

Auto Report: The Next-Gen EVs
ASSAM: BJP'S DEPORTATION DRIVE / HEALTH: ICU AT HOME

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JULY 7, 2025 ₹100



INDIA TODAY

US president Donald Trump, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu (L) and Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R)

ISRAEL-IRAN WAR

UNEASY TRUCE

WHY DONALD TRUMP'S BUNKER-BUSTING STRATEGY WILL NOT DEFUSE NUCLEAR TENSIONS IN THE REGION



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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The world has lurched into a season of war. If there is a redeeming trait, it is that ceasefires are coming, however tenuous they may be. In May this year, India and Pakistan were engaged in a four-day conflict, with an overhang of nuclear threats. The Russia-Ukraine blood feud that began in February 2022 grinds on. However, the real tinderbox is West Asia. After the dastardly terror attacks by Hamas on October 7, 2023, Israel embarked on a scorched-earth policy of eliminating it, the relentless pursuit resulting in more than 56,000 civilian deaths in Gaza and rendering many more homeless. In the past year and a half, Israel also went after the other key players of the so-called Axis of Resistance led by Iran. It faced off with Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen, besides doing its bit to hasten the regime change in Syria.

With Donald Trump returning to power this January, Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu saw it as an opportune moment to attack Iran, the chief challenger to its cherished monopoly of military power in the region. Trump shared Netanyahu's antipathy toward Iran as also his concern that Tehran was just months away from building an atomic weapon. But Trump initially preferred diplomatic negotiation over military action and set a two-month deadline ending June 12 for Iran to agree to dismantle its nuclear infrastructure. When it failed to do so, Israel launched a massive pre-emptive strike on Iran the very next day, on June 13, using fighter jets and drones to target its major nuclear and ballistic missile facilities. Tel Aviv combined it with hybrid warfare, including car bombs and assassinations. In retaliation, Iran put up a live expo of long-range missiles designed specifically to pierce Israel's Iron Dome.

Events took on an ominous momentum when Trump decided the US would join the war and authorised unprecedented bombing of Iran's three main nuclear sites using its B2 stealth aircraft, loaded with the mother of all bombs, the GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrators. Known as bunker busters, these could crack through reinforced concrete up to 60 feet and get at Iran's deeply buried underground nuclear facilities, including the big one at Fordow. In response, Tehran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a vital sea lane through which pass about 20 million barrels of oil and gas a day, a fifth of the daily global consumption. Any disruption would have been disastrous for the world economy. Iran also executed an apparently performative missile strike, causing zero casualties, on a US base in Qatar. This is when Trump, whose actions never cease to surprise, enforced a ceasefire as sudden and unexpected as an ambush. It had all the Trumpian trademarks: dramatic, messy in its crafting, perhaps too fragile to last, yet hugely welcome for all sides. Israel, having dealt body blows to Iran's nuclear programme, especially after the US joined the fray, could claim victory but also felt the heat of Iran's ability to breach the

impregnability of its major cities, including Tel Aviv. Iran, having demonstrated its missile capabilities, had nothing to lose and everything to gain by returning to negotiations.

But there are many reasons why the truce is tenuous. One stated common aim of both the US and Israel was to finish off Iran's nuclear programme. Far from accomplishing it, Trump's claim of "obliteration" is now being viewed with scepticism, especially after mainstream US media carried American intelligence assessments indicating its military strikes did not destroy core components of Iran's nuclear programme or its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. Though Trump dismissed such reports, experts see it as a reason for continued instability: it is only a matter of time before the US and Israel reset their strategies to tame Iran and resume hostilities. Especially because Iran is now unlikely to allow scrutiny of its nuclear facilities, going opaque as North Korea did on its intent to build atomic weapons. Meanwhile, the direct military action by both Israel and the US sets a dangerous precedent for unilateral action, outside the normative boundaries of global peacekeeping. Such unilateralism could see China justifying occupying Taiwan, as Russia did when it invaded Ukraine. It could also encourage weaker nations to develop nuclear weapons to protect themselves against the new 'might-is-right' global order.

India's links to this conflict are both tangential and direct. Diplomatically, just as with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, it cannot easily take sides. Over 40 per cent of its crude oil and natural gas imports come through the chokepoint represented by the Strait of Hormuz. Conflict in West Asia could lead to a surge in oil prices, costing the exchequer significantly more, which would push up inflation and slow India's economic growth just when it needs to accelerate, besides its impact on the diaspora of 9 million or so Indians in the Gulf, who send back home 40 per cent of our \$129 billion global remittances. So, the stakes are high for both India and the world.

Our cover story this week unpacks the global descent into conflict, marked by sporadic peacemaking efforts, and examines how it may unfold in the future. Currently, it's a bizarre situation in which the US, Israel and Iran have all declared victory. America claims to have destroyed Iran's nuclear capability, Israel says it has broken the Axis of Evil, Iran boasts about its attack on US bases and piercing of Israel's famed Iron Dome. But the future of Iran's nuclear programme, the whole purpose of the war, remains opaque. The fate of the region hangs in the balance. Hopefully, better sense will prevail, although it seems a rare commodity in these times of global strife.



▲ Nov. 18, 2024

(Aroon Purie)

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 WILL NOT DEFUSE NUCLEAR TENSIONS IN THE REGION**

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READY FOR AN UPGRADE

A pair of LCA Tejas fighter jets fly in wingman formation



ANI

► DEFENCE

A MAKE IN INDIA SNUB

In a blow to indigenisation, HAL has opted for foreign technology, jettisoning DRDO's radar and Electronic Warfare equipment for the LCA Mk1A jets

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

Operation Sindoor was an emphatic assertion of indigenous military prowess. Yet, a troubling contradiction emerged soon after. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which lies at the heart of India's defence innovation, now finds itself cornered, because Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has opted to instal imported radar and early warning systems in its latest jets, going back on its word to use the DRDO's indigenous Uttam AESA (Active Electronically Scanned Array)

radar and the Swayam Raksha Kavach (SRK) Electronic Warfare (EW) suite. Sources say that HAL has issued a Letter of Intent to Israeli firm ELTA systems regarding the delivery of radars and EW suites. In a similar move in the Rafale Marine fighter jet deal, the Uttam radar was pulled out of the final configuration at the insistence of manufacturer Dassault Aviation despite being part of the original plan.

In 2021, when the Indian Air Force (IAF) ordered 83 LCA Mk1A multirole fighter jets from HAL in a Rs 48,000 crore deal, the latter had committed

to integrating indigenous radar and EW systems for the last 43 aircraft, or from the 41st LCA Mk1A. However, in a volte face, HAL in March 2025 decided to put in radar and EW systems from ELTA, the supplier for the first 40 aircraft, for those final 43 aircraft as well. Though HAL was to start delivering LCA Mk1As from February 2024, not a single aircraft has materialised.

In a fighter jet, radars provide situational awareness by tracking targets and guiding missiles while an EW suite protects it from enemy radar by jamming them or deploying countermeasures. The AESA radar project, called the Uttam (or 'excellent') radar, was initiated in 2008 and sanctioned in 2012. DRDO completed the Transfer of Technology to HAL in July 2023, with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) as a subsystem supplier. The radar was cleared for export that year.

The SRK EW suite—designed to work with the Uttam radar—is being made by DRDO's Combat Aircraft Systems Development & Integration Centre, Bengaluru, and Defence Electronics Research Laboratory, Hyderabad. The EW suite comprises two components: the Radar Warning Receiver (RWR) and the Advanced Self-Protection Jammer (ASPJ) pod.

WHY FOREIGN CHOICE

An HAL official attributed the decision to the delayed certification of the DRDO's radar and EW suite by the Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC). "We have the imported radar as the DRDO radar and EW suite are not certified for production by CEMILAC completely," a key HAL official tells INDIA TODAY. HAL had issued a tender in November 2024 for 43 Uttam radars for the LCA Mk1A, making its U-turn all the more unexpected. A DRDO official acknowledges delays in conducting trials of the EW suite due to the non-availability of suitable test aircraft but claims that CEMILAC had certified the radar for production last year. The official adds that the DRDO had requested HAL for



► An Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar provides situational awareness to a fighter jet by tracking targets, guiding missiles

► The DRDO's Uttam radar uses Transmit/ Receive Modules for faster beam switching, improved tracking, resistance to jamming

► An Electronic Warfare (EW) suite protects aircraft by jamming enemy radar, deploying countermeasures to evade detection/ attack

► The Swayam Raksha Kavach EW suite comprises the Radar Warning Receiver and the Advanced Self-Protection Jammer pod, providing cutting edge tech to the LCA Mk1A

more time and that a final decision was yet to be taken.

DRDO officials point out a viable alternative—integrating the Uttam radar with imported EW systems until the SRK suite receives complete certification. In fact, making HAL's decision even more perplexing, in a recent internal communication to HAL and DRDO in April, CEMILAC stated that the Uttam radar had completed four phases of flight trials. Additionally, the radar hardware had undergone qualification tests according to the LCA Mk1A's requirements. To facilitate the induction of the radar, CEMILAC recommended commencing production of the radar subsystems, with HAL's avionics division in Hyderabad serving as the lead system integrator.

A senior DRDO official suggests that HAL's hesitation may stem from a lack

of confidence in the indigenous system. "It seems it is under pressure to deliver the jets," he tells INDIA TODAY. "If the air force has expressed confidence, the HAL should also be a little patient to adopt an Indian made system. Moreover, by the time HAL reaches at 41 aircraft, the Indian EW suite would be certified," he says. HAL's decision to opt for imported technology, he adds, undermines the efforts towards indigenisation. Ravi Gupta, a former DRDO scientist, states that the DRDO's Electronics and Radar Development Establishment (LRDE) invested years in developing these technologies. "Having complete control over the supply chain and source code of indigenous radar systems is essential for national security, particularly in the event of war, when imported systems may be compromised," he says.

The LRDE co-developed the Uttam AESA radar system with other DRDO labs and partners like BEL. Unlike mechanically scanned radars, Uttam employs electronically controlled antennas, known as Transmit/ Receive Modules (TRMs), which enable faster beam switching and improved target tracking and resistance to jamming.

The Uttam radar has also demonstrated an ability to track up to 50 airborne targets at ranges beyond 100 km and engage four targets simultaneously. The IAF has taken a keen interest in the Uttam radar, and top IAF leadership has praised its performance.

However, a senior DRDO official says that flight trials of the radar and development of the EW suite faced numerous hurdles. Developing cutting-edge systems from scratch with industry partners is a huge challenge. Secondly, DRDO's access to only older Tejas LCA aircraft hindered progress. In contrast, foreign manufacturers were provided with two LCA Mk1A prototypes.

The following weeks will reveal whether HAL's decision will stand, or if the DRDO's painstaking efforts will be honoured. One thing is clear—the IAF, MoD officials and most Indian scientists are standing by the Uttam radar and the SRK EW suite. ■

▼ GLASSHOUSE



REDDY REBUFF

Wispers in the Congress corridors suggest that Telangana CM **A. Revanth Reddy** may be out of favour with the party's de facto boss **Rahul Gandhi**. The chatter grew louder on June 19—Rahul's birthday—when Reddy, despite being in Delhi, failed to secure a courtesy meeting. Meanwhile, colleagues from Telangana, Nagarkurnool MP Mallu Ravi and ex-Union minister Pallam Raju, were clicked wishing Rahul in person. Interestingly, Reddy had met Rahul in Delhi on June 10 (to discuss a Cabinet expansion), as did Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah and his deputy D.K. Shivakumar. Photos of the Kannada partymen were seen on social media, but Reddy's meeting? Not a frame in sight.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ NAME, PLACE, ANIMAL, THING

WILD INSPIRATION

Cricket, wildlife and royalty, they are still a match made in...well, Madhya Pradesh. Nearly every team in the year-old MP Cricket League is named after a wild animal—Gwalior Cheetahs, Jabalpur Royal Lions, Bhopal Leopards...Chambal Gharials. The inspired glossary is the brainchild of league patron and wildlife enthusiast **Mahanaryaman Scindia**, son of Union



Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. Most names reflect MP's native fauna—except the Rewa Jaguars and the bizarre Indore Pink Panthers—while the state's iconic big cat, the tiger, features in the league's logo. And the Bundelkhand Bull? *Gau mata* seems to have trumped what would have been a befitting Bundelkhand Bisons (Gaur), a species abundant in the state.

PROXY WAR

A battle of the babus has spiralled into a turf war in the BJP in Kanpur. After days of public sparring with DM Jitendra Pratap Singh, Chief Medical officer Hari Dutt Nemi was suspended, fuelling a split in the ruling party. Uttar Pradesh speaker Satish Mahana backed Nemi, as others rallied behind the DM and raised red flags with CM **Yogi Adityanath**. Rival Samajwadi Party suggests a deeper rift: between Yogi and deputy CM **Brajesh Pathak**.



Brothers Up in Arms



After feuding uncles, nephews and cousins, it seems to be brother vs brother in Maharashtra. Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) MLA **Nilesh Rane**, elder son of ex-Union minister Narayan Rane, first took umbrage at brother and BJP fisheries minister **Nitesh** for speaking against his party leaders. Now the latter has shared a screenshot of a WhatsApp conversation of Nilesh threatening a local BJP leader in Sindhudurg district. The sibling rivalry is raising eyebrows.

FLAGGING A CONCERN

Kerala's government-governor run-ins never seem to end. On June 19, CPI(M) leader and education minister V. Sivankutty walked out of a Raj Bhavan event, objecting to a prominent Bharat Mata image with a saffron flag. Governor **Rajendra Arlekar's** office called it "a grave insult", while the state government accused the guv of "transforming" the august office "into an RSS shakha (unit)". The war of words has now moved to the streets after senior BJP leader N. Sivarajan's alleged comment that the national tricolour should be replaced with the saffron flag.



TECH WATCH

By Ajay Sukumaran

THE RIGHT ADDRESS

The Department of Posts, on May 27, launched its Digital Postal Index Number (DIGIPIN) platform, which aims to transform India's addressing system

WHAT: Digipin is a unique 10-character alphanumeric code representing the latitude and longitude coordinates of a location. It aims to complement a regular postal address, which is based on locality, street and house number. An open-source, inter-operable addressing system, Digipin was developed by the Department of Posts in collaboration with IIT Hyderabad and the National Remote Sensing Centre, ISRO.

WHY: The aim is to improve delivery accuracy, logistics and service coverage, especially in areas with complex addresses. In rural and peri-urban areas, addresses are often descriptive, using landmarks and proximity references in place of standardised formats. For instance, there are wide variations in the area covered by a Postal Index Number (PIN) code—a system first introduced in 1972—with the average cover being around 170 sq. km per pin code. This translates to a radius of around 7 km. Given the scenario, service providers in areas such as e-commerce and navigation have introduced their own addressing methods,

such as auto-fetching and Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) pins, to facilitate address discovery and delivery. A need for a more structured, machine-readable and user-friendly addressing layer was then recognised. Digipin is seen



as a component of digital public infrastructure for address management, just as UPI is for financial services.

HOW: Each Digipin code represents a 4m x 4m square, enabling a high level of precision for navigation, deliveries and emergency services, especially in areas with unstructured or changing addresses. It also helps in areas where no clear address exists, such as rural regions and forests.

FDI SLIPPAGE WORRY

Net foreign direct investment has been on a slide as MNCs repatriate more earnings. Indian firms too increase their overseas investments, narrowing the gap between inflows and outflows

Text by M.G. ARUN | Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

NET FDI INFLOWS ARE DOWN

Gross FDI*

↑ \$81 bn

(Rs 6.9 lakh cr.)

Up 14% in FY25, from \$71.3 billion
(Rs 6 lakh cr.) in FY24

Net FDI#

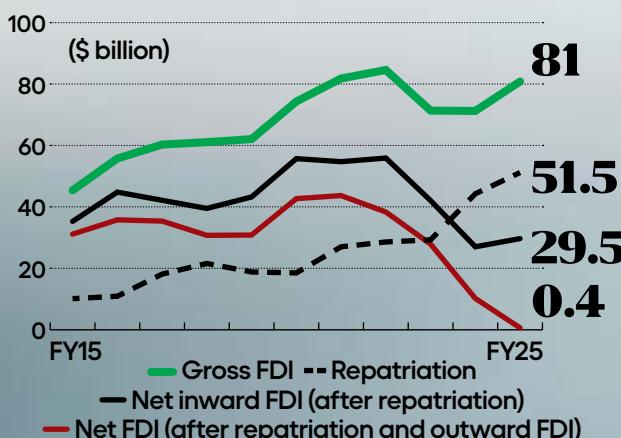
↓ \$0.4 bn

(Rs 3,427 cr.)

Down 96% in FY25, from \$10 billion
(Rs 85,690 cr.) in FY24

***Gross FDI** is the total investment made by foreign entities directly into the productive assets of India

#Net FDI is the difference between gross FDI inflows and outflows, including repatriation and outward FDI by domestic firms



\$29.1 bn (Rs 2.5 lakh cr.)

Outbound FDI by Indian firms in FY25

Source: RBI; all dollar-rupee conversions are based on the exchange rates as of June 24

BEHIND THE NET FDI SLIDE

High repatriation: MNCs take their investments back to their home country after earning returns through the automatic route after a three-year lock-in period, a share buyback and remittance of assets like proceeds from shares and securities

Experts say there is a trading mentality among foreign investors rather than a commitment to long-term capital formation

This “inward orientation” has been prominent especially after the global financial crisis

The multitude of regulations that companies need to comply with in India also make it tough to do business

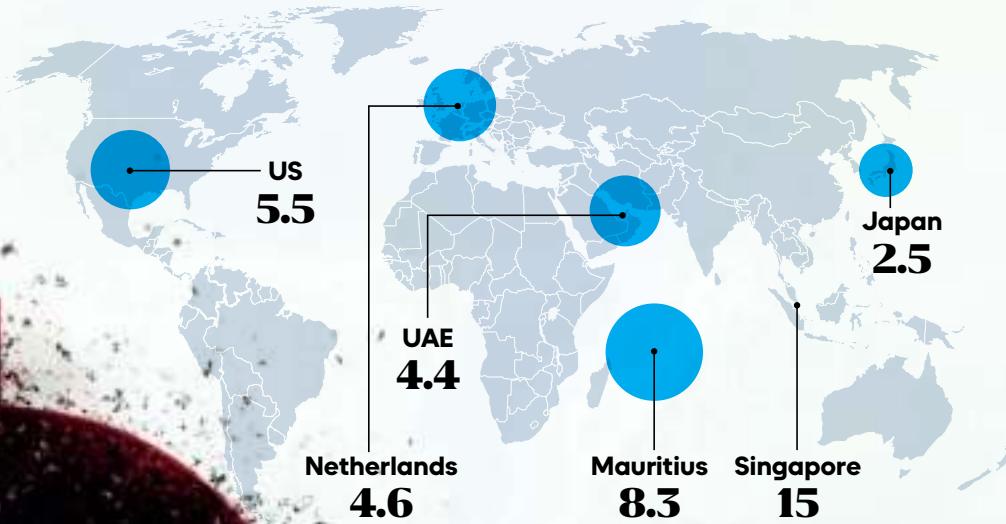
Outward FDI: More Indian companies are expanding and diversifying by investing abroad, aided by the Overseas Direct Investment or ODI guidelines liberalised in 2022

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

India is losing more investment than it is attracting. While some would argue that both higher repatriation and higher overseas investment are signs of a more mature economy, others would want to see a much more favourable investment climate in the country that will encourage more inward FDI

GLOBAL HOTSPOTS

Top countries from where FDI flowed into India in FY25



STAR SECTORS

Manufacturing leads the pack among key sectors that drew foreign investment in FY25

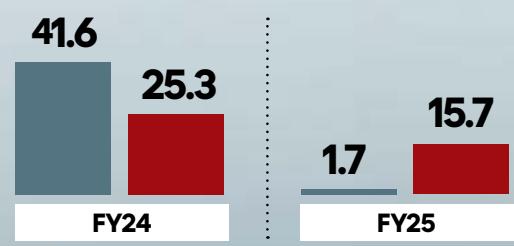
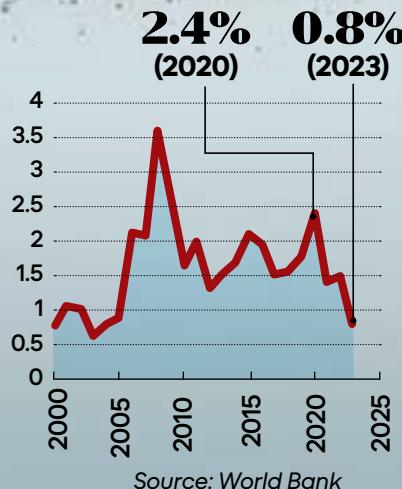


THE FPI PULLBACK

Foreign Institutional Investors or FIIs were net sellers in the equity markets in FY25, driven by geopolitical tensions, high valuations in the Indian markets and weak corporate earnings

NET FDI DROPS AS A SHARE OF GDP

The fall signifies that FDI has not kept pace with the country's economic growth



Net inflows ■ Net outflows

FPI: Foreign Portfolio Investment; figures in \$bn; Source: RBI



BHUTAN'S GELEPHU MINDFULNESS CITY POWERS GROWTH WITH GOODNESS

Buoyed by the success of Gross National Happiness Index, the 'hermit kingdom' is on a makeover mode. Amid an ambitious urban development project that integrates mindfulness, holistic living and sustainability with economic prosperity, the Himalayan nation is pulling out all stops to tap into its enormous hydropower potential to the tune of around 33,000 MW — its primary source of electricity and a major export commodity.

The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is on a road to nirvana. Bhutan, known for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, which measures overall well-being, not just economic growth and a unique approach to development, is planning a "mindfulness city" that, once built, will cover some 2.5 per cent of the country — an area larger than the city state of Singapore and is being modelled on the lines of an autonomous region. Preliminary plans reveal that the 1,000-square-kilometre (km) city will be built near the town of Gelephu, which is situated along Bhutan's southern border with Assam, India's most populous north-eastern state.

"Gelephu Mindfulness City" (GMC), as per the project's masterplan, aims to build an economic hub and gateway for tourists to the rest of the country.

His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is upbeat about the ambitious project, which has caught global attention.

He has said that Bhutan is "not trapped by legacy and can innovate swiftly to implement plans that other countries might hesitate to pursue."

Though Gelephu is one of the key border crossings for Indian travellers, most international visitors fly into Paro International Airport, near Bhutan's largest city and capital, Thimphu, which is spread over 26 square km.

Construction of a new international airport and a dry port in the landlocked country has already started in Gelephu.

The Bhutan government is yet to announce any date of completion for the project.

Significantly, GMC appears to take a leaf out of Saudi Arabia's planned linear city, called The Line, which has created a global buzz about how modern cities look, function and serve the needs of residents.

"We look forward to taking this partnership ahead with Adani and learning from their huge successes across the globe."

Chhewang Rinzin, MD, DGPC

Adani Group's maiden foray into Bhutan

As Bhutan shifts its development gear, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel has been pulling out all stops for a holistic makeover of what is often



"This partnership reflects our deep commitment to developing clean energy infrastructure that enhances regional energy security."

Naresh Telgu, COO (PSP & Hydro), AGEL

(From left to right) Naresh Telgu, COO, PSP and Hydro, Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL); Bhutanese PM Tshering Tobgay and DGPC's MD Chhewang Rinzin after signing of the MoU in Thimphu on May 8.



The officials from the Bhutanese government, DGPC and AGEL after signing of the MoU in Thimphu on May 8.

referred to as the “hermit kingdom”. The King has turned its gaze on the nation’s all-weather friend India’s leading infrastructure company, the Adani Group.

In July 2024, the King and Bhutan’s Prime Minister (PM) Tshering Tobgay visited Adani Green Energy’s 30-gigawatt (GW) renewable energy site at Khavda and Mundra Port in Gujarat.

On that trip, the King and PM Tobgay met Adani Group’s Chairman Gautam Adani in Ahmedabad. The meeting proved to be a gamechanger, leading to a growing trust between the Bhutanese government and the Adani Group.

And 10 months on, a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in Thimphu on May 8. The MoU was signed between Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) and Bhutan’s Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) to jointly develop 5,000 megawatt (MW) of hydro power projects in the South Asian nation.

The MoU was signed in Thimphu by AGEL’s Chief Operating Officer (COO), Pump Storage Projects (PSP) and Hydro, Naresh Telgu and DGPC’s Managing Director (MD) Dasho Chhewang Rinjin. PM Tobgay, Bhutan’s Minister for Energy and Natural Resources, Lyonpo Gem Tshering, and other dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

This MoU builds on the ongoing partnership for the 570 MW peaking run-of-the-river Wangchhu Hydropower Project (HPP). The broader 5,000 MW initiative will encompass additional hydropower and PSPs to be identified over the course of

time. Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) have been prepared and taken forward for implementation in phases.

The Wangchhu HPP can be designed either as a water storage scheme or as a peaking run-of-the-river scheme. According to experts, the former requires a large reservoir that submerges a significant amount of land, impacting nearby forests and residential areas considerably, leading to resettlement and rehabilitation, along with increased project costs. In contrast, peaking run-of-the-river projects require a much smaller pondage area, which reduces land requirements and forest submergence, making them more sustainable and commercially viable, the experts maintain.

Wangchhu HPP is on a fast track

The Adani Group is looking at signing the shareholders’ agreement (SHA) for Wangchhu HPP shortly.

Once the SHA is signed, up to 10 months will be required for pre-development activities, supplementary investigations, design optimization and award of Civil, Electrical and Mechanical (E&M) contracts for this project. Immediately after the award of contract, project construction activities will start, and it is likely to take around 60 months for commissioning and start of operation of the project.

A win-win collaboration

The DGPC, Bhutan’s premier hydropower developer, has decades of experience in managing the nation’s renewable energy resources. It plays a pivotal role in Bhutan’s clean energy journey, contributing to both domestic energy security and sustainable development. Through such partnerships, the DGPC is also helping to strengthen Bhutan’s position in regional energy cooperation.

As part of this collaboration, the Adani Group will ensure reliable power offtake and integration with India’s commercial power markets, further

Hydel haven

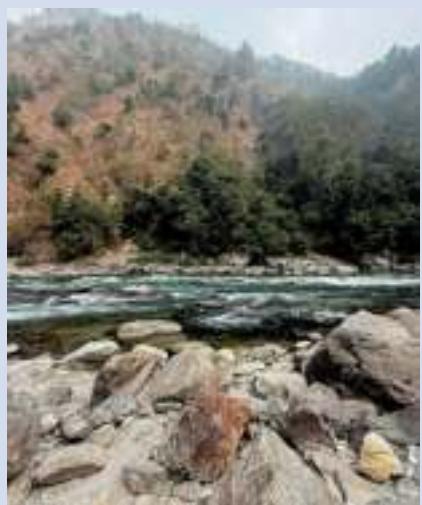
Total technical potential: 37,000 MW

Techno-commercially feasible potential: 33,000 MW

Installed capacity: 2,344 MW, which is around 26% of Delhi’s peak demand of around 9,000 MW this summer.

reinforcing Bhutan’s role in the regional energy trade. The partnership is strongly backed by the Royal Government of Bhutan and the Government of India, underscoring a shared vision for clean energy growth and economic integration.

This initiative also aligns with Bhutan’s renewable energy roadmap, which aims to achieve an additional 20,000 MW of generation capacity by 2040. The roadmap prioritises diversification into solar and geothermal energy and encourages strategic partnerships to attract investment and innovation.



The Wangchhu HPP site, which is located around 130 km from the capital Thimphu.

AGEL’s dream run

May 2022: AGEL’s Hydro and PSP business unit starts operation

May 2022 – June 2025: 4,800 MW PSPs are under construction, including 500 MW in Chitravathi, Andhra Pradesh (AP); 2,019 MW in Gandikota also in AP; and 1,695 MW in Tarali, Maharashtra.

STATE SCAN

ODISHA: DRAGNET IN THE EAST PG 16

TAMIL NADU: IN THE NAME OF MURUGAN PG 18



ANI

► BIHAR

CHIRAG JUMPS INTO FRAY

LJP chief Chirag Paswan declares his intent to contest the Bihar polls, positions himself as possible heir to the NDA leadership in the state

By Amitabh Srivastava

ON JUNE 20, as Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) chief Chirag Paswan shared the stage at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally in Siwan, Nitish, according to Chirag's brother-in-law and party MP Arun Bharti, enquired whether Chirag was contesting the upcoming assembly election. "Chirag," says Bharti, "replied that should the LJP so decide, he'd seek the CM's blessings."

The exchange may appear cordial, but it reflects the unease simmering within the ruling NDA coalition. For, Chirag is no longer concealing his ambition: to establish himself as the natural heir to the NDA leadership, especially in a post-Nitish set-up. A few days earlier, in

Arrah, the 43-year-old leader had proclaimed to rapturous applause, "We will contest from every seat in Bihar...I am leaving it to you to decide from which seat I should contest."

VAULTING AMBITION

Why would Chirag, a Union minister, want to plunge head-first into Bihar polls? Firstly, should the election throw up a hung assembly, Chirag will be well-positioned to stake claim to the CM's post. Secondly, and more plausibly, he's using this momentum to expand the LJP's footprint, to transition from second rung to the top of Bihar's political ladder.

In the mutual jockeying between the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal-United (JD-U) and the BJP, the LJP,

in all its incarnations, has played a supporting role at best. Chirag seems determined to change that. With Nitish's health and political heft apparently waning, he senses a vacuum and the chance to project himself as a leader who blends a solid caste base with the aspirations of a modernising Bihar.

One sign of Chirag's recalibrated ambition is his stated intent to contest from an unre-served constituency rather than a safer Dalit/Paswan stronghold. As a BJP insider puts it, "Chirag wants to grow the LJP beyond a caste party—to one that appeals to the youth and women." The numbers will have to reflect it, of course. In 2020, across the 135 seats the LJP contested, it lost its deposit in 110 and won just one seat. But it did pull in 2.4 million votes, with a notable 10.3 per cent vote share in those seats (5.7 per cent statewide). If one were to whittle down the arenas where the LJP has a big presence, one gets around 25 seats—precisely those the NDA might be willing to concede. But if Chirag does

Takeaways

► **Chirag Paswan to contest assembly poll, may pitch himself as a CM contender**

► **Unlike 2020, he's positioned within NDA, anticipating a post-Nitish political order**

not settle for anything less than 30, and accounting for other allies, the domineering BJP and an ebbing JD(U) will have less than 200 seats to split between them. Easy, then, to see Chirag's utility. With the 5.3 per cent Paswan swing vote spread out, the LJP's disruption had cost Nitish 34 seats in 2020. This time, Chirag sees a larger role for himself: as successor to Nitish. What he possesses in spades is his father's perennial capacity to be the X factor. His decision to tilt, therefore, is timed to perfection. ■

► JAMMU & KASHMIR

A LANGUAGE WAR BREWS

A mandatory Urdu test for J&K revenue department jobs agitates the BJP, which cries language bias

By Kaleem Geelani

JAMMU AND KASHMIR was amongst the first states and Union Territories to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, but had been immune from the furore against the policy's three-language formula and the suspicion that it signified an 'imposition of Hindi'. But it couldn't stave off a political standoff over language for long—a recruitment

notification for 75 Naib-Tehsildar posts on June 9, requiring a mandatory 50-mark Urdu test has spawned a controversy. A knowledge of Urdu is deemed essential for J&K revenue department jobs—it had been the only official language of Kashmir, and the region's centuries-old revenue, land and administrative records are in Urdu. However, the change in J&K's status



from state to Union territory in 2019 also brought key changes to its domicile and land laws—in 2020, the official language list was expanded to five, with Kashmiri, Hindi, Dogri and English becoming part of it. This is the basis on which the opposition BJP is pillorying the Omar Abdullah government over the mandatory Urdu exam. Predictably, it has likened it to the sidelining of Jammu, where a majority speak Dogri, Pahari and Hindi. “We have five languages; this looks like the prioritisation of one region over the other,” says Sat Sharma, president of the J&K BJP.

ON PROTEST MODE

The compulsory Urdu exam is nothing new. It was part of the last revenue department recruitment in 2021 as well, but there were no protests from the BJP then. That was probably because the J&K government was under the tight leash of the New Delhi-appointed Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. This time around, Sat Sharma and Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma (also of the BJP) met Sinha on June 12 to demand the inclusion of other languages in the exam. In Jammu, the party’s youth wing has organised protests.

The ruling National Conference, however, is unmoved. “Urdu is an intricate part of the region’s cultural identity,” Tanvir Sadiq, MLA and NC chief spokesperson, told INDIA TODAY. “It’s the backbone of our governance, revenue, judiciary, land systems and belongs not only to Kashmir and Jammu regions but Ladakh as well.” He called the BJP’s objection “petty politics” aimed at creating a wedge between regions. The opposition Peoples Demo-

cratic Party (PDP) supports NC’s stand on Urdu.

Urdu replaced Farsi as the official language of the erstwhile J&K princely state during Maharaja Pratap Singh’s rule in 1889. In recent decades, the dominance of English in mainstream education has eroded its influence. Though many revenue records have been translated and digitised into English, Urdu is essential for comprehensive identification and quantification of land.

Meanwhile, resentment is brewing in another quarter. The high quantum of quotas in

Takeaways

► **A recruitment notification for 75 Naib-Tehsildar posts in J&K requires a mandatory 50-mark Urdu test**

► **Pointing at Dogri and Hindi speakers in Jammu, BJP says it is unfair to many**

government jobs has angered Kashmiri youth. In 2015, there was 38 per cent quota in Naib Tehsildar recruitments; in 2025, it is a staggering 60 per cent. Under pressure from general category Kashmiris, a three-member government panel examining quotas tabled its report in the cabinet on June 18, which sent it to the state law department. Yet to be made public, disgruntled students are calling it a time-buying exercise. “It’s binding on the law department to revert without delay,” Sadiq says. “Justice will be served to all.” ■

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

IT’S NOT EXACTLY A WIDENING FRONTIER, more a tactical pivot to an old staging post. For, Odisha has long been an operational base of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)—especially its poverty-ridden hinterland, which is part of eastern-central India’s tribal continuum. But mark the recent Maoist-related action in the state, and you can almost live-track the shifting map of the war against LWE. Take the latest one. In the early hours of June 13, the pre-dawn gunshots that lit up the forests were in Malkangiri district—deep down south in the state and smack bang in the Eastern Ghats.

Here, a special police team, acting on an intelligence input, accosted an armed Maoist unit near Sargiguda village, under Mathili police station. After a firefight, several insurgents managed to flee, but two senior operatives—Kesa Kawasi and Rakesh a.k.a. Sanu Kunjam—were apprehended. Both are ‘area committee members’ of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) and hail from Chhattisgarh’s Bastar and Bijapur districts, respectively. Long active in the Andhra-Odisha Border (AOB) region, they carried a bounty of Rs 4 lakh each. A fortnight earlier, a similar operation had netted Kunjam Hidma—another Maoist figure of that rank and also a Chhattisgarh native—in Koraput district, immediately to the east.

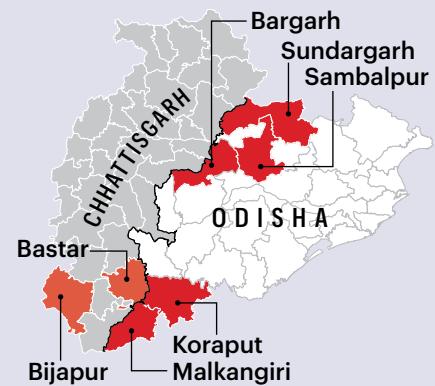
A CONCERTED STRATEGY

These incidents are neither accidental nor isolated. They are part of a broader offensive by Odisha Police and central paramilitary forces to close off a key flank in the wider war against the Maoists. In recent months, intensified operations in neighbouring Chhattisgarh appear to have forced many Maoists to seek refuge in Odisha’s forests, triggering a renewed push to intercept them before they can regroup. The idea is to get at the network of straggler Maoists still active in Odisha’s remote tracts and close off any tactical sanctuary to fugitive insurgents.

Just days earlier, in the Charmal forests of Sambalpur district, also in the west, an operation was prompted by suspicions of Maoist movement across the border. Officials described it as a pre-emptive area domination



NO WAY OUT
Paramilitary officers with the two arrested Maoist leaders, Jun. 13



► ODISHA

DRAGNET IN THE EAST

The Odisha police and central paramilitary forces are bent on closing off a key flank that may offer tactical sanctuary to insurgents from neighbouring states

exercise—an effort to choke off any possible entry and maintain pressure in a region where Maoist numbers are otherwise visibly dwindling. The security calculus is changing: insurgents are increasingly on the defensive, dispersing in smaller units and shifting bases rather than launching direct offensives.

Yet, the threat remains. In late May, 30-40 armed Maoists hijacked an explosives-laden truck in Sundargarh district, on the northwestern border. The vehicle, en route from a licensed warehouse in Itma to a quarry site, was commandeered near Banko and diverted into the forests of Jharkhand's Saranda region. A portion of the stolen explosives—estimated at nearly four tonnes—was later recovered after a firefight

between Maoists and joint forces of Odisha and Jharkhand. The plot deepened with the arrest of Shraban Agarwal, a licensed explosives dealer, and his driver. Agarwal had initially misled investigators, hid-

ing two additional trucks packed with gelatin sticks and detonators. Though a direct Maoist link has yet to be established, the scale of the seizure suggests a dangerous nexus.

Behind the headlines lies a more complex picture. While police operations may have dented Maoist strongholds—particularly in Kandhamal and Boudh—the Centre's early-2024 decision to recategorise several regions, including Koraput and Bargarh, as 'LWE-affected' suggests an awareness that the conflict is far from over. Areas once deemed 'cleared' are being reinvestigated as thrust districts. As Odisha DGP Yogesh Bahadur Khurania said recently, the goal remains the complete eradication of LWE by March 2026. But all eyes are on the game. The forest may be thinning, but the roots of discontent run deep in these parts. ■

Takeaways

■ **Maoist encounters in Odisha mark shifting theatre of war against LWE**

■ **Intensified ops in neighbouring Chhattisgarh forcing rebels to seek refuge in Odisha**

■ **Surveillance is up in forest areas once deemed 'cleared' of LWEs**



By Kavitha Muralidharan

► TAMIL NADU

ON JUNE 22, MADURAI PLAYED HOST TO A grand gathering of Lord Murugan's devotees—the *Muruga Bhakthargal Maanadu*. Organised by the Hindu Munnani, a right-wing outfit closely aligned with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the event featured devotional music, ornate replicas of Murugan's six sacred abodes, or Arupadai Veedu, along with a steady undercurrent of political messaging.

Though billed as a spiritual congregation, few missed the ideological subtext. The BJP, which has long struggled to find resonance in Tamil Nadu, has in recent years attempted to recast the Tamil deity Murugan as a cultural and religious symbol aligned with its Hindutva politics. The Madurai event was the most elaborate iteration of that strategy yet.

In 2020, the BJP had launched the Vel Yatra—a religious procession named after Murugan's divine spear. Led by then state BJP president L. Murugan, the yatra sought to visit all six Arupadai Veedu and was timed to conclude on December 6, a date loaded with political symbolism: the anniversary of both Babri Masjid's demolition and Dr B.R. Ambedkar's

IN THE NAME OF MURUGAN

Behind the BJP-backed spiritual spectacle in Madurai was a clear political project: Hindutva, tailored for Tamil Nadu

death. The then AIADMK-led government denied permission, but BJP leaders forged ahead, leading to multiple arrests.

RAM MOVEMENT OF THE SOUTH

Analysts saw the Vel Yatra as a southern analogue to the emotional mobilisation around Lord Ram in northern India—an attempt to forge a religious identity narrative in a Tamil idiom. The Madurai event took that approach further. BJP leaders L. Murugan and K. Annamalai were prominent attendees, as was Andhra Pradesh deputy chief minister Pawan Kalyan. Despite court-imposed restrictions—banning processions and political speeches—the organisers passed six resolutions that left little doubt about the event's political aims.

One resolution demanded that temples be freed from the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Department—a long-standing RSS-BJP position intended to remove state oversight of temple finances and administration. Critics argue this would undo decades

Takeaways

► The BJP positions Lord Murugan as a Tamil Hindutva icon to gain traction

► A religious gathering passes politically coloured resolutions on temple autonomy, Hindu unity etc.

► SPIRITUAL BROTHERS BJP leaders Nainar Nagendran (left) and K. Annamalai (right) with Andhra Pradesh deputy CM Pawan Kalyan in Madurai, Jun. 22

of social reform. "The demand is a direct attack on OBCs and marginalised communities," says Vanni Arasu, deputy general secretary of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi. "The department was created to dismantle Brahminical monopoly over temples. A reversal will bring back exclusion."

Another resolution urged Hindu consolidation as a voting bloc. A third encouraged the collective chanting of 19th-century Tamil devotional hymn 'Kandha Sasti Kavasam', casting it as a tool for religious unity, though implicitly Hindu-only.

The choice of Madurai as the site for this event was strategic. Not just a temple city, it is also a hub of Dravidian political identity. In recent months, it has emerged as a stage for political theatre—hosting actor Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) rally, an AIADMK conference, a DMK roadshow helmed by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and a visit by Union home minister Amit Shah.

Just outside the city lies Thiruparkundram, where one of Murugan's six abodes stands alongside an old Sufi dargah and ancient Jain caves. Hindu Munnani has labelled the area as "encroached" by other faiths, inflaming local tensions. One resolution called for lighting the 'Karthigai Deepam'—associated with Murugan—atop the hill; another backed protecting the sacred hills from "non-Hindu" practices.

Even before the event was held, civil society groups, including the Madurai Religious Harmony Federation, raised objections, warning of communal polarisation. They now plan to hold a 'People's Unity Conference' on June 29 to promote interfaith harmony.

Lord Murugan's symbolic importance is not new in TN. Last year, the DMK government organised a global conference on Murugan to showcase him as a secular cultural icon of the Tamil diaspora. The BJP's effort is explicitly majoritarian, hoping to turn the folk deity into a unifying religious figurehead like Ram. In this battle of narratives, Madurai's become both symbol and stage. ■

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ISRAEL-IRAN WAR

UNEASY TRUCE

WHY DONALD TRUMP'S BUNKER-BUSTING STRATEGY WILL NOT DEFUSE NUCLEAR TENSIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

D

ONALD TRUMP HAS MADE QUITE A HABIT OF PULLING RABBITS OUT OF HIS HAT, especially while dealing with international conflicts. Just when the 12-day Israel-Iran war threatened to engulf the Middle East and along with it his own presidency, Trump bullied the two countries into agreeing to a seemingly impossible truce on June 24. It was reminiscent of the US president's claims of having got India and Pakistan to call off their four-day war on May 10 just when a major escalation seemed imminent. The Indian government, though, continues to deny that Trump had any role to play, maintaining it was Pakistan that capitulated.

So even though Trump has so far failed to keep his campaign promises of ending the Russia-Ukraine conflict within 24 hours of being sworn in or of swiftly ending the war in Gaza, he has shaken off the image that he is all bluster and no bite. Before he brokered a ceasefire between Israel and Iran, Trump sardonically wrote in his social media post, "No, I will not get a Nobel Peace Prize no matter what I do, including Russia/Ukraine and Israel/Iran, whatever those outcomes may be, but the people know, and that's all that matters to me." He was obliquely referring to his predecessor Barack Obama winning the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize just eight months into his first term based on his election promise to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons across the world.

Soon after the Israel-Iran ceasefire, Republican representative Buddy Carter wrote to



the Norwegian Nobel Committee nominating Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet, many strategists think it's too early to be praising Trump as the truce remains tenuous. "This is a pause, not a breakout of peace," says Syed Akbaruddin, India's former Permanent Representative to the UN and an expert on the Middle East. "It is a first step in a long, long road because none of the fundamental issues that caused the conflict, including Iran's nuclear prowess, have been adequately addressed."

A Fragile Peace

So, what triggered the current round of bloodletting and why is the truce so brittle? On June 13, when Israel launched its fiercest-ever attack on Iran, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified it by claiming that Tehran was months away from developing a nuclear weapon. This despite International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi denying such claims. However, his agency had voiced concerns about Iran's 2021 decision to enrich a portion of its uranium fuel stockpile to 60 per cent, pushing it closer to nuclear weapon-grade purity. Israel felt emboldened to strike Iran at this time because, as Mohan Kumar, a former Indian ambassador and currently Professor of Diplomatic Practice at the Jindal School of International Affairs, puts it, "With the active help of the US in the past two years, Israel had defenestrated with great success Iran's proxies in the region." This includes the Hamas, which carried out horrific terror attacks on October 7, 2023; the Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon; and the Houthis in Yemen. Israel also played a role in the sudden exit of the Iranian ally, Bashar al-Assad, in Syria.

From June 13 onwards, Israel unleashed a barrage of 200 missiles in air strikes that substantially dismantled Iran's military and nuclear infrastructure, and caused more than 950 casualties. In retaliation, Iran fired more than 500 ballistic missiles and launched over a thousand drones against Israel. Although Tel Aviv repulsed most of them, a few missiles got past its famed Iron Dome. However, in a country only slightly larger than Mizoram, India's fifth smallest state, its 10 million people are densely packed, and the missiles damaged civilian infrastructure and reportedly caused more than 28 deaths.

Initially, Trump had seemed undecided on joining forces with Israel against Iran since many of his top MAGA (Make America Great Again) backers were against any US involvement in foreign wars. Trump had come to power on the back of a campaign in which he promised that US troops would not be entangled in "forever wars". After he assumed office in January, Trump got his team to begin diplomatic negotiations with Iran, setting a stiff deadline of two months ending June 12 for it to reach an agreement with the US to dismantle any nuclear weapons capability it possessed. Despite five rounds of nego-



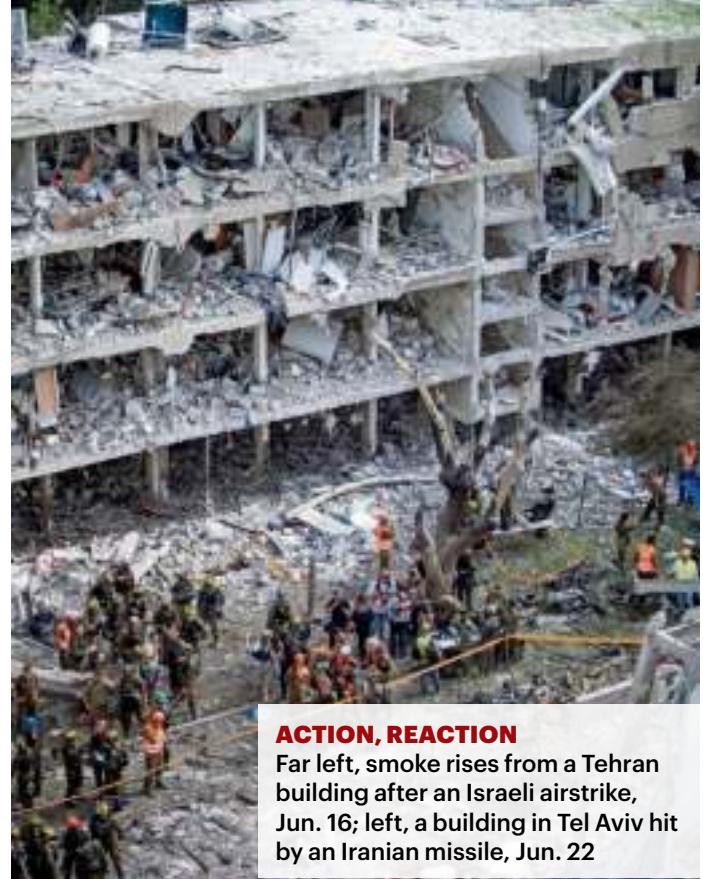
AFP

tiations, the two sides failed to arrive at a deal by D-day. The very next day, Israel launched its massive strikes against Iran.

The Bunker Buster Strategy

Trump didn't seem inclined to join the war but caught most by surprise when he took the huge gamble of authorising 'Operation Midnight Hammer' to permanently defang Iran's nuclear prowess on June 22. That mission saw seven US Air Force B2 stealth bombers take off from American bases, refuel mid-air on their 37-hour journey to Iran and back, and carry out precision strikes with 14 GBU-57A Massive Ordnance Penetrators or MOPs, the mother of all bombs, on three of Iran's key nuclear facilities. The bunker buster bombs, as they are called, are designed to penetrate depths of up to 60 metres before exploding, and were dropped to target Iran's deeply buried Fordow enrichment facility as well as another at Natanz, while a third site in Isfahan was attacked with as many as 30 submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles. This is the first time since 1988—when the US navy destroyed an Iranian warship and blew up two of its oil platforms—that America had carried out a significant military strike on the Islamic republic.

Trump declared the US strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities to be "a spectacular military success" and claimed that its "key nuclear enrichment facilities have been totally obliterated". Having achieved America's objective of destroying Iran's nuclear enrichment capacity, Trump saw no value in continuing the conflict and forced both Israel and Iran to agree to halt hostilities. Israel, too, claimed that it had dealt a death blow to Iran's nuclear ambitions and repulsed its ballistic missile threats. Even as he thanked Trump for his support, a trium-



ACTION, REACTION

Far left, smoke rises from a Tehran building after an Israeli airstrike, Jun. 16; left, a building in Tel Aviv hit by an Iranian missile, Jun. 22

AFP

EXPERTS ARE CALLING THIS A PAUSE, NOT PEACE, AS NONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES, LIKE IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROWESS THAT LED TO THE 12-DAY WAR, HAVE BEEN ADEQUATELY ADDRESSED

phant Netanyahu asserted, “For decades, I have promised you that Iran would not have nuclear weapons. And, indeed, in all of the swift actions that our soldiers carried out, we sent Iran’s nuclear project to oblivion.”

On its part, Iran declared that it had retaliated by targeting America’s Al Udeid air base in Qatar with the exact number of missiles that the US used to strike its nuclear facilities. It is widely believed that Tehran had warned the American forces of the attack beforehand, enabling them to avoid military casualties. Iran maintained that it had given a befitting reply to both American and Israeli military adventurism and despite the strikes, its nuclear capability wasn’t dented. In a post on X, Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wrote, “Those who know the Iranian people and their history know that the Iranian nation isn’t a nation that surrenders.”

Not Quite the Hammer

Despite Trump claiming Op Midnight Hammer to be an unqualified success, mainstream US media, including the *New York Times* and the CNN, quoting leaked US intelligence

assessments, reported that American military strikes on Iran’s three nuclear facilities did not destroy the core components of the country’s nuclear programme, but only set it back by months rather than years. Also, that Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium had been moved out of the sites prior to the US strikes. The damage at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan, it is claimed, may have been largely restricted to overground structures, including their power infrastructure and some facilities used to turn uranium into metal for bomb-making.

Former Indian Army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane believes such analysis means the bunker bombs may not have caused the massive destruction that Trump had hoped for. With his biggest military asset possibly falling short, the American president, Naravane reckons, pushed for truce so that he could work out other strategies to attack Iran. “The truce will then only be temporary,” Naravane says. “It seems more like Iran, Israel and the US agreed to it because they wanted time to assess the outcomes of the war, their strengths and weaknesses, regroup their military forces and resources and then possibly go at each other’s throat again.”

There are other major discomforting implications for the US and Israel, especially the fact that their combined strikes failed to destroy an estimate 400 kg of Iran’s highly enriched stockpile. Dr Anil Kakodkar, former chairman of India’s Atomic Energy Commission, says that if reports that Iran had moved out its stock of enriched uranium before the attack are true, then Tehran retains the capability to assemble crude atomic devices that could be quite potent. “Iran has the capability to quickly rebuild its centrifuges,” he says. “So, all the US and Israel may have done is to have postponed the development.

DEATH FROM THE AIR

THE ISRAEL-IRAN CONFLICT PLOUGHED THE REGION WITH MISSILES, DEATH AND DESTRUCTION. A LOOK AT THE 12-DAY CLASH FROM JUNE 13 TO 24 THROUGH STARK NUMBERS AND THE INSTRUMENTS OF WAR

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS | Text by PRADIP R SAGAR

ISRAEL: OPERATION RISING LION

F-35I ADIR
Stealth fighter jets carrying GBU-28 bombs, GBU-39/B Slim Bombs struck Iranian nuclear/ military targets

GBU-28 BUNKER BUSTER BOMBS
5,000-pound, laser-guided for penetrating fortified targets

200
No. of missiles Israel used, besides hundreds of drones, many launched from within Iran

HERON UAV
Drones for reconnaissance and strikes with precision targeting

28
No. of Israelis killed, along with over 3,000 injured

F-15I RA'AM AND F-16I SUFA
Strikes on missile sites, IRGC facilities with payload of Rampage air-to-ground missiles, Spice 1000/2000 Kits (precision-guided munitions)

ANKOR MISSILE FAMILY
Blue Sparrow, Silver Sparrow missiles for long-range strikes

ENRICHED URANIUM: THE CONCERN OVER IRAN

Uranium is critical for nuclear power and weapons because it can sustain a chain reaction

Natural uranium contains about 0.7 per cent of the Uranium-235 (U-235) isotope—the component for nuclear fission. The remaining 99.3 per cent is Uranium-238 (U-238)

For generating nuclear power, U-235 has to be enriched to a concentration of 3 to 5 per cent

That is done through gaseous centrifuge separation where the lighter U-235 are separated from the heavier U-238 so that a concentration of 3 to 5 per cent is reached

For weapons grade, U-235 has to be enriched to 90 per cent

The concern was that Iran had stockpiles of U-235 enriched to 60 per cent, saying it was for research

Iran had over 10,000 kg of U-235 enriched to 60 per cent, got it down to 300 kg in the US-led 2015 N-deal

When US- Israel bombed Iranian nuclear facilities, it had around 400 kg of U-235 enriched to 60 per cent, a step away from weapons grade

Reports say this stockpile was not destroyed and is available for Iran to refine into bomb grade material

The diagram illustrates the gaseous centrifuge enrichment process. It shows a vertical tube representing the centrifuge. Inside, a gas mixture of Uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) enters from the top. The tube is divided into two sections: a lower section labeled "More U-238" and an upper section labeled "More U-235". The gas passes through a "Vacuum" region. Arrows indicate the flow of gas and the separation of enriched U-235 at the top. Labels include "Uranium hexafluoride", "Depleted Uranium", "Enriched U-235", "More U-235", "More U-238", "Electric motor", and "Vacuum".



IRAN: OPERATION SEVERE PUNISHMENT



2,000
Iran's stockpile of ballistic missiles,
according to intelligence estimates

FATTAH-1

Hypersonic missiles
with Mach 5+ speed,
manoeuvrability
to evade defences
Range: 1,400 km



550
Approximate
number of missiles
Iran fired, besides
1,000 drones

KHORRAMSHAHР BALLISTIC MISSILES

Capacity for large warheads (up to 1,800 kg). Fired at Camp Moshe Dayan in Tel Aviv, damaging a warehouse and wastewater treatment plant. Range: 2,000 km



950

No. of Iranians
killed in Israeli air
strikes, along with
5,000 wounded

KAMIKAZE DRONES SHAHD-SERIES

Low-cost, long-range
(up to 2,000 km)



US: OPERATION MIDNIGHT HAMMER

On June 22, the US joined the war by launching strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites—Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan—using seven B-2 stealth bombers to drop 14 GBU-57 ‘bunker buster’ bombs and Tomahawk missiles from submarines



B-2 SPIRIT STEALTH BOMBERS

Stealth design, long-range aircraft carrying heavy ordnance. Seven B-2s took off from Whiteman air force base, US, on June 21, for a 37-hour flight to Tehran and back, requiring mid-air refuelling



GBU-57 MASSIVE ORDNANCE PENETRATOR

Each weighing 30,000 pounds, designed to penetrate deeply buried targets like Fordow. This was the first combat use of the MOP, capable of penetrating 60 m through earth or 18 m through concrete



It's a cat and mouse game that has been played over the years and is not a permanent solution, just a patchwork one."

Other experts say that when it comes to Iran's nuclear capabilities, one needs to look at essentially its hardware and software capabilities. The US and Israeli strikes would have damaged hardware installations like centrifuge halls to some extent. But with Iran developing its nuclear capability for over 40 years with huge amounts of investments and resources, its knowhow would not be diminished by these strikes or killing of a few nuclear scientists as Israel and the US had hoped for.

New Nuke Danger

Instead, Akbaruddin says, the real danger is that by targeting Iran's facilities, America may have lost oversight of Iran's nuclear programme because Tehran will now refuse IAEA monitoring and be opaque about its plans. Under the 1968 Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT), the trade-off for receiving technology to develop nuclear reactors for peaceful means and desist from possessing nuclear weapons was that no other country would have the right to strike your open safeguarded facilities.

Israel, a nuclear weapons power that is not a signatory of the NPT, severely undermined its provisions when in June 1981 its air force bombed the Osirak research reactor that France had given Iraq. Then, in 2007, Israel used its air force jets to bomb a suspected nuclear research facility under construction at Al Kibar in Syria, claiming that North Korea was supplying the technology. That action seems to have pushed Syria to resort to making dangerous chemical weapons instead. As for Iran's nuclear programme, prior to 2025, Israel, backed by the US, used covert means to undermine Tehran's nuclear quest, including allegedly introducing a computer worm called Stuxnet into equipment at its Natanz facility in 2007 that caused centrifuges to self-destruct.

However, this time, with the US, the principal initiator and one of the depositaries of the NPT (with whom the instruments of ratification and accession are kept), joining Israel in bombing Iran's nuclear infrastructure, the compact not to carry out strikes against facilities under IAEA safeguards seems to have been broken. The fault lines that dogged the NPT have come to the fore. So, countries like Iran could be tempted to follow the model North Korea did—join the NPT, then go rogue and develop nuclear bombs. "The issue," says Akbaruddin, "is whether the US wanted to employ bunker busters or pursue diplomatic solutions. It chose the former and now the jury is out on whether it will pay you the dividend diplomacy did under Barack Obama."

During Obama's second term as president, the US along



AP

US-ISRAEL STRIKES MAY HAVE DESTROYED SOME OF THE HARDWARE AT THE BOMBED SITES BUT NOT THE KNOWHOW THAT IRAN HAS BEEN BUILDING OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS

with the other P-5 countries—Russia, China, France and the UK—and Germany entered into an agreement with Iran called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015. Under it, Iran agreed to dismantle much of its nuclear programme and open its facilities for more extensive international inspections in exchange for billions of dollars of sanction relief. The idea was to degrade Iran's nuclear programme to the point that if Tehran decided to develop nuclear weapons, it would take at least a year, allowing the world powers to mount tough measures in the interim.

Under the deal, Iran agreed not to produce highly enriched uranium or plutonium that could be used for nuclear weapons and allowed the IAEA unfettered access. It also reduced its stockpile of highly enriched uranium by 97 per cent—from 10,000 kg to 300 kg. Trump, however, was dead against the deal, as he believed the removal of sanctions saw Iran's economy boom without deterring it from its secret intention to build nuclear weapons. After Trump became president in 2017, he pulled out of the agreement in May 2018 and imposed heavy sanctions on entities that did business with Iran.



FRIENDS AND THEIR FOE
US president Donald Trump with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House, Apr. 7; Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

AFP

Return of Might is Right

What's concerning is that barring rhetorical noises from major powers like Russia and China, criticism of the brazen Israeli and US military strikes was muted. This was in sharp contrast to the UN Security Council passing a resolution censuring Israel for its attack on Iraq's Osirak research reactor in 1981. Israel claimed it was a one-off preventive strike. However, 45 years later, there is hardly any condemnation of Israel or US actions.

The US justified its strikes on Iran, with US defense secretary Pete Hegseth calling them necessary for America "to neutralise threats to our national interests posed by the Iranian nuclear programme and for the collective self-defence of US troops and our ally Israel". Gen. Naravane sees this collective self-defence approach as worrying, and points out, "The only tangible outcome of the current conflict is that unilateralism has come to stay and that might is right. Nations like Israel and the US are imposing their will without formal declarations of war or hostilities as Russia did when it invaded Ukraine in 2022. Now, no country in the world is safe. The big message is, if you don't toe the line, you are liable to get bombed. And if you don't have nuclear weapons, you are at their mercy. This is a dangerous turn in international affairs."

China seemed quite happy for Trump to get embroiled in the Middle East and the Ukraine-Russia conflict while building its strength to unilaterally take over Taiwan. Russia had its own vested interest for Trump to take his eyes off Ukraine and focus on other conflicts. In Europe, Ger-

man chancellor Friedrich Merz endorsed Israel's attack on Iran, praising it for doing the "dirty work" of other countries. French president Emmanuel Macron urged "utmost restraint, de-escalation and return to the negotiating table".

Most Arab powers, including Saudi Arabia, saw benefit in Iran's nuclear capabilities being degraded given the traditional Persian-Arab blood feud. So, while they condemned the attacks on Iran, the conservative monarchies are largely beholden to the US and had no option but to allow it to use their air space to bomb Iran. Some experts saw the combined US-Israel action as a paradigm shift in Middle Eastern geopolitics. "In the short term, it leaves Israel enormously strengthened at the expense of every other power in the Middle East," says Kumar.

Israel as a regional dominant power without a Muslim country to rival its ambitions is a serious threat and one reason why there will be no defusion of tensions. Especially if, as T.S. Tirumati, former secretary in the external affairs ministry, says, a Netanyahu emboldened by his Iran adventure decides to proceed with his dream of an 'Eretz Yisrael', or the promised land covering all the land from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. It could see Israel annexing Gaza and the West Bank too, though annexing Palestinian territories would put Israel in direct conflict with the surrounding Muslim nations and result in endless conflict. Already, with the mounting civilian bloodshed, Israel's

**MANY BELIEVE THAT
US AND ISRAEL
ACTIONS HAVE SENT
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ANYMORE**



GUEST COLUMN
NAVTEJ SARNA

The author is a former Indian ambassador to the US

TOUGHEST OF TIGHTROPE WALKS

Netanyahu's decades-long obsession and Trump's eagerness to own a win led them to pulverise Iran. Due to strategic links with all three nations and substantial interests in West Asia, India has to back the path of dialogue and diplomacy

A ceasefire between Israel and Iran was announced by Donald Trump in characteristic hyperbolic fashion early morning on June 24. Within hours, the tenuous agreement, worked out with the help of Qatar, had been violated by both sides, much to Trump's expletive-spiced frustration. At the time of writing, the situation remains uncertain, but the whys and the wherefores are becoming clearer.

At the heart of this war of choice lies Benjamin Netanyahu's search for a new legacy. He wants to be remembered not as the watchman on duty on October 7 but rather as the leader who changed "the face of the Middle East". For decades, he has raised fears of a nuclear-armed Iran posing an existential threat to Israel and has tried to lure US presidents into war with Iran; it is his way of ensuring Israeli-US hegemony and a free hand across the region. The timing has never been so propitious: Iran's proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah, have been debilitated, Syria's Assad overthrown, Iran's economy in disarray, its regime unpopular. And Trump, who earlier abandoned the nuclear agreement with Iran, is back in the White House. Netanyahu attacked Iran in spectacular fashion, gambled on Trump being cajoled,

given his weakness for owning a win, into doing the heavy lifting with his bunker busters. And he won.

Donald Trump could not resist the adrenaline rush of playing the Commander-in-chief. After a deliberately vague statement—"I may do it, I may not do it"—and a dissembling round of golf, he unleashed America's menacing military might on the nuclear sites at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. With that, he joined the US presidents who, in his own words

Iran had made no moves towards nuclear weaponisation. The truth is that Trump got nicely played by Netanyahu and the Israeli lobby.

Where does this dance of destruction leave the region? There is no clarity regarding the damage to Iran's nuclear facilities. Trump claimed they have been "completely and totally obliterated"; the IAEA

Without a stable West Asia, India's investment in Iran's Chabahar port and visions like I2U2 and IMEC must be approached with caution

delivered in Saudi Arabia last month, "have been afflicted with the notion that it is our job to look into the souls of foreign leaders and use US policy to dispense justice for their sins".

Trump has earlier railed against "endless wars" and projected himself as the peacemaker. But frustrated by failures to resolve Gaza or Ukraine quickly, he needed a victory. He brushed aside MAGA naysayers, ignored the Congress and negated the intelligence submitted to the Congress by his own director of National Intelligence that

proclaims "significant damage" and yet there has been no rise in off-site radiation. Some of Iran's 400 kg of 60 per cent enriched Uranium is thought to have been moved to unknown sites. Only time will tell whether this was a better way than negotiations for making Iran compliant with its NPT obligations or whether it will push Iran out of the NPT or further towards a clandestine bomb.

But Iran's top line of nuclear scientists and military commanders have been assassinated and its air defences decimated. Netanyahu has



had a free run of Iranian skies, bombing at will not just military targets but Revolutionary Guard and police establishments, indicating his intent to engineer regime change. He has now announced that the dual imminent existential threat to Israel, both nuclear and ballistic, has been removed.

Israel's missile defences have also been shown to be vulnerable. Tel Aviv and other cities and iconic institutions have been hit by Iranian missiles. Israelis, though broadly supportive of Netanyahu's attack on Iran, will be thankful that this has not turned into a war of attrition.

At best, this is an uncertain end to the present conflict; military actions are not the solution to complex underlying problems. The lessons of such conflict need to be factored into India's West Asia policy. ■

Around 40 per cent of our oil imports (Iraq, Saudi and UAE) and LNG supplies from Qatar come through the Strait of Hormuz which Iran can close as a desperate measure. Raised shipping and insurance costs for our exports to West Asia and through the Red Sea will impact trade and transportation. The nine million-strong Indian diaspora in the region and their remittances will be at risk. Without political stability, our investment in Iran's Chabahar port is vulnerable, and visions like the I2U2 and the India-Middle East-Europe corridor (IMEC) should be approached with caution.

Given our strategic links with the US, Iran and Israel, we will have to walk more than one tightrope in a demonstration of strategic autonomy. But our substantial interests demand that we encourage them all to take the path of dialogue and diplomacy. ■

military campaign against Hamas, earlier seen as justified, is now being viewed less sympathetically and more as Netanyahu wreaking vengeance.

High Stakes for India

For India, the biggest challenge of the continuing unrest in the Middle East is economic. Iran's threat of shutting down the vital Straits of Hormuz had the war continued saw stock markets shiver. Almost 20 per cent of the world's oil and 30 per cent of the global gas supply passes through the Hormuz Straits. With the Gulf nations meeting over 40 per cent of India's oil and gas needs, any disruption in supplies could see petroleum prices rise sharply and wipe out the strides India has made in keeping inflation under 6 per cent. For every \$10 increase in oil prices, India has to spend an additional \$1 billion (Rs 8,580 crore) in imports. With the country importing over 89 per cent of its oil and gas requirements, India's best-laid economic plans can go haywire and slow down economic growth.

Moreover, 40 per cent of the annual Indian remittances of \$129.1 billion (Rs 11.04 lakh crore) in 2024 came from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which have 8.9 million Indian expatriates living in the region. That could be seriously hit in case of a conflict there. There is also the emergency evacuation of Indian citizens from conflict zones as was done in Iran. That's why Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to Israel and Iran to de-escalate and give more room for dialogue and diplomacy rather than military options.

The other lesson from this conflict as well as from India's own 'Operation Sindoor' is how air superiority and armaments capable of striking from stand-off distances have come to play a dominating role in modern warfare. India, therefore, needs to proactively strengthen its strike capability using precision missiles and unmanned combat vehicles like loitering drones with munitions. However, unlike Iran and Israel, which do not share a border and have 2,000 km separating them, India has common boundaries with Pakistan and China and cannot rely on air power alone. "In India's case," says Gen. Naravane, "all three military domains, whether land, air or sea, have to be given equal importance. And we have to ensure that we have state-of-the-art technology, especially with manned aircraft, tanks and similar large surface combatants likely to become dinosaurs in the 21st century." Even more important is to control the conflict narrative and ensure that international opinion remains favourable. Neither the US and Israel nor Iran have done a good job of it, deepening the unease about the ceasefire being anything but a lasting truce. ■



FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNT

LIFE UNDER FIRE

IN THE DIN OF WAR, IRANIANS SHOWED A STUBBORN GRACE—AND EXTENDED UNEXPECTED WARMTH TO STRANGERS

By JUMANA SHAH in Iran



Like the battle of Karbala, this war must be fought till the end,” Reza Ahmadi, a juice vendor in his 30s, told me, as he went about his business on the busy Naser Khosro street in Shiraz, a historical town of gardens, wine and poetry in southwest Iran’s Fars province. It was just two days after Israel had launched airstrikes on Iran, on Friday, June 13. Reza was invoking the 7th-century clash that, in Islamic history, stands as a symbol of moral resistance against political tyranny. We were talking amid street celebrations for Eid al-Ghadir, the air thick with revelry and the aroma of sweetened drinks. Every 10 seconds or so,

the sky lit up with streaks of intercepted drones, followed by a thud of explosions. And yet, Reza barely flinched.

Earlier, on June 12, I was further north—in Isfahan’s majestic Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Hameed Rezaei, 28, was selling Persian carpets to Indian tourists, warning them half-jokingly, “Who knows, tomorrow the US bombs us...” His face was bruised, his eye stitched up, but they were the result of a recent bike accident. “I survived many wars, I survive,” he said. It was a Thursday—the evening before the Friday holiday—and the site was packed with families picnicking well past midnight, kids playing frisbee or cycling under the moonlight, Persian music playing in the streets. This was just hours before Israel launched surprise attacks on key military and nuclear facilities in Iran. A

week later, missiles pounded Isfahan, leaving us anxious for Hameed’s safety—even as reports confirmed the historic square had been spared.

What struck me throughout my stay in Iran was the remarkable calm with which ordinary people endured the chaos of war. Tehran native Suraiya Amani, for instance, appeared indifferent when asked about the possibility of US escalation. Now 60, she had spent her youth in and out of underground bunkers during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. “These things keep happening here,” she said with a shrug, as news channels reported the deaths of Iranian nuclear scientists and elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders in Israeli strikes.

That stoicism was put to test on June 15, shortly after my conversation



A

FIGHTING SPIRIT
Iranians protest the
Israel-US strikes, in
Tehran, June 22

sign of overt despair, there was none. In the wee hours of June 22, the call to prayer continued uninterrupted at the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, a pilgrimage city in the northeast, even as reports emerged of US bombs striking nuclear sites in Isfahan, Fordow and Natanz. Even at that hour, Mashhad's restaurants were serving steaming kebabs and local shoppers haggled animatedly. It was business as usual.

As an Indian, I was met with unexpected warmth and familiarity—taxi fares quietly waived, café bills refused—with many locals expressing a kind of embarrassed sympathy for the hardship their war had brought upon us. “Hindostani!” people would call out warmly, and Bollywood stars, notably Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan and Hema Malini, were frequently invoked in conversations. More surprising was the number of Indian students I encountered, particularly Kashmiri youth studying medicine. “We feel safe here,” said Rubina, a second-year MBBS student at Shiraz University, dressed in a pair of jeans, a casual T-shirt and the customary headscarf. But as evacuation began, many of them were forced to abandon their studies and leave behind months, if not years, of effort and hope.

What had begun for me as an art and architecture-themed study tour of four cities in Iran ended in the drama, disruption and anxiety of a war that had made the world hold its breath. There was relief at the commendable success of the Indian embassy in organising our evacuation from Mashhad, within hours of the US strikes. As Mahan Air’s Boeing 747 touched down in New Delhi, the cabin filled with a chorus of emotions—Punjabi cries of “*Jo bole so nihal*”, Kashmiri chants of “*Ya Ali*”, and the soft murmur of the Gayatri Mantra from Gujaratis. In that moment, I was reminded not just of the tremors of war we had left behind in Iran, but of the unshakeable grace with which its people live through them. Dignity, defiance, hope—each took flight with us. ■

**IN THE TWO WEEKS I SPENT ACROSS TEHRAN,
KASHAN, ISFAHAN, SHIRAZ, YAZD AND
MASHHAD, I DIDN'T MEET A SINGLE PERSON
WHO ADMITTED TO BEING AFRAID OF WAR**

with Reza in Shiraz. It began with a partial internet blackout. WhatsApp messages stalled, videos failed to load, and Telegram slowed to a crawl. The sense of isolation was immediate and visceral. That evening, military installations outside the city were bombed, the reverberations loud enough to keep anyone awake. And yet, by morning, the city was bustling again. Locals headed to college or work; rickety European cars, mainly the ubiquitous Peugeots, jammed the streets; and women—perfectly groomed, confident and stylish despite the state-mandated hijabs—shopped for rose water and saffron-infused sugar candies.

In the two weeks I spent across Tehran, Kashan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd and Mashhad, I didn't meet a single person who admitted to being afraid of war. In fact, many voiced support for retaliatory strikes on Israel. At the same time, there was a perceptible dislike for the Ayatollah's regime, which many blamed for Iran's faltering economy and for the clerics' dogmatic interference in their way of life. “We all hate our government,” said Mehrdad (*name changed*), an urban planner in Isfahan. “A change would be good. But we don't want Israel or the US to interfere.”

However, if you were looking for any

THE DRAMA OF DEPORTATION

Ahead of the 2026 assembly election, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma invokes an old law and pushes an identity-driven narrative to eject illegal Bangladeshis

BY KAUSHIK DEKA

AS ASSAM GEARS UP FOR ASSEMBLY ELECTION EARLY NEXT YEAR, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has already set a combative tone for the campaign. In recent months, his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has launched an aggressive, and legally contentious, drive to identify and deport “illegal Bangladeshis”. This move has involved reviving decades-old laws, sidelining the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and stirring a combustible mix of security, identity and religion in the state’s political discourse.

Partly prompted by judicial developments but largely driven by electoral calculations, the Sarma government has intensified efforts to deport individuals suspected of being illegal immigrants, particularly those of Bangladeshi origin. What marks this phase as particularly significant is a new legal interpretation: even those included in the NRC, the Supreme Court-monitored citizenship register, are not necessarily safe from deportation if later declared foreigners by the state’s quasi-judicial Foreigners Tribunals (FT) that determine citizenship status through an adversarial process. This reinterpretation quietly nullifies the political and administrative heft of the NRC exercise.

The NRC was conceived as the definitive solution to Assam’s decades-old “foreigner problem”, a comprehensive register that would once and for all separate genuine Indian citizens from illegal immigrants. The exercise consumed enormous

resources and generated tremendous anxiety across the state before finally producing its results in 2019. However, the outcome satisfied no one. Of the 33 million applicants, 1.9 million were excluded from the final list, a number that BJP leaders, including Sarma, deemed suspiciously low.

Sarma, who was then a rising star in the BJP after his dramatic defection from the Congress in 2015, was among the NRC’s most vocal critics. He demanded “reverification” of 20 per cent of names in border districts and 10 per cent elsewhere, arguing that the process had been compromised. But rather than wait for any such reverification, his government has now taken a more radical step: effectively robbing the NRC of any legal significance.

The SC handed Sarma the legal tool he needed in a May ruling in *Rafiqul Hoque vs Union of India*, in which Hoque had challenged his designation as a foreigner partly on

BJP'S PUSHBACK POLITICS

How Himanta Biswa Sarma is setting the tone for next year's assembly election

➔ Legal reinterpretations, communal flash-points and identity politics converge into a single narrative, projecting Sarma as Assam’s last bulwark against infiltration and cultural erosion

➔ By sidelining the Supreme Court-backed NRC and invoking a





AN

forgotten 1950 law, Sarma fast-tracks deportations, bypassing legal safeguards to project his tough-on-immigration image

► **The BJP revives the spectre of “illegal Bangladeshis” altering Assam’s identity, using pushbacks to ignite insecurities among indigenous voters**

► **Sarma signals a renewed push to reclaim land for indigenous communities by intensifying the crackdown on alleged encroachments by illegal immigrants**

► **Alleged beef provocations near temples post-Eid, and arms licences to “original inhabitants” are being used to amplify a siege mentality and frame immigrant Muslims as internal threats**

grounds that his name appeared in the draft NRC. The court ruled that “inclusion of the name of the appellant in the draft NRC would have no bearing on the order passed by the Tribunal, affirmed by the [Gauhati] High Court, declaring the appellant a foreigner”. In other words, being on the NRC list provided no protection against being declared a foreigner by a tribunal.

This dual-track system has unleashed a Kafkaesque nightmare in Assam where even legal reprieve offers no protection. In a recent case, one Hachinur, who was out on bail and regularly reporting to the police, was detained again, without warning, and without his family being informed, despite his appeal pending before the high court. The court later termed the detention illegal, ordering his immediate release and chastising state authorities for violating due process.

Having sidelined the NRC, Sar-

ma has turned to more expedient methods. His government’s most controversial innovation has been the revival of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act (IEAA), 1950, that had largely fallen into disuse. The Act grants the central government and, by extension, district commissioners acting on its behalf, sweeping powers to expel “any person or class of persons who have come into Assam from outside India” if their presence is deemed “detrimental to the interests of the general public of India or any Scheduled Tribe in Assam”.

What makes this law so attractive to Sarma’s government is that it bypasses the elaborate judicial machinery that has come up around immigration cases. Under the current system, suspected foreigners are typically referred to FTs. These proceedings can drag on for years, and many of those declared foreigners subsequently appeal to higher

courts, creating further delays.

The 1950 Act, by contrast, allows for much swifter action. Sarma contends that a recent SC constitutional bench ruling (October 17, 2024, in a case concerning Section 6A of the Citizenship Act) validates this approach, thereby facilitating swifter “pushbacks”, occasionally even without antecedent FT proceedings. The SC bench, in upholding Section 6A, explicitly stated that the IEAA “shall be effectively employed for the purpose of identification of illegal immigrants”, granting the Centre the power to remove immigrants deemed “detrimental to the interests of India”.

At least 330 declared foreigners have reportedly been “pushed back” into Bangladesh. In January 2025, when more than 200 individuals were found languishing for years in Matia detention centre, the country’s largest, the SC expressed stern disapproval over the delay and directed the government to expedite the deportation process.

However, executing the court order has not been easy. Bangladesh has shown little enthusiasm for accepting deportees, especially those unable to provide clear proof of their nationality. The 14 people who were “pushed back” in May but then spent days in no-man’s land before returning to Assam illustrated the practical limitations of the deportation policy. Without cooperation from Bangladesh, many deportation orders become political farce.

That, indeed, is what Himanta’s drive has become. By reviving the decades-old fear of demographic alteration, the Assam CM is reactivating the BJP’s Hindu-Muslim binary in a state where religion, language and indigeneity form an unstable triangle. His messaging is aimed squarely at indigenous communities who have historically felt threatened by migration from erstwhile East Bengal and later Bangladesh. Sarma’s “uncompromising” stand on security and illegal immigration is designed to consolidate this support base. On June 25, he signalled a renewed

push to reclaim land for indigenous communities by intensifying the crackdown on alleged encroachments by illegal immigrants. Soon after taking office, Sarma had launched a series of eviction drives, largely targeting Bangla-speaking Muslims.

Several recent incidents in Assam, where meat was allegedly found near temples following Eid celebrations, have reinforced the narrative the BJP is trying to push. Sarma was quick to



SUPPORTING DUE PROCESS AND MINORITY RIGHTS PUTS THE CONGRESS IN A BIND, LEAVING IT VULNERABLE TO CHARGES OF BEING “PRO-FOREIGNER”

frame these acts as “the weaponisation of beef against Hindus”, amplifying communal tensions. Another polarising move has been the government’s decision to issue arms licences to “original inhabitants” in vulnerable border areas. This has been widely interpreted as an attempt to strengthen perceptions of insecurity and promote community-based self-defence. Sarma has urged citizens to adopt a firm stance. “Modiji alone cannot protect

us,” he warned, insisting that unless the Assamese people themselves resist infiltration, neither laws nor leaders can preserve their identity.

Sarma’s political intent becomes more apparent when considered alongside Assam’s shifting electoral dynamics. The All India United Democratic Front, once a key force representing Muslim interests, has been significantly weakened. This opens up space for the Congress to reclaim Muslim support. At the same time, it gives the BJP an opportunity to label any Congress-Muslim alliance as evidence of the party’s alleged “anti-national” leanings. The Congress finds itself in a complicated position. Supporting due process and minority rights leaves it vulnerable to charges of being “pro-foreigner”. But remaining silent in the face of what critics see as systematic persecution of a certain group undermines its secular credentials. The recent appointment of Gaurav Gogoi as state Congress president was an attempt to find a leader who could navigate these treacherous political waters.

But Gogoi’s own background has given Sarma ample ammunition for attack. The BJP leader has accused Gogoi and his British wife of being Pakistani sympathisers gathering intelligence on Indian soil. Sarma’s announcement that he will reveal “evidence” on September 10 appears strategically timed to build anti-Congress sentiment. For Gogoi and the Congress, the stakes are high. Gogoi’s appointment suggests the Congress is willing to stake its fortunes on a direct contest with Sarma. But the BJP’s narrative, of a Muslim-friendly Congress allegedly compromised by foreign interests, could prove a potent challenge in Assam’s volatile electoral arena.

As Assam approaches the election, Sarma’s efforts are not only aimed at consolidating the BJP’s support base but are also subtly redefining the terms of political engagement in the state, where the boundaries between governance and campaign rhetoric are getting increasingly blurred. ■



Govt. of Bihar

PRAGATI YATRA

UNFOLDING NEW HORIZONS

Nitish Kumar's Pragati Yatra marks a momentous milestone in Bihar's journey—steering its people past the roadblocks of yesteryears' struggles towards new vistas, brimming with limitless possibilities...



Over the last two decades, Bihar has been scripting an inspiring tale of resurgence. Once branded as a developmental laggard, Bihar is marching forward on a ceaseless journey of all-round progress as it stands on the cusp of a renaissance. At the helm of this transformation is Chief Minister Nitish Kumar whose dynamic stewardship has brought about a sea change in the perception of the state. His latest endeavour, the Pragati Yatra, has underscored an expansive landscape of growth with the state determined to be at the forefront of India's mission to become a developed nation by 2047.

A cavalcade winding through dusty roads and verdant fields, threading its way across 38 districts of Bihar over two months, from 23 December to 21 February... this was no ordinary expedition. The Pragati Yatra, Nitish Kumar's 15th such outreach since taking office in 2005, was a masterstroke of vision and action. By the journey's end, Bihar was gifted development schemes worth ₹50,000 crore, a staggering sum that promises to

reshape the state's physical and social fabric. From multi-lane expressways to sturdy bridges, sprawling sports complexes to robust power grids, the announcements span every conceivable sector,

Seven new medical colleges to bolster healthcare, nine degree colleges to nurture young minds, 14 sports complexes to foster talent, 24 religious sites to preserve heritage, nine power grids to light up villages, six desilted drains to tame floods, eight industrial expansions to spark jobs, seven Atal Kala Bhawans (named after former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee) to celebrate art, and a slew of roads and bridges to stitch the state together.



touching every corner of the state.

The numbers tell a compelling story. Of the 430 projects greenlit so far, 190 have been approved at the departmental level, while 240 have secured the nod from the state cabinet. In two crucial cabinet meetings chaired by the CM himself, the government moved with rare alacrity. The first meeting sanctioned ₹20,000 crore for 187 projects in North Bihar—67 at the departmental level and 120 via the cabinet—covering flood-prone districts like Madhubani and Sitamarhi. The second, held at the yatra's close, approved ₹30,000 crore for 243 schemes in South Bihar, with 123 departmental approvals and 120 cabinet clearances, targeting regions like Gaya and Bhagalpur.

What do the schemes seek to accomplish? Seven new medical colleges to bolster healthcare, nine degree colleges to nurture young minds, 14 sports complexes to foster talent, 24 religious sites to preserve heritage, nine power grids to light up villages, six desilted drains to tame floods, eight industrial expansions to spark jobs, seven Atal Kala Bhawans (named after former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee) to celebrate art, and a slew of roads and bridges to stitch the state together.



roads and bridges to stitch the state together. It's a magnificent blueprint for a Bihar that dares to dream big. For instance, the medical colleges include upgrades in districts like Siwan and Saran, addressing a doctor-patient ratio that once languished at 1:17,000. The sports complexes, like the one planned in Patna, echo the state's push to reclaim its sporting legacy—think of cricketer Ishan Kishan, a Bihari lad who's made waves in the IPL.

A BIRTHDAY BOOST ON BIHAR DAY

The timing couldn't have been more appropriate. The Pragati Yatra culminated just as Bihar geared up for its annual statehood celebration, Bihar Day, on 22 March. On 22 March 1912, after sustained

efforts by leaders like Sachchidananda Sinha and Mahesh Narayan against colonial inertia, Bihar was carved out from Bengal, gaining its own administrative identity. What began as a quest for recognition has, over a century later, morphed into a mission for redemption.

Once the cradle of empires—Magadha, the Mauryas, and the Guptas, whose capital Pataliputra (modern Patna) was a global marvel—Bihar fell into a post-independence slumber. Poverty, poor infrastructure, and lawlessness defined its narrative for decades. According to the Planning Commission report, Bihar's per capita income during the 1990s was around ₹5,000–₹6,500,

Nitish Kumar's tenure since 2005 has been punctuated by bold moves. Law and order was his first triumph—once a land where daylight robberies, murders and kidnappings were rampant, Bihar saw crime rates plummet as police stations were revitalised.

NITISH KUMAR'S PROGRESS JOURNEY BRINGS A WAVE OF DEVELOPMENT TO BIHAR A GIFT OF 50,000 CRORE

During Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Pragati Yatra, Bihar has received a significant boost with development projects worth 50,000 crore. As part of this initiative, crucial announcements have been made across various sectors for all 38 districts of the state, marking a milestone in Bihar's comprehensive development.

| Category | Number | Districts |
|------------------------|--------|---|
| Medical Colleges | 10 | Darbhanga, Samastipur, Khagaria, Supaul, Araria, Banka, Nawada, Aurangabad, Jehanabad, Kaimur |
| Degree Colleges | 7 | Gopalganj (Vaishali), Buxar, Banka, Nawada, West Champaran, Jehanabad, Kaimur |
| Power Grids | 9 | West Champaran, Sitamarhi-Sheohar, Vaishali, Sheohar, Madhepura, Banka, Raxaul-Sheikhpura, Nawada |
| Religious Tourism | 17 | Kaimur, East Champaran, Gopalganj, Vaishali, Madhubani, Samastipur, Buxar, Kishanganj, Saharsa, Katihar, Munger, Raxaul, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Rohtas, Nalanda |
| Industrial Development | 11 | Bhagalpur, West Champaran, East Champaran, Gopalganj, Vaishali, Madhepura, Buxar, Munger, Nawada, Darbhanga, Madhubani |
| Airports | 5 | Darbhanga, Madhubani, Supaul, Saharsa, Bhagalpur |
| Eco-Tourism | 1 | Nalanda |
| Sports Complexes | 10 | Buxar, Kaimur, West Champaran, Saharsa, Purnia, Jamui, Aurangabad, Jehanabad, Arwal, Nalanda |

This ambitious initiative is expected to accelerate Bihar's infrastructure, education, and industrial growth, reinforcing the state's journey towards progress.

significantly lower than the national average of ₹10,000–₹12,000 at the time. The Pragati Yatra has lent this year's Bihar Day an extra sheen, a reminder that the state is no longer content to linger in the shadows of its past. This year, the 113th anniversary of Bihar's separation from the Bengal Presidency felt different—charged with a renewed sense of purpose. The CM's ambitious announcements have turned a commemorative date into a launchpad for progress, amplifying the festivities with tangible hope.

SHEDDING THE TAG OF BACKWARDNESS

Rewind to 2005. Bihar was a state on its knees—roads were potholed nightmares, schools were hollow shells, and power cuts were a way of life. Enter Nitish Kumar, a soft-spoken engineer-turned-politician with a steely resolve. Taking the reins after years of political chaos under predecessors whose tenure saw infrastructure crumble while caste politics thrived—he vowed to erase the backward state label. His early years were a whirlwind of reform: law and order tightened, roads sprang up like arteries, and electricity began to flicker into homes. Historians will debate his legacy, but the numbers don't lie—Bihar's transformation over the past two decades is palpable.

The Pragati Yatra is the latest chapter in this saga.

It's not just about bricks and mortar; it's about a mindset shift. Take West Champaran, where Nitish unveiled 400 projects worth ₹752 crore—including a new sugar mill revival, tapping into the district's agrarian roots. Or Saran, which was gifted 52 schemes costing ₹985 crore, such as a trauma centre to cut mortality rates on NH-19. Darbhanga, a cultural hub famed for Mithila art, bagged 180 projects worth ₹2,000 crore, including a ring road to ease its perennial traffic snarls. Every district got its share, a district-wise blueprint ensuring no corner is left behind. This isn't top-down diktat—it's development with a local pulse, tailored to each region's needs, informed by grassroots feedback the CM has honed over his numerous tours.

Nitish Kumar's tenure since 2005 has been punctuated by bold moves. Law and order was his first triumph—once a land where daylight robberies, murders and kidnappings were rampant, Bihar saw crime rates plummet as police stations were revitalised. A 2019 NCRB report pegged Bihar's crime rate at 185 per lakh, below the national average of 241. Roads followed, weaving a network that shrank distances and spurred trade—by 2020, the state boasted over 100,000 km of rural roads, up from 30,000 km in 2005. Education got a shot in the arm—girls' enrolment soared thanks to schemes like the Mukhyamantri Cycle Yojana, which handed out free cycles to 1.4 million schoolgirls by 2015, slashing dropout rates.

Then came electricity—a luxury in 2005, a norm by 2025. Power generation leapt from 700 MW to over 6,000 MW, as per the Bihar State Power Holding Company, lighting up 98% of households by 2023. Healthcare improved with new hospitals and free medicines—AIIMS Patna, opened in 2012, stands as a testament. Millions of government jobs—over 6 lakh since 2005,



including 2.5 lakh teachers in 2023 alone—lifted families out of poverty. The 2016 liquor ban was a gutsy call to curb domestic violence and addiction, backed by a 2021 study showing a 15% dip in related crimes. The Jal Jeevan Hariyali campaign, launched in 2019, married sustainable development with environmental care, planting 25 crore trees and reviving 20,000 water bodies by 2024. These aren't just policies; they're lifelines for a state clawing its way up.

A TRAVELLER OF TRANSFORMATION

The Chief Minister is no stranger to the road. The Pragati Yatra was his 15th statewide tour, a testament to his hands-on style. From the Nyay Yatra of 2005, tackling justice delays, to the Vikas Yatra of earlier years, he's crisscrossed Bihar, listening to grievances and sketching solutions. This latest journey, spanning 60 days, is his most ambitious yet. Covering 38 districts, he didn't just wave from a podium—he plunged into the nitty-gritty, announcing projects that promise to redefine

Bihar's skyline. His Janata Darbars—public grievance forums—complement these tours, resolving over 1 lakh complaints annually, ensuring his ear stays close to the ground.

The scale is unprecedented. Never before has a single tour yielded such a deluge of schemes. With ₹50,000 crore committed and cabinet approvals secured by February, the pace is breakneck. North Bihar's package targets its flood-prone plains such as Kosi embankments in Supaul, while South Bihar's focuses on its rugged terrain, like Rohtas' industrial zones. It's a dual-pronged assault on underdevelopment, executed with surgical precision, backed by a bureaucracy, which is now responsive and accountable.

Modern highways, overbridges, elevated corridors, and ring roads are set to decongest cities and link villages in the state. Patna's JP Ganga Path will stretch from Didarganj to Mokama, slashing travel times by 40%. Nehru Path's drainage will be paved over for a sleek road to Saguna More. Gola Road, Rajiv Nagar, and Anandpuri will see widened streets, banishing bottlenecks that once choked Patna's western flank.

Beyond the capital, Nalanda's Hilsa gets an eastern bypass, Bihar Sharif's Ranchi Road broadens, and

The Pragati Yatra was his 15th statewide tour, a testament to his hands-on style. From the Nyay Yojana of 2005, tackling justice delays, to the Vikas Yatra of earlier years, he's crisscrossed Bihar, listening to grievances and sketching solutions.



Nitish Kumar's Pragati Yatra has lit a new spark, turning hope into momentum. As the edifying vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047 beckons, Bihar is all geared up to contribute to its realisation as a prominent player in India's development story.



Rohtas' Wajidpur gains a bridge over the Kaw River—cutting its distance to the sub-divisional HQ by 71 km, a boon for farmers. Kaimur's Mohania, Bhagalpur's array of paths, and Buxar's Dhansei Bazaar will sport new bypasses. Samastipur and half a dozen other districts join the list. Ring roads will encircle key towns like Muzaffarpur, while bridges and ROBs promise seamless travel—over 300 bridges were built between 2005 and 2020, and the Yatra envisages to add dozens more. Bihar's jam-packed days are numbered—soon, a trip to Patna from anywhere in the state will take just three to four hours, down from eight or more a decade ago.

A HOLISTIC OVERHAUL

Infrastructure isn't just concrete. Agriculture and irrigation, long neglected, have got a big boost. Patna's embankment from Didarganj to Purnia will widen, with a plea to the central government for ₹525 crore in support. Nalanda's Sarnera block sees Zamindari dams refurbished, while Noor Sarai and Harnaut get eight anti-flood sluice gates—a response to 2023 floods that displaced two lakh people. The Panchane irrigation scheme

will be revived, irrigating 50,000 hectares. Across districts, canals will be fortified, and river interlinking—linking the Sone to the Falgu—will combat drought and floods, a lifeline for farmers who produce 8 million tonnes of rice annually. Healthcare leaps forward with seven medical colleges adding 700 MBBS seats annually. Education expands with nine degree colleges, like in Begusarai, tapping a literacy rate that's climbed from 47% in 2001 to 70% in 2021. Industry grows with eight new zones—Bhojpur's agro-processing hub among them—while tourism flourishes with revamped sites like Bodh Gaya's Mahabodhi precinct. Power grids and interstate bus terminals round out the vision in a tapestry of progress, weaving together every sector.

After these schemes take root, Bihar will match pace with frontrunner states in a year or two. The state government's road-building spree since 2005 has laid the groundwork—road density hit 225 km per 100 sq km by 2020, rivalling Punjab's 220. Now, high-speed corridors will turbocharge connectivity. Traffic jams will fade, and economic activity will surge. The Pragati Yatra's big-billion infusion promises lakhs of jobs, fuelling a continuing cycle of growth.

The government schools in the state now have 2.5 lakh new teachers since 2023, hospitals boast doctors and free drugs (80% coverage), and jobs draw talent to Bihar ranging from Uttar Pradesh to Tamil Nadu. Patna's flyovers and upcoming metro reinforce a modern, vibrant capital. Even local brand Sudha, a dairy cooperative under COMPFED, is going global—its sweets now reach the US and Canada, exporting ₹21 crore worth in 2024, hinting at Bihar's untapped potential.

THRIVING ON THE YOUTH

The state's ace is its youth—60% of its 12-crore people are under 25, a demographic dividend waiting to be harnessed. With smart human resource use—IT hubs in Patna or skilling via the Kushal Yuva programme, training 5 lakh youth since 2016—Bihar could join India's elite states in near future. Nitish Kumar's Pragati Yatra has lit a new spark, turning hope into momentum. As the edifying vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047 beckons, Bihar is all geared up to contribute to its realisation as a prominent player in India's development story. Shedding its backward label way behind, Bihar's achievements span all sectors. The landscape is changing, and the state is ready to shape a new, aspirational journey.

Bihar will match pace with frontrunner states in a year or two. The state government's road-building spree since 2005 has laid the groundwork—road density hit 225 km per 100 sq km by 2020, rivalling Punjab's 220. Now, high-speed corridors will turbocharge connectivity.





THE ELECTRIC REVOLUTION

THE EV SECTOR IS SET TO SEE A HOST OF NEW PLAYERS



YOGENDRA
PRATAP

THE EV INFLUX

IT'S EARLY DAYS FOR FOREIGN CARMAKERS LOOKING AT THE GOVERNMENT SCHEME ON ELECTRIC VEHICLES



Lucid Gravity

The newly announced incentive scheme for foreign carmakers to make EVs in India is about to get off the ground. According to government sources, a lot of carmakers have evinced interest in registering for the scheme. This includes some who are already present in the country as well as new companies taking the opportunity to establish a manufacturing base in India. But that does not mean there will be a long wait for new cars at lower prices, because once registered, these companies can start importing EVs at a duty of 15 per cent as opposed to 70 or 100 per cent as the case may be. The number of cars that can be

imported at the incentivised rate is governed by the total amount the company is saving by paying duty at a lower rate. This amount can be equal to the total amount the company has invested under the scheme—the saving being capped at Rs 6,484 crore. Of course, there are a lot more stipulations and caveats to this and it is not as simple as it sounds.

It remains to be seen how many

companies will finally avail this scheme (SPMEPCI) to promote manufacturing of passenger electric cars in India. It is almost certain that the one company that this scheme was tailor-made for will not be signing up for it, and will instead be going the CBU (completely built unit) route and paying the prevailing import duty. This may be because Tesla could be hoping for a lowering of tariffs once a bilateral trade agreement is signed between India and the US, or for that matter with any of the territories where it is already making its cars, like the EU.

Other US companies that make EVs are also keenly eyeing the Indian market and awaiting the result of the negotiations and the signing of the trade deal before weighing the best route to enter India. Those that are closely watching the developments are new players like Lucid Motors and Rivian as well as the established players like Ford and General Motors.

Automaker Stellantis has already announced plans to launch its Leapmotor brand of EVs in India while another new emerging EV player from Vietnam, VinFast, even before the launch of SPMEPCI, has made an investment of US \$500 million (Rs 4,305.6 crore) to set up a manufacturing facility in Tamil Nadu and will be rolling out its India-made cars, the VF6 and VF7, in the country soon.

It is not certain which routes the various EV companies will take but a number of new and established brands will be available soon in the country, and at much lower price points. ■



VinFast VF6



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VW DRIVES IN THE DEFINITIVE HOT HATCH

Volkswagen has launched the Golf GTI, that comes here in its 8.5-gen avatar, at an ex-showroom price of Rs 53 lakh. This is the second GTI model to come to India, after the Polo GTI that was sold here in limited numbers. The initial import batch has 150 units, and all of these are already sold out. The Golf GTI is powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo-petrol that makes 265 bhp and 370Nm. Power is sent only to the

front wheels, while the transmission is the DQ380I 7-speed DCT. This helps the GTI launch from nought to 100 kmph in just 5.9 seconds with a top speed of 250 kmph (electronically limited). The Golf carries a familiar VW aesthetic, with an illuminated logo and Matrix LED headlamps. Sporty elements are present all over, and the fog lamps form an 'X' motif. It rides on 18-inch dual-tone alloys and has red brake callipers, while

the dual exhaust tips announce the GTI's spirited side. Inside, the highlights are the sport seats that feature tartan inserts (a GTI classic) as well as GTI badging. It also gets a leather-wrapped steering, again with a GTI clasp. There is a 12.9-inch infotainment display as well as a 10.25-inch digital instrument cluster. Features include three zone climate control, 30-colour ambient lighting, heated front seats and a wireless charger.

A VERY SPECIAL G

Mercedes-Benz India has launched the first-ever India-inspired AMG G 63 'Collector's Edition', a bespoke and limited variant of its iconic luxury off-roader. Priced at Rs 4.3 crore (ex-showroom), only 30 units of this special edition will be made, and will be available exclusively to existing customers of Mercedes-Benz top-end luxury vehicles.

Co-developed with

Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India (MBRDI), the 'Collector's Edition' pays homage to India's diverse landscape and cultural richness. It marks a milestone in hyper-personalisation, featuring custom paint shades Mid Green Magno and Red Magno, and will have a personalised grab handle engraved with the owner's name.

The exterior features edition-specific touches like a 'One of Thirty'

G-FORCE Manu Saale, MD and CEO, Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India, and Santosh Iyer, MD and CEO, Mercedes-Benz India with the AMG G 63 'Collector's Edition'





HYUNDAI EXTER CNG GETS EX TRIM

Hyundai has launched the Exter EX Hy-CNG Duo at Rs 7.51 lakh (ex-showroom). This makes the model available at a lower price point, from the earlier Rs 8.64 lakh (ex-showroom). Power comes from the same 1.2-litre petrol motor that makes 83 bhp and 114Nm of torque in

petrol mode and 69 bhp and 95.2Nm of torque in CNG mode, and is mated to a 5-speed manual gearbox. The EX trim has H-shaped LED tail-lamps, digital instrumentation with a 4.2-inch MID (Multi-Information Display), driver's seat adjustment, six airbags and keyless entry.

HYUNDAI Verna's New Variant

Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) has expanded Verna's range by launching a new SX+ variant of the sedan, available in both manual and iVT (Intelligent Variable Transmission) options. The Verna SX+ boasts a host of high-end features, including a Bose 8-speaker sound system, leather seat upholstery, front ventilated and heated seats, LED headlamps and front parking sensors. In other news, Hyundai launched a Wired to Wireless Adapter for seamless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity. The adapter is compatible with seven models—the Grand i10 Nios, Exter, Verna, Aura, Venue, Venue N Line and Alcazar.



badge on the spare wheel cover, unique protective side strips and 22-inch Tech Gold AMG wheels. The interiors are finished in two-tone MANUFAKTUR nappa leather, complemented by open-pore walnut wood trim, enhancing the SUV's luxury quotient. It also gets the latest MBUX NTG7 infotainment system with augmented reality navigation and 3D surround sound.

Deliveries of the AMG G 63 Collector's Edition will begin in Q4 2025, with the carmaker reiterating its focus on locally tailored, exclusive offerings for the Indian market.

HERO XOOM 125



Hero has launched the Xoom 125 in India. Offered in two variants, VX and ZX, the Xoom 125 shares its platform with the Destini 125. The VX variant will cost Rs 86,900, while the ZX is priced at Rs 92,900 (both ex-showroom, Delhi).

Inside, the Xoom features a 124 cc single-cylinder engine (same as the Destini 125), delivering 9 bhp and 10.4Nm of torque. The engine is mated to a CVT. It gets a telescopic front suspension and a single-side rear shock. There are 14-inch alloys with a front disc brake and rear drum. Positioned within Hero's sporty scooter lineup, it boasts aggressive, angular styling.

The scooter also comes equipped with a digital instrument cluster featuring Bluetooth connectivity, offering call and notification alerts along with turn-by-turn navigation. Notably, the Xoom 125 is the first scooter in India to feature sequential turn indicators. Bookings will commence next February, with deliveries scheduled to start in March '26.

VIETNAM'S INDIAN AMBITION

VINFEST'S VF7 SUV PAIRS BOLD DESIGN WITH TECH-LADEN INTERIORS AND EV MUSCLE AHEAD OF ITS INDIA LAUNCH

BY YOGENDRA PRATAP

VinFast, part of the Vietnamese conglomerate Vin-Group, will be launching two electric SUVs in India later this month. The VF6 and VF7 will be made in India at its new state-of-the-art plant in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu.

We were in Vietnam to experience the two cars engineered for the Indian market at the company's sprawling mother plant in Haiphong, northern Vietnam. Here is what we think of the VF7, the larger and more premium of the two.

Unlike its smaller sibling, the VF7 has a much sharper design with more angles and a bit more flair, with a very pronounced sporty roof that slopes back



VinFast VF7
Motor: Dual-motor, AWD
Power: 354 bhp
Torque: 500Nm
Transmission: Single-speed
Battery: 70.8kWh, Li-ion phosphate
Range: 431 km (WLTP estimated)
Top speed: 200 kmph (est.)
Price: ₹30 lakh (est.)
On sale July 2025

a lot, resulting in a minimal glasshouse on a very chunky body. The front V signature is more upright and similar to the design at the rear, and both the tail lamp and the front DRLs are quite attractive and have a lot more panache than the VF6. The VF7 is shorter than the MG Hector and Mahindra XUV700 but is exactly the same width as the latter and not as tall.

The VF7 will be available in both FWD and AWD versions, with the former sharing the same 150kW motor as on the VF6, with an additional motor doing service at the rear on the AWD version. The power and torque figures on the AWD version would increase to 260kW and 500Nm, respectively. The 0-100 kmph acceleration times on the more powerful variant would come down to 5.8 seconds from 9.5 seconds for the FWD variant. The battery would also be larger, moving to 70.8kWh for both versions of the VF7. Though the MIDC (Modified Indian Drive Cycle) range is yet to be disclosed, one can see that in other markets, the VF7 has claimed a range of just





VINFEST VF7

about 450 km (431-450 km WLTP estimated). While the VF7 is equipped with CCS2 charging ports and will be able to take high-speed DC charging, AC charging is limited to 7.2kW, and that for a battery size upwards of 70kWh would mean a whole night of charging at home. The VinFast team is looking at upgrading this to an 11kW on-board charger.

The larger wheelbase, as well as the fact that it is built on a dedicated electric platform, means that there is a lot of space, both in terms of leg room and shoulder room. And it is loaded with tech—up to the gills. A large 12.9-inch infotainment display performs some of the functions of the IP and takes centrestage on the dashboard. While most of the functions are provided on the touch screen, there are 5 switches that can be configured to provide access to whatever feature one wants. There is also a very large panoramic glass roof, but that is without a cover of any sort, and VinFast engineers assure us that collapsible screens will be available as accessories to cover up the large glass area for the summer. While the boot is a rather large 537 litres, and includes a puncture repair kit, it is not clear whether VinFast will equip the car with a space saver, though it

has done so in some other markets.

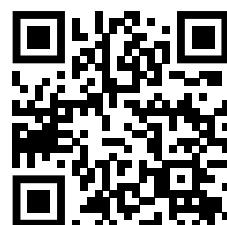
As far as ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance Systems) go, the VF7 stops just short of driving by itself and has a whole host of driver assistance systems, including highway and lane-keep assist, and an adaptive cruise control system. The car also has 360-degree surround view as well as rear parking assistance. It has a slew of connected features such as the operation of the HVAC system, opening of windows and locking/unlocking of doors, all through the app. There is also wireless Apple CarPlay as well as Android Auto. There are even seven airbags on the cars, and the VinFast engineering team assures us that the cars will get a 5-star rating at NCAP.

The brutal acceleration of electric powertrains is very much present, but the car cannot handle the surge of power as the suspension is tuned more towards ride comfort than razor-sharp handling. Regen modes abound from no regen to low, medium and high, but even the highest regen setting does not translate into single pedal driving. The powertrain also has three driving modes, Eco, Normal and Sport, though the difference in the three does not seem to be of a large magnitude. ■

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A REVOLUTIONARY E-SUV FOR THE FAMILY

MAHINDRA HAS CREATED RIPPLES IN THE INDIAN ELECTRIC CAR MARKET. WHILE ITS BE 6 IS A COMPACT SUV COUPE, THE XEV 9E IS THE LARGER MODEL. HERE'S HOW THE XEV 9E WEIGHS UP

BY RAHUL GHOSH

HARVINDER SINGH

Meet the Mahindra XEV 9e: an electric SUV that blends size, style and smarts. Measuring 4,789 mm in length and 1,907 mm in width, it stands tall at 1,694 mm. The front end is dominated by the large LED light panel, an excellent visual. The grille is absent but the section gets a grille-like detail, which looks cool. Under the bonnet resides a large trunk which can gobble up 150 litres. In profile, the XEV 9e sure looks massive. The 20-inch wheels look great and fill up the wheel wells with ease. The sweeping roof line is also a cool element. This was first seen many years back when Mahindra showcased a coupe SUV concept based on the

XUV 500. The door handles at the back have also been repositioned next to the C-pillar to ensure a smooth shoulder line. The rear section feels massive and once again is dominated by the LED light panel. The electric tailgate rises to reveal a large and flat 663-litre boot. While the boot is large enough, the loading lip is a bit high and one will have to lift the luggage up.

The XEV 9e embraces a futuristic design, though it appears slightly more conventional compared to the outlandish styling of its BE 6 sibling. However, there's plenty here to excite the modern family buyer. Inside, the dashboard stands out with its trio of 12.3-inch screens, one dedicated solely to the front passenger. The central touchscreen con-



trols most functions, including the air conditioning and seat ventilation. But we'd prefer physical or haptic buttons for these frequently used features to make on-the-go operation easier for the driver. The digital instrument cluster is equally comprehensive and adapts its theme based on the selected drive mode. The spacious centre console adds to the practicality by offering ample storage space.

Comfort is a priority. The seats are generously sized and supportive, while the panoramic moonroof with integrated light panels enhances the cabin's airy feel. Rear seat occupants are well-catered for too, with abundant legroom, a completely flat floor (thanks to the IN-GLO platform), Type-C charging ports for all passengers, and a bench that comfortably accommodates three.

Audio enthusiasts will appreciate the 16-speaker system that delivers a rich and immersive sound experience. The XEV 9e also features automatic parking, which can be activated even via the remote key when the driver is

Mahindra XEV 9e
Motor: Single-motor, RWD
Power: 282 bhp/227 bhp
Torque: 380Nm
Transmission: Single-speed
Battery: 79kWh/59kWh
Range: 656 km/542 km
Top speed: 202 kmph
Price: ₹21.90 lakh (ex-showroom)
On sale now

nearby. The system handles parallel and angled parking with ease and is calibrated for real-world Indian conditions, making it especially useful in urban environments. The SUV is offered with two battery pack options. The smaller 59kWh delivers 227 bhp, while the larger 79kWh unit boosts power to 282 bhp. Torque remains a healthy 380Nm across both variants. ARAI-certified ranges are 542 km and 656 km, respectively.

Performance and ride quality are enhanced by semi-active dampers and a variable gear ratio steering system, designed to balance comfort with responsive handling. The front row feels large, and visibility all around is good. But the same cannot be said for the rear, as the sweeping roofline eats up the space. The XEV 9e offers good acceleration even in the lightest of modes. It also feels light to steer in traffic, and the small turning radius just adds to the effortless feel of driving. The ride quality at low speed is excellent, and so is the NVH packaging, which ensures a silent cocoon for the occupants. The good bit is that the SUV comes with a 'Boost' mode, which momentarily unleashes all the power from the motor and that makes overtaking effortless.

At higher speeds, though, the sheer weight and size of the vehicle are marginally felt. This is especially the case with the brakes, where one has to get used to the pedal feel—not as progressive as what we would have liked. The semi-active dampers do a great job of curtailing body roll around corners, but there is still some. On the upside, the XEV 9e is perhaps one of the best-handling SUVs in the segment. In all, it strikes a compelling balance between cutting-edge tech, family-centric practicality and electric performance. ■



The interior; (top) front boot space

ELECTRIC DREAMS

BYD HAS LAUNCHED AN EXCITING NEW PRODUCT, THE SEALION 7 SUV. BUT IS IT GOOD ENOUGH TO TAKE ON THE BIGWIGS OF THE AUTOMOTIVE WORLD?

BY RAHUL GHOSH

B

YD, or Build Your Dreams, has been in India for a long time. More famous for its Blade Battery pack, the company is now offering the Sealion 7.

The Sealion 7 is based on BYD's e-Platform 3.0 and uses the tried and well-tested Blade Battery pack. The platform allows RWD as well as AWD set-ups. In the design department, BYD refers to it as the Ocean Series—interpreted as smooth-flowing lines. The SUV comes with a sleek front-end design, complete with sharp LED headlamps.

The bumper houses sharp cuts which serve as aero aids. In profile, one notices that the SUV is rather large. Massive 20-inch wheels fill up the wheel wells, and the design for the alloys is also cool. The sweeping roofline and the spoiler at the back add to its sporty character. The rear end features a smart and simple look with connected tail lights.

Smooth and sophisticated is how we would like to refer to the Sealion 7's interiors. The dash is one seamless panel that plays coloured themes. The infotainment system is a massive 15.6-inch unit, which is electrically rotatable. The well-designed unit is also paired with a brilliant 12-speaker Dynaudio system. The all-digital instrument panel is excellent, too. Thanks to the plethora of cameras and sensors, the system picks up types of

traffic around and displays it on the screen. This can be particularly handy while driving in foggy conditions.

The centre console comes with a set of controls, which are easy to use. Further down, there is a 50-watt wireless charging pad that has an integrated cooler for the device. There is additional space next to it for a second phone as well. The electrically adjustable and ventilated seats are extremely comfortable. Space is the BYD Sealion's forte, and it is evident when one steps into the back seat. The boot can take in 500 litres of cargo. The SUV also comes with a small frunk that can accommodate 58 litres of cargo.

BYD is offering the Sealion 7 in two variants. The entry-level version, the Premium, features an RWD architecture. The power output is rated at 230kW, and the torque generated is 380Nm. The battery pack in this variant is rated at 82.56kWh, and the range offered is 567 km. The top variant is the Performance, and as the name suggests, it features dual motors and is an AWD offering. Maximum power is rated at 390kW, and torque output is 690Nm. BYD claims that this version can travel 542 km on every charge.

When it comes to handling, BYD has done a good job in specing up this 2.3-tonne SUV. The Sealion 7 takes on corners with confidence, and the steering in performance modes offers decent feedback. Body roll is also well-controlled, although prevalent. ■

BYD Sealion 7 4.5 AWD
Motor: Dual-motor, AWD
Power: 523 bhp
Torque: 690Nm
Transmission: Single-speed
Battery: 82.56kWh
Range: 542 km (NEDC)
Top Speed: NA
Price: ₹54.90 lakh
 (ex-showroom) On sale now



XPLORER'S PULSE

The Hero Xpulse 210 is an embodiment of premiumness and performance that has transformed the meaning of versatility and style



Hero MotoCorp is the world's largest manufacturer of two-wheelers, and some of these two-wheelers are more special than others. The Xpulse is one such product, and the Xpulse 210, redefines what it means to be an adventure bike. It strikes a perfect balance of a machine that is capable of blitzing tarmac, while being fearless when there is no road at all. The Xpulse 210 retails through Hero Premia stores, the new home for Hero's premium and performance-oriented lineup.

At the heart of the Xpulse 210 rests a 210cc DOHC liquid-cooled engine that develops

24.6hp at 9,250rpm and 20.7Nm of torque at 7,250rpm, that means power is available right from the slightest twist of the throttle, ensuring unmatched adrenaline rush. The engine comes mated to a 6-speed transmission with an assist & slipper clutch for seamless gear shifts, while the switchable ABS with multiple modes can be adjusted for optimum performance, whether on tarmac or on the roughest of trails.

The Xpulse can conquer every terrain, its sophisticated suspension system with 41mm telescopic front forks and the 10-step adjustable rear monoshock that offer 210mm and 205mm

of suspension travel at the front and rear respectively, results in unmatched impact absorption for rough roads, and a stable ride at high speeds. Stopping power comes from high-performance petal disc brakes, 276mm at the front and 220mm at the rear, that ensure that the Xpulse 210 stops with the same command that it climbs up mountains.

All of these superior components are packaged in a manner that turns heads wherever it goes. The Hero Xpulse 210 is a tool for the explorer, fine-tuned to be used in the city, and capable of reaching anywhere, anytime.



VIDA TO REDEFINE EV OWNERSHIP

VIDA, powered by Hero MotoCorp, is set to introduce a pioneering two-wheeler ownership experience, in the form of Battery-as-a-Service (BaaS) subscription model. This will redefine ownership, allowing accessible and affordable electric mobility. The BaaS comes with a flexible 'pay-as-you-go' ownership model that is truly disruptive and will significantly reduce upfront costs for customers. Customers will have the option to finance the scooter chassis and battery separately, segregating these capital expenditures into monthly payments. There are flexible subscription plans tailored for customers, depending upon budget and usage per month. BaaS empowers customers with greater choice, improved cost efficiency and have the advanced VIDA VX2 electric scooter in their garage.

EXTREME WAYS

THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE XTREME LINE-UP IS HERO'S MOST POWERFUL MOTORCYCLE IN INDIA

BY ABHINAV JHAKAR

HERO XTREME 250R

HARVINDER SINGH

Recently, we got a chance to sample the newest member of Hero MotoCorp's Xtreme family, which is supposed to compete in the 250cc segment. It's called the Xtreme 250R and is completely new from the ground up.

If I had to use one word to describe the 250R's design language, it would have to be aggressive. Another word would be aspirational. Overall, though, Hero must be commended for the design adopted not just for the 250R, but the whole Xtreme line-up. The 250R is based on a trellis frame and features a 50-50 weight distribution between the front and rear. Then there's the 249 cc, single-cylinder, liquid-cooled, four-valve, DOHC motor derived from the Karizma XMR 210 cc motor. However, Hero has completely reworked the internals and made several important changes. For example, the bump in capacity comes from a different crank, and the Hero team says there is reduced friction thanks to a DLC-coated valve train. It

also makes use of semi-dry-sump lubrication, and heat management has also been reworked so that it drives hot air away from the rider's legs. Now, that motor mentioned above produces 30 bhp of peak power and

25Nm of peak torque, which makes it Hero MotoCorp's most powerful model on sale in India.

On starting, there's a distinct beat from the exhaust, which feels throaty yet refined. The power delivery in the low-end is mild, but around the mid-range mark, which is around the 4,000 to 5,000 rpm range, things begin to liven up. There's another sudden burst of energy around 7,000 rpm, which feels helpful when one needs a quick overtake. At 75-80 kmph, this bike sits at under 5,000 rpm, which is a great set-up for a motorcycle that will mostly be ridden

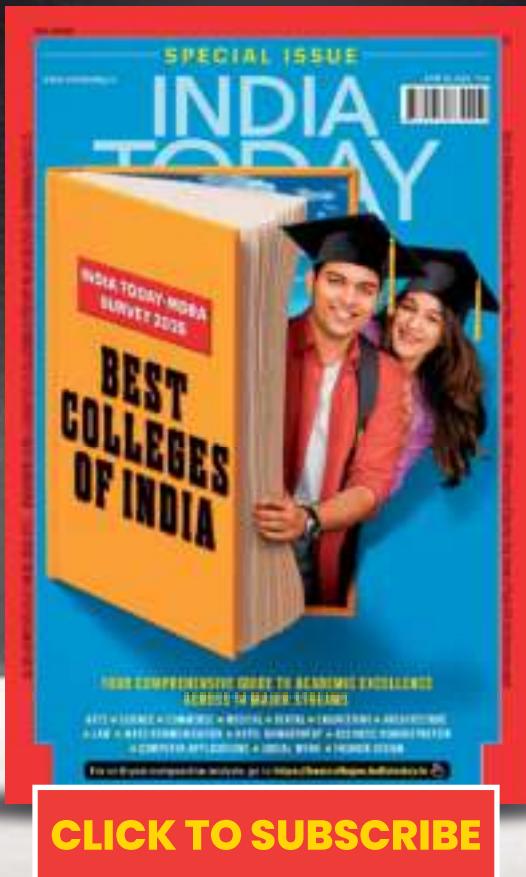
in city conditions. Hero's ace-in-the-hole with the Xtreme 250R has to be the ride quality and handling. There's a hint of stiffness, but it still gobbles up bad roads commendably, without feeling crashy or overburdened.

That short wheelbase means that this motorcycle handles like a charm, and is probably the best out of Hero's entire stable.

The Xtreme 250R is priced at Rs 1.80 lakh (ex-showroom), which is good since it undercuts its main rivals—the Suzuki Gixxer 250 and KTM 250 Duke—comfortably. There are three colour options to choose from, and my favourite of the lot has to be the 'Stealth Black', which looks properly menacing. In conclusion, Hero MotoCorp's Xtreme line-up feels more complete with the 250R and is a perfect motorcycle for those looking for an upgrade. ■

Hero Xtreme 250R
Engine: 249 cc, single-cylinder, liquid-cooled, four-valve, DOHC
Power: 30 bhp@9,250rpm
Torque: 25Nm@7,250rpm
Gearbox: 6-speed
Price: ₹1.80 lakh (ex-showroom)
On sale now

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MOUNTAIN BLUES



In the far reaches of Ladakh, three legendary lakes beckon. With the Mercedes-Benz GLC 300 as a companion, this is a journey through silence, altitude, and reflection, where water and engineering meet in perfect harmony

By ABHINAV JAKHAR

In Ladakh, stillness is not a lack of movement; it is a profound state of being. It is a presence of air, of scale, of silence so deep it echoes in your thoughts. Across this towering, stark, and lunar expanse lie three lakes that don't just define the landscape—they elevate it: Pangong Tso, Tso Moriri, and Tso Kar. Each is a mirror of Ladakh's many moods, each more remote than the last. And to chase them is to understand that the journey is as much about the road between them as the water itself. The journey began from Jispa, on a frigid and damp early morning with an eerie silence.

At its heart was a 2.0-litre, four-cylinder, turbocharged petrol engine, mated to a mild-hybrid system that brought both responsiveness and refinement. The power was immediate but never urgent—a surge when needed, a whisper when not. The first stretch of road towards Chang La Pass rose slowly, then suddenly. Tarmac gave way to gravel, and the weather teased with uncertainty. But the GLC 300 4MATIC never flinched. It carried on its pursuit of providing modern-day explorers with a penchant for luxury and class.

As the elevation increased, so did the terrain's hostility.

Steep gradients, rockfall-prone stretches, icy rivulets across the road - each bend demanded attention. The GLC 300 answered not with brute force but with balance. Its 4MATIC all-wheel-drive system didn't simply react; it anticipated. Beyond Chang La, the landscape opened like a cracked canvas. Flat valleys stretched to oblivion, only to be suddenly interrupted by jagged peaks. And there, breaking through this wild monochrome, was Pangong Tso.

Stretching over 130 kilometres, with two-thirds lying in Tibet, Pangong is not just a lake—it's an optical illusion. The road to Tso Moriri is less a route and more a negotiation. After a while, the lines on the map begin to disappear, and with them, all expectations of what roads should look like. The GLC 300 felt more like a capsule than a car, easily driving through sand, crossing streams, and handling all kinds of changing terrain.

The perfectly tuned suspension soaked up unpredictability with grace. The 9-speed automatic transmission shifted intuitively, always in sync with the rhythm of the terrain. Eventually, beyond the bends of Korzok, the land relaxed its grip, and Tso Moriri emerged.

If Pangong was the performance, Moriri was the prayer.

There was a different kind of silence here. Heavier. More sacred. The lake lay in a bowl of weathered mountains, its waters darker, its moods slower.

From Moriri, the journey shifted into something more introspective. No longer chasing but absorbing. The valleys between lakes weren't empty - they were expansive. Wild kiangs ran across flatlands without boundaries. Through it all, the GLC 300 never faltered its poised handling, composed steering, and the balance of technology and grace allowed it to become part of the landscape, not an intruder but a fellow traveller.

The final lake, Tso Kar, felt like a place the world had forgotten. It was the most subdued, the most minimal, and perhaps for that reason, the most haunting. Perched at 14,860 feet, Tso Kar is a saltwater basin surrounded by bone-dry hills and forgotten winds. Once part of a freshwater system, it's now a pale, cracking mirror to the sky, ringed by salt crusts and the bones of time.

Ladakh doesn't ask for much. It doesn't promise comfort or clarity. But if you arrive ready to surrender - equipped with patience, humility, and a machine built not just to endure but to elevate - it rewards you with something few places on earth can offer: complete presence. Ladakh, where everything is quiet and the lakes shine, the best part of the journey isn't comfort, it's a clear mind. And that feeling is always worth finding.



The GLC 300 handles Ladakh's toughest terrain with ease, from icy streams to rugged mountain trails. Inside, it offers a sanctuary of luxury and tech which is perfectly suited for the high Himalayas



HYUNDAI TO LAUNCH 26 NE

Hyundai Motor India has announced that it will launch 26 new models in the country by FY30, comprising 20 internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles and six electric vehicles (EVs). In addition to ICE and EV models, the South Korean automaker will also introduce hybrid vehicles to cater to the

evolving needs of Indian consumers and support cleaner mobility solutions. In FY25, Hyundai sold 598,666 vehicles in India, with SUVs accounting for 68.5 per cent of total sales—410,200 units—highlighting the segment's continued importance in the company's growth strategy for the Indian market.



MARUTI SUZUKI ADDS SIX AIRBAGS AS STANDARD ON ALL ARENA MODELS

In a move to boost occupant safety, Maruti Suzuki has standardised six airbags across all its Arena models, including the Alto, WagonR, Swift, Dzire, Brezza, Celerio and the Eeco. The upgraded safety package features dual front, side and curtain airbags, along with other key safety technologies like electronic stability program (ESP), hill hold assist, ABS

with EBD and 3-point seat belts for every passenger and seat belt reminders to ensure optimal safety. The updated models with enhanced safety features are now available at Maruti Suzuki Arena dealerships across India. With this initiative, the brand aims to make advanced safety features a standard offering, rather than a luxury, for Indian car buyers.

W MODELS IN INDIA BY FY30



Only BS6, CNG, or EV commercial vehicles in Delhi from November 1

In a decisive move to combat air pollution, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has announced the Air Pollution Mitigation Plan 2025, a strategy targeting vehicular emissions, dust and solid waste while advancing green mobility and infrastructure. A key highlight is the restriction on non-compliant commercial vehicles entering Delhi from November 1, 2025. Only BS-VI, CNG or electric commercial vehicles will be allowed to run. The city will also revise its EV policy, aiming to transition 80 per cent of government fleets to clean fuels. Sensitive ecological zones will be reserved exclusively for EVs, with gradual removal of non-electric vehicles. To enforce this, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras will be installed at borders and fuel stations to detect End-of-Life (EoL) vehicles.



ALL TWO-WHEELERS TO GET ABS AS STANDARD FEATURE

In a major push to improve road safety, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has announced that starting January 1, 2026, all new two-wheelers sold in India, regardless of engine size, must be equipped with Anti-lock Braking Systems (ABS). Additionally, dealerships must provide two BIS-certified helmets with each vehicle, ensuring protection for both the rider and pillion. Currently, ABS is only mandatory for models above 125 cc. The new rule extends this crucial safety feature to all segments, including budget scooters and motorcycles. ABS helps prevent wheel lock-up during sudden braking, reducing the chances of skidding and improving vehicle control, especially in emergency situations. This regulation may lead to a slight price hike in the 100-125 cc segment—the most popular in India—due to the added safety hardware like front disc brakes and ABS units.

BYPASSING THE HOSPITAL A patient with nurses at an eICU set up in a residence by Max@Home in Noida



HEALTH | HOMECARE

THE HOSPITAL COMES HOME

With home healthcare offering everything from dialysis and eICUs to palliative care for cancer patients and rehabilitation services for stroke survivors, Indians are learning to move from hospital care to 'anywhere-care'

BY SONALI ACHARJEE / Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



A

PLEASANT REVOLUTION IS TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE IN INDIA. For a long time, home care was limited to end-of-life or palliative care, geriatric nursing and physiotherapy. All diagnostic, emergency and critical care functions happened in hospitals. Now, in a massive shift, the comfortable confines of a home are taking centre stage. They call it home healthcare or, simply, home-care. Today, complex clinical profiles

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EXPECTED SIZE OF INDIA'S HOME HEALTH-CARE MARKET BY 2027, AS PER A 2021 NITI AAYOG REPORT



VIKRAM VERMA
Senior VP & business head, MAX@Home

“Whether it's a parent on long-term antibiotics, a cancer patient needing palliative support or someone after a stroke, recovery at home leads to better clinical outcomes and lower risk of hospital-acquired infections”

can be managed at home, something deemed impossible a decade back. This includes looking after those in coma, stroke survivors and dementia patients. Other than the usual barrage of blood/urine tests, a wide range of diagnostic procedures like x-rays, ultrasounds, electrocardiograms (ECGs) and some biopsies can be done at home by trained professionals. Not just this, use of ventilators, dialysis units and setting up of e-ICUs (electronic intensive care units) have expanded the range of home healthcare. Doctors say it speeds up complex recoveries, including from organ transplants, cancer care and major surgeries. Furthermore, it saves money, reduces congestion in hospitals and is considered safer. Sensing a shift, major players like Apollo and Max hospitals have introduced homecare services under Apollo Home and MAX@Home, respectively, while other players like Portea Medical and Healthcare at Home (HCAH) contribute to a burgeoning market worth thousands of crores. Taking note, the government is not far behind.

The Covid-19 pandemic marked an evolutionary inflection point for home healthcare. According to government data, over 90 per cent of Covid cases were treated at home. “Increasingly, especially post Covid, patients prefer to recover in their homes. At Apollo, we saw this as both a need and an opportunity. Hence, we thought of creating a dedicated vertical for home healthcare,” says Vishal Lathwani, CEO of Apollo Home, which has launched a service in Bengaluru that guarantees a home visit by a doctor within 90 minutes—the medical equivalent of quick commerce.

“Whether it's an elderly parent on long-term antibiotics, a cancer patient needing palliative support, or one regaining strength after a stroke,

recovery at home leads to better clinical outcomes, higher emotional comfort, and lower risk of hospital-acquired infections,” says Vikram Verma, senior VP & business head, MAX@Home.

It has eased tensions for people like Swati Deshmukh, 63, who delayed her total knee replacement surgery for two years despite medical recommendation. She put it off because she was “terrified at being hospitalised for a week or so afterwards”. Today, the former school teacher from Mumbai feels emboldened. “My sister-in-law opted for a hospital knee replacement surgery with homecare recovery. She was in hospital for just two days,” says Deshmukh. “I now plan to get mine done.”

The setting up of eICUs by major healthcare providers—with systems using video conferencing, high-definition audio and software tools for patient monitoring, data access and real-time support by ICU specialists—are a boon for many. MAX@Home installed more than 1,400 step-down ICUs—a stripped down ICU designed for homes—in 2024. A sample study of 506 patients by HCAH who used eICU-

providing network Critinext, revealed a reduction in infection, rehospitalisation rates and cost of care (saving Rs 30,000 on average per day per readmission).

According to Deloitte 2022 Global Consumer Trends in Healthcare, 74 per cent Indians prefer home sample collections, and 49 per cent prefer treatment at home. As with a spa experience or groceries, people want services and products to reach them. "Healthcare is no exception. Patients now expect healthcare to come to them—seamlessly, reliably and with the same standards as hospitals. So, the demand for home healthcare is accelerating across urban and semi-urban areas," adds Verma.

Rachit Kabra, 33, from Bengaluru availed homecare services from the start-up Harito. "They have physiotherapists, nurses, and caretakers for the elderly. They are my go-to provider for my father, who is a hemiplegic with regular physio and care requirements," he says.

Expectedly, India's homecare market is expected to touch Rs 1.82 lakh crore by 2027, compared to Rs 53,065 crore in 2020, according to projections in a 2021 report by NITI Aayog. According to business research consultancy HFS Research data, the CAGR (compound annual growth rate) for homecare is 19.3 per cent for India, more than double the 7.1 per cent for the US and the worldwide average of 7.9 per cent.

BENEFITS OF HOMECARE

The first benefit of having a room at home converted into a hospital room is comfort. It helps reduce anxiety, loneliness and improves adherence to medical protocol. A report by market research agency Cyber-Media Research (CMR) revealed that home healthcare has the potential to replace up to 65 per cent of unnecessary hospital visits in India. From January 2019 to July 2021, out of the nearly 7,000 Indian critical care patients who chose to recover at home under the care of Portea Medical, only 7.5 per cent required re-hospitalisation. "Having your own bed, clothes, toilet is powerful in physical recovery," says Dr

WHAT HOMECARE OFFERS

The different services that come under the category



DIAGNOSTIC TESTS: X-rays, ultrasounds, blood tests at home. AI-powered tests mean even those untrained in radiology can perform them

PROVIDERS: Apollo Home, Max@Home, Healthians

COST: Variable



SPECIALISED PROCEDURES:

Treatments for injured limbs, home dialysis, injections, infusions, catheter management and post-operative recovery

PROVIDERS: Max@Home, Apollo Home, Seva at Home

COST: Variable



ICU/ CRITICAL CARE: For patients needing advanced medical care, specialised units with digital monitoring are set up at home

PROVIDERS: Max@Home, Apollo Home, Critical Care Unified

COST: From Rs 10,000 a day



PALLIATIVE CARE: For patients with long-term illnesses, focused on improving quality of life, managing symptoms

PROVIDERS: Pallium India, CanSure, Care24, Apollo Homecare

COST: From Rs 25,000 a month



NURSING CARE: Registered nurses for wound care, medication administration, personalised care plans, geriatric care

PROVIDERS: Portea, Emoha, Max@Home, Apollo Home, Seva at Home

COST: Rs 25,000 for 30 days of 24-hour care

Akhil Srinivas, a general physician from Bengaluru. Indeed, the Follow Your Heart Program by Apollo Home, designed for patients who have undergone coronary artery bypass surgeries, saw 100 per cent medical compliance, improved sugar control and blood pressure.

The second benefit is that of cost. With no room rent, less hospital overhead costs and doctor consultations, home healthcare significantly reduces the financial burden of hospitalisation. The same Portea study found

a 70 per cent reduction in medical costs. More importantly, out-of-hospital care until recently had limited health insurance cover. Today, Portea and HCAH offer cashless homecare services through tie-ups with over 40 insurers that include StarHealth, Nivabupa, ICICI Lombard and GoDigit.

TECH & TRAINING

Advancing technology is the basis of the success of homecare. AI-enabled diagnostic devices like X-ray, ECG and CT scan machines mean that

THERAPY SERVICES:

Physiotherapy, speech and psychiatric therapy, community-based mental health support to rehabilitate patients, aid pain relief



PROVIDERS: HelpAge, Max@Home, Apollo Home, Fix Health, 2050 Healthcare

COST: Some are free; others start at Rs 1,000 for an hour of therapy

DOCTOR VISITS:

For consultations, providing diagnosis and treatment at home



PROVIDERS: Portea, Emoha, Max@Home, Apollo Homecare, Kyno Health, Mobile Healthcare Vans run by government/NGOs

COST: Starting at Rs 1,000 for a general physician visit

even nurses and midwives can use them without additional radiology training. The gadgets do it all—monitoring parameters, body scanning and medical analysis. Doorstep X-rays, ultrasounds and even some MRIs can be performed at home by providers like Scan4Health, Apollo Home, Max@Home and Healthians.

An ageing population and increasing incidence of lifestyle diseases make the concept of 'healthcare anywhere' a promising investment. "Hospitals are strained and

BENEFITS OF HOME HEALTHCARE

FOR PATIENTS

- Emotional and physical comfort of being at home
- Reduced risk of hospital-acquired infections
- Less risk of re-hospitalisation
- Cost-effective care, especially for long-term needs of elderly
- Anxiety-free, instant diagnostic services like ECG, dialysis, CT scan, X-rays

FOR HOSPITALS

- Reduced burden on beds, especially ICUs
- Improved patient satisfaction
- A longer-term patient relationship
- Reduced hospital overhead costs
- Better management of post-surgery recovery and diseases like hypertension, diabetes, chronic heart disease through closely monitored care

diseases that can be treated successfully at home need not take up unnecessary bedspace," says Lathwal. This is crucial, for India's hospital bed-to-population ratio is currently at 1.3 beds per 1,000 people, against a recommended three beds.

Investing in homecare instead of building new hospitals makes business sense too. The CMR report revealed that home healthcare could replace up to 20 per cent of hospital operational costs. You don't need an X-ray for these results to make sense.

With over 245,000 patients served annually and Q4 FY25 revenue growth of 22 per cent, MAX@Home has plans to expand operations.

Public healthcare is not lagging behind. Over 60 million nationwide e-consults were done till 2021 across the government-supported telehealth infrastructure. With access to digital health records, doctors could treat patients over the phone. The Centre has also been rolling out its flagship 'Aarogya-Doctors on Wheels'—an AI supported telemedicine mobile clinic that reaches out to patients. A patient gives details of her illness in her native language to the AI doctor, who responds in the same language. Afterwards, she is connected to a super specialist through various hospital tie-ups and given a free-of-cost prescription.

Trained caregivers are an attraction too. While previously, there was no formal skills validation for home caregivers, today firms train staff on infection control, empathy, medical hygiene and emergency handling. Apollo Home, for example, also invests in staff safety through pre-deployment risk assessment of a home and an SOS alert system.

To ensure family members understand a patient's needs, firms provide them detailed counselling on medical adherence and maintaining daily logs to track compliance with the care plan. Around 60-80 per cent of home health needs are for senior citizens. "The elderly require compassionate listening, understanding and care," says Dr Ritu Rana, mission head-healthcare, HelpAge India. Home healthcare providers now have specially trained nurses and senior citizen-friendly plans. "I have been using a senior first programme and I have never felt safer and happier," says 71-year-old Amruta Nair, a homemaker in Bengaluru. Her nurse looks after her emotional and medical needs and in case of an emergency, is skilled to call the right doctors.

Homecare is here to stay, just like quick commerce and work from home. A room of one's own is now also a place of regular medical care and recuperation. ■



**INDIA TODAY
COOPERATIVE SUMMIT**

SPIRIT OF

AT THE INDIA TODAY COOPERATIVE SUMMIT, THE GOVER

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

The Union government has reiterated its commitment to strengthen the system of cooperatives, which have their roots in India's past. For this, a massive expansion in the distribution and reach of cooperative societies covering all panchayats is on the anvil. The move will allow these primary credit societies to go beyond their legacy mandate of providing short-term agriculture loans to finance multifarious activities, like cooking gas distribution and taxi service.

These were among the slew of announcements made at the maiden INDIA TODAY 'Sahkar se Samriddhi' summit in Mumbai



Photographs by MILIND SHELTE



COOPERATIVE POWER 1. Union Home and Cooperative Minister Amit Shah handing an equity grant to Vijay Sunil Gargote of Silkberry Fed Farmers Producer Company Ltd along with Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM Eknath Shinde and Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate; 2. Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan along with NCCF Chairman Vishal Singh, KRIBHCO Chairman Dr Chandra Pal Singh, NCUI Chairman Dileep Sanghani, NAFED Chairman Jethabhai Ahir inaugurating the event; 3. Audience at the summit

COOPERATION

GOVERNMENT REITERATED ITS PLAN TO TAKE COOPERATIVES TO EVERY PANCHAYAT



on June 20. The event was attended by Amit Shah, Union home minister and minister of cooperation; Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Union minister of agriculture and farmers' welfare and minister of rural development; and Devendra Fadnavis, chief minister, Maharashtra, among other dignitaries.

Shah said while the country is known for the cooperation movement, it has an uneven presence. It is strong in western states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Goa, but has been weakened in the northern and eastern states. The government now plans to ensure that not even a single village panchayat is bereft of a cooperative society.

Chouhan said the government is working to ensure food security and a nutritious diet

and soil safety besides increasing agricultural incomes.

Fadnavis pointed out how a sector like cooperatives, which has a rich history, had no separate ministry in the Union government. "Prime Minister Modiji recognised the power of cooperation and created a separate Ministry of Cooperation for the first time in India," he said.

The summit also saw prizes being distributed to winners of various competitions, grants of equity to three Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) supported by NAFED (National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd), and distribution of certificates to five FPOs for launch of NAFED Bazaar franchisees. ■



AMIT SHAH, Union Minister of Home, Minister of Cooperation

The Union government is identifying vacuum areas in the cooperatives sector and will establish 200,000 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) across the country, the Union home minister and minister of cooperation Amit Shah said at the summit. This, he added, would ensure a cooperative society in all the village panchayats in India.

"We have computerised all PACS, and almost 52,000 of...71,000 PACs have gone live. Model bylaws have been prepared at the central level, and I am happy that all states have accepted them. Under this, the PACS can do 24 types of work," Shah said. "They were earlier into short-term agriculture finance, and now they can also be CSCs (Common Service Centres), Jan Aushadhi Kendras, petrol pumps and gas distributors. They would maintain water supply schemes, build godowns, run cooperative taxis, and make air and rail bookings."

In three years, the government has launched the National Cooperative Exports Ltd, National Cooperative Organics Ltd and Bharatiya Beej Sahakari Samiti Ltd. These cooperatives will sell agricultural produce in world markets, and the profits will be directly credited to the farmers' bank accounts. Organic products will be certified and sold under the 'Bharat Organic' brand in local and international markets. This will ensure gains for farmers as well as the end-users who will get certified organic products. Shah expressed confidence that in the next 10 years, these three new cooperatives will grow into major institutions like Amul, NAFED, IFFCO and KRIBHCO that serve farmers.

To strengthen our annadatas and create a robust ecosystem to back it, PM Modi has created the Ministry of Cooperation

In fisheries, 44 deep-sea trawlers are being supported through cooperatives. The dairy sector is also being strengthened under the White Revolution 2.0

A national taxi service will be launched. Here, a driver will not just be connected to it, but will also be the owner of Bharat co-operative taxi and will get profits straight into his bank account



Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the people of this 1.4 billion-strong country should get a stomach full of food. There was a time when India was forced to eat imported American wheat, but now, Chouhan said, he could "say with pride" that the country has sufficient stocks of wheat, rice and maize, and is even exporting foodgrains. He added that under PM

Narendra Modi's leadership, they have set a roadmap for agriculture, which includes boosting per-hectare production, reducing the capital costs of farming, ensuring remunerative pricing for produce and diversification. "We are now in the 11th year, and if we consider agricultural production—be it foodgrains, fruits or vegetables—it has risen by 44 per cent under PM Modi's helmsmanship," he said.

Cooperation is in India's soil, in India's roots. Thousands of years ago, our *rishis* said 'Atmavat Sarvabhuteshu' (all living beings are like our own selves)

Even today, 46 per cent of India's population depends only on agriculture for sustenance. We cannot do without farming

In some instances, research happened in labs while farmers remained in their fields. The lab and land never met.... Motivated by the prime minister, we decided to link the lab with the land

This focus on cooperation and investment in the sector...has led to cooperatives getting a new form. It has led to a different kind of economy emerging in the villages

Maharashtra has always led in the cooperatives sector. Even in the future, it will continue to lead in all parameters





INDIA TODAY COOPERATIVE SUMMIT



REVIVING ROOTS 1. Kumar Ram Krishna, Director, Ministry of Cooperation; 2. (from left) Dr Chandra Pal Singh, Dileep Sanghani, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Jethabhai Ahir with the winner of International Year of Cooperatives Painting Competition Rajwi Vinay Nile; 3. Manikrao Kokate with Jethabhai Ahir; 4. Eknath Shinde distributing Franchise Certificate to P. Rajendran; 5. (from left) Yogendra Kumar, Chairman, Seed Cooperative Society; Deepak Pareek, Director, Global Partnerships and Trade, Indian Chamber of Food and Agriculture; Kumar Ram Krishna; A.V. Ravindra Prasad, GM, NABARD

TACKLING OBESITY IN INDIA

THE ROLE OF BARIATRIC AND METABOLIC SURGERY



DR SARFARAZ BAIG

GI, Laparoscopic, Hernia and Bariatric Surgeon and Director of Digestive Surgery, Belle Vue Clinic Kolkata.

Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery in Current Era in India

Obesity is a global pandemic, and India is not spared from the disease burden as revealed by the National family Health Survey (NFHS-5) which showed a prevalence of overweight/ obesity in 24% of women and 22.9% of men, with a sharp jump from 2015 figures. While mild to moderate obesity can be treated by diet, lifestyle changes, and drugs, severe obesity ($BMI > 40$) is best treated by metabolic and bariatric surgery, with data showing weight loss of 30-40% at 1 year and 25% at 10 years. Newer drugs (GLP-1 analogues such as semaglutide and tirzepatide) are reasonable alternatives producing 10-20% weight loss at 1 year. The downside of medicines is that once stopped, patients regain weight, and therefore, it needs to be continued lifelong. Considering the cost of medications is Rs 14000 to 20000 per month, this translates into a costly treatment for many middle-income group patients. In contrast, surgery is a single-shot treatment that gives durable and significant weight loss in the majority. Despite this data, the utilization of surgery is paradoxically poor in our resource-stricken country. This needs to be addressed by spreading awareness, insurance ease, and government policy.



India's Obesity Alarming Rise



1 in 4 women & 1 in 5 men are overweight or obese (NFHS-5)



Huge jump from 2015 figures



Linked to poor diet, inactivity, stress & urban lifestyle



DR NIRUPAM SINHA

Assistant professor and bariatric and metabolic surgeon NSMCH, BIHTA, PATNA

RISING TRENDS OF OBESITY IN BIHAR & JHARKHAND: BAIATRIC SURGERY: A RAY OF HOPE.....

Hathras, like many parts of Uttar Pradesh, has been facing a severe water crisis. Groundwater levels have been steadily declining and with erratic rainfall patterns. Obesity is emerging as a major health concern in Bihar and Jharkhand, driven by rapid urbanization, sedentary lifestyles, and unhealthy dietary habits, stressful work culture. Increasing numbers of people, including younger adults, are experiencing obesity-related conditions such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, joint disorders, PCOD due to obesity, Depression. Bariatric surgery offers a highly effective solution for individuals with severe obesity who have not achieved results through diet and exercise alone. Procedures like gastric bypass, sleeve gastrectomy, Mini gastric bypass, Sleeve plus procedures, Intra-gastric balloons not only support long-term weight loss but also improve or resolve comorbid conditions. In Bihar and Jharkhand, the scope for bariatric surgery is

expanding, particularly in urban centers like Patna, Ranchi, and Jamshedpur, where advanced medical facilities and trained surgeons are becoming available. Earlier patients used to travel to the metropolitan cities for the same but nowadays, Advanced surgical procedures are being performed in tier 2 cities as well. However, barriers such as lack of awareness, limited insurance coverage, and cultural misconceptions still hinder growth. With the right initiatives, bariatric surgery can play a vital role in combating obesity and improving overall public health in the region.

DISCLAIMER: The views/suggestions/opinions expressed in the article are the sole responsibility of the brand concerned this should not be considered a substitute for medical advise. Please consult your treating physician for more details.



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COLLECTIVE GAIN 1. (from left) NAFED MD Deepak Agrawal, Dr Chandra Pal Singh, Dileep Sanghani, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Jethabhai Ahir, Vishal Singh and COBI Chairman Ajay Patel release a NAFED booklet, 2. Gajanan Patil of Girnamai Fed Farmer Producer Company Ltd receives equity grant from Fadnavis in the presence of Amit Shah, 3. Yogendra Kumar, Chairman, Seed Cooperative Society, 4. A.V. Ravindra Prasad, 5. A performance of Lavni, Maharashtra's traditional dance

5



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4



Where Military Precision Meets Medical Excellence: SUT Hospital's Transformation Under Veteran Leadership

A decorated army colonel brings battlefield discipline to Kerala's premier healthcare institution, proving that the best medicine combines clinical expertise with unwavering human compassion.

In Thiruvananthapuram's medical district, Sree Uthradam Thirunal (SUT) Super Specialty Hospital exemplifies what happens when institutional legacy meets visionary leadership. Since 1987, this healthcare pioneer has operated under the philosophy "Pulse before Purse"—prioritizing patient care over profit in its evolution from regional medical center to Kerala's most trusted healthcare destination.

With over 30 specialized departments, SUT has consistently pushed medical innovation boundaries in South India. It achieved several Kerala firsts, including the state's inaugural beating heart surgery and complex mitral valvuloplasty procedures. Today, its expertise spans advanced stroke care, interventional radiology, orthopedics, and comprehensive neonatal services, including pioneering painless labor programs.

Recognition has followed excellence. SUT holds prestigious honors including "Most Trusted Multi-Super Specialty Hospital" from the APJ Abdul Kalam Inspiration Awards and "Brand of the Year in Healthcare" from Outlook Business Spotlight. Certifications from NABH, MBFHI, and Kayakalp, plus its

'Eat Right Campus' designation by FSSAI, underscore its commitment to holistic patient care.

Behind this transformation stands Col. Rajeev Mannali, whose transition from battlefield command to healthcare leadership exemplifies modern medical administration evolution. With over three decades of distinguished Indian Army service, including commanding roles during the Kargil War, he has guided SUT since 2018, bringing his "mission-critical healthcare" approach to medical delivery.

His impact has been immediate and sustained. Within two years, SUT witnessed significant specialty service expansion, operational efficiency improvements, and substantial patient inflow increases. Under his stewardship, SUT evolved into a comprehensive healthcare ecosystem extending beyond traditional treatment models.

The hospital now serves as a medical education and research hub, offering DNB programs with 100% pass rates. It houses an ICMR-approved Institutional Ethics Committee and operates as an American Heart Association-certified training center for BLS and ACLS courses, reflecting Col. Mannali's vision



Col Rajeev Mannali

MD & CEO of Sree Uthradam Thirunal (SUT)
Super Specialty Hospital

of healthcare institutions as learning and innovation centers.

Col. Mannali's influence extends beyond SUT as a founding member of national healthcare organizations like ANBAI and AHPI, actively shaping quality benchmarks across India's healthcare sector. His transformative leadership earned recognition including "CEO of the Year" at the National Awards for Excellence in Healthcare and honors at the Asian Business & Social Forum in Dubai. Through www.colrajeevmannali.com, he mentors healthcare professionals nationwide.

What distinguishes SUT in Kerala's competitive healthcare landscape is its unwavering human-centered care focus. Despite technological advances and operational scaling, the hospital maintains consistently high patient satisfaction ratings and cultivates a culture rooted in empathy and dignity.

As healthcare evolves toward business-oriented models, SUT Hospital and Col. Rajeev Mannali represent a powerful alternative—where military discipline enhances rather than compromises healing arts, where growth strengthens rather than dilutes patient focus, and where true healthcare leadership serves something greater than profit margins alone.



A Compassionate Revolution: How one Doctor Transformed Mumbai's Pediatric Healthcare

When Dr. Bodhanwala took the helm of these semi-governmental charitable institutions, she inherited organizations with proud histories but limited resources. What happened next defied conventional healthcare wisdom. Instead of scaling back ambitions to match constraints, she expanded both the scope and quality of care.

"Healthcare innovation isn't merely about cutting-edge technology—it's about reimagining access points for those traditionally excluded from quality care," says Dr. Bodhanwala. "Every transformation we've implemented begins with a simple question: How does this serve our most vulnerable patients?"

This patient-first philosophy crystallized most dramatically in the case of conjoined twins Riddhi and Siddhi. Rejected by multiple Mumbai hospitals, the twins found hope at Wadia. "When those twins arrived at our doorstep, we didn't see medical impossibilities—we saw two children deserving the chance to live independent lives," Dr. Bodhanwala explains. The successful separation surgery not only transformed two lives but signaled Wadia's emergence as an institution willing to tackle challenges others deemed impossible.

Under her stewardship, the hospitals have achieved remarkable milestones. The establishment of India's largest Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with 155 cutting-edge beds has saved countless

infant lives. More impressively, Dr. Bodhanwala has systematically developed over 30 specialized pediatric services and Centers of Excellence, creating a comprehensive care ecosystem that rivals international standards while serving patients from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Her leadership shines particularly bright in initiatives targeting healthcare gaps for marginalized communities. The creation of India's first clinic for children with multiple disabilities and visual impairment (MDVI) addresses a previously neglected patient population. Similarly, the IVF center for economically disadvantaged couples challenges the notion that advanced reproductive technologies should remain exclusively available to the wealthy.

The annual Little Hearts Marathon exemplifies Dr. Bodhanwala's innovative approach to healthcare philanthropy—simultaneously raising awareness about pediatric cardiac conditions while generating resources for children needing life-saving surgeries.

"True equity demands building sustainable systems that continuously expand access to cutting-edge care," asserts Dr. Bodhanwala, who has managed the rare feat of balancing fiscal discipline with clinical advancement.

As India confronts enormous healthcare challenges, Dr. Bodhanwala's leadership at Wadia Hospitals offers a compelling blueprint: excellence and equity can coexist, and institutions with modest resources can deliver extraordinary care when guided by both strategic vision and humanitarian values.

In a healthcare landscape often fragmented between profit-driven corporate hospitals and underfunded public institutions, Dr. Bodhanwala has carved a middle path that maximizes both clinical outcomes and social impact—proving that with the right leadership, charitable hospitals can become centers of both medical distinction and compassionate care.



In a country where quality healthcare often remains a privilege rather than a right, Dr. Minnie Bodhanwala stands as a remarkable exception to the rule. Her transformative leadership at Mumbai's Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital and Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital for Children represents a masterclass in combining medical excellence with social responsibility.

► Dr. Minnie Bodhanwala
CEO of Nowrosjee Wadia
Maternity Hospital &
Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital
for Children

LE! SURE

THE LISTICLE: ART EXHIBITIONS PG 72

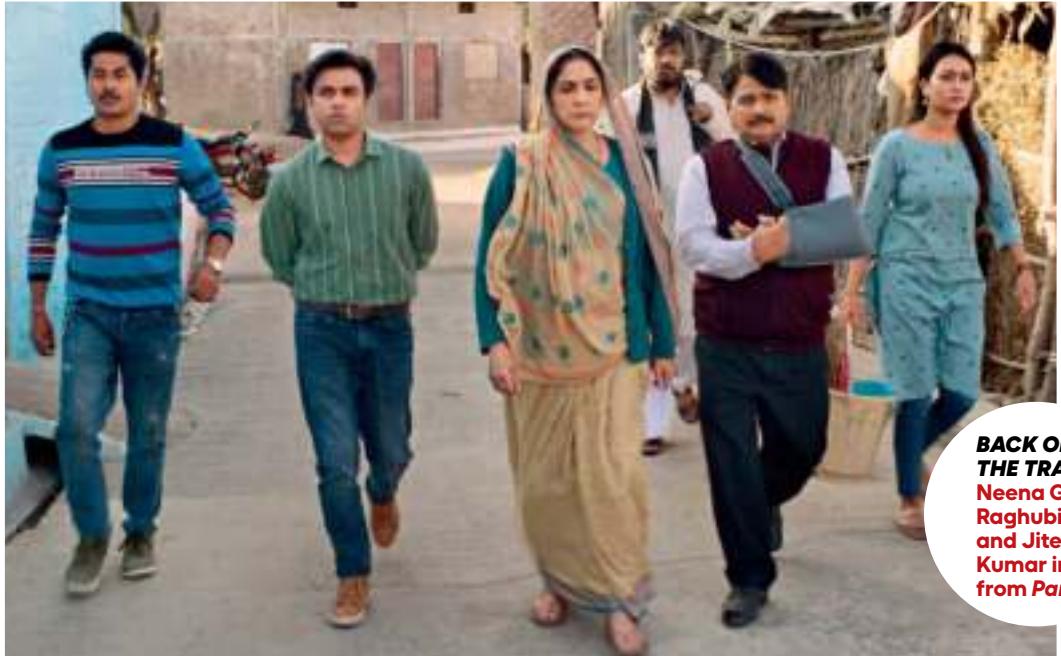
Q&A: FATIMA SANA SHAIKH PG 76



OTT ▶

WOMEN IN CHARGE

**NEENA GUPTA AND SUNITA RAJWAR TALK
ABOUT THE GROWING CLOUT OF THEIR
CHARACTERS IN PANCHAYAT SEASON 4**



BACK ON THE TRAIL
Neena Gupta, Raghbir Yadav and Jitendra Kumar in a still from *Panchayat*

F

Few can claim to be “India’s most loved show” and get away with it. The Viral Fever’s *Panchayat* is that rare show which does have the bragging rights. Packed with wry observations on everyday life and human behaviour in the hinterland and memorable characters, the Amazon Prime Video series has entered its fourth season, an incredible feat in itself. Actor Neena Gupta credits the writing of Chandan Kumar and the work put in by director Deepak Kumar Mishra. “Season after season, they do something special. I wait for the script. I don’t know how they do it,” she says. “We don’t need to improvise; *sab kuchh milta hai* [everything’s there in the script itself].” She further attributes apt casting for the show’s success, which has seen actors become synonymous with their parts, with some even featuring in viral memes (type Binod, Bhushan and Bam Bahadur in Google and get ready for laughs).

One such character to have struck a chord is the mean confron-

tational machine that’s Kranti Devi, played by the talented Sunita Rajwar. “Wherever you are from, people love *Panchayat* because you can watch it with your family,” she says.

“*Saral hai. Smart banne ki koshish nahin hai* [It’s simple. They don’t try to be oversmart]. They show things with respect,” adds Gupta on the TVF formula that has seen it generate hit shows like *Kota Factory*, *The Aspirants* and *Pitchers*.

Panchayat’s fourth run puts the women in the spotlight: Rinki ki Mummy a.k.a. Manju Devi (Gupta) and Kranti Devi battle it out in the elections. Further proof of the ladies’ growing stature are the promotional posters where Manju brandishes her election symbol, the gourd, while Kranti holds the pressure cooker.

“This time, I have become

***Panchayat*’s fourth run sees Neena Gupta and Sunita Rajwar’s characters battle it out in the elections**

interested in the elections and in doing things,” says Gupta. “The seed was sown in the earlier seasons when characters have asked why I don’t do anything.” If Manju Devi takes more initiative in the quest to retain her seat, Kranti is a rookie largely following the questionable footsteps of her husband, the ever-entertaining Bhushan a.k.a. Banrakas (Durgesh Kumar). “I don’t know any better,” says Rajwar of her character. “For the first time, she is getting importance. She is going to the *vidhayak*’s house, who in turn is playing the bigger game as he knows we are upset with Pradhaanji and company. But most of the major planning is done by the three [Bhushan, Binod and Madhav].”

It’s one thing to be part of pop culture conversations, another to catalyse societal change. Such is the show’s influence that the ministry of panchayati raj recently roped in members of the cast to shoot small skits where Gupta’s Manju Devi is the elected representative calling the shots, and not her husband. “There are seats where women win but it’s the husbands who run the show,” says Gupta. “But I have decided I will do this. To be part of an initiative that encourages and inspires other women is special.”

BLOOD IN THE KITCHEN

RENUKA SHAHANE'S *LOOP LINE* IS A SOBERING FEMINIST TALE WHICH USES ANIMATION TO GOOD EFFECT

Gupta was an inspiration to Rajwar herself. Like her, she too studied at the National School of Drama (NSD). "The first time I saw a celebrity was when she visited the NSD campus. I remember she was wearing a lovely red outfit," says Rajwar. "We used to all look up to her. So in awe was I that I couldn't even go and talk to her." Soon their paths would align in then Bombay as Rajwar arrived to kick off her acting career. The duo would first work in a play, *Surya ki Antim Kiran se Surya ki Pahali Kiran Tak*. "She is the first person who ensured we were paid well for rehearsals and the play," says Rajwar. "Every time I was down [professionally], something worked out with her." Rajwar would work as an assistant creative head in Gupta's production house and managed her daughter, Masaba, for a year.

"Kaam hi toh karna hai [One just has to work]," says Gupta of her role in assisting Rajwar in her professional journey. "She has done a lot. *Koi bhi kaam chhota nahin hota* [No work is small]. She is proof that if you work hard and consistently, you will reach where she has. She has been to Cannes." Rajwar plays a key part in India-set UK drama *Santosh*, which was the UK's submission to the best international film category at the Oscars. But it's her work in the TVF shows, *Gullak* and *Panchayat*, that has made Rajwar a familiar face. "They have changed my life," she says. ■

—Suhani Singh

Ina startling sequence in actor-director Renuka Shahane's animated short film *Loop Line*, a homemaker makes pakoras out of her brain and serves them to her husband and his friends while they drink and chatter noisily. No, this is not a horror film. *Loop Line* is the sort of poignant feminist cinema Shahane has honed over her last two features, *Rita* (2009) and *Tribhangi* (2021).

Loop Line follows a woman compelled to be voiceless at home, while her indifferent and brutish husband stays blind to her. Titled in Marathi as *Dhawpatti*, it was screened at the New York Indian Film Festival on June 21.

"The protagonist keeps slipping into her fantasy world, and I initially wanted these portions to be animation while reality could be live action," says Shahane. "But I realised, the audience wouldn't experience the story properly then, so I chose to tell this through animation." The *Dhawpatti* title has multiple meanings. "It means a runway, which allows airplanes to pass, but we focus on the planes, not the runway," says Shahane. "It also means parallel lines. The protagonist is living parallel lives: one at home, one in her fantasies."

The animation—done by Mumbai's Paperboat Design Studios—forces you to notice the sound

design of the protagonist's mundane chores: sweeping the floor, making roti. It also helps drive home the point in the bloody scene with the brain. "A lot of homemakers feel their job doesn't require brains, their opinions don't matter," explains Shahane. "In that scene, the men feasting on alcohol and chakna are blind to her, her brain, her soul, but only notice her when her sari's pallu drops. Then, she is a piece of meat."

The protagonist is also kept silent because, "the moment I give her a voice, the spell of her being voiceless breaks", says Shahane. Forever challenging herself with new mediums, she is now working on a Marathi feature about caste and a black comedy in which she plans to cast her husband Ashutosh Rana. ■

—Shanu Ghosh

FEMINIST TAKE
Renuka Shahane; (below) a still from *Loop Line*



EXHIBITION ▼

Private Collector, Public Legacy

Architect **Sohrabji K. Bhedwar**'s private bronze icons finally surface in a rare public exhibition

As an architect, Sohrabji K. Bhedwar left his signature on India's most prominent urban landscape by designing art deco marvels across Mumbai. From the iconic Eros Cinema facing Churchgate railway station, and landmark residential buildings like Queen's Court and Green Fields to the Indo-Saracenic marvel of the Syndicate Bank building in Fort, Bhedwar was a master of the arches and turrets that have come to define one of the most

influential design movements of the century.

But Bhedwar was also a man of art. He was a connoisseur, scholar and a collector of art, especially of South Indian and Nepali bronzes that have been extensively written about by cultural icon Karl Khandalavala in his essay 'Masterpieces in South Indian and Nepalese Bronzes in the Collection of Mr. S.K. Bhedwar of Bombay' in a 1950 issue of *Marg* magazine.

An ongoing exhibition at Mumbai's Chatterjee & Lal gallery, Colaba, showcases Bhed-



Photographs by CHATTERJEE & LAL



THE LISTICLE

Interesting art exhibitions to look out for this month

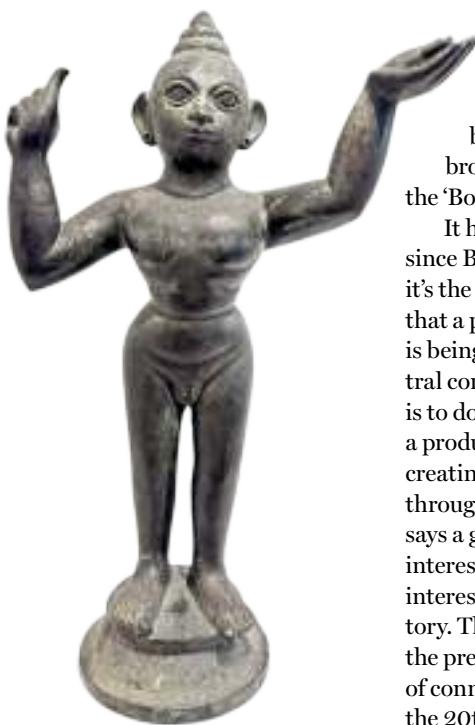
▼ MUMBAI
A Shared Future

On view at **Tao Art Gallery** till July 10

Curated by Yash Vikram, *Isotropical Futures* brings together nine artists—including Unnikrishnan C., Avni Bansal, David Malaker, Geetanjali Bayan and Moumita Basak—whose works engage with themes of ecological and

social survival to dive deep into environmental justice, identity and interconnection. The exhibition throws up some intriguing experiments in form, like Bayan's textile work and Unnikrishnan's use of terracotta bricks as a canvas.

CLASSICAL BEAUTY
Tara (left) and Hanuman (below)—two bronze figurines from the Bhedwar collection



war's love for these unique pieces. Curated inhouse by the directors of the gallery, the show, titled *Building the Past: An Architect Collector*, takes a closer look at a fraction of the collection of what Khandalava famously cited as among "the best private collection of metal images in the country. It is a collection built up over 30 years with great discrimination..." Among the displays are two of the best-known Nepalese bronzes—the 'Tara' and the 'Bodhisattva'.

It has been 70 years since Bhedwar's death, and it's the first time since then that a part of his collection is being displayed. "The central concern of the exhibition is to do with connoisseurship. As a producer of culture, Bhedwar was creating a new, future-looking Bombay through the buildings he was designing," says a gallery spokesperson. "His deep interest in classical Indian art reveals an interest in a long art historical trajectory. This coming together of the past, the present and the future was a feature of connoisseurship during the first half of the 20th century."

The exhibition is also an attempt to

BHEDWAR
was a scholar
and collector of
art, especially
Nepali and
south Indian
bronzes

draw one's focus to why Bhedwar deserves recognition as both an architect and a connoisseur of classical Indian art. According to the gallery, "This exhibition acknowledges his importance to both communities." His extensive investment in sculptures and miniatures was an endeavour three decades in the making. Each piece shows Bhedwar's sensitive eye that didn't miss a detail in the intricacies of form, balance and iconography.

While his architectural design was anchored in structural astuteness and functionality, his collection is a testament to his dedication to spiritual and artistic heritage. Whether it's the tranquility of a standing Buddha from the Kathmandu Valley or a Hindu deity

in motion, these collectables traverse an astonishing range. "The gallery has always taken the view that contemporary art does not emerge out of a vacuum and that it is important for us to present work that is able to provide context for the art that is being made at present," says the gallery, underlining the significance of leaning into the past for a better reading of the present and the future. ■

—Arshia

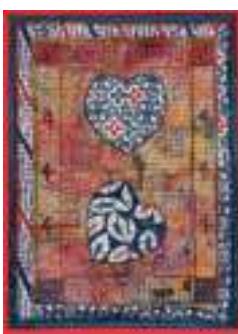
▼ KOLKATA

BUILDING BRIDGES



On view at **Emami Art**
till August 9

The octogenarian Partha Pratim Deb is showing works done over the past two decades in an exhibition titled *Play-Forms*. Deb trained at Santiniketan and at MS University, Baroda, and his works marry Santiniketan's philosophical approach with the progressive experimentalism of Baroda. Here, vibrant paintings, expressive drawings and playful objects that blur the line between toy and sculpture show his astonishing range.



On view at
Experimenter
Colaba till
August 20

▼ MUMBAI

Weft and Warp

In *Volume IV: Truths, Half-Truths, Half-Lies, Lies*, which opens on July 10, Kallol Datta uses textile as a lens to examine the intersection of gender politics, hierarchies, censorship and other issues. The exhibition features experimental work stemming from Datta's research into imperial laws and religious edicts of the past.

—Compiled by Amit Dixit

City Snapshots

Best known for his poetry, **ADIL JUSSAWALA** shows his prose chops in this collection of pieces on Bombay/ Mumbai

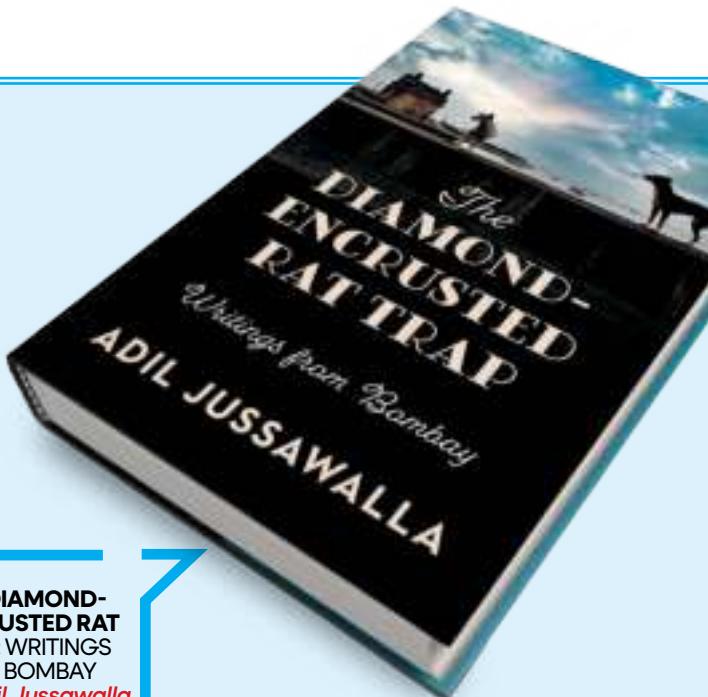
There are many things that *The Diamond-Encrusted Rat Trap* does not do. It does not tell a comprehensive story of Mumbai. It does not pretend to capture the soul of the city, or even to understand its moods and mysteries.

This slim and occasionally eccentric volume—made up of a collection of Adil Jussawalla's prose pieces about Bombay-Mumbai—does something else altogether. It records the fleeting moments that add both beauty and horror to our city. In it, we encounter a city that “smells of the powder on the carrom board” and reverberates with the “sledgehammers of demolition crews”.

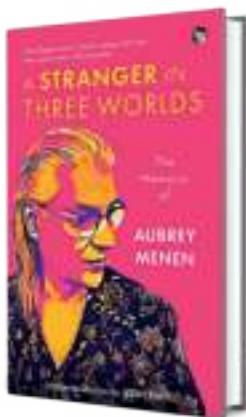
Where life often involves moving through a “box within box above box out of box inside box”.

“The pieces gathered here do not attempt to understand Mumbai-Bombay...,” writes Jerry Pinto in his Introduction. “They are a way of giving witness to the bigness and the strangeness of the city.... His city is built of chance encounters, of laughing liftmen, of departed friends

and other ghosts.” Jussawalla has shared a complex relationship with Mumbai. He left Bombay for London in 1957, seeking somewhere grander than the grey, peeling city of his birth. Thirteen years later, he returned to this place of stray dogs and Gokulashtami pot-breakers. After which he stayed on to write poetry, edit newspapers and magazines and observe his city by the sea.



**THE DIAMOND-ENCRUSTED RAT TRAP: WRITINGS FROM BOMBAY
By Adil Jussawalla
SPEAKING TIGER
₹499; 160 pages**



A STRANGER IN THREE WORLDS
By Aubrey Menen
SPEAKING TIGER
₹499; 280 pages

Aubrey Menen was born in England in 1912 to an Irish mother and an Indian father, a doctor—and brought up as an Englishman. The mixed upbringing makes him a stranger in three cultures, or the very opposite—an insider-outsider, which lends a unique flavour to his writing: a sage-like perspicacity and playful literary acuity mark every sentence. This edition is a two-in-one boombox—*Dead Man in the Silver Market* (1953) and

MENEN'S WRITING VOICE IS INVOLVED YET MAINTAINS AN ARM'S DISTANCE—IT'S BOTH PARTICIPANT AND OBSERVER

MASTER OF THE FORM

AUBREY MENEN STRADDLED SEVERAL CULTURES AND IT'S THIS LIMINAL SPACE THAT INFORMS HIS WRITING

Space Within the Heart (1970)—that jolts the reader awake.

The autobiographical essays here are classics of the genre. In ‘My Grandmother and the Dirty English’, we meet his maternal grandmother who considers herself superior to the British in all aspects: bathing ritual, food habits, even furniture: “she disliked chairs and thought them vulgar.” In ‘The Dead Man in

JUSSAWALLA'S
PIECES
RECORD THE
FLEETING
MOMENTS THAT
ADD BOTH BEAUTY
AND HORROR TO
MUMBAI

Jussawalla writes about the annual exodus when the city's cobblers and fruit sellers and Mafco stall assistants pack up and leave for their "native places"; about the change of light after men on a scaffolding hang up a jute curtain outside his window; about the drummers who are part of the Ganpati processions and who seem to "erupt out of the earth just to take part in the celebrations, and to sink back into the earth once the celebrations are over".

This is like a lucky dip: you never know what you will come up with. Some pieces can feel dated and random. But others remain fresh, funny and a reminder that some things—like the disappearing waiters of posh clubs or the "De daan, de daan" cry after an eclipse—are here to stay.

—Shabnam Minwalla

the Silver Market', the author witnesses an Indian protester being shot dead in Chandni Chowk; later, he dines with a soldier—"from an industrial slum near Liverpool"—who "had been in the party that had done the shooting."

In the second book, Menen reads the Upanishads after the death of his parents. The titular space within the heart, the void inside the onion, is "only an empty space to be used as a post for observation". Menen writes about sex and the spirit, the Gita, Rigveda, Descartes and the Bloomsbury set with wicked humour and in tone-perfect prose. The writing voice is involved yet maintains an arm's distance—it's both participant and observer. "The best way to stop thinking about yourself is to talk about yourself, and that is why so many people do it... When you know yourself for what you are—or what the world has made of you—you prefer to shut up about it." ■

—Palash Krishna Mehrotra

A SINGULAR ARTIST

A comprehensive study of conceptual artist **Mithu Sen**, *Unmyth* is as stimulating as her art

Is it possible for an artist monograph to feel like a live art performance? Capturing the essence of Mithu Sen's work—installations, moving images, sculptures, word art, performances, and

rules of language. The first comprehensive study of the artist's wide-ranging oeuvre, *Unmyth* is thoughtfully edited by scholar-writer Irina Aristarkhova and innovatively designed by Anusha Yadav. Along with being an archive, the intention is to underline the individuality of Sen's practice, which provokes us to envision new worlds

**WHEN ONE SCANS
THE QR CODES IN
THE BOOK, SEN'S
WORK UNFOLDS
IN REAL TIME**

built around negotiating ideas of lingual anarchy, mything, 'un'mything and postmything, radical hospitality, 'un'taboo sexuality, and 'un'monolith identity. It is what Sen describes as "a testament to 25 years of love and playbour (play + labour)." ■

There are QR codes inserted within the book which when scanned reveal work that unfolds in real time.

The book also features contributions from curators, academics, and critics who have engaged with Sen's work over the years. Yet, the book's breathless centrepiece is the 'Fictional Interview' by Sen herself. The questions asked resemble some of the inquiries posed at her practice over the years. But in form and scope, they replicate the playful provocation that makes Mithu Sen truly singular. ■

—Poulomi Das

**UNMYTH: WORKS AND
WORLDS OF MITHU SEN**
*Edited by Irina
Aristarkhova*
MAPIN
₹3,500; 364 pages

drawings—over two decades, *Unmyth: Works and Worlds of Mithu Sen* is as untameable as her practice itself.

It's also in line with Sen's ethos behind "Unlanguage," a creation where she uses nonsensical phrases and incorrect syntax as an act of dismantling the conventional



Double Q+A **BILL**

Fatima Sana Shaikh has two big-ticket releases coming up in July

Q. Nobody plans to but you feature in two love stories in July—Anurag Basu's Metro... In Dino and Aap Jaisa Koi.

I have had back-to-back releases before too. I got to shoot three romances last year so I am glad two of them are coming out. *Mere liye to chaandi hai* [It's a jackpot for me], for they are all such different characters. I play a Bengali in *Aap Jaisa Koi*. I find Bengali women inherently sexy and feminine.

Q. It's a tad ironic that you work with a Bengali filmmaker [Basu] for a Mumbai-set romance while *Aap Jaisa Koi* is set in Kolkata and Jamshedpur and directed by Vivek Soni.

And both of them have presented these cities so beautifully. It was a breeze to work with Maddy [R. Madhavan] in *Aap Jaisa Koi*. He is a fabulous actor, so professional and giving. He is also a filmmaker, so he has a different perspective, which is interesting to observe.

And I am a huge fan of Vivek. In the new generation of directors, he is among the rare ones with a strong, special voice.

Q. Gangster, Life in a... Metro, Barfi! Basu is the godfather of the romance genre.

I love him and his wife, Tani. There have been times I have called Dada at 2 am and cried about things. When you are friends with somebody, you don't tell them 'give me work', because it doesn't sit right. But, with him, I shamelessly ask for work.

Q. It has been nearly a decade since you started your journey as an actor with *Dangal*. How do you look at your journey so far?

I am very happy and thankful. It is not easy, especially when you have nobody from the industry and are an outsider. I feel very blessed to have got the opportunity to work with such incredible filmmakers and actors. And that I am still working and doing good projects.

—with Suhani Singh



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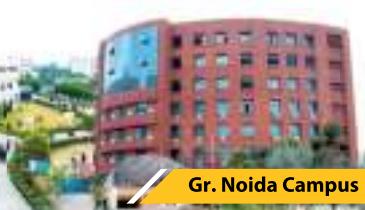
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