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TECH: THE HYPERLOOP DREAM / SMART MONEY: THE 7 SINS OF INVESTING

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT



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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The sixth Indo-Pakistan war ended as suddenly as it began. It came dangerously close to hitting full throttle before an uneasy truce dawned—not a ceasefire, but an “understanding”, in India’s words. That peace came in a rather curious manner, with both sides claiming victory, as they have done on similar occasions in the past. As the India-Pakistan conflict leapt up entire rungs of the escalatory ladder within a space of 88 hours, the world was watching anxiously. No one wanted the retaliatory cycle to become a spiral difficult to tame: two hot-headed neighbours with nuclear bombs did not bode well for anyone. The US, the main actor in a buzzing backchannel, weighed in with some distress diplomacy. It succeeded in applying emergency brakes, but the manner of execution muddied the tenuous peace right on its arrival.

President Donald Trump, overzealous and self-aggrandising, elicited from New Delhi a sharp reaction that was both a ‘thank you’ and a ‘no, thank you’. In his usual cavalier manner, he claimed he had averted a nuclear conflict. To New Delhi’s chagrin, he re-hyphenated India and Pakistan, that too by putting the source of terror and its victim on the same moral footing, mollycoddling both patronisingly. Not only did Trump jump the gun by breaking the news of the ceasefire, Secretary of State Marco Rubio worsened it by announcing Indo-Pak talks at a neutral venue. India was even more furious as Trump sought to insinuate himself into the Kashmir frame, with all his ignorance of history, by offering to solve the “1,000-year dispute”. It took Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s combative speech on May 12 to set the record straight.

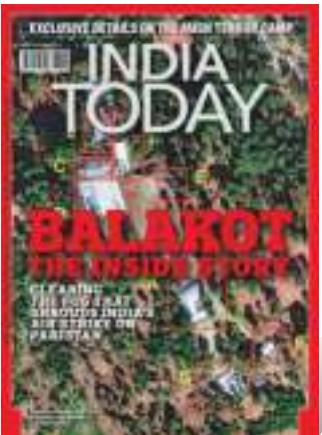
He didn’t mince his words, pointing out it was Pakistan that begged for the ceasefire. Operation Sindoor was not over, he said. This was just a pause, and any fresh act of terror would elicit an even stronger re-

taliation. Geography would not be a constraint, he warned. India would go after them anywhere, and as high up the pecking order of terror as was necessary. Modi also reiterated that trade and talks can’t go together with terror. And that blood and water could not flow at the same time, indicating that India’s suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty would remain till Pakistan mended its ways. Kashmir, especially, was off the table entirely and if at all it was broached, “it would be only about PoK”. Modi also declared that India had successfully called Pakistan’s nuclear bluff, and showed it wouldn’t succumb to blackmail. With this address, he laid down stringent red lines which Pakistan would cross at its peril.

mountain of evidence. It is surprising that a bankrupt country should be provoking war. India is now in a bit of dilemma. Will it commit itself to such high-octane action for every instance of terrorism? There is a danger, too, that autonomous non-state actors with all kinds of vested interests can provoke a war. India will have to ensure that the threshold of action against Pakistan will be crossed only by showing the world a solidly evidence-based chain of causation.

In our cover story, Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa surveys this complex post-war landscape for insights and clues on what happens next. A graphic-rich presentation captures the first hot war of the digital age between two nuclear nations in all its grey granularity. But the urgent questions that smite us are geostrategic in nature. All choices are difficult here. In any cost-benefit analysis, it would be unwise to leave out economics. India has a lot of other business to attend to. It cannot stay engaged on the Pakistan front, nor get imprisoned in a commitment to erupt in war at any moment. America may have given us a pass but not for all-out action or for permanent war. That serves none of its interests. Global investors, too, will not be greatly enthused by a landscape shadowed by flying missiles. Not to speak of the nuclear threat. The chance for India to garner and retain global sympathy rests on it being a mature, restrained state that acts as a stabilising force, especially in South Asia.

For that, it’s a given that Pakistan has to change. The world must put pressure on Pakistan through institutions like the IMF to predicate bailouts upon a verifiable, conclusive end to terror. China can play a crucial role in reining in Pakistan if it so wishes because of its dependency. As India is involved, China possibly has other intentions. India has to navigate all these factors nimbly and thoughtfully. Conflict without purpose serves no purpose.



▲ March 25, 2019

With the 2025 strikes, Modi has set a far higher bar of deterrence for Pakistan’s military-jihadi nexus. His punitive doctrine is now set in stone. The next time the Pakistan establishment is tempted to plot transgression, they will think not twice but thrice. Yet, it’s a precarious peace. Pakistan refuses to relinquish its claims on Kashmir and runs a proxy war against India through the terrorists it fosters on its soil. For India, Kashmir is not on the table for discussion except, as the prime minister said, for uniting the two Kashmirs. It is an impossible impasse, but the self-serving Pakistan army keeps it on the boil to justify its own grip on power. It is somewhat laughable how Pakistan continues to deny the existence of terror training camps in spite of a



(Aroon Purie)

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Volume 50-Number 21; For the week
May 20-26, 2025, published on every Friday

- Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100
- Subscriptions: For assistance contact, Customer Care, India Today Group, C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP) - 201301, email: wecare@intoday.com; Phone / WhatsApp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Friday, 10 am - 6 pm).
- Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP).
- Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
- Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indubans Centre, (Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013; Phone: 022 69193355; Fax: 66063226
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Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana) and at Rajhans Enterprises, 134, Industrial Town, 4th Main Road, Rajajinagar, Bengaluru-560044, (Karnataka).

Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Editor: Raj Chengappa.

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

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CONTENTS

UPFRONT: JUDGING THEMSELVES PG 6

STATE SCAN: COMPETITIVE HINDUISM IN BENGAL PG 14



MORALE BOOSTER
 Narendra Modi at the Adampur air base in Jalandhar, May 13

COVER STORY

INDO-PAK WAR

THE NEW RED LINES

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

► TEJASHWI YADAV

32 Casting a Wider Net

The RJD scion is taking no chances as he goes all-out to woo sections that have so far been cold to the party

► TRANSPORT

36 High on the Hyperloop

India bets on student-led innovation to crack Hyperloop technology for next-gen ultra-high-speed mobility

► SMART MONEY

42 The 7 Sins of Investing

Don't be a victim of investment sins, as they will hurt your assets

► LEISURE

53 In Fine Print

Jyoti Bhatt's retrospective captures his passion for printmaking

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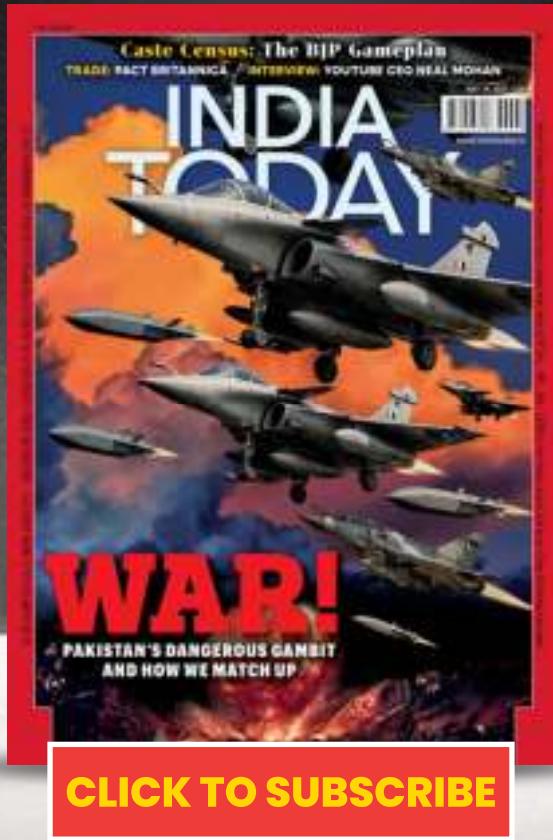
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**INDIA
TODAY**
MAKING SENSE OF INDIA

UPFRONT

CRICKET: FAREWELL TO TESTS PG 8

TECH WATCH: INDIA HIGH ON AI PG 11



JUDICIARY

JUDGING THEMSELVES

The Supreme Court opens up on judges' assets and appointments in an unprecedented act of transparency and self-scrutiny

BY KAUSHIK DEKA

The Supreme Court of India has embarked on an unprecedented transparency drive.

Late on the night of May 5, it quietly uploaded an unusual set of documents to its official website, making public the personal asset declarations of 23 of its 33 sitting judges. It also noted that the remaining disclosures would be uploaded "as and when" submitted. Alongside this, the court also released detailed records of its typically opaque appointment process. This disclosure followed a unanimous resolution at a Full

Court meeting held on April 1, where all SC justices agreed that judges' asset declarations must be placed in the public domain.

The move comes amid intensifying scrutiny of the judiciary, including allegations of corruption, nepotism, caste bias and a lack of accountability in how judges are appointed. Two recent flashpoints proved to be catalysts: a 'cash-for-justice' scandal involving Delhi High Court Judge Yashwant Varma, and unusually sharp public criticism from Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar over judicial opacity

THE TRANSPARENCY DOSSIER

UPFRONT

and overreach. Facing these pressures, the top court's senior judges resolved to shine light on the institution's inner workings. Incoming Chief Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai led the initiative; outgoing CJI Sanjiv Khanna, too, was eager to leave a legacy of integrity with a drive signalling an effort at self-correction. Civil society groups and legal experts have long called for such transparency to pre-empt any perception of corruption or impropriety. A crucial push came from a 2023 Rajya Sabha standing committee report recommending that judges' asset declarations be mandatorily made public.

While the move has been widely welcomed, it is not without its shortcomings. The declarations are self-reported and lack any external audit or verification. Critics argue that one-time disclosures are going to be merely symbolic unless they are regularly updated and independently reviewed.

OPENING THE 'BLACK BOX'

Equally pathbreaking is the SC's decision to shed light on its long-shrouded judicial appointment process. For the first time, the court has made public comprehensive records of all recommendations made for HC and a handful of SC appointments between November 9, 2022, and May 5, 2025. Of the 170 HC appointments finalised, seven (4 per cent) were from Scheduled Castes, five from Scheduled Tribes (3 per cent), 21 from Other Backward Classes (12 per cent), 23 from minority communities (14 per cent), and 28 (16 per cent) were women. For a system long criticised for being dominated by privileged caste males from elite metropolitan backgrounds, this level of transparency enables a long-overdue public audit of social representation. The current numbers show only marginal improvement on this front. Between 2018 and 2023, only 17 per cent of HC appointments were from SCs, STs or OBCs. It's now 19 per cent.

The top court also sought to address persistent allegations of "judicial nepotism". For instance, in the first

303

Candidates proposed by the SC collegium for appointment as judges to HCs between Nov. 9, 2022, and Nov. 10, 2024

170

Names have been approved by the Centre

23

SC judges of the total 33 have declared assets

7

STs

**SOCIAL
BREAKUP**

5

SCs

28

Women

21

OBCs

23

Minorities

7

MBCs/
BCs

12

Related to judges

Critics argue that one-time disclosures of assets are merely symbolic unless they are regularly updated and independently reviewed

week of May, it emerged that among the 33 sitting SC judges, at least 10 are closely related to former judges, while another 10 are sons of lawyers. The newly released data reveals that 12 of 170 recent HC appointees, or roughly 7 per cent, had close relatives serving as judges in the higher judiciary.

Since its inception in the 1990s, the collegium system, wherein the CJI and a small group of senior judges select candidates for elevation, has functioned as a virtual "black box". That has now changed, at least in part. Between November 2022 and May 2025, the SC collegium recommended 303 names for appointment to HCs, of

which 170 were confirmed by the government. Dozens of recommendations remain pending, a telling reminder of the persistent tug-of-war between the executive and judiciary over control of appointments. Under CJI Khanna's tenure alone (November 2024 to May 2025), 51 recommendations were approved, while 12 others are still awaiting government nod.

Critics of the collegium system contend that the publication of asset declarations and appointment data, while welcome, merely scratches the surface. While some tools, such as the High Court Performance Appraisal Template, have now entered the public domain, other key documents, like internal collegium letters, remain classified as "confidential", even when they contain little more than perfunctory justifications. Further, while the appointment handbook for HCs now states that the government must accept reiterated collegium recommendations, the memorandum of procedure for SC appointments lacks such clarity, leaving a significant gap in protocol.

PRE-EMPTING OVERSIGHT?

Many observers see this as a tactical compromise: by offering a degree of openness, the judiciary is trying to safeguard its broader autonomy. As one senior lawyer notes, this sends a clear message: the judiciary is willing to put its own house in order, reducing the rationale for legislative or executive encroachment. Expectedly, initial responses from political leaders suggest the move is yielding results. Dhankhar praised CJI Khanna for the transparency shown in both the Varma matter and the asset disclosures. The law ministry, too, has commended the judiciary's "initiative to enhance accountability" and holding off, at least for now, on any fresh attempt to revive the National Judicial Appointments Commission legislation. However, whether this commitment to transparency is a passing gesture or the beginning of a shift in ethos, will become clear only in the coming months. ■

FAREWELL TO TESTS

**BATSMANSHIP ASIDE,
VIRAT AND ROHIT ALSO
HAD A STELLAR RUN AS
TEST CAPTAINS. BOTH LED
INDIA TO THE WORLD TEST
CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS**

Text by SUHANI SINGH
and AMITABH SRIVASTAVA

ROHIT SHARMA

12

No. of Tests won of the 24 played under Rohit's captaincy (2022-'25). India lost 9 matches, drew 3

177

Score on his Test debut in 2013 against West Indies in Kolkata

► Revived his Test career as an opener in 2019, flourishing in a role tailor-made for his temperament

► Sub-par performances against the Kiwis at home and later in Australia led selectors to reportedly drop him as captain for the coming England tour

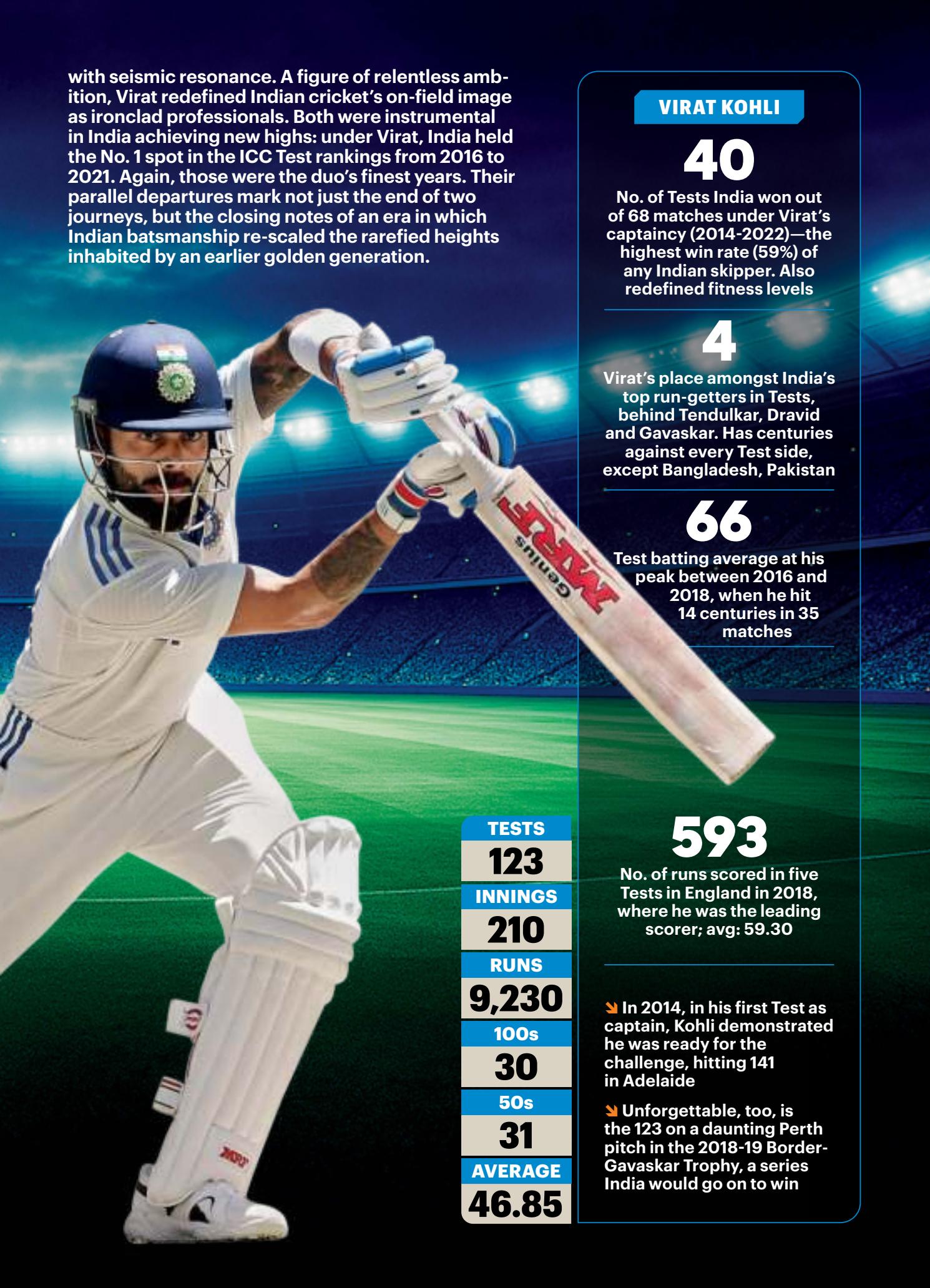
TESTS	67
INNINGS	110
RUNS	4,310
100s	12
50s	18
AVERAGE	40.57

JUST LIKE IT WAS FOR T20 INTERNATIONALS

last June, in a confluence of cricketing destinies, **Rohit Sharma**, 38, and **Virat Kohli**, 36, stepped away from Test cricket within days of each other. Distinct in style and temperament, they left an indelible mark on Indian cricket. If Rohit imparted a sense of elegant calm and quiet assurance, Virat embodied a hyperactive brilliance. And while Rohit's departure stirs a quiet nostalgia—an ode to a late Test bloomer—Virat's exit reverberates



Photographs: ANI



with seismic resonance. A figure of relentless ambition, Virat redefined Indian cricket's on-field image as ironclad professionals. Both were instrumental in India achieving new highs: under Virat, India held the No. 1 spot in the ICC Test rankings from 2016 to 2021. Again, those were the duo's finest years. Their parallel departures mark not just the end of two journeys, but the closing notes of an era in which Indian batsmanship re-scaled the rarefied heights inhabited by an earlier golden generation.

VIRAT KOHLI

40

No. of Tests India won out of 68 matches under Virat's captaincy (2014-2022)—the highest win rate (59%) of any Indian skipper. Also redefined fitness levels

4

Virat's place amongst India's top run-getters in Tests, behind Tendulkar, Dravid and Gavaskar. Has centuries against every Test side, except Bangladesh, Pakistan

66

Test batting average at his peak between 2016 and 2018, when he hit 14 centuries in 35 matches

593

No. of runs scored in five Tests in England in 2018, where he was the leading scorer; avg: 59.30

TESTS
123
INNINGS
210
RUNS
9,230
100s
30
50s
31
AVERAGE
46.85

► In 2014, in his first Test as captain, Kohli demonstrated he was ready for the challenge, hitting 141 in Adelaide

► Unforgettable, too, is the 123 on a daunting Perth pitch in the 2018-19 Border-Gavaskar Trophy, a series India would go on to win



COMMANDING THE ALGORITHM

As tensions flared between India and Pakistan, the loudest applause on social media wasn't for the saffron-tinged chest-thumpers, but for two men usually at the other end—Congressman **Shashi Tharoor** and AIMIM chief **Asaduddin Owaisi**. Tharoor's steadfast defence of India's military action while accusing Pakistan of "spilling Indian blood like sindoor on our soil" on international media platforms came with the former diplomat's characteristic finesse. Owaisi, meanwhile, was unrelenting, calling Pakistan a factory of terrorism and vowing it will be shown its place. No wonder Tharoor and Owaisi's salvos, delivered with surgical precision, ruled the algorithmic battlefield.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ OPENING MOVES

KERALA CONG-CHESS

The Congress high command has made its move: **Sunny Joseph**, 72, the MLA from Peravoor, slid into the Kerala PCC chief's post, replacing **K. Sudhakaran**, 76. The subtext here: an overture to the state's Catholic voters, many of whom have of late shown a soft corner for Modi's BJP, ahead of the 2026 state election. There was much cheer on stage as Joseph took over, but sources hint at some drama behind the



scenes. AICC general secretary and Kerala in-charge Deepa Dasmunsi had been trying to ease the hot-headed Sudhakaran out, and only a 'promotion' as permanent invitee to the Congress Working Committee kept the peace. In all this, one man lost out: Anto Antony, four-term MP and a favourite of the Gandhis, who saw the post elude him yet again.

DIVINE DRILL

On May 7, BJP leaders in West Bengal were handed a divine directive from the party high command—to visit temples and “seek blessings” for the Indian Army. Ever the obedient flock, many Bengal BJP leaders assembled before temple deities on May 8, hands folded in prayer, cameras rolling, one of them even mouthing a scripted—“This is for our jawans.” The ruling Trinamool Congress, of course, could not stop smirking at what it called an attempt to dissipate international tensions with some smoke and incense sticks.



Snake Charmer

Madhya Pradesh CM **Mohan Yadav** has slithered into uncharted territory with his directive for a ‘snake census’ in the state. The forest department, left scrambling, has turned to the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun for help. Yadav’s snake fixation isn’t new. Some months ago, he wanted the King Cobra to be ‘reintroduced’ in MP, saying their disappearance had led to a spurt in other snake species. Now, Yadav claims the reptiles themselves have been sidelined in wildlife censuses, prompting what may be India’s first official snake roll call.



TERRITORIAL TUSSLE

That Goa CM **Pramod Sawant** and town and country planning (TCP) minister Vishwajit Rane are not the best of mates is no state secret. The tug-of-war is now out in the open, with the personnel department, headed by Sawant, appointing senior town planner R.K. Pandita as chief town planner (Planning)—even as Rane chose Vertika Dagur for the post. Finally, the CM had his way: Pandita will be chief town planner (land use) and head of the department. Dagur will now be chief town planner (admin and planning).



Kaushik Deka with Jeemon Jacob, Dhaval S. Kulkarni, Arkamoy Datta Majumdar, Rahul Noronha

TECH WATCH

By Ajay Sukumaran

HIGH ON AI INDIA HITS TOP LEAGUE

The global AI race is hotting up, and India is now a contender. The country cracked the top 10 in private investment in AI globally, bringing up the rear with \$1.4 billion (Rs 11,875 crore), a UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report announced in April. The US was top dog with \$67 billion (Rs 5.7 lakh crore) in 2023, while China came in a lowly second with \$7.8 billion (Rs 66,163 crore). India did much better in ‘cloud infrastructure’, where it was tied third with Australia (China and the US



SHUTTERSTOCK

took the top two posts). But we did go one up on China in GitHub developers, taking the No. 2 spot with a 12.8 million-strong army. The Americans, with 19.7 million nerds heating up the servers, took the top spot. Apparently, we are now also a leader in ‘creating GenAI projects on GitHub’.

SUPERCOMPUTERS THE POWER OF DESI COMPUTING

Giant databases, parallel processing, supercomputers live in a world that processes data at speeds measured in floating-point operations per second (FLOPS). India’s National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) started in 2015 but in just over a decade has set up 34 supercomputers with a combined compute

capacity of 35 Petaflops, says a recent ‘status report’ of the Ministry of Electronics & IT. The first phase involved the installation of six supercomputers, with the focus being on assembling components domestically. By phase two, home-grown value addition rose to 40 per cent, including developing a local software stack. Sources say the final phase is all about full indigenisation, including design, development and manufacturing of key components. And the good part: these supercomputers have been accessed by over 10,000 researchers for their work.



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



MINING GOES GREEN WITH HYDROGEN-FUEL TRUCKS

The pioneering initiative will instill confidence in other industry leaders and can reduce transportation costs.

For a rapidly growing and energy-intensive country like India, the use of hydrogen fuel cell-powered trucks promise to be a major gamechanger.

In capital-intensive sectors such as mining and logistics, where diesel dependency is extremely high, these new-age trucks are seen as a harbinger of sustainability.

Data shows that hydrogen-fuel trucks are not only environmentally beneficial but also hold the key to India's net-zero goals by 2070. To be sure, traditional diesel trucks emit large volumes of carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and fine particulate matter (PM2.5), aggravating air and noise pollution in industrial zones.

The matter has come to a head since several Indian cities occupy the unenviable position to be featured among the most polluted in the world, according to IQAir, a Swiss company that tracks global air quality, looking specifically at PM2.5, one of the smallest but most dangerous pollutants. In this scenario, hydrogen-fuel trucks, which emit only water vapour while operating, have emerged as a clean and sustainable alternative in a massive global battle against climate change. Studies have revealed that an increasing emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as carbon di-oxide, which trap heat in earth's atmosphere, is causing an unprecedented rise in global temperature and triggering extreme weather conditions



Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai presents the key to the nation's first hydrogen-powered truck in Raipur on May 10.

like floods, droughts, and cyclones.

Heavy diesel trucks are also contributing to the pollution mix in a big way. An estimate suggests a single heavy diesel truck emits up to 150 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. On the contrary, hydrogen trucks are 100% emission-free.

But perhaps, the most cogent argument in favour of the switch to hydrogen trucks is economic.

India spends over \$260 billion annually on importing energy sources—primarily diesel

and other fossil fuels. Hydrogen-powered trucks can reduce the import burden and boost domestic energy security in a big way. Hydrogen fuel cell technology also positions India as a global innovation hub. Thanks to initiatives by companies like the Adani Group, India has the opportunity not just to be a consumer of clean technologies, but also a producer and global exporter. The deployment coincides with over 100 newly-auctioned coal commercial blocks set to begin production. Additionally, the



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai flags off the country's first hydrogen-powered truck for mining logistics in Raipur on May 10 in the presence of Sanjiv Kumar Katiyar, the Chief Managing Director of Chhattisgarh State Power Generation Company Limited; and Dr Vinay Prakash, Chief Executive Officer of Adani Natural Resources

truck will be useful in mining other metals and minerals. Once hydrogen becomes widely available along major routes, this new -generation vehicle will be capable of longer journeys, significantly reducing carbon emissions across the length and breadth of the country.

Chhattisgarh shows the way

In a global first, Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL) is deploying a hydrogen fuel cell-powered electric tip trailer for mining and logistics operations.

Beyond big cities and bright lights, the initiative is unfolding in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, a heartland of India's coal mining economy. In financial year (FY) 2024, Chhattisgarh alone contributed over 205 million tonnes (MT), or 20%, of India's nearly one billion tonnes of coal production.

Raigarh will herald a new era of green mining that could serve as a model for other states and countries.

What's the hydrogen truck play like?

In 2022, AEL partnered with Ashok Leyland and Canada's Ballard Power Systems to create this green heavy-duty vehicle. Ashok Leyland is tasked with manufacturing the truck and Ballard is responsible for providing hydrogen fuel cells. Adani New Industries Limited (ANIL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of AEL, is developing the infrastructure for hydrogen fuel.

The truck will be deployed at GP-III coal

block in Raigarh for transportation of coal.

Jharkhand to Odisha to Madhya Pradesh.

What will the truck be like?

This heavy-duty tip trailer will weigh about 55 tonnes and will be equipped with three onboard hydrogen tanks, which have a cumulative capacity to operate around 200 kilometres (km). The contraption features a tipping mechanism, allowing loading and unloading of coal.

The truck will use hydrogen produced through electrolysis. In the fuel cell, hydrogen will react with oxygen to generate electricity, which powers the electric motor. And in a welcome relief, water will be its only emission.

Why does Chhattisgarh matter in India's hydrogen pivot?

Chhattisgarh, one of India's leading mineral-rich states, is a strategic starting point for this initiative. The young central Indian state's economy and employment are inextricably linked to mining. It also faces the environmental consequences of fossil fuel-based industrialisation.

India wants to make a definite statement about its net-zero commitment to the wider world by launching the initiative in Chhattisgarh. The nation seeks to ensure that clean tech doesn't remain confined to cities, but is actively deployed in industrial heartlands, where its impact can be most transformative. If hydrogen-powered vehicles can succeed in Chhattisgarh's rugged mining terrain, they can be scaled across India's coal belts—from

Environmental and economic benefits

Hydrogen trucks are zero-emission vehicles—their only byproduct is water vapour. They reduce air and noise pollution, making them ideal for use even in environmentally sensitive and urbanised zones. Because hydrogen can be produced from renewable sources, it is a viable sustainable energy alternative.

India leads from the front

In countries such as the US, Germany, Japan, and South Korea, though hydrogen fuel cell trucks are being used, the deployment is of limited scale, mostly in urban logistics and delivery. Companies like Tata and Hyundai Toyota and others have deployed or are developing hydrogen truck fleets.

However, these deployments are primarily for road transportation, not for high-load, off-road industrial use.

AEL will break new ground when it becomes the first company globally to deploy hydrogen fuel cell-powered tip trailers specifically for mining applications.

Once successfully deployed, India can become a global leader in hydrogen logistics and mining innovation.

Significantly, this pioneering initiative will instil confidence in other industry leaders, and a ramp up in scale and operations will reduce transportation costs with hydrogen-powered trucks.

STATE SCAN

MAHARASHTRA: CEASEFIRE IN PAWAR LAND? PG 16

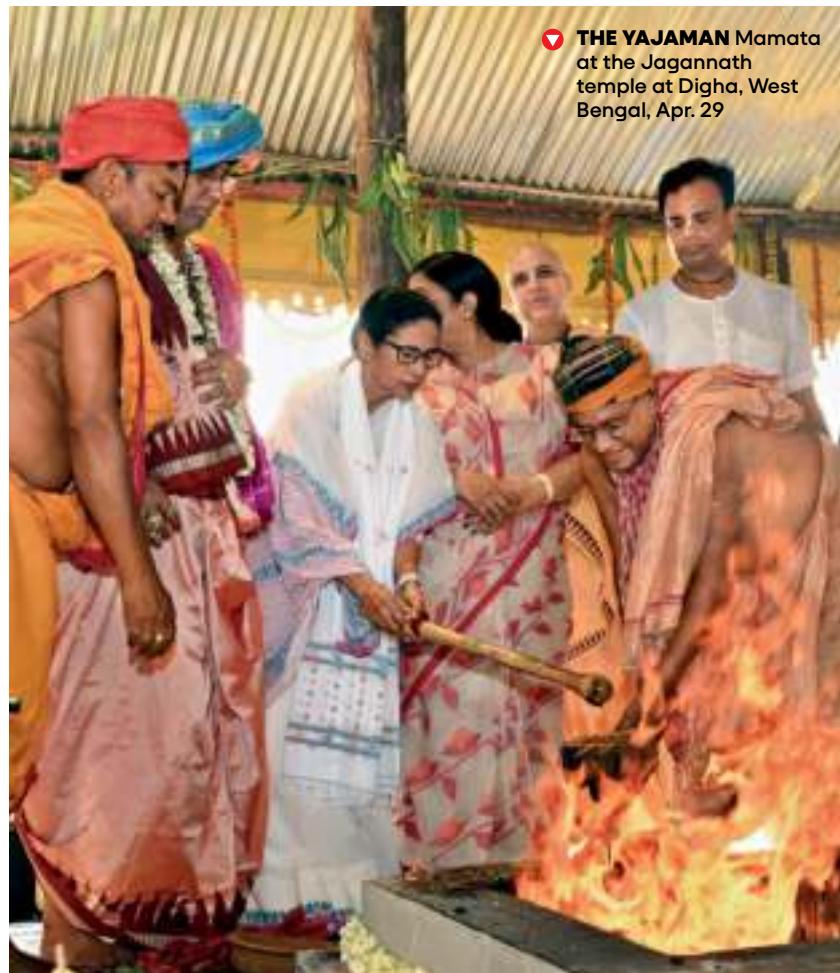
KERALA: 'MOLLY' GOES ZUMBA PG 18

► WEST BENGAL

MAMATA'S HINDU AVATAR

Competitive Hinduism comes to rule in West Bengal, as Mamata Banerjee seeks to negate the BJP's USP—and maybe wash off old sins—with a new Jagannath temple

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar



THE YAJAMAN Mamata at the Jagannath temple at Digha, West Bengal, Apr. 29

IN WINDSWEPT DIGHA, beneath the searing April sun, there stood Mamata Banerjee with folded hands. Climbing the 210-foot-tall spire with the sacred flag, for the final act of a long-awaited consecration, were two servitors from Puri. Their presence conferred sanctity upon this shiny new epigone of the Jagannath temple. A day later, April 30, the public would stream in, some 200,000 of them, rising to 500,000 the next day. But today, West Bengal's chief minister was a deity unto herself. Playing yajaman with gravitas, the role enacted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Ayodhya, ensuring she was the cynosure of all eyes.

The act was live-streamed to every corner of the state, by her state administration as well as her party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC).

Hoardings reprised the BJP's "after a thousand years" phraseology. Prasad (and photos of the temple) will be distributed to every household in Bengal—an exact echo of the RSS's mass outreach post Ayodhya. Lord Jagannath, or his divine alter ego, had clearly been wheeled all the way from Puri, 300-odd km down the coast in Odisha, with a purpose. Salvation not in the hereafter, but here and now.

POLITICAL JUGGERNAUT

Often pilloried for 'anti-Hindu' politics, Mamata has made her most conspicuous embrace yet of Hindu symbolism with this mega spectacle. The moment was not merely ceremonial. It was a declaration. Previously content with letting TMC satraps partake of local rituals, or sponsoring Durga puja pandals, Mamata has now sallied forth directly into the domain of mass devotion. The ground was prepared with public assertions of her Brahminical identity. Now, Mamata is eminently capable of

feints, but her thrusts are always bold, brash and writ in capital letters. The temple at Digha is a curious amalgam of both: a striking bid to steal the BJP's thunder, to neutralise any edge that Hindutva grants it. The TMC is likely to retain its state-backed secularism, but Mamata seems to be shifting to a more even-handed approach to symbolic appeasement, and dramatically enlarging her political vocabulary to do so.

Any mass mental diversion from headaches like Murshidabad, the Waqf debates or the school recruitment scam, and the Rs 250 crore spent on this pink sandstone architectural hybrid would have been well worth it. Returns are also expected via another Ayodhya/Kashi replay: the shrine is envisioned as the nucleus of a religious tourism hub, with annual footfalls of one million.

Initially planned in 2018, the project has come to fruition at a propitious time



DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

Takeaways

- **Mamata delivers a grand response to Hindutva: a new Jagannath temple at Digha**

- **Copies Ayodhya playbook, from live-stream of yajaman act to tourism hub ambitions**

for Mamata, with the last lap for the 2026 state election crackling with heat. The temple has been entrusted to ISKCON, but Mamata is front and centre. She composed a devotional song for the *pran pratishtha*, and donated a golden broom worth Rs 5 lakh for the rath yatra. Three ornate chariots await their inaugural roll on June 27; the ambitious plan is to replicate Puri's annual affair.

The BJP shrugs off Mamata's Hindu grandstanding, but its regime in Odisha ordered a probe into how men and material from Puri flowed out. Also, Digha is in Purba Medinipur, heart of Suvendu Adhikari country. Mamata's ex-aide, now arch foe and saffron stormtrooper, he has been vocal against the temple. "A boom in local religious tourism will help corner Suvendu," says a TMC insider. The CPI(M) has criticised the use of public funds for religion, but that's unlikely to halt Mamata's juggernaut. ■

► GUJARAT

GANDHI'S GROUND 'ZERO'

Rahul Gandhi's revitalisation programme waters the roots in the districts, but the tree is also barren at the top

By Jumana Shah

THE PAST THREE WEEKS HAVE been a frenetic blur for Naushad Solanki. District chief for the Congress in Surendranagar, his political life usually reflects the placidity of this Saurashtra outback. So why has he been meeting and interacting with so many



▲ **REVAMP EXERCISE** Rahul Gandhi with Gujarat party chief Shaktisinh Gohil at the District Workers' Conference in Modasa, Gujarat, Apr. 16

others of his ilk? Perhaps more than ever before? It's Rahul Gandhi. In mid-April, he made his third visit to Gujarat in 45 days, and set rolling a party revamp that seeks to strike at the root of its rot: the districts.

After the symbolism of choosing Gujarat for its AICC session (April 8-9), Rahul was back a week later to kickstart some action on the ground. Chosen teams have been spending up to five days every week since mid-April in the districts, interacting, eliciting points of view, identifying fresh local leadership and, most importantly, spotting BJP 'agents'. The decentralised approach comes not a moment too soon: grassroot workers, feeling directionless and unmotivated in the absence of a strong local tier of leadership, have lost connection with voters.

Takeaways

► **No credible, inspiring pan-Gujarat face. Those who represent social blocs**

► **The search has started at the grassroots. A panel will identify 50 promising faces**

That same paucity applies at the state level: there are no credible, inspirational, pan-Gujarat faces. "We are creating a profile of 45-50 leaders in each district," says an excited Solanki. By the time a five-member panel submits its exhaustive district-wise dossier in July, "they would have collectively interacted with 2,500-3,000 in each district," says Solanki, explaining why otherwise listless party offices are buzzing like beehives.

But the party's biggest challenge is a total disconnect with Gujarat's urban voters. Around 75 assembly seats are considered 'urban seats'. Of these, the Congress won only two in 2022 (even as it plunged to its worst-ever tally 17/182). Does this revamp

EXODUS AT TOP

The paucity of leadership owes to a string of big names defecting to BJP



► **Arjun Modhwadia:**

Ex-state party chief and OBC leader rejoined BJP in March 2024



► **Ambarish Der:**

The ex-MLA from Rajula joined BJP in March 2024



► **C.J. Chavda:**

Ex-chief whip and three-time MLA from Vijapur quit in 2024



► **Hardik Patel:**

Once the face of the Patidar agitation and state working president, Hardik joined BJP in June 2022

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

T HE LOCAL ROOKS AND BISHOPS

say please, let's do it. The grand old man says yes, okay, maybe. The grand nephew says yes, we must. The daughter says what, no, nothing like that. Seismographers wouldn't know how to parse the signals emerging from the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar)—it's not quite a tectonic shift yet. But Sharad Pawar, 84, and a semi-retired supremo by his own description, is not one who speaks loosely. If he's hinting at a possible entente with estranged nephew and deputy CM Ajit Pawar, top honcho of the rival NCP, it must mean something.

A SURPRISE, OR IS IT?

So, what did the craftiest man of Maratha politics say actually that has set speculation swirling? It was classic Pawar. The words were cryptic, and sat right on the fence, leaving enough scope to alight on either side. He told media personnel that his daughter Supriya Sule and her cousin Ajit had to decide if the two NCPs needed to reunite—and that he "won't be surprised" if the idea came to fruition.

Earlier, in a newspaper interview, he had spoken of 'two views' in the party. One favoured reunion, and the other prescribed unconditional distance from the BJP so as to maintain ideological hygiene in the public eye. Sule, the MP from Baramati, has "taken a decision of sitting in the Opposition in Parliament", he said; the words "our thinking" implied endorsement.



◀ THIS WAY, THAT WAY NCP(SP) chief Sharad Pawar with daughter and Baramati MP Supriya Sule; (inset) the estranged Ajit Pawar

estrangement is just two years old. It hasn't yet ossified among the rank and file." The MPs and legislators, he adds, are suffering from "exclusion" in the grant of development funds, citing how even Sule had to go on a hunger strike to get a road repaired in her constituency.

Another NCP(SP) leader speaks of 'three views' in the party—the third being merging with the Congress, a diminution of leadership being the only danger. As for an NCP reconciliation, his timeline strictly defers any chance for it past the Bihar election and Maharashtra's local body polls.

MANDAR DEODHAR

► MAHARASHTRA

CEASEFIRE IN PAWAR LAND?

Sharad Pawar sets speculation swirling with hints of 'two views' in his party. One favours a reunion of the two NCPs. Daughter Supriya clearly says no

Known for his unpredictable but always shrewd chess moves, Pawar's words only whetted the appetite of political punters, offering nothing to sate it. Speaking to INDIA TODAY, Sule refused them even crumbs. She said she had "not even thought about it (a reunion)", that "there has been no discussion", and that Pawar Sr had "clearly indicated (that) he is where he is". She may not be party to it, but there indeed exists a point of view that differs from hers. For one, Pawar's grand nephew Rohit, one of only 10

survivors in the NCP(SP)'s assembly poll washout in 2024, has openly urged the seniors to sue for peace.

"Any reconciliation will be a win-win for both parties," says another senior. His line entails shifting out of the block—i.e. the INDIA bloc. The NCP(SP)'s cohort of eight Lok Sabha MPs, he says, could add to Ajit's clout in New Delhi (the latter's NCP has just one LS MP), helping him upstage his rival deputy CM Eknath Shinde, whose Shiv Sena has seven LS MPs. "It's easier for the Pawars to reunite," he says. "The

Takeaways

► Sharad Pawar frankly says some in NCP(SCP) want a patch-up with Ajit's NCP

► Grand nephew Rohit Pawar, strong local lobbies are some of the votaries

It's a lobby with a strong presence in the cooperatives and education sector that favours a reunion, says a source (hinting at the presence of another group that thinks a non-fuzzy secular line would deliver results by 2029). The flurry of whispers began after four MLAs from Solapur reached out to Pawar via state chief Jayant Patil, advocating a stake in power. A top leader says Pawar may have been spurred to speak due to this pressure from within to prevent a further split. However, like a master of the old ball, his seam was pointed towards the wind but no one could properly see which side the shine was on. ■



▲ **STRESS BUSTER** A Zumba session on April 30, at a school in Thiruvananthapuram

PRD KERALA

► KERALA

'MOLLY' GOES ZUMBA

Rising substance abuse among teenagers had Kerala fretting. Pinarayi's replacement fix: dance!

By Jeemon Jacob

DRUG ABUSE AMONG KERALA'S young, especially schoolchildren, has been making panicky headlines of late. The Marxist regime has now struck upon a novel Latin American fix. Novel and Latin American? Marquez? No, that was the teenaged Malayali of the 1980s. Their Gen Alpha legatees will also go Colombian, but with dance: Zumba, to be precise.

Beginning June, the next academic year, Kerala's schools will have the last period every day devoted to Zumba. The pilot run, in Thiruvananthapuram on April 30, saw 1,500 school students kick and stomp with gusto. At its launch, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan counselled "students and teachers to participate actively" in the Zumba sessions to stay fit and reduce stress. Education minister V. Sivakutty credits the 79-year-old CM with the idea of integrating Zumba into the curriculum. "It will make learning more enjoyable," he told INDIA TODAY. Zumba would "reduce stress", killing a causative link in drug abuse, he said.

Kerala has 1.16 million students enrolled in 4,693 government

Takeaways

➲ **From June, Zumba will be the daily last class for Kerala's school students and teachers**

➲ **With surveys showing high teen drug use, the Pinarayi govt aims to 'reduce stress'**

schools, 2.15 million in 7,216 aided schools and 389,000 students in 1,042 private ones—up to Class 10. Another 800,000 are enrolled in higher secondary and vocational schools.

A 2022 official survey of 600 under-19 teens had painted a troubling picture: 62.66 per cent were undergoing counselling and treatment; 25.83 per cent were accused in narcotics cases; 11.5 per cent (69) ticked both boxes. Some 97 per cent of teens had used some kind of drug at least once—82 per cent used cannabis, 7.5 per cent psychiatric drugs, 6.5 per cent LSD and 2.1 per cent MDMA. The Pinarayi regime aims to replace that with a simpler form of fun. ■

By Ashish Misra

THE SMELL OF SYRUP IN THE AIR, the hot *petha* rolling out of factories on both sides of the road, their candied memories travelling up and down the country in tiny coloured boxes by road, rail and now air—this is the identity of Agra's Noori Gate area. About seven kilometres from the Taj Mahal, these desi pâtisseries also churn out tiny, delicate monuments to the sweetness of composite culture. If the Taj was born in Shah Jahan's mind, legend has it that the *petha* was born in his royal kitchen—upon a royal firman to create a sweet delicacy as pure and white as the Taj! Marble was traded for white pumpkin, Agra's magic spell was spoken, and voila...the world was suddenly sweeter.

SUGAR SPIKED

That magic spell is being broken. The Noori Gate *petha* manufacturers, running unbroken since the Mughal period, have been ordered to shift out of the city. That also breaks other ties with history. In 1929, the revolutionary Bhagat Singh, after shooting down British police officer John Saunders (the Lahore Conspiracy Case that led to his hanging), spent a few days hiding in a two-storey house right here in Noori Gate area.

Girish Singhal, 63, lives next to this house, beginning his *petha*-making career in his two-room abode in 1980. Over 40 years on, he's worried. "I do not have the resources to go 30 km away and set up business afresh. If there's too much pressure, I'll stop making *petha* and open a grocery shop but not move."

Anoop Mittal, 50, another Noori Gate native, conjures

► UTTAR PRADESH

NO PLACE IN AGRA FOR TAJ OF SWEETS

The Agra petha is as much a part of the city's cultural confection as its architectural twin, the Taj. Pollution fears now put the padlocks on Noori Gate, its old abode



ASHISH MISRA

► **SUGARY LEGACY** A petha manufacturing unit in the Noori Gate area of Agra

up the Gilauri Patta, a special sweet made from petha. "I make petha on the ground floor of my two-storey house," he says. "It's a cottage industry for my family. If I shift out, I won't be able to bear the costs. I'll have to stop."

Noori Gate has over 500 small and big units related to petha production. Over 5,000 people work here, churning out some 1,000 quintals of petha daily. For about three decades, the locality has attracted the attention of disapproving government planners due to an ironic

Takeaways

➲ **A Supreme Court ruling ends a long story, forcing petha-makers out of Agra**

➲ **Many are small family-run units, can't afford to shift to a new 'petha city' 30 km away**

inversion of the petha's relation to the Taj: the fear that pollution caused by this sweet-making industry could be damaging the heritage monument.

On April 3, the Supreme Court

ordered the evacuation of petha units from the city. It was hearing cases related to the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ), a designated 10,400 sq. km area around the Taj, established to protect it from pollution. After this, the Agra administration and the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) have started surveying these petha units.

Pollution is indeed an issue. After the TTZ was set up in 1983, the use of coal in kilns was banned and petha units adopted gas-based technology. In 2013, the UPPCB imposed a complete ban on the entry of coal-laden trucks into Agra. But problems persisted. According to a 2021 study by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the city's petha industry generates about 17,800 kg of solid waste per day, mostly petha peels, sugar syrup and lime water. District officials say a campaign was launched in 2018 to educate petha producers about the importance of proper waste disposal, also granting aid to the big players to procure equipment for it. A large part of the industry, though, falls under the unorganised sector, beyond the pale of government benefits.

The traders deny petha pollution, and say the incriminating data is from a 25-year-old survey. Says Rajesh Agarwal, a leading voice from the organised part of the industry: "Now all the units run on gas furnaces. The peel was earlier identified as waste, but now they use it as animal feed. They should conduct a fresh survey."

Dr Devashish Bhattacharya, an ENT surgeon who's fighting a case in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) against petha pollution, is still sympathetic to their fate. "If all facilities were provided on time by the government, the petha makers would not have faced any problem," he says. Now, they face the gloomy prospect of shifting to the New Petha City in Kalindi Vihar, a 1999-vintage plan on which none of the traders were consulted.

A bitter end looms to a long story. ■

COVER STORY

INDIA
PAKISTAN
WAR

THE NEW RED LINE



TRUCE REMAINS TENUOUS AS INDIA DRAWS A TOUGH NEW NORMAL FOR DEALING WITH A RECALCITRANT PAKISTAN OVER SPONSORING TERROR, INCLUDING RESUMING DEADLY RETRIBUTION IF PAKISTAN DOES NOT MEND ITS WAYS

By RAJ CHENGAPPA



DIFFERENT POINTS

The S-400 missile defence system in the background, PM Narendra Modi salutes Indian airmen at the Adampur air base, May 13; left, Pakistan PM Shehzad Sharif addresses the National Assembly, May 7

S



AS

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI PREPARED TO ADDRESS THE NATION ON MAY 12, two days after the dramatic cessation of hostilities in India's sixth war with Pakistan, he knew it would be a defining moment of his third term. Twenty-

six years earlier, in the summer of 1999, the Indian armed forces had, under the watch of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the first prime minister of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), successfully repelled Pakistan's brazen bid to capture the Kargil heights in what was the fifth war between the two countries. If circumstances had forced Vajpayee to go to war, then Modi, too, had no option but to visit severe punishment upon its neighbour for fostering a terror infrastructure that was responsible for the brutal gunning down of 26 innocent civilians in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on April 22.

Just two years into his first term (2014-2019), Modi had pivoted away from his predecessor Manmohan Singh's policy of strategic restraint against Pakistan's transgressions towards punitive deterrence. It meant that

The OPERATION SINDOOR Four-Day War

India's strikes on terror havens in retaliation to the Pahalgam massacre were non-escalatory. But Pakistan responded with attacks on military targets and upped the lethality. Everything it hurled was repulsed. Then, India struck fierce blows at Pakistani air bases

DAY 1

MAY 7 0100-0130 HRS

- India initiates Operation Sindoor, launching precision strikes on terrorist infrastructure across nine locations in PoK and Pakistan Punjab

- Drones, loitering munitions and Rafale/ MiG 29 jets equipped with precision weapons hit Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba hubs; 100 reportedly killed. Pakistan claims downing of Indian jets

- Later in the day, Pakistan convenes National Security Council. Cross-border shelling intensifies in Kashmir

2030 HRS

- Pakistani counterattack starts; 15 Indian air bases—including Awantipur, Srinagar, Jammu, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Adampur, Bathinda, Pathankot, Uttarlai and Bhuj—targeted with drones, loitering munitions

- India's air defence (AD) grid neutralises attacks

- India asserts that Pakistani AD targets were hit in retaliation, crucial AD systems in Lahore destroyed through Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) operations

DAY 2

MAY 8-9 20:30 HRS-04:30 HRS

- Pakistan opens with short-range surface-to-surface missiles, targets Udhampur and Pathankot air bases

- India's S-400 missile defence system, activated for the first time in combat, intercepts multiple threats; also in play are the Akash surface-to-air missiles, Barak 8 air defence systems, anti-drone systems

- Pakistan targets Jammu; India claims successful interception of all missiles

- In all, Pakistan sends 300-400 Turkish-made Songar drones against 36 Indian sites. India retaliates with drone strikes on four Pak AD sites



The damage at the Lashkar complex at Muridke after the Indian air strike on May 7

AFP

Pakistan would henceforth have to pay a blood-for-blood price for any misadventure it dared to undertake. India's fresh resolve was evident soon enough when, in response to a terror strike at an army camp in Uri in September 2016, Modi ordered surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC). Three years later, in February 2019, the PM cleared air force jets to strike a terror camp in Balakot right inside Pakistani territory after a car suicide bombing in Pulwama killed 40 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Six months later, shortly after being elected prime minister for the second time, Modi took the watershed step of abrogating Article 370, which bestowed special status on Jammu and Kashmir. That put a formal closure on Pakistan's dubious claims over the Valley, though it didn't stop Pakistan army chief General Asim Munir from describing it as his country's "jugular vein" in a recent speech.

Following the Pahalgam attack, Modi has drawn thick new red lines in dealing with Pakistan-backed terror

attacks. These entail a quantum jump in punitive measures, based on three simple principles, as external affairs minister S. Jaishankar communicated to the major world powers, including the US and China, before India struck. Jaishankar reportedly told them that firstly, India's retribution against terror would increase exponentially; secondly, both terrorists and their sponsors (read Pakistan) would be held accountable and, thirdly, India would ensure they were brought to justice. Multiple vectors—political, military, economic and psychological—would be employed to achieve these objectives. India had already exercised the political option when it decided to suspend the 65-year-old Indus



ANI

DAY 3

MAY 9 2030 HRS ONWARDS

- Pakistan launches third wave against 26 locations—Operation Bunyan Marsoos—trying to strike Indian military bases. India accuses Pakistan of attacking civilian areas and religious sites, with drones, heavy artillery

- Pakistani Fatah-II missile, aimed at "an important base", reportedly Delhi, is intercepted over Sirsa. India releases images of undamaged air bases to counter Pakistan's claims of inflicted damage

- India expands operation, targeting Pakistani military installations. Intense aerial engagements. Pakistan struggles to penetrate Indian air defences

DAY 4

MAY 10 AFTER 0140 HRS

- Pakistan expands attacks on air bases in Punjab. J&K targeted with missiles. Civilian areas near Amritsar targeted too

- India hits eight Pak air bases—Murid (Chakwal), Sukkur, Rahim Yar Khan, Bholari, Rafiqui, Shahbaz (Jacobabad), Mushaf (Sargodha) and Nur Khan (Chaklala/ Rawalpindi)

- Military installations, command centres, radar sites, weapon storage areas targeted

- With Nur Khan close to Pak army HQ and the Strategic Plans Division, the operational arm of its nuclear command, tensions rise

- Reports from Pakistan claim the National Command Authority, which controls its nuclear response, has convened. Later denied

- Heavy artillery, mortar fire exchanged in Kupwara, Baramulla, Poonch, Rajouri, Akhnoor sectors of J&K

- Pakistan reports 31 civilian deaths and 57 injuries overall, while India reports 12 deaths and 57 injuries from overnight Pakistani shelling

1700 HRS Ceasefire comes into effect

-Pradip R. Sagar



Villages like this—Salamabad in Uri, in Kashmir—bore the brunt of Pakistani shelling

Waters Treaty—which had survived four wars—immediately after the Pahalgam attack. The waters of the Indus are vital for Pakistan's agricultural needs, especially for the politically powerful provinces of Punjab and Sindh—more than Kashmir, rivers are seen as Pakistan's jugular vein. Though the suspension does not immediately stem the flow of water, India's threat of reviewing the treaty puts tremendous psychological pressure on the Pakistani leadership.

The New Sindoor Lines

When it came to military options, Operation Sindoor was a demonstration of the decisive force with which India would strike. While giving the armed forces a free hand to mount the Indian response, Modi told the three service chiefs in a meeting, "Wahaan pe goli chalegi, to yahaan se gola chalega" (If they fire bullets, we respond with mortar shells). The clear brief was to up the ante each time and give a befitting response to the terrorists and their state sponsors.

In his fiery, tough-talking address to the nation, Modi defined these actions as the "new normal" in India's fight against terror. As a top official involved in decision-making elaborates, "We are now going for the head

of the snake, not just the foot soldiers. We have also sent them a clear message that there is no place where you can hide and that no matter where you are in Pakistan, we will hit you." Operation Sindoor was a clear embodiment of India's new approach. On Day 1 itself, the Indian armed forces targeted key terror hideouts, hitting not just Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) but Pakistan's very heartland—the province of Punjab—for the first time since the 1971 war. The headquarters of two key terror outfits—the Jaish-e-Mohammed in Bahawalpur and the Lashkar-e-Taiba in Muridke near Lahore—were struck with precision.

Another element of Modi's strategy included calling Pakistan's nuclear bluff. After the first round of strikes by the two countries, US Vice President J.D. Vance reached out to the Indian premier on May 9 to inform him that Pakistan was going to dramatically escalate the war. Given that the two countries were nuclear-armed, his concern was that events were moving rapidly up the escalation ladder towards an all-out

**OP SINDOOR
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RATHER THAN
JUST THE FOOT
SOLDIERS**

DIPLOMACY

HOW THE GUNS FELL SILENT

Wary of the prospects of a wider conflagration, the US took a lead role in helping India and Pakistan hit the pause button in their bitter exchange

Graphic by **NILANJAN DAS**

Text by **PRADIP R. SAGAR**



MAY 8

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, emphasises the need for "immediate de-escalation", expresses US support for direct dialogue between India and Pakistan



That same day, in an interview on an American news channel, US Vice President J.D. Vance says, "We can't control these countries.... What we can try is encourage these folks to de-escalate a little bit. But we're not going to get involved in the middle of war, that's fundamentally none of our business...."

MAY 9

Vance calls up PM Modi, offers an off-ramp to the situation, gets non-committal reply



3



4

MAY 10

9.30 am: Rubio speaks with Pakistan army chief Gen. Asim Munir, urging him to climb down the escalatory ladder



5

12 pm: The US Secretary of State speaks with the Indian and Pakistani PMs and National Security Advisors, urges restraint



7

3.35 pm: Pak DGMO dials Indian counterpart. Ceasefire agreed upon, effective from 5 pm IST



8

5.35 pm: US President Donald Trump announces ceasefire; followed by Marco Rubio



9

5.38 pm: Ishaq Dar says Pakistan and India have "agreed to a ceasefire with immediate effect"



6

3.30 pm: Saudi foreign minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan dials India and Pakistan in attempts at de-escalation. Speaks with Jaishankar and Pakistan's deputy PM and foreign minister Ishaq Dar



10

5.55 pm: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri announces ceasefire

war that portended disastrous consequences. As a signal of its intent, Pakistan's prime minister Shehbaz Sharif had reportedly summoned the country's National Command Authority, of which he is the chair and the three service chiefs its members. It is the supreme body that decides on deployment of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Modi remained unmoved and told Vance firmly that India's riposte would be "far more forceful, stronger and devastating". He reinforced the point in his address to the nation, making it clear that "India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail, and strike decisively" and that, in doing so, it "would not discriminate between the government sponsoring terrorism and the masterminds of terrorism". A day after Pakistan launched drone and missile attacks on 36 different locations on India's western border, India unleashed "hellfire", as an official puts it, launching precision strikes on eight key bases, and damaging runways and communication facilities in Pakistan. The strikes included the one at Nur Khan, located between Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, and Rawalpindi, headquarters of the Pakistan army.

Why Pakistan Cried Uncle

With India demonstrating that it could strike Pakistan at will, including government and army nerve centres, and its navy poised to blockade the Karachi port, crippling it economically, Pakistan's leadership, as a senior Indian official says, "cried Uncle"—meaning they rang the US for help. He believes that the devastating air strikes convinced Pakistan that the war would only go downhill for them. Both Sharif and Munir reportedly spoke to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, asking the US to intervene and get India to stand down. They apparently claimed that if an all-out war did break out, Pakistan would be forced to use all its options, which, they hinted, may even include bringing nuclear weapons to the table. Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistan ambassador to the US and currently a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, says, "Sometimes, the threat itself is superior to action. India lost the narrative on terrorism and it became more about destroying Pakistan. That turned into a David vs Goliath story. One thing that is missing in the international media coverage of the war was terrorism."

Rubio is said to have spoken to Jaishankar who told him that Pakistan was to blame for moving up the escalation ladder. In its counterstrike to the Pahalgam attack, India had struck terrorist hideouts and avoided military targets. Lt Gen. Rajiv Ghai, the director general of military operations (DGMO) in the army, had even called up his Pakistan counterpart Maj. Gen. Kashif Abdullah 15 minutes after the first wave of strikes and told him that India had no intention of launching further strikes. But Abdullah apparently told him to go to hell and said that Pakistan would retaliate. In his conversation with Rubio, therefore, Jaishankar reportedly said that if Pakistan wanted a truce, then it should use the DGMO hotline to do so. On



INDIA AGREED TO THE TRUCE AS IT HAD ALREADY MET ITS KEY OBJECTIVE—SETTING A NEW PUNITIVE DETERRENCE POLICY WITH GRADED ESCALATION AGAINST PAKISTAN'S TERROR EXPORT

May 10, Abdullah called Ghai and told him Pakistan wanted a ceasefire. Ghai consulted his seniors and, by 3.35 pm, informed Abdullah that India had agreed. And that's how the 88-hour war came to an end even if it was amidst a host of claims and contradictions. As a senior Indian official remarks, "Pakistan wanted a ceasefire not because you spoke good English but because something hard hits its bases from the sky."

The reason India took the exit ramp Pakistan asked for was because it had never wanted an all-out war. Its objectives were to communicate that 'enough is enough', and take punitive action against terrorist organisations that have launched attacks on India in the past 25 years, while warning both Pakistan and its terror cohorts of stronger action if they continued with their nefarious agenda. However, to India's dismay, American president Donald Trump posted about the ceasefire on social media even before India and Pakistan had announced it, claiming full credit for orchestrating it. To make matters worse, Rubio put up another post on X, claiming both India and Pakistan had also agreed "to start talks on a broad set of issues at a neutral site". Trump's trumpeting continued too, as he proceeded to boast about preventing "a nuclear conflict" in the subcontinent in one social media post,



AFP

WHEN TOP GUNS VISIT
Far left, Indian army chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi visits a forward location of the Chinar Corps in Kashmir, May 15; Pakistan army chief Gen. Asim Munir at a Rawalpindi hospital, May 12

and in another, talked of working with leaders of both countries to see “if after a ‘thousand years’, a solution can be arrived at concerning Kashmir”. Equally mortifying was Trump wanting these two countries to increase trade, saying, “Let’s not trade nuclear missiles, let’s trade the things that you make so beautifully.” Not only did the re-hyphenation of India with Pakistan sting, adding insult to the injury was Trump equating India, the victim of a terror attack, with its perpetrator Pakistan.

Ashley Tellis, Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is dismissive of Trump and Rubio’s claims of mediation, saying, “It’s a promise that simply could not be implemented. I think Trump has a billion things on his hand—we are still waiting for the Gaza ceasefire and the end of the Ukraine war which was supposed to happen 24 hours after he came to power.” He believes that contrary to popular notions, both India and Pakistan went into the war reluctantly and, for them, the hostilities were an unwelcome surprise. “The turning point,” says Tellis, “came when both sides believed that from their vantage point they had done enough damage to each other and to signal that the provocations will not go unanswered. At some points, your objectives for war shape your choices. And, in that context, the US intervention made a difference by persuading both they had done enough and may regret any further steps they may take. For that, you should give Rubio credit.”

However, the American leadership’s loose statements made it look as though India had yielded to US pressure rather than supporting the narrative that it was Pakistan that had pleaded with India for ceasefire because of its mounting military losses. “The lesson for Mr Modi,” says Haqqani, “is to be careful of drawing too close to Trump

as he remains unpredictable.” As blasphemous for India was Rubio’s statement about talks at a neutral place, disregarding New Delhi’s steadfast policy of not entering into a dialogue with Islamabad till it stopped sponsoring terror. Worse, Trump wanted to insinuate himself into the Kashmir space when India had made it clear that there would be no more discussion with Pakistan on the status of the Valley after the abrogation of Article 370. Modi indirectly dismissed Trump’s assertions in his speech when he said, “India’s stand is very clear: terror and talks, terror and trade cannot go together.” He also indicated that India would lift the suspension of the IWT only after Pakistan turned off the tap on terror, since, as he put it eloquently, “Water and blood cannot flow together.” As for Trump’s offer of mediating the Kashmir issue, Modi disregarded it, saying, “I would like to tell the global community that our stated policy is: if there are talks with Pakistan, it will only be on terrorism, it will only be on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.”

What the American leadership’s assertions did do, though, was to embolden Pakistan, as Shehbaz declared that they had not only withstood India’s assault successfully but also repaid in kind. Pakistan claimed it had downed six Indian aircraft, five of them on the first night of the strike. India has not denied that charge so far, though Air Marshal A.K. Bharti, India’s director general of air operations, did say that while all Indian fighter pilots were safe, “losses are part of combat”. Ajay Bisaria, a former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan, says, “Let’s be clear that India has achieved its objectives of both accountability of terror perpetrators and the setting up of a credible deterrence against their sponsors, the Pakistan state.

**TO THE USA,
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TERRORISM
AND PoK**

Its military action, not US intervention, was the main catalyst for Pakistan to ask for ceasefire. But Munir has gained too by wrapping the Pakistan flag around himself and claiming to be the true defender of its sovereignty while also internationalising Kashmir once again.”

What to Expect Next

Most experts see the current truce as a tenuous one. With none of the key issues between the two countries resolved yet, there is every chance of a resumption of hostilities. As Modi himself said, “We have just suspended our retaliatory action against Pakistan’s terror and military camps. In the coming days, we will measure every step by the criterion of the attitude Pakistan adopts going ahead.” Operation Sindoor, an official remarks, “has been paused, it has not ended.” Meanwhile, news channels had Modi government sources saying that it had decided that, from now on, every terror strike in India would be treated as an act of war. While it is not clear whether that is official policy now, it is a risky strategy that could have India caught in a militaristic frame when it should be focusing more on economic growth and beefing up its intelligence and surveillance networks to thwart terror strikes. Michael Kugelman, a US-based South Asia specialist, says, “We have a very fragile peace in place. The core drivers of this crisis and those before it have not been dealt with. That includes terror, it includes Kashmir, and the deeper levels of tension between the two, with increasingly sophisticated weapons and technology being used against each other. The crisis shows that the two countries are primed for another round of hostilities, sooner rather than later.”

The Modi government is aware of the risks and has instructed the three services to be on full alert. Each of them has begun evaluating the outcome of the war, and assessing their strengths and weaknesses. India also knows Pakistan is doing the same and deduces it will persuade China and Turkey to strengthen its ability to combat India’s air power since it knows it cannot match its naval prowess. The possibility that India may have to take on adversaries on two fronts and that China may pump arms into Pakistan in the event of another bout of war continues to be of grave concern to India. This might neutralise any military superiority that India may have over Pakistan, and enable the latter to hold out against India as Ukraine has been able to do against Russia thanks to the constant stream of arms supplies from the US and Europe. India also has to work on improving its space-based surveillance and

electronic warfare—areas in which China excels.

It is also clear that having targeted terror outfits in which JeM chief Masood Azhar’s kin have been killed, India can expect them to regroup for a big strike. It is worrying that India has not been able to nab the Pahalgam perpetrators even three weeks after the incident. Harsh Shringla, former foreign secretary, says, “We need to focus on our intelligence and security apparatus and enhance those capabilities. To bring tourists back to Kashmir and defeat the aims of these terror groups, we need to ensure foolproof protection. We must also have a mechanism for a graded response to such attacks. So, higher the level, higher the response.” This is essential as India needs to focus on getting massive investments to fund its ambitious economic growth targets. Frequent hostilities would breed an uncertainty, which will be detrimental to India’s larger interests.

WITH PAKISTAN’S ECONOMY IN TATTERS, INDIA NEEDS TO BUILD A COALITION OF NATIONS, INCLUDING THE USA AND SAUDI ARABIA, TO PRESSURE PAKISTAN VIA INSTRUMENTS SUCH AS THE IMF

To avert another blow-up, it’s important that Pakistan keeps the LoC free of conflict and works towards restoring the ceasefire agreement that was in place since 2021 before the Pahalgam attack shattered it. Many experts believe that India focuses on dealing with the problems created by Pakistan, and not dealing with the Pakistan problem. Sharat Sabharwal, a former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan, though, believes that it is a futile exercise. “If a crushing defeat in the 1971 war couldn’t change the nature of Pakistan, you think a four-day war will? Strategically, our endeavour should be to bring them down to a point where we can have a constructive engagement with them. It’s a distant goal, but good diplomacy may craft out

something.” According to him, despite army chief Munir consolidating his hold, many in Pakistan feel that their country should be focusing on economic growth and well-being instead of terror. With Pakistan’s economy in tatters and surviving on intermittent tranches from the International Monetary Fund, Sabharwal suggests that India find other ways of putting pressure on Pakistan to behave. Shringla recommends that apart from the US, India could work through Saudi Arabia, whom Pakistan listens to, and build an informal international coalition that nudges Islamabad out of its bad old ways.

India-Pakistan relations have always been somewhat of a roller-coaster ride, with unexpected twists and turns. Who thought the war would end so quickly just when it seemed headed for a no-holds-barred conflict? Sometimes, the unexpected can be a positive too—that is the only silver lining to the dark clouds that continue to hover over the subcontinent. ■

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The Digital Frontier

Deepfakes, bots and troll farms emerge as a new weapon in the India-Pakistan conflict

By Pradip R. Sagar and Anilesh S. Mahajan

ON

May 7, after India struck terrorist infrastructure inside Pakistan, Islamabad responded by lifting a 15-month-old ban on X (formerly Twitter). Though the Pakistan military's official handle remained dormant, affiliated proxies sprang into action. A deepfake video of Indian external affairs minister S. Jaishankar appearing to apologise for the strikes went viral. The Fact Check Unit of India's Press Information Bureau (PIB) quickly debunked it. In a counter-strike of sorts, another clip went viral, showing Pakistan military spokesperson Lt General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry admitting the loss of their two JF-17 jets—shared nearly 700,000 times on X before it was exposed as a fabrication by the media watchdog Bellingcat.

The battle during

Operation Sindoor wasn't fought solely with fighter jets, missiles and drones. It raged just as fiercely in the digital domain—a parallel war, where deepfakes, fake advisories, doctored videos and coordinated propaganda flooded timelines. In this cognitive battlefield, perceptions—not just positions—were under siege. And truth was often the first casualty.

India, with over 500 million social media users, became both a megaphone for misinformation and a force for rebuttal. Crowdsourced fact-checking sometimes outpaced official communication. Yet, in this AI-fuelled information war, troll farms and unsuspecting users frequently countered one falsehood with another. From recycled war clips to AI-generated statements by top officials, platforms like X, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok (banned in India) turned into digital trenches.

While the tools were cutting-edge, the concept was ancient—what the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu called “subduing the enemy without fighting”, a core principle in his 5th century BC treatise *The Art of War*. The modern equivalent is cognitive warfare—manipulating narratives to influence audiences, with social media acting as a powerful tool.

WEAPONISING THE FEED

Misattributed visuals surged online. Footage from the Israel-Gaza conflict was rebranded as fresh Indian air strikes. Old Indian Air Force (IAF) crash videos resurfaced as proof of Pakistani retaliation. Claims of multiple blasts at an air base in Jammu were accompanied by an image from the 2021 Kabul airport attack. A wildfire was pitched as a Pakistani missile strike on a military base in Amritsar.

By May 11, the I&B ministry had issued over 20 official clarifications, warning of “Pakistan-linked accounts” trying to “flood the information space with falsehoods”





Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

Even a routine farm fire in Jalandhar was reimagined as a drone attack.

The misinformation wasn't limited to visuals. Fabricated advisories also caused panic. One WhatsApp forward, posing as a ministry of defence alert, warned of imminent war. Another urged citizens to disable location services on their mobile phones to prevent the enemy from identifying densely populated areas.

Pakistan's "ironclad friend" China joined the

fray too. *China Daily*, a Central Propaganda Department-run English newspaper, falsely claimed three Indian jets had crashed in Kashmir, using a photo from 2019. Fake reports elsewhere included absurd claims—like the Indian military mistakenly bombing Amritsar from Ambala.

Unlike India, Pakistan and China have long invested in cognitive warfare capabilities. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the

media wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces, has morphed into a state-run production house, churning out military-themed music videos and dramas to shape public perception. During the Operation Sindoar fallout, ISPR briefings were often held late at night—timed for western media cycles. By the time India responded, much of the damage was often already done.

THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

Amid this digital fog of war, India scrambled to launch a counterattack. A war room led by information and broadcasting (I&B) minister Ashwini Vaishnaw was

research on information warfare. The outrage such stories provoke only boosts their visibility through algorithmic amplification. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram, heavily used by Gen Z, have emerged as key propaganda tools for both Pakistan and China, adds Pathak. Interestingly, unexpected vigilantes came to the rescue—the Indian K-pop fan community mobilised to debunk misinformation and provide clarity to global followers on X, winning hearts back home.

As another expert in information warfare observed, social media enables rapid propagation of content, where users serve as both consumers

The tools are cutting-edge, but the concept is ancient—Sun Tzu's timeless dictum of “subduing the enemy without fighting”

set up, drawing on social media experts from the army's Corps of Signals and the National Cyber Coordination Centre. Every image, clip and hashtag produced by this team was an armed probe—not just to set the record straight, but also to identify Pakistani bot networks. By May 11, the ministry had issued over 20 official clarifications, warning of "Pakistan-linked accounts" trying to "flood the information space with falsehoods".

Fake stories that cast India in a negative light often "gain higher traction", says Sriparna Pathak, professor of China Studies at O.P. Jindal Global University, who has done extensive

and propagators. Unlike the press, it's not bound by editorial checks. Yet, traditional media, too, occasionally added to the confusion. On May 8, in the heat of the crisis, several Indian news channels breathlessly reported that the navy had destroyed Karachi Port—a claim later proved false. Some suggest this was part of psychological warfare, others blame the race for ratings.

Either way, the current crisis underscores a stark reality. That the frontlines of conflict have expanded—from the land to the mind. The challenge will be to defend truth without blurring the line between vigilance and paranoia. ■

CASTING A WIDER NET

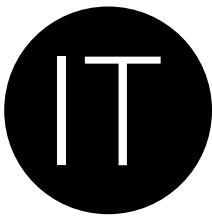
THE 2020 MISSED-BY-A-WHISKER ELECTION BEHIND HIM, THE RJD SCION IS TAKING NO CHANCES AS HE GOES ALL-OUT TO WOO SECTIONS THAT HAVE SO FAR BEEN COLD TO THE PARTY

By AMITABH SRIVASTAVA



63%
of Bihar's
population are
either EBCs or
OBCs

12
No. of seats the
RJD-led Grand
Alliance lost by
in 2020 despite
a near-identical
vote share



WAS A SWELTERING SATURDAY IN PATNA ON MAY 3, but the heat wasn't just from the rising mercury in the summer. At the Miller High School Ground in the centre of the city, Tejashwi Yadav was whipping up some serious passion of his own. The Rashtriya Janata Dal leader was addressing a rally—the

Ati-Pichhda Jagao, Tejashwi Sarkar Banao (Wake Up the EBCs, Elect a Tejashwi government) rally organised by his party's EBC (Extremely Backward Classes) cell. "No EBC community has prospered, while Nitish has flourished," Tejashwi thundered, mounting a salvo against his once grand ally—Janata Dal (United) supremo and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar. He promised them jobs and safety; freedom from crimes and criminals too. "*Jo apraadh karega, gareebon ka shoshan karega, apamanit karega, usko main jail bhijwaunga* (Whoever commits a crime, exploits or insults the poor, I will send them to jail)," he vowed, positioning himself in just that single sentence as a bulwark against injustice as well as indignity.

Just four days earlier, on April 29, Tejashwi had been addressing an altogether different assembly—of the economically forward Vaishya or trader community. The occasion was Bhama Shah Jayanti, and the state RJD office had organised a function to honour the 16th-century merchant hero. "Your enterprise has driven Bihar's growth," he told them, "yet the current regime never

a strategy forged out of hard electoral arithmetic. In the 2020 Bihar assembly election, the *mahagathbandhan*, or the grand alliance, a coalition of the RJD, Congress and the Left parties, had won 110 seats in the 243-member House. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), comprising chiefly of the BJP and the JD(U), eked out a victory with 125 seats, despite a vote share that was just 0.03 percentage points higher than that of the rival formation. While the actual difference in votes was just 11,150, the real margin, as it turned out, lay in the unaligned and disaffected segments that neither bloc fully commanded. And it is into this untapped reservoir that Tejashwi is now casting his net.

GETTING HIS EBC RIGHT

The EBCs are 113 marginalised castes that constitute more than 36 per cent of Bihar's population, according to the latest caste-based survey. Given their fragmented nature, they have never had the social clout of dominant OBC castes like the Yadavs—who account for 14 per cent of the state's population—yet exercise outsize influence at the hustings thanks

TEJASHWI WILL HAVE TO BE CAREFUL THAT THE PUSH TO WIDEN THE RJD VOTER BASE DOES NOT CREATE RESENTMENT AMONG HIS CORE MUSLIM-YADAV VOTE BANK

recognised your contributions." It was a pivot for a party that has seldom shown any affection for the merchant community. Tejashwi reminded the gathering how, during his brief tenure as deputy chief minister between August 2022 and January 2024, he had brought in "Rs 50,000 crore in fresh investment" and delivered "half a million jobs". The ground laid thus, Tejashwi got down to business. "If you walk one step with me, I will walk four with you." The audience expressed its approval, with a giant burst of applause.

Tejashwi's two speeches, delivered in quick succession, are of a piece with

to their numbers. They have been an inalienable part of Nitish's support base, ever since the nine-time chief minister granted them 20 per cent reservations in panchayat bodies back in 2006. Tejashwi is now trying to chip away at that support base, and attempting to forge a bond with voters who almost never pick the RJD as first choice in Bihar's political power play. His current efforts may not consolidate every EBC vote, but they could be enough to tilt the scales.

This will not be the first time that Tejashwi has tried to broaden his outreach, but while the efforts have resulted in impressive tallies, they have failed



ALL FOR ONE, ONE...
Tejashwi Yadav speaks
at the RJD's 'Ati-Pichhda
Jagao' rally in Patna, May 3

to crystallise into decisive victories. In 2020, the RJD had emerged as the single largest party, securing 75 seats and a 23.1 per cent vote share, thanks largely to a job-centric campaign that delivered nearly 39 per cent of the vote in the 144 constituencies the party had contested. Yet, it was not enough in the absence of fresh constituencies to compensate for incremental losses among the EBCs, Dalits and women, and the RJD-led Grand Alliance fell short of forming the government by a mere 12 seats. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the RJD amassed 9.6 million votes—the highest for any party in Bihar—yet they translated into just four parliamentary seats. The NDA, on the other hand, maintained a lead in 176 of the state's 243 assembly segments.

With the assembly polls now due in six months, Tejashwi is determined not merely to reprise the campaign themes of 2020, but also to extend his party's outreach well beyond the customary "M-Y" coalition of Muslims (17 per cent of the population) and Yadavs. Together, the M-Y are a formidable bloc, but still insufficient if the NDA succeeds in peeling away chunks of the remaining voters. Hence the new, amplified refrain: shared welfare, enhanced security and unflinching accountability.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY

For the EBCs, Tejashwi is holding out the lure of targeted employment schemes, local infrastructure projects and community-led policing initiatives to safeguard women. To Dalits, he is offering land title regularisation and scholarships; to urban entrepreneurs, simplified licensing and relief from punitive "GST raids". Women's collectives are being promised not just security and empowerment but also a monthly social security stipend of Rs 2,500. Of course, Tejashwi's polyphonic appeal could well boomerang. By courting these

new constituents, he risks alienating his loyal supporters. His core M-Y vote bank could resent overtures to erstwhile rivals; the NDA is already portraying him as a political opportunist. And while onerous compliances and sporadic enforcement crackdowns may have bred discontent among Bihar's traders, they may hold back, driven by scepticism after years of U-turns by regional parties.

cumbent as "tired...retired, even".

Tejashwi's youthful brio also comes with a strategic nod to dynasty and his father Lalu Prasad's contributions. The RJD patriarch remains the patron saint of Bihar's social justice politics, but his rule is also identified as a '*jangal raj*' that deprived the state of growth opportunities. Aware of the contradiction, Tejashwi takes pains to paint Lalu's legacy as one of empowerment, not of chaos, and himself as someone who can carry it forward while marrying it with 21st century imperatives.

WILL IT WORK?

In a state where electoral fortunes have swung on margins as slim as a few thousand votes, even modest gains among EBCs, traders or women could prove decisive. But Tejashwi's strategy demands near-flawless execution. For that, he'll first have to get the allies in line. Tejashwi's big challenge will be to persuade the Congress to cap its ticket count at around 50 seats. In 2020, the party fought in 70 seats but managed only 19 wins (even the CPI-ML had a better strike rate—12 wins in 19 seats contested). The RJD chief also has to accommodate two new parties: Mukesh Sahani's Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP), which won four of the 13 seats it contested as an NDA ally in 2020, and Pashupati Paras's faction of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP).

Meanwhile, there are fresh ripples from another quarter—Prashant Kishor's newly formed Jan Suraj party. Riding a wave of disaffection with traditional party hierarchies, Kishor's party promises clean governance, community-driven development and a break from entrenched dynastic politics. Partymen claim it will get 5-7 per cent of the Muslim vote in key districts, depriving the RJD—which considers Muslim voters as part of its natural constituency—of the very margins it needs to convert popular support into legislative strength. This election, Tejashwi will have his hands full, as he must reckon with the old NDA and the new rival. ■

RJD'S SUPER-SIZED PLATTER

FOR THE BUSINESS/ELITE CASTES

► PROMISES: Investment, security, end to tax harassment

► PITCH: "Walk one step with me, I'll walk four with you"

► SIGNAL: RJD is not anti-business

FOR THE EBCs

► PROMISES: Jobs, caste-based quotas, political representation

► PITCH: "No EBC has been empowered under Nitish"

► SIGNAL: Reclaiming the mandate of social justice

FOR WOMEN

► Every woman will get Rs 2,500 monthly stipend

Yet, the momentum is clearly shifting. Bihar's caste survey has reignited the public debate on representation. Promises to field more backward class candidates than ever in 2025 have sparked enthusiasm in communities long accustomed to tokenism. There is also the generational shift, something the 35-year-old Tejashwi brings up regularly against the 73-year-old Nitish. In speech after speech, he refers to the in-



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India is betting on student-led innovation to crack Hyperloop technology—aiming not just to catch up, but to lead the global race for next-gen high-speed mobility

By AVISHEK G. DASTIDAR

G

unting in the summer sun amid the lush green expanse of the sprawling Discovery campus at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras in Chennai is a 422-metre-long metallic tube. Inside it lies an idea, one that a team of students is developing which could hasten India's journey towards Viksit Bharat.

This is the Avishkar Hyperloop, India's most ambitious shot at joining the elite group of nations racing to make vacuum tube-based ultra-high-speed transportation a reality. It's a government-supported, academia-led effort placing young engineers at the heart of a mass-mobility experiment. Since 2022, the Modi government has pumped in over Rs 30 crore into the project, the latest tranche arriving this February. Spearheaded by the railway ministry under Ashwini Vaishnaw, the plan is to build an ultra-long Hyperloop test track of 40

FUTURE-READY (Clockwise from left) The experimental Hyperloop tube; the pod; Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw inspects the pod model with a student team at IIT Madras in Chennai



THE HYPERLOOP PROMISE

The concept is an ultra-high-speed public transportation system where passengers travel in autonomous electric pods through near-vacuum tubes. Often called the fifth mode of transport, it reduces air resistance to allow capsules to reach speeds exceeding 1,000 km/h



to 50 km, a scale no other country has attempted. It's a bold leap: to set global benchmarks in propulsion, levitation, safety and cost efficiency.

So, what exactly is the Hyperloop? Imagine stepping into a pod roughly the size of a hatchback car, which accelerates inside a sealed vacuum tube to speeds approaching 1,200 km per hour, far faster than a commercial jet. That's the promise. But how is it done? With the air removed, the vacuum tube eliminates drag. Electromagnetic levitation lifts the pod off the surface, and a linear electric motor provides thrust. The result? A near-frictionless glide at breathtaking velocity. "We are constructing a sub-scale passenger cabin, a concrete tube rather than a steel tube, which is going to ensure over 80 per cent cost savings," says Prem Mukkannavar, a third-year civil engineering student. "We are also working on a pioneering end-to-end booster-cruiser technology."

Hyperloop became the big buzzword post-2013, follow-

ing the publication of 'Hyperloop Alpha', a white paper by tech billionaire Elon Musk. However, the concept has more than a century of history. It runs the gamut from George Medhurst's 18th-century idea of air-powered tubes, to pneumatic rail networks in 19th century London. That early, experimental phase faded away. But Musk breathed new life into the concept, giving it some tech optimism.

THE INDIAN INVENTION

Avishkar Hyperloop was launched in 2017. Its current testbed, likely the world's largest student-led Hyperloop initiative, can replicate the vacuum conditions needed to remove drag and enable a pod to zip using electromagnetic propulsion inside a two-metre-diameter tube. Using computational topology optimisation, a process that allows computers to identify the most efficient structural shape by eliminating non-essential material, the team reduced the chassis mass by 46 per cent with-

RACING INTO THE FUTURE

out compromising safety or performance. The Avishkar team competed with their Pod 5.0 at the European Hyperloop Week 2023 in Delft, the Netherlands, which is when they knew they were headed in the right direction. Avishkar ranked in the Global Top-5 in the Electrical, Traction and Complete Pod categories. The team is now busy preparing for this year's iteration of the competition, which will happen in July. IIT Madras also organised a Global Hyperloop Competition of its own in February, which saw the participation of 10 Hyperloop teams from across the world.

One of the highlights of the Avishkar project is the prototype concrete tube. However, "concrete is porous. So, preserving a vacuum will be a challenge. In a year or two, we can complete the tube," claims Prem. Their 'booster-cruiser system' employs two kinds of motors. The pod is driven by a single motor. Another motor further powers the moving pod at a constant velocity and is very energy-efficient. Cabin systems onboard—such as life support, humidity control and thermal management—are now in the testing stage, using procedures similar to those employed in space flight. The pod uses a mission control-style GUI (graphical user interface) network that gathers and displays real-time data, allowing it to monitor and even perform diagnostics on the go.

IS IT A PIPEDREAM?

The first-ever manned Hyperloop test was held in 2020 by Virgin Hyperloop, once the poster child for the movement, reaching a top speed of 172 km per hour. Since then, a string of private efforts have stumbled on commercial roadblocks, shifting priorities and scaling issues. "The dream is still alive," they say, but not without glitches. Though Musk has proposed that journeys—say, from Los Angeles to San Francisco or New York to Washington, DC—could take under 30 minutes, test velocities of unmanned pods under practical conditions have hovered around 387 km per hour due to safety, engineering, and scaling limitations.

No wonder, the road to commercialisation remains hazy worldwide. Some research firms don't expect Hyperloop to be commercially viable before 2040. While developers claim that artificial intelligence is accelerating progress, Indian policymakers are keeping room for some healthy scepticism. Vaishnav himself has called the technology "nascent". Fundamental problems

India is accelerating its Hyperloop ambitions with Avishkar, an IIT Madras student-led initiative to build the world's longest test track and take the lead in next-gen transport innovation. This is what the project entails

THE PROJECT: AVISHKAR HYPERLOOP

GOAL
To build the world's longest hyperloop test track (40-50 km)

SUPPORT
Rs 30+ crore from Modi government since 2022

FIRST-USE CASE
High-speed cargo movement via Indian Railways

TARGET SPEED

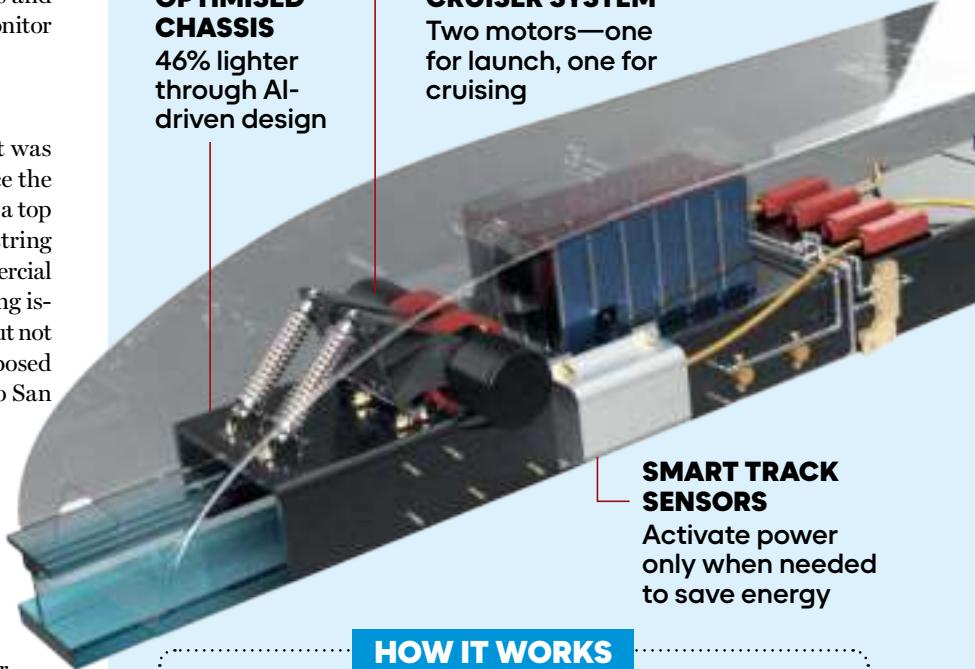
1,200 KMPH

Faster than a commercial jet

CORE TECHNOLOGIES

TOPOLOGY-OPTIMISED CHASSIS
46% lighter through AI-driven design

BOOSTER-CRUISER SYSTEM
Two motors—one for launch, one for cruising



SMART TRACK SENSORS
Activate power only when needed to save energy

HOW IT WORKS

With the air removed, the vacuum tube eliminates drag

Electromagnetic levitation lifts the pod off the surface

The linear electric motor provides thrust

A near-frictionless glide at breathtaking velocity

BUILT SO FAR

422-metre-long, 2-metre-diameter vacuum tube: The world's largest student-built Hyperloop testbed

Pod prototypes developed: Currently progressing to Version 8.0

Onboard systems under testing: Life support, humidity control, thermal regulation

Concrete tube prototype in progress: Projected 80% cost reduction

MISSION CONTROL GUI
Real-time diagnostics, remote monitoring

**THE CHALLENGES**

☛ No full-scale working Hyperloop demonstrator yet

☛ Concrete tube still in R&D phase; vacuum retention is a key hurdle

☛ Passenger applications likely several years away; safety validation a big question mark

☛ Global commercial viability likely post-2040, say some analysts

are still unsolved: maintaining vacuum in tubes, controlling levitating pods at high speeds and ensuring passenger safety. And, as with most infrastructure projects in India, land acquisition for long-distance corridors could become a stumbling block. With no established safety standards, regulatory approval will be another hurdle. Officials say they'll cross that bridge when they come to it. "Let's applaud the ambition. Let Indian Railways experiment boldly," says Sudhanshu Mani, former GM, Integral Coach Factory (ICF) Chennai, "but let's not confuse the hopeful 400-metre scaled-down prototypes with revolutions."

THE ROAD AHEAD

High-speed transport is a part of the Narendra Modi government's infrastructure playbook. Their fascination with cutting-edge mobility solutions is well-known—

and vacuum tube facility at the institute. Chennai-based startup Tutr Hyperloop, in which IIT Madras has a stake, is hastening the commercialisation of the technology. TuTr Hyperloop, Technical University of Munich (TUM) and Neoways Technologies GmbH have signed an MoU to drive the research, development and deployment of Hyperloop technology.

Says Prof. Satya Chakravarthy, advisor (Hyperloop), IIT Madras: "By partnering with TuTr Hyperloop, TUM and Neoways, we are moving closer to making Hyperloop a reality." TuTr has also partnered with global transport engineering firm SYSTRA, with plans to jointly launch a pilot project. "If we can transport cargo even at 150-200 kmph, that's over three times the average speed of trucks. That makes it a business case in India," says Aravind Bharadwaj, CEO, TuTr.

Government entities say a full rollout should cost no more than metro systems—around Rs 200 crore per km—while cargo solutions will be significantly cheaper

most notably in the ongoing Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project, whose first phase is expected to launch by August 2026. A few years ago, the prime minister interacted with the Avishkar team, signalling his government's serious intent. Ministries like railways and even ports, shipping and waterways are in active consultations to support proof-of-concept use-cases for cargo. Government entities have indicated that the full-fledged rollout should not cost more than metro systems, approximately Rs 200 crore per km. The cargo-movement solutions, however, will cost much less than that, officials say. "The entire tech that is used is indigenous, which is a matter of pride. In the railway set-up, we will decide on a site for commercial transportation over a distance of 40-50 km. ICF Chennai will make its electricals," says Vaishnav.

Indian Railways has already signed a pact with IIT Madras to set up a Centre of Excellence for Hyperloop technology. The objective is to develop a sub-scale model of the pod, along with a test track

Next up: the long test track, an improved pod with cargo that will move an item of 100 kg by the year-end. India Inc has lent a hand as well. Tutr calls it a consortium approach, collaborating with firms such as L&T Construction, ArcelorMittal and Tube Investments of India. "Every one in the consortium is an expert in their field. Tutr is bringing all that together," Bharadwaj says.

Official sources say talks are on to trial parcel/cargo movement in railways, metro and ports, even if on a small scale, starting sometime this year. "We can alleviate port congestion by hauling cargo," Prem claims. "Our ultimate goal is that the first Avishkar Hyperloop will be a 350-km tube between Chennai and Bengaluru, making the travel possible in 30 minutes."

No one can predict how far the Hyperloop dream will travel in times to come. But this spirited band of young innovators, coupled with an agile startup, has already ensured that India won't be left behind for lack of ambition or effort. ■

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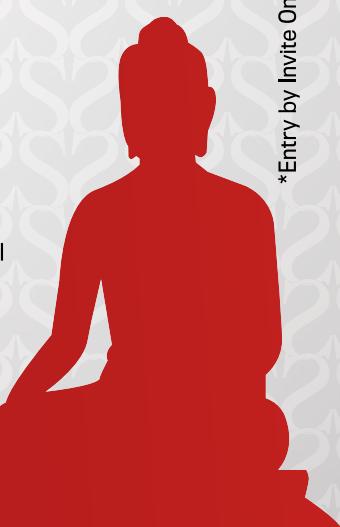
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COVER STORY

THE SEVEN SINS OF INVESTING

Predicting stock market outcomes is irrational. Don't be a victim of investment sins, because unlike biblical sins, these won't hurt your soul, but will hurt your assets

By **Narayan Krishnamurthy**

Investing is constantly evolving, and so are strategies and financial models, which are applied and tested by scores of investors. Yet, these strategies and models fall short of explaining the complexities in human decision-making. Take, for instance, our tendency to leap at news of a sale, be it at stores or more so online, making purchases that justify the price drop or discount. However, when it comes to a fall in the stock markets—which is akin to a sale as prices of stocks and mutual funds fall—few investors clamour to buy them. Many get scared and sell their holdings, worried over the uncertainties.

Since May 2024, you need to ask yourself how you felt about your investments. The markets were going up, and there was more money being ploughed in during this phase by foreign institutional investors (FIIs) and Indian investors (institutional and retail). However, as we approached September 2024, the FIIs began to exit their positions (see *FII Trading Activity*). Now, there are many

reasons for FIIs investing in India, and there are probably as many reasons for them to pull their investments from the country. For instance, the US elections and rising inflation were a few reasons that were cited for the exit beginning September 2024.

While the Indian markets did not witness great drops, there was turbulence, and it did cause worry among many

investors, especially small ones. Some investors sold their stock holdings, worried that a bear market was looming. As we can see now, market indices have returned to the levels they were at during September 2024, and chances are that they will touch the high of 85,836 points that the BSE Sensex reached on the 26th of that month. Market recoveries are often watched from the sidelines by investors

FII TRADING ACTIVITY

DATE	GROSS PURCHASE	GROSS SALES	NET PURCHASE/SALES
Apr. '25	2,97,604	2,91,241	6,363
Mar. '25	2,98,912	2,90,858	8,053
Feb. '25	2,79,222	3,25,821	-46,599
Jan. '25	2,69,623	3,42,300	-72,677
Dec. '24	3,28,550	3,17,465	11,086
Nov. '24	3,38,209	3,56,467	-18,259
Oct. '24	3,26,426	4,18,360	-91,934
Sep. '24	4,34,967	3,85,175	49,793
Aug. '24	4,15,807	4,02,373	13,434
Jul. '24	3,79,883	3,51,926	27,958
Jun. '24	4,05,908	3,79,967	25,940
May '24	3,95,944	4,21,203	-25,260

Source: SEBI; all values in ₹ crore



**WHILE THE
INDIAN
MARKETS DID
NOT WITNESS
GREAT DROPS,
THERE WAS
TURBULENCE. IT
WORRIED MANY
INVESTORS**

who feel they missed the opportunity to participate because they did not have it in them to stay invested.

Fear is a powerful force, especially when reading a headline like 'Sensex loses 1,000 points in a day'. What one misses is that there is often a context to such an outcome. Yes, a 1,000-point drop sounds like a big number, but it is about 1-1.5 per cent of the index at current levels. In other words, the market has grown so much over time that point drops are less significant than they seem. But headlines are

often eye-catching when they report raw numbers, not percentages. Raw numbers bring in the drama and the emotion, and make people take short-sighted and emotional moves.

Behavioural finance challenges the assumption that individuals make decisions in a rational and self-interested manner because, in reality, emotional and psychological factors play a significant role in shaping financial decisions.

Leading psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have studied, evaluated and written extensively on the psychological aspects of decision-making, particularly how people evaluate and choose between different options involving investing. In the following pages, we will be throwing light on the seven deadly—or cardinal—sins, which represent fundamental tendencies that can lead to a moral failure in investing.

1 LUST: INTENSE DESIRE

How often have you desired that one investment idea that would double or quadruple your money? The investment world is full of buzzwords and trends that can make anyone feel like they're missing out on the "next big thing". FOMO can lead to lust and impulsive decisions. It can also lead you to make riskier choices than you might otherwise make.

Hype-driven investing often capitalises on emotions rather than sound finan-

cial reasoning. Don't be governed by social media influencers, and even conversations with friends who may be experienced investors or just glib talkers. Investing without fully understanding the risks or the potential for long-term returns can result in losses. Stop chasing hot stocks and tips. You need some understanding of investing before committing.

In the run-up to the 2024 general election, the BSE Sensex reacted cautiously from January 2024 with frequent fluctuations. This was in anticipation of the election outcome, which is an important matrix for stock market movements (see chart, *Cautious Moves*). Then, during an election rally in May, just towards the last phase of voting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that investors would benefit from the stock market investments on June 4, the day the election results were to be announced. This comment made many investors lust for the possible fast gains for their investments. The Sensex moved up from around 73,000 to 76,000 on June 3. Lust did pay off.

However, within a day of the election results, the Sensex witnessed a massive fall of 4,389 points in a single day. The Sensex was 76,468 points on June 3 and ended June 4 at 72,079 points. The 5.7 per cent single-day fall is a suitable example of how lust can cause harm. Now,

some investors may be sulking at having missed the opportunity of investing on June 4, 2024 (see *Short Rebound*). Lust, when investing, has no rational foundation. Don't forget your investment purpose; you are the best judge of your interests.

2 GREED: CRAVING FOR MORE

Greed is a powerful emotion that drives market movements, and fear complements it. Greed can cause poor investment choices. If you have felt safe keeping money in the

bank and not investing it, you are not alone. However, diminishing bank interest rates and rising awareness about gains from stock market investments induce a greed to invest to benefit from the upside it offers. Ignoring the risk that is inherent to investing and moving your savings from the bank to investing is being greedy.

Investing blindly, instead of keeping money in the bank, is a big mistake. Unlike banks, where the money earns a fixed return, investing in stock markets doesn't guarantee any returns. You need to understand this basic difference. Based on historical data, the annualised

returns posted by the Sensex since 1980 are 16 per cent, which is well above the 2.5-3 per cent returns currently available in bank savings deposits. But this data alone should not make you greedy to invest in the stock market.

Take, for instance, the annual returns posted by the Sensex over the past 10 years (see *Annual Sensex Returns*); there have been years when the returns have been negative. Investing in stock markets can erode capital. The lesson is not to be greedy and factor in the risks involved. Another aspect that results in greed is when investors make a big profit on a particular investment. The example of IPOs is often a good reference point. While many successful IPOs tend to gain on listing, it doesn't always mean that all IPOs are profitable on listing.

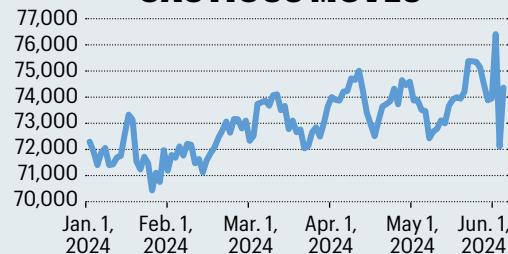
Similarly, don't fall prey to investing heavily in one type of stock, sector or index. Chasing trends is the best instance of being greedy. The way to overcome this sin is to create a sensible investment plan or principle that works for you, and stick to it. Have a list of criteria based on which you will invest, and tick them off every time you make an investment based on your assessment. Another aspect of greed is holding on to specific investments without a clear reason.

Investments in real estate are an example where people don't factor in the opportunity loss they incur due to greed, waiting for prices

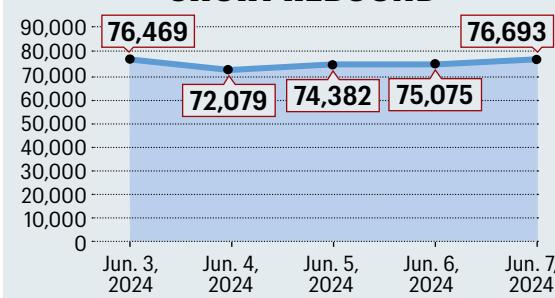
VOLATILE TURNS

Early 2024 saw restrained Sensex gains, followed by a volatile bounce after the June general election results

CAUTIOUS MOVES



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to rise above the price at which they acquired the property. The same is true with some stocks as well, where the context to stay invested would have changed, yet you stay invested, hoping for things to change, ignoring the real reason for the investment losing its worth. Don't be greedy based solely on the past performance of an investment; look for the reasons for the fluctuation in its value (down or up) to change your view. Sometimes, it is better to cut your losses on an investment rather than keep hoping for a turnaround.

3 ENVY: DESIRE WHAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS

How often do you come away from a conversation feeling that you should have done the same investment as your friend? That stock, which has tripled since they invested, should have been with you, too. It is common to use the rear-view mirror when it comes to making investments, with the belief that past performance is a sure way to make future gains. This is also a trap set by smart wealth management managers who come up with limited-period exclusive offers that can do wonders. The offer is attractive and also makes one feel important with the great deal coming one's way.

However, many of these investments are hyped and often dan-

ANNUAL SENSEX RETURNS

DATE	SENSEX	1-YEAR RETURN (%)
Jan. 1, 2016	26,160.9	-4.90%
Jan. 1, 2017	26,626.46	1.78%
Jan. 1, 2018	33,812.75	26.99%
Jan. 1, 2019	36,254.57	7.22%
Jan. 1, 2020	41,306.02	13.93%
Jan. 1, 2021	47,868.98	15.89%
Jan. 1, 2022	59,183.22	23.64%
Jan. 1, 2023	61,294.2	3.57%
Jan. 1, 2024	72,271.94	17.91%
Jan. 1, 2025	78,507.41	8.63%

Source: BSE Sensex, historical data

gerous to your financial health. Take, for instance, the scores of investors who opened demat accounts in the wake of Covid, as they saw an opportunity to invest in stocks during the market turnaround in the first six months of the pandemic, between March and September 2020. While many investors benefited, many others felt the heat as not all decisions worked out favourably. Without getting into

specific stocks, the sheer chase for returns prompted many new investors to put money in the small-cap segment because they saw the index surge sharply.

Not all of them deserved the price at which investors lapped them up. The result: there was a steep fall when the valuations skyrocketed without rationale. Basing your investment decision on the first piece of information that you are exposed to is a recipe for disaster.

Chasing the crowd when it comes to investing is better known as herd mentality. There are many examples to understand herd mentality and how it results in investments losing money. PMS (portfolio management services) is a special way to invest in the stock market, where an expert (licensed PMS operator) takes money on your behalf and builds a portfolio just for you.

The minimum that one needs to invest in a PMS is Rs 50 lakh, and the PMSs run portfolios that have often done well too. As is the case with all forms of investments, there are phases when certain methods do exceedingly well, but they may fail miserably when the variables favouring their performance are no more there. Consistent Compounds is the name of a PMS scheme offered by Marcellus Investment Managers. Marcellus's founder Saurabh Mukherjea is well known and regularly shares his views and opinions on





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- 49 lakh families covered under **Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Yojana**
- ₹3280.95 crore aid provided to 2,37,125 needy patients through **Mukhyamantri Vivekadheen Kosh**
- 40.79 lakh Antyodaya cardholder families included in **Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Yojana**
- 5,834 hospitals (2,949 government, 2,885 private) empaneled under **Ayushman Bharat Yojana**, benefiting 53.93 lakh people
- **Health ATMs** installed in PHCs across the state for easy diagnostics
- 2,270 ambulances under **National Ambulance Service**, 2,200 ambulances under 108 emergency service and 250 **Advanced Life Support** ambulances operational
- 13.50 crore patients treated at **Mukhyamantri Arogya Swasthya Melas**
- **Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Rajya Karmchari Cashless Chikitsa Yojana** launched for state employees and pensioners
- 3.64 crore patients benefited from **teleconsultation services** with specialist doctors
- **Free dialysis services** available in all 75 districts, benefiting 30,000+ patients
- 22,681 **Ayushman Bharat Health & Wellness Centers** operational

KAAM ASARDAR-DOUBLE ENGINE SARKAR



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investments. He has professed his theory, BAAP (buy-at-any-price), behind the performance of this scheme.

The lust to earn high returns has prompted many investors to opt for this PMS scheme, which has underperformed massively. Mukherjea has acknowledged that valuation missteps in stock selection are the reason for the poor performance. Many other investors who started choosing stocks that were part of this portfolio have also been affected. Marcellus did not lose much, as it earned its commission.

4 GLUTTONY: OVER- INDULGENCE

Buy low and sell high is a timeless investment advice. Yet, there are numerous studies and data to indicate how investors get excited and end up doing just the opposite. They invest at market peaks and miss out when the markets are down. When investing, it is a good strategy to plan the duration one will stay invested in. For short term or less than three years, investing in equities is risky; for the medium term, investing for about 5-6 years works favourably, and for the long run, investing for 7 years and more is desired.

Those who stay invested for 7-10 years and more rarely lose money in the stock markets (see *It Pays to Stay Invested*). If



THOSE WHO STAY INVESTED FOR 7-10 YEARS AND MORE RARELY LOSE MONEY. A RS 1,000 INVESTMENT IN THE BSE ON JAN. 1, 1980, WOULD BE WORTH RS 6.64 LAKH ON JAN. 1, 2025

you invested Rs 1,000 in the BSE Sensex on January 1, 1980, the investment would be worth Rs 6.64 lakh on January 1, 2025. However, if you had exited the same after three years, it would have only doubled instead of the 664x growth over 45 years. There is no way of predicting how well your investments will perform. Will they take a hit during tough economic times? Or will they give you steady returns?

In the face of market uncertainty, the best investment strategy is to invest in quality companies for a long period with periodic reviews to change

your investments to suit the times. Frequent investing comes at a cost—you pay commissions on transaction costs, and there are also tax implications that can take away from your investment gains if you frequently exit and then reinvest. You also need to be correct twice—when buying a stock at a low cost and selling it at a high price.

The strategy of investing in stock markets through mutual funds is a smart way to reduce transaction costs. It also provides you with an option to invest regularly through SIP (systematic

investment plan), by which you can average your cost of investment. Control your gluttony by regularly investing based on a goal and a plan that suits you.

5 WRATH: BEING OVERLY AGGRESSIVE

Aggression and investing don't always work well. While 'higher the risk, higher the reward' is oft-quoted, it does not work for everyone. Investing in penny stocks or new businesses, and even in F&O (Futures and Options), can be considered being overly aggressive. Each one of these has a higher upside potential, but more often than not, the downside is the reality. Wrath is also a trait showing a lack of understanding of investing.

Every day in the media, you can find predictions from stock analysts, professional investors and experts about what's going to happen in the markets. These forecasts are believably argued, pointing to market history and various data points. There is very little check on how this advice has fared over time. However, there is enough evidence that the experts are no better at seeing into the future than you are. Yet, investors commit the sin of listening to them.

For instance, during bull markets, the media often contributes to the hype, showcasing stories of astounding profits. These

stories tend to create a sense of urgency among investors who don't want to miss out. The stories of very successful investors, without going into specific details, can make you more aggressive than you can manage, and can lead to decisions detrimental to your risk tolerance and investment needs.

These days, you also have a plethora of DIY investing apps that are quick and easy to use. Many of these also run mock portfolios that one could invest in, with past performance flashing every time you access the apps. There is a tendency to get more aggressive than you typically are, which means investing without enough research and understanding. An extension of this is the rise in the number of F&O investors in recent years. These investors compete against algorithms and big institutions that are hard to beat.

Such has been the havoc caused by F&O investing that the market regulator Sebi has stepped in time and again to tweak the rules to make it less tempting for retail investors to get into this form of investing. According to a recent Sebi study, 93 per cent of individual F&O traders lost money from FY22 to FY24. Imagine, 11.3 million unique individual traders incurred a combined net loss (trading loss inclusive of transaction costs) of Rs 1.81 lakh crore in F&Os in this period. It further noted that over 10 million traders (92.8 per cent of individual traders) lost, on an average, about Rs 2 lakh per person in F&Os over three years.

When you get very aggressive, you get irrational and start investing in untested investment ideas. However, you should try to time investing and look for strategies that promise higher-than-reasonable returns. The best way to avoid this sin is to tone



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down your investing, take a step back, and look for rational investment strategies such as less active investing through mutual funds and even exploring passive investing through index funds and ETFs (exchange-traded funds).

6 SLOTH: IGNORING THE BASICS

In every investor's journey, there comes a time when complacency gets the bet-

Investing, like any other endeavour, requires knowledge and skills that need to be updated to changing times and scenarios. For instance, investing in IPOs was very straightforward a couple of decades ago, but the process has changed, which means that as an investor, you can no longer take it for granted that you will be allotted shares in an IPO. Similarly, the basic tenet of investing is all about asset

the asset allocation you've set out in your plan. To rebalance, you need to return to target weightings by selling assets that have risen in price and buying those that have done less well.

7 PRIDE: WHEN EGO DRIVES INVESTING DECISIONS

A tendency to believe that patterns repeat and assume that it is an indicator of a trend is a sign of a bias. Your

ers know that it is difficult to beat market returns. However, if you choose a benchmark that is way below what your investments need to be benchmarked against, you are cheating yourself. For instance, benchmarking equity returns to bank FDs, just because you started investing in equities with the money that was in the FD, isn't the right comparison. The best way to overcome this sin is to have an accurate way to understand investment research.

It is very easy to lose control over your investments, especially if you do not regularly track how they fare individually, and in comparison to the broad markets. You will lose the point of reference to evaluate your investment's performance to know how poorly or how well it has done. You also need to stay in sync with your investment goals and adjust them based on the time you have to reach the goal. If your goal is over 10 years away, you need to track its progress each passing year and not in the 8th or 9th year, and then panic.

There are often instances when you may reach your investment goal before the target date. This is a good sign, and while you should rejoice in this achievement, you should not believe this is the norm with your other investment goals. Don't let behavioural biases set in, because this can cause you to sin without realising you are doing so. It is always good to seek advice from a trusted investment advisor. ■

IT PAYS TO STAY INVESTED

YEAR	SENSEX	1-YEAR	3-YEAR	5-YEAR	10-YEAR
		RETURN (%)			
Jan. 1, '15	27,507.54				
Jan. 1, '16	26,160.9	-4.90%			
Jan. 1, '17	26,626.46	1.78%			
Jan. 1, '18	33,812.75	26.99%	7.12%		
Jan. 1, '19	36,254.57	7.22%	11.49%		
Jan. 1, '20	41,306.02	13.93%	15.76%	8.47%	
Jan. 1, '21	47,868.98	15.89%	12.29%	12.84%	
Jan. 1, '22	59,183.22	23.64%	17.75%	17.32%	
Jan. 1, '23	61,294.2	3.57%	14.06%	12.63%	
Jan. 1, '24	72,271.94	17.91%	14.72%	14.79%	
Jan. 1, '25	78,507.41	8.63%	9.88%	13.70%	11%

Source: BSE. The table indicates the returns the Sensex would have earned if one had stayed invested in it each year or in cycles of 3 years, 5 years, or 10 years over 11 years from January 1, 2015. The returns vary over each cycle, and the longer you stay, the less likely you are to lose money, and the return you earn also varies less

ter of them. They tend to ignore the basics and begin to believe that investments make profit because of some magic that they have. This is especially true during a bull run when almost every stock goes up irrespective of its quality or business strategy.

allocation and diversification. This means you need to keep rebalancing your portfolio to maintain the asset allocation that suits your risk profile and investment objective.

As markets move up or down, the composition of your portfolio strays from

overconfidence may stem from a few bets that you placed working out favourably. This could also be due to factors that you aren't aware of. If you often think that you are better at investing than others, you suffer from the sin of pride.

The best of fund manag-



INSPIRING & SUCCESSFUL INDIAN PERSONALITIES

MALLIKA MEHTA, INDIAN PLAYBACK SINGER

Mallika Mehta, a mesmerizing songstress has enthralled the world with her powerful voice and poignant performances. Dubbed "The Adele of Mumbai," the alumna of Berklee, Harvard and NYU has unveiled ten soul-stirring originals, amassing a massive following on Instagram and lakhs of streams on Spotify. Mallika's diverse discography showcases her creative spirit and passion for storytelling through music. With her captivating

stage presence and genuine artistry, Mallika has solidified her position as a rising star in the music industry. Her song "But Tonight I Wanna Cry" has graced the iconic Nasdaq billboard in Times Square, while her single "You Are A Criminal" was released under Salim Sulaiman's Merchant Records, further cementing her success.

DR. AFSER HINDUSTANI, ENTREPRENEUR

Dr. Afser Hindustani, MD & CEO of Vstaar Plus, is a visionary leader dedicated

to promoting wellness through high-quality Ayurvedic products. Under his leadership, Vstaar Plus has emerged as a trusted name in health and wellness. His vision is to impact millions of lives globally by reviving the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda in modern form. With a strong mission to empower individuals, he offers health-focused opportunities that not only enhance well-being but also create pathways to financial freedom. Dr. Afser's passion for holistic health and entrepreneurship continues to inspire thousands to lead healthier, wealthier, and more purposeful lives.

MR. SUNHARI LAL, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Mr. Sunhari Lal is a renowned motivational speaker and business coach with over 22 years of experience in the direct selling industry. He has inspired millions to achieve success and financial freedom. With his powerful insights and actionable strategies, he empowers individuals to unlock their potential and build prosperous, fulfilling lives. He received the prestigious Kohinoor Award in 2016 and was awarded a Doctorate degree by Stanford International University, USA. His dedication to personal growth and empowerment has earned him a reputation as a trusted mentor. Through his unique approach, he creates a lasting impact on individuals and organizations alike, continuously inspiring the next generation of leaders.

OWAIZ HINDUSTANI, ENTREPRENEUR

Owaiz Hindustani is a young entrepreneur and business coach who has inspired lakhs of individuals to kickstart their entrepreneurial journey

and achieve financial independence. As the Finance Director of Vstaar Plus, India's fastest-growing Direct Selling company, he is a key force behind its rapid success. With a mission to guide and mentor aspiring entrepreneurs, Owaiz is committed to building a generation that values growth, leadership, and self-reliance. His vision is to make India a global powerhouse of entrepreneurs, where every individual has the tools, mindset, and courage to turn dreams into reality. He leads with purpose and passion.

Dr. Garima Sharma, Co-founder, Evacare Plus

Dr. Garima Sharma, co-founder and Medical Director of Evacare Plus in Mumbai, is a trailblazer in women's healthcare and fertility treatment. Honoured with the Young Achievers Award in 2021 and the Youth Icon Award in 2022 and 2023 by ISAR, the largest national organization of fertility experts, she exemplifies excellence in her field. Alongside her husband, Dr. Suyash Bhandekar, a seasoned expert with over 12 years of experience, she is committed to a holistic approach to healthcare, addressing physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. At Evacare Plus, fertility treatment stands at the core. The couple doctors focus on nurturing a supportive environment that caters to the needs of couples, acknowledging the importance of addressing both partners' concerns. They provide personalized treatment plans that blend cutting-edge medical technology with empathetic care, helping couples navigate the complexities of infertility with confidence. Recipient of Best Fertility Specialist West Zone at ET Healthworld Awards 2025.



इंडिया टुडे

देश की भाषा में देश की धड़कन



इंडिया टुडे

सबसे भरोसेमंद
खोतों से,
सबसे सटीक
जानकारी

सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

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

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

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

कृपया फॉर्म को ब्लॉकलेटर में भरें

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

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहाँ स्कैन करें.

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



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LE! SURE

OTT: THE POWER OF IMAGINATION PG 57

THE LISTICLE: BOOK RELEASES PG 58



ART

In Fine Print

JYOTI BHATT'S RETROSPECTIVE AT LATITUDE 28 CAPTURES HIS PIONEERING SPIRIT, POLITICAL SUBTLETY, AND PASSION FOR PRINTMAKING AS CULTURAL DIALOGUE

A

At 91, Jyoti Bhatt looks at showcases of his works as a means to hold on to a fast-fading memory; memory that's been slipping away like sand. The ongoing retrospective titled 'Jyoti Bhatt: Through the Line and the Lens...' by Latitude 28 in Delhi (on till May 25), and curated by artist Rekha Rodwittiya, puts on display the artist's complete collection from Bhavna Kakar's printmaking archive, featuring etchings, lithographs, serigraphs, photographs and personal writings, including diary entries and letters. It offers a unique insight into Bhatt's practice and philosophy. Over the years, his photographic documentation of India's living traditions forged a profound dialogue with his graphic prints.

In a career spanning over six decades, the artist's longstanding engagement with folk symbols and motifs, meticulously recorded in his notebooks, has helped build a distinctive visual vocabulary that marries local traditions with contemporary sensibilities. "Initially, I used photography to document my own work," Bhatt says, introspecting on his journey from sketching to picking up the camera. "Gradually, I began photographing the works of fellow artists and, eventually, the living traditions of rural and tribal India—something I continued for over 25 years. During that time, I more or less neglected painting and printmaking, returning to them only after retiring from teaching."

But ever since, Bhatt has remained unwavering in his commitment to pedagogy, championing printmaking not merely as an artistic pursuit but as a democratic medium, vital for mass dissemination and the nurturing of

cultural literacy. As an intellectual, Bhatt occupies the intriguing position of not only being a conduit between modernist and contemporary art in India, but also being acutely unaware of his sway on the cultural landscape.

His unselfconsciousness allows him to have a disinterested view of things. In his graphic prints, Bhatt subtly integrated political critique to challenge institutions that opposed pluralism and liberal values. Considered ahead of his time, Bhatt experimented with text and art references, laying early foundations for post-modernist ideas that would take shape in Indian art years later.

And yet, the artist tends to shrug off the political import of his oeuvre. "I do not believe that works of art are bound to any single purpose or message," Bhatt says. "I have, from time to

time, used certain images and symbols that might carry political implications. But, for me, the visual quality of the image has always been the primary concern, not the political or historical message it might convey."

In that vein, he clarifies how print and printmaking aren't the same. Printmaking is an artistic endeavour, unlike printing, a broader mechanical process of reproducing images. "Because prints are editioned and not physically unique in the way a painting or sculpture might be, some people don't appreciate them as original works of art. But each print carries the artist's intent and direct engagement with the medium," he says, adding that he has been just as excited about the digital avenues for art.

However, digital works are often not immediately recognised as original art. "Personally, I believe that the im-



STILL IN PRINT
Jyoti Bhatt
in his studio at
MSU Baroda,
1959; above,
'The Flight'
(etching, 1978)

PAINTING ▼

Colonial Shades

AN EXHIBITION OF **COMPANY PAINTINGS** AT DAG DELHI SHOWS A SUBSTANTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN INDIAN AND EUROPEAN ART

pact of our unique caste system has a pervasive influence on our mindsets, causing us to create hierarchies wherever possible, whether in society or art," says Bhatt, who has straddled every medium and studied and overcome each bias on the way.

The artist studied painting and printmaking at M.S. University in Baroda. In the early 1960s, he won a scholarship to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Naples, Italy, and later at the Pratt Institute in New York, where he came across abstract expressionism. He dabbled in cubism ini-

IN HIS GRAPHIC PRINTS, BHATT INTEGRATED POLITICAL CRITIQUE TO CHALLENGE INSTITUTIONS OPPOSING PLURALISM AND LIBERAL VALUES

tially, which later evolved through pop art imagery and eventually settled into a visual language inspired by traditional folk motifs.

Over the years, printmaking became synonymous with Jyoti Bhatt, so that when he returned to MSU Baroda in 1966, he was armed with a thorough knowledge of the intaglio process. Over his illustrious teaching career at the institute, he prolifically photo-documented its journey, the creative practices of its students and faculty, and Baroda's architecturally important buildings.

"My artworks reflect what I observe. It is a record of the world as I experience it, filtered through a visual language that feels honest to me," he concludes. ■

—Arshia

The humble custard apple ('shareef' or 'sitaphal' in Hindi) is cherished across north India for its intense sugary taste and the zing it adds to otherwise strait-laced desserts. But before I saw several 18th-century gouache-on-paper paintings of the fruit, drawn in the style of European botanical drawings, I had never quite realised the geometric elegance of its honeycomb-like form. The works are on display at Delhi's DAG, a part of their ongoing exhibition 'A Treasury of Life: Indian Company Paintings c. 1790-1835' (on till July 5). As the

name suggests, these 'Company paintings' (nearly 200 of them, from the 18th and 19th centuries) were drawn by Indian artists commissioned by India-based European patrons.

"In all of the company paintings, there is a substantive dialogue going on between Indian and European art," says Giles Tillotson, senior vice president at DAG and the curator of this exhibition. "Indian artists used the western printed image—mostly British but also French, like the works sourced from Pondicherry here—as a template or a starting point to develop a new,

hybrid sensibility." There are examples of this hybridity across the three principal categories the exhibition is divided into—natural history, architecture and Indian customs/rituals. In the natural history category, for instance, the choice of botanical subjects was often driven by the cultural or religious significance of the plant/fruit (like the tulsi plant, a common object of worship for Hindus).

Some of the Indian artists, hitherto used to royal patronage, worked in the dominant style of their erstwhile kingdom. Once they were exposed to, as Tillotson says, "the western printed image", their style naturally accommodated the new influences. 'A Treasury of Life' makes the case for 'Company paintings' to be considered as early examples of (or precursors to) Indian modernism. ■

—Aditya Mani Jha



EARLY COMPANY
Above, 'Festival at Thirunallar' (Madras, watercolour, c. 1800); right, 'Kali Puja' (Murshidabad, watercolour, early 1800s)





THE TROIKA

Raoul Kerr, Karan Katiyar and Jayant Bhadula are currently on a world tour

MUSIC ▼

MUSIC WITH A MESSAGE

Heavy metal band Bloodywood's second album is dedicated to their home city, Delhi

Heavy metal has a niche following within India, but New Delhi band Bloodywood's take on the genre—which blends in hip-hop and Indian folk music rendered in a mix of Hindi and English and occasionally Punjabi—has won fans around the globe. The trio of composer and multi-instrumentalist Karan Katiyar, singer Jayant Bhadula and rapper Raoul Kerr is currently on a world tour in support of their recently-released second album *NU DELHI*.

The record, which is dedicated to their home city and features 'Bekhauf', a collaboration with Japan's BABYMETAL, is their first since signing to American label Fearless Records on whose roster they're the only Indian act. The 2024 signing was another among Bloodywood's long list of achievements that includes playing almost every major metal festival in the world and cracking the US and UK

album sales charts with their debut collection *Rakshak* (2022) on the back of a fan campaign.

A highlight was "performing to nearly 60,000 people at [the] Download [festival in England] in 2023", says Bhadula. It was a special moment for the group that started out in the mid-2010s as an internet sensation. Back then, Bloodywood—Bhadula clarified that the name was not inspired by the title of Mumbai electro-rock band Pentagram's 2011 album—was best known for their headbang-friendly versions of Bollywood and pop hits such as Bombay Rockers' 2005 smash 'Ari Ari' and the title track of *Rang De Basanti* (2006).

But it wasn't until they completed their first tour of Europe and the UK in 2019 and performed their origi-

nal material to packed crowds that they "knew we belong", says Kerr. A sense of belonging is also what bonds their fans, which they've been told by multiple venue staff in India, Germany and the US, are some of the most "wholesome" they've encountered. Says Kerr, "Our music is a place for everyone to come together."

A big reason for this is that in Bloodywood's case, the moshing is accompanied by a message. 'Dana-Dan—which was synched in the Dev Patel-directed movie *Monkey Man* (2024)—confronts sexual violence; 'Gaddar' decries political communalism; 'Jee Veerey' addresses depression; 'Hutt' takes on trolls; and 'Daggebaaz' is a seathing comment on corrupt corporations. ■

THE ALBUM, WHICH ALSO FEATURES A COLLABORATION WITH JAPAN'S BABYMETAL, IS THEIR FIRST SINCE SIGNING TO AMERICAN LABEL FEARLESS RECORDS

—Amit Gurbaxani

OTT ▼

The Power of Imagination

Black, White & Gray—Love Kills is an innovative new crime series on Sony LIV

An intelligent filmmaker knows that all stories have been told already, and a fresh story means fresh storytelling. Case in point: the new Sony LIV Hindi series *Black, White & Gray—Love Kills*. Written, directed and edited by Pushkar Sunil Mahabal, the *Rashomon*-like six-episode series is part true crime mockumentary, part chase thriller, and full metafiction. What could have been a straightforward crime story is explored as a fake documentary looking into the aftermath of the crime, juxtaposed with its dramatic re-enactment. This style coaxes us to question the ethics of the true crime genre, and the intersections of caste, class and gender across which crimes occur.

A politician's daughter and the son of the politician's driver sneak out one night to have sex in a hotel. Later, CCTV footage suggests that the man has killed the woman

and escaped with her body. The police allege that the man goes on to murder a cop and two others in his killing spree. The man has been absconding for two years.

The series is framed as a project by a western filmmaker visiting India. His mockumentary features interviews with friends and relatives of the victims, while the dramatic re-enactment shows what could have gone down between the man, the woman, and the three other victims. The filmmaker reveals his trump card at the end of episode one: he has tracked down and interviewed the accused.

One of the most innovative Indian series in a long time, *Black, White & Gray...* is true gonzo filmmaking. At a time of despair in the Mumbai film industry over its products' staleness and commercial failures, Mahabal proves that imagination is all it takes. ■

—Devarsi Ghosh

It's a follow-up to Mahabal's first film, *Welcome Home*, a thriller he made on a shoestring budget

A FICTIONAL TRUE CRIME
The series is framed as a project by a western filmmaker visiting India



A TRIBUTE

The festival features a retrospective of the late Shyam Benegal's films



MILIND SHELTE

FILM FESTIVAL ▼

FOR THE LOVE OF CINEMA

Here's what you can expect at this year's Habitat Film Festival in Delhi

The 17th edition of the Habitat Film Festival (HFF), scheduled in Delhi from May 16-25, will be a celebration of Indian cinema's past, present and future. Since its inception two decades ago, the platform has been a breath of fresh air for independent filmmakers, regional auteurs and cinephiles who seek an exceptional cinematic experience. From tributes to cinematic legends to a curated selection of contemporary films across 24 languages, HFF 2025 promises a packed programme. One of the highlights is a tribute to the titan of Indian parallel cinema, Shyam Benegal. The retrospective will kick off with a screening of his first film *Ankur*, in the presence of actress Shabana Azmi, who made her cinematic debut with it. "To complement the retrospective, we're also presenting an exhibition that traces his remarkable journey," says Vidyun Singh,

Creative Head Programmes, Habitat World, India Habitat Centre. A thoughtfully curated celebration of Raj Kapoor's birth centenary is also on the cards, and includes a *dastangoi* performance, poster exhibition and the screening of *Awaara* along with a documentary by Siddharth Kak. "We are also screening award-winning films from across India, like *All We Imagine As Light*, *Pyre* and *Feminichi Faithima*, besides a powerful line-up of feminist documentaries and a special package of non-fiction films," adds Singh. ■

—Geetika Sachdev

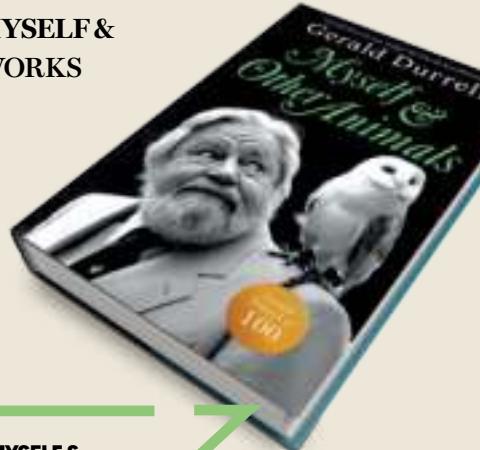
BOOKS ▶

Adrift on Noah's Ark

GERALD DURRELL'S POSTHUMOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *MYSELF & OTHER ANIMALS*, IS AS DELIGHTFUL AS HIS OTHER WORKS

Published 30 years after his passing, and in his centenary year, *Myself & Other Animals* should revive interest in naturalist Gerald Durrell's legacy. Jamshedpur-born Durrell's childhood was spent in a wild rapture. Happily for his readers, he never grew up. In 1930, following his father's death, his mother Louisa moved with her four children (including eldest son Lawrence, later another famous writer) to England. But

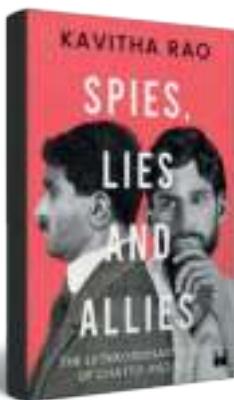
the India-raised Durrells couldn't cope with life there. The family followed Lawrence to Corfu, a Greek island where young Gerald spent an idyllic Mediterranean boyhood among creatures great and small. There he met his natural history mentor, the polymath Theodore Stephanides. These recollections would appear, garnished with saucy humour and serendipity, in the bestselling Corfu Trilogy—*My Family and Other Animals*; *Birds, Beasts and Rela-*



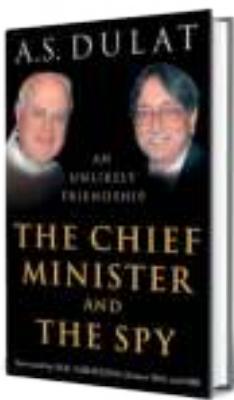
**MYSELF &
OTHER ANIMALS**
*By Gerald
Durrell*
PENGUIN VIKING
₹1,399; 352 pages

THE LISTICLE

Recent book releases which should be on your reading list



SPIES, LIES AND ALLIES
By Kavitha Rao
WESTLAND
₹499;
272 pages



THE CHIEF MINISTER AND THE SPY
By A.S. Dulat
JUGGERNAUT
₹799;
312 pages

Secrets and Shadows

Intrigue and espionage seem to be the flavour of the season. Kavitha Rao's *Spies, Lies and Allies* is the extraordinary tale of two Indian revolutionaries—Virendranath Chattopadhyaya a.k.a. Chatto (Sarojini Naidu's brother) and M.N. Roy, who founded the Tashkent group of the Communist Party of India—as they dodge the British secret service in their journey through Europe. The author of the much-lauded *Lady Doctors* has pulled off another coup with this dual biography which has no dearth of interesting encounters. And making waves since its launch is former RAW chief A.S Dulat's book which sheds light on his unlikely alliance with then J&K chief minister Farooq Abdullah through truly challenging times.

tives; and *The Garden of the Gods*.

These weren't his first books. When the Second World War forced the Durrells back to England, young Gerald dodged formal schooling to apprentice at pet shops. At Whipsnade Zoo, where he cared for captive wildlife, he despaired that zoos had their priorities wrong. This cemented his goal: to start a zoo that would save endangered animals from extinction at human hands.

With an inheritance from his father's will, he bankrolled expeditions to West Africa and South America. After many trips collecting animals for other zoos, he grew despondent. His wife Jacqueline urged him to write. *The Overloaded Ark* (1953), his first book, was successful. Readers adored the animal characters, and he wrote prolifically to raise money and awareness to build his own ark. In 1959, supported by well-heeled trustees, Jersey Zoo opened to the public. The

READERS ADORED THE ANIMAL CHARACTERS, AND DURRELL WROTE PROLIFICALLY TO RAISE MONEY TO BUILD HIS OWN ARK

animals he'd been keeping in his sister Margo's garden finally had their own apartments.

In 1977, shortly after Jacqueline divorced him, Durrell met Lee McGeorge, an American zoology student 25 years his junior. Today, Lee Durrell helms the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. With the extinct dodo as its mascot, the Trust has transformed zoos into conservation hubs and breeding centres to reintroduce little-known species to rewilded habitats. Durrell was hailed

as a modern-day Noah, though in recent years his zoo has faced flak for straying from its founding vision.

Those who grew up on Durrell's books recall his hilarious accounts—fish queuing at barber shops, grumpy Brow-leaf Toads like Lord Mayors in lavatories, and a chimpanzee named Cholmondeley St. John. This volume, lit with Lee's chapter prefaces, reinforces what we know of Durrell with letters, shards from an unpublished autobiography, and photographs. It omits the shadows—financial woes, depression and alcoholism (revealed in Douglas Botting's 2000 biography).

Durrell wrote in the postcolonial afterglow of Empire. Some descriptions may jar modern readers, but he lampooned everyone—including himself. More than anything, he saw humour and charisma in obscure animals—and made humans want to undo their follies. ■

—Bijoy Venugopal

ON FAILING
Edited
by Amit
Chaudhuri
WESTLAND
₹399;
124 pages

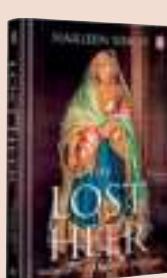


EMBRACING THE FALL

The 'Literary Activism' series—an initiative of the Centre for the Creative and the Critical at Ashoka University and Westland Books—takes on the issue of the creative process's 'failure' and, curiously, its necessity. There are meditative essays by Ranajit Das, Sunetra Gupta, Sumana Roy and Anurag Kashyap, among others, ably curated by series editor Amit Chaudhuri, who also writes an essay.

RECLAIMING THE PAST

Masculinity, this book argues, was a key pillar of Punjabi identity in colonial times. *The Lost Heer* goes beyond male-centric narratives to reclaim the contributions of women through the stories of Aas Kaur, Mai Fatto and Bibi Sahib Kaur in the early colonial period to latter-day figures like Manmohini Zutshi, Raghbir Kaur and others.



THE LOST
HEER
By Harleen
Singh
PENGUIN
VIKING
₹1,299;
544 pages



WANDERERS,
ADVENTURERS,
MISSIONARIES
By Anuradha
Kumar
SPEAKING
TIGER
₹599; 384
pages

The Missionary Position

Americans arrived on our shores in the 1700s. This fascinating book unearths a bevy of 'early American' characters, including 'Ice King' Frederic Tudor, who made a fortune shipping ice from Boston to Calcutta; Samuel Evans Stokes, who pioneered apple cultivation in Himachal; and the beloved Alters of Mussoorie.

Q+A

SACRED THOUGHTS

Pavan K. Varma's latest book—*Echoes of Eternity: A Journey through Indian Thought from the Rigveda to the Present*—is a collector's anthology, showcasing the breadth of Indian philosophical traditions

Q. How challenging was the process of selecting a representative cross-section of Indian thought?

The corpus of Indian thought is vast. As the compiler of this journey, I wanted to include what I consider to be the most important documents, and their most important excerpts, that the average Indian needs to know.

Q. As an accomplished translator, what are the qualities you're looking for while picking a good translation of a centuries-old text?

First of all, I look for fidelity to the original text. Second, the fluidity with which it is presented. It should be a readable document with the same animating spirit as the original.

Q. As a chronicler of India's middle class, what do you see as some of the biggest socio-logical changes in this demographic in the 21st century?

The malaise that I spoke of in my earlier books *Being Indian* and *The Great Indian Middle Class* is still here—the lack of requisite social sensitivity to the far greater number of people below the middle class.

Q. Do you have plans for a book about your personal philosophy—or would you rather express that via fiction?

I wrote exactly one work of fiction, *When Loss is Gain* (2012)... Now, I have written a short novel called *The Lady Who Carried the Monk Across the River* and it has just been picked up by a publisher.

—with Aditya Mani Jha



Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



PROSPEROUS FARMERS UTTAR PRADESH'S IDENTITY



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- ₹80,000 crore transferred to over 2.86 crore+ farmers under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi
- ₹2.80 lakh crore+ paid to sugarcane farmers as record procurement
- ₹47,535.09 crore compensation under PM Fasal Bima Yojana, benefiting 58.07 lakh farmers
- Agricultural growth rate surged from 8.6% (2016-17) to 13.7% (2023-24)
- 76,198+ solar pumps allocated under PM Kusum Yojana
- 85,710 hectares dedicated to natural farming across 49 districts
- 2.52 lakh farmers enrolled in PM Kisan Maandhan Yojana
- 63,000+ farmers benefited under Mukhyamantri Krishak Durghatna Kalyan Yojana
- ₹8.78 lakh crore+ total crop loan distributed
- Payment of more than ₹43,424 crore+ to farmers for procurement of 233.99 lakh MT of wheat from Rabi marketing year 2017-18 to 2024-25
- Payment of more than ₹88,746 crore to farmers for procurement of 456.86 lakh MT of Paddy (Dhaan) from Khareef marketing year 2017-18 to 2024-25

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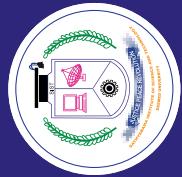


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