

# AI-171 Crash: The Hunt for Answers

AUTO: SMALL CARS, BIG LOSSES | CINEMA: A DWINDLING AUDIENCE

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# INDIA TODAY

## THE PLASTIC PERIL

**INDIA IS NOW THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PLASTIC POLLUTER  
WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR HEALTH AND HOW TO FIX IT**



କଥାଦେଇ କଥା ରଖିଲେ  
ଲୋକଙ୍କ ସରକାର

ପ୍ରାଚୀ ନିର୍ମାଣ କର୍ମଚାରୀ  
ପାତ୍ରବିଧୀନୀ

ପ୍ରକାଶକ ମହିନା ମେଲା

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**ପ୍ରମାଣ ଏବଂ ପରିଚୟ**

**ଶ୍ରୀ ପାତ୍ରପାତ୍ର ଉପରେ**  
ମାତ୍ର କିମ୍ବା ୧୦୦ - ୧୫୦ ମିନିଟ୍ସ

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ଏ ଦିନ ୧୯୫୨ ମୁହଁ ମାତ୍ରାକୁ  
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**ପରେତ ଉଦ୍ଧିଷ୍ଠା ଯାହିଁ କେବଳ**



## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**A** lot of attention these days is on the global charts India is climbing and getting close to the top. Here's one peak we would rather not be on: India is now the world's largest plastic polluter, according to the journal *Nature*. How we achieved this dubious distinction requires an explanation. India is only about the world's fourth-highest in terms of the amount of plastic waste it generates; the US, China and the EU bloc generate much more than we do. However, what lets India down is the primitive waste management practices that prevail here compared to other polluters. Studies show only about 12 per cent of our plastic waste gets processed. An astounding 88 per cent remains, piling up at open dumpsites, choking our rivers, or getting incinerated by households and informal waste collectors. That's where we become the top plastic polluter on the planet. According to *Nature*, we produce plastic emissions of 9.3 million tonnes per annum. We burn an estimated 5.8 Mt of that, releasing noxious gases. Approximately 3.5 Mt ends up as loose plastic debris. This is not counting the enormous amounts disposed of in open dumps, literally spreading poison. That's a frightening array of toxins leaching permanently into our land, water, air and food chains.

For comparison, look at China. Its plastic production may be 4-6 times that of India. Even till six years ago, it was tagged as the world's largest plastic polluter. But its annual plastic emission is now only 2.8 Mt, reflecting substantial progress in the adoption of better recycling techniques and stricter regulatory protocols. By contrast, though India's stated per capita consumption of 13 kg is less than half of the global average of 30 kg, its recycling sector is riddled with stark inefficiencies. Open dumpsites outnumber sanitary landfills by 10:1.

India cannot do without plastics. Modern economies pretty much come gift-wrapped in this versatile, durable and lightweight substance. It is an inalienable part of everyday utilities, from packaging material to mobile phones, computers, cars, ships, planes, plumbing, flooring, all manner of high-end industrial uses, right up to spacecraft. The plastics industry was worth Rs 3.5 lakh crore in FY23, accounting for 1.4 per cent of the GDP. India has over 30,000 plastic processing units, close to 90 per cent of these being small and medium enterprises. Together, they employ 4 million people. It's an industry growing at a healthy clip of 10-15 per cent; India even exported plastics worth \$12.5 billion in FY25.

Based on their behaviour when heated, plastics can be divided into two broad categories—thermoplastics, which become soft upon heating, can be melted and reshaped and are therefore recyclable; and thermosets like bakelite

which can be moulded only once and are used for electrical insulation, cookware, roofing and auto and industrial components. Both types are non-biodegradable. They stay around forever. But, over time, they fragment into toxic micro- and nano-sized particles that infiltrate the soil, the oceans and the food chain, causing serious health issues in humans and animals. Global studies have shown that microplastics are entering the bloodstream and accumulating in organs such as the brain and heart.

**T**o reduce plastic use, the Indian government in 2022 banned 19 single-use plastic (SUP) items with "low utility and high littering potential", including plastic cutlery, straws, trays and decorative thermocol. Additionally, a thickness criterion was imposed on SUP items like carry-bags—only products over 100 microns were allowed. In an effort to check the amount of plastic ending up as debris or poisonous smoke, the government notified the Guidelines on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Plastic Packaging the same year, making it compulsory for producers, importers and brand owners (PIBOs) to ensure 100 per cent of life disposal of the plastic generated from their products' packaging.

But, like with everything else in India, good intentions falter at the doorstep of implementation. Studies show India's SUP ban addressed hardly 11 per cent of the products in the category, and that carry-bags that were not compliant with SUP thinness rules were still commonly available in major cities, along with other banned products like thermocol decorations and balloons. A major reason for the lack of enforcement, says Swati Singh Sambyal, senior circular

economy expert at Norwegian non-profit GRID-Arendal, is the lack of rigour among state pollution control boards and local governments. This, she explains, is compounded by insufficient capacities of the enforcers and manpower. "Additionally," she points out, "the industry for alternatives to plastic remains relatively small and less specialised, with inadequate efforts to integrate it into the mainstream market." SUP alternatives, including bamboo cutlery, areca palm leaf tableware or paper plates, remain expensive, and inaccessible across income groups. Senior Associate Editor Sonal Khetarpal ploughs through mountains of data, sorting and assembling the points that most urgently call us to attention. This week's cover story will hopefully contribute to a workable roadmap. Perhaps that road can be built of recycled plastic.



▲ September 12, 2022



(Aroon Purie)

# CONTENTS

UPFRONT: AI 171 CRASH PG 8

STATE SCAN: A SEA OF TROUBLES PG 16



HARDIK CHHABRA

30

COVER STORY

## THE PLASTIC PERIL

INDIA IS NOW THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PLASTIC POLLUTER.  
WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR HEALTH AND HOW TO FIX IT



► LANGUAGE WAR

### 38 A Lingua Fracas Over Hindi

The NEP's three-language policy and the Union government's push for Hindi have sparked hostility from several states

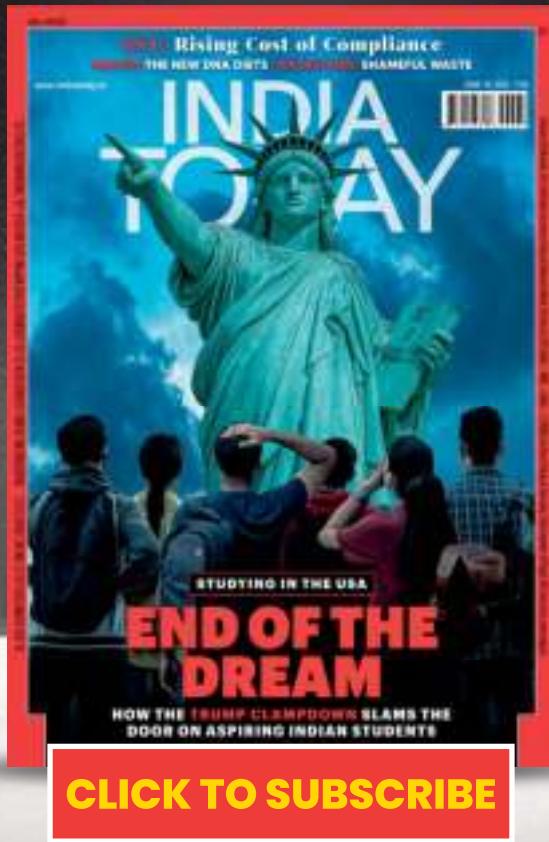


► AUTOMOBILE

### 54 Small Cars, Big Losses

Rising costs from stricter safety and emission rules and a shift toward SUVs have battered small car sales

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# CONTENTS

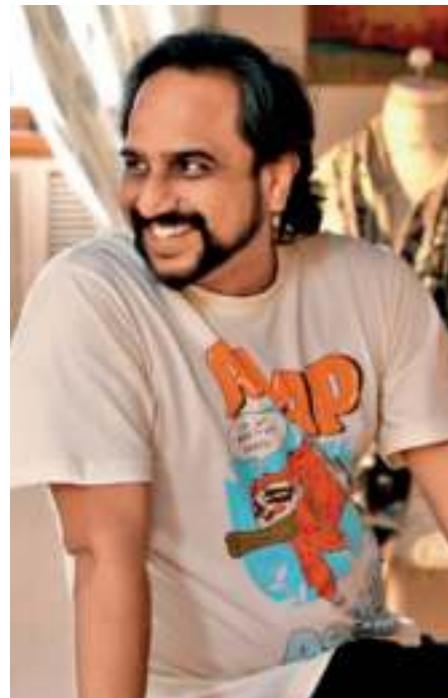


MIND SHELTER

## ► CINEMA

### 60 An Empty Feeling

Post-Covid, movie theatres have not been able to arrest the decline in footfalls. But even as many single screens close, new plans are afoot to lure the fans back to the halls



### 67 Aiming for the Stars

Director R.S. Prasanna talks about what went into the making of the highly anticipated Aamir Khan-starrer *Sitaare Zameen Par*

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## Madhya Pradesh Unwavering Commitment to Water Conservation



Dr. Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

# JAL GANGA SANVARDHAN ABHIYAN

30th March to  
30th June  
2025



**Inspired by the Prime Minister's vision for water conservation, Madhya Pradesh has embraced the 'Jal Ganga Sanvardhan Abhiyan.' This people-centric movement, nurtured by nature, is dedicated to safeguarding our water, forests, land, and all forms of life, truly becoming a grand public endeavor across the state.**

Dr. Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister

- 50,000 farm ponds are being built for small and marginal farmers.
- A target for 90 major and medium irrigation projects to be completed within 90 days.
- Restoration work is underway, including the cleaning of water sources and temples of historical, cultural, and religious significance.
- Over 1000 new ponds are being constructed, and more than 50 major rivers are being revived.
- Restoration work is underway for disused ponds, check dams, and stop dams, with one water structure being inaugurated every day.
- A plan for water conservation and tree plantation by demarcating the Narmada Parikrama path.
- "Pani Chaupal" (water forums) are being organized in rural areas, and over 100,000 "Jaldoot" (water messengers) have been created by selecting men and women from each village.

- To prevent sewage from contaminating water sources, the construction of soak pits is being encouraged.
- 54 water structures are being maintained, and canals are being marked as "Government Canal" on village maps.
- Dams and canals will be freed from encroachment, and approximately 40,000 kilometers of the canal system are being cleaned.
- Various public awareness programs are being organized, including the Sadanira Film Festival, Water Conference, discourses on the water traditions of the state, and a photo exhibition
- The Jal Ganga Samvardhan Abhiyan for the conservation of water sources began in the year 2024. During this campaign, between June 5, 2024, to June 16, 2024, over 56,000 water sources were constructed and renovated at a cost of Rs. 1384 crore.

Khandwa District  
leads the nation in the  
Public Participation  
campaign for  
Water Conservation

Come,  
let's join  
hands and  
protect our  
water sources

# UPFRONT

VIEWPOINT: STAMPING OUT STAMPEDES PG 12

HEALTH WATCH: KETAMINE CACOPHONY PG 15



► AHMEDABAD AIR TRAGEDY

# AI-171 CRASH THE HUNT FOR ANSWERS

In one of the worst aviation disasters, the London-bound Air India flight 171 Boeing 787-8 aircraft with 230 passengers and 12 crew on board crashed at Ahmedabad shortly after taking off, killing 241 people on board and an unknown number of casualties on the ground. What went wrong?



3



4



## THE DEVASTATION AFTER THE JUNE 12 AIR CRASH

1. A tyre of the AI-171, which crashed into the BJ Medical College hostel mess in Ahmedabad

2. Fire service personnel put out the flames and search for survivors in the wreckage

3. A part of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner's vertical fin that came off in the explosion

4. The tail of the aircraft sticks out of the hostel building it had crashed into

► AHMEDABAD AIR TRAGEDY

# FATAL TRAJECTORY

Four possible reasons why the Boeing Dreamliner came down in a crash a few seconds after takeoff

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS / Text by AVISHEK G. DASTIDAR

## 1. ENGINE FAILURE AND FUEL STARVATION

- Engine or propulsion system failure is a plausible line. It's buttressed by videos that show the plane didn't gain altitude after it took off
- An unexpected loss of thrust in one/both engines caused by a mechanical failure, flameout or fuel starvation—where the engines do not get sufficient fuel—might have left the crew with little time to take control



## 2. BIRD HITS

Bird activity is not unusual in the vicinity of the Ahmedabad airport, especially in the mornings. But the winged creatures would have had to be ingested by both engines in the critical moments after takeoff for them to stall together

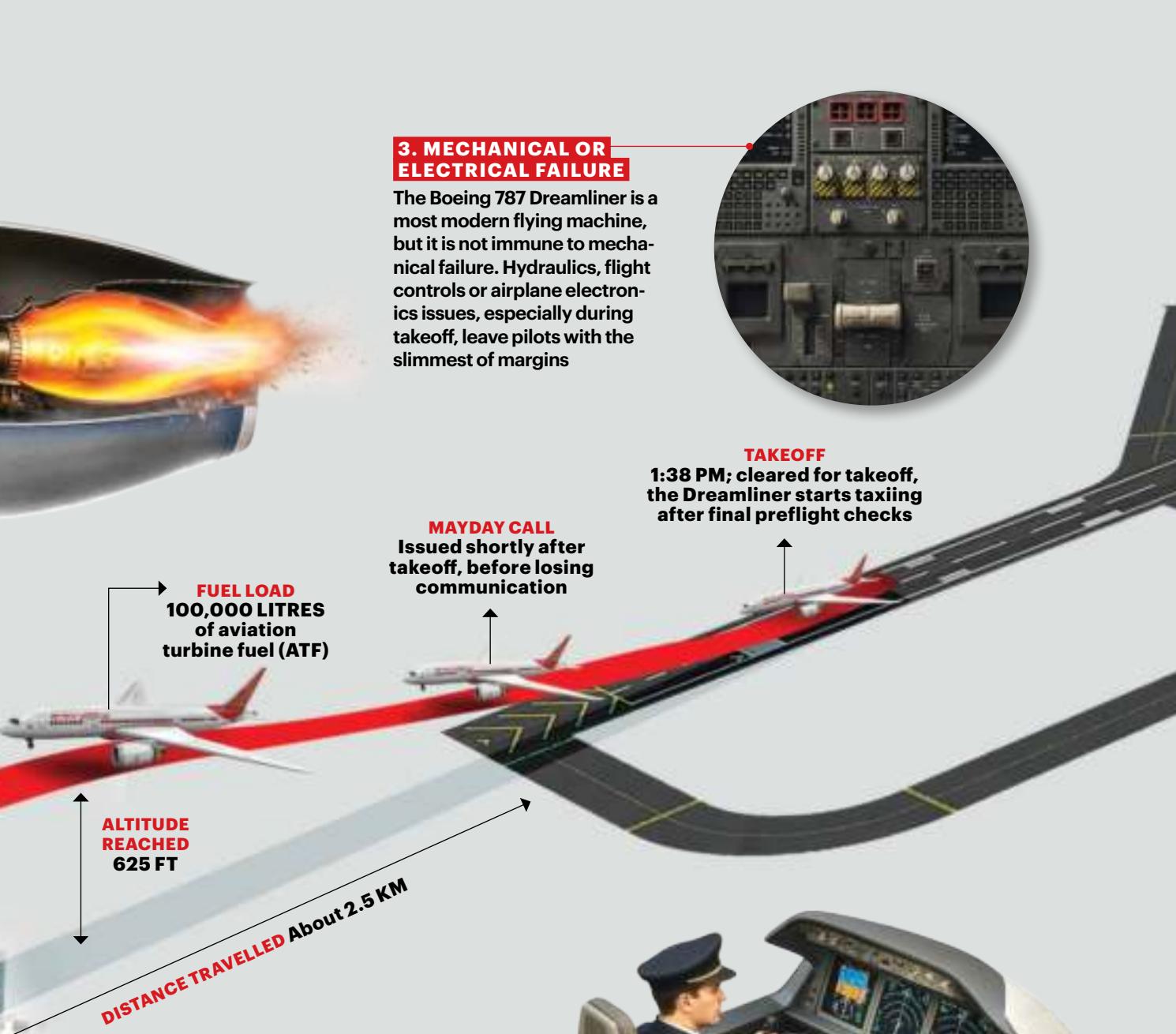
TOP SPEED ACHIEVED  
174 KNOTS (322  
KMPH), before the  
plane begins to fall

CRASH  
30 SECONDS  
after  
takeoff

**241**

DEATH TOLL

People killed on board, with one survivor. As yet unknown number of casualties on the ground as plane ploughs into medical college hostel



#### 4. HUMAN ERROR

- Aircraft stability experts seem less inclined towards this, saying the airplane was clearly in a nose-low attitude, suggestive of power loss, rather than misjudged control inputs. Capt. Sumeet Sabharwal had 8,200 hours of flying experience in 787 Dreamliners alone in his three-decade-plus career
- Only after the flight data, black box and cockpit voice recorders (CVR) are decoded can anything be said with certainty. For now, the weight of suspicion has settled on the plane's engines and external environmental factors

**230**  
**TOTAL PASSENGERS**  
169 Indians and  
61 foreign  
nationals

**12**  
**TOTAL CREW MEMBERS**  
These included Capt.  
Sumeet Sabharwal and First  
Officer Clive Kundar

## ▼ VIEWPOINT

# STAMPING OUT STAMPEDES

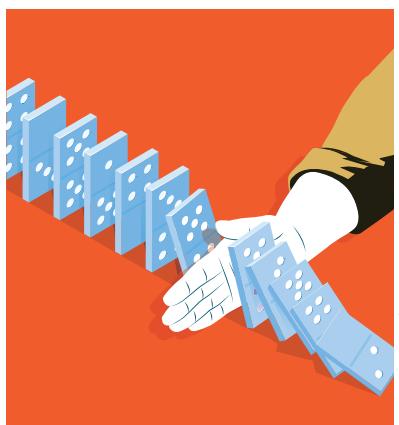
**Frequent stampedes expose critical gaps in planning, policing and preparedness across India's crowded public spaces**

In nearly three decades of service in the police force, one has come to understand that public order and safety hinge upon both past experience and continuous innovation. In India, a land of immense diversity and vibrant public gatherings, the frequency of stampedes is a recurring challenge, demanding our unwavering attention and proactive measures.

Over the past five years, more than two dozen stampedes have been reported from all parts of the country. These are mostly triggered during religious festivals and large-scale public events. Each incident, whether during a cultural celebration or an unexpected rush, serves as a sombre reminder of the critical gaps in our crowd management strategies and state capacity. What remains evident is that our approach must evolve, and so must our leadership at every level of the police hierarchy—especially when incidents such as the June 4 stampede in Bengaluru remind us of the human cost of inadequate planning and response.

This year alone, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh have seen stampede-related deaths. On that fateful day in Bengaluru, the stampede not only took the lives of many citizens and devastated their grieving families, but also laid bare the vulnerabilities within our operational protocols. While the state government has taken action against the police leadership, and a judicial inquiry has been ordered, all those who pushed the police leadership into agreeing to this event at less than 12 hours' notice without proper planning or preparation must also be held accountable.

Reflecting on that incident, several



**BESIDES BOLSTERING POLICE LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY CAN BE LEVERAGED TO MAKE OUR APPROACH THOROUGHLY PROACTIVE**

lessons must be embraced by police leadership across the country. First, it is essential to adopt crowd management strategies that are constantly updated. Detailed preparations that include clear demarcation of entry and exit points, setting up physical barriers and deploying adequate personnel to oversee crowd flow are non-negotiable. Strategic planning informed by past experiences will enable us to anticipate challenges even before they fully manifest.

Another critical lesson is the imperative of rigorous training and preparedness. The unpredictable nature of stampedes demands that every officer, especially those on the front lines, participates in realistic drills and simulations. Such exercises are crucial in preparing teams for high-pressure situations, ensuring that decisions can be made



BY ABHINAV KUMAR

swiftly and decisively. We must foster a culture where our officers are not only skilled in routine operations but are also well-prepared to handle emergencies with calm and precision.

Technological integration is another area where we have opportunities to improve. Modern advancements in communication and surveillance, including the use of drones and real-time analytics, can enhance situational awareness during peak events. As police officers, leveraging these technologies can firmly shift our approach from being reactionary to becoming thoroughly proactive. Synergy among law enforcement, emergency responders and event organisers is imperative for the smooth organisation of all such events.

Public cooperation remains a cornerstone of effective crowd management. Educating citizens on how to remain composed during unforeseen emergencies must be prioritised. Through comprehensive public awareness campaigns, we can equip the community with the necessary knowledge to navigate crowded spaces safely, turning potential chaos into organised safety.

In conclusion, the distressing frequency of stampedes in India compels us to introspect, adapt and strengthen our public order strategies. The lessons drawn from the Bengaluru stampede should become a catalyst for change—a call to police leadership to re-examine our protocols, bolster our training and invest in technology and community relations. That will be a fitting tribute to the victims and their grieving families. ■

The author is a serving IPS officer.  
Views are personal



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## BACK TO (SHOW) BUSINESS

Former Union minister **Smriti Irani** quietly dropped in at Amethi, some 11 months after the rude shock of losing the Lok Sabha seat to Gandhi family fixture Kishori Lal. But this time, there were no jabs at Rahul, no rousing speeches—just a brief sojourn and a cryptic Dinkar couplet: “Main mazdoor hoon, mujhe ameeron ki basti se kya (I am a worker, what will I do in the mansions of the rich).” BJP faithfuls were left scratching their heads: was it political fatigue or just Smriti being dramatic? Talking of drama, the buzz is she’s going back to doing her old TV avatar in ‘*Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*’. Guess Tulsi Virani’s return is anyday a bigger story than any old Amethi visit.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

### ▼ NEW ADDRESS

## HOME FOR THE CM

Delhi CM **Rekha Gupta** is already 100 days into her tenure but is still to move into her official residence. The search is finally over and a bungalow in the Civil Lines area has been identified, not far from the Delhi Assembly. Repairs have begun, with the Rs 47 lakh upgrade expected to be done



in a couple of months. Gupta, who currently lives with family in north Delhi's Shalimar Bagh, is in no rush, even though the move will involve two bungalows, one as residence and a neighbouring one as camp office. Interestingly, her office had tried to secure a bungalow in Lutyens' Delhi, where the powers-that-be reside, but none were available.

## DADDY NO. 1

Who is Bihar's Daddy No. 1? Ask **Prashant Kishor**, and he'll pick **Lalu Prasad Yadav** every time. Not because PK is moonlighting for the RJD, but because, by his own admission, he's an admirer of Laluji's tireless efforts to see son Tejashwi crowned as Bihar CM. At every Jan Suraj rally, Kishor tells his audience that they should learn from Laluji and think about the future of their own children. The back-handed compliment aside, what PK is saying is that voters should think hard about who they're plumping for in the coming election.



## A Quiet Reboot?

PDP chief **Mehbooba Mufti** met J&K Lt Governor **Manoj Sinha** in Srinagar on June 2, their first

encounter since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. Mufti, a sharp critic of the L-G's decisions, especially the firing of public employees, has sought to position her party as

an alternative to the NC's "faltering governance" model. So, is this the first sign of a rapprochement and a possible shift in the power levers? But then her PDP hardly has enough MLAs to make a dent.



## NEW FLIGHT PATH

In politics, there are no permanent enemies. Congress rivals in Rajasthan **Sachin Pilot** and Ashok Gehlot had a 'reunion' of sorts recently when the former visited to invite him for an event marking father and former Union minister Rajesh Pilot's 25th death anniversary. The gesture is seen as a softening of the hard stand Pilot had taken against the three-time CM. The buzz is that with the courtesy call, and Gehlot's warm reception, Pilot is smoothing the runway for a possible landing as PCC chief next year.



**Kaushik Deka with Avaneesh Misra, Avishek G. Dastidar, Amitabh Srivastava, Kaleem Geelani and Rohit Parihar**

## HEALTH WATCH

# The Ketamine Cacophony

By **Sonali Acharjee**

**K**etamine is not a new drug.

But since the accusations made by US President Donald Trump that Elon Musk allegedly uses it to treat depression, the drug has been edging into mainstream view. Ketamine has been used

found that a mix of 2 ml ketamine in 300 ml orange juice helped counter suicidal thoughts in a patient. But that doesn't mean it is good or safe to take without guidance.

Cases of dependency, withdrawal symptoms, and, in some patients,



SHUTTERSTOCK

widely to manage pain and anesthesia during surgical procedures. For its hallucinogenic effects, it is also used as a party drug, going by the name of 'Special K'. In India, ketamine is categorised as a Schedule III controlled substance but outside of hospitals it is relatively unknown.

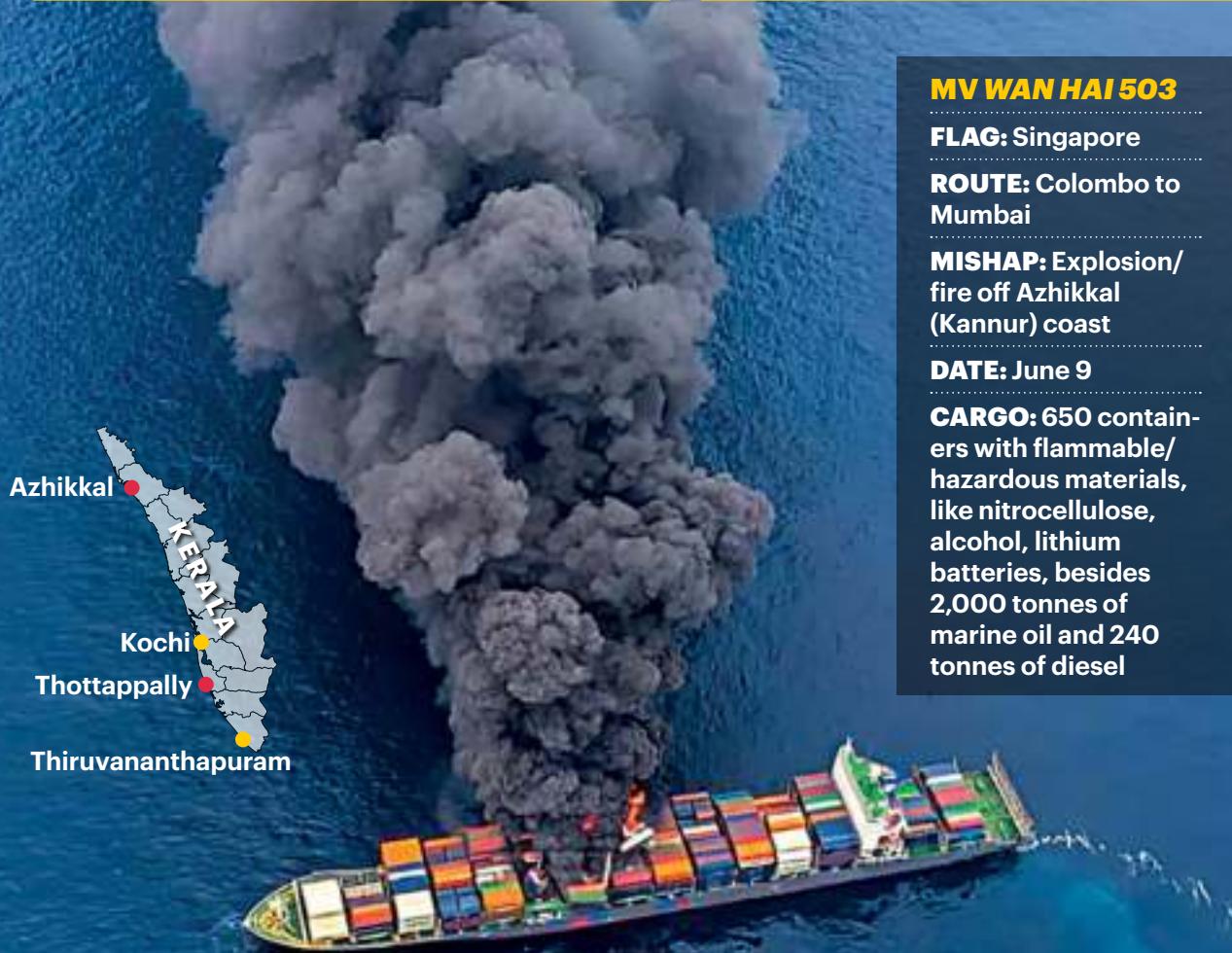
A study published in the National Library of Medicine found that it does indeed help ease depressive symptoms and anxiety. Last year, the Sion Hospital in Mumbai

increased anxiety have been reported. Some 55 per cent of people who have tried at-home ketamine therapy reported either accidentally or intentionally using more than the recommended dose, says a 2023 survey by mental-health company All Points North. Short-term use comes with risks as well—high BP, nausea and hallucinations at night. Long-term chronic use can cause bladder, liver and urinary tract disorders. Best then, to avoid its use.

# STATE SCAN

TAMIL NADU: STALIN GETS A SLOGAN PG 20

UP: THE GORAKHPUR MODEL PG 24



## MV WAN HAI 503

**FLAG:** Singapore

**ROUTE:** Colombo to Mumbai

**MISHAP:** Explosion/fire off Azhikkal (Kannur) coast

**DATE:** June 9

**CARGO:** 650 containers with flammable/hazardous materials, like nitrocellulose, alcohol, lithium batteries, besides 2,000 tonnes of marine oil and 240 tonnes of diesel

► KERALA

## A SEA OF TROUBLES

**As two shipwrecks foul its coastal waters, Kerala finds itself staring at a deepening maritime emergency that threatens its fragile marine ecology and millions of livelihoods**

By Jeemon Jacob

In the span of just two weeks, Kerala's 600-kilometre shoreline—a ribbon of emerald backwaters and bustling fishing hamlets—has been rattled by two catastrophic maritime mishaps involving cargo ships, sending shockwaves through its coastal communities and unfurling environmental red flags.

The first blow came on May 25, when the Liberian-flagged MSC Elsa 3, a hulking vessel carrying 643 containers, succumbed to a suspected mechanical failure

and sank 14.6 nautical miles off the Thottappally coast. The ship, sailing between the Vizhinjam and Kochi ports, had 24 crew members, rescued well in time. But the real trouble lay beneath the waves: several containers of hazardous cargo, now submerged or bobbing ashore in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Alappuzha. Salvage crews are still racing to prevent the ship's fuel tanks from leaking oil, but the greater menace may be the plastic nurdles—tiny, insidious pellets used in



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**MSC ELSA 3****FLAG:** Liberia**ROUTE:** Vizhinjam to Kochi**MISHAP:** Sank off Thottappally (Alappuzha) coast**DATE:** May 25

**CARGO: 643** containers; including 13 with hazardous cargo, like plastic nurdles, besides 367 tonnes of highly inflammable furnace oil and 84 tonnes of diesel

plastic manufacturing—scattered across the water, a synthetic blizzard in the middle of fish-breeding season.

If Kerala's coast was still catching its breath, the sea had other plans. On June 9, the Singapore-registered MV *Wan Hai 503*, a floating warehouse of 650 containers, erupted in flames and explosions further north, 43 nautical miles off the Azhikkal coast. The ship, bound from Colombo to Mumbai, had 22 crew members. Four are missing and two of the 18 rescued have severe burns. Five coast guard ships and the navy's INS *Surat* were deployed, but the fire, fed by volatile cargo—nitrocelulose, benzophenone, magnesium, turpentine, ethanol—proved a stubborn adversary. Adding to the peril, the vessel's 2,000 tonnes of marine oil and 240 tonnes of diesel sit precariously close to 32 tonnes of alcohol, making for a lethally inflammable cocktail. “Our priority is to carry out salvage operations and minimise the oil spill. The task is very challenging,” says Commander Atul Pillai, defence PRO for Kerala and Lakshadweep.

**AFTER THE WRECK**

Back in Kochi, the bureaucratic machinery has lurched into motion. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has set up two high-level committees—one at the state level and another at the

district level—to coordinate relief and environmental assessments. “The state has taken all necessary precautions [to contain] maritime casualties and is conducting environmental and social impact studies on the Kerala coast,” says chief secretary A. Jayathilak. “Now, our priority is to assess [immediate] losses and extend relief to the affected coastal communities.” The state, after some foot-dragging, has also filed a criminal case against Mediterranean Shipping Company, the Geneva-headquartered operator of the MSC *Elsa 3*.

With the southwest monsoon back at orange alert levels and a statewide trawling ban in effect since June 10, the dual disasters have dealt a double

blow to Kerala's 1.13 million-strong fishing community. “These shipwrecks have compounded the fisherfolk's hardships,” says T.J. Anjalose, state president of the All India Trade Union Congress. “They are finding more plastic than fish. The state must compensate them for the losses and press for a thorough investigation by the Directorate General of Shipping.”

The predominantly fish-eating state is also increasingly concerned about the toxic pollution washing up along its once-pristine coastlines. Dr Anu Gopinath, head of the aquatic environment management department at Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS) in Kochi, has warned of serious long-term consequences. “We must conduct detailed monitoring on the impact of the shipwrecks. The *Wan Hai* vessel has tonnes of inflammable and toxic substances, including pesticides, that may threaten aquatic ecosystems with far-reaching and serious consequences,” she says. The Kochi-based Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), initially tasked with investigating coastal pollution after the MSC *Elsa 3* wreck, has now begun collecting seawater samples near the *Wan Hai* mishap site as well to detect the presence of harmful chemicals.

As salvage crews toil against time and tide, Kerala finds itself at an inflection point. V.J. Mathew, former chairman of the Kerala Maritime Board, argues that with the Vizhinjam port expanding, the state needs a permanent maritime monitoring system and tougher legal mechanisms. “Shipping companies must be held accountable,” he says. The immediate crisis will fade, as all crises do. But without urgent reforms—stricter regulations and enforcement for hazardous cargo movement and long-term ecological surveillance—Kerala's fragile marine habitats, and the lives that depend on them, may be doomed to relive these disasters, again and again. ■

**WHAT NOW**

- ➔ Salvage op. to prevent oil spill and other hazards
- ➔ Detailed scientific studies to assess coastal pollution
- ➔ Legal action and tighter maritime safety regulations
- ➔ Compensation and long-term support for fisherfolk

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► TAMIL NADU

# STALIN GETS A SLOGAN

**The census and an election: that's 2026 in Tamil Nadu. Renewed fears, as well as politics, over delimitation play well for DMK—for now**

By Kavitha Muralidharan

**I**S IT A STATE-SPECIFIC ISSUE? A regional one concerning only the South? Or one that can tilt India's axis? From the national to the local, all lines intersected in a high-voltage visitation last week. Union home minister Amit Shah was in town, predicting saffron rule over Tamil Nadu next year. His speech in Madurai bristled with invocations of military strength, allegations of DMK corruption and calls for an Opposition resurgence. Amid the fire and brimstone, though, one silence rang out loud: no mention of delimitation.

It's no longer an abstract theme. With the census rollout set for 2026, its corollary also looms closer as a clear and present political vector. The mandated 'rebalancing' of the political weightage accorded to states threatens to curtail the South's clout: at least if it follows the logic of pegging the number of Lok Sabha seats to new population figures. Biggest among the potential aggrieved will be Tamil Nadu, where the issue is rapidly gaining traction.

For the ruling DMK, Shah's silence is tacit confirmation that the BJP intends to push ahead with delimitation ahead of the 2029 Lok Sabha election. For the AIADMK, which recently returned to the BJP-led NDA after attending a southern states' conclave in March that unanimously opposed population-based delimitation, it's a tightrope walk. After all, this theme could become what GST,



▲ **GEARING UP FOR 2026** M.K. Stalin at a DMK meeting, Jun. 1; (right) Amit Shah in Madurai, a week later

NEET and the National Education Policy (NEP) once were: a lightning rod for Tamil politics. One that may not stop flashing with the 2026 assembly election.

## SHRINKING POWER?

Tamil Nadu has 39 Lok Sabha seats—7.2 per cent of the House. On updated population data, that could drop to as few as 31. Chief

Minister M.K. Stalin has demanded a constitutional guarantee that Tamil Nadu's representation will not be reduced. In 1976, during the Emergency, the 42nd Amendment froze for 25 years the number of Lok Sabha seats per state based on the 1971 census—the idea was to avoid penalising states that implemented family planning. The 84th Amendment in 2002 extended the



ANI

freeze till 2026. That 50-year-old ice cap is melting now, but with its basic contradiction unresolved. The dysfunctional North, with its runaway population, stands to benefit.

“Delimitation shouldn’t reward failure and punish states that met population control targets,” says an observer. “This isn’t just about numbers—it disincentivises performance. These states reduced fertility, cut maternal mortality,

#### Takeaways

➤ Home minister Amit Shah makes a splash in TN, predicting a BJP win in 2026. Does not mention delimitation

➤ DMK says it’s a sign that BJP plans to prune TN’s Lok Sabha seats from 39. Also accuses AIADMK of complicity

improved women’s health. The Centre says the South won’t lose out—but what do assurances mean without a methodology in place?”

Fears over shrinking political power are real. The March conclave saw the South ask for the freeze to be extended till 2051. Stalin says the BJP is undermining federalism and accuses the AIADMK of complicity. AIADMK general secretary E.K. Palaniswami counters that Stalin is dangling a red herring. But the absence of a clear word from New Delhi offers the DMK a political opening wrapped up in a policy challenge. ■

#### ► PUNJAB

## AAP SEEKS A CHHOTA REFERENDUM

**A chance election in Ludhiana West gives the Mann regime an arena in which to test its urban popularity**

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

**L**UDHIANA WEST is voting in a bypoll on June 19 because its last AAP MLA lost his life in a firearm accident. His party, having metaphorically met that fate in the Delhi election, has got more than redemption on its mind. At stake is a seat that captures Punjab’s urban pulse, and may shape the narrative for the 2027 assembly election—perhaps even inflect national politics. So AAP, Congress and the BJP are giving it their all.

Each has fielded the strongest available hand. AAP’s face, Rajya Sabha MP and

Ludhiana-based industrialist Sanjeev Arora, is interesting for another reason. Despite stone-faced denials, the buzz is that if Arora wins, party supremo Arvind Kejriwal may explore a Rajya Sabha route from Punjab. After his low-key retreat from the public eye in the wake of electoral setbacks and legal challenges, such a re-entry could offer Kejriwal a fresh national perch, reviving both visibility and legitimacy.

Even without that angle, Punjab is vital to the party’s bid to retain national relevance. A defeat could deepen the sense that AAP is slipping



➤ **GOING ALL OUT** AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann campaign for Sanjeev Arora (far right) in Ludhiana

even in its last remaining strong-hold. By extension, this bypoll also means a lot to CM Bhagwant Mann, being a sort of interim referendum. Mann has taken direct charge of the campaign, rallying MLAs, ministers and cadres to secure what he calls a “decisive urban endorsement” of his regime.

Arora is running a restrained campaign—centred around his clean image, business acumen and philanthropic work. His appeal is strongest among the industrial and trader classes, whom AAP has ardently courted. Locally, Arora’s supporters admit the enthusiasm of 2022 has cooled, with civic complaints piling up. The promise of ‘badlav’ now competes with an uncomfortable sense of drift.

### THE YOUNG TURK

Sensing an opportunity to reclaim lost turf, the Congress has fielded the Ludhiana native Bharat Bhushan Ashu—a two-time former MLA with deep roots here and a score to settle. Currently working president of the state unit, his

#### Takeaways

➤ AAP face Sanjeev Arora is an RS MP. If he wins, it opens a route for Kejriwal

➤ It's also a battle to renew faith in AAP's urban 'doer' image, against a strong Congress challenger

2022 defeat was part of the larger Congress collapse, but he never lost touch with his constituents. Ashu has methodically rebuilt his ground presence, going door to door, visiting ward-level units, and reconnecting with civic groups and trade unions. His campaign draws heavily on his past as a doer, who delivered on civic issues, pushed through in-



**CHIEF CHALLENGER** Bharat Bhushan Ashu, Congress

rastructure projects and kept up a personal rapport with the city folk. His pitch is emotional: give me one more chance to serve, he says. The Congress, still struggling to find coherence post-Amarinder Singh, is watching hopefully: a win would signal urban resurgence.

**A**shu, with a flowing white beard that can overstate his 54 years, is a tough-talking local business scion who was part of a corps selected for a greater role by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over a decade ago, when he was attempting to groom a new generation of leaders in Punjab. Close to fellow ‘young turk’ and then Ludhiana MP Ravneet Singh Bittu, now a Union minister, the duo almost made it to a ‘Battle of the Bosom Pals’ in 2024 after the latter shifted to the BJP. Ashu stayed put in the GOP and is now invoking his decade-long record as legislator, towards whose end he was briefly cabinet minister.

The BJP, meanwhile, has nominated veteran Jiwan Gupta—investing in its own cadre after a long time, rather than in high-profile turncoats or transactional alliances. More than a realistic stab at an upset win, it's a “long-term investment”. In a constituency with some 30 per cent Hindus, the two main opponents are also Hindu—so that's not particularly a USP.

It's tightly poised. AAP retains an edge, but Arora, a respected figure, is not the sort to set the barn on fire. That makes it a purer barometer of which way Punjab's politically orphaned urban voter will turn. ■

► THE DAILY TOIL NREGA workers in Memari, West Bengal



DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

► WEST BENGAL

## NO END IN SIGHT

**It's been over three years since the Centre paused funds to the job scheme in Bengal, alleging a scam. A bitter debate picks up ahead of polls**

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

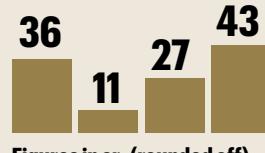
**M**UCH LABOUR HAS BEEN SPENT on this debate—never settled, it's gasping for capital too. Left marooned by New Delhi 40 months ago, West Bengal has had to dig into its own scanty coffers to keep work afloat under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). It's nearly not enough for the state's 138 million active job card holders. Consider the figures. Since March 2022, when the Centre suspended NREGA funds citing



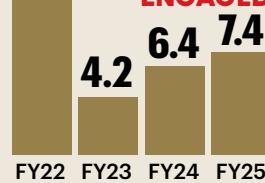
## SO LITTLE TO DO

After 2021-22, Bengal struggled to get NREGA work going

### PERSON DAYS GENERATED



### WORKERS ENGAGED



Source: West Bengal govt

# O NREGA FAMINE

irregularities, Bengal has managed to create only 809.6 million person days—barely double the 364.3 million achieved in a single ‘normal’ year just before. Indeed, in FY22, it was also able to give work to 11.2 million individuals.

### NEGLECT VS ACCOUNTABILITY

There’s a silver lining: under state financing, in FY25, the number of person days generated—which refers to the total number of days of work individuals were engaged in—has crossed FY22 numbers to hit 429.2 million (see graphic, *So Little to Do*). But this slight progress hardly addresses the financial famine caused by New Delhi’s pause, for Bengal employed only some 7.4 million workers in NREGA work last year. What this means is that the base of the scheme has become smaller (there are less projects now), although more work days are being generated. It also means the benefits are reaching fewer people.

Repeated appeals by the state to the

### Takeaways

► After FY22, Bengal has had to self-finance NREGA work. The Centre has ‘paused’ funds, alleging irregularities

► Person days created were 364.3 mn in FY22; 809.6 mn in the next 3 years together

► Cash-strapped Bengal has imposed strict austerity to clear unpaid central dues

Centre for release of funds have failed. Bengal’s Trinamool Congress regime ascribes political motives; the BJP-led Centre insists it’s enforcing accountability. The 2022 freeze had followed allegations of corruption and procedural lapses, especially in Purba Bardhaman, Hooghly, Malda and Darjeeling. This

April, the Calcutta High Court said an indefinite suspension was not justified, and asked the Centre why NREGA funds shouldn’t resume for the rest of the state, excluding those districts. Earlier this year, a meeting between Bengal’s panchayat minister Pradip Mazumdar and his counterpart in the Union cabinet, Shivraj Chouhan, was abruptly postponed by the latter’s office. The last minister-level meeting was in November 2022. The prolonged deadlock has paralysed welfare delivery in rural Bengal.

The issue acquires renewed urgency as the state approaches a critical election year. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at a recent rally in Alipurduar, accused the TMC regime of stalling development projects and perpetuating corruption. In a riposte, the TMC cited unpaid NREGA and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) dues as evidence of deliberate central neglect. The TMC had sailed through the 2024 Lok Sabha election on that narrative. But the deprived masses largely remain where they were.

According to Nabanna, Bengal’s administrative HQ, people are still awaiting NREGA payment for work completed up to December 2021. Wage arrears alone amount to Rs 3,732 crore. Add material, contractors, administrative costs, and the total dues reach Rs 6,907 crore. The state has cleared the due wages from its own budget. It has also begun clearing PMAY dues on its own—much the better to invest in a narrative.

The attendant fiscal pressure has led the state finance department to impose strict austerity measures. No new development project to be sanctioned in the foreseeable future, and government expenditure above Rs 10 lakh needs special clearance. All that is only band-aid on a gaping institutional wound. ■



► UTTAR PRADESH

# THE GORAKHPUR MODEL

The home base of CM Yogi Adityanath is emerging as the industrial nerve centre of eastern UP

By Avaneesh Mishra

**O**NCE DISMISSED AS THE “BADLANDS” of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Gorakhpur, the home district of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, is now seeing an industrial transformation, with many high-profile infrastructure projects coming to the region. The Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority (GIDA) has played no small part in this. CEO Anuj Malik says Rs 12,500 crore has come just in the past three years. “Proactive policy support, subsidies and easy availability of land are the key drivers in eastern UP,” she says. GIDA says it has 3,500 acres in its land bank, with 250 acres ready for immediate allocation.

Indian Glycols Ltd, Gallant Ispat Ltd, Ankur Udyog, Varun Beverages,

Keyan Industries... the list of big-ticket companies that have set up shop here is long. Altogether, 1,167 industrial units, currently operational under GIDA, have generated employment for some 42,000 people. Akeel Khan is one of the lucky ones, working with Keyan Distillery, which has invested over Rs 1,200 crore and employs over a thousand people. “Earlier, there were no jobs here, which is why I had to leave Gorakhpur and UP in search of work. Now, nearly every family in my village has someone working at one of the industries,” says Khan.

The Keyan distillery, which began ethanol production earlier this year, was one of the first large units to start operations. And, according to Ankur Gangwar, AGM (project and mainte-

nance), the company is already planning an additional unit. “We had the bhoomi puja in August 2023, and with the raw material availability, uninterrupted electricity and connectivity, things moved faster than expected,” says Gangwar.

## EVOLVING LANDSCAPE

The pace at which Gorakhpur’s industrial landscape has evolved reflects in the numbers. Anupam Mishra, officer on special duty at GIDA, says the region’s Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has more than doubled, from Rs 22,000 crore in 2017 to around Rs 47,000 crore now.

Especially heartening is the fact that 20-30 per cent of the skilled workforce now comes from

► GOA

## SAVING THE FROG

**A new awareness campaign hopes to get an illicit delicacy—frog's legs—off Goa's restaurant menus**

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

**I**N 2020, GOA'S REPUBLIC DAY tableau on Rajpath had a giant green frog strumming a guitar. Back home, though, they often land on a plate. 'Jumping Chicken', they call it, for the benefit of meat lovers indulging in it on the sly. Up the chain from restaurants that serve it are poachers who track frogs when they surface during the rains, their breeding season. The most hunted species are the Indian Bullfrog and the Jerdon's Bullfrog. Both have fleshy hindlegs, the part that's curried or fried.

What the frogs themselves eat is quite crucial. Adults and tadpoles feed on mosquito eggs and larvae, exerting a natural control on vector-borne diseases. Besides, they devour a whole variety of insects deemed farm pests, ensuring lower crop losses. Thus, frog poaching impinges on the ecology, public health, agriculture and food security. It also

violates the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Frogs are protected species—hunting them can lead you to getting fried in jail for three years.

Goa is now trying to get frog meat off restaurant menus. In May, state forests minister Vishwajit Rane launched a 'Save the Frog' campaign, aiming to protect their monsoon habitats. "The hunters track down the Bullfrog at night by its croak, using torch light to stun them," says a forest official. While it's an age-old practice in many parts of Goa, the rising commercial demand for frog meat has started seriously skewing the numbers.

Frogs, a barometer of ecological health in zones along the Western Ghats, also face threats from urbanisation, deforestation and linear projects like highways. Activist Clinton Vaz says awareness is getting the 'jumping chicken' off menus, but that's only a start. ■

### Takeaways

■ **GIDA brought Rs 12,500 crore in investments to Gorakhpur in the past 3 years**

■ **1,167 units now operational at industrial corridor, generating 42,000 jobs**

India, Bihar, Nepal and the rest of UP. This benefits local industries and positions Gorakhpur as an alternative to more saturated hubs," points out Mishra.

GIDA is also working to attract sector-specific investments. "We are developing UP's first plastic park, with space for 90 industrial units. Over 70 units have been allotted," says Malik. Beyond the industrial infrastructure, Gorakhpur's urban transformation is also playing a role. With two five-star hotels already functional and two more under construction, the hospitality industry is expanding. State-backed infrastructure and urban projects are also reshaping the city. In FY25, CM Adityanath laid the foundation for projects worth over Rs 3,500 crore, including the Rapti Nagar Expansion Township and Sports City, and the 'new Gorakhpur city'. ■



● **CAUGHT IN THE ACT** Smuggled bull frogs seized from a bus in Goa



**CLOSE RANKS**  
Policemen in front of the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha

► MADHYA PRADESH

## MARCHING TO THE DECEPTION BEAT

**The fraud in MP Police's selection test for constables shows the practice still thrives in the land of Vyapam scam**

By **Rahul Noronha**

**T**HE INFAMOUS VYAPAM SCAM, which had once grown like weed over the state recruitment process, has just had a baby—in the digital age. The shadow of corruption this time is on a selection test held in 2023 to conscript fresh constables into Madhya Pradesh Police. As is usual in India, there were 7,411 posts and more than 950,000 applicants. So it seems the cannier ones among those who aspired to be footsoldiers of the law broke the law in the first instance, allegedly using impersonation, tampered documents and sophisticated biometric swaps.

The modus operandi was a time-honoured one, but with a contemporary twist. Impersonators would take the written test. Since identity had to

### Takeaways

► **The scam in the selection test for constables involves impostor 'solvers' taking tests with forged Aadhaar cards**

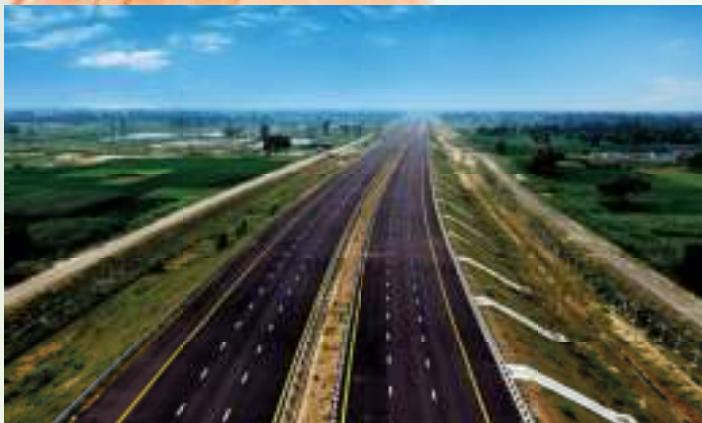
► **The MP Police has made 12 arrests; 20 FIRs have been filed, and there are more than 100 suspects**

be confirmed through Aadhaar, the photograph and fingerprints of applicants were replaced with those of the 'solvers'—who would make a neat Rs 4-5 lakh in the process. The Aadhaar biometrics would then go back to the original settings, for the physical test. Here, the lazier ones became the weak link: having outsourced the written part, they began looking for proxies to take the physical test as well. Word reached the recruitment wing of the MP police, investigations began, and everything unravelled.

The haul so far: around 20 FIRs across the state, 12 arrests and more than 100 suspects, including some attached to kiosks that do online application work. One arrest is that of an ace solver from Bihar who had cracked five papers for six candidates—no cloud, therefore, on the job he had himself landed in 2024 as a school teacher in Bihar. But he typifies the scam's suspected sprawl, extending to Jharkhand, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, say police. Locally, most suspects are from the Gwalior-Chambal region, which has become synonymous with recruitment scams. It had had a starring role during Vyapam, and has apparently never forgotten its skills. ■



## Viksit Bharat Viksit Uttar Pradesh



- Establishment of a Technology Translation Research Park in Cyber Security is in progress.
- The state with the largest railway network in the country, spanning over 16,000 kilometers.
- Dadri (Greater Noida) is the junction of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor and Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor.
- Uttar Pradesh is progressing towards becoming a state with 21 airports, including 5 international and 16 domestic airports.
- A leading state in implementing the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.
- Launch of the Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission.
- Development of the Defence Industrial Corridor at six nodes: Lucknow, Aligarh, Kanpur, Jhansi, Agra and Chitrakoot.
- India's first inland waterway developed, the Uttar Pradesh Inland Waterways Authority established.
- India's first Freight Village developed over 100 acres in Varanasi.
- Establishment of IIT GNL in Greater Noida, Mega Food Park in Bareilly, Trans Ganga City in Unnao, Plastic Park and Garment Park in Gorakhpur.
- Lucknow being developed as 'AI city'.

**Expressways Under Construction:** Ganga Expressway, Ballia Link Expressway, Gorakhpur Link Expressway, Chitrakoot Link Expressway, Link Expressway connecting Agra-Lucknow Expressway to Purvanchal Expressway, Link Expressway connecting Bundelkhand Expressway and Agra-Lucknow Expressway via Farrukhabad to Ganga Expressway, Jewar Airport Link Expressway, Vindhya Expressway, Spur construction to connect Chandauli to Ghazipur on Purvanchal Link Expressway, Expressway to connect Bundelkhand Expressway from Chitrakoot to Prayagraj via Rewa Road, Expressway to connect Ganga Expressway from Meerut to Haridwar

**Operational Expressways:** Purvanchal Expressway, from Lucknow to Ghazipur (341 km)

Agra-Lucknow Expressway, from Agra to Lucknow (302 km)

Bundelkhand Expressway, from Chitrakoot to Etawah (296 km)

Yamuna Expressway, from Greater Noida to Agra (165 km)

Delhi-Meerut Expressway, from Meerut to Delhi (96 km)

Noida-Greater Noida Expressway (25 km)

# NEW UTTAR PRADESH OF NEW INDIA

KAAM DAMDAAR

DOUBLE ENGINE SARKAR

6 operational expressways, 11 under construction  
Uttar Pradesh holds the largest share in the country's total expressway network.



Information and Public Relations Department, U.P.

UPGovtOfficial

CMOUPradesh

CMOOfficeUP

► RAJASTHAN

# A LEASE RENEWAL AT CM'S OFFICE

**Ambitious rivals crowd the Jaipur palace, but BJP is inclined to favour Sharma's continuation**

By Rohit Parihar

**T**HERE WAS A PIECE OF PUBLIC performance, there were private conversations—and plenty of whispers off-stage. Happily for CM Bhajan Lal Sharma, the important facts all seem in virtuous alignment. When BJP president J.P. Nadda chose Jaipur to mark the 300th birth anniversary of Ahilyabai Holkar, it wasn't just about honouring a Maratha queen. Sharma, 18 months young in his tenure, had never managed to get himself off the receiving end of pointed social media gossip. Credible or not, the buzz about a change of guard was always in the air, like a beast with a life of its own.

Spurring it is the imminence of a reshuffle in a cabinet strikingly full of freshers. With veterans getting restive and rival power centres coalescing, the recipe also has that extra lemon twist this time: the idea that Sharma's exit could be timed with Nadda's departure as BJP chief. The fuzzy chronology of the latter has prolonged the suspense, not ended it. All together, the perceived crisis of authority seemed serious enough to warrant a rebuttal.

On stage, Nadda wasted no time on platitudes. "Making Bhajan Lal the CM is not the issue," he declared, at the May 31 event. "It's about having



▲ **SEAL OF TRUST**

Bhajan Lal Sharma greets BJP chief J.P. Nadda during a party camp in Narmada, May 6

## Takeaways

■ **An imminent reshuffle of Rajasthan cabinet renews speculation on CM's post**

■ **Nadda's public backing of Sharma sets record straight even as rival power centres mushroom within party**

a dedicated soldier of the ideology... working day and night under Modi's leadership." As Sharma listened from the dais with a half-smile, Nadda cut deeper. "When there's a difference between day and night, you ought to like the day," he said. A jab, some would say, at the Vasundhara Raje camp.

## SCOTCHING SPECULATION

Behind closed doors, Nadda is believed to have reviewed ministerial performance, preparatory to an anticipated shake-up. Will Sharma seize the moment to stamp his authority on

things? Will he have to accommodate dissenters? Will he become a casualty of high-stakes party dynamics? At least on the last, Nadda has implied it's too early to turn the page. Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jolly allowed himself a dig, saying Nadda's remarks confirm that Sharma's position is iffy.

Among his ambitious seniors, agriculture minister Kirori Lal Meena resumed office in April, 10 months after a dramatic resignation that was never accepted. Rebellious as ever, he upstaged Nadda's visit by storming half-a-dozen factories accused of producing spurious fertilisers—a not-so-subtle critique of government functioning. Then there's Rajyavardhan Rathore, industries and sports minister, and now a quiet dissenter.

All this discounts Sharma's own capabilities, as an approachable man whose free access extends from common MLAs to Union ministers. On May 25, he presented the resolution on Operation Sindoora at an NDA CM's conclave. There are those who say he's the BJP's best bet in 2028. ■

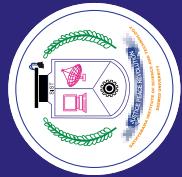


**SATHYABAMA**  
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)**

**CATEGORY - I UNIVERSITY BY UGC**

# Empowering Minds Enriching Futures



**50+ UG Programmes**  
**25+ PG Programmes**  
**Ph.D Programmes**



**250+**  
MOUs signed



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**Ranking**  
position in the  
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20<sup>th</sup>  
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# DROWNING IN PLASTIC

**INDIA IS NOW THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PLASTIC POLLUTER.  
WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR HEALTH AND HOW TO FIX IT**

BY SONAL KHETARPAL / Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

# At

**the sprawling 250-acre plastic bazaar at Tikri Kalan** on the Delhi-Haryana border, towering mounds of white PP raffia bags stuffed with plastic scrap line the dusty, winding lanes. The plastic is segregated into at least 100 distinct varieties, ensuring each sack contains only one kind of plastic, since mixed plastic cannot be processed together. “Plastic waste from every district of India comes here,” says Vijay Sharma, office secretary, PVC and Plastic Waste Dealers Association. Between 30 and 50 trucks, each of 10-15 tonne capacity, arrive daily, says Sharma. Other traders estimate the figure to be much higher—200-250 trucks. Which means only one thing: the presence of a massive informal market—much larger than the formal one—right on Tikri Kalan’s periphery.

And thereby hangs a whole tale. In a 2022 analysis of Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data from 23 states and Union territories, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) concluded that only 12 per cent of plastic waste in India is recycled, 20 per cent of it is burned while a significant 70 per cent is unaccounted-for, likely ending up in landfills or dumpyards and along roadsides. No wonder India emerged as the world’s largest plastic emitter in a September 2024 study published in science journal *Nature*, which based its conclusions on 2020 data gleaned from 50,702 municipalities worldwide. India contributes 9.3 million tonnes (Mt), or 20 per cent, to the 52.1 Mt of the annual global plastic waste emissions. This refers to the waste emitted into the environment that is not subject to any form of management or control. An estimated 5.8 Mt of plastic is openly burned in India, releasing poisonous gases; 3.5 Mt escapes as loose plastic

in the environment that eventually enters the oceans. This is not counting the enormous quantum that gets collected and thrown in mismanaged sites, where it eventually decomposes and leaches deadly toxins into the soil. In an e-mail, the authors of the study told **INDIA TODAY** that the total plastic waste generated in India is 27.8 Mt, far, far higher than the 3.5 Mt the CPCB estimated for 2020 (see *The India Stack*). As the study says, official figures in India do not include rural areas, open burning of uncollected waste or waste recycled by the informal sector.

How did India get here? Plastic first came to India in the form of polystyrene circa 1957; it would take a few decades for other forms to be produced in India. The appeal of the material lies in its very name—derived from the Greek word ‘plastikos’, meaning that which can be shaped or moulded. A synthetic material made from fossil fuels like petroleum or natural gas, plastic is constructed out of long chains of mol-

**9.3**  
**MILLION TONNES  
PER ANNUM**  
**INDIA'S PLASTIC  
POLLUTION  
EMISSIONS, THE  
HIGHEST IN THE WORLD**

Source: *Nature*,  
September 2024



ecules called polymers, much like hundreds of paper clips strung together.

The fact that it can be moulded into any shape when heated adds to the material's versatility. Based on their behaviour when heated, plastics can be divided into two broad categories—thermoplastics, which become soft upon heating, can be melted and reshaped 2-3 times, and are therefore recyclable; and thermosets, which can only be moulded once after heating, and thus cannot be recycled. The first include the familiar PET (polyethylene terephthalate) water bottles, PVC pipes, polypropylenes that are used in disposable cups and food containers, and the polyethylene used in shopping bags etc. (see *Waste to Wealth*). Thermosets include bakelite, melamine and vulcanised rubber found in shoe soles, car tyres, rubber hoses etc.

**L**ightweight, durable, waterproof and inexpensive to boot, it was a matter of time before plastic began to be used across industries—from food and fashion to construction, automotive and healthcare—as well as in homes, an indispensable accessory when you went out shopping, whether for groceries or for garments. As the population and economy boomed, so did plastic manufacture and use. The plastic industry, estimated to be Rs 3.5 lakh crore in FY23, is projected to grow to Rs 10 lakh crore in FY28. It is home to 30,000 processing units, a majority of them micro, small and medium enterprises, employing more than 4 million people and contributing 1.4 per cent to the GDP. In FY25, India exported plastics worth \$12.5 billion (approx. Rs 1.07 lakh crore), according to the Plastics Export Promotion Council.

Today, India is among the top three consumers of plastics globally, after China and the US, though its per capita plastic consumption of 13 kg is less than half the global average of 30 kg. But while China generates 0.08 kg per person per day of plastic waste, one and a half times more than the 0.054 kg generated in India, our inability to manage the waste makes us the largest plastic emitters in the world, more than three times China's emissions of 2.8 Mt, according to the calculations in the *Nature* study.

### PLASTIC AS HAZARD

Its very ubiquity has made plastic a global menace, in which India is said to play a major part. Plastic's non-biodegradable nature means it stays around forever, and everywhere.

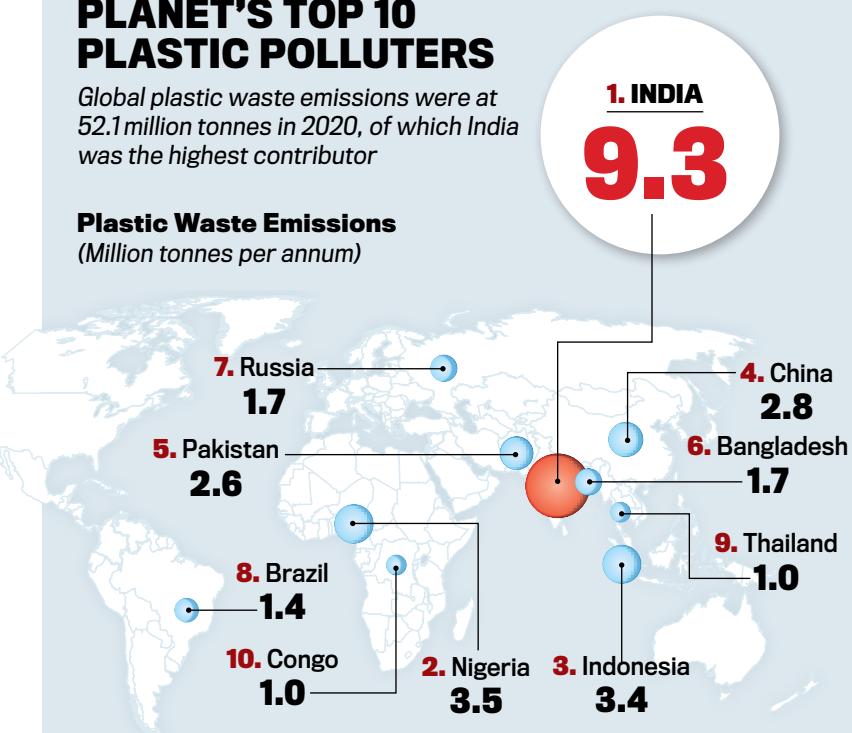
# DUBIOUS DISTINCTION

**India may be producing less plastic waste per capita than, say, China, but mismanagement of that waste makes it the world's worst offender in plastic emissions**

### PLANET'S TOP 10 PLASTIC POLLUTERS

Global plastic waste emissions were at 52.1 million tonnes in 2020, of which India was the highest contributor

**Plastic Waste Emissions**  
(Million tonnes per annum)

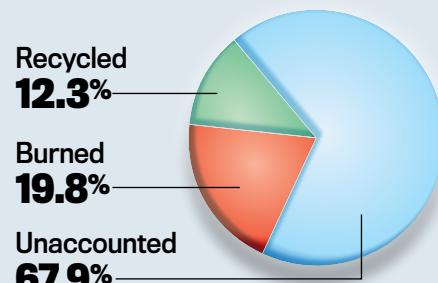


Source: *Nature*, Sept. 2024 (data for 2020)/Angeliki Savvantoglou of Bear Bones / phys.org

**LITTERING IS THE MAIN SOURCE FOR EMISSIONS IN THE GLOBAL NORTH WHEREAS UNCOLLECTED WASTE IS THE LARGEST SOURCE ACROSS THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

### THE PLASTIC WASTE CRISIS

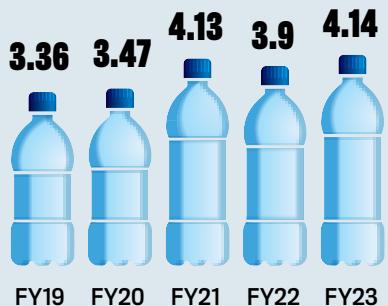
*The lion's share of plastic waste disposal in India is unaccounted-for, lingering in the environment*



Source: A 2022 analysis by Centre for Science and Environment

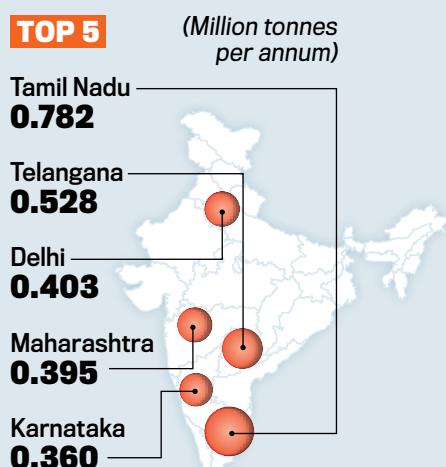
# THE INDIA STACK

The increase in plastic waste generated in the country  
(Million tonnes per annum)



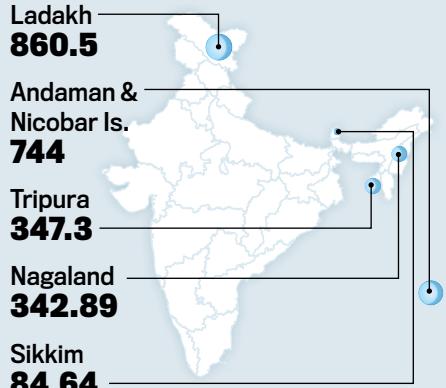
## PLASTIC WASTE GENERATORS

Quantity generated by the states/UTs in FY23



## BOTTOM 5

(Tonnes per annum)



HINDUSTAN TIMES



**JUNK JUNCTION** The Juhu Beach in Mumbai

## GROWING SEA OF PLASTIC

Plastic waste has devastating consequences all around—polluting oceans, harming wildlife, endangering health and the climate



### ENVIRONMENTAL

- Plastics are non-biodegradable, taking 500-1,000 years to decompose, causing long-term accumulation in ecosystems
- They contribute 80% of marine pollution, with 4.8-12.7 million tonnes entering oceans yearly, forming garbage patches like the Great Pacific Garbage Patch
- Over time, plastics fragment into microplastics, contaminating water, soil and air



### WILDLIFE

- Microplastics find their way into the food chain, being consumed by wildlife
- Animals are often entangled in plastic, leading to injuries, suffocation or death



### HUMAN HEALTH

- Plastics contain toxic chemicals, including pesticides and flame retardants, linked to: cancer, heart disease, reproductive disorders and other severe health conditions



### CLIMATE

- Plastics are derived from fossil fuels, and their production accounts for at least 5.3% of global greenhouse gas emissions, worsening climate change

**GLOBAL PLASTIC POLLUTION IS EXPECTED TO TRIPLE BY 2040. PLASTIC WILL OUTWEIGH FISH BY 2050 AND MAY EVEN EXCEED THE BIOMASS OF ALL HUMANS**

Over time, it fragments into micro and nano-sized particles, which infiltrate the soil, air, water and vegetables, causing health issues in humans and animals (see *Growing Sea of Plastic*). The presence of plastic in complex body parts such as heart and brain suggests it is not only being ingested (reflected by its presence in urine and faeces) but entering the bloodstream in the form of microplastics and accumulating in various organs.

**A**nimals often mistake plastic for food and end up eating it. Dr P.V. Parikh, professor and head of veterinary surgery and radiology at the College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry, Kamdhenu University in Anand, Gujarat, recalls operating on a cow that had 65 kg of plastic bags, cups and disposable spoons entangled in its stomach. The owner had bought the cow believing she was pregnant, but when she did not deliver in nine months, he brought her to Parikh. Garima Poonia, whose solid waste management initiative Kachrewala Foundation has removed over four tonnes of plastic waste from the beaches of the Andaman Islands since 2018, says plastic fishing nets get entangled in corals, eventually suffocating, starving and poisoning them. "Last year alone, we recovered more than a kilometre of fishing line and ropes," she says.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

To reduce plastic use, the government in 2022 banned 19 single-use plastic (SUP) items with "low utility and high littering potential", including plastic cutlery, straws, trays, decorative thermocol. Additionally, a thickness criterion was imposed on SUP items like carry-bags and banners—plastic carry bags less than 120 microns and PVC banners less than 100 microns were banned as it is difficult to collect and recycle thin plastics.

Meanwhile, in an effort to check the amount of plastic ending up in landfills, the government notified the Guidelines on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Plastic Packaging in 2022, wherein producers, importers and brand owners (PIBOs) were obligated for 100

per cent of life disposal of the plastic generated from the packaging of their products. This included targets for collection, recycling, end-of-life management, recycled content usage and selective reuse in plastic packaging. "As on date, it is among the world's biggest frameworks for EPR implementation on plastic packaging," says a senior official of the environment ministry. Beginning this April,



**"PLASTICS POSE A CHALLENGE AT EVERY STAGE OF THEIR LIFE CYCLE—FROM PRODUCTION TO DISPOSAL. TO PREVENT PLASTIC POLLUTION, EACH STAKEHOLDER HAS TO PLAY A PART"**

**SIDDHARTH GHANSHYAM SINGH**  
Programme Manager,  
Solid Municipal Waste, CSE

# WASTE TO WEALTH



## POLYETHYLENE TEREPHTHALATE (PET)

**Used in:** Disposable water bottle, polyester cloth, ropes, binding straps, covering seats

**Recyclability:** Yes, widely recycled



## HIGH DENSITY POLYETHYLENE (HDPE)

**Used in:** Shampoo bottles, jerry cans, chairs, bottle crates, fertiliser bags

**Recyclability:** Yes, widely recycled

beverage companies, including Coke and PepsiCo, are required to use 30 per cent recycled plastic in their bottles. A Hindustan Unilever spokesperson welcomed the mandated use of recycled plastic in packaging material. "From 58,000 TPA in 2020, HUL increased its EPR quantity to over 100,000 TPA in 2021 and has been sustaining at 100 per cent of our plastic footprint since then," he says. Likewise, Tejashree Joshi, head of environmental sustainability, Godrej Enterprises Group, says they have been offsetting 10-15 per cent more than the volume of plastic used for packaging their products through their recycling

partners. "Over the past five years, we have recycled more than 15,000 tonnes of plastic from various regions."

A few exceptions apart, good intentions, as with everything else in India, falter at the doorstep of implementation. According to a report by Australian philanthropy Minderoo Foundation, India's SUP ban addressed hardly 11 per cent of the products in the category, and its implementation has been ineffective on many fronts. A survey conducted by Delhi-based non-profit Toxics Link in October 2023 at 700 survey points—including street food vendors, restaurants, railway stations and malls—across five

**Plastics can be grouped in two categories: thermoplastics and thermosets. While thermoplastics can be remoulded 2-3 times into any shape after being heated and are therefore easy to recycle, thermosets can be moulded only once. Here are the different kinds of plastics, their uses and recyclability**

## THERMOPLASTICS



### POLYVINYL CHLORIDE (PVC)

**Used in:** Pipes, weather-resistant clothes, medical devices, toys, kitchen cling wraps, wires, shoe soles

**Recyclability:** Often not recyclable



### POLYPROPYLENE (PP)

**Used in:** Bottle caps, plastic cutlery, takeaway food containers, raffia bags, buckets, mugs, tubs, chairs, automobile parts

**Recyclability:** Often not recyclable



### LOW DENSITY POLYETHYLENE (LDPE)

**Used in:** Plastic bags, juice and milk pouches, electrical components

**Recyclability:** Not recyclable



### POLYSTYRENE (PS)

**Used in:** Home appliances like AC, TV, water purifier

**Recyclability:** Not recyclable

## THERMOSETS

### EPOXY RESIN, PHENOLIC RESIN, BAKELITE, MELAMINE, VULCANISED RUBBER

**Used in:** Car parts, mattresses, circuit boards, jewellery

**Recyclability:** Not recyclable



Indian cities, found Delhi and Gwalior the least compliant, with 88 and 84 per cent points, respectively, still using banned SUPs, followed by Guwahati (77 per cent), Mumbai (71 per cent) and Bengaluru (55 per cent). Depressingly, carry bags less than 120 microns were commonly available, and other banned products, including thermocol decorations (74 per cent), balloons and plastic stick earbuds (60 per cent each), continued to be sold in all cities.

One of the top reasons for the lack of enforcement, says Swati Singh Sambyal, senior circular economy expert at Norwegian non-profit GRID-Arendal,

is the lack of rigour in state pollution control boards and local governments, including municipalities. This, she explains, is compounded by insufficient capacities of the enforcers and manpower. “Additionally, the industry for plastic alternatives remains relatively small and less specialised.” SUP alternatives include bamboo cutlery, areca palm leaf tableware or paper plates, paper cups with plant-based lining, beeswax food wraps instead of cling films etc. But these remain expensive and inaccessible across income groups, which is why mainstream adoption of SUP alternatives stays low.

**S**iddharth Ghanshyam Singh, programme manager, municipal solid waste, CSE, sees the problem of plastic pollution as more than waste management. Waste management principles adhere to an order of priority: reduce, reuse, recycle, recover. We seem to falter at the very first step—globally, the production of plastic is only increasing. As a result, a 2023 report by Swiss research consultancy Earth Action reveals that, even with improvement in waste management capacity, global plastic pollution will triple by 2040. Wilma Rodrigues, founder and chief transformation officer of Bengaluru-based social enterprise Saahas Zero Waste, says, “We can’t continue producing plastic without the proper means to manage the waste.” Singh has an issue with the material itself. “It poses a challenge at every stage of its life cycle, from production to disposal,” he says. To prevent plastic pollution, each stakeholder must play a part. From the big petrochemical companies like Indian Oil Corporation, GAIL, BPCL and Reliance that supply the polymers, to the manufacturers—mostly MSMEs—that fashion the polymers into products catering to their vendors, to the brands, retailers and consumers who ultimately distribute and use these products.

According to a government report titled ‘Chemical and Petrochemical Statistics at a Glance, 2024’, of the 19 Mt of petrochemicals produced annually, 12.5 Mt, or 65.8 per cent, is used for polymer production. While plastic is widely seen as a ‘wonder material’, Singh thinks

Source: Recykal

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



**ON SORTING DUTY** The plastic bazaar at Tikri Kalan in northwest Delhi

it's time to shift focus—plastic should be reserved for essential use in healthcare, defence and aerospace rather than for short-term, convenience-driven and single-use purposes.

**M**eanwhile, brand owners remain the biggest culprits in plastic pollution in the country, with packaging waste a significant contributor to the menace. According to a 2021 report titled 'Unwrapped: Exposing India's Top Plastic Polluters', by the global Movement #BreakFreeFromPlastic, multi-layered plastics—which are non-recyclable—made up 35 per cent of all plastic waste and 40 per cent of all branded plastic waste. Of the 149,985 pieces of plastic the researchers audited, Unilever, PepsiCo,



**"ALMOST 30% OF OUR PLASTIC WASTE IS INCINERATED, AND IS INCLUDED IN THE RECYCLING FIGURES. THIS SHOULD NOT BE THE CASE"**

**SATISH SINHA**  
Associate Director,  
*Toxics Link*

Coca-Cola, Reckitt Benckiser, Nestlé, Amazon, Colgate-Palmolive, P&G, Kraft Heinz and Mondelez International emerged as the top global companies polluting India with plastic, while Parle, ITC, Britannia, Haldiram, United Spirits, Tata Consumer Products, Marico, Hector Beverages, Milky Mist and Balaji were among the Indian brands.

Even when it comes to EPR, as Rodrigues of Saahas says, "Very few take up this responsibility at scale; even fewer do it in the right spirit." Cost is a constraint in formalising reverse logistics. "Brands don't want to pay appropriately for collection and recycling, and often opt for the informal sector," she says. The lack of standard guidelines on recycling complicates the situation further. Some 30-40 per cent of the waste leaks out solely because of

# TACKLING TRASH

Experts highlight steps that India can take to address the environmental threat effectively



## STRENGTHEN DATA COLLECTION

► The government must rigorously estimate production, consumption and recycling of plastic. Even today, several state pollution control boards do not provide data



## REGULATE PRODUCTION

► Plastic production by petroleum and petrochemical companies needs to be regulated to effectively address the source of the problem



## IMPROVE DISCLOSURES

► Those who are dealing in plastics should disclose, in their annual filings, the amount they have put out in the environment as well as collected, recycled and incinerated



## ECOFRIENDLY PACKAGING

► Packaging should prioritise end-of-life design, promote reusable models and restrict composite plastics due to their high cost and recycling challenges



## PROPER LABELLING

► Every plastic product needs to be labelled according to its type and recyclability to ensure proper waste segregation, recycling and disposal



## RAISE ENFORCEMENT

► Enhancing the capacities of officials at various levels is essential to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of plastic waste management policies



## GOVT CAMPAIGNS

► Government can lead behaviour change campaigns to encourage individuals and communities to embrace sustainable practices and reduce reliance on single-use plastics

to make products, making their recycling extremely difficult and expensive." Unrecycled items often get dumped in landfills or purchased by brick kiln owners, albeit illegally, to generate heat for firing the bricks. "In rural areas, households often resort to burning garbage for disposal or generating heat during winters due to weak waste collection systems, releasing toxic fumes in the environment," he says.

In the absence of high-grade recycling and contamination of plastic waste, most plastics are downcycled—essentially used to make low-quality household items like buckets, jugs and synthetic clothes. Because of this, they can only be recycled 3-4 times in their lifetime, says Abhishek Deshpande, co-founder & COO of Recykal, a tech solution provider that helps manage the plastic waste of 12,000-plus businesses.

Until the collection and recovery of plastics in a closed-loop manner becomes a reality, the narrative must shift towards reduction, says Rodrigues. Change, Sambyal suggests, must begin at an individual level. Like always carrying a cloth bag and saying no to shopping bags. Also, developing a habit of keeping three items in one's bag: basic steel cutlery, including a steel or coconut straw, a water bottle, and a bag for eating out at roadside kiosks. "This way, you'll end up avoiding a lot of single-use items. Once you're able to practise it daily, try to influence at least five people around you to do the same to create a chain of multipliers," she says.

Given the colossal scale of the crisis, global action is imperative. In 2022, 175 UN member-countries agreed to create a first-of-its-kind legally binding treaty to curb plastic pollution. However, its release was postponed during the negotiations last year in Busan, Korea, due to differences over a variety of issues, among them capping plastic production, which saw strong opposition from oil and petrochemical-producing countries. The next negotiations are scheduled to take place from August 5-14 in Geneva. The needle has to move fast, as plastic will outweigh fish by 2050 and may even exceed the biomass of all humans on the planet. ■

informality in the collection and disposal system. "Almost 30 per cent of the plastic waste is incinerated, which is included in plastic recycling figures. This should not be the case," says Satish Sinha, associate director, Toxics Link. Experts also lament the lack of authentic data in the country.

## RECYCLING RIGMAROLE

Not all plastics are the same, and each kind has to be recycled separately. India's problem is that segregation at the source or household level remains poor. So, plastic becomes part of mixed solid waste—dumped with wet waste like vegetable and fruit peels, and dry waste like paper, plastic bags and e-waste. Also, even though thermoplastics such as polypropylene, polystyrene and low-

density polyethylene are recyclable, they are often treated similarly to the non-recyclable thermoset plastics, and sent to waste-to-energy plants.

Most waste collection in India also happens via informal channels such as kabadiwalas, who pick up only the waste that is lucrative. So, while 'easy' plastic waste like PET bottles, shampoo and bodywash containers fetch up to Rs 40-50 for a kg, other types of plastic—such as multilayer and disposable boxes—fetch only Rs 5-10 per kg, and are often left uncollected, according to Sinha of Toxics Link.

Plastic products have also become very complex, says Vinod Kumar, programme officer, waste & sustainability, Toxics Link. "Different polymers are being compressed or mixed together

# A LINGUA FRACAS OVER HINDI

**THE NEP'S THREE-LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE UNION GOVERNMENT'S PUSH FOR HINDI HAVE SPARKED A HOSTILE REACTION FROM SEVERAL STATES**

BY DHAVAL S. KULKARNI

**L**ate in May, the Tamil Nadu government took the unprecedented step of moving the Supreme Court, seeking the disbursal of over Rs 2,000 crore in funds under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme (SSS), claiming the Union government had withheld it in a bid to coerce the state into implementing the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. Tamil Nadu has been vociferously opposing the NEP's three-language formula and the tacit pro-Hindi tilt ascribed to it.

This is the latest flashpoint in the battle between non-Hindi-speaking states and the Centre over the NEP. On May 9, the apex court had dismissed a plea filed by advocate G.S. Mani seeking directions to the governments of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal to implement the NEP. The court stated that its powers under Article 32 of the Constitution were limited to ensuring the protection of citizens' fundamental rights and not mandating policy decisions on state governments. The aggrieved states allege that attempts to 'impose Hindi' are part of a grand design of the Sangh parivar and, by extension, the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre,

to undermine local cultures and languages and imperil India's cultural diversity.

After Tamil Nadu's impassioned protests, it was Maharashtra's turn to reach boiling point. A rising chorus of protests has forced the Devendra Fadnavis regime to backpedal on making Hindi the compulsory third language after Marathi and English in Classes I to V. The objectors, not counting activists, ranged across the ideological spectrum, from the Congress, Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray to CPI(M) and Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS). Together, this seemingly unlikely coalition railed against the "imposition of Hindi at the cost of Marathi".

This has been the crux of the battle in non-Hindi speaking states, and Maharashtra's case typified it. After a government resolution (GR) in mid-April made Hindi mandatory for the primary classes in the state, stakeholders immediately cried foul, saying this would involve additional challenges for their young wards. Mahendra Ganpule, a former head of the Maharashtra School Principals Association, feels





● HINDU, NOT HINDI  
An MNS poster with Raj Thackeray in Mumbai

the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shine faction), has stoked the fires further by publicly claiming Hindi has become Mumbai's "bolibhasha (lingua franca)".

Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are hardly the only states militating against Hindi. There's a growing impatience with it in states such as Punjab, Telangana, Kerala and West Bengal. The battle has also sparked a larger debate on the need to protect India's linguistic diversity, with a fear that regional languages and dialects are being steamrolled by the Centre's push for Hindi. In Tamil Nadu, where the anti-Hindi agitation dates back to 1937 when the C. Rajagopalachari-led Madras Presidency government tried to make Hindi compulsory in schools, the debate has reopened old fissures and anxieties. Chief minister M.K. Stalin has called the NEP an instrument of "Hindi colonialism"; even as his son and deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin posted on X that this is not just a "language struggle, but also an ethnic struggle to protect Tamil culture". Stalin also crossed swords with Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan after the latter allegedly threatened to withhold funds till Tamil Nadu complied.

Earlier this year, the Punjab government had made Punjabi a mandatory subject in the state's schools, saying students will have to study it as a primary subject to clear Class X. This came after it opposed the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) draft norms for holding Class X board exams twice a year, claiming Punjabi has been left out of the subject list. The Telangana government too has now enforced Telugu as a mandatory language for students from Class I to X in all schools.

Last year, West Bengal implemented its State Education Policy (SEP), 2023 which, experts say, is essentially a covert replication of the NEP. The state government had earlier claimed it would not adopt the NEP, but the SEP introduces several NEP-like reforms, including the semester system in schools, interdisciplinary studies, four-year undergraduate courses and abolish-

forcing 6-10-year-olds to learn a third language, would reduce the mind space available for crucial subjects like maths. Ganpule also pointed out that, unlike the decision on English, there had been no consultations with experts on the Hindi issue.

### GROWING ANTI-PATHY

On April 22, school education minister Dadaji Bhuse said they were staying the order on Hindi. Although Fadnavis denied it, it is evident the impending local body polls led to the rethink. BJP sources say they did not want to be stuck with the 'anti-Marathi' tag, especially considering the belligerent support of non-Marathi groups for the party in Maharashtra. The Hindi issue also formed a conducive backdrop for politically estranged cousins Uddhav and Raj Thackeray to extend overtures for a possible rapprochement. Pratap Sarnaik, transport minister from

**“HINDI IS NOT BEING IMPOSED... ONLY MARATHI WILL BE COMPULSORY. BUT WHY OPPOSE HINDI, AND SING THE GLORIES OF ENGLISH? ”**

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS  
CM, Maharashtra



**“HINDI IS GETTING A POLITICAL PUSH. LANGUAGE IS TIED TO CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND THIS FORMAL EMPHASIS ON HINDI IS WHAT IRRITATES MANY IN THE SOUTH”**

MANU S. PILLAI, Historian

ing the detention system. The Mamata Banerjee-led administration's receptiveness is evident in its adoption of the three-language policy. But Hindi is a touchy point. Prof. Tarun Kanti Naskar, general secretary of the All India Save Education Committee, described the NEP-in-disguise thus: "Hindi is not mandatory in the NEP, but the Centre has left no doubt that it is the only third optional language. Bengal has done nothing to protest, unlike Tamil Nadu."

**T**he NCERT texts are another front in the battle, the provocation starting with the titles themselves. For instance, the Standard VI and VII English textbooks are named 'Poorvi' as against the previous 'Honeysuckle' and 'Honeycomb', respectively, while the math text has been rechristened 'Ganit Prakash'. A flummoxed Kerala government says this is "against federal principles and constitutional values" and a bid to "foist Hindi on Malayalis". The NCERT has also drawn flak for dropping all references to the Mughals and the Delhi Sultanate in the Standard VII textbooks, while adding references to obscure Indian dynasties, the Kumbh Mela, 'sacred geography' and central initiatives like 'Make in India'. Critics have panned the attempt to airbrush and politicise history under the guise of decolonisation.

An NCERT official, however, says the new language texts were named after 'pan-Indian' musical instruments, ragas and concepts such as Bansuri, Malhaar, Sarangi and Khyal. Most would point out that the northward tilt fairly shines through, but the official says this nomenclature aligns with NEP's vision of embracing joyful learning, cultural rootedness and integration of arts and music into education.

## MIGRATORY PATTERNS

The official push for Hindi comes at a time when economic migration from the economically weak Hindi-speaking states is growing, thus leading to a rising presence of this linguistic

## 3 LANGUAGES AND A FORMULA

► **The University Education Commission (1948-49), under S. Radhakrishnan proposes the three-language formula for primary and secondary education**

► **In 1966, the Indian Education Commission under D.S. Kothari endorses formula. Implemented via National Education Policy, 1968**

► **The National Education Policy 2020 mandates that from primary classes students must learn three languages, two Indian ones and English**

► **Tamil Nadu has gone to court over NEP. Maharashtra's BJP government brought a resolution making Hindi compulsory, but it didn't last**

## 2025 FLASHPOINTS

► **MAHARASHTRA:** MNS chief Raj Thackeray warns bank workers, says they must converse in Marathi; party workers visit bank branches, intimidate staff

**On Apr. 22, state government backs down on move to make Hindi mandatory in Class I-V**

► **TAMIL NADU:** CM M.K. Stalin alleges the NEP was not created to help the country, but to propagate Hindi, claims it will ruin the state's education system

**Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin says NEP, three-language formula and NEET are out to undermine Tamil**

► **PUNJAB:** AAP government makes Punjabi mandatory subject for all schools/boards

► **TELANGANA:** State government says Telugu will be made mandatory for all schools

► **KARNATAKA:** CM Siddaramaiah says committed to two-language policy, will not allow imposition of Hindi. Sporadic protests against Hindi signages in state

► **KERALA:** Education minister V. Sivankutty blasts NCERT's use of Hindi titles for English-medium texts

cohort across India. In Maharashtra, for instance, the 2011 census revealed that, in Mumbai, respondents identifying Hindi as their mother tongue had grown by around 40 per cent from 2.6 million in 2001 to around 3.6 million. The Marathi *manoos* is still the city's largest ethno-linguistic group, but their numbers fell from 4.5 million in 2001 to 4.4 million in 2011.

In fact, the saturation in urban centres like Mumbai has led to many north Indians shifting to smaller towns and even villages where they

work in hotels, restaurants and as labour in industries and farms. This has led to nativist parties like the Shiv Sena and the MNS choosing to focus their energies on opposing Hindi speakers.

Former IAS officer, author and president of the state language advisory committee Laxmikant Deshmukh has written to Fadnavis opposing the move to make Hindi mandatory from Class I. He considers the imposition "a cultural attack on Marathi by the Hindi speakers" while pointing out how the migrants, largely, do not



# KAAM DAMDAAR DOUBLE ENGINE SARKAR



## PROSPEROUS FARMERS THE IDENTITY OF UTTAR PRADESH

*Record payment of more than ₹2.80 lakh crore  
for sugarcane to farmers.*

*More than  
₹80,000 crore transferred  
to more than 2.86 crore  
farmers under the  
PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi.*

- Compensation of ₹47,535.09 crore given to 58.07 lakh farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.
- Agricultural growth rate increased from 8.6% in 2016-17 to 13.7% in 2023-24.
- Allocation of over 76,189 solar pumps to farmers under the PM-KUSUM scheme
- Implementation of the Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Kisan Samriddhi Yojana.
- 2.52 lakh farmers issued beneficiary cards under the PM-Kisan Maandhan Yojana.
- Natural farming is practiced on 85,710 hectares of land in 49 districts.
- Over 63,000 farmers benefitted under the Mukhyamantri Krishak Durghatna Kalyan Yojana.
- Food grain production increased from approximately 5.57 crore metric tonnes in 2016–17 to about 6.69 crore metric tonnes in 2023–24.
- Procurement of 233.99 lakh metric tonnes of wheat from Rabi marketing year 2017–18 to 2024–25, with payments exceeding ₹43,424 crore made to farmers.





the birth of the present-day BJP. “The NEP has, in fact, liberalised language teaching by changing this to English, the local mother tongue, and another Indian language,” he added, while denying claims that the BJP was trying to foist Hindi on anyone.

Apoorvanand notes that the three-language formula adopted in the 1960s was not based on pedagogic and educational principles. It was done to integrate the country by learning a language not spoken in that state. For instance, a Khasi speaker could learn Bengali, and a Bihari could learn Telugu. But the ‘Hindi belt’ adopted Hindi, English and Sanskrit as part of the formula, even as some southern states like Karnataka and Kerala were teaching Hindi voluntarily. “The Hindi states refuse to integrate with the non-Hindi-speaking states and their culture, but are now forcing the non-Hindi ones to integrate with them,” Apoorvanand concludes.

Nil Shidore of the MNS points to other attempts to push the cultural dominance of Hindi. For instance, the Reserve Bank of India mandates that banks also conduct their business in the local language. The MNS had asked the Indian Banks’ Association to provide such services and put up boards in Marathi and also launched a short-lived protest to ensure this was implemented. “This is part of the Sangh’s ‘soft power experiment’, trying to attain cultural hegemony using entry points like curriculum, books, the education system,” says Shidore.

In the end, it all comes down to whether groups and communities can respect each other and try not to straitjacket the other. In his book, *India: A Linguistic Civilisation*, Devy argues that the ‘idea of India’ can never be a singular one. “Plurality and diversity are its inalienable attributes,” he points out. Amen to that. ■

—with Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

bother to learn Marathi.

Author and historian Manu S. Pillai says he doesn’t see any reason why Hindi should receive “special state patronage”. “It’s a dated notion that nations must have a common language to stick together. We are a diverse country and instead of pushing our diversity into a political straitjacket, we should let all our languages thrive,” he says.

## AN IDEOLOGICAL PROJECT

G.N. Devy, cultural scholar and the man behind the People’s Linguistic Survey of India, notes that the number of Hindi speakers in India is inflated, with “Hindi subsuming many smaller languages”. According to the 2011 Census, the country had over 528 million Hindi speakers, but that figure combined 206 million people whose mother tongues had been grouped under Hindi, including Bhojpuri (51 million speakers), Chhattisgarhi (16 million) and Kumaoni (2 million). So, the actual number of native Hindi speakers is around 320 million. Considering that the census had a base of 1,210 million, this meant that at best a third of the population has Hindi as mother tongue. “How can 30 per cent of the population impose their will on the other 70 per cent? This is not right in any political modality,” says Devy.



**“ONLY 30 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION SPEAK HINDI, HOW CAN THEY IMPOSE THEIR WILL ON THE OTHER 70 PER CENT? THIS IS NOT RIGHT IN ANY POLITICAL MODALITY”**

**G.N. DEVY, author of *People's Linguistic Survey of India***

His questioning is in line with the perception that the BJP-RSS have long been pushing a unitarian model on India when it comes to religion, language and culture. Author-academician Apoorvanand says the “Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan” push was linked to the Hindutva project, but the emphasis on one language, one nation, one religion and one culture was in line with a European model of nationalism.

BJP national spokesperson Prem Shukla dismisses such criticism, saying the three-language policy has been in place since the 1960s, even before

# Odisha

GOVERNMENT CELEBRATES  
**ONE**  
Year  
OF SERVICE TO  
THE PEOPLE



**Reflecting on  
Achievements and  
Future Aspirations**





# ODISHA A LAND OF Heritage

## Culture and Natural Beauty

Odisha is a state rich in history, culture and natural resources.

Known for its ancient temples, classical dance, tribal traditions and scenic landscapes, Odisha offers a unique blend of the tradition and the modernity. The state's historical significance is still evident in its numerous archaeological sites, ancient monuments and temples.

**H**istorically, Odisha was known at different times by different names like Kalinga, Utkal, Udra Desh, Toshali etc. throughout its long past. These ancient names reflect different periods of history, dynasties and cultural influences. They highlight Odisha's importance as a cultural, religious and political centre in Indian history. The government appropriately depicts the state as "India's hidden gem". Despite its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and unique traditions, the state remains less explored and less commercialised compared to other popular tourist destinations in India. Its unspoiled charm and hidden treasures make it a gem waiting to be discovered.

One of the most iconic landmarks of Odisha is the Sun Temple at Konark, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this chariot-shaped temple is a masterpiece of Kalinga architecture. Equally famous as the Shri Jagannath Temple in Puri, one of the Char Dham pilgrim sites for

Hindus. The annual 'Rath Yatra' or chariot festival held here attracts millions of devotees from across the globe.

'Odia' is one of the oldest languages in India with a literary history dating back to over 1,000 years. It was granted 'Classical Language' status by the Government of India in 2014, acknowledging its rich literary and historical tradition. Odia is known for its sweetness, melodic tone, poetic quality and deep connection to the cultural and spiritual life of Odisha. Odisha is also known for its classical dance form 'Odissi', which is one of the eight recognised classical dance styles of India. With its intricate movements, graceful expressions and deeply spiritual themes, Odissi has its roots in the temple rituals of the region.

The state is home to over 60 diverse tribal communities, each with its own distinct language, customs, dances and crafts and art forms, contributing to the rich cultural mosaic of Odisha. The tribal art, handlooms and Pattachitra

paintings are quite vibrant.

Geographically, Odisha boasts a diverse landscape that includes coastal plains, fertile river valleys, hills and forests. The state is home to several wildlife sanctuaries and national parks such as Simlipal, Asia's largest brackish water lagoon Chilika Lake and Bhitarkanika, making it a haven for nature and wildlife lovers.

Economically, Odisha is rich in minerals and is one of India's top producers of iron ore, coal and bauxite. The state has also been developing its infrastructure and industrial sectors, with a focus on IT, manufacturing and renewable energy.

With its deep-rooted heritage, natural beauty and growing economy, Odisha stands as a vibrant and evolving state, offering both serenity and dynamism to those who want to explore it.

**Its unspoiled charm and hidden treasures make it a gem waiting to be discovered. This makes it ideal for travellers seeking offbeat and meaningful experiences.**

# Hallmark of Humility

Mohan Charan Majhi has earned the sobriquet of “People’s Chief Minister” with much effort. He has all the ingredients of simplicity rising to the position of Chief Minister, which have an uncanny resemblance with that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

representing the tribal-dominated district of Keonjhar. This progression has built his image as someone who understands the struggles of the common man. Unlike many political figures, Majhi has been seen living modestly, reflecting his connection to rural life and his constituents. Besides his grassroots political journey, Majhi has won the hearts through his symbolic gestures that resonate with the common people. On his first day in office, Majhi was seen touching the ground with reverence before entering the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), a powerful symbolic act of humility and service. People are comparing this gesture with that of Modi when the Prime Minister had bowed and touched his forehead on the steps of Parliament the day he took office for the first time in 2014.

Through his people-centric governance and direct public engagements also, CM Majhi has won the confidence of the people of Odisha within a short span of one year. He has launched Jan Sampark Abhiyan, a public outreach program where ministers and officials engage with citizens directly. Such programs promote transparency and accessibility, regularly reviewing grievances and development projects in districts personally.

Notably, the 'Lakhpatti Didi' initiative of Majhi government has topped the national chart, showcasing his successful focus on women's economic empowerment. It has boosted the rural women's income through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in a big way. Take the case of 'Subhadra', the most popular flagship scheme of Majhi government. It has become the talk of the town with crores of women in Odisha being benefitted by it.

His commitment to SC/ST upliftment has also gone well with the marginalised sections of the society. Measures like renovation of tribal hostels, conversion of tribal schools into higher secondary institutions and development of 500 model tribal villages as well as implementation of interest-free loans and SHG support in rural and tribal regions have reinforces his image as a leader for socially

disadvantaged groups.

On the front of infrastructure and connectivity for the masses, “Zero Accident Day” initiative and installation of smart safety devices in buses show a commitment to public safety. Similarly, launch of Shri Jagannath Express bus service connecting Odisha to spiritual and cultural centres reflects cultural sensitivity and support for religious tourism accessible to all. Expansion of rural banking and telecom networks to ensure that digital and financial inclusion has reached Odisha's remote villages too.

The Majhi government has also promptly responded to people's issues like it has increased social security pensions to Rs 3,500 per month for senior citizens and persons with disabilities and launched a relief package for over 9 lakh kendu leaf workers, providing essentials like slippers, hats and blankets to them. The government has ordered show-cause notices to 300 revenue officers for land registration irregularities, signaling seriousness about accountability and anti-corruption.

CM Majhi's non-elitist demeanour, use of regional language and open-door approach have led many to describe him as approachable and relatable. It has been seen that Majhi would often visit the home of an ordinary man and have typical Odia food like 'Pakhala Bhaat' and 'Santula' with ease there. His mixing with common people in such an amicable manner has not only enhanced his public image and reception, it has even forced his political opponents to acknowledge his clean image and sincere intent.

Hence, Mohan Charan Majhi is seen as a “People’s Chief Minister” not because of rhetoric, but due to a combination of his grounded personal history, visible humility and accessibility, a focused governance agenda on tribals, rural poor, women and youth as well as cultural resonance and local identity promotion. He represents a shift toward inclusive leadership in Odisha — prioritising equity, outreach and respect for the people he governs.

**T**he Santhals of Odisha is certainly in the peak of their glory these days. Both the President of India, Draupadi Murmu, and the Chief Minister of the state, Mohan Charan Majhi, hail from Santhal tribe, one of the largest tribal communities in eastern India. Majhi becoming the first tribal CM of Odisha has created a historic milestone that has empowered a long-marginalised group and reflects inclusion in the highest level of state leadership.

The title “People’s Chief Minister” for Majhi stems from a combination of symbolic gestures, substantive governance choices and his personal background that collectively portray him as someone closely connected with the masses of Odisha. Majhi has earned this with much effort. He has all the ingredients of simplicity rising to the position of Chief Minister, which have an uncanny resemblance with that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Let us examine them one by one.

Apart from his humble origin and tribal identity, Majhi started his political career at the panchayat level and worked his way up,



# 'WE DELIVERED WHAT WE P

## ■ How has been your journey so far – from a non-descript tribal village to the Chief Minister's office?

I had a very simple life in my village Raikala in Kendujhar district. However, I was always inclined to serve people. From a teacher to Sarpanch, from an MLA to become the Chief Minister. I have accepted all my responsibilities with humility. Life is beautiful, if one faces challenges of life with courage and calmness.

## ■ Who is your icon? Your working style seems more like replicating PM Modi.

Not only for me, for every BJP worker as well as countless young men who are not even politically affiliated to any party, our Prime Minister is not only an icon, but also an inspiration. For me personally, there can be no one else. Prime Minister Modi ji is the most dynamic and inspiring leader of the country we have seen in a long time. It is not possible to replicate his working style or his vision. I can

only draw inspiration from his passion to work for the country and people of India.

## ■ You aspire to be known as a "People's CM".

**What all are you doing to earn this sobriquet?** It is a wrong question. Everybody as the head of the government, especially a Chief Minister, wants to be 'People's Chief Minister' which literally means that people love their Chief Minister and they see him as one of their own. Whoever is able to fulfill this simple expectation of people, they call him or her as 'People's Chief Minister'.

In my case I had taken a decision consciously to remove the artificial barrier created between the 'Chief Minister' and 'Janata' (common man). This was done through listening to the people's grievances directly by me and my cabinet colleagues in presence of the highest level officers. During the past one year, I have personally attended 11 such meetings and met about 12,000 people directly, interacted with them, listened to their problems and solving in the best possible manner. Besides, more than 5 lakh grievances have been resolved through online redressal mechanism.

Secondly, in the first year itself, I have visited all the districts of Odisha, talking to them. These twin spontaneous act has resulted in removing the wall between me and people. The people have started to call their government 'People's Government' and their Chief Minister as 'People's Chief Minister' – not claimed by me.

## ■ You have coined the slogan "Katha Dei Katha Rakhiu". Have you fulfilled all your poll promises?

That literally means, 'We had promised, we have delivered'. From the Day-1 when the Cabinet met for the first time, within 24 minutes we fulfilled four major projects like Subhadra Yojana, enhancing Rs. 800 per quintal for paddy procumbent, opening the four doors of Jagannath Temple and creating a Rs 500-crore corpus fund. Since then, almost every other day, some scheme or some programme have been undertaken, some projects are inaugurated or some projects have started. As they call it, 'Yojana aur Karyakram ki baadh aa gayee'.

## ■ What are the major achievements of

## your government in last one year?

There is a long list and it is difficult to pick a few. But, specifically schemes like Subhadra, input assistance to farmers, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and CM Kisan Nidhi are worth mentioning because these three interventions have increased the yearly income of the farming family by 50% as a minimum of Rs 30,000 were added through these direct cash schemes.

We are building world-class primary school infrastructure through Godavarish Mishra Prathamik Vidyalaya, implemented the 'New Education Policy 2020' which was kept in abeyance due to political reasons. Similarly, the government has implemented Ayushman Bharat - Jana Arogya Yojana which was denied to people of Odisha for six long years, again due to political reasons. The scheme is being implemented along with our own Gopabandhu Jana Arogya Yojana. We are working for the four categories of people as outlined by the Prime Minister – 'Poor, Annadada (farmers), Youths & Women', whom Prime Minister says are the only four castes in India.

## ■ What is your vision on taking Odisha forward?

We have prepared a Vision Document for 2036 and 2047. Our goal is to become Samruddha Odisha with an economy of USD 500 billion by 2036, and to become a major growth engine of India by 2047 with an economy by USD 1.5 trillion. For this, we have prepared 36 robust programs which will be our roadmap for future. From education, health to infrastructure and industry, we have massive plans to achieve our vision.

## ■ Like West Bengal, Odisha too has more of an 'anti-industry' image, because of scrapping of mega projects like POSCO, Kaling Nagar fiasco, Balipal agitation, Niyamgiri issue etc. With this background, what are your plans to turn Odisha into an industrialised state?

I think you are drawing a wrong parallel here. There was never any anti-industry sentiment here. Yes, many of the projects were mishandled by the previous regime which you have mentioned rightly. They could have handled better.

As I keep on repeating that for industrialization, there need not be any 'balidan' (sacrifice). Our vision for industrialisation is based on 'sahabagita' (partnership). People are more amenable to industry now than ever before. There



## IN CONVERSATION WITH

SHRI MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha

# ROMISED'

are of course issues. But we will definitely take people into confidence. Once people start getting benefits of industrialisation, they will not object. With infrastructure and industry, we are creating better opportunities for our people and posterity.

**■ 'Odia Asmita' was one of your major poll planks. What do you mean by it and what has your govt done in this regard? What about the issues like Kotia, Deomali and other border villages are facing?**

Apart from celebrating and taking pride in rich cultural heritage of Odisha, Odia Asmita is also Odia identity. It means celebrating everything that is linked to Odisha and Odia. We are celebrating the life and works of all our forgotten heroes. We celebrated Odia Pakhya (fortnight) for the first time in Odisha, a 14-day festivity, each day linked to one specific cultural glory of the state. In fact, we have a long list of initiatives on this count.

Odia Ashmita is closely linked to protection of Odia language, cultural heritage and literature as well. Immediately after assuming office, the government directed to make all forms of communication in Odia only, which has already been implemented. Similarly, the government is encouraging Odia writers, poets. From KG to PG, all teachings will be in Odia medium only. We are working to write the required text books in Odia language.

I don't think Deomali is any issue. There are some environmental issues regarding creating infrastructure in the tourist place there. Regarding Kotia, it is a long-standing issue. There were some neglect in the past which we are correcting now. We are improving our outreach to the locals with focus on holistic development in those areas.

**■ Odisha has a major problem of its people migrating to other states as labourers in massive scale. Are you doing something seriously to check this menace?**

The issue of migration has a long-standing problem which unfortunately never got the attention it deserved. We have formed a Task Force to deal with it under the chairmanship of Deputy Chief Minister. In the meantime, we are undertaking massive industrialisation of Odisha. All the 30 districts of the state will see this in the coming days.

Besides, consciously we are spending massively as capex. During this year's budget, a massive Rs 65,012 crore amounting to 6.1% of GSDP, probably highest in India in percentage terms to GSDP. This massive expenditure will create jobs and employment.

## THE JOURNEY SO FAR

### POLITICAL CAREER

- ↗ 1995: Lost Assembly polls as Independent candidate from Keonjhar (ST) constituency
- ↗ 1997-2000: Elected and served as Sarpanch of Raikala village
- ↗ 2000: Elected as MLA from Keonjhar as a BJP candidate
- ↗ 2004: Re-elected as MLA from the same constituency
- ↗ 2005-2009: Served as the Government Deputy Chief Whip in the Assembly
- ↗ 2009 & 2014: Contested the Assembly elections from Keonjhar but lost both times
- ↗ 2019: Re-elected as MLA from Keonjhar and appointed as the Chief Whip of BJP in the Assembly
- ↗ 2021: His vehicle was attacked with crude bombs by unidentified assailants in Keonjhar; he escaped unhurt
- ↗ 2022-24: Chaired the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) overseeing government expenditures
- ↗ 2023: Suspended from the Odisha Assembly while protesting against Rs 700-crore scam in mid-day meal scheme
- ↗ 2024: Re-elected as MLA from Keonjhar and sworn in as the 15th Chief Minister of Odisha on 12th June 2024

### FINANCIAL OVERVIEW (AS OF 2024)

- ↗ **Declared Net Worth:** Approximately Rs 12.43 crore
- ↗ **Movable Assets:** Includes cash, bank deposits, insurance policies, a 'Toyota Fortuner' vehicle and jewellery
- ↗ **Immovable Assets:** Owns agricultural land valued at Rs 19.2 lakh
- ↗ **Annual Income:** Reported income of Rs 4.22 lakh for the financial year 2023-24

This twin strategy will kick in decent amount of jobs and once jobs start coming in, there will not be any forced migration. People will travel outside the state anyway in search of better jobs, but our goal is to arrest forced migration. Nobody should travel outside the state for work on exploitative terms. Besides, we are giving a big push to the farm sector, where farmers can go for diversification of crops that will create jobs in agriculture and allied sectors in all seasons.

**■ Odisha is dependent on its neighbours for most of the consumables, especially agricultural products. What efforts your govt is taking to make the state self-sufficient?**

Unfortunately, in previous years, too much emphasis was given on paddy cultivation at the expense of other fruits and vegetable. But, we have made a course correction. For vegetables production and storage, cold storages and cold-rooms are being set up. Special grants are given to farmers to produce crops like potato, onion, spices, cash crops etc. The result will show in next few agricultural seasons.

Schemes and initiatives have already been launched like the Karmadhenu Yojana to improve milk production. Similarly, we have made specific plans to increase fish, egg and vegetables production. I believe we will be self-sufficient in a few years.

**■ How effective is the "double-engine govt"? Is it only limited to syncing or implementation of the national schemes at the state level?**

Firing from all cylinders... Double engine government means convergence in policies and programs. Apart from syncing with Central government programs, we are also getting support

in our own initiatives. Since our government came to power, the Central government has sanctioned infrastructure projects worth about Rs 1 lakh crore in railways and roads. Many Central institutes like National Forensic Science University are opening their campus here.

You have a smaller Cabinet than prescribed... only 75% is filled, and distribution of portfolios also does not seem quite balanced. Do you have an expansion plan in near future?

The government is working on the theme 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' which is doing pretty well. I will undertake expansion as and when necessary.

**■ Your government is just one year old and people's expectations are very high. What are the main challenges you think you are going to face in the coming days in realising your dream of Odisha?**

We have launched huge initiatives in various sectors. We are also moving at a pace and scale never seen before. Our empowerment programs, employment and industrialisation initiatives have been massive success. There is no specific challenge.

I will again remind what the Prime Minister had said in his second visit to 'Niti Ayog' back in 2015: "Days of incremental development is gone. India now needs 'Transformational Change'." This is exactly what we are doing – doing things with Speed, Scale and without compromising Standard or quality. This will be the strategy to build Samruddha Odisha in next 11 years. We are racing against time and, yes we can do it...



# SUBHADRA

## MAJHI TURNS "FRIEND IN NEED" FOR ALL

Promise of financial assistance directly to women has been a poll winner since Jayalalitha days. Many political parties have won elections on this plank. Most popular story is that of Shivraj Singh Chauhan, who during his long tenure as Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh had earned the epithet "Mama" (maternal uncle) for his government's "Ladli Behna" scheme.

After forming government in Odisha with a sound majority, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi also came up with such a scheme "Subhadra Yojana", named after the sister of Lord Jagannath. The scheme has apparently made Majhi a "Bhai" of the womenfolk of Odisha.

Subhadra Yojana is a women-centric welfare scheme launched on 17th September last year, coinciding with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday. It aims to empower over one crore women across the state by providing direct financial assistance, thereby promoting economic independence and social upliftment of women. It provides financial support to women aged between 21 and 60 years from economically weaker section. Eligible women receive a total of Rs 50,000 over five years, disbursed in annual installments of Rs 10,000. Each year, the amount is split into two installments of Rs 5,000, credited directly to the beneficiaries' Aadhaar-linked bank accounts on Raksha Bandhan and International Women's Day.

To ensure efficient delivery, the scheme leverages the JAM trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) framework. Beneficiaries are provided with a "Subhadra Debit Card" to facilitate seamless transactions. Additionally, the top 100 beneficiaries in each gram panchayat and urban area with the highest digital transactions receive

an additional Rs 500 incentive. With a total budget allocation of Rs 55,825 crore for the period 2024-29, economists anticipate that the scheme will have a multiplier effect, potentially contributing Rs 2.5 lakh crore to Odisha's economy over the five years. Named after Devi Subhadra, it holds cultural significance also because of its association with 'Rakhi'.



### SUNANDA JANI

Another example of the Subhadra Yojana transforming the life of the rural women is Sunanda Jani of Digapahandi in Ganjam district. She lost her shopkeeper husband 12 years ago. She did take a small bank loan to revive the shop but repaying monthly instalments was a big challenge. With the Subhadra funds, she bought stock for the shop and palm leaves for craft-making. Slowly, things began to look up, and now she is in a position to provide her children better education.

### MEENAKSHI BADHEI

A notable example of Subhadra Yojana's impact is the case of Meenakshi Badhei, a student and daughter of an auto driver, from Sevakapur in Rayagada block of Gajapati district. Facing financial challenges in pursuing higher education, Meenakshi benefited from the scheme, which helped her resume her studies and rekindled her dream of a stable job that will allow her to support her family, and walk towards a life of dignity and purpose.

### DEEPTI SAHU

Similarly, a tribal woman of Sagarguda in Kundra block of Koraput district has turned Subhadra support into a steady business. 34-year-old Deepti Sahu's tailoring skills remained underutilised for years due to financial crunch. As she used the Subhadra funds to buy better fabric and stock up on festive clothing materials, her sales slowly picked up which helped her stand on her own feet.



# ODIA PRIDE AT ITS PEAK

Riding on the anti-incumbency factor and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the Assembly polls in Odisha last year with a sound majority. 'Odia Asmita' was one of the party's major poll planks. 'Odia Asmita' refers to the collective pride, identity and cultural heritage of the Odia-speaking people. It encompasses the Odia language, literature, art, history and traditions that define the essence of Odisha and its people.

After Mohan Charan Majhi was chosen as the Chief Minister, his government undertook several initiatives to promote and preserve this cultural identity. On the line of PM Modi's vision of 'Vikash Bhi Virasat Bhi', the government is striving for progress and ensuring at the same time that Odisha's unique identity is recognised and strengthened in the modern world. It has coined a slogan "Odisha, where tradition meets tomorrow" for the purpose.

Establishment of 'Odia Asmita Bhawan' is one of the such key initiatives. The Bhawan will be a dedicated cultural hub aiming to serve as a centre for the promotion and preservation of Odia language, literature and heritage. It will host various cultural activities, exhibitions and events that celebrate Odia culture.

The second major step the Majhi government in this regard is setting up of an 'Odia Translation Academy' to facilitate the translation of Odia literature into other languages and vice versa. This institution will work towards making Odia literature more accessible to the global audience and promote cross-cultural exchanges.

Development of a 'Paika Rebellion Memorial' is yet another initiative of the government which is certain to pep up the Odia pride as 'Paika rebellion' is considered as the "first war of Independence" but has failed find any such place in the history books.

The government has also created a Rs 200-

**On the line of PM Modi's vision of 'Vikash Bhi Virasat Bhi', the government is striving for progress and ensuring at the same time that Odisha's unique identity is recognised and strengthened in the modern world.**

crore corpus fund to support various cultural initiatives aimed at revitalising Odia identity. The interest generated from this fund will finance not only the above three projects but also to create a 'palm leaf manuscript museum'.

The government has also decided to restructure and reconstitute key cultural institutions such as the Odia Sahitya Akademi, Odia Sangeet Natak Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi. These academies will be revitalised to enhance their capacity to promote Odia literature, music, dance and arts. Financial assistance is also provided for training in Odissi music and dance. This support aims to preserve and promote the classical dance and music forms that are integral to Odia culture.

Active engagement with the Odia diaspora worldwide is another initiative the Majhi government is trying its hands on. CM Majhi has announced formulation of a policy for 'Pravasi Odias', with focus on increasing their participation in Odisha's development journey and address issues faced by them in their countries.

Promotion of Odia language in official work is another key step the incumbent government has taken to fulfil its election promise of preserving Odia identity. Chief Minister Majhi has mandated the use of the Odia language in all official government work. The move aims to strengthen



the presence of Odia in administrative functions and ensure that the language is upheld in governmental processes.

Through the establishment of cultural institutions, revitalisation of historical narratives and active engagement with the public and the Odia diaspora, the Majhi government is fostering a renewed sense of pride and identity among the people of Odisha. These initiatives reflect his government's commitment to cultural preservation and the celebration of Odia heritage in the modern era.

## FACTSHEET

### TOURISM

- 15 destinations like Puri-Konark, Dhauli, Bhitarkanika, Satkosia, Hirakud-Debrigarh, Talsari, Tampara, Mahendragiri-Jirang, Daringbadi, Deomali-Kolab, the Buddhist Circuit, Chilika & Simlipal identified for integrated development
- Approved under Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASI), Hirakud and Satkosia to get around Rs 100 crore each for holistic development
- Around 4,780 acres of land identified for acquisition for private sector investment for development of Hospitality Districts/Hubs across the state
- For the first time, Odisha hosted the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas on 8-10 January this year, where eminent dignitaries and industry leaders were engaged in discussions on Odisha's tourism potential and investment opportunities
- At the "Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha" conclave earlier this year, 121 investors expressed their intent to invest Rs 8,154 crore, creating 28,446 jobs in key districts like Koraput, Puri, Keonjhar, Ganjam and Khordha
- 69 projects with an investment of Rs 4,364 crore in tourism and hospitality sector have been approved through the single-window mechanism and around Rs 50 crore of CIS has been disbursed to eligible tourism projects.





# VIKASIT ODISHA, A VISION FOR PROSPERITY & GROWTH

Odisha was one of the poorest states in the country around three decades ago. Whatever was left was washed away by the Supercyclone in 1999. Though the state has come out of that ignominy, its journey of economic prosperity has rather been slower than expected in these years despite political stability.

**H**owever, Odisha is now daring to dream of becoming a developed state or 'Vikasit Odisha' in the coming decade in line with PM Modi's vision of a developed India or 'Vikasit Bharat'. The state is rather raring to become the growth engine of Vikasit Bharat by 2036, the centenary year of its formation as the first linguistic state of India.

'Vikasit Odisha' embodies the aspiration of transforming the culturally rich and resource-abundant state into a model of inclusive and sustainable development. Rooted in the state's heritage and natural wealth, the vision aims to ensure economic prosperity, social equality and technological advancement for every citizen.

The idea of 'Vikasit Odisha' is also aligned with India's broader developmental goals and the global sustainable development goals (SDGs). It envisions Odisha as:

- A hub of industrial growth and economic opportunities.

- A state with robust infrastructure and smart cities.
- A centre for high-quality education and healthcare.
- A leader in sustainable development and environmental conservation.
- A place where cultural heritage and technological innovation coexist.

#### ITS KEY OBJECTIVES INCLUDE:

1. Economic growth: Boost the GDP of the state by fostering industries, agriculture, tourism and IT.
2. Poverty alleviation: Reduce poverty through employment generation and skill development.
3. Education and healthcare: Strengthen access to quality education and world-class healthcare facilities.
4. Infrastructure development: Modernise transportation, energy, water and digital infrastructure.
5. Environmental sustainability: Conserve natural resources and adopt green practices.

#### INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

Odisha has abundant natural resources, including minerals like iron ore, coal and bauxite. By leveraging these resources, Odisha can (1) attract investments in steel, aluminium and other industries, (2) expand downstream industries to generate value-added products, and (3) promote special economic zones (SEZs) and MSMEs to boost employment.

● **'Vikasit Odisha' embodies the aspiration of transforming the culturally rich and resource-abundant state into a model of inclusive and sustainable development.**

#### INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Odisha has to expand its rail and road connectivity to remote regions, develop its ports like Paradip and Dhamara as world-class shipping hubs as well as strengthen the air connectivity to attract investments and tourism.

The state will have to transform cities like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Rourkela into smart cities with efficient transportation, waste management and green spaces.

On the digital front, it has to ensure universal access to high-speed internet and promote e-governance initiatives to enhance transparency and efficiency.

#### TOURISM WITH INDUSTRY STATUS

Odisha's rich heritage, including iconic temples such as the Konark Sun Temple and Puri's Jagannath Temple as well as other popular destinations like Chilika Lake and Puri sea beach can make it a global tourism hotspot. Investment in tourism infrastructure, hospitality and marketing can drive growth in this sector.

#### AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMY

With fertile lands and diverse climates, Odisha has immense potential in the field of agriculture and fisheries. Initiatives like promoting organic farming and food processing industries, expanding irrigation systems and facilitating access to modern agricultural technologies will harness that potential and bring about rural prosperity.

### **AYUSHMAN BHARAT: IMPACT OF 'DOUBLE-ENGINE' GOVT**

After inception, the Mohan Majhi government undertook a significant rebranding of many welfare schemes in June last year. While these changes primarily involved renaming and restructuring state-level programs, there was also a notable integration of certain Central government schemes into the state's framework. Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) or simply 'Ayushman Bharat' is the most prominent among them.

Previously, Odisha had its own health insurance scheme, the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY). Under the Majhi administration, BSKY was rebranded as the Gopabandhu Jana Arogya Yojana and integrated with the Centre's Ayushman Bharat scheme, initially touted as "Modi Care" on the lines of "Obama Care". This convergence aims to provide cashless treatment facilities at both private and government hospitals across the state.

### **11.25% QUOTA FOR SEBC STUDENTS**

In a landmark decision, the Mohan Majhi government has introduced an 11.25 per cent reservation for students from the socially and economically backward classes (SEBC) in state-owned and state-funded higher education institutions. This is set to come into effect from the academic year 2025-26, taking the total ratio of quota in education to 50 per cent in the state.

The new reservation is part of a broader framework that includes 22.5 per cent for Scheduled Tribes (ST), 16.25 per cent for Scheduled Castes (SC), 5 per cent for persons with disabilities (PwD) and 1 per cent for ex-servicemen.

The initiative seeks to promote access, equity and inclusion, increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and enhance opportunities for marginalised and disadvantaged communities in Odisha in line with the National Education Policy 2020. This aligns with the national goal of increasing educational opportunities for underrepresented groups.

### **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Odisha can position itself as an IT and startup hub by setting up IT parks, innovation hubs and incubation centres in cities like Bhubaneswar



and Rourkela as well as by encouraging local entrepreneurs through funding and mentorship programs.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Odisha is prone to natural disasters like cyclonic storms and floods. Hence, 'Vikasit Odisha' emphasises disaster-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy initiatives like solar and wind energy projects as well as afforestation and conservation of biodiversity-rich ecosystems like Chilika, Simlipal and Bhitarkanika.

### **CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**

On its way to achieving this feat, Odisha faces many arduous challenges like poverty alleviation, managing frequent natural disasters and balancing industrial growth with environmental sustainability. But, at the same time, the state is also a land of opportunities. 'Vikasit Odisha' envisages to leverage the state's strategic location on the eastern coast, utilise its rich cultural heritage to promote tourism and

attract investments through policy reforms and incentives.

The state government, with the support of the Central government, private enterprises and NGOs, can also play a pivotal role in realising the vision of 'Vikasit Odisha'. Key programs and policies like 'Make in Odisha' aim to attract investments and foster development.

'Vikasit Odisha' is more than just a developmental blueprint. It is a call to action for every Odia to participate in the transformation of their state. By building on its strengths and addressing its challenges, Odisha can emerge as a model state that offers its people a high quality of life while contributing significantly to the nation's progress.

## **FACTSHEET**

### **ELECTRONICS & IT**

- **AI Policy:** Cabinet nod to the state's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy to facilitate use of technology in key sectors like education, healthcare, agriculture, disaster management and governance, ensuring every citizen benefits from AI

- **Advancing AI:** A state-level workshop on "Advancing AI in Odisha" was organised, bringing together thought leaders, policymakers and AI experts to explore strategies for leveraging AI to drive digital transformation and enhance governance across Odisha

- **Semiconductor unit:** The ground-breaking ceremony held for India's first Silicon Carbide manufacturing facility to be set up by RIR Power Electronics Ltd

- **Job creation:** Investment intents worth Rs 20,000 crore with employment potential of 49,000 received at Utkarsh Odisha-Make in Odisha conclave held early this year

- **Odisha One Portal:** For one-stop access to public services, this common front-end interface has been developed to make it convenient for citizens to access G2C services





# BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE PEOPLE

India is undoubtedly on a fast-lane of development, prosperity and growth since a decade and has for the past many years has remained the fastest growing among the big economies of the world. This is reflected in major socio-economic indicators including the headline growth numbers consistently. This is quite important at a time when the world economy is going through a difficult times and major economies are on the verge of contraction.

The government in Odisha, led by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, is the only one the ruling party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has in the eastern region. That is why, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has described Odisha as the "gateway to Purvodaya". CM Majhi also envisions the state to become the prime growth engine of Indian economy by 2047 – a 'Vikashit' or developed Odisha contributing towards a 'Vikashit Bharat' through "double-engine governance".

The four pillars of building a 'Samruddha Odisha' will be livelihood, infrastructure, social sector and Odia Asmita. To ensure good governance, a three-pronged approach is being adopted. First, through recruitment and capacity-building of human resources, the government aims to fulfil more than 1,50,000 vacant government positions in next four years. It filled around



**The 'Samriddh Odisha' plan aims at making the state a \$ 500-billion economy by 2036 while 'Vikashit Odisha' will propel it to become a \$ 1.5-trillion economy by 2047, the centenary year of Independence.**

27,000 vacancies in last one year and is on track to fill up about 40,000 more in the coming year. In order to build capacity of its officers, the Mohan Majhi government signed an MoU with

## FACTSHEET

### AGRICULTURE

- **Samruddha Krushak:** A landmark initiative of Majhi government to procure paddy from the farmers at Rs 3,100 per quintal, which is Rs 800 more than the MSP of Rs. 2,300
- **Shree Anna Abhiyan:** The government has launched this mission to improve the livelihood of small and marginal farmers in rain-fed areas through sustainable millet farming
- **CM Kisan:** Rs. 1,025 crore of assistance for Kharif released benefitting 50.2 lakh small and marginal farmers, including 2,381 PVTG farmers and 25,532 urban farmers
- **Farm mechanisation:** 78,681 machines have been supplied and Rs 460 crore subsidies disbursed till last month, of which Rs 75 crore has gone to 13,462 WSHGs
- **Highest budgetary allocation:** It went up to around Rs 15,000 crore last fiscal with thrust on enhancing livelihood of small farmers and ensuring nutritional security

### HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- **Odisha Yatri:** A sustainable mobility app launched for providing seamless, multimodal connectivity empowering drivers and gig workers through a zero-commission, direct-to-driver model and offering a one-stop solution for transportation, tourist attraction, ticketing, parking etc
- **Samruddha Sahar:** This scheme aims to strengthen urban planning and development of Bhubaneswar-Cuttack-Puri-Paradeep Economic Region (BCPPER) by establishing an urban-industrial corridor as Odisha's primary growth engine
- **New Bhubaneswar:** Pact inked between Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) and Surbana Jurong Infrastructure (SJI), Singapore, for the "Bhubaneswar New City Development" project
- **AMRUT Mitra:** Under this initiative, 120 projects of water body rejuvenation approved to be implemented through WSHGs



# सबसे भरोसेमंद स्रोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

## सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

ट्रोलाइट ट्रिप यही लागाए गारंटीयों ने भारतीय हास्पी फी उम्मीदों के दायरा में बना



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 केअर, लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लि. सी-९, सेक्टर-१०, नोएडा २०१३०१ (भारत)

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

कृपया फॉर्म को ब्लॉकलेटर में भरें

मैं चेक/डीडी जमा कर रहा/रही हूँ जिसकी संख्या.....है और इसे दिनांक.....को लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लिमिटेड के पक्ष में .....(बैंक का नाम).....रूपये की धनराशि (दिल्ली से बाहर के चेक के लिए ₹ 50 रूपये 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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THE BIG STORY  
**AUTOMOBILE**

# **SMALL CARS, BIG LOSSES**

Rising costs from stricter safety and emission rules, coupled with a shift toward SUVs, have battered small car sales. Carmakers are urging tax relief to revive the segment

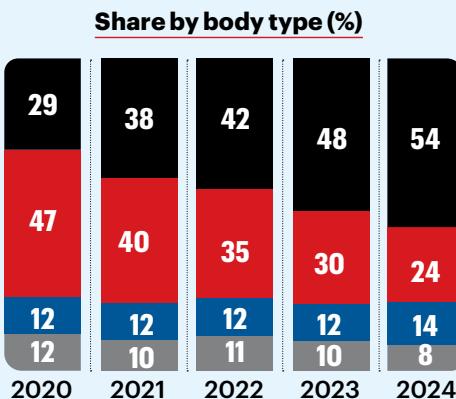
By M.G. ARUN

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

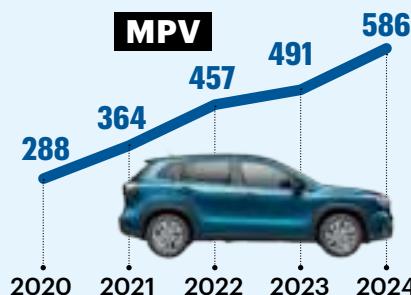
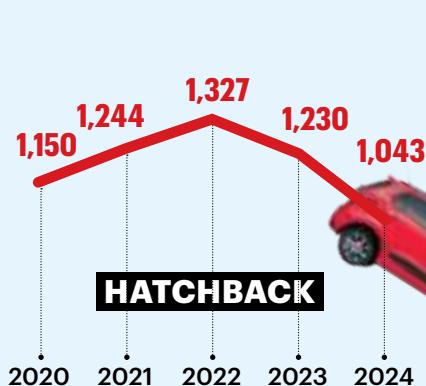
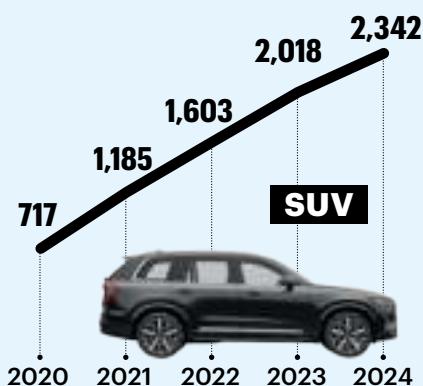
# THE SMALL CAR SLIDE

Hatchbacks lose steam as SUVs and MPVs surge ahead, reshaping India's car market and consumer preferences since 2020

- SUV ● Hatchback
- MPV ● Sedan



Sales by body type (in '000 units)

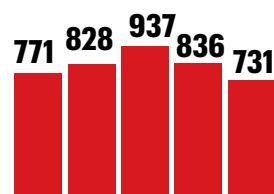


## VANISHING VOLUMES

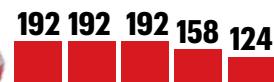
Falling consumer demand pulls down hatchback sales across leading carmakers

Sales ('000)

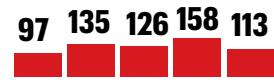
### MARUTI SUZUKI



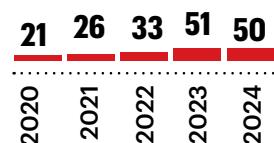
### HYUNDAI



### TATA



### TOYOTA



Courtesy: JATO Dynamics

**THE SMALL CAR, ONCE A SYMBOL OF MIDDLE-CLASS MOBILITY** and mass aspiration, is fast disappearing from Indian roads. Entry-level cars priced below Rs 5 lakh, which sold around a million units in FY16, declined to just 25,402 units in FY25. The share of hatchbacks in total car sales has halved, from 47 per cent in 2020 to 24 per cent in 2024. Hatchback sales of India's largest carmaker, Maruti Suzuki, fell from 771,478 units in 2020 to 730,766 units in 2024. The plunge has continued in 2025, with sales in the company's mini segment (Alto and S-Presso) registering a 31.5 per cent year-on-year drop in May, falling to 6,776 units from 9,902 units last year. Hatchback sales at the second-largest small carmaker, Hyundai Motor India, also fell—from 192,080 units in 2020 to 124,082 in 2024.

This has alarmed automakers. "So somewhere the government has to understand that if they want to fuel the growth of the auto industry, they need to understand where the problem is and how to increase the size of the pie (small car sales)," Partho Banerjee, senior executive officer (marketing & sales), Maruti Suzuki, said at a media interaction on June 2. "Some incentives are required, so that the customer who is not able to afford a car can come in and migrate to a four-wheeler from a two-wheeler." Hatchback sales comprised 40 per cent of Maruti Suzuki's total car sales in 2024. R.C. Bhargava, the company's chairman, told INDIA TODAY that small car sales were upbeat until 2018. "But now a large segment of the car market isn't growing. Overall growth of the auto sector happens only when all



HARDIK CHHABRA

## WHY SMALL CAR SALES ARE FALLING

► **HIGHER COMPLIANCE COSTS:** Mandatory six airbags, safety sensors and anti-lock braking systems raise entry-level vehicle costs. Emission norm adherence adds to expenses

► **MANDATORY 3-YEAR INSURANCE:** Car buyers must have three-year insurance policies for third-party coverage at the time of purchase, raising the upfront cost of vehicles

► **HIGH ROAD TAX AND GST:** In Maharashtra, petrol vehicles (up to Rs 10 lakh) pay 11% road tax, diesel vehicles 13% and CNG ones 7%. In Delhi, it's 5% for petrol (up to Rs 6 lakh) and CNG vehicles, and 6.25% for diesel ones. Small cars under 1,200cc face 18% GST

► **THE SUV BOOM:** Consumers increasingly prefer subcompact SUVs priced below Rs 10 lakh, attracted by larger vehicle formats at competitive prices

► **GROWING USED CAR MARKET:** Five- to six-year-old cars offer better safety, build quality and technology, making them attractive to first-time buyers seeking value

segments grow." What worries him is that small car sales will keep declining if nothing is done to address the issue, and that this will eventually hit carmakers hard.

### HIGHER COMPLIANCE COST

One of the reasons small car sales have been falling is that their prices have gone up due to increasing regulatory requirements. "There is a disproportionate increase in the price of cars due to the regulatory requirements," says Bhargava. "This year, we had to increase the price of some small cars because of the air bags we need to put on them. That has caused a slide in

the retail market." The Union ministry of road transport and highways has made it mandatory for small cars to have six airbags to make them safer. However, the industry estimates that the cost of airbags and the structural changes required can increase the vehicle price by up to Rs 60,000. Although car prices have been rising across the board due to regulatory requirements and emission norms, the segment likely to be most affected is small cars—for buyers with a budget of Rs 5 lakh, such additional costs can be a dampener.

Take the case of Anjani Kumar Singh, 35, who owns a fabrication shop in Panvel in Navi Mumbai and earns around Rs 50,000 a month. He had long aspired to buy a vehicle under Rs 5 lakh, preferably a WagonR, by paying up to Rs 2 lakh upfront and financing the rest through an auto loan. However, he says the base price of the car is now around Rs 5.8 lakh. "I don't think I will be able to own a new car anytime soon," says the father of three, who hails from Sasaram, Bihar. "I may go in for a second-hand car for now."

**W**hat miffs carmakers is that even a developed market like Japan does not have such stringent rules. For instance, it is not mandatory for kei cars, which constitute about a third of the country's car market, to have six airbags. They believe customers should have options. Bhargava says that if there is market demand for six airbags, manufacturers should provide them. "In our case, there is no option for the customer. We do not know if all the customers would want to continue with the scooter and not buy a small car with six airbags or with some other of the features," he says. Apart from six airbags, features like safety sensors and anti-lock braking systems add to the cost of entry-level vehicles. Moreover, vehicles have to adhere to Bharat Stage VI emission norms to reduce pollutants. This is hurting affordability, as it is largely determined by the car's initial price. Even when taking a loan, the down payment is based on the vehicle's upfront cost.

Bhargava cites the example of two-wheeler sales to prove his point. "Two-wheelers had reached 20 million sales in 2018.

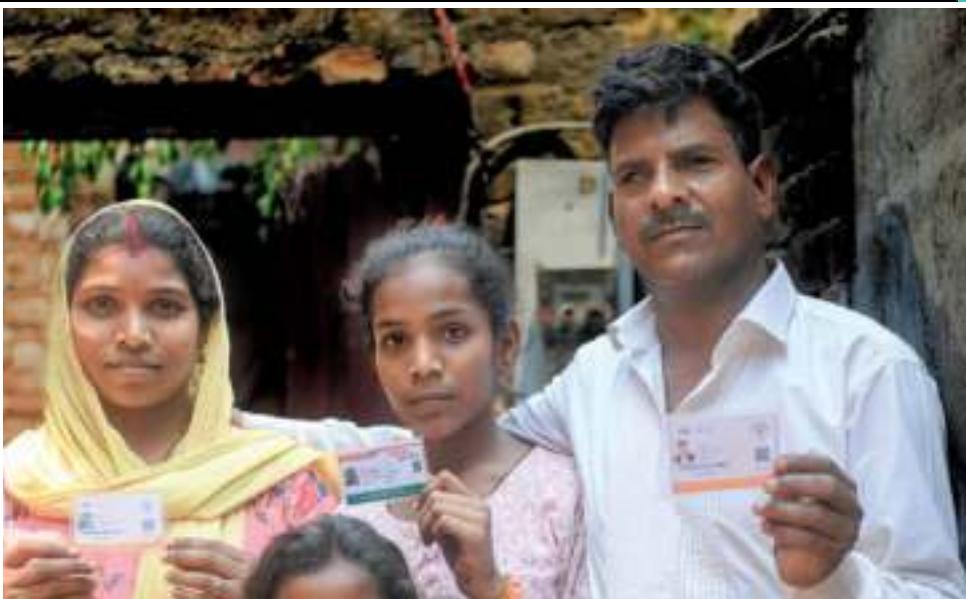


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**KAAM DAMDAAR  
DOUBLE ENGINE SARKAR**



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And after Euro VI came in, their sales fell sharply in the initial years. The same happens to small cars," he says. Also, it seems strange that while scooters have hardly any safety features, policymakers want a car—a product of next-level aspiration for two-wheeler owners—to be loaded with 100 per cent of the safety features found in larger cars. What's lacking, carmakers feel, is a transitional stage between zero safety and full safety.

Yet another hurdle is car insurance: a three-year insurance policy is mandatory at the time of car purchase. This means the premium has to be paid in advance for three years to ensure coverage for any liability arising from third-party damages or injuries. Road tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) are additional burdens. In Maharashtra, for example, road tax varies with fuel and vehicle price—petrol vehicles (up to Rs 10 lakh) pay 11 per cent, diesel 13 per cent and CNG 7 per cent. Similarly, in Delhi, petrol (up to Rs 6 lakh) and CNG vehicles attract 5 per cent and diesel vehicles 6.25 per cent road tax. Meanwhile, small cars with engine capacities below 1200cc are levied 18 per cent GST. Put together, these add as much as 10 per cent to the car's initial cost.

## THE SUV SURGE

A key factor behind the slump in small car sales is the shifting buyer preference for toward subcompact sports utility vehicles (SUVs). Models like the Tata Nexon, Maruti Suzuki Brezza and Hyundai Venue are seeing higher demand—not just because they're priced under Rs 10 lakh, but also because buyers now favour the larger size. Their sturdy road presence, upright seating style and smoother ride are major draws. Sales of SUVs grew from just 716,976 units in 2020 to 2.34 million units in 2024, while that of multipurpose vehicles (MPVs) from 287,663 in 2020 to 586,467 units in 2024. SUVs commanded a 54 per cent share of the car market in 2024, compared to 29 per cent just four years ago. "As incomes rise and credit becomes more accessible, buyers move upmarket," says Ravi Bhatia, president and director, JATO Dynamics, a consultant. People want more features, more comfort, more brand appeal. "Automakers prefer that too. It's easier to make money on a well-equipped mid-size SUV than on a barebones hatchback."

Small car manufacturers now fear inventory buildup at dealerships due to

lagging sales and have turned cautious. "Till last year, it was all wholesale. Many of us were pushing cars out to the dealers and building inventory with them. They were all reported as sales. But now, we are moving much more towards retail figures," says Bhargava. "There is no purpose in pushing cars to the dealers and keeping large inventories and then giving big discounts to sell those cars."

Buyers are also gravitating towards used cars. "A five- or six-year-old car today isn't what it used to be. It's safer, better-built and loaded with tech," says Bhatia. "For many first-time buyers, it becomes the smarter option: more car for less money. That puts pressure on new entry-level models, which often end up looking underwhelming in comparison."

India's used-car market surpassed new car sales in 2024, per a CARS24 report—5.4 million used cars sold versus 4.2 million new cars. The report also projects a 13 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in used car sales, pushing volumes to 10.8 million units by 2030. "In a way, the used car market becomes the new entry-level segment," Bhatia adds.



**"Now a large segment of the car market isn't growing. Overall growth of the auto sector happens only when all segments grow"**

— R.C. BHARGAVA  
Chairman, Maruti Suzuki



**"As incomes rise and credit becomes more accessible, buyers move upmarket. It's easier for the automakers to make money on a well-equipped mid-size SUV than on a barebones hatchback"**

— RAVI BHATIA  
President & Director,  
JATO Dynamics

## A TAXING TRANSITION

With regulatory requirements firmly in place, carmakers are now calling on the central and state governments to ease the tax burden and make small cars more affordable. Bhargava suggests a few measures: "First, GST has to be reviewed and reduced. Second, the road tax must become an annual tax. And the three-year insurance should become an annual insurance." If the road tax is spread to an annual tax, it would improve the initial buying price by 10 per cent. India has a relatively low number of cars per capita compared to developed nations. Roughly, there are 34 cars for every 1,000 people, significantly lower than in countries like the US (860 cars per 1,000 people) or Japan (612 cars per 1,000 people). India needs to bring down the prices of small cars if more people have to find them affordable.

While the car market is naturally progressing toward larger vehicles with better safety features, the transition from two-wheeler to cars has become challenging due to affordability. For India to improve its per capita car ownership, addressing this affordability barrier is essential—as well as urgent. ■

INDIA  
TODAY

# BREAKING NEWS

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# A DWINDLING AUDIENCE

POST-COVID, MOVIE THEATRES HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO ARREST THE DECLINE IN FOOTFALLS. BUT EVEN AS MANY SINGLE SCREENS CLOSE, NEW PLANS ARE AFOOT TO LURE THE FANS BACK TO THE HALLS

By SUHANI SINGH

# A

**Amidst the glitz and spectacle of the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES),** one topic weighed on the minds of most film industry stakeholders—the current crisis in the theatre business. “I have always believed that India has too few theatres, given the size of the country and [number of] people,” actor Aamir Khan said at a session. “Our biggest theatre hits have had footfalls of 30-35 million. That’s 2 per cent of our population in what is a cinema-loving country.” Seated next to him was Ajay Bijli, founder

of PVR Cinemas and managing director of country’s biggest multiplex chain, PVR INOX Ltd. Bijli replied in jest, “*Main office jaata hoon* [I better head to office to get work done].”

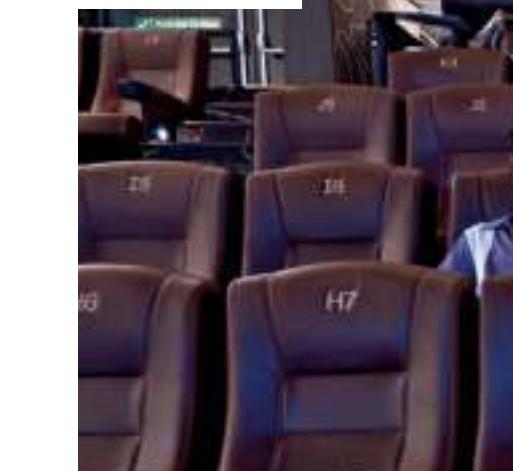
The world’s most populous country has just about 9,000 screens, a number that has been steadily declining, largely due to the closure of single-screen cinemas. The figure implies that there are roughly 7-8 screens per million people. More than half of these screens are concentrated in southern territories, predominantly in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, followed by Karnataka and Kerala. Even as new box office benchmarks have been set post-pandemic with releases like *Pathaan*, *Jawan*, *Animal*, *Stree 2* and *Pushpa-Chapter 2-The Rule*, the hard reality is

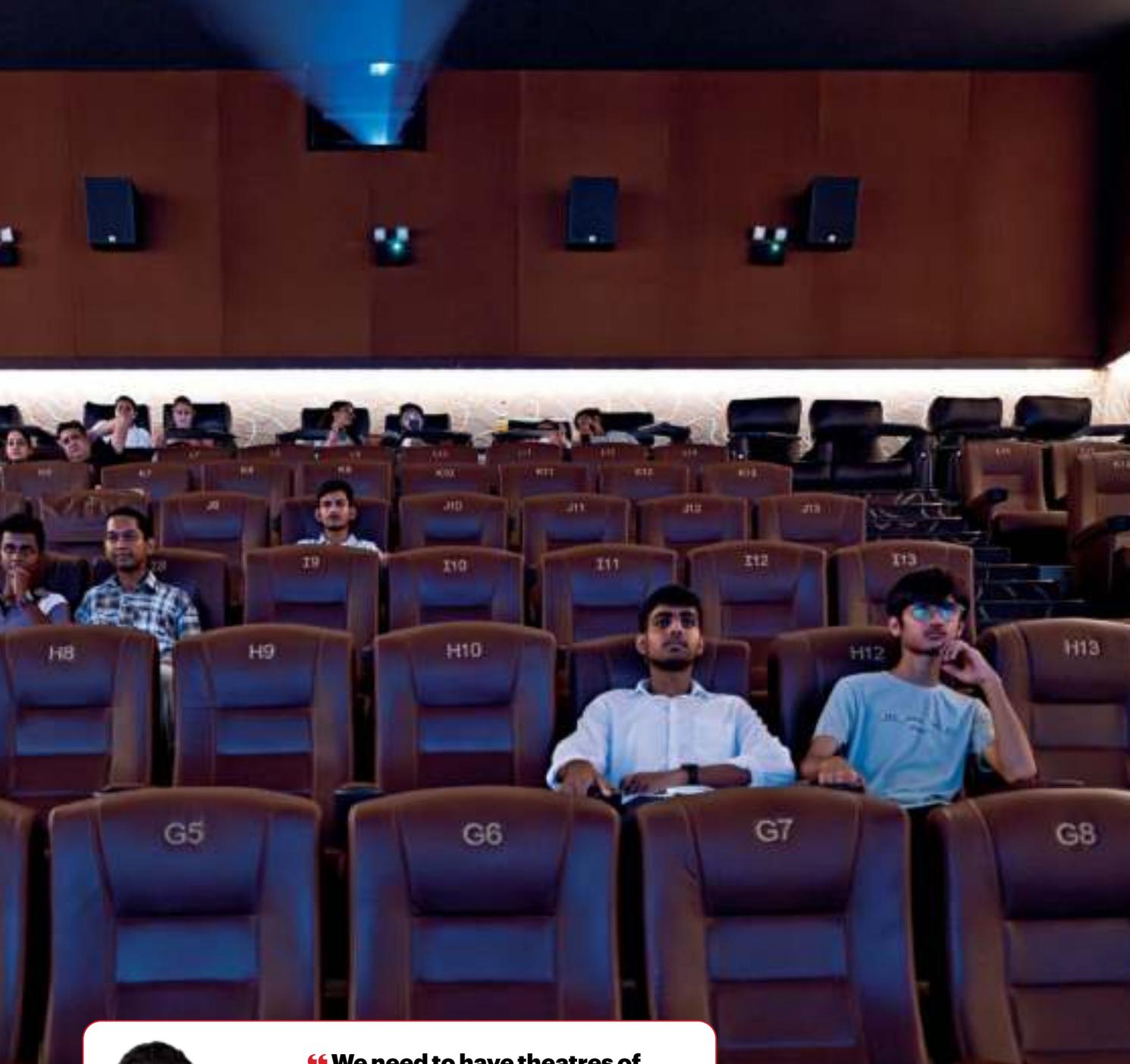


**AN EMPTY FEELING**  
A Cinepolis hall in Delhi, June 11

that footfalls have still not matched up to 2019 levels. As Aamir called for more screens in “vast tracts where there are no cinemas”, Bijli reminded us that existing screens were struggling to put bums on the existing 4 million seats. “Consistency of content that engages is important, as the consumer is critical,” Bijli said. “We need to start cinemas carefully...in pockets where they are not available.”

The latest EY report on India’s



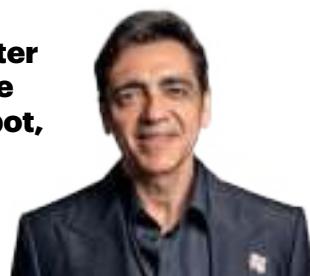


**“We need to have theatres of different kinds. There are vast districts which don't have a single screen”**

— **AAMIR KHAN** at the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit, May 2025

**“It's been feast and famine after Covid-19. Suddenly a big movie comes along and hits the jackpot, then it's a famine”**

— **AJAY BIJLI**, Founder, PVR Cinemas, and MD, PVR INOX Ltd, at WAVES



HARDIK CHHABRA

media and entertainment sector states the need for low-priced theatres in Tier III and IV markets alongside growth in “mass-themed films”. Five months into 2025, there has been only one that fits the bill—*Chhaava*, a period action drama on Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, which collected Rs 530 crore, a significant chunk of it coming from Maharashtra. Bollywood's sluggish start to the year

# SCREEN PRESENCE

India has 6,877 theatres currently, 54% are in the South

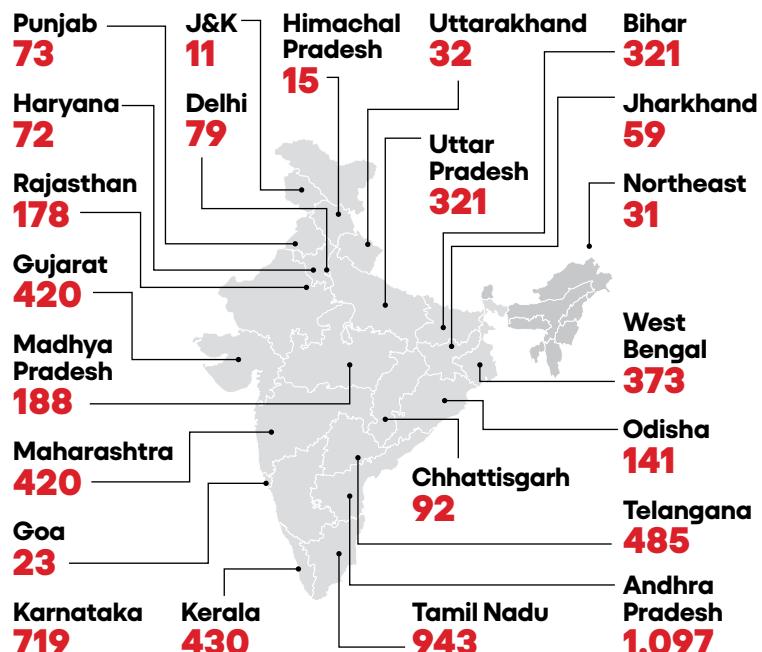
cannot be attributed to just fewer big releases in the first half. Mid-budget films have also struggled to make an impact, with just a few exceptions such as *Kesari-Chapter 2*, *Raid 2* and *Jatt*.

**A**t Cinepolis India, which has 186 of its 430 screens in Tier II and III centres, the situation is improving, but with a caveat. "While overall attendance figures have recovered to near pre-Covid levels—85 per cent of 2019 level in 2024—this is primarily due to the increase in screen count rather than per-screen productivity, which is down 25-30 per cent," says Devang Sampat, the managing director of the multiplex group. "This disparity highlights the underlying challenges the exhibition sector faces. Ultimately, it boils down to the content the industry is churning out." The chain's expansion strategy has seen it open cinemas in Kozhikode, Bhopal, Jaipur, Rajkot and Kannur, with plans to set up shop in Jhansi, Pondicherry and Jodhpur in a few years.

## NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

Talk to any exhibitor and the conversation ultimately boils down to the lack of a steady stream of compelling films that can lure the audiences back into cinema halls. "Nobody makes movies for the masses anymore," says Yusuf Shaikh, whose family operates five single screeners in Gujarat that are just about breaking even. "We are not ready to understand who our audience is or [have] ignored who they are." An 'ABCD film', one that connects in all geographic centres, is a rarity, he says. Instead, he praises filmmakers in the South for working out "their target audience and sale and recovery model" as well as marketing, which has resulted in a few films becoming hits even in the Hindi belt. "In the South, actors have their own fan clubs. Even the music and trailer launch are events for them," he adds.

There's no overlooking the fact that



Source: cinemaprofile.com

**9,000**

Approx. number of cinema screens in India. China has 90,000, the US 39,000

**16%**

Footfalls in cinemas in 2024. Occupancy rate was 32% before the pandemic in '19

**₹22,400**

CRORE  
Loss of revenue to piracy in 2023, per EY report



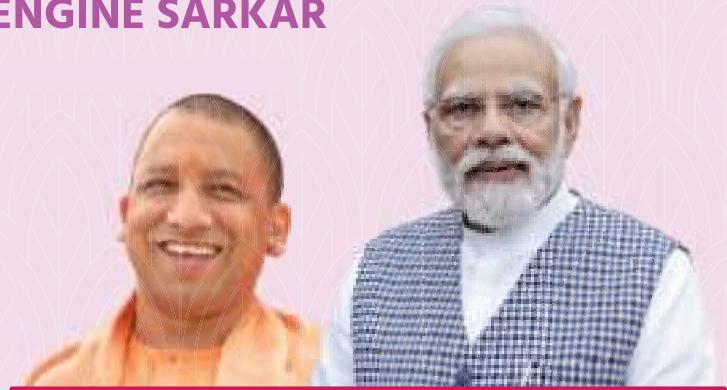
**“What this country needs is cinema halls for the masses. Those who can pay up to Rs 100 and watch a movie”**

**— YUSUF SHAIKH**  
Founder of Janta Cinemas

the South is way above the rest of India when it comes to big screen viewing. As per cinemaprofile.com, of the 6,877 theatres in India, 54 per cent are in the five southern states. Add Maharashtra, and the figure rises to 70 per cent. Screen density in the South too is much higher than the national average. Ashish Pandey, currently head, programming and strategic initiatives, at MovieMax, has been in the film distribution business for over two decades and has some understanding on why the likes of Andhra, Telangana and Tamil Nadu dominate. "In the South, there's a culture of going to the cinemas. It's not like you are going for the sake of entertainment alone. It's also not considered demeaning to go



## KAAM DAMDAAR DOUBLE ENGINE SARKAR



- 'Mission Shakti' campaign has reached 9 crore women and spread awareness about safety, rights, and welfare schemes.
- 1.86 crore families benefitted under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana.
- More than 2 lakh women benefitted from the PM SVANidhi Scheme.
- More than 60 lakh mothers benefitted under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.
- Under the Safe City Project, 100 Pink Booths/Outposts and 1,090 Analytics Centers are operational in Lucknow; UP set to become the first state in the country with 18 Safe Cities, including 17 municipal corporations and Gautam Buddha Nagar.
- Over 1.75 lakh women provided government jobs.
- Over 10 lakh self-help groups formed under the Livelihood Mission, connecting more than 1 crore women.
- First in the country for securing convictions in POCSO Act and in crime against women.
- Over 27,178 women police personnel appointed, with more than 10,378 women's beats allocated.
- One-stop centers set up in all districts for women victims of violence, benefitting 2.03 lakh women.
- More than 4.76 lakh couples married under the Mukhyamantri Samuhik Vivah Yojana; the grant amount increased from ₹51,000 to ₹1,00,000.
- On Raksha Bandhan, free travel provided to mothers, sisters, and daughters in all categories of Uttar Pradesh government buses; over 1.20 crore women benefitted.
- Pink Buses are operational by women drivers and conductors under the Uttar Pradesh State Transport Corporation.
- Granddaughters (son's daughters), nieces (brother's daughters), and nieces (sister's daughters) granted land rights under the Revenue Code.
- Free education for girls up to graduation.
- 34.14 lakh destitute women received ₹1,000 per month pension.

# EMPOWERED WOMEN PROSPEROUS UTTAR PRADESH



Women as Catalysts of Development & Progress  
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**BLOCK BUSTER**  
A PVR complex  
in Jabalpur, MP

## THE CINEMAS

### MANY EXHIBITORS FEEL THAT CURRENTLY BOLLYWOOD HAS A PAUCITY OF COMPELLING FILMS THAT CAN LURE AUDIENCES BACK TO THE HALLS

to the cinemas. So, there's no hesitation," he says. "A regular audience comes regardless of which film is released. There's penetration of cinemas even in smaller towns."

But all is not hunky-dory even in the hero-worshipping South. If there's a *Tourist Family* (Tamil) or *Thudarum* or *Alappuzha Gymkhana* (both Malayalam) which succeeds, there's also a Kamal Haasan-Mani Ratnam's *Thug Life*, which failed to live up to the hype. Sunil Narang of Asian Cinemas feels some course correction is needed, especially when it comes to aspects such as the theatre-to-streaming release window. In the South, it's just 28 days, compared to 56 days in the Hindi belt. Steep ticket prices as well as those for food and beverage, he feels, are also deterring audiences. "How can we have more screens when existing screens are not running?" he laments. "Where are the movies? Where are the numbers? How will the theatres run?" As many as 30-40 single-screen cinemas in the South have closed in the past six months, he says.

### THE BIG PICTURE

If India wants to level up to the markets in China and the United States, what it needs are films that pique audience interest enough for them to make the trip. "There isn't a regular supply of tentpole pictures or big films. They come once every three months; the rest of the time is when we face a downturn," says Pandey, whose MovieMax is looking to expand from 80 to 100 screens by the end of the year. "Once we have a stronger content pipeline, the expectation is that those footfalls will come back. Because people are coming to the cinemas even to watch re-releases and smaller, mid-budget fare like *Munjya* and *12th Fail*."

But even these pleasant surprises are too few and far between. Bijli summarises the cinema theatre business post-pandemic as akin to "feast and famine", wherein a film does exceedingly well only to be followed by a long dry spell where nothing clicks. Yet, he also realises that new cinemas need to come up in smaller centres as opposed to the big cities. Currently, 372 of PVR INOX's 1,743 screens are located in 66

Tier II and Tier III cities and come with a cumulative seating capacity of 80,947. In 2018, the multiplex giant launched the 'franchise owned, company operated' (FOCO) model to take its presence beyond the metros. Adopting an 'asset-light strategy', FOCO has franchise partners who own the property but with PVR INOX handling the design, operations and customer experience. Under this, 42 screens are operating across 12 locations, with 35 more planned in nine new locations, including Shillong, Gangtok and Siliguri.

**M**eanwhile, Shaikh is hoping to revolutionise the film exhibition market with Janta Cinemas, a business idea that emerged from a simple premise: '*Grahak khada hai, dukaan hi nahin hai*' [(The customer is there. But there's no shop in sight)]. He has tied up with the state governments of Assam and Tripura to convert vacant town halls and panchayat houses into 300-seater cinema spaces. While the morning and afternoon hours are devoted to edutainment, the evenings are reserved for films. Tickets are priced at Rs 99 and Shaikh throws in a chai and samosa too.

"What this country needs is cinema halls for the masses. I am planning 10,000 screens in the next two years," he boasts, adding that he is already communicating with the governments of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi to launch more Janta properties. "I am converting the pirate audience to the ticketed audience." The ultimate endeavour, he hopes, is that there's a steady maintenance of average collections through modest outlets, which, in turn, helps build a loyal audience. It may not have swanky recliner seats or fancy food and beverage offerings, but what it can ensure is that the show goes on. A houseful one at that. ■

BEST  
COLLEGES  
OF INDIA

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## INDIA TODAY

### BEST COLLEGES SURVEY

On stand Date: 20<sup>th</sup> June | Issue Date: 30<sup>th</sup> June

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कहीं भी, कभी भी

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# LE ! SURE

MUSIC: A MAN OF LETTERS PG 70

THE LISTICLE: BOOK RELEASES PG 72

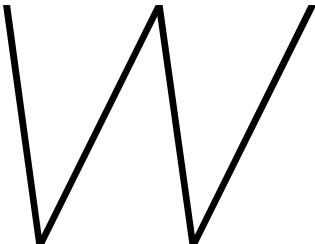
► CINEMA

## AIMING FOR THE STARS

**DIRECTOR R.S. PRASANNA**  
TALKS ABOUT WHAT WENT INTO  
THE MAKING OF THE HIGHLY  
ANTICIPATED AAMIR KHAN-  
STARRER SITAARE ZAMEEN PAR

**PAST PERFECT**  
Prasanna is best known for directing the comedy *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan*, a remake of his sleeper Tamil hit





"When the whole world was in lockdown, my world was opening up," says filmmaker R.S. Prasanna. The year was 2020 and Prasanna, then living in Chennai, had managed to land a meeting, albeit virtual, with Aamir Khan. Best known for directing the comedy *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan*, a remake of his sleeper Tamil hit, it was a dream Prasanna says he didn't dare dream. Convincing the pernickety Khan about a script is no easy feat, but Prasanna and writer Divya Nidhi Sharma managed to grab his attention with a funny tale about a man who comes of age as he trains a basketball team of neurodivergent individuals. Five years later, that pitch has manifested as *Sitaare Zameen Par*, which Khan has also produced.

Seated in the Aamir Khan Productions office in Santa Cruz, Mumbai, Prasanna expresses sentiments which Khan would concur with. He talks of his "responsibility as a storyteller", which entails reaching out to the audience with stories that come from "the heart". He speaks of having no "insecurity" despite being absent from the filmmaking scene for almost seven years. And he emphasises the need to have "conviction".

But that very conviction wavered a bit as he came into the orbit of the mercurial Aamir Khan, one of the last superstars of Indian cinema. Says Prasanna, "I was full of anxiety, I had imposter syndrome, I couldn't believe I was directing him. I was like, 'Of course, he is going to call you

**CHANGING PERCEPTIONS**

Aamir Khan with his team of 'misfits' in *Sitaare Zameen Par*, which releases on June 20

out." An eight-hour-long conversation, which started over South Indian breakfast, allayed those fears and brought an immediate sense of comfort. "Aamir sir is quite open and one who only sees talent and passion for cinema and no other identity marker," says Prasanna. "I usually call him the Atlantis, [for] he is like the refugee camp of passionate filmmakers. He is very protective about the director and empowers them."

Passion alone doesn't drive Prasanna. He'd prefer the word "obsession". "I'm told you are too involved. You have to give it everything. There's no ego and hierarchy, you take inputs from everyone." It's perhaps why he sees himself as

a misfit and has made a comedy about working with other individuals whom society perceives as misfits.

Central to *Sitaare Zameen Par* was a cast of individuals diagnosed with autism and Down's Syndrome. Over 2,500 auditions were conducted, with casting directors Tess Joseph and Anmol Ahuja taking charge. Finally, 10 were finalised and put through workshops. "They are my stars," says Prasanna. "They have *josh*, a positive spirit and a *keeda* to perform. You just have to give them the tools on how to face the camera and learn the lines." Their presence, adds Prasanna, made the set a happier place. A paediatrician who champions for inclusion and works with neurodivergent people was present during the shoot to assist.

Much like other films in Khan's rich filmography, this one comes packaged with a social message. "Today, we live in a world where we don't connect with anybody, forget neurodivergent people," says Prasanna. With the film, he hopes that audiences remember the child within themselves. "You are born

**Central to *Sitaare Zameen Par* was a cast of individuals diagnosed with autism and Down's Syndrome**



with purity and being non-judgemental. It's only later we learn to discriminate."

*Sitaare Zameen Par* arrives at a time when the yardstick of what works at the box office has undergone a seismic shift. Loud spectacles with hypermasculine heroes are favoured over slice-of-life soft outings. Khan's last film, *Laal Singh Chaddha*, a remake of the Hollywood hit *Forrest Gump*, crashed at the box office. *Sitaare Zameen Par*, which has been pegged as a "spiritual sequel" to Khan's own directorial debut, *Taare Zameen Par*, is inspired by a Spanish film, *Campeones* (2018). Prasanna isn't too worried that the film may seem an anomaly in the current landscape. "Everyone wants a palate-cleanser. A film works if it entertains and has a strong emotional connect with people," he says. "Everything changes with one thing. It's Aamir Khan who usually starts the trend." ■

—Suhani Singh

OTT ▼

# What Lies Beneath

Ostensibly a survival drama, **KARAN TEJPAL'S** *Stolen* touches upon a number of societal concerns

The journey from apathy to empathy is a fraught one in Karan Tejpal's debut film, *Stolen*, which is currently streaming on Amazon Prime Video. Inspired by the horrific events in Karbi Anglong in Assam, in which two young men mistaken for being child kidnappers were lynched by a mob, Tejpal crafts a survival drama that pushes the anxiety buttons and touches on many pertinent issues afflicting society today.

mother looking for her abducted toddler, *Stolen* rarely misses a beat. At the crux of it, the film deals with the dilemmas around doing the right thing. For Banerjee, it's the relatability of the situation that made Tejpal's script irresistible. Initially approached to play Raman, the morally upright brother who goes out of his way to help a distraught mother, Banerjee was eventually asked to play Gautam, the sibling who is all too aware



**QUIET DREAD**  
Mia Maelzer plays a mother looking for her abducted toddler

From the dangers of fake news shared on WhatsApp groups to public distrust of police and privileged middle-class India's wariness towards those on the economic fringes, *Stolen* pushes audiences on the edge and challenges them with a stark depiction of reality. "The Karbi Anglong videos were always on my mind and left a knot in my stomach," says Tejpal. "I wanted the audience to feel the anxiety and present a sanitised version of the reality." In the process, he also poses a pivotal question: Would you take a stand?

Starring Abhishek Banerjee, Shubham Vardhan and Mia Maelzer in a pitch-perfect act as a

of the mess the brothers are getting themselves into. "There's a tendency to not be in trouble," says Banerjee of the character. "What he dreads is happening. It's only when everything is lost and there is no other option but to rise."

The emotional spine of *Stolen* though is Maelzer. Tejpal is all praise for the National School of Drama alumna in what's a breakthrough role. "Mia suggested we plant her in a Santhal area. She knew the language and was aware of the people and issues. The specificity she brought to the role was great," says Tejpal, who, too, makes a solid first impression with *Stolen*. ■

—Suhani Singh



KR\$NA's new album features collaborations with friends such as Raftaar and Seedhe Maut

MUSIC ▼

## A MAN OF LETTERS

The songs of rapper KR\$NA stand out for their lyrical wordplay, as can be heard on his new mixtape

**W**hen KR\$NA's new mixtape, *Yours Truly*, reached No. 1 on Apple Music's Top Albums chart within 24 hours of release last month, the hip-hop star felt validated. He made the record at a point in his life when he was unsure of his next move. "For a while, I was like, 'What can I do that will be liked [by the public] and satisfy me artistically?'" says KR\$NA of the collection that's been put out in partnership with Mass Appeal, the label co-founded by one of his idols, American MC Nas.

He had a breakthrough after listening to a 2015 episode of VOTP, the Indian hip-hop podcast hosted by

rappers Bobkat and Enkore, on which they discussed how he's frequently been under-appreciated. Says KR\$NA, "[I thought,] okay, I wasn't crazy to think people weren't giving me my props."

Consequently, *Yours Truly*, which includes excerpts from that episode, became a vehicle for him to write about things he has never addressed, on songs such as the reflective 'Nothing To Prove'. "I have never on a track said that this is the way I felt about what others were thinking about me," he says. The mixtape also takes a swipe at the music industry where labels are notorious for treating upcoming artists like potential products rather than creative professionals. KR\$NA says his career took off after he

KR\$NA'S NEW MIXTAPE, **YOURS TRULY**, HIT NO. 1 ON APPLE MUSIC'S ALBUM CHARTS WITHIN 24 HOURS OF RELEASE

met Ankit Khanna, who signed him to his label Kalamkaar Music in 2017.

Today, KR\$NA is among India's best-known rappers, lauded for his wordplay. He partially attributes this skill to being surrounded by newspapers and magazines while growing up, thanks to his grandfather. That habit of voracious reading has manifested itself in the form of the many references he drops in his bars, and is particularly prominent on *Yours Truly*, which features collaborations with friends such as Raftaar, Badshah, Seedhe Maut and Yashraj as well as international talents like Japan's Awich and the UK's Aitch. Notable by their absence are diss tracks, which he has had success with in the past. "Those listeners are there for the drama, not because they enjoy listening to you on a sad day," says KR\$NA. ■

—Amit Gurbaxani

# Presents from the Past

On the new album, **Tarun Balani** explores his Sindhi heritage and the community's collective lived experience

**T**arun Balani found the inspiration for his new album *Kadahin Milandaa-sin* at home—in the paintings, photographs and writings of his late grandfather whom he had never met. He found it in the music of Sindhi singers such as Haider Rind and Allan Faqir, introduced to him by his father, who passed away last year. He found it in his ancestral house in New Delhi's Lajpat Nagar in which his studio takes up the same place his granddad used as a workspace. And he found it in the stories of countless Sindhi families such

as his own who bear the generational trauma of Partition.

"It's incredible how despite displacement, we've not played the victim card," says Balani of the community. For the drummer, jazz composer and electronic music producer who prefers to be known as a "sonic storyteller", the album is an exploration of cultural heritage and an endeavour to both mourn and celebrate losses and legacies.

On the wistful instrumental record—the Sindhi title of which translates to 'When will we meet?' and is derived from a line

in poet Shaikh Ayaz's verse 'Tiri Pawanda'—Sindhi folk music is a point of interpretation rather than a sonic reference for him and his band Dharma, which features the NY-based trio: trumpet player Adam O'Farrill, guitarist Olli Hirvonen and pianist Sharik Hasan.

The visual identity of *Kadahin...* pays more direct tribute. The cover is a photograph of Balani's grandfather. For the promotional photo shoot, he wore a traditional Sindhi cap and his father's shawl, purchased in Pakistan in the early 1990s. In the images, Balani's head is turned sideways. "I'm looking over my shoulder to acknowledge my ancestors," he says. "I've been told my music is very cinematic. That's a great compliment. Because I want people to be moved by the music." ■

—Amit Gurbaxani



**SONIC YOUTH**  
The Sindhi title of Balani's new album translates to 'When will we meet?'



## DOG STORY



The first in a graphic novel series based on the movie *Lakadbaggha* is out

**T**he 2023 action film *Lakadbaggha*—based on an animal-lover vigilante—now has its own comic book. *Lakadbaggha: The Prologue* is illustrated by the American artist Brittain Peck, and takes you right into the thick of the action at Kolkata's Khidirpur docks. "One of my favourite parts is doing research and development as I design the characters, location and details that will make up the world of the story. That part was especially exciting with this project because I love the variety of characters and Kolkata is such a visually interesting location," says Peck. The comic is firmly rooted in the Lakadbaggha universe, with Peck drawing inspiration "from their nearly every aspect, including the music, lighting, costumes and settings". The illustrations are in the *ligne claire* ('clear line') tradition pioneered by Hergé, the colour palette distinctly noir. Peck shares a co-creator credit with Anshuman Jha, who played the lead character Arjun Bakshi in the movie. Both are comic buffs. "In this first prologue book, we were both excited to be creating a part of Arjun's story with the attack at the docks that is mentioned at the beginning of the film but not seen," says Peck. ■

**LAKADBAGGHA:  
THE PROLOGUE  
TAKES YOU  
RIGHT INTO  
THE THICK OF  
THE ACTION  
AT KOLKATA'S  
KHIDIRPUR  
DOCKS**

—Amit Dixit

## BOOKS ▾

# Fighting the Good Fight

The environmentalism of Rajasthan's Bishnoi is the subject of **Martin Goodman's *My Head for a Tree***

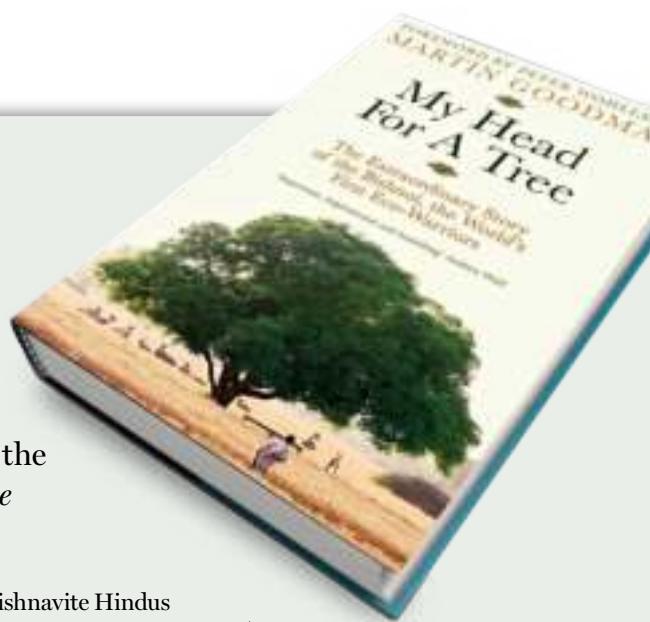
In May, Radheshyam Bishnoi died in a road accident near Jaisalmer while trying to intercept poachers. Devoted to protecting the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard, the 28-year-old conservationist did not merely profess environmentalism; he lived it. Like many others of his ilk, he paid with his life.

In the 1990s, the Bishnoi made news for bringing actor Salman Khan to justice for hunting blackbuck on their lands. Martin Goodman's *My Head for a Tree* attempts to clarify the context of

their fierce activism.

The Bishnoi are Vaishnavite Hindus who owe allegiance to the teachings of Guru Jambheshwar, a 15th-century mystic. "A tree covered in greenery is my temple and my home," Jambhoji declared, advocating compassion to living things. Indeed, an oft-circulated and endearing cliché is an image of a Bishnoi mother suckling, on each breast, her own infant and a chinkara fawn.

Jambhoji's teachings extend the Bishnoi's nurturing love to the stewardship of everything from bustards,

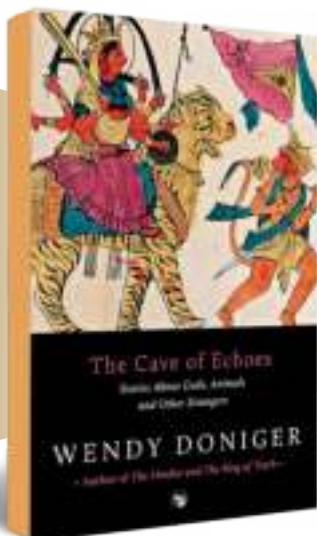


**MY HEAD FOR A TREE:**  
The Extraordinary Story of the Bishnoi, the World's First Eco-Warriors  
*By Martin Goodman*  
PROFILE BOOKS/  
HACHETTE INDIA  
₹699; 272 pages

## THE LISTICLE

## RECENT BOOK RELEASES THAT SHOULD BE ON YOUR READING LIST

**THE CAVE OF ECHOES**  
By Wendy Doniger  
SPEAKING TIGER  
₹599;  
240 pages



# Telling Tales

**T**his is the reissue of a seminal text by the Indologist Wendy Doniger which was first published in 1988 by the University of Chicago Press. Rather than dwelling on specific myths and tales, for which she is of course much admired and loved, in *The Cave of Echoes*, Doniger puts the very act of storytelling front and centre. This is a book that deals "with stories about stories—metastories, or, more specifically, meta-myths". It draws on storytelling traditions from around the world, including Hindu and Greek mythology, Biblical parables, and even modern acts of mythmaking a la Woody Allen and soap operas to illustrate how myths help cultures define themselves. Doniger considers it less a collection of essays and more a "tapestry of threads" or "sutras". Drawing connections across cultures and timespans, she gives us much to ponder about.

cranes and vultures to trees and watercourses. This protectionism has led them to lock horns with the powerful. Radheshyam is the latest martyr of their

cent shade offers succour from the desert sun. Here, in 1730, centuries before Chipko made tree-hugging emblematic of environmentalism, Amrita Devi

down in history as the Khejrali massacre.

Goodman's book, written with Bishnoi blessings, begins with this story. Travelling around Rajasthan, he conversed with people—Radheshyam who saved bustards from colliding with power lines, young Pooja who nurses orphaned chinkaras back to health, Ranaram who plants trees to repel the invading desert, and others. Interspersed with Franck Vogel's monochrome photographs, the narrative is a sequence of enquiring essays and profiles.

What should have been a flawless book is riddled with an insouciance for facts. The Demoiselle Crane is conflated with the Sarus Crane, the *kraun-*

*cha pakshi* of Valmiki's Ramayana. Marwari is misidentified as a dialect of Hindi. Well-known names are misspelled. Despite such foibles, this book has an urgent message for our generation's climate anxiety: though one cannot be born Bishnoi, one can draw upon the sect's credo of living by one's conscience.

"This body is born and it perishes," Jambhoji warned. In the aftermath of Khejrali, the king relented; the trees were spared. Amid the juggernaut of development in Rajasthan, trees are lost, grasslands destroyed, and wildlife sentenced to death. As the Bishnoi keep a body count, their battles endure and so do their sacrifices. ■

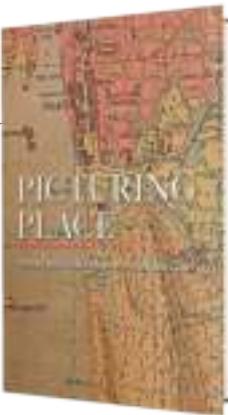
—Bijoy Venugopal

## Travelling around Rajasthan, Goodman meets many eco-warriors. The narrative is a sequence of essays and profiles

righteous war.

A commemorative cenotaph stands at Khejrali near Jodhpur, which draws its name from the khejri (*Prosopis cineraria*), Rajasthan's state tree whose munifi-

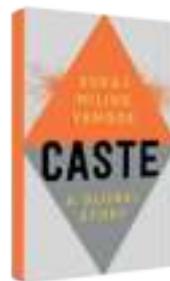
embraced a khejri to prevent it from being axed by a local maharaja's men. For daring to resist, the mother and her three daughters were hacked to death. Another 360 Bishnoi joined their sacrifice, which went



### CHARTING THE PAST

**B**ased on an exhibition of rare maps of Udaipur and Mewar held at the City Palace Museum in Udaipur, this catalogue brings together maps and miniatures from medieval to modern times. Most prominent are riveting archival photos of Mewar, including an album documenting the construction of railways in the princely state.

**PICTURING PLACE**  
Painted and Printed Maps at the Udaipur Court  
*By Shaikha Mishra*  
MAHARANA OF MEWAR CHARITABLE FOUNDATION  
176 pages



**CASTE: A GLOBAL STORY**  
*by Suraj Milind Yengde*  
PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE  
₹899; 360 pages

### CASTING A SHADOW

**S**et to hit Indian bookstores by June-end, this groundbreaking study of Dalit lives examines how caste and caste-based discrimination are experienced around the world. Based on 10 years of research, it spans 15 countries and trains its lens on everything, from 19th-century indentured labourers in the Caribbean to modern-day migrant workers in the Middle East.

### KEEPING THE FAITH

**T**his new anthology of queer writing from South Asia focuses on the fraught intersection of queerness and faith. Addressing identity and belonging through poetry, memoir and flash fiction, it brings together 24 LGBTQIA+ writers who conjure up worlds which are either fantastical or painfully real.

**ON THE BRINK OF BELIEF**  
*Edited by Kazim Ali*  
PENGUIN  
₹499; 264 pages



—Compiled by Amit Dixit

**Q+A**

# ROLES **THAT MATTER**

**RAJIT KAPUR** is playing a Bengali detective in *Kaisi Ye Paheli*, which will have its world premiere at the New York Indian Film Festival on June 21

**Q.** You play a Bengali detective in the murder mystery *Kaisi Ye Paheli*. How does it compare to your role of the iconic Byomkesh Bakshi over three decades ago?

This was a fresh approach. This detective is different from Byomkesh, who was a common man. Here, he is more of a bureaucratic detective who's part of the government circle. That's why I agreed—to break the earlier detective mould.

**Q.** Last year, you made a comeback on television with *Sardar: The Game Changer*. What made you return to TV?

It was the opportunity and the challenge to play Sardar Patel. I have played Gandhi, Nehru and Modi and people kept asking when I was going to play Sardar Patel. So, when that chance came, I told myself that I need to do this as it will allow me to understand this man as well.

**Q.** Are you looking to direct something now?

I would like to, maybe for the stage or for an OTT platform, but I'm looking for something that will give me sleepless nights. It has to shake me up to want to do it. Ten years ago, it would have been much easier but, today, I am less patient. Whatever will be, will be.

**Q.** You have been acting for almost four decades. What does a script need to offer someone who has explored various mediums and roles?

It has to push or excite me. That excitement or push could be from the people I am working with or it could be something extraordinary in the role that I have to attempt. If there is a part that I have never done earlier or something that would stretch me as an actor—that gets me excited.

—with Deepali Dhingra





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ପ୍ରଧାନମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ



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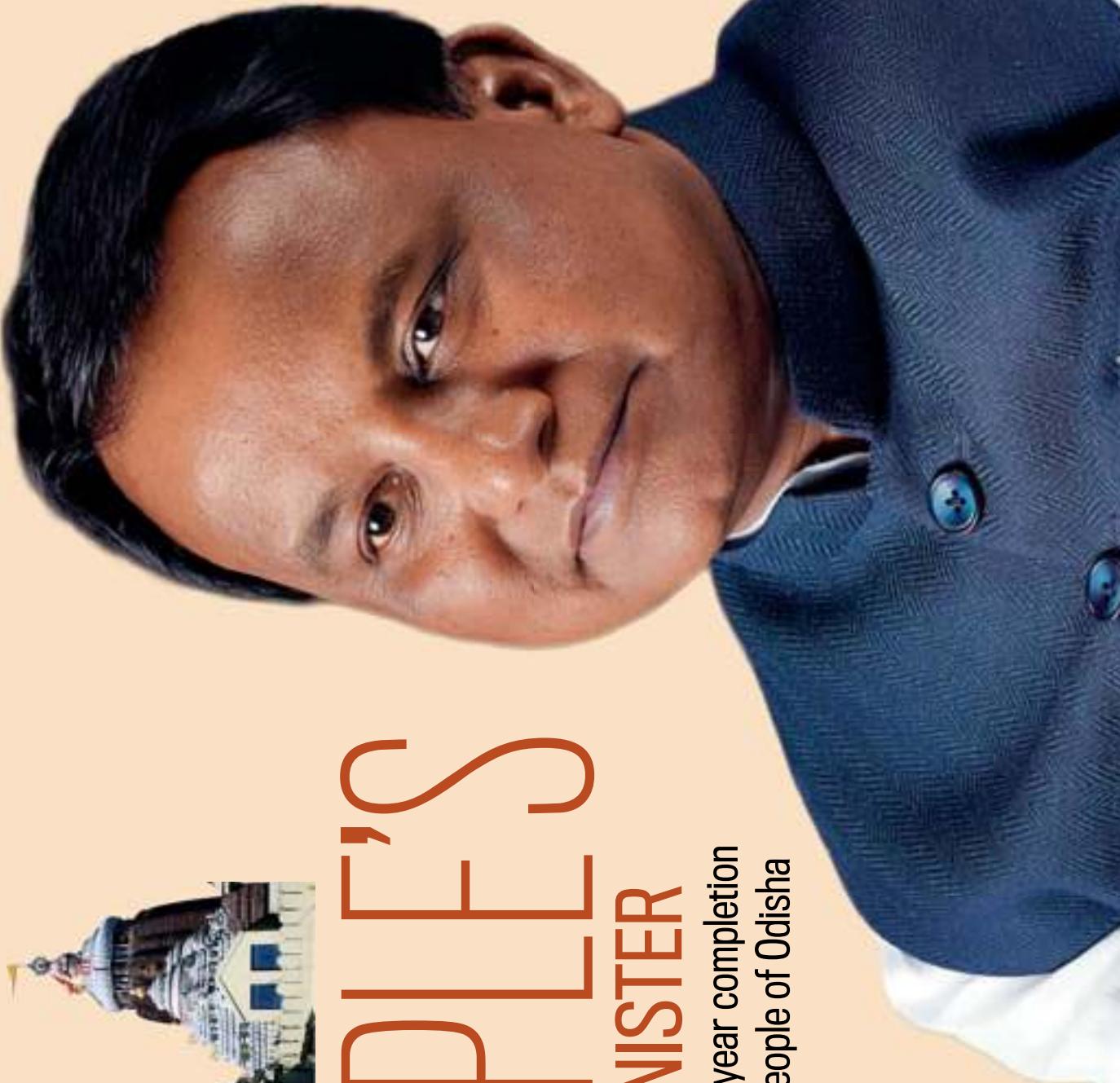
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14

## MONSOON SPECIAL

Be it products inspired by the season, balcony decor ideas or a special style file, your design guide for when's it's hot and humid outside



8

## LAUNCHES

## RETAIL THERAPY

Ritu Beri gives new life to a 200-year-old Portuguese villa in Goa

34



VOL. 20 NUMBER 6: JUNE 2025

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10  
GADGETS

## MARBLE MARVEL

A home in Betul that uses spatial planning, materials and a bit of magic to stand out

38

42  
LAST LOOK

## LAST LOOK

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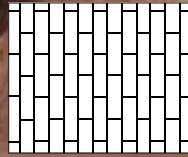
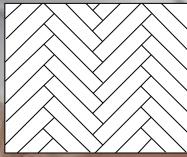
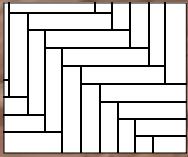
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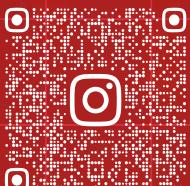


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Launches

# iSpy

Your guide to the hottest new stores and products

By RIDHI KALE



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**New Delhi** - 99 Empire Plaza, Mehrauli-Gurgaon Rd, Sultanpur T. +91 11 26809772

**Bangalore** - Ground Floor, 87, Centrum, Infantry Road, Near Canara Bank T. +91 80 25585577

**Hyderabad** - Plot No 839 / A1, Road No 44, Jubilee Hills, Telangana, Hyderabad – 500033 T. +91 90329 89555

[poltronafrau.com](http://poltronafrau.com)

SOFAS | ARM CHAIRS | BEDS | DINING CHAIRS & TABLES | OFFICE FURNITURE

# BLOW HOT, BLOW COLD

**Is this the air purifier that will change how you look at home purification?**

By CHUMKI BHARADWAJ

**D**elhi's dystopian winters summon Dickensian allegories—cold, damp, smog-shrouded days that seep into even more miserable twilight hours. But summer changes all that; it brings fresher air and sun-drenched days, when it's time to banish heaters and air purifiers to their rightful places in lofts and attics. Unfortunately, this year, while the summer sun has come with its expected quota of heat and dust, dismal AQI levels are still spotlighting the urban malaise. For most cities, especially land-locked ones like Delhi, air purifiers are the post modern, tech-loaded sentries that guard our inner sanctums from the virulent maladies associated with skyrocketing air pollution.

And that's why the Dyson Purifier Hot+Cool (HPO7) is such a marvel of tech and design. Not only does it monitor air quality in real time, but even adjusts its settings automatically for those who prefer the fancies without the fuss. However, if you're one of those control freaks who likes to take charge, there's an entire programme of options that allows you to control everything from the direction of the airflow, swing motion, to the noise, and even the temperature at which it cools (or warms as per seasonal requirements). Yes, it does cool (not enough to make the air-con redundant, but it's a pleasant add-on). Although, in winters, it is much more



effective at warming the room, but beware the electricity costs, which are pretty significant. However, when you keep it on 'auto' or night mode (when the quiet setting and dimmed display kick in), it does improve energy efficiency. The device comes armed with a magnetised remote control that can be placed on top of the machine.

Dyson's advanced filter technology means that it's not just the filter that meets HEPA H13 standards, but the entire machine. It claims to capture H1N1 virus and 99.95 per cent of particles, even as small as 0.1 microns, which includes allergens, bacteria, virus, pollen and mould. The filters are built for longevity and significant pollutant load, but are fairly easy to clean. All in all, it is a nifty device and easy to use, but if you, like the writer of this piece, require a personalised engagement to understand the functions, the wait could be long. The company prefers to send a DIY video link; I insisted on an engineer visit and had to wait for almost three weeks before one was aligned. Was it worth it? Absolutely. Patience is a virtue as is a brand that understands the need to adapt technology to the lowest common denominator; especially tech-agnostics like me.

PRICE ₹66,900; AT [www.dyson.in](http://www.dyson.in)

#### LIVING IT UP

A spectacular celebration of design, dialogue and drive—Duravit brought together visionaries and creators for an unforgettable experience. An event that seamlessly blended luxury with legacy in true Duravit style



# Celebrating Design on the Greens

Duravit Elite Circle, Delhi Edition brought together design, community and sports at Jaypee Greens, Greater Noida

#### BUREAU REPORT

## A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE IN BATHROOM DESIGN

With a rich heritage spanning 208 years and a presence in 130 countries, Duravit has established itself as a global leader in bathroom solutions, collaborating with world-renowned architects and designers. The German brand specialises in manufacturing sanitary ceramics, bathroom furniture, bathtubs, shower trays, wellness systems, shower-toilets, faucets, accessories and installation systems. As a premium bathroom brand, Duravit has made a significant impact globally, with a strong presence in luxury hotels and premium residential projects across India.

**O**n May 10, leading architects and designers from the capital came together for an exclusive event that seamlessly blended networking, learning and leisure in a setting that embodied refinement and relaxation.

#### Golf with Elegance

The event kicked off with a warm welcome and elegant interactions as architects arrived and mingled over refreshments, exchanging ideas. The setting sun cast a golden hue across the greens, creating the perfect atmosphere for a meaningful, memorable experience. The highlight was a curated Golf Clinic led by seasoned instructors.

#### The Future of Bathrooms

Duravit India shared an inspiring perspective on the brand's vision, reaffirming its commitment to sustainable innovation, premium design, and creating bathroom solutions that truly “Upgrade Your Everyday”.



#### Dinner, Dialogue and Deeper Connections

The evening culminated in a curated dinner under the stars—an ideal close to a day filled with design inspiration, personal exchange, and shared purpose. Conversations flowed easily, and the spirit of connection lingered well into the night.

The Delhi edition marks another proud milestone in the journey of the Duravit Elite Circle—an ongoing series of exclusive events crafted for India's design and architecture leaders.

Tripod, a sculptural object, is a nod to the spartan kitchens in a Kutchi home (inset); Thumb from the Kutch Collection references geology, landscape and kitchen tools from the region (below)

# Creative Coupling

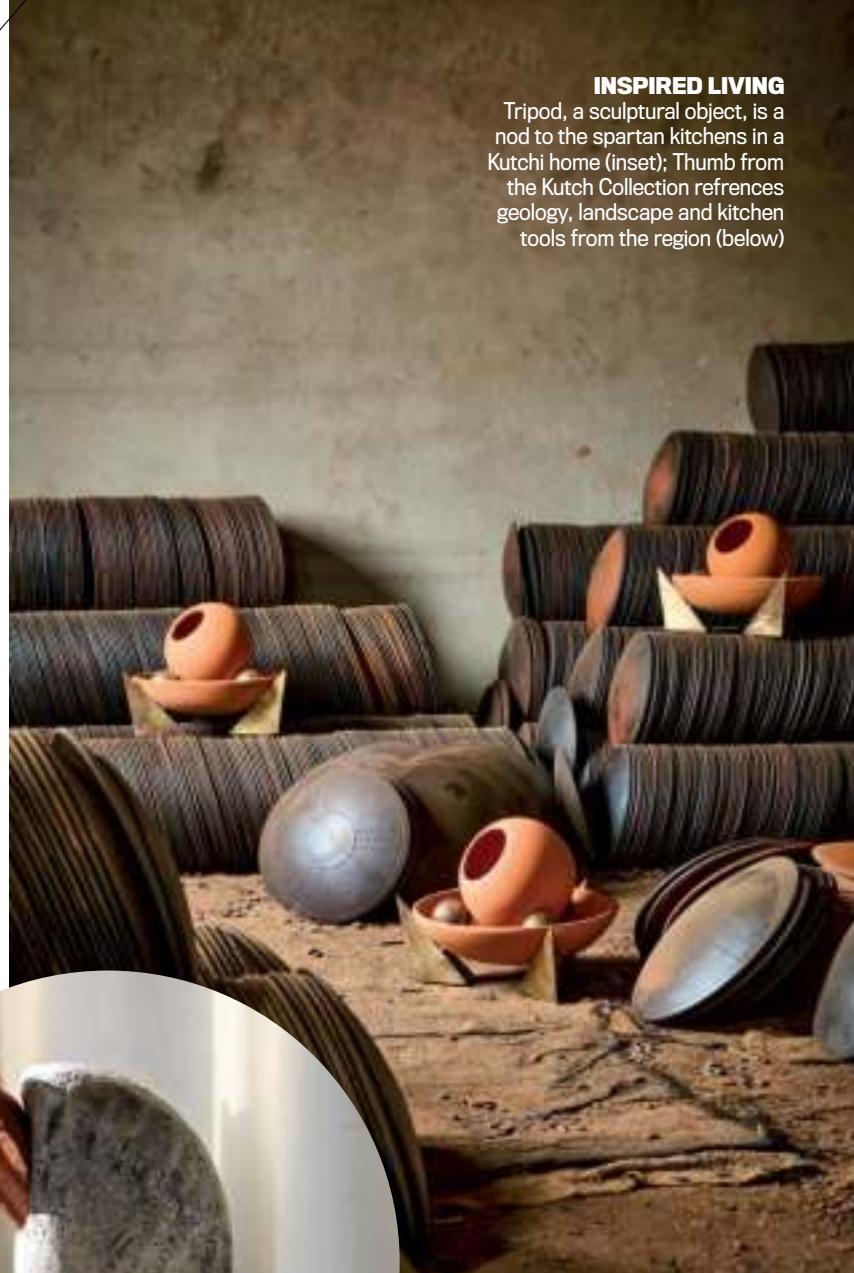
**What happens when a stylist and his craft-loving client team up? Heritage and artisanal pieces find a new meaning and home**

By RIDHI KALE

Interior stylist Samir Wadekar's career feels less like a straight line and more like a brilliantly improvised dance of serendipity. What started as a 'why not?' internship at a top interiors magazine soon blossomed into a full-time styling gig—and then into something even bigger. When client Gunjan Gupta challenged him to outfit her Gandhidham home using only Indian antiques and homegrown brands, the two discovered a mutual passion for regional crafts—and Amrai was born.

"Amrai—literally 'mango orchard'—captures our vision of a flourishing ecosystem where creativity, tradition and community bear fruit together," explains Wadekar. An orchard isn't just a collection of trees; it's a living network that offers shade, sustenance and endless inspiration. In the same spirit, Amrai brings artisans, designers and art lovers under one canopy, each one adding a unique flavour to the collective harvest.

Years after that first home makeover, Gupta returned with a fresh brief: "Design a collection for me." Wadekar turned to her home turf—Kutch—for



inspiration. Its vibrant hues, storied landscapes and masterful crafts became the blueprint for Amrai's debut series: six sculptural statement pieces that echo Kutch's terrain and tales.

Alongside these sculptural artworks, Amrai curates vintage textiles, garments and silver jewellery—each item unearthed from the heart of Kutch's bazaars. "We share an unabashed love for India's craft heritage and the countless narratives woven into every piece," says Wadekar. This capsule collection is both homage and handshake to Kutch's rich artistry.

Pottery pieces start at ₹13,000 and go up to ₹20,000; vintage treasures are priced on request, reflecting their one-of-a-kind nature. AT [www.amraiindia.com](http://www.amraiindia.com)

# Design Report

An analysis of what's new in the industry

BUREAU REPORT



## Looks Hues Here

AkzoNobel India's latest Dulux Maestro is a smart move to strengthen collaboration with architects and interior designers. For those not in the know, if there are any, AkzoNobel India is a leading global paints and coatings company and the maker of Dulux paints.

Thoughtfully crafted to the needs of architects and interior designers, Dulux Maestro integrates the best of end-to-end business support with the brand's global insights into colour, visualisation and personalisation. From site inspections, on-site sampling, expert colour consultancy to advanced digital visualisation with Dulux Colour Plug-in with over 2,000 shades—it is designed to empower professionals at every stage.

With over 2,000 architects and interior designers already on board, it is live in 16 cities across five states and one Union Territory in phase one; there are plans of expansion to over 40 cities across all regions by the end of 2025. AT [www.dulux.in](http://www.dulux.in)

## BATH AND BEYOND

There's a good reason why the WC is fondly called the throne. It's not only functional, but adds to the overall aesthetic value of the bathroom. The good news is that today we are a far cry from the hole in the ground; WCs are smarter, sleeker, and far more stylish than ever before. Leading the pack is a new launch from Hansgrohe India, LavaPura Element S. The LavaPura Element S series of e-toilets come with eSanitize ion sterilisation (electrolysed water technology cleans and sterilises inner walls and nozzles), UV sterilisation, hygiene effect pure shield® technology (using materials with antibacterial factors), and OdorFresh, water-based odour neutralisation. There's also AquaHelix 360° vortex flush, a silent flush system that ensures thorough coverage and AquaWash multi comfort wash that has multiple wash modes including bidet wash, feminine wash, massage wash, and moving wash.

Apart from the stand-out features, the comprehensive design aesthetics also consist of IPX4 waterproof remote control, sensing night light, automatic flush and opening and closing covers, multi stage seat-heating, and SmartClean glazed surface that is easy to clean.

AT @hansgrohe (Instagram)



# cover story

## Home



Shimona Bhansali, chief designer  
and founder of Mumbai-based  
studio, DesignHex  
[www.designhex.in](http://www.designhex.in)

**Name of Project**

The Llofft

**Name of Design Firm**

DesignHex

**Location**

Prabhadevi, Mumbai

**Area**

5,000 sq ft

**Principal Designer**

Shimona Bhansali



# COLOURFUL, CHEEKY AND CHARMING

**With hues that complement and design that's smart, monsoon struts with a confident flair in this cheery apartment in Mumbai**

By SHIMONA BHANSALI



Photographs by WABI SABI STUDIO

**P**erched on the 21st floor and packing the personality of a rooftop soirée, Lloffit is not your average duplex—it's an architectural wink with high design and higher ambitions. A playful twist on “loft”, this home is equal parts sanctuary and stage, designed for a mother and her two kids who wanted serenity with a side of sass.

Upstairs, it's all about calm charisma. The master suite whispers luxury in off-whites and earthy textures, crowned by a sculptural, petal-shaped headboard and flanked by porcelain art pieces. Sunlight waltzes across the room through the day, creating a live light show no projector could match. Even the guest and parents' rooms hum with understated elegance.

The living and dining areas are wrapped in a moody teal that shifts with the light—chameleon chic, if you will. City views stretch endlessly through full-height glazing, while a sleek bar tucked into the layout adds just the right splash of indulgence.

Downstairs? That's where the party lives. Designed as a personality playground for the children, every space brims with attitude. The son's room is a bachelor pad in the making—warm wood, a tan bed, and a cheeky neon sign. The daughter's room flirts with dusky pinks, fluted walls, and a sculptural reading nook that doubles as an Instagram backdrop. It is a

## FUN AND FUNCTIONAL

The living room at the lower level has a red sofa, a striking work by Tanvi Kulshreshtha, and a contemporary KAWS sculpture





#### ROOM BY ROOM

(clockwise from far left) Curved walls add to the drama in the bar; the master suite; a special retreat for the parents who visit the couple often; a dedicated yoga room

sophisticated yet whimsical escape, enveloped in nuanced pinks that straddle delicacy and depth. A custom headboard seamlessly extends into fluted wall panelling, crafting a visual rhythm that anchors the space.

At the centre of the lower level, a bold red sofa takes charge like the lead in a fashion spread, backed by art from Tanvi Kulshreshtha and a KAWS sculpture that cheekily questions what “home decor” even means.

A cosy, second kitchen hides downstairs too—perfect for midnight snacks or spontaneous soirees. Binding the two halves is a staircase that turns necessity into drama. Here, architectural ingenuity meets spatial constraint—the low ceiling heights, a potential design limitation, are resolved with masterful sleight of hand.

A double-height window drenches it in light, while clever ceiling drops play tricks with your perception, turning a corridor into a moment. The challenge of varying ceiling heights is addressed through a series of meticulously calibrated drops—some as subtle as three inches—conceived as sculpted interventions that enhance spatial perception. The result is a staircase that unfolds to heighten anticipation and seamlessly bind the home’s dual personalities.

Clearly, Lloffit isn’t just a home—it’s a living art piece with a wild side. It doesn’t just hold life; it performs it, one curated corner at a time. The best part? It offers plenty of summer-ready ideas to steal.



# OUTSIDE INTERESTS

Is there a way to enjoy the great outdoors during the downpour? Turns out the answer lies in beautifully designed balconies

By KUSHAGRA TYAGI



*Kushagra Tyagi is the founder and principal designer at Purru Home, a boutique design studio that fuses landscaping, interior design, styling, and storytelling. [www.puruhome.in](http://www.puruhome.in)*



## EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(clockwise from far left)  
A 120 sq ft compact balcony in Baner, Pune; textures add drama in this 250 sq ft outdoor space in NIBM, Pune; colours pop in this terrace spanning 1,100 sq ft in Kothrud, Pune

Photographs by EKANSH CHAURASIA

In an age defined by urgency, the luxury of pause is no longer optional—it's essential. While we often chase calm in distant destinations, serenity can begin much closer to home. Imagine your own private retreat, cradled in the clouds, where time slows down and the city hum fades. Your balcony or terrace isn't just an architectural afterthought—it's your most intimate space in the sky.

A well-conceived balcony balances openness with seclusion, sky views with grounded comfort. Whether you're basking in the golden morning light over a quiet cup of tea or gathering friends for an al fresco sundowner, this small pocket of space can become a deeply transformative everyday experience.

**Design with Purpose** Intentionality is the cornerstone of an elevated balcony. It's not just about making it look good—it's about making it feel like you.

**Compact Seating** For modest spaces, built-in benches, stackable chairs, or earthy floor seating like *gaddas* and poufs create comfort without crowding. Think cosy nooks with fluid movement.

**Vertical Greenery** When floor space is scarce, look skyward. Creeping vines, herb ladders and modular planters sculpt blank walls into verdant, living art—low-maintenance yet immensely soothing.

**Layered Lighting** As day slips into dusk, lighting sets the mood. Lanterns, fairy lights and warm LED accents soften the space, creating a cocoon of calm perfect for evening reflection.

**Textural Warmth** Rugs, cane swings, oversized cushions and playful textiles add soul to the structure—each layer inviting you to linger a little longer.

**Meaningful Details** Curate your story with traditional wall plates, terracotta sculptures or handcrafted mirrors. These are more than objects; they are extensions of you.

Don't think of this as just outdoor decor, it's about a shift in mindset, a cool refuge in monsoons. After all, with just a few blooms such as hibiscus or bougainvillea, the space can brim with life and rhythm.

# RAINING IDEAS

From furniture to furnishings, we take a look at decor that's perfect for the season

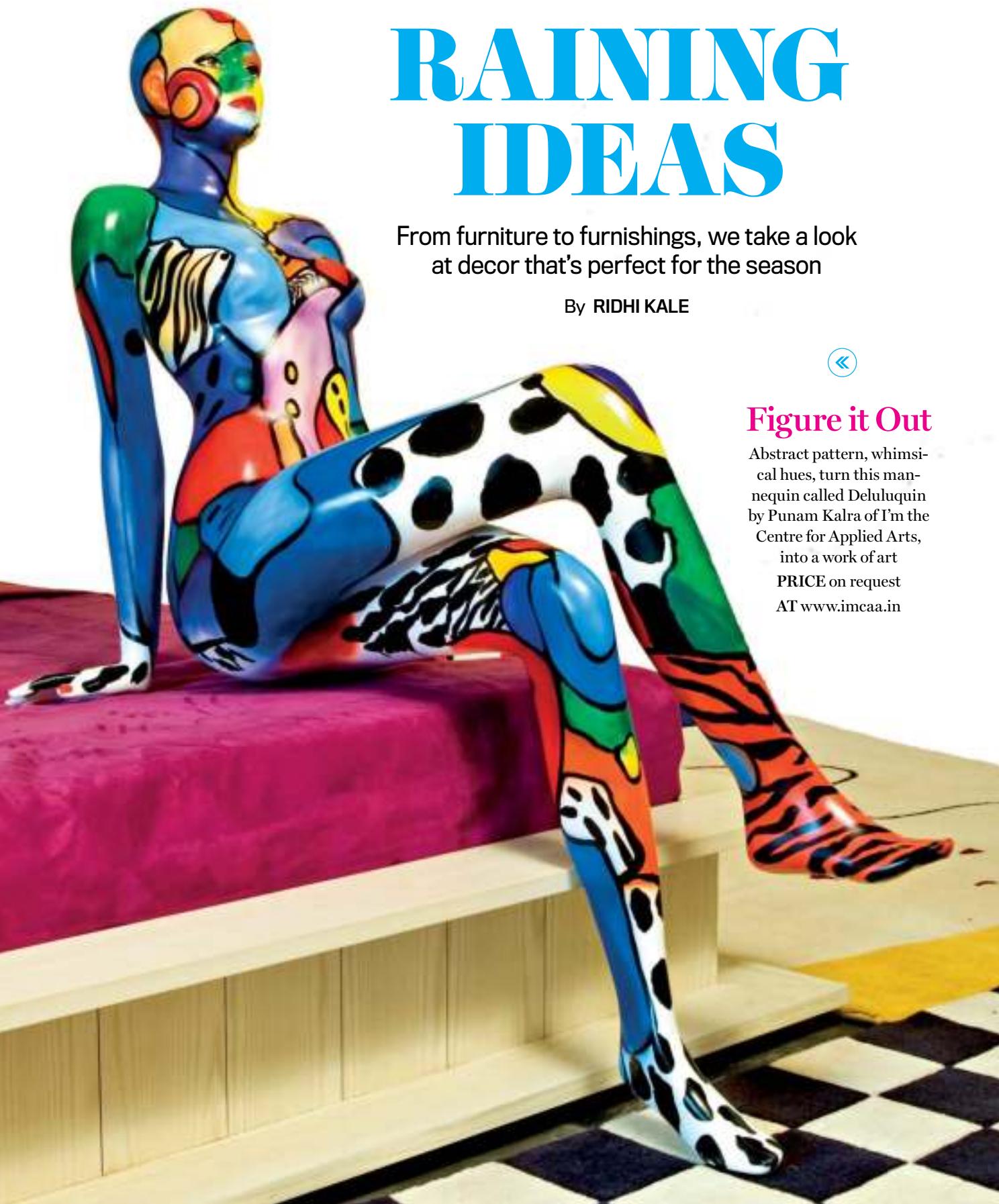
By RIDHI KALE



## Figure it Out

Abstract pattern, whimsical hues, turn this mannequin called Deluluquin by Punam Kalra of I'm the Centre for Applied Arts, into a work of art

PRICE on request  
AT [www.imcaa.in](http://www.imcaa.in)



## Quirk Works

Meticulous craftsmanship is synonymous with a Bitossi Ceramiche piece. The Karim Rashid Collection is no different. High quality ceramics, available at Opulin, add a touch of fun and fantasy indoors

PRICE on request

AT [www.opulin.com](http://www.opulin.com)



## Get Your Snooze On

Humble cotton gets a chic makeover with the Tree Full of Parrots quilt by VIYA. While the motif is a symbol of success, intricate embroidery sets the range apart

PRICE ₹9,500 (single quilt)

AT [www.viyadesign.com](http://www.viyadesign.com)



## Bright Beauty

Art marries functionality with The Picasso Jar from Aura, available at Maison by Nirmals. True to its name, it's inspired by abstract forms and Cubist influences

PRICE on request

AT [www.nirmals.com](http://www.nirmals.com)



## Blow Your Horn

Blue Pottery ceramic garden shell from Swadeshi has been sculpted by skilled artisans from Rajasthan

PRICE ₹21,990

AT [@swadeshi\\_online \(Instagram\)](https://www.instagram.com/swadeshi_online)



## Sofa So Good

The Mood for Summer collection by Sarita Handa embraces Indian Summer, lush greens, and sun-baked oranges, ocean blues and deep corals. It features crisp linen and cotton, dori embroidery, and bouclé stitches

PRICE on request AT [www.saritahanda.com](http://www.saritahanda.com)



## Eat Your Cake

Elevate your dessert presentation this season with cake stands from vVyom by Shuchiita. Crafted from durable aluminium, it features signature prints from the brand

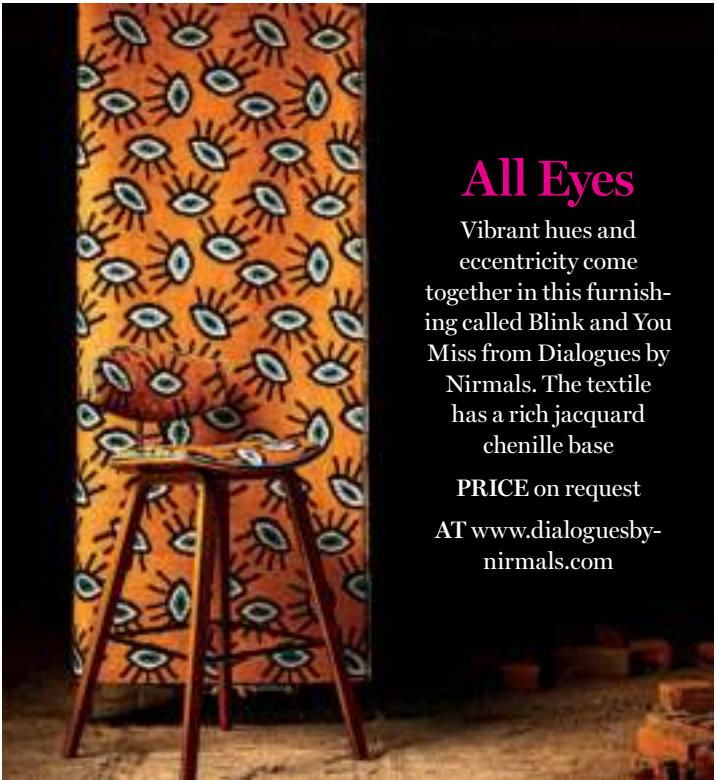
PRICE on request  
AT [www.vvyom.com](http://www.vvyom.com)



## Bowled Over

This one from Lotus Arts de Vivre is a hand carved and hand layered cinnabar lacquer cloud bowl with sterling silver and carved shell lotus flowers, leaves and stems. Collaborating with traditional lacquer artists from China, each piece takes eight months to complete

PRICE on request  
AT [www.ladv.com](http://www.ladv.com)



## All Eyes

Vibrant hues and eccentricity come together in this furnishing called Blink and You Miss from Dialogues by Nirmals. The textile has a rich jacquard chenille base

PRICE on request

AT [www.dialoguesbynirmals.com](http://www.dialoguesbynirmals.com)



## Furniture Fiesta

The art of marquetry, a centuries-old technique that involves intricate cutting of natural pieces of wood and inlaying to create beautiful patterns, forms the basis of the Padma Console from Intent Made

PRICE ₹1.85 lakh; AT [www.intentmade.in](http://www.intentmade.in)



## Swing into Action

With an Art Deco-inspired design, this double-sided swing from Design ni Dukaan, is a masterpiece. It is crafted from solid teak wood and adorned with rare porcelain tiles. PRICE on request

AT [www.designnidukaan.com](http://www.designnidukaan.com)



## And So to Bed

Nancy is a low-foot end, iron bed frame that combines the durability of metal with the comfort of upholstery.

Crafted using thick gauge iron tubing, the frame is welded and cast using traditional techniques

PRICE ₹26,799; AT [www.obc-uk.net](http://www.obc-uk.net)

# FABRIC OF LIFE

**With vibrant textiles as the backdrop, four people from different walks of life share their vision and insights**

By RIDHI KALE

Like fashion, interiors too need a seasonal refresh. The quickest way to give it a makeover is through furnishings. This summer we went to Drapesy, a premium one-stop destination for bespoke curtains, premium window blinds, exquisite wallcoverings from Belgium, and exceptional upholstery fabrics that embody 'globally local' elegance. Co-founders Rahul and Charu Anand walked us through their latest summer offerings that became the basis of our 'summer fun' photo shoot.

Photographs by HARDIK CHHABRA





## The Royal Treatment

"Chilled mangoes and cold salads sum up summer for me," says Princess Chandni Kumari, who is also a well known philanthropist. As for summer fabrics, her go-to remains organic cotton in off white, coral and pastels.

The princess strikes a pose against a Moooi Kissing Booth wallcovering with pops of red that complement her cream and gold outfit from her label. An ombre panel blind, customised embroidered cushions mirroring the wall, custom red-and-white toffee cushion and boucle upholstery pouf complete the look.

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All products are from Drapesy  
[www.drapesy.com](http://www.drapesy.com)



### A Gourmet's Delight

"Summer is a burst of energy, full of life and food," says Chef Nishant Choubey. For him, this season also equates with cottons, lighter fabrics, selected silks and a dash of chanderi.

Chef Choubey has been photographed against a special eco-friendly wallcovering made using real mulberry tree bark bordered by another wallcovering crafted from raffia palm leaves. The light hues lend themselves well to summers. Adding a dash of colour and texture are the fur chenille upholstery fabric and a soft rug.





## Drama in Design

For Aparna Kakrania, founder, Design Dimensions and Beyond

Beyond Skincare, mango represents summer in the most delicious way possible. "Linen, cottons and mulmuls in pastels and light colours work well for summer, but if you really want to stand out, contrast black and white," she says.

Dressed in summer hues, Kakrania sits on a red-orange chair against beautifully crafted, custom Drapesy curtains with an embroidered border. The light summer rug takes its colour cues from the cushion covers.



## Bottom's Up

For Prerna Sangal, head of marketing, Simba Beer and ZigZag Vodka, summer is best described as a beach holiday. "A cold beer, linen and cotton fabrics in yellows and pastels work best," shares Sangal.

Sangal sits on a cool white, textured fabric sofa with pops of gold (via the custom-made cushions) for drama. Layered Drapesy curtains, in solid grey, and embroidered floral motifs, add depth to the space while ensuring that they block the harsh summer sun.



# WHEN TWO DON'T TANGO

A look at the most unpalatable,  
jarring and overpowering  
colour pairings you should avoid  
when it's hot and humid

By SHELLY ANAND

Why do two colours, put one next to the other, sing? There could be many answers to Spanish painter, sculptor and ceramicist Pablo Picasso's enquiry. But while two colours can create harmony, put together in the wrong season, they can also trigger dissonance.

Well, that's exactly how it works for our homes and interiors, especially during summer. Colours don't just add a pleasant quality to design, but reinforce it, and give rise to sensations which influence our conception of space. Here are four colour pairings that should as a rule be not introduced inside your home during the sweltering season.



AI-generated images by SALONI VAID

## BLACK AND BROWN A FAUX PAS TO AVOID



## RED AND PURPLE HEAVY ON THE EYES



### Dull and depressing

Red might be the colour of love and romance, but when teamed with purple, it does just the opposite; it ends up giving the space a depressive vibe. Both being very strong colours, chances are high that when paired together during summer, they will end up being more an eyesore than eye candy. Imagine how would you feel sitting on a deep purple upholstered high back chair in your living room accessorised with a huge red chandelier touching the floor.

Do we need to say anymore?

### Dark and uninviting

If mixing black and brown is seen as a fashion faux pas when it comes to our clothes and accessories, the same rule stands for our interiors as well. Imagine coming home to a bedroom where black and brown is a dominant colour scheme. Both being high contrast, dark shades, there is no way you would be able to rest and rejuvenate in such a heavy, oppressive colour set-up. The two shades together are clashing and not complementary in nature and make the space feel smaller and less inviting.

## NEON AND NEON OVERSTIMULATION OF THE SENSES



**c**over story  
Colour

### Too bright isn't right

Did you know that bright and fluorescent or neon hues can lead to a sense of visual chaos, draining out your energy levels. Picture yourself sitting in your den with your favourite book, but where neon pink and neon green is the colour scheme on the wall, furniture and accents. The room will just overstimulate your senses, make your body temperature rise, and leave you anything but relaxed. The same would be the case with a corner in your living area just in case you got carried away and ended up buying a neon pink upholstered couch and decided to put it against a fluorescent yellow wall.

## YELLOW AND ORANGE TOO HOT TO HANDLE

### A tragic mix

Unless you are someone who thinks bold and bright is better—and that you can pair yellow and orange in your study—well think again. An area where you would need to focus and concentrate a lot, mental clarity is most important. Yellow and orange being warm colours, instead of creating a cool and creative environment, will overstimulate your senses and leave you overwhelmed. It's, therefore, a strict no-no to paint the walls in your study in yellow and orange.



INDIA  
TODAY

# BREAKING NEWS

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# A HOUSE OF MEMORIES

**The heritage Diwans Bungalow in Ahmedabad oozes history and character in equal measure**

By AMIT DIXIT

The veteran architect I.M. Kadri, now in his 90s—who has designed iconic projects like the Nehru Centre in Mumbai and the Taj Mahal and Taj Palace hotels in Delhi—has fond memories of growing up in Diwans Bungalow, his ancestral home in Saiyad Wadu in Ahmedabad's Old City. The charming bungalow, painted in resplendent white, marries traditional Indian architecture with colonial elements, and was built in 1875 by his great-grandfather Sayad Bavamiyan Kadri, the Diwan of the princely state of Radhanpur.

The most striking feature of the stately home are two exquisitely carved wooden oriel windows which overlook the busy street in front. Lined with plush cushions, you can spend all day lounging here and watch the world go by. Inside is an island of calm, punctuated with fine jaalis, sharp arches and meticulous stucco work. The original stained glass has been carefully preserved. The central wing, Kadri recalls, was built in 1936 to accommodate a growing family and was designed by British architect Claude Batley.

Vintage family photographs adorn the walls, with bedrooms named after various family members. The centrepiece of the dining room is a chandelier from Belgium, once lit with candles. Behind the well-appointed



## OLD-WORLD CHARM

With visitors that included Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Diwans Bungalow, architect I.M. Kadri's ancestral home, is now a mix of the old and new



living room is a verandah overlooking a small but lush garden. It has a swing typical of Gujarati homes. Kadri's mother used to be parked on the swing for most of the day, and ran her household from there. The vernacular layout has now been transformed to create a home with independent suites. And, of course, mod cons have been added.

Kadri's father was associated with the freedom movement and, over the years, Diwans Bungalow has hosted several dignitaries. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a regular. Mahatma Gandhi rested here before setting out in a historic procession to set up the Sabarmati Ashram across the river. *Farshi baithaks* (floor meetings) were conducted in the large living room. Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Frontier Gandhi) always preferred staying here because he could get non-vegetarian fare. The family retainer still rustles up a mean *khatta gosht*.

Today, this well-loved home is a boutique stay managed by jüSTA Hotels, so you, too, can experience the charmed life through the prism of heritage.



Photographs courtesy ESCAPE



# SLICE OF HISTORY



When a 200-year-old  
Portuguese villa in Goa blends  
fashion, art, decor, music and  
culture seamlessly

By RITU BERI



We chose this 200-year-old Portuguese villa for Escape because it's more than just a building—it's a living piece of history. The villa's soul, with its old-world charm, arches and natural light, sets the perfect tone for storytelling through design. It allows us to offer an immersive experience that goes beyond retail—inviting visitors to step into a space where time slows down and creativity flourishes.

### Architectural Delight

This villa embodies the confluence of Indian and Portuguese architecture—arched doorways, high ceilings, carved wood, hand-laid tiles—all preserved with great care. It holds layers of memory and craftsmanship that reflect Goa's cultural richness. Its heritage reminds us of a slower, more intentional way of living, which resonates deeply with our design philosophy.

### Decoding The Layout

The store is thoughtfully divided into curated zones—where each room has its own tale to share. One opens into a fashion and textiles showcase, another into a home and lifestyle corner. There's a central salon space that feels more like a lounge than a retail area, perfect for personal styling or slow browsing. We've retained the laterite walls, old beams and window details to keep the feel and soul of the villa intact.



### Retail Therapy

At Escape, we're retailing a mix of handcrafted fashion, artisanal home decor and collectibles, all with a strong emphasis on craftsmanship and cultural storytelling. Many pieces are inspired by traditional techniques; think hand-block printing, heritage weaves, repurposed antique textiles, and design motifs drawn from local art and architecture. This has been achieved by working closely with artisans to reinterpret these traditions in a contemporary form.

The pricing is the result of thoughtful consideration. The price ranges from ₹1,500 for handcrafted accessories and lifestyle products and goes up to ₹75,000 for limited-edition fashion or statement home pieces. It's a wide spectrum, intentionally so both collectors and curious wanderers can find something special to take home.



*Ritu Beri is a globally celebrated Indian fashion designer, known for her innovative designs  
[www.rituberi.com](http://www.rituberi.com)*

### DRAW A DISTINCTION

The bold red-and-white exterior, Ritu Beri's favourite colour combination, sets the tone for the boutique, which features a palette of striking hues, edgy art and playful details



►

*Sharon Nathani is a working professional who loves to clean and whose Instagram handle doubles up as a handbook for keeping things spic and span  
@thatangloindiansindh*

# A CLEAN SWEEP

**Want to make your home sparkle? Then follow these expert-backed tips and tricks**

By SHARON NATHANI

**C**leaning is a monotonous chore, but one can make it enjoyable. I put on my favourite playlist and hum along while cleaning. Plus, all that exercise makes up for not going to the gym.

But enough about me. Let's talk about seasonal deep cleaning. Trust me, it's worth it. By breaking down tasks room-wise and season-wise, you'll be amazed at how organised and clutter-free your home can become.

In spring, declutter and refresh your bedrooms—swap the heavy winter quilts with the lighter Jaipuri sheets or dohars. In summer, service the air conditioners, change the curtains to lightweight fabrics and pastel

shades, get the freezer ready for all the ice-creams you will need to stock.

In autumn, as the weather cools, prepare for cosy indoor living. Deep clean carpets, flip the mattresses, clean the fans so the dirt on the edges doesn't show up when they are not in motion and deep clean the oven. Since indoor time increases in winter, pay more attention to sanitisation. Disinfect high-touch surfaces, check the heating systems. Get the warm clothes and quilts out and, above all, make space for all the unnecessary holiday decorations that you're going to buy.

As for the cleaning, I use a lot of eco-friendly natural cleaning alternatives for sustainable living and an almost chemical-free home. Baking

soda, vinegar, salt, lemons are some of my favourite cleansing agents. The two things I use most are lime skins and baking soda.

Lime skins mainly in the kitchen to get grease off dishes and the microwave. You can also give them a good boil along with some whole spices to make a natural spray that keeps your home smelling great. Another great ingredient is baking soda to clean drains, wash clothes, especially whites, and to shine up silver.

Here's a pro tip for the kitchen. Boil a cup of water, add in a ball of aluminium foil, a tablespoon of baking soda and place the silverware. They will shine like new when you take them out. Happy cleaning.



# SMALL WONDER

We found a brand that is all about casting a spell of love, comfort and aesthetics

By SALONI VAID

If you are a new parent, your top priority is setting up that room which holds your heart and leads your home—aka the nursery. That's exactly where Abracadabra steps in, a brand dedicated to creating thoughtfully-designed linen and accessories. Tailored for the 0–2 age group, they focus on everyday comfort and style. With over 30 years of experience in the global baby industry, this homegrown brand brings together international standards and handcrafted Indian soul. They not only understand or 'get' babies, they 'get' their parents too. "We don't just follow trends—we reimagine them for Indian homes in ways that are both practical and beautiful," explains Viyom Agrawal, COO Abracadabra.

## BIG ON STYLE

Products from Abracadabra range from cushions, baskets and rugs to nets and bed linen

## Purpose Meets Playfulness

The brand's philosophy is refreshingly simple. Each product is designed in house, allowing the team full control over quality, consistency and the ability to respond quickly to what today's parents actually need. "We stay in tune with modern parenting by blending trend insights with real feedback from our customers," says Agrawal. They realise that nursery decor isn't just about aesthetics, it's about creating a space that's safe—realistic and still charming enough to make you forget the 3am diaper duty.

## Bringing Style to the Changing Table

We like their themed bedding sets, from Bambi & Friends to D for Dino to Lost in Clouds, these charming, coordinated sets turn a plain nursery into a storybook haven. They also have *gadda* sets with mosquito nets that are soft, snug, and a lifesaver during bug season. Swaddles and swaddling sheets, musical mobiles, memory foam pillows and cot bumpers, storage baskets, changing mats, bolsters, quilts, dohars and cotton canopies are a few of their other offerings.



## Custom Call

For those seeking a more personal touch, the brand offers customised nursery solutions, even helping set up the entire space. It's perfect for parents who want more than off-the-shelf baby gear without a luxury price tag (₹349 onwards).

So, whether you're welcoming a newborn or refreshing a toddler's room, Abracadabra turns your vision into a warm, whimsical reality.  
**AT** [www.abracadabrikids.com](http://www.abracadabrikids.com)

*Saloni Vaid is a mum to an active three-year-old. When she is not photo researching, she can be found exploring all things baby*





**SMART  
DESIGN**

(clockwise from below) Marble facade; elevated garden with black-and-white floor, mandir with custom, hand-painted ceramic tiles; guest bedroom

# Bungalow in the Sky

**How a Betul home by Neelesh Chopda Architectur e redefines town living with an elevated garden, marble magic and arches with attitude**

By NEELESH CHOPDA

In the bustling heart of Betul, Madhya Pradesh—where narrow lanes tangle with tradition and the town square still reigns supreme—a 17.6 x 55 metre plot has been turned into a vertical dreamscape. At the request of a third-gen industrialist and social maven, this isn't just a family home. It's an ode to community, a push for progress, and maybe even a cheeky nudge at the town's skyline.

With 3,000 sq m of built-up area, this home is a lesson in stacking space with style. The ground floor doesn't waste a brick—gathering halls flow into offices, a sleek



Photograph by KUBER SHAH



*Architect Neelesh Chopda  
founded Pune-based Neelesh Chopda  
Architecture in 2001. [www.nearch.in](http://www.nearch.in)*

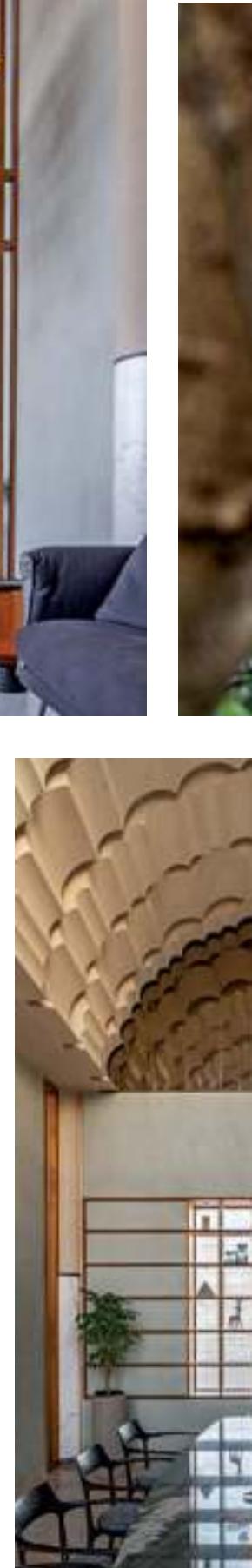
driveway leads to a welcoming lobby, and even the cows and dogs have their corners. Mezzanine levels handle the business end of things, while the first floor takes a bold leap with a triple-height gathering space and guest rooms that whisper, 'stay a while'.

However, it's the second floor that really flips the script—literally. Suspended 12 metres above ground, it's a sprawling garden slab with sunken zones for full-sized trees. A green oasis hovering over Betul. Not your typical backyard setup.

The third floor handles sleep—with bedrooms tucked above the treetops—while the terrace is all leisure: a gym, spa, and snooker table surrounded by chirping birds and city views. From the lift to the lawn-in-the-sky, it's a residential sandwich of luxury, utility and greenery.

From the parking area, a lift ascends to the second-floor garden, where living, dining and family rooms open onto verdant views, dissolving the sense of elevation. A central hallway connects to bedrooms, with guest rooms and services one level below and additional family bedrooms above, forming the core residential triad. The terrace offers a secluded retreat for entertaining, insulated from the town's bustle.

And that facade? It's no wallflower. Clad in local stone, it shifts from grey to pink as you walk past—like mood lighting for buildings. Two arches anchor it: one grand and proud, the other coy and shaded.





## CARVE A NICHE

(clockwise from far left) Stylish living room; tranquil terrace lounge; a sculpted ceiling, marble finishes and bespoke marble table can be found in the dining room; the gathering hall



## FACT FILE

### Project Name

Vortex 21

**Firm** Neelesh Chopda  
Architecture

### Gross Built Area

32,000 sq ft

**Location** Betul,  
Madhya Pradesh

**Lead Architects** Ajit  
Gavhane, Darshan Jana,  
Aishwarya Pandit and  
Purnakshi Jagetia

Above 12 metres, marble panels glow softly with sunlight, filtering warmth and wonder through every room.

The facade system prioritises performance alongside beauty. Early explorations into glass and metal were set aside for marble—a non-porous, sound-insulating, dust-resistant material that diffuses the harsh east-facing light. The bungalow stands tall crossing the skyline of the town, sunlight piercing the bungalow. The marble's natural translucence captures and refracts light, revealing the crystalline textures within and creating a poetic interplay between exterior and interior. Designed as a “floating skin”, the marble facade sits 10 ft away from the structural slab, allowing west light to seep through in the afternoon, resulting in a dynamic and multidimensional elevation.

More than just a house, this is a civic sculpture. It's a symbol of ambition, culture, and the kind of architectural audacity small towns rarely get. It breathes, it glows, and it just might get Betul a pin on the design map.

# BREATHE EASY

This one's twice as nice. Double the benefits and fun with this plant-based air purifier

By RIDHI KALE



## IN THE AIR

Their five-layer filtration process makes the uBreathe Life and Mini series of air purifiers stand out



**T**he goal of mixing and matching is to find the perfect pairing. The uBreathe Life clearly takes this to heart. It merges an air purifier with a planter—because why choose when you can have both? Born from a collaboration between Ugaoo, an urban gardening company, and biotech startup uBreathe, this green machine cleans spaces up to 250 sq ft using patented Breathing Roots tech and a five-layer plant-powered filter. Add in real-time AQI tracking, smart home control, and eco-friendly materials, and you've got the freshest corner in the room—literally.

PRICE ₹24,999 onwards; AT [www.uBreathe.in](http://www.uBreathe.in)

# BalcooN

DESIGN BY  
PATRICIA URQUIOLA



Every layer tells a story

Natural color shades and the layering of materials and textures create a long-lasting, warm aesthetic.



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