prefer importing engines, hydraulic systems, electronics, airframes and other components instead of collaborating with Indian companies to enhance

indigenous content," says Narang. He attributes this to the lack of Qualitative Requirements (QRs) mandating maximum indigenous content across subsystems, materials, components, software, sensors and payloads as a procurement criterion. "Addressing this issue is crucial to reducing vulnerabilities and minimising unwarranted dependencies," he says.

However, a defence official points out that an immediate crackdown on Chinese-made components will increase the cost of developing military drones in the short term, as local manufacturers will need to source

more expensive foreign-made parts till they develop and manufacture these, potentially leading to delays.

## DRONE OPPORTUNITIES

As seen in the past two years of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, UAVs have transformed warfare. Recently, army chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi described plans to induct indigenous drones as part of developing "smart soldiers", with every soldier equipped with a "drone to himself—an eagle on the arm of every soldier". The Indian military has plans to invest over Rs 3,000 crore in procuring nearly 2,500 military drones.

With the Indian drone market poised to breach the \$40 billion mark (Rs 3.36 lakh crore) over the next decade, the government is promoting local drone manufacturing through initiatives such as the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and reformed guidelines like the Drone Rules, 2021. Given the fact that the US has plans to procure over one million drones and Russia 1.4 million, these moves aim to promote India as a global drone manufacturing hub while reducing reliance on foreign technologies.

"The global demand for drones presents a unique opportunity for India," notes an expert. India could leverage its domestic requirement of over a million drones to position itself as a trusted exporter, given the global distrust of China and India's reputation as a reliable technology partner, he adds. However, other than developing fully indigenous drones, this will require a shift toward centralised procurement, ensuring standardisation of products, rather than allowing individual (military) units to buy drones independently.

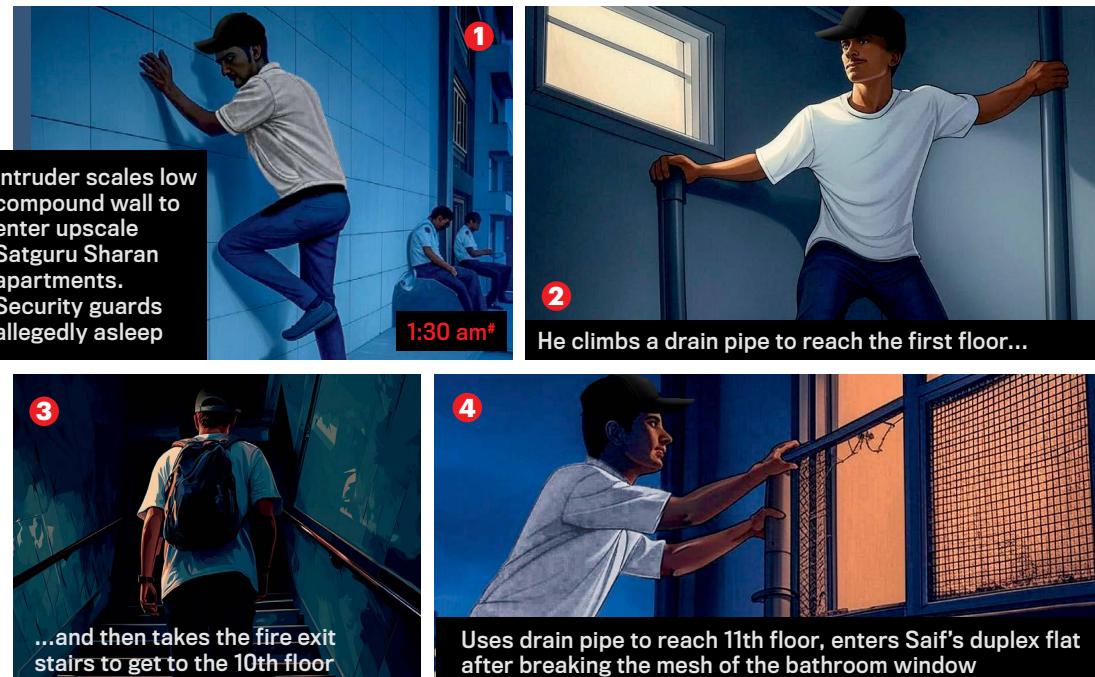
The recent red flags over the use of Chinese components in military drones may have cast a shadow on India's grand drone project. As the military scrambles to develop a comprehensive cybersecurity framework, domestic manufacturers must be persuaded to develop their own components. A 100 per cent Make in India tag is the only way forward. ■

# TROUBLING QUESTIONS

In the wee hours of January 16, an intruder breaks into the double-storeyed penthouse apartment of Bollywood stars Saif Ali Khan and his wife Kareena Kapoor in Bandra West. A scuffle ensues, Saif is stabbed, and the robber escapes. After a 3-day manhunt, Mumbai Police announce they have the culprit—an illegal Bangladeshi migrant named Shariful Islam Shehzad Fakir. Except that the police version of events doesn't quite add up...

\*Graphic by NILANJAN DAS | Text by DHAVAL S. KULKARNI

## SCENE 1 THE BREAK-IN



### WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP

**Q.** Why does such a high-end apartment have such poor security and CCTV coverage?

**Q.** How did the intruder know the layout of Saif's apartment and how to access it? Had he visited it before?

**Q.** Why did he target the penthouse on the top floors? Wouldn't a flat on a lower floor been easier to rob?

## SCENE 2 THE CONFRONTATION



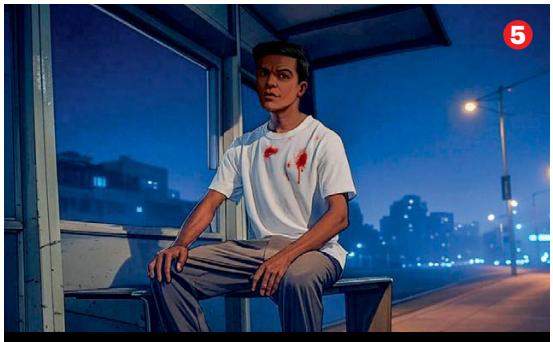
### SCENE 3 THE STABBING



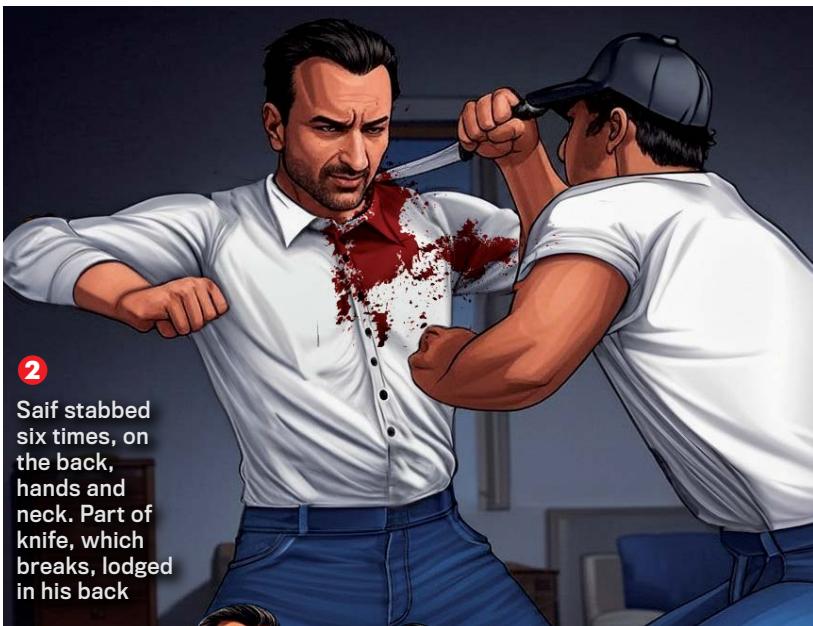
Geeta, a nurse who stays in elder son Taimur's room, intervenes and is also attacked on her face, neck and wrist of her right hand



Saif manages to extricate himself...



Assailant escapes the way he came, spends night at National College bus stop, 1 km from apartment



2  
Saif stabbed six times, on the back, hands and neck. Part of knife, which breaks, lodged in his back



4  
...they all run out of bedroom, lock it, hurry to the 12th floor

### WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP

Q. Was this a robbery/ attack specifically targeting Saif?

Q. CCTV footage seems to show a younger looking man on the stairs, compared to Shariful

Q. Was this the act of a lone wolf? Or were more people involved?

### SCENE 4 AFTER THE ATTACK



Auto driver Bhajan Singh Rana sees a lady screaming near main gate of apartment building, stops



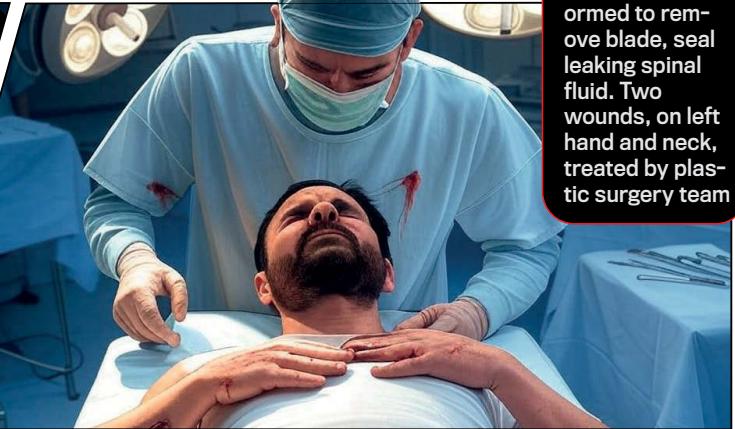
A bloodied Saif gets into the auto with son Taimur and a staff member, asks Rana to take them to Lilavati Hospital. The journey takes 7 minutes

## CRIME THE SAIF CASE



3

Hospital informs the police. Actor has severe injuries, part of knife lodged in spine



4

**WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP**

**Q.** Why didn't family inform the police immediately?

**Q.** Why didn't Saif use one of his cars to go to hospital?

**Q.** Why did he take 8-year-old Taimur with him?

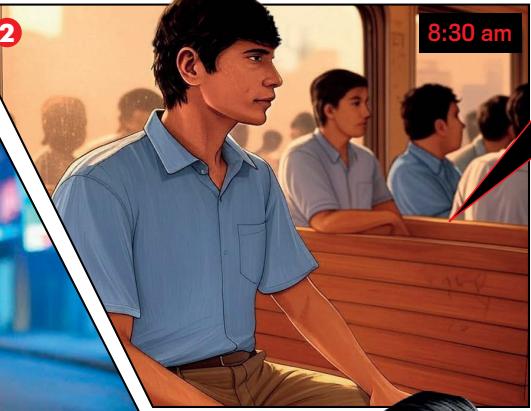
**Q.** Conflicting reports on Saif's injuries. Later, ports minister and BJP leader Nitesh Rane raises doubts over Saif's "astonishingly speedy" recovery

### SCENE 5 | ON THE RUN



1

The attacker changes clothes on Linking Road behind Bastian restaurant, throws handle of broken knife in the Bandra Talao, police allege



2

Takes a local train from Bandra railway station to Dadar



3

Purchases earphones from a mobile shop at Dadar West, leaves for Worli Koliwada



4

After learning he has attacked an actor and that the police are on his trail, gets a haircut at a local salon. Heads to Thane

### WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP

**Q.** Shariful's actions, caught on CCTV, do not seem to suggest any high anxiety

**Q.** If he knew he had attacked a celebrity and that the entire Mumbai police force was after him, why didn't he flee the city?

## SCENE 6 THE HUNT IS ON



### WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP

Q. Media reports suggest DNA samples, fingerprints from crime scene do not match Shariful's

Q. Shariful's father says he fled to India after being persecuted by earlier Awami League regime. Says man in CCTV footage police have put out not his son

Q. Investigating officer changed midway adds to intrigue

Saif discharged from hospital, meets autorickshaw driver Rana to thank him

# COPING WITH A FALLING MARKET

**Numerous factors may trigger stock market volatility, which could result in a sharp, sudden increase or decrease in the value of your portfolio. Don't make hasty decisions about your investments**

By Narayan Krishnamurthy

**S**eptember 2024 was a euphoric time for Indian investors. This was when market indicator BSE Sensex touched an all-time high of 85,978.25, raising expectations among investors who continued to increase their exposure to the markets.

Many over-optimistic investors and market experts predicted the Sensex would close the year by breaching the 100,000 level. By mid-January 2025, however, many of the same investors were rethinking their enthusiasm. The gradual, but continuous fall in stock markets is worrying investors, especially on the back of foreign investors exiting amid the fall of the rupee (*see graphic*). Yet, the Indian markets experienced something very different in 2024, even as FIIs were net sellers in eight months, with the highest selling of Rs 1.14 lakh crore in October. Overall, in 2024, FIIs sold

a net of Rs 2.96 lakh crore, and in the same period, systematic investment plan (SIP) inflows were Rs 2.42 lakh crore. The belief in the markets by domestic investors, especially retail ones, is visible in the increasing number of demat accounts as well as rising SIP investments through mutual funds. The markets are today back to the levels they were in June-July 2024.

Naturally, this fall has caused some anxiety among investors, especially those who haven't experienced significant falls. A regime change in the US, the falling rupee against the dollar,

rising inflation and many other domestic and international factors are some of the reasons that have resulted in this market correction or drop. While there is enough reason for concern, it would be unwise to take any dramatic step, especially by way of selling investments.

**N**obody can predict the stock market moves in the long run, if one goes by historical data, but there is plenty to indicate that the markets have gone up in the long run with many short periods of dips, falls and even phases of staying almost flat. Moreover, one

should remember that the BSE Sensex or Nifty only measures a very concentrated set of large-cap Indian companies. A diversified investment portfolio across stocks, commodities and debt instruments can help moderate overall portfolio volatility and fall in value when the stock markets become turbulent.

There have also been years when the stock markets have made significant pullbacks during the





Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

year to deliver a positive return over the full year. For example, in 2017, the Sensex witnessed a fall in the first quarter only to end the year with 28 per cent gains. Then, again in 2020, the Covid pandemic witnessed a steep fall in the markets in the first three quarters only to end the year with a 15 per cent gain. These market corrections are more common than you might think and, as

an investor, you need to know that, historically, there are occasional pull-backs that are followed by rebounds. The data for the past 24 years of the Nifty indicates that there have been more years (14 years) when the markets have posted more than 10 per cent returns and only four instances when the markets have ended the year in a loss. Here are some strategies to cope with market volatility:

#### ↘ Love a market

**correction:** Patience is a virtue when investing in the stock markets. Warren Buffett has given this age-old wisdom a fresh spin: "The stock market is a device for transferring money from the impatient to the patient." Smart investors look out for opportunities when the markets fall. For them, a drop in the markets is like a discount sale at the mall and they feel good every time the market corrects, as they look for opportunities.

Just like you don't stop venturing out to perform your routine chores because the weather gets too cold or hot, the same goes with investments. You are investing or are

investment goals, investors can often find opportunities amidst the chaos.

#### ↘ Stick to your plan:

Your investment decisions are based on your financial goals and factors in your risk tolerance and time horizon for the goal. Remember, investing is a long-term endeavour and market corrections are temporary disruptions in the broader trajectory of market growth. For instance, if you are investing for a 7-10-year time frame and a market correction occurs in the third or fourth year of the goal, you still have some time before making any hard decisions.

However, if you were in the eighth year of a 10-year time frame for a goal, you would need to step in to make harsh decisions. To address the volatile nature of the stock market, it is recommended that you start shifting to a less aggressive and volatile investment instrument as you approach your financial goal instead of being in the riskier equity asset class.

#### A DIVERSIFIED PORTFOLIO ACROSS STOCKS, COMMODITIES AND DEBT INSTRUMENTS CAN HELP MODERATE OVERALL PORTFOLIO VOLATILITY

invested because of a financial goal or need. This need doesn't change because of changes in market conditions. You can arm yourself with the wisdom of how others have weathered market falls, you could develop your strategies to come through market downturns effectively. The first step during a market fall is to not panic, and step back and think about why you have invested in the first place. By resisting the herd mentality and focusing on long-term

#### ↘ Diversification: A

well-diversified portfolio can mitigate the risks associated with market corrections. By spreading your investments across different asset classes, you can reduce exposure to any single market fluctuation. This strategy can help cushion the impact of a correction on your overall portfolio and has proven to work for most investors.

#### ↘ Staying informed:

When you invest, you cannot stay off news, especially market-related news. This doesn't mean you have to stay up watching every headline or

# MARKET LEXICON

**A**s an investor, it is a tough call to know which phase of the stock market you are in. The psychological toll of watching the favourite stock market index tumble day after day for weeks can result in sleepless nights, often leading to poor decision-making. For new investors and those who haven't experienced market cycles, a drop in the markets for even a few days can cause panic, forcing many to sell their holdings.

However, most market participants are optimists who believe in the eternal rise of stock markets. They are not wrong in their belief because in the very long run of over a decade or two, the stock markets have only gone up.

☛ **Pullback:** A market fall of 5–10 per cent in a very short period is

## MOST MARKET PARTICIPANTS ARE OPTIMISTS WHO BELIEVE IN THE ETERNAL RISE OF STOCK MARKETS

a pullback. It could be a dip from a recent high during an ongoing bull market while upward momentum continues or there is a normal adjustment to a market cycle. There have been years when the markets have pulled back on many occasions in the same calendar year.

☛ **Correction:** When a fall or drop of 10–20 per cent over a few months occurs, it is a correction phase. This phase, unlike the pullback, also experiences higher volatility. Corrections cause fear and panic, with

many investors panicking and selling their holdings. Market corrections often last up to six months and are frequently accompanied by adverse news on several factors that impact market movements. Corrections are often seen as ideal times to buy high-value stocks at discounted prices but require knowledge and ability to spot such stocks with the right fundamentals.

☛ **Bear markets:** A market is said to be in a bear phase after a drop of over 20 per cent which lasts for a significant number of months. In a bear market, investor confidence has been shattered and many investors will sell their stocks for fear of further losses. Bear markets can be vicious, wiping out investor wealth and lasting sometimes for a few years. ■

## 24 years of NIFTY returns

Above 30%	2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2014
25% to 30%	2012, 2017
15% to 25%	2010, 2021, 2023
10% to 15%	2004, 2019, 2020
Up to 10%	2002, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2022, 2024
Up to -5%	2015
-5% to -20%	2001
Below -20%	2008, 2011

react to every stock market indicator that comes up. Stay calm, step back and focus on the impact of news and events on your investments before taking the next steps.

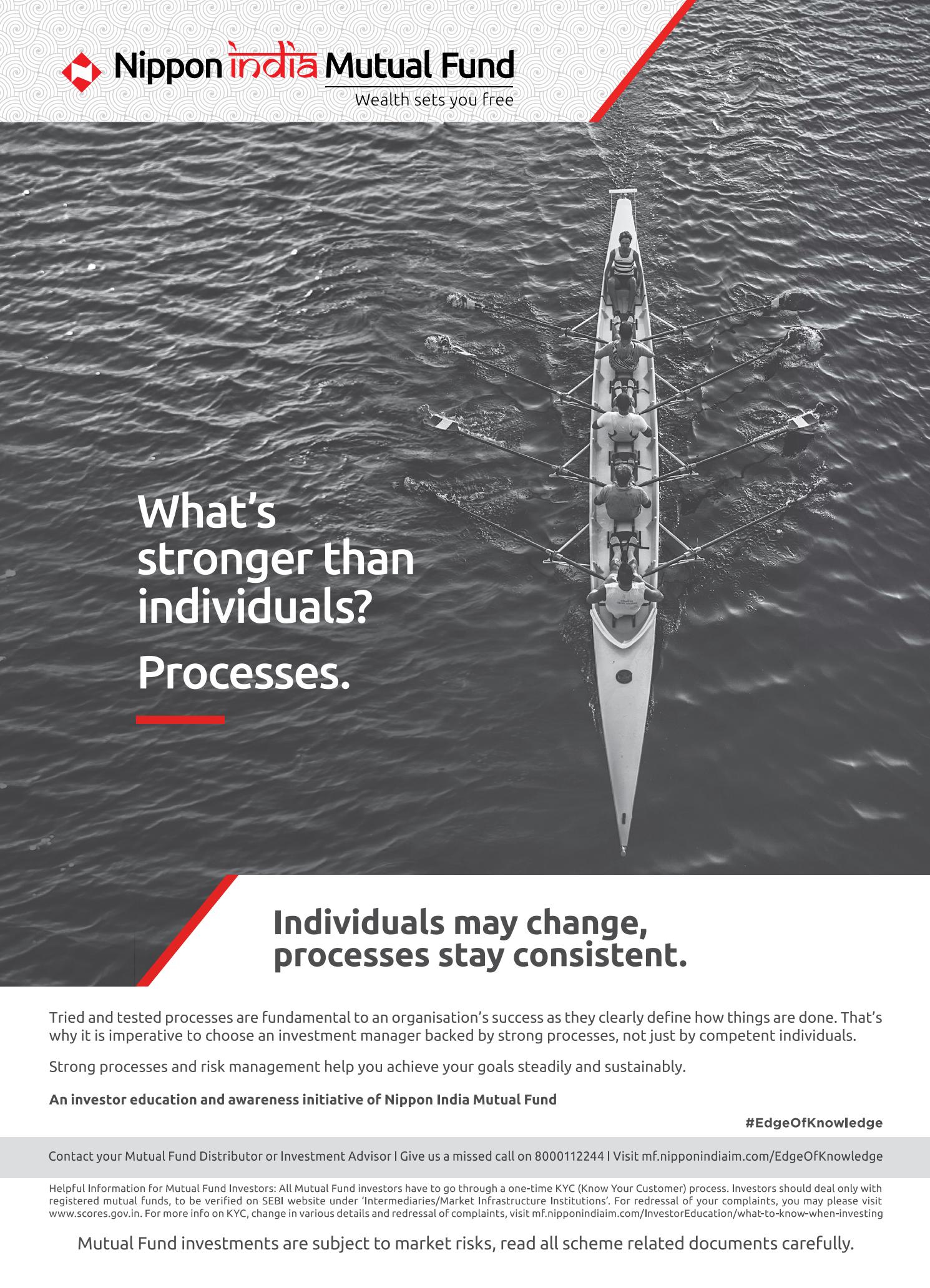
☛ **Opportunities:** Market falls do provide buying opportunities, especially when the fall impacts even quality stocks because of the herd mentality. If a quality stock that you have researched well

is available at a cheap price, capitalise on the temporary dip to add to your holdings.

A fall is also a good time to assess your holdings, asset allocation and risk tolerance. While market falls do provide an investment opportunity, they also offer a chance to exit some of your investments that may have a genuine reason to sell. Explore the financial stage you are in and the financial goals towards which you are investing during market falls to decide on your moves. Having a long-term perspective does help in managing volatility as well as reacting to short-term market falls.

Recognising market cycles is not an easy task for even the best investors. John Templeton observed that "Bull markets are born on pessimism, grow on scepticism, mature on optimism and die on euphoria." Understanding these stages can provide valuable context for making investment decisions. Eventually, market corrections and bear markets are inevitable parts of the investing landscape. By understanding their nature and implementing sound strategies, investors can navigate these challenging periods more effectively. The key to long-term success lies not in avoiding market downturns, but in learning how to respond to them. ■





What's  
stronger than  
individuals?  
Processes.

**Individuals may change,  
processes stay consistent.**

Tried and tested processes are fundamental to an organisation's success as they clearly define how things are done. That's why it is imperative to choose an investment manager backed by strong processes, not just by competent individuals.

Strong processes and risk management help you achieve your goals steadily and sustainably.

**An investor education and awareness initiative of Nippon India Mutual Fund**

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**Mutual Fund investments are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.**

## COVER STORY

# NAVIGATING MUTUAL FUNDS IN FALLING MARKETS

**Do not sell or stop your MF investments based on worrying headlines about market falls. Learn to manage this turbulent phase instead**

By Narayan Krishnamurthy

Stock market movements can often resemble heartbeats on an ECG monitor. The ticker fluctuates, going up and down and, yes, there are occasional spikes and dips in the markets just as your heartbeat varies in response to excitement or stress. To address this worrying nature of investors, the stock markets have a financial product—equity-oriented mutual funds (MFs). Unlike how a single stock reacts to stock market shocks, mutual funds are a basket of securities that offer a lot more cover.

Structurally, an MF pools the money of many investors and invests it for them in a collection of securities by purchasing stocks, bonds, money markets, and/or other securities based on the fund's investment objective. According to the regulator SEBI, mutual funds can be broadly categorised as equity-oriented, debt-

oriented, hybrid, solution-oriented and others. The equity-oriented category is further divided into about a dozen sub-categories based on stock market combinations such as sector, market capitalisation, value or dividend, etc. For investors, this categorisation is a good starting point to navigate across equity-oriented funds based on their risk tolerance.

taking ability. If you haven't seen the categorisation document, do look it up on the SEBI or AMFI (Association of Mutual Funds in India) websites to understand how equity-oriented schemes are classified. Once you are conversant with it, you will be able to relate to how funds react to stock market changes. You will also be able to appreciate why MFs are a

tors, especially the new ones, panic and often sell their holdings. Some who have experience pause their mutual fund SIPs and many others move their investments from one fund to another. Even investors who entered the market with a long-term vision start to doubt their investment rationale. Investors must know that market volatility is inevitable—you cannot escape it if you decide to play the investing game, but you can learn to ride it.

Market volatility refers to the degree of variation or fluctuation in the NAV (net asset value) price of a mutual fund over a certain period. In other words, it measures how drastically prices move up or down in a given time-frame. Higher volatility means prices swing widely and unpredictably, while lower volatility indicates more stable, gradual price changes. Volatility is an indicator of market risk—when it spikes, so does uncertainty and potential risk for investors.

## AS MUTUAL FUNDS HOLD A BASKET OF INVESTMENTS, THEY PROVIDE SPACE FOR INSTANT DIVERSIFICATION, WHICH CAN MINIMISE PORTFOLIO RISK AND VOLATILITY

Each fund type is associated with a specific risk. For instance, large-cap equity schemes are moderately less risky compared to the small-cap fund which comes with a high-risk tag. This approach helps investors choose an MF scheme based on their investment time-frame and risk-

better way to have exposure to the markets than directly investing in stocks (see *9 advantages of investing through MFs*).

### » VOLATILITY AND MUTUAL FUNDS

When the market is volatile, many mutual fund inves-



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

The advantage of investments in mutual funds versus direct stocks is that the fluctuation in a fund's NAV is relatively less compared to that of a stock price. The basket of investments that a mutual fund holds acts like a shock absorber when stock markets fluctuate,

making the NAV less volatile compared to individual stock prices. You could navigate the tricky period when markets are volatile through your mutual fund investments.

Firstly, do not panic. Setting clear financial goals is important when investing through MFs. Likewise,

**DURING  
STRETCHES OF  
INSTABILITY,  
LONG-TERM  
INVESTORS MAY  
PROFIT THE MOST  
BY ULTIMATELY  
STAYING THE  
COURSE**

continue your SIPs through market lows and highs. The very essence of SIPs is to accumulate more units when the markets are low and vice versa. With SIPs, you invest a fixed amount regularly, regardless of the market's ups and downs. It allows you to average out



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

## 9 ADVANTAGES OF INVESTING IN MFs

**#1 Diversification:** As mutual funds hold a basket of investments, they provide instant diversification, which can minimise portfolio risk and volatility. For example, a hybrid fund would hold a mix of stocks and bonds, based on the theory that stock and bond prices don't often decline (or rise) in tandem.

**#2 Professional advice:** Each MF is managed by a professional fund manager and follows an investment outline supported by a team of researchers and analysts. These professionals are supported by technology and have access to a lot more information, data and analytics than individual investors.

**#3 Low minimum investment:** Creating a basket of diversified holdings can be expensive because you have to invest a minimum amount in each stock or bond you want to own. With MFs, your money is pooled with that of a large group of investors, which keeps the minimum investment amount down.

**#4 Little time commitment:** You can build a diversified portfolio on your own, but it takes time and expertise. With MFs, that is done for you.

**#5 Investing discipline:** With an MF investment, decisions are made for you, so your focus can always remain on the long term rather than trying to time the market over the short term.

**#6 Rupee cost averaging:** For mutual funds, you can invest a set amount at regular intervals (through SIPs). With rupee cost averaging, you can potentially buy more units of the fund when prices are low and buy fewer units when prices are high, which may result in a reduced purchase price over time. The SIP route is the go-to choice for most mutual fund investors.

**#7 Liquidity:** MFs are relatively easy to buy and sell at any time. You can get the money after selling your holdings within days.

**#8 Range of options:** From pure equity funds that maximise returns but carry a higher risk to money market funds that minimise risk but offer lower returns, there's a mutual fund for virtually every type of investor.

**#9 Access to markets:** Mutual funds provide access to markets that are virtually unavailable to the individual investor. For example, investing in countries and regions outside India

purchase costs over time, benefiting from both market highs and lows.

Of course, if market volatility makes you too uncomfortable, after consider shifting your investment to less volatile debt or liquid funds doing due diligence on the stage your financial goals or risk-taking abilities are at. These funds tend to be more stable during turbulent markets and can protect your capital from large swings. But such a drastic shift will come with taxation, so do make sure to plan ahead before you take such a step.

### CHOOSE EQUITY FUNDS

The approach to choosing equity funds depends on several factors and even the most articulate method may or may not work. It is somewhat like the Indian cricket team for a particular format (think of it like your financial goal), which may or may not deliver in that specific game. So, if you are a long-term investor who is not one for too much volatility but is keen to reap the benefits of equity, consider index funds. These are passive investments in equity-related indices such as the Sensex, mid-cap, banking, and so on.

At the same time, if you are someone who can take a little risk, the broad large-cap fund category may work for you. Likewise, if you are confident of the fortunes of a particular sector such as healthcare or banking or auto, or some such that offers a mutual fund investing in such themes, you could consider them. Remember, sector investing is risky as such investments concentrate on a specific theme. If the theme doesn't play out, you may face losses.

Then, of course, we have the multi-cap and flexi-cap funds. They sound similar, yet are different. These funds spread their investments across different market capitalisations with specific limits to each segment of the market. It's like a buffet meal, where your choices are defined but give you a taste of everything. You then have equity funds that are based on value investing principles or dividend-oriented stocks.

These have specific outcomes that may be aligned with your needs and fit into your selection. Depending on your goals and needs, you could choose from these funds or a combination to match.

You have the option to invest in a lump sum or through SIPs in equity mutual funds and there are pros and cons with both. Whichever mode you choose, try to automate your investments and invest regularly. It is difficult to know when to buy or sell an investment, which makes it a good idea to invest frequently. This approach can remove the emotional element of investing so you can take advantage of periodic downturns when the markets are like on a sale. As a rule of thumb, it is time in the market, not timing the

## MULTI-CAP FUNDS ARE LIKE A BUFFET MEAL, WHERE YOUR CHOICES ARE DEFINED BUT STILL GIVE YOU A TASTE OF EVERYTHING

market that can have a huge impact on your potential outcomes.

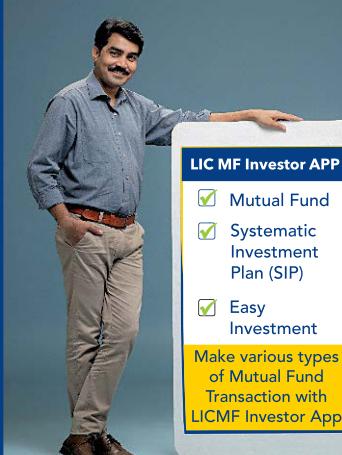
During the spells of volatility, which may include a period of turbulence followed by one of rebound, long-term investors may profit the most by ultimately staying the course. The price of missing the market's best cycles can end up being more costly than avoiding its worst cycles.

Stick to the basics of investing to check your asset allocation during phases of doubt and make any changes based on any imbalance. Lastly, consult an expert when you have extreme doubts about your investments because often the best thing to benefit from market turbulence is to do nothing. ■



The advertisement features a man and a young boy cheering with their arms raised, wearing t-shirts that read "Large + Midcap = Growth". The LIC Mutual Fund logo is at the top. Below the image, a call-to-action button says "Invest in". The main title is "LIC MF LARGE & MID CAP FUND". A subtext states: "Large & Mid Cap Fund - An open ended equity scheme investing in both large cap and midcap stocks." A Riskometer chart shows the risk level as "Very High". A note says: "This product is suitable for investors who are seeking\*: • Long term capital appreciation • A fund that primarily invests in Large and Mid-cap stocks • Risk - Very High \*Investors should consult their financial advisers if in doubt about whether the product is suitable for them. The change in Risk-o-meter will be evaluated on a monthly basis. For Scheme related details, including updation in Riskometer (if any) may please be referred on our website: www.licmf.com".

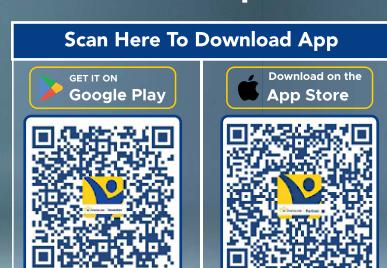
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MUTUAL FUND INVESTMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO MARKET RISKS,  
READ ALL SCHEME RELATED DOCUMENTS CAREFULLY.

## LEARNING CENTRE

# THE INFORMATION RATIO

Mutual fund performance cannot be gauged just by the returns it earns and should be understood by how it has fared compared to its benchmark

**A**s a mutual fund investor, you are often unsure of how to interpret the performance of the fund you have invested in. Fund performance is often indicated over different time frames such as three months, one year, five years, since the inception of the fund and so on. Performance could be compared to peers, benchmarks, or even a no-risk instrument such as the interest rate one could earn from a bank savings account. With so much to go into evaluating the performance of the fund in which you have invested, there is one indicator that could help you understand the way your investment has fared—the Information Ratio (IR).

The IR is a critical indicator for assessing a mutual fund's performance, especially the benchmark that the fund tries to mirror. It is a quantitative measure that factors in the volatility of the returns to the benchmark. Unlike the benchmark, the IR not only evaluates how well a mutual fund scheme is matching and exceeding the benchmark's returns but also incorporates the

standard deviation component, known as tracking error, to assess the consistency with which the portfolio achieves this outperformance.

It is a way to check how the fund has performed in comparison to the benchmark at different times and benchmark performance. A low tracking error signifies consistency, while a high tracking error indicates a more volatile performance. The IR indicates the performance of the fund, especially of the fund manager, and whether they have achieved a superior risk-adjusted return consistently. Risk-adjusted return means measuring how much risk has been taken to achieve the returns generated. This is expressed as a number.

The higher the information ratio, the better the fund manager's performance compared to fund managers of peer funds. A higher IR also means better chances of achieving consistent returns.

## CALCULATING IR

The IR is computed for a specific period by comparing the active return of the fund against the tracking error. The tracking error

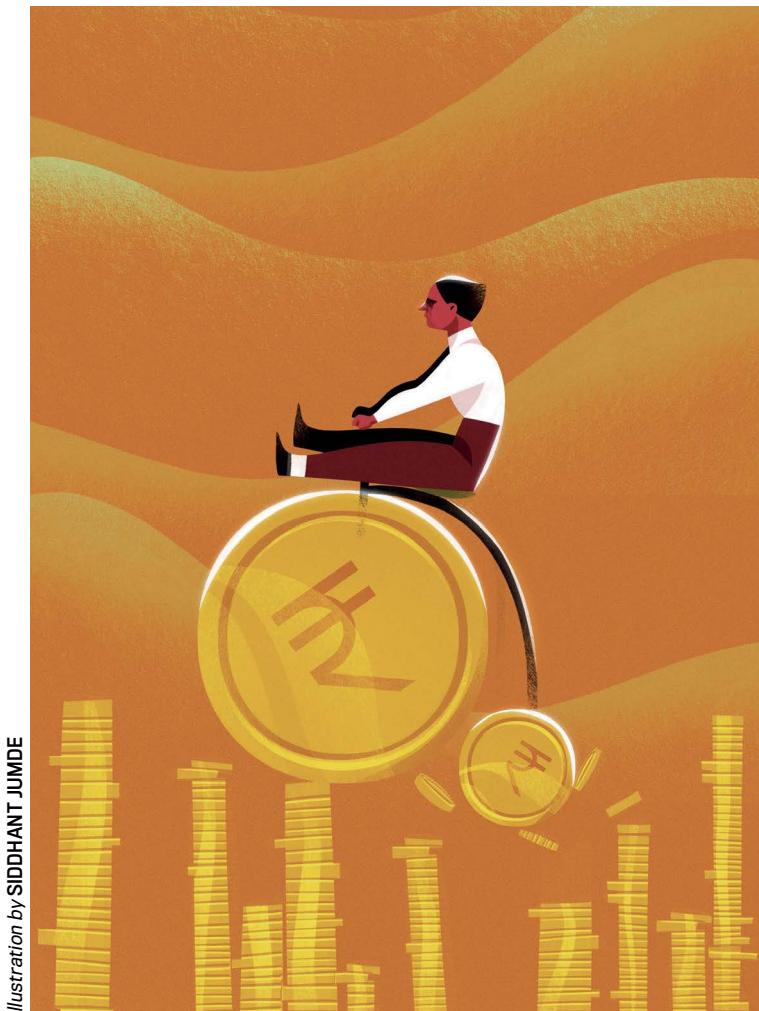


Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

is the difference between a fund's returns and the benchmark or index it was meant to mimic. Mathematically, IR is equal to active return divided by tracking error. Here, the active return is what's generated by the fund minus its benchmark index return while the tracking error is the standard deviation of fund return minus benchmark return.

The IR helps investors make informed investment decisions. In the given example, although Fund A has

PARAMETER	FUND A	FUND B
Fund Return	15%	12%
Tracking Error	7%	3%
Benchmark Return	9%	9%
Information Ratio	0.85	1

a higher return than Fund B, the higher IR of Fund B makes it a better fund to invest in. ■

—Narayan Krishnamurthy

# Your awareness is your biggest investment.



## Avoid unregulated trading apps & social media groups guaranteeing returns

**Dabba trading** is illegal and run by unregistered entities. They often lure you to create Institutional account for high returns. Always verify the broker's registration on [sebi.gov.in](http://sebi.gov.in) and transfer funds only to their registered client bank account.

Guaranteeing returns in securities market is prohibited by law. Investment in such schemes are not eligible for compensation from the Exchange. You may report such practices to us on [Feedbk\\_invg@nse.co.in](mailto:Feedbk_invg@nse.co.in) or call us on **1800 266 0050**

Visit [www.nseindia.com/invest/be-a-smart-investor](http://www.nseindia.com/invest/be-a-smart-investor)  
or Scan the QR code for more details.



## NEED TO KNOW

# NEW RULES FOR MUTUAL FUND NOMINATIONS

Now, investors will be able to nominate up to 10 individuals for each account or folio, with the option to assign percentage allocations

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has recently announced new guidelines to streamline the nomination process for mutual fund folios and demat accounts. These new rules allow investors to nominate up to 10 individuals for each account or folio, with the option to assign percentage allocations to each nominee. The nominees can either continue as joint holders or open separate single accounts/ folios for their respective portions. Set to take effect on March 1, the guidelines apply to both investors and regulated entities, including asset management companies (AMCs).

A key update involves the rule of survivorship, whereby assets in joint accounts will be transferred to the surviving holders without impacting prior nominations or operational agreements. The market regulator has also introduced new measures to validate and authenticate nominations to enhance security and transparency. So, investors who do not specify allocation percentages among their nominees

will have their assets distributed equally. If the investor and one of the nominees die, the remaining nominees will receive their shares on a pro-rata basis. SEBI clarified that nominees will act as trustees for the legal heirs of the account holder, rather than having direct inheritance rights if the nominee predeceases the investor.

The guidelines include provisions for both digital

bonds from nominees. Only a death certificate and updated KYC documents will be required for asset transmission.

The regulator also emphasised the importance of maintaining accurate and updated records of nominations, directing entities to store either physical or electronic copies of nomination records for at least eight years after asset transmis-

## PUSH FOR FUND PERFORMANCE TRANSPARENCY

In a circular dated January 17, SEBI has also directed all mutual fund companies and the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) to disclose risk-adjusted returns (RAR) and Information Ratio (IR). The move will increase transparency in the mutual funds' disclosure of performance instead of just relying on the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) returns of the fund and its benchmark.

This disclosure will come into effect from April 17. For investors, the IR is a widely accepted financial metric that measures the risk-adjusted return (RAR) of an MF scheme portfolio. According to the circular, RAR gauges the excess returns generated by a portfolio and also evaluates the consistency of performance by factoring in risk elements. It is also a way to evaluate a fund manager's ability to deliver returns exceeding a benchmark and at the same time factoring the risks taken to achieve the return which is indicated by the standard deviation.

SEBI has mandated AMCs to display the IR of

## SET TO TAKE EFFECT ON MAR. 1, THE NEW GUIDELINES APPLY TO BOTH INVESTORS AND REGULATED ENTITIES, INCLUDING ASSET MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

and physical submission and updating of nominations. Digital submissions can be validated using Aadhaar-based e-signatures, digital signatures or two-factor authentication, while physical submissions require signature verification or thumb impressions witnessed by two individuals. To simplify the transmission process, SEBI has restricted regulated entities from requesting affidavits or indemnity

sion. Regulated entities are required to acknowledge all nomination submissions or updates, regardless of whether they are submitted online or offline.

For existing account holders, the guidelines provide an option to revise nominations or opt out entirely using a secure online process that includes one-time password (OTP) verification and an optional video recording for additional security.



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUVVODE

## ■ EPFO SIMPLIFIES PROFILE UPDATE

The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has simplified the process of updating member profiles. From now on, members can change personal details without the approval of their employers. Personal information, such as the date of birth, spouse's name, marital status, gender and the date of joining the EPFO, can be modified by members online.

In fact, these profile details can be updated without uploading documents if the UAN (Universal Account Number) is validated through Aadhaar. The members can also self-approve the update request without waiting for the approval from employers.

This new facility on the EPFO website will be available for members with UAN issued after October 1, 2017. Members with pending profile update requests with their employers can now delete the existing request and self-approve using the simplified process. In case the UAN was issued before October 1, 2017, the employer can correct details without the EPFO's approval. The requirement of supporting documents has also been simplified for such cases.

According to the EPFO, 27 per cent of the grievances filed by members were related to member profile/ KYC issues, which are expected to drop due to this new facility. Further, EPFO members who have e-KYC accounts can file their EPF transfer claims online with Aadhaar OTP without the need for any intervention from the employer. This step will reduce the burden on the EPFO to make corrections in the profile details of members and will reduce the wait time for members. ■

—Narayan Krishnamurthy

their MF scheme portfolios on their websites alongside daily performance disclosures. Further, the AMFI will ensure that these disclosures are accessible on its website in a comparable format, downloadable as a spreadsheet, and machine-readable, making it easier for investors to analyse the data. Importantly, to ensure these new indicators are consistent across mutual funds, SEBI has also introduced a uniform methodology for calculat-

ing the IR across various categories of schemes.

Standardisation will ensure that the metric is presented consistently, allowing investors to make more informed comparisons between different funds, the market regulator says. For investors, this disclosure provides yet another indicator to judge the performance of their investments and to make investment decisions based on more information that could help them.

**SEBI HAS MANDATED ASSET MANAGEMENT COMPANIES TO DISPLAY THE INFORMATION RATIO OF THEIR MF SCHEME PORTFOLIOS ON THEIR WEBSITES ALONGSIDE DAILY PERFORMANCE DISCLOSURES**



CINEMA | **THE NORTHEAST**

# Bollywood Looks **NORTHEAST**

Mumbai creators are making a beeline for the region, eager to showcase a different landscape as well as a fresh perspective

By SUHANI SINGH



### BHEDIYA (2022)

Son of a forest ranger, director Amar Kaushik grew up in the sylvan environs of **Medo, Arunachal Pradesh**. For his film, he went back to the state to centre the story around the local folklore of shapeshifting werewolf Yapum, and cast local Paalin Kabak in a meaty part

### PAATAL LOK (2025)

**Kohima and Dimapur in Nagaland** are the setting for a chunk of the drama in Season 2 of the Amazon Prime series. The cast features a host of local musicians, YouTubers and professionals, says Anungla Zoe Longkumer, associate researcher, translator and dialogue coach

### FIGHTER (2024)

When it comes to shooting authentic aerial action sequences in India, nothing beats the IAF base in **Tezpur, Assam**. That's where Hrithik Roshan and Anil Kapoor headed



procure quick permissions for film shoots in the vast, unexplored region. From Kangana Ranaut's Manikarnika Films, which shot portions of *Emergency* (2025) in Kaziranga and Chambal in Assam and also in Meghalaya, to the upcoming season of the popular Amazon Prime series *Family Man* (2019-), which recently wrapped up a shoot in Kohima, Nagaland and Assam's Karbi Anglong and Kaziranga, Handique handles crews of hundreds and ensures the show goes on.

Handique's busy schedule is proof of how the Northeast is becoming a

go-to destination for Mumbai-based studios. With locations like Kashmir, New Delhi and Lucknow overexposed, Mumbai-based creators are discovering the unexplored charms of the Northeast. And not just as exotic location with colourful cultural motifs (*Jewel Thief*) or picturesque backdrop to a romantic number (Shah Rukh and Madhuri Dixit-starrer *Koyla*) but with a narrative and characters all its own. Hence the new culture, language, costume and environs viewers are seeing in Season 2 of Prime Video's *Paatal Lok*, which travelled to



**THE WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT**, James Handique is someone you'd call 'hot property'. Well-connected with deputy commissioners, director-generals and superintendents of police in the Northeastern states, the Assam-based line producer can

Nagaland as the lead characters investigated a local politician's murder.

### A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Ask *Paatal Lok* creator Sudip Sharma what drove him to the region and he tells you that having grown up and studied in Guwahati, he was always enamoured of a part of India that was little known or spoken about, especially in mainstream Indian cinema. "It's incredibly rich culturally," says Sharma. "For me, it was to discover it in greater detail. To go to a place we've never seen on screen, as in nothing's been set there...at best, it has been a reference."

Much the same impulse drives Nikhil Madhok, head of Originals, Prime Video India. Shows like *Paatal Lok* and *The Last Hour*, which was shot in Sikkim, have only made the platform's programming slate more varied, showcasing "an often underrepresented side of India" and, hopefully, also its "social fabric". "Our focus has always been on fresh, locally rooted narratives set across India," says Madhok. "Projects like these reflect our commitment to telling diverse stories and exploring the region's rich heritage in depth. Authenticity is key—we cast local artistes in both, bringing incredible talent both on and off screen."

But it isn't just curiosity and the need for diversity that has Mumbai crews flocking to the region. The improved law and order and road connectivity, too, have contributed to a rise in shoots in places like Assam and Nagaland. "Earlier, because of militant groups, the perception was that the Northeast is unsafe," says Handique, who runs Zeymz Visions, which boasts credits like the Varun Dhawan-starrer horror comedy *Bhediya* and Vishal Bhardwaj's *Rangoon*, both shot in Arunachal Pradesh. "People were hesitant to come here. But once they did, their outlook completely changed."

Simanta Shekhar, chairman of the Assam State Film Finance & Development Corporation, attributes Bollywood's growing fascination to the "state-of-the-art roads and five bridges over the Brahmaputra". "There's single-window clearance now for all shooting purposes," says Shekhar. "If they [filmmakers] want to shoot in Assam, the state government will help them in every way. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is keen to have guests from the film industry here."



**“EARLIER, BECAUSE OF MILITANT GROUPS, THE PERCEPTION WAS THE NORTHEAST WAS UNSAFE. BUT ONCE PEOPLE CAME HERE, THEIR VIEWS CHANGED”**

**JAMES HANDIQUE**  
Founder & MD, Zeymz Visions

### AN IDYLLIC LAND

Such openness is welcome and pivotal, for Assam operates as the gateway to other northeastern states. Guwahati runs frequent flights to Itanagar, Shillong, Dimapur and Aizawl, but there are also other airports in the state—Silchar, Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur and Lakhimpur. Tezpur, which hosts the headquarters of the IV Corps of the Indian Army and also an air force base, has in particular become a favoured destination for action-based projects. Remember Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone in *Fighter*? ZEE5 web series *Jaanbaaz* was also shot

here. A singer by profession, Shekhar says virgin locations and a safe environment have made the Northeast a winning combo for the studios. The safety factor extends even to the narratives set there. As titles with political and historical themes become the targets of the fringe and the censor board, stories unfolding in a less-known region help avoid controversy and, subsequently, backlash.

The low density of population also makes crowd control at outdoor locations easier. As Handique says, "The people of the Northeast think more with their hearts than with their minds. People are cooperative during shoots."



### RANGOON (2017)

Vishal Bhardwaj found his Rangoon in Arunachal Pradesh. Shot mostly in villages like Pasighat and Pangin around the Siang river, the area's dense jungles and open landscapes lent a perfect setting for this epic romance drama set in the 1940s



It has also brought employment. Locals are acquainting and equipping themselves to meet the growing demand for jobs in security, catering, art production (carpenters, painters and setting boys), ground transport as well as costume design and hair and make-up, besides for junior artistes and stuntmen. So much so that the number of Mumbai-based crew on these shoots has begun dwindling, as production houses repose confidence in the skills of the local talent.

**A**nungla Zoe Longkumer is one such beneficiary. An author, researcher and filmmaker, Longkumer was surprised to receive a call from the makers of *Paatal Lok* to be associate researcher, translator and on-set dialogue consultant. Apart from pointing out anything controversial or inaccurate in the script which could offend local sensibilities, Longkumer suggested changes in character names and taught cast members Tillotama Shome, Nagesh Kukunoor and Jahnu Barua the state's lingua franca, Nagamese. "They gave me a lot of space and trusted

me to do the work," says Longkumer about her months-long experience on shoots in both Kohima and Dimapur apart from Delhi and Kalimpong and Darjeeling. She also guided the costume and set design team on what to source so that the outfits and sets remained authentic. "So many people who come from outside have their own prejudices and perceptions about what Naga people and the place are like and what's happening here," she says. "But Sudip saw Nagaland as a place where



**“ THAT AMAZON’S TWO BIG SHOWS ARE SET IN NAGALAND IS A TESTAMENT TO THE FACT THAT BRINGING THE NORTHEAST INTO THE MAINSTREAM IS A PRIORITY ”**

**GUL PANAG**  
Actress

### ROCK ON 2 (2016)

Shillong, called India's rock capital for its abundant talent, was a fitting location for the sequel to this musical drama about the band Magik. It was producer-actor Farhan Akhtar's attempt to bring the region into popular culture



### ANEK (2022)

Anubhav Sinha's action drama in which Ayushmann Khurrana's police officer goes to the Northeast to broker

peace between the government and the separatist groups was shot in Assam and Meghalaya. The Naga model-actress, Carol Andrea Kevichusa, had a central part

real people face real-world issues rather than see it an unusual or foreign place, and understood that we have stories to tell of our struggles." Longkumer is excited to see how the Naga audience views the show given that the cast includes many familiar faces from among the local musicians, YouTubers and professionals from other fields. "I hope they enjoy the storytelling. This is our chance to showcase our potential."

Actress Gul Panag, who has been in the region to shoot the documentary series *Off the Road* and recently wrapped up *Family Man Season 3*, is glad that Mumbai creators are looking east. "The fact that Amazon's two big shows are set in Nagaland is a testament that inclusivity and bringing the Northeast into the fold of mainstream India is a priority for people," she says. And this is just the beginning. Handique is set to work with two leading Mumbai banners this year. He's been pitching new locations to producers on WhatsApp and netting 2-3 Hindi projects every year. The filmmakers, he says, have barely scratched the surface when it comes to locations and stories in the region. ■



# BRANDING INDIA'S HERITAGE

At the INDIA TODAY GI Samagam, commerce and industry minister **Piyush Goyal** laid emphasis on preserving India's treasures through Geographical Indications, highlighting their role in boosting the local economy and enhancing global recognition

**We have a very ambitious plan...we have set a target to increase the GI registrations from 605 to 10,000 by 2030**

**In the next five years, can we take the story of GI to every state and Union territory, can we take it to every district in this country because there are hidden gems and hidden jewels in the remotest parts of India?**

**From granting 6,000 patents in 2014, one lakh patents were granted last year, that's the growth story of India**

**It will be a whole-of-government approach, spreading the message of GI products across the nation**

**PIYUSH GOYAL**  
*Union Minister of Commerce and Industry*

**T**here is no country richer than India when it comes to traditions, customs and heritage. We are a people blessed with immense diversity in our food, textile and handicraft. Protecting and preserving these treasures is of utmost importance, something Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal could not emphasise enough at the inaugural

INDIA TODAY GI Samagam held in Delhi.

An area that nobody thought worth consideration post-Independence, the intellectual property ecosystem—including patents, copyrights, trademarks and GIs—received a strong push in the Narendra Modi-led regime since 2014. From just 200 GI-tagged products [in 2014], we have 605 today. Similarly, authorised users for GI tags have risen from 365 in 2014 to 29,000 last year. Annual patent grants have surged from 6,000 in 2014 to 100,000 in 2024. “This is the growth story of India,” Goyal said.

The aspiration over the next five years, the minister stressed, should be

to take the GI story to every state, Union territory and district in the country, given that there are hidden gems in the remotest corners of India. He, in fact, announced an ambitious target: reaching 10,000 GI registrations by 2030. To support this effort, a committee will be notified to oversee the identification of products and the creation of the ecosystem around them.

**S**tate governments, district collectors and organisations such as the Spices Board, Tobacco Board, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority, Development Commissioners of Handicrafts and Handloom, and the Textiles Committee, among others, will also be involved. “It will be a whole-of-government approach, spreading this message across the nation,” Goyal said. Bold the target may be, but the minister said it is achievable given the growing interest in these products, guidance from PM Modi and the recent sanction to hire 1,000 personnel in the department. “We will equip them with the most modern technology. Everything is moving online,” he said.

On the government’s initiatives, the minister mentioned the creation of a dedicated section for GI-tagged products on the Government e-Marketplace. Government departments will be encouraged to procure GI-tagged products. Indian embassies worldwide can also promote ODOP (One District, One Product) and GI products. Additionally, ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) will feature a dedicated section for GI products, and e-tailers will be encouraged to promote traditional Indian items. “There is also a need to promote the GI mark, brand it strongly and establish a simplified mechanism for genuine producers to obtain a hologram mark or similar certification to distinguish authentic products from counterfeits,” he said.

Already, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has collaborated with MasterChef India to promote the unique flavours and culinary traditions of different Indian regions, enhancing the brand value and consumer awareness of GI food products. ■

**- Sonal Khetarpal**



## ▼ CRYSTAL GAZE: GI BOOSTER FOR GLOBAL MARKETS

This insightful discussion showcased a compelling vision for leveraging GI products to propel India into global markets. Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa and former NITI Aayog CEO, outlined the untapped potential of the country's diverse GI-tagged products, emphasising branding, packaging and digital retail to catalyse their global appeal.



Amitabh  
Kant  
Sherpa,  
G20, Former  
CEO, NITI  
Aayog

## TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Diluting the exclusivity of GIs undermines their global value and economic potential
- 2 GI products need superior packaging to compete globally and attract premium markets
- 3 E-commerce platforms like Flipkart and Amazon are essential for product accessibility and scaling
- 4 State-level hubs can spotlight artisans and increase GI product visibility
- 5 Positioning Kashmiri Pashmina as a high-value global product illustrates the transformative potential of branding

# THE MARK OF ORIGIN

Geographical Indications or GIs protect unique regional products, preserving cultural heritage while boosting local economies and global recognition

## What is Geographical Indication?

A GI is a sign used on products—such as handicrafts, handloom items, manufactured goods, textiles and agricultural produce—that originate from a specific geographical region and possess qualities or unique characteristics attributable to their origin. GIs are also considered a form of intellectual property rights (IPR)

## MADHYA PRADESH

Ratlami Sev, Morena Gajak, Jhabua Kadaknath Black Chicken Meat



## GUJARAT

Kutch Embroidery, Jamnagar Bandhani, Patan Patola, Mata ni Pachhedi, Bharuch Sujani Weaving



605

NUMBER OF  
GI-TAGGED  
PRODUCTS IN THE  
COUNTRY AS OF  
JANUARY 2025



## **Key products with GI tags**

### **HIMACHAL PRADESH**

**Kangra Tea,**  
**Himachali Kala Zeera**



### **UTTAR PRADESH**

**Banaras Zardozi,**  
**Aligarh Tala,**  
**Mainpuri Tarkashi,**  
**Varanasi Wooden Lacquerware & Toys,**  
**Pilibhit Bansuri**



## **Benefits of a GI tag**

- ➔ Protecting the skills, traditions and knowledge handed down through generations by offering legal protection to unique products
- ➔ Boosting the local economy by curbing the unauthorised creation or sale of imitation products, ensuring that only genuine producers profit from their investments and skills
- ➔ Enhancing the competitiveness of products in national and international markets through their association with specific geographies, thereby boosting exports
- ➔ Promoting tourism by attracting visitors eager to experience the rich customs and cultural heritage of different regions, while also creating employment opportunities

## **How to apply for a GI tag?**

- ➔ Send three copies of the application to the Geographical Indications Registry office in Chennai
- ➔ Application can be filed by a legal practitioner or a registered agent
- ➔ Application should include details of the special characteristics and how those standards are maintained
- ➔ Three certified copies of the map of the region of the GI product should be included
- ➔ The application is then scrutinised by experts who verify the facts and issue an Examination Report
- ➔ If the Registrar has any objection to the application, they will communicate so and the applicant should respond within two months or apply for a hearing
- ➔ Every application, within three months of acceptance, gets published in the *Geographical Indications Journal*
- ➔ On the acceptance of the application, the Registrar will register the GI and issue a certificate with the GI registry seal to the applicant

## **▼ THE GEO-GI WARS: PRESERVING THE TERRITORY**

**"In India, we are actively pursuing FTAs. If MSMEs can be part of the negotiations, why can't GIs be? These agreements must look for mutual recognition as well as the protection of GIs"**

**AJAY SAHAI**

Director General & CEO, Federation of Indian Export Organisations



**"There's no 'GI war', but there's a need to recognise the co-existence of GIs across borders. When people migrated, they brought in their culture and traditional art forms. The larger Indian culture should be preserved"**

**PROF. UNNAT PANDIT**

Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks and Registrar of GI



## ▼ TRADE: ADDING PREMIUM TO BRANDS OF BHARAT

### TAKEAWAYS

1

Uttarakhand's success in obtaining 18 GI tags exemplifies how states can leverage biodiversity and collaborate with institutional partners to add significant value to local products

2

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)'s efforts in Basmati rice illustrate the necessity of robust traceability systems to protect GI-tagged products in international markets

3

QR codes and IT-enabled systems can authenticate GI-tagged products, enhancing their premium value and providing transparency for global consumers

4

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)'s initiatives in modernising tribal



From left, **Ramsinh Rathwa**, Chairman, TRIFED; **Roop Rashi**, India; **Vinay Kumar**, MD, Uttarakhand Organic Commodity Board;

## ▼ COMMERCIALISATION AND BRANDING OF GI



**"There is a need for decentralisation in GI registration and greater state involvement. There is a need for creating a GI promotion board and categorising GI products for export readiness"**

**RAJENDRA RATNOO**

Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management and ex-Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks

## ▼ GLOCALISATION: GI BO

**"While the process of granting GI tags should be robust and strict, we also need to ensure that genuine producers and producing regions are not excluded from the process"**

**AKASH BADAVE**, CEO, Bhoomgaadi Organic FPC



**"Government initiatives around GIs, like the Millet Mission, can help spread awareness. If there can be a GI campaign where it stands for greatness of India, it can help fuel the consumer demand"**

**ANUJ RUSTAGI**  
COO, ITC Foods



**Textile Commissioner & Vice Chairperson, Textiles Committee, Govt. of India**  
**Abhishek Dev, Chairman, APEDA**

products demonstrate the importance of maintaining authenticity while innovating to meet global market standards

**5**  
GI tagging is not merely a branding exercise but a pathway to preserving cultural heritage and ensuring economic sustainability for artisans and farmers

## OSTERS FOR BRANDS FROM BHARAT

**"Consumers are looking for products that are authentic, ethically sourced, sustainable, and good for the environment. There's also an element of storytelling involved, and that's what we are trying to communicate to our customers—that we embody all these values"**

**AMBUJ NARAYAN**  
CEO, Taneira



**"A lot of investment is coming from corporations, government initiatives and CSR. However, most of it is being directed toward production or building entrepreneurs. Investments are equally needed in building a new consumer base and creating new demand"**

**NITIN PAMNANI**  
Co-founder, iTokri



## ▼ TAGGING TRIUMPHS: GI AS NORTHEAST'S ENTERPRISE ENGINE



**James Sangma**  
Chairman, Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation; former cabinet minister, Meghalaya

## TAKEAWAYS

- 1** Products like Lakadong turmeric have transformed rural livelihoods by creating market linkages and fostering global demand
- 2** GI tags ensure the protection and promotion of traditional processes and cultural narratives
- 3** Meghalaya faces challenges in addressing the proliferation of fake GI-tagged products, underscoring the need for awareness and enforcement
- 4** Enhanced infrastructure and mission-mode programmes are vital to unlocking the full potential of Northeast India's GI products
- 5** A synergistic approach involving government, private sector and community efforts can bridge gaps and scale economic opportunities



▼ LEVERAGING  
BRAND VALUE OF GIs  
IN DOMESTIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL  
MARKETS



**“Even though we say GIs can add value, it can deepen the engagement of rural communities and local actors, and activate collaborations, but we still do not have many examples to support this. We would like to do this, but there’s actually very little empirical evidence from India”**

**“Everyone’s coming to India for its huge domestic market. We can just fulfill the market requirements within our own country and then we can look out. I think that’s a really clean way of looking at things”**

**HIMANI PANDE**

Additional Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Govt. of India



TAKEAWAYS

- 1 GI tagging must move beyond registration to commercialisation, ensuring premium pricing and better livelihoods for producers through initiatives like cultural entrepreneurship
- 2 India's GI laws require tightening, including pre-registration checks and registrant accountability, to ensure quality control and prevent the market flooding with counterfeit products

▼ PECHAKUCHA: PRESERVING VIRASAT



**“One of the biggest threats to food heritage today is counterfeit. So GI tagging helps us in preserving this by providing legal protection against it”**



**“India has more than 55 types of art forms which are there, which are registered, but I think there are more than hundreds which need to be registered”**

**MANISHA BHASIN**  
Corporate Chef, ITC Hotels

**MANISHA JHA**  
Artist

## ENABLING INDIA'S INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY



From left, **Lisa P. Lukose**, Professor of Law and Director, Legal Aid, Guru Gobind Singh IP University; **Ganesh Hingmire**, Founder and Chairman, Great Mission Group Society; **Latha R. Nair**, K&S Partners

**3** Universities and research institutions can play a pivotal role in providing historical evidence, scientific validation and technical guidance for robust GI applications

**4** Consumers should adopt the 'Har Ghar, GI Ghar' philosophy to create demand for GI-tagged products, fostering grassroots economic growth

**5** Introducing post-registration inspections and annual reports can maintain product integrity and enhance the credibility of India's GI ecosystem

### THROUGH GI TAGGING



**"We move through cities without truly seeing them. We experience spaces without knowing their stories... What if that changed? What if our buildings carried a mark of their origin?"**

**TANYA KHANNA**

Architect and Founder,  
Epistle Communications

### ▼ THE POLICY STIMULI: UNLOCKING THE FUTURE POTENTIAL OF GI FOR BHARAT



**"We are trying to make it easier for the farmers to not only file the GI tags for the crops, but also to get the authorised user certificate. There are experts, who are technically 'facilitators'; we must fund them"**

**DEVESH CHATURVEDI**

Secretary,  
Department of  
Agriculture &  
Farmers' Welfare



**“Kashi is a very unique city and model... It will be very difficult to replicate it. In fact, it should neither be desired nor pushed”**

**PARTHO SAHA**

Chief General Manager,  
Off Farm Development  
Department, NABARD

**“Kashi's GI journey started with Banarsi saree and brocades in 2006. It captures three Cs—culture, craft and cuisine—to build on the region's heritage ”**

**PROF. RAJNI KANT**

Gen. Secy, Human Welfare Association, Varanasi

**“GI registry is one step. The ecosystem should also be developed to ensure that the economic benefits of cultural heritage reach exactly where they are intended to”**

**GOPAL KRISHNA AGARWAL**

National Spokesperson, BJP

**“GI tag evokes respect in the minds of prospective buyers, and premium prices can be commanded. The Kashi model had demonstrated the same”**

**DR RAJENDRA PRASAD SHARMA**

Prof. of Marketing, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade

▼ TAKING GI FROM GLOCAL TO GLOBAL

**“One can use social media and technology to tell a compelling story to a wider audience and help the next generation be aware of the wonderful work that happens in the country”**

**NISHANT CHANDRA**

Director,  
Carpet Cellar

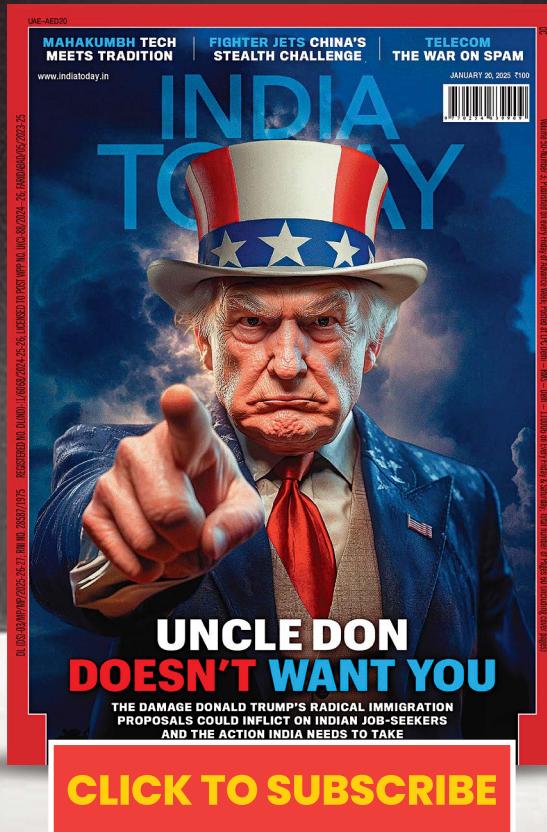


**“We've had a national policy for coals, agriculture, mines but not culture. India needs a cultural policy to give its culture structure, substance and synergy”**

**ASHISH KHOKAR**

Expert on cultural policy

# CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, WHICH WAY WILL TRUMP GO?



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INDIA  
TODAY  
**MAKING SENSE OF INDIA**

## ▼ HOW GI TAGS CAN TRANSFORM INDIAN SPIRITS AND LIQUOR

### TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Indian single malt whisky producers are working to obtain a GI tag, having developed internal standards
- 2 Giving GI tags to Indian spirits and alcohol will improve credibility and global recognition. It will also incentivise manufacturers to maintain high quality standards
- 3 Tribal liquor mahua and Indian rum are identified as promising spirits with potential for international success were they to receive a GI tag
- 4 Despite a GI tag, Indian wine has not been able to weave a story compelling enough to make the most of the certification



**Sandeep Arora**, whisky & spirits ambassador (left),  
**Rajnish Singh**, founder, Dhvaen Law Practice

## ▼ FIRESIDE CHAT: BUILDING BRANDS ON GI

**"This opportunity is widening as there are 605 brands or GI-tagged products in this category but width is not the only thing. The depth is missing at this point of time and that is my core worry"**

**HARISH BIJOOR**

Founder, Harish Bijoor Consults Inc.

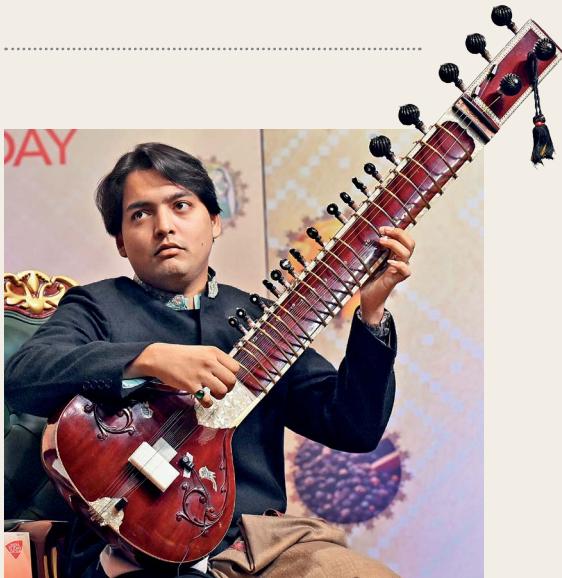


## ▼ GI MUSIC: THE GI TAG MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS MEET FOR A COLLABORATION



**"We need more takers for the GI-tagged shehnai. Currently, there are more foreigners learning this instrument. We need to keep the *parampara* alive and the continuity of this instrument. The government needs to take this up and encourage youngsters to learn and master the shehnai"**

**SANJEEV SHANKAR**, Shehnai maestro



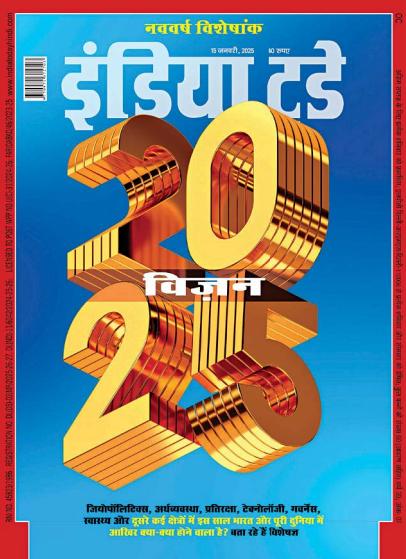
**"Giving GI tag to the sitar is akin to giving the Bharat Ratna to this instrument. GI tag is a badge of honour—made in India and performed globally"**

**MEHTAB NIAZI**, Sitar player

**IndiaContent**

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# सबसे भरोसेमंद खोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

## सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

पिछले 25 साल में हुए ऐसे 25 बड़ावारी की कहानियां जिनसे आप आदमी की रोजमर्रा की दुश्वारियां कम हुईं

नियोपौलिटिक्स, अर्थव्यवस्था, प्रतिरक्षा, टेक्नोलॉजी, गणराज्य, राजस्व और दूरधृति के बारे मान सरकार और बड़ी इकाइयों के अधिक रूप से जान सकते हैं। यात्रा रहे हैं विशेषज्ञ



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

अपनी पसंद के सब्सक्रिप्शन को टिक करें और फॉर्म को इस पर भेज दें—वी केएर, लिंविंग मीडिया इंडिया लिं. 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 लिंविंग 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



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# LEISURE

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L. SUBRAMANIAM  
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BOOKS

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

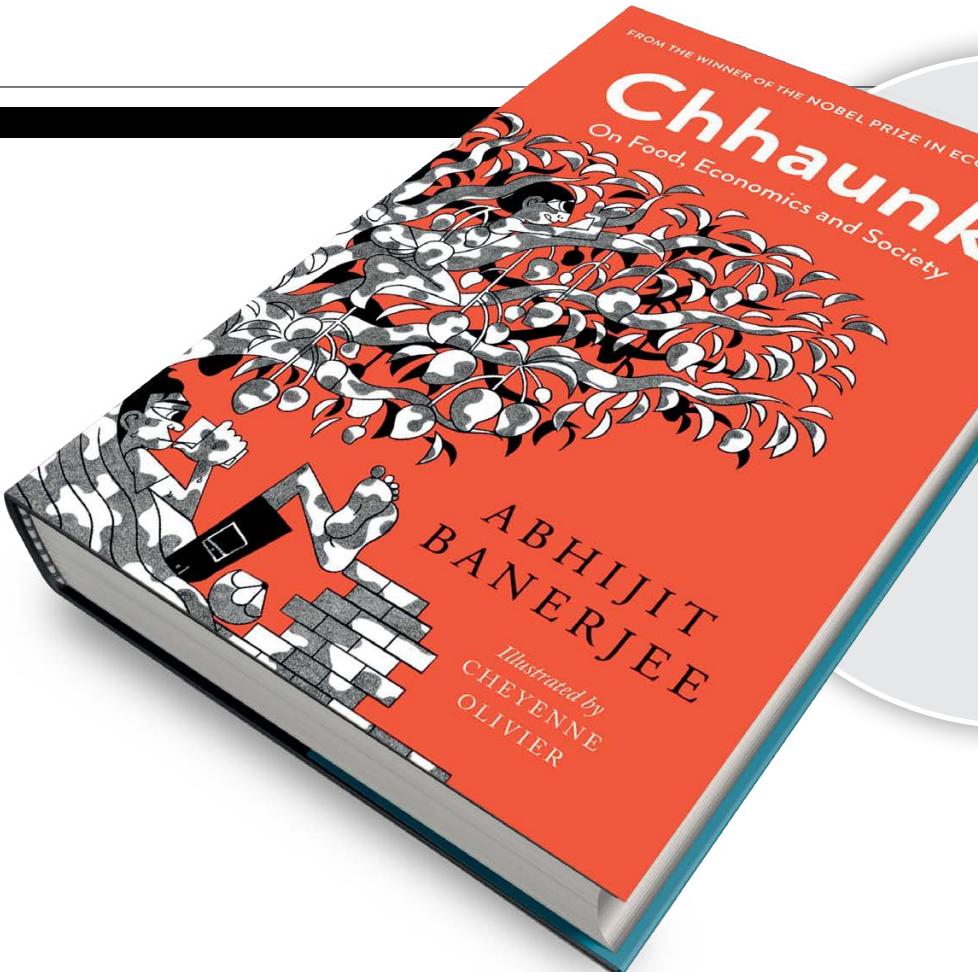
Economist and Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee's latest book—*Chhaunk*—examines the interesting space at the intersection of food and economics



A

Abhijit Banerjee, Ford Foundation International Professor of Economics at MIT and the 2019 Nobel laureate in economic sciences, created quite a stir when he published a cookbook, *Cooking to Save Your Life*, in 2021, revealing a hitherto unknown facet of his personality, far removed from the stereotype of the absent-minded professor. With his latest book, *Chhaunk*, he marries what one can safely presume are two of his greatest interests—food and economics. While based on a monthly newspaper column he has been writing for the past two years, the book has the pieces arranged into three neat themes: ‘Economics and Psychology’, ‘Economics and Culture’, and ‘Economics and Social Policy’, with each section getting a fresh introduction. The columns were accompanied by his trademark recipes; for the book, many new ones have been added, which should keep Banerjee’s fan base sated for a while. The evocative illustrations are by the talented Cheyenne Olivier, who has also illustrated Banerjee’s previous book, as well as his wife Esther Duflo’s *Poor Economics for Kids*.

Banerjee tackles a diversity of subjects in *Chhaunk*, from the intensely personal, like reminiscing about his mother who passed away in November 2023—“I miss her all the time”—to weightier concerns like inequality, nutrition and, of course, climate change. It’s all peppered with interesting trivia, like the mention of the medieval “feast of the chest-



## **BANERJEE IS PERHAPS UNUSUAL AMONG INDIAN MEN IN LEARNING TO COOK EARLY AND HELPING HIS MOTHER OUT IN THE KITCHEN AS A CHILD**



nuts, organised at the behest of Pope Cesare Borgia, where a hundred prostitutes were present”.

“We rotate with three basic ingredients for the pieces—Abhijit’s memories about India; economics, but more broadly social sciences; and then the food connection,” explains Olivier. While the pieces, written with the general reader in mind, are digestible, they occasionally take on a more cerebral and thought-provoking tone. When the writing gets too heavy, Olivier—who, while nominally the illustrator, is really more a collaborator—reins Banerjee in. “Once I’ve written the text, she’s the one who reads it carefully and often points out that this part is meant to be light, meant to be Sunday morning

reading. There is a need for someone who’s quite brutal, who’ll say, no, that paragraph is too involved or academic or boring—and Cheyenne is not shy to say those things,” adds Banerjee.

The recipes, drawn from diverse sources, are integral to each piece. “Often, while writing the piece, I’ll plant some food ideas so there is a continuity between the piece and the recipes,” says Banerjee. When asked how many of the recipes are entirely his creations, he muses, “Nothing ever is entirely anybody’s. There are recipes here that are very traditional. There are recipes I’ve seen other people make. There’s one called Akeela’s Karela which was made by someone’s cook in Patna and I stole it from her. We also have this goal of combining

# MELTING POT

Delightful compendiums that showcase the breathtaking range of Indian food

**CHHAUNK**  
On Food,  
Economics and  
Society  
*By Abhijit Banerjee*  
*Illustrated by*  
*Cheyenne Olivier*  
**JUGGERNAUT**  
₹899; 352 pages

mother, a busy academic who also ran an NGO.

More than any particular dish, Banerjee remembers the ritual order of eating the dishes. "You'd get scolded for eating your fish before your *shukto*," he says. When pressed to name a favourite dish, he chooses two: *ilisher tel jhal* from his Bengali heritage and *khandvi*—or *suralichi vadi*, as the Maharashtraans call it—in a nod to his Marathi mother.

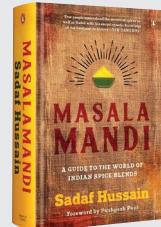
What sets Indian food apart, Banerjee feels "is our deep understanding of different flavouring agents". He, however, rues the fact that we are losing the culture of letting no part of an ingredient go to waste, what he calls "creativity driven by need". "For instance, in Bengal, you cook the potato, but also the potato skin with poppy seeds and chilli (*aloo khosha bhaja*)," he explains.

*Chhaunk* is also part memoir, brimming with interesting anecdotes, like Banerjee's brief incarceration in Tihar Jail during his student days in JNU or the time his great-great-grandfather gifted the dhoti he was wearing to a bringer of good news and went off in the buff. "Ultimately, for me, writing these columns is therapy. It allows me to revisit my childhood, my family, my many friends, my hopes and disappointments, and perhaps above all, the India that I love and never left," he says. ■

—Amit Dixit

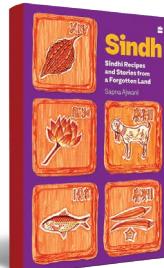
Indian and occidental food, so several recipes are engineered for that purpose." Perhaps the most outré example of this is the 'Millefeuille of Papad and Baigan Bharta', a savoury South Indian take on the classic French pastry. And, if you're wondering, each of the recipes in the book was cooked by Banerjee before it made the cut.

Banerjee is perhaps unusual among Indian men in having learned to cook early, helping his mother out in the kitchen as a child. "My mother was quite a vociferous feminist, so it was not exactly accidental," explains Banerjee. "You would get these long diatribes about lazy Indian males. My father, for example, made breakfast for us every day. He didn't want to push his luck!" Cooking also gave the young Banerjee an opportunity to spend time with his

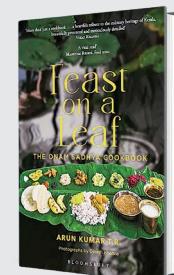


**MASALAMANDI**  
A Guide to the  
World of Indian  
Spice Blends  
*By Sadaf Hussain*  
**PENGUIN VIKING**  
₹999; 568 pages

Not only is Chef Sadaf Hussain's tour de force a treasure trove of spice mixes from across the length and breadth of India—from Khotachiwadi East Indian Bottle Masala to Madras Curry Powder, Mrs Beeton's Indian Curry Powder, masala chai spice blends and an array of chaat and garam masalas—there are recipes, too, for dishes where the spice mix is fundamental to their identity. These include biryanis, kababs, pickles, curries and more. Gourmands like Ranveer Brar and Pushpesh Pant, too, have generously shared their blends.



**SINDH**  
Sindhi Recipes  
and Stories from a  
Forgotten Land  
*By Sapna Ajwani*  
**HARPERCOLLINS INDIA**  
₹1,199; 272 pages



**FEAST ON A LEAF**  
The Onam Sadhya  
Cookbook  
*By Arun Kumar T.R.*  
**BLOOMSBURY INDIA**  
₹799; 208 pages

If you've ever been intimidated by the prospect of rustling up an Onam sadhya—the Malayali vegetarian festive feast served on a banana leaf which can feature up to 64 different dishes—fear no more. *Feast on a Leaf* is a step-by-step guide to earning your sadhya chops, educating you on traditional lore, the utensils used, different sadhya menus and, of course, recipes to the dishes themselves, from avial to olan, thoran to kallan, and an impressive range of payasams. In keeping with modern dietary fashions, there's even help on how to put together a vegan, gluten-free sadhya.

—Amit Dixit

»  
**LITERARY  
IMPRESARIOS**

Sanjoy K. Roy,  
Namita Gokhale and  
William Dalrymple  
at a preview of the  
Jaipur Literature  
Festival, Jan. 10



LITERATURE

# The Great Gathering

*With over 300 speakers across five venues, the Jaipur Literature Festival promises an impressive 18th edition*

T

**The Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF), often called the “greatest literary show on Earth”,** returns for its 18th edition from January 30 to February 3, 2025, at Hotel Clarks Amer in Jaipur. Organised by Teamwork Arts, the Festival is a celebration of literature, bringing together writers, thinkers and readers from across the world. The 2025 edition offers thought-provoking discussions and performances that explore the transformative power of literature.

Over five days, the Festival will feature over 300 speakers across five venues. The line-up includes global literary figures like André Aciman, Jenny Erpenbeck, Venki Ramakrishnan and David Hare, alongside Indian authors such as Geetanjali Shree, Manav Kaul and Aruna Roy. Discussions will cover diverse topics, from memoirs and the intersection of art and politics to the economic ideas shaping the future. Conversations will also explore the legacies of figures like Gandhi and Tolstoy, challenging audiences to re-

consider established narratives.

The 2025 Festival will feature sessions in a variety of Indian languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Rajasthani, alongside English. Namita Gokhale, JLF co-director, highlights how translations help broaden the reach of Indian literature. “Readers are eager to return to their familiar language pools,” she says. The presence of international writers, including those from Europe and Ireland, further enriches the Festival’s global spirit.

The Jaipur Music Stage, running from January 30 to February 1, will showcase performances from artists like Kailash Kher, Abhijit Pohankar, and Kamakshi Khanna.

The Jaipur BookMark (JBM), now in its 11th edition, serves as a key B2B networking platform, where publishers, authors, and literary agents collaborate to bring creative projects to fruition. As the business arm of the Festival, JBM is a vital space

for the global publishing community.

Sanjoy K. Roy, MD, Teamwork Arts, reflects on JLF’s expansive role: “The Festival celebrates the power of arts and ideas to unite us, creating a space where perspectives converge. Even as we expand internationally, the legacy of the Festival remains integral to every edition.”

Namita Gokhale captures the Festival’s spirit: “We resist echo chambers and showcase diverse voices, especially young ones.” William Dalrymple, Festival co-director, calls it “a carnival of literature”.

With sessions such as Esther Duflo’s *Poor Economics for Kids* and Geetanjali Shree’s discussion of her Booker Prize-winning novel *Tomb of Sand*, the 2025 Festival offers something for every literary enthusiast. Whether you’re a reader, writer, or cultural explorer, JLF 2025 invites you to engage with leading literary figures and immerse yourself in a global exchange of ideas. ■

*The 2025 Festival will feature sessions in Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Rajasthani, alongside English*

**-Nikhil Sardana**



# GLASS ACT

**SulaFest** is back post-pandemic with an entirely Indian line-up of musicians

O

Of all the multi-genre, mainstream music festivals that went on hiatus during the pandemic, SulaFest has taken the longest to return. The two-day event organised by and held at Sula Vineyards in Nashik will be staged after a five-year break in 2025, in its usual slot of the first weekend of February.

In the interim, not only has there been an exponential increase in the number of large-scale concerts and music festivals across the country, the purpose for which SulaFest was conceptualised has also been fulfilled. It was launched in 2008 with the aim of drawing people to Sula Vineyards and introducing them to its wines. Their head of hospitality Monit Dhavale says that over the last half-decade, the number of visitors has doubled from more than 200,000 a year to around 400,000 annually.

They're bringing SulaFest back then, owing to public demand. "The idea behind this festival is not

commercial gain, but to popularise wine as a beverage," says Dhavale. They considered holding it in 2023, but Sula Vineyards, the company, launched its IPO in December 2022, which took up "all our efforts". Further delays were caused by expansions of its three properties, which include York Winery in Nashik and Domaine Sula near Bengaluru.

This time around, SulaFest—which was hailed for being the first to get to India international acts such as Young The Giant (2015), Jungle (2019) and Bloc Party (2017)—will host an entirely local line-up. The bill, headlined by rapper DIVINE and electronic musicians Ritzviz and Karan Kanchan, also features DJ-producer Dualist Inquiry, rock bands Parvaaz and When Chai Met Toast, pop duos Madboy/Mink and OAFF and Savera, and singer-songwriters Ankur Tewari, Aarifah and Frizzell D'Souza.

Other changes include making SulaFest a biennial event and

dropping spirits from the offerings (Sula used to import them but has exited the segment). Beer and cocktails remain on the menu while cheese- and chocolate-paired wine tastings and grape stomping will make up the adjacent activities. The 'Atmasphere' electronic music stage will be missing as its erstwhile venue has been converted into a selfie-friendly garden.

Though these changes might disappoint some, Dhavale says "a lot depends on how this edition goes" with a plan to "have a good blend of international and national artists and eventually add a second stage". The response has been very encouraging with tickets being bought faster than ever before. "Usually, 30-40 per cent of the sales happen in the last 8-10 days [prior to the event]," says Dhavale. "We're almost sold out already." ■

-Amit Gurbaxani

**SulaFest** is taking place on February 1 and 2 at Sula Vineyards, Nashik

Along with the music, BEER AND COCKTAILS remain on the menu, with cheese- and chocolate-paired wine tastings



# ARTISTIC EPICENTRE

The **India Art Fair**'s 16th edition is its most ambitious yet with 118 exhibitors and a range of conversations on the arts of the future

**T**aking place at New Delhi's NSIC Exhibition Grounds from February 6 to 9, the 16th edition of India Art Fair (IAF) will feature a record 118 exhibitors, 78 galleries and an expanding design section with 11 renowned studios from across the world. "Following last year's success, the Design section returns with a stronger focus on craft-led innovations and will incorporate disciplines such as furniture, textiles and product design, bridging the gap between art and design," says fair director Jaya Asokan. "Look out for Vikram Goyal, the design studio based out of New Delhi, and working with brass as the primary material," she adds.

Among other highlights are new works by Pakistani-American sculptor Huma Bhabha and Colombian artist Oscar Murillo, presented by David Zwirner, and fair veterans like Anish Kapoor with Galleria Continua and Chinese artist Ai Weiwei with Lisson Gallery. IAF continues to diversify its outdoor projects with artists like Paris-based Claire Fontaine's LED installation inspired by their storied 'Foreigners Everywhere' series, or even a Mohd Intiyaz exploring themes of discrimination, resilience and belonging through the lens of his childhood memories with an evocative sculpture.

"Asim Waqif's 'MAKE-SHIFT' is another standout—a monumental mobile artwork crafted from

a second-hand cement truck and metal scrap, embodying the rawness of material and the unpredictability of improvisation," says Jaya. Then there is BMW India and IAF's 'The Future is Born of Art' commission-winning artist duo Dennis Peter and Yash Chandak, who will present 'Biolumine', an immersive experience that draws inspiration from bioluminescence.

The fair's mainstay, however, continues to be its conversations, with the 'Growing Focus' talks series amplifying creative voices from South Asia. Speakers like Sangita

Jindal, president of Art India and chairperson of the JSW Foundation; Hans Ulrich Obrist, artistic director at the Serpentine Gallery, London; and artist duo Thukral and Tagra will lead discussions on cultural cross-pollination,

grassroots movements in the arts, and the impact of technology. For the past five years, IAF has also been a springboard for collectors below the age of 45. Now in its sixth edition, the Young Collectors' Programme, curated by Wribhu Borphukan, widens the purview of the module to grant budding collectors access and insight into contemporary art practices.

Jaya underlines why the event has continued to foster an ever-evolving dialogue for over a decade and a half now. "It is a rare venue," she says, "where thousands of artists, galleries and art lovers come together to form connections over their love for the arts." ■

-Arshia

**The fair will take place at New Delhi's NSIC Exhibition Grounds from Feb. 6 to 9**



## VIVID DISPLAY

Clockwise from above, Anish Kapoor's 'Apple Magenta mix 2 and Black Mist', Huma Bhabha's 'Maybe Nothing Maybe Everything', a brass work by Vikram Goyal

**A**n exhibition in the capital traces the illustrious five-decade-long artistic journey of one of India's most celebrated contemporary artists. The comprehensive showcase features over 60 works by Delhi-based printmaker Anupam Sud, from her early etchings crafted in the 1970s to her sculptural forms as well as her recent experimental print collages created during the pandemic.

Sud's pioneering contributions to etching and printmaking stand as a testament to her technical brilliance and relentless experimentation. The exhibition, spanning two distinct periods of her practice—the early 1970s and

the more recent 2010s—showcases the evolution of an artist who has continuously challenged conventions over the years. "It is a time to reflect on how the concerns of an urban society, as experienced by me and manifested in my printmaking, have changed over time," says Sud.

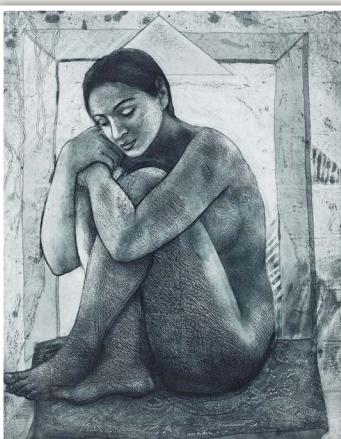
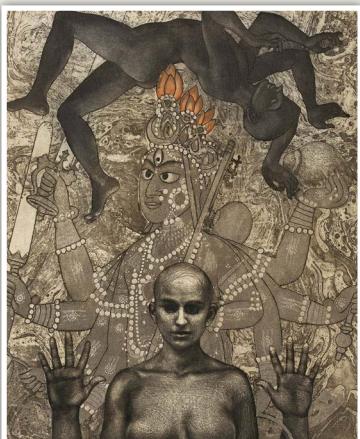
Sud's early years were spent in Shimla where she was educated. The Bengal School of Art greatly influenced her during her childhood. Later, when her family moved to Delhi, her father took her to the National Gallery of Modern Art, where she was inspired by Amrita

Sher-Gil's western style of art. "Even though I wanted to be an artist, I was disappointed when I didn't get admission to an art college. Instead, I entered into a bachelor's degree in mathematics. However, the next year, I got through the College of Art, New Delhi. Thereafter, I learnt what art is," she reminisces. Sud went on to win a scholarship to the Slade School of Art, London, where she mastered the art of traditional printmaking techniques using metal plates. She also became an active member of Jagmohan Chopra's Group 8. At the age of 23, she debuted with a

solo exhibition at Triveni Kala Sangam, Delhi, in 1967. A prominent feature of her practice is human figures—both male and female. Gradually, the female perspective, primarily due to the female protagonists in her work, became critical to Sud's practice.

The rigours of printmaking, involving exposing one's hands to water and acid, are too physically arduous for the octogenarian artist now. Thus currently, she is working on oil paintings. "Otherwise, I am always scribbling something or the other in my sketchbook," she says. ■

—Neha Kirpal  
Anupam Sud: The Journey A Full Circle will run at Palette Art Gallery till Feb. 7



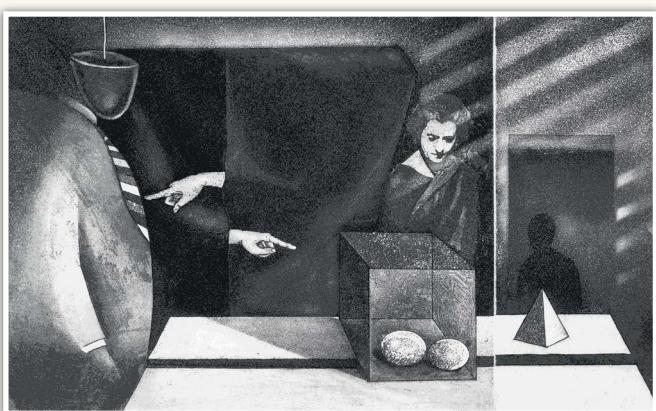
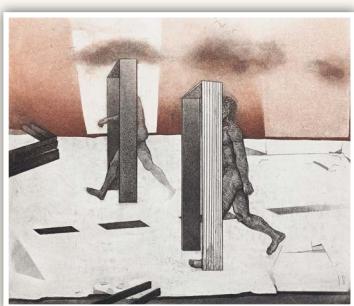
## EXHIBITION

# *A Creative ODYSSEY*

Veteran printmaker **Anupam Sud**'s solo show at Delhi's Palette Art Gallery showcases a half-century of relentless experimentation

### ART UNBOUND

Clockwise from above, 'Cosmic dancer', 'Enfold', 'Hatching', 'Morning Walk'





**LEISURE**  
CINEMA

# AGAINST *All Odds*

The Afghan documentary filmmaker **Sahra Mani** talks about the making of *Bread & Roses* and having Hollywood A-lister Jennifer Lawrence as a producer

In

the weeks and months following the fall of Kabul on August 15, 2021, documentary filmmaker Sahra Mani started to receive daily vlogs from women in her home country of Afghanistan. This was real-time footage filmed on phones by “educated and working women who believed that they can and should be equal partners in the future of our country”. “Instead, they had started losing all their rights, from education to working to even stepping out of their homes,” says Mani. Around the same time, the filmmaker received an e-mail from Excellent Cadaver, a production company headed by Oscar-winner Jennifer Lawrence and her produc-

ing partner Justine Ciarrocchi, offering their support in case she wanted to make a film about women in Afghanistan. This is how the documentary, *Bread & Roses*, which premiered at Cannes in 2023 and is now on Apple TV+, was born.

Filmed in the Afghan languages of Dari and Pashto, *Bread & Roses* follows three fearless women—newly engaged dentist Zahra Mohammadi, activist Taranom Seyed and Sharifa Movahidzadeh, a government official—in the early months of the Taliban regime as women were systematically stripped of all their rights.

Most recently, women have been banned from receiving



AFP



## IN THE GLOBAL **LIMELIGHT**

Indian cinema is well represented at the upcoming International Film Festival Rotterdam

INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
ROTTERDAM, on  
from Jan. 30 to  
Feb. 9, will show-  
case 15 Indian films

**W**hat a time for Indian cinema! In the wake of Payal Kapadia's global acclaim for *All We Imagine as Light!* Fifteen Indian films, including global premieres, find space in the 2025

International Film Festival Rotterdam (Jan. 30 to Feb. 9).

Kapadia's film is part of the Limelight section, which brings together last year's highlights and the most anticipated films of 2025. Also in the section are two Tamil

films—Ram's *Fly Away*, which follows a debt-striken man and his pampered son on a countryside motorcycle trip, and a director's cut of Pa. Ranjith's *Thangalaan*, a British India-set tale of caste, sorcery and imperialism.

In the Tiger competition section, meant for upcoming global talent, is Varsha Bharath's *Bad Girl*. The Tamil comedy follows a young woman's journey of finding the perfect man while fighting social mores and strict parents. The Big Screen competition features Suman Mukhopadhyay's



any medical education, including nursing and midwifery. Mani believes the film would be next to impossible to make today, simply because women have lost all "social and political rights". "Imagine a country with 20 million women with no access to health services," she says.

The UN calls this gender apartheid and Mani wants the world to know that is not what Afghanistan is all about. "Afghanistan is so much more than what people know it for today-Tali-

## TO MAKE BREAD & ROSES, MANI HAD TO RELY ON HER PROTAGONISTS FOR FOOTAGE



ban, opium and war. We have a rich history of music, dance, literature and poetry. In the last 20 years, we had so many bright minds who had studied all over the world and had come back to rebuild the country. We stayed all this time even as the Taliban bombed

schools, public spaces and even weddings and hospitals. We stayed because we love our home and wanted to rebuild it," she says.

Mani was in Europe for a film festival when the Taliban regime came back to power and she hasn't been able to return since. This meant that, to make *Bread & Roses*, she had to completely rely on her protagonists to send her the footage she needed. "They had never done something like this before, so I had to teach them how to film themselves. I explained to them that I was interested in the details of their lives. So, if they were filming a meal, I'd want to feel like I'm right there with them. Often I would also film myself doing things and send those to them so that they understood."

Having Lawrence on the film's

credits has helped it reach a larger audience. "The biggest problem I've faced as a documentary filmmaker from Afghanistan is that people think 'we've seen everything on the news, what more could there be'. Also Jennifer's involvement wasn't limited to putting her name. When we were editing in Sweden, she spent time with us talking about how the film is shaping up and saw the first cut." Nobel Peace Prize winner and activist Malala Yousafzai saw this first cut and came on board as an executive producer immediately. "When we talk about the Taliban and women's freedom and education, you can't not have Malala onboard. I am so grateful that both these women choose to use their platform to shine a light on what is a very urgent situation," adds Mani. ■

-Karishma Upadhyay

Bengali-language *The Puppet's Tale*, based on the 1936 novel *Putulnacher Itikotha*.

The non-competitive Harbour section, home to the best contemporary cinema, is hosting six Indian films, some of them premieres. This includes *Bokshi*, Bhargav Saikia's horror film shot in the jungles of Sikkim; *Gaami*, Vidyadhar Kagita's Telugu punch-up of science fiction and fantasy; *Morichika*, Ishaan Ghose's film



**MAKING THE CUT >**  
(From far left clockwise)  
Scenes from *Thangalaan*,  
*Bokshi*, *Bad Girl* and *The Slow Man and His Raft*

about a single mother and a Bihari migrant man in Kolkata; *Rhythm of a Flower*, Amit Dutta's animated feature-length look at the life of classical singer Kumar Gandharva; *The Slow Man and His Raft*, Pradip Bhattacharyya's magic-realist tale set in rural Bengal; and *Theatre*, Nishanth Kalidindi's docufiction which tracks a cattle farmer travelling to the city to join a theatre troupe.

IFFR 2025 also includes documentaries such as Vani Subramaniam's *Cinema Pe Cinema* and Jagannathan Krishnan's *Video-kaaran* (2009). ■

-Devarsi Ghosh

**Q. What are your thoughts on winning the Padma Vibhushan, and how important is it vis-a-vis the music you are creating?**

I am delighted the Indian classical violin is being recognised for this prestigious honour. I'm told this is the first time the Padma Vibhushan is being given to an Indian violinist, so it's a double whammy. Music is everything to me. I connect with it spiritually and I want to help the audience also to find such a connection.

**Q. What brought you to the Kerala Literature Festival?**

I'm here to discuss my two books, *Raga Harmony*, which came out in 2024, and *Classical Music of India*. The former puts forth my 36-scale concept that will allow compositions by Indian composers based on Indian ragas to be performed by orchestras across the globe. This concept can create wonderful major orchestrations that have never been heard before.

**Q. At a time when attention spans have shortened remarkably, what catalytic role can lit fests play?**

They can play a very important role in nurturing the love of reading. I for one am delighted to see the huge crowds gathered at the Kerala Literature Festival with people of all age groups and backgrounds. Such fests also allow people to meet their favourite authors and interact with them.

**Q. You created the Global Fusion concept and the Lakshminarayana Global Music Festival. What are your upcoming concerts?**

I'm performing at the Jaipur Literature Festival on Feb. 1-2 followed by another concert at the Siddhivinayak temple in Mumbai. From May to July, I'll be performing across various cities in the US.

-with Neeta Lal

**Q+A**

# The Perfect Note

Celebrated violinist **L. SUBRAMANIAM** is set to receive the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second-highest civilian honour



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