

Vote-fixing: Rahul Gandhi vs the ECI

PUNJAB: NO MANN'S LAND | CHESS: IT'S REIGNING QUEENS

www.indiatoday.in

AUGUST 25, 2025 ₹100



9 7 7 0 2 5 4 8 3 9 9 0 9



INFOTECH SECTOR

WHO MOVED MY JOB?

INDIA'S BIGGEST EMPLOYMENT GENERATOR SEES MASSIVE
LAYOFFS FORCING FIRMS TO RESET OR FACE OBSOLESCENCE

SUPERSTAR HAI YEH!

- 6.3 gms of protein • 13 essential vitamins
- Minerals like calcium, iron and potassium
- Contains Omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants
- Good for brain and eyes • Good source of folate



This cool superstar makes
your body strong,
tough and builds immunity.
So have an egg every day.



NATIONAL
EGG CO-ORDINATION
COMMITTEE

(Non-Government Public Charitable Trust)

SUNDAY HO YA MONDAY
ROZ KHAO **ANDE**.

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The information technology industry has been one of the remarkable success stories of the Indian economy. From \$30 billion in 2005-06, it has grown to \$282.6 billion currently, contributing 7 per cent to the country's GDP. It thus became one of the primary job creators in India in recent decades, employing close to 7.3 million people. And it did this organically, with minimal government assistance.

Recently, the industry received a rude shock when Tata Consultancy Services, India's most prominent IT firm, announced the biggest layoffs ever in its history—as many as 12,000 workers, about 2 per cent of its entire global staff. Earlier, employees in foreign companies losing jobs would say they had been 'Bangalored'. Now, the reverse is happening. The immediate context may give it the appearance of a cyclical trough. IT giants are facing severe strains on their profitability. In the last quarter of FY25, big IT services firms saw revenues drop for the first time since the COVID summer of 2020. TCS lost 28 per cent of its market value last fiscal, falling from Rs 15.5 lakh crore to Rs 11 lakh crore. Infosys, the other iconic IT giant, dropped 19 per cent. It has also shed jobs, as have HCL and TechMahindra. The phenomenon is severe and its causes and implications for the Indian economy worthy of examination.

It seems there is an existential panic in India's IT sector, of a kind it has never faced before in its three decades of global prestige. From a long-term perspective, what is happening is a structural reset, and not just a seasonal blip. The post-COVID spurt of 'revenge hiring' in FY22 saw one million new recruits across the sector. But that plateaued soon; the next three fiscals together added only 1.26 million. The projection for FY26 is 520,000, half of FY22. The top six IT companies hired just 3,847 people in the first quarter of FY26, a precipitous 72 per cent drop from 13,935 in the preceding quarter. Entry-level hiring has fallen by half compared to before COVID. Starting salaries have been stuck at Rs 3.5 lakh per annum for over 10 years.

Fluctuations on the job graph are only the surface symptom of deeper shifts. If the very function that technology performs is changing, it stands to reason that jobs that fulfilled older needs won't stay immune. TCS attributed its layoffs to "skill mismatch" and "limited (re)deployment opportunities" for its mid- and senior-level employees rather than to the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI). There's some truth in that. Indian IT firms have traditionally relied on a high-volume, low-value employee base that soaked up outsourcing work. Such a pyramid typically has an army of drone bee techies at the bottom, and an uptake from there into the middle and upper tiers of those who turned into 'people managers', leading teams and chasing targets rather than handling technology itself. This band of 30-40-year-olds is, predictably, the one staring at obsolescence.

But as Managing Editor M.G. Arun and Associate Editor

Ajay Sukumaran analyse the flux in the IT job market for this week's cover story, the long, advancing shadow of AI certainly looms as one of the factors impinging on it. India's IT sector is not a monolith; it has different parts with different occupational profiles and knowledge/ skill levels. IT services firms, with 2.6 million employees, handle routine software and system management work. Below them are the typical back-office operations of BPOs, manned by about 1.4 million of those unflatteringly labelled 'tech coolies'. By contrast, Global Capability Centres (GCCs), where foreign majors directly employ 1.8 million in India, operate higher up the value chain in software development, AI-driven data analytics and innovative R&D. That nimbler skill set is also a key prerequisite in big tech companies like Amazon and Microsoft, who employ 1.5 million here. Closing this value gap entails catching up in terms of knowledge and skill adaptation. This evolutionary trigger is behind the shift from bloated managements to flatter, lighter, more agile structures. K. Kirthivasan, TCS CEO, says they are moving away from the traditional 'waterfall' project management—a linear sequential approach—to a more agile, product-centric model, reducing the need for conventional project and programme managers.

The storm called Donald Trump just happened to make its disastrous landfall on Indian shores at the worst time. Indian IT companies had to stop hiring senior managers right after he was re-elected. US clients, who provide 70 per cent of Indian IT business, are also cutting spending. But over and above transitory events, one sees the birth pangs of a new order—a time when AI can do coding 20-40 per cent faster, data analysis 50-70 per cent faster, and routine data centre work 70-90 per cent faster. Buzzwords like 'billability', which quantifies the value an employee brings to a client, reflect only an ad hoc anxiety around revenues. Both Indian IT, and the university system that feeds it with a workforce, need a vastly deeper redefinition of their fundamentals.

The very nature of infotech is changing. We have crossed over into the Fifth Industrial Revolution that emphasises human-machine collaboration using advanced AI, robotics and the Internet of Things (IoT). It's a transformative time, a moment of reckoning. AI is now a manifest presence across industries. In its ingress into businesses and downstream software services, it's a creative disruptor that's changing the ground rules all around. A significant portion of revenue for global IT is shifting from 'run-the-business' to transformational work, or 'change-the-business'. India's IT giants need to change fast, and drastically, if they have to remain the Sultans of Silicon.



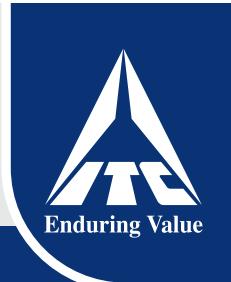
(Aroon Purie)



ITC: Navigating A TURN To Reimagine The Future

Excerpts from the Address by
Shri Sanjiv Puri, Chairman & Managing Director, ITC Limited

114th Annual General Meeting, ITC Limited



A few months ago, India demonstrated to the world its firm resolve to counter terrorism with zero tolerance. The swift and decisive action, led commendably by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, and the indomitable courage demonstrated by our Armed Forces have earned universal respect and admiration.

Operation Sindoora also unveiled India's transformation into a global player of significance in manufacturing indigenous, hi-tech defence systems. This remarkable progress is indeed a testament to the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision to 'Make in India' and build an Atmanirbhar Bharat – a dream that is today becoming a reality with India emerging as an economic, strategic and technological powerhouse.

“ Your Company has always lived by its credo of Nation First: Sab Saath Badhein, that has inspired a commitment to subserve larger national priorities that puts the Country before the Corporation and the Institution ahead of the Individual. ”

ITC's world-class Indian brands create, capture and retain larger value in India and generate large-scale livelihoods. Across your Company's businesses, over **90% of value-addition** takes place in the country, enlarging ITC's contribution to the economy. Committed to the 'Make in India' vision, ITC has built **40 state-of-the-art manufacturing assets**, which enrich your Company's robust **ecosystem of 250 dedicated factories and 7,500 MSMEs**, fostering local entrepreneurship. Your Company's deep engagement in agriculture has empowered millions of farmers, aiding a virtuous cycle of rising incomes, consumption, investment and livelihoods. ITC's Life Sciences & Technology Centre (LSTC) is an epicentre of agile science-based innovation that powers the development of your Company's differentiated products. Your Company's impactful social investment initiatives have expanded to over 300 districts across 24 States, helping transform lives and landscapes. ITC's inclusive businesses and value chains today **support nearly 9 million livelihoods**, serving national imperatives.

We live in an era of unprecedented change. Geopolitical conflicts, geo-economic fragmentation, elevated uncertainty in trade policies, the

accelerated climate crisis, rapidly changing consumer preferences and regulations as well as the societal impact of dynamically evolving areas such as Artificial Intelligence are today raising significant concerns.

“ We are indeed navigating a critical TURN, a pivotal inflection point shaped by Turbulence, Uncertainty and Rapid change that calls for Novel strategies, innovation and solutions to reimagine the future. This underscores the imperative to redefine growth and competitiveness, build resilience and adopt a new paradigm of compassionate capitalism. ”

India's Ascent in a

Turbulent World

This is truly India's moment, and one that ushers in unparalleled opportunities emerging from visionary policies of the Government, as well as the country's young demography, increasing disposable incomes, rapid urbanisation, accelerated digital adoption and entrepreneurial spirit.

The year gone by has witnessed challenges from a weak external sector, dumping of cheap imports and inflationary pressures leading to softening of demand. However, the future outlook remains promising, on the back of the continued thrust on reforms, strong domestic drivers and macroeconomic stability.

As India ascends on the global stage, the opportunities are both vast and transformative. With this promise also comes responsibility. At ITC, we believe that enterprises have a vital role to play – not only by partnering India's growth story, but also by creating larger societal value for stakeholders. It is this north-star that inspires us to build an institution that is resilient and competitive, a force for good and a source of enduring pride for India.

ITC: Key Highlights 2024-25

A significant milestone was achieved with the demerger of the Hotels Business into ITC Hotels Limited. In the 9 months ended 31st December, 2024, the Hotels Business posted its highest ever

Chairman's Address

revenue and operating profits. The demerger is poised to drive new dimensions of growth in the future, pursuing its asset right strategy and sharper business focus aligned with industry-specific market dynamics.

“ The ITC Next strategy envisions the creation of a future-ready portfolio through both organic and inorganic vectors to win today and beyond. In line with this strategy, several value-accretive acquisitions were announced this year. ”

ITC Infotech, your Company's wholly owned subsidiary, also **acquired Blazecan Technologies Pvt Ltd**, a leading cloud consulting firm, to further deepen its multi-cloud capabilities.

A new vector of growth envisioned in the ITC Next strategy is your Company's **Food-Tech Business**, which leverages ITC's strengths in Foods, Hotels and Digital technologies to tap into the fast-growing online food services segment. A delectable range of cuisines is today being offered under 4 brands, '**ITC Master Chef Creations**', '**ITC Aashirvaad Soul Creations**', '**ITC Sunfeast Baked Creations**' and '**Sansho by ITC Master Chef**'. The full-stack food-tech platform has already scaled up to **60 cloud kitchens across 5 cities**. In addition, your Company's new vectors launched under ITCMAARS and Sustainable Packaging are also making encouraging progress.

Encouraged by the promise of the Indian economy, your Company has invested in **8 world-class manufacturing facilities** in the recent past. As we continue to scale new horizons, ITC plans to invest ₹20,000 crores across businesses in the medium term.

Your Company has embedded sustainability as a bedrock of its corporate strategy and continues to raise the bar in triple bottom line performance. ITC has sustained its distinction of being the only company in the world to be **carbon-positive, water-positive and solid-waste recycling positive for nearly 2 decades** now. It continues to be on the Dow Jones Sustainability Emerging Markets Index and has retained the 'AA' rating by MSCI-ESG, as well as the Leadership score for CDP Climate and the 'A' list for CDP water. Today, **renewable sources power 52% of ITC's energy consumption**. Your Company has also been **plastic neutral for 4 years now**.

“ ITC has committed to achieving Net Zero operations by 2050, entailing an even sharper reduction of emissions by over 85% in the next 25 years, despite a growing footprint. ”

ITC: Shaping the Future

Amidst Global Challenges

“ Enterprises of the future will need to navigate the TURN, that I mentioned earlier. Future readiness is not merely about adapting to change, it is about anticipating, innovating and proactively shaping the future. And this is what the ITC Next Strategy has set out to achieve, redefining the next horizon of growth and competitiveness, creating larger value for stakeholders. ”

I would like to highlight 2 key pillars of this strategy, namely, the creation of a future-ready portfolio and the need to build anti-fragile supply chains.

Building a Future-Ready Portfolio

Your Company is building a portfolio across all businesses to win the markets of tomorrow, harnessing its extensive institutional synergies to seize emerging opportunities. This is powered by a **three-horizon strategy that focuses on 1) fortifying the core, 2) addressing value-added adjacencies and 3) nurturing new vectors of growth aligned to emerging trends.**

Strengthening Value Chains from Farm to Fork, Lab to Home

India's consumer market is at the cusp of a profound transformation, with per capita incomes expected to exceed \$4,000 by 2030. Gen Z is expected to account for every 2nd rupee spent by 2035. The preferences of Gen Alpha, who are growing up in a hyper-digital, socially conscious and AI-integrated world, are also vying for attention as a distinctive cohort. Segments like health & wellness, nutrition, functional foods, organic and naturals are poised to become megatrends of the future. New generation channels are also transforming the market and accentuating these trends. ITC's diverse enterprise strengths provide strategic competitive levers to capitalise on these evolving trends.

“ It is our firm belief that Indian brands must adorn the global stage and towards that, establish an enduring legacy in Bharat first, before making an impact overseas. ”

ITC's FMCG portfolio today accounts for an annual consumer spend of over **₹34,000 crores**, reaching over **260 million households** in India and gaining encouraging consumer franchise in over **70 international markets**. Over 100 new, differentiated

and superior products were launched last year. Even as we strengthen our mega brands, we are also introducing new brands and pursuing **value-accretive acquisitions** to address emerging opportunities and whitespaces.

- As consumers increasingly seek healthier, organic and natural food products, ITC is meticulously building its 'Good-for-You' portfolio with the mission to '**Help India Eat Better**'. This portfolio was earlier augmented with the acquisition of **Yoga Bar** and is now being strengthened with the addition of the popular **24 Mantra Organic** brand, with its impressive array of 100+ products.
- In a first-to-market move, your Company introduced a range of nutrition-dense products under the '**Right Shift**' brand for consumers in the 40+ age group, using clinically proven natural ingredients and proprietary formulations developed at LSTC.
- Today, consumers are also seeking new therapeutic experiences. To address this, your Company launched '**Pranah**', a range of incense sticks, cones and scented candles, built on the core promise of '**Earth Inspired Aromatherapy**' that harmonises the planet's natural elements with scientific wellness.
- Your Company's exquisite range of frozen food, under the '**ITC Master Chef**' brand, comprises over 80 Indian and Western Snacks, Indian breads, Prawns and Vegetables. We are now fortifying our presence in this category with the acquisition of **Prasuma**, which has developed several first-to-market Pan Asian frozen products spanning over **170 options in 100+ cities**.
- As consumers seek specialised natural solutions, ITC has signed definitive agreements for the acquisition of **Mother Sparsh**, a front-runner in the premium ayurvedic, natural baby care and hygiene space.

Your Company has also sharpened its focus on **premiumisation** as also **value-added adjacencies**. At the core of your Company's strategy to build a future-ready portfolio lies the powerful synergies of its enterprise strengths nurtured assiduously over time.

- A robust **Digital Superstructure** has been established to engage in deep insighting, utilising proprietary algorithms to analyse a multitude of signals and real-time data. **Extensive deployment of AI and GenAI** is reinforcing the ecosystem to uncover dynamically evolving trends, identify unique opportunities and promote hyper-personalised marketing.
- The journey from such consumer insighting to formulating superior and differentiated products that enable speedier time-to-market is being

powered by **specialised research platforms** at the ITC-LSTC, which has been recognised as a top innovator in India.

- Leveraging its **deep agricultural expertise**, your Company has empowered farmers to sustainably '**produce the buy**', facilitating the scalable procurement of high-quality, safe, traceable, and attribute-specific agri commodities.
- ITC's **state-of-the-art manufacturing units** are today hubs of innovation, technology and efficiency.
- Your Company's smart, omni-channel **Trade Marketing & Distribution** highway has evolved into an invaluable enterprise asset serving multiple channels across urban and rural geographies, besides addressing a wide range of value-chains spanning ambient, perishables, cooled and chilled products.

Taken together, these enterprise strengths provide unmatched competitive advantages to build a future-ready portfolio that addresses evolving needs and accelerates performance over time.

Spearheading the Plantations to Paper and Packaging Value-Chain

This sector possesses enormous potential given that India's per capita consumption is only one-fourth of the global average. Moreover, the country is the fastest-growing market in the world for paper and paperboards, with demand growing at 6-7%, requiring industry to create an additional capacity of about 1 million MT per year for the next decade. This will spur economic multipliers, with afforestation creating large-scale employment generation and carbon sequestration. New growth drivers are also emerging as customers increasingly seek solutions that are biodegradable, substitute single-use plastic and meet stakeholder & regulatory expectations.

ITC is a market leader in **Value-added Paperboards** and derives formidable competitive advantage from its integrated business model. Substantial investments have been made over time to expand capacity 3-fold and strengthen structural competitiveness.

“ The fibre value-chain pioneered by ITC has promoted an afforestation programme that has cumulatively greened over 13 lakh acres, supporting 240 million-person-days of livelihoods, while sequestering 6.4 million tonnes of CO₂ annually contributing to the nation's endeavour to combat climate change. ”

In a strategic move aligned to your Company's growth aspirations, ITC has signed an Agreement for the acquisition of the **Century Pulp and Paper**

Chairman's Address

undertaking to scale up its Paperboards business. The proposed acquisition will substantially enhance capacity, and in a more cost-efficient manner. In addition, the acquired plant's locational advantage will provide proximity to key raw materials and enable better servicing of customers.

Your Company's proprietary knowledge and knowhow will contribute to significant cost optimisation and superior customised solutions. Consequently, the acquisition is expected to be EPS-accretive in the first year of operations, whilst driving overall profitability improvement with a targeted increase of 30% to 40% in EBITDA per ton over normalised levels after 2 full years of operation.

In addition to scaling up your Company's core portfolio, **Horizon 2** envisages new vectors of growth through the development of sustainable solutions to substitute single-use plastics. A wide range of recyclable or compostable materials as also offerings with proprietary **patented barrier coatings** have been developed, which are today commercially available under the '**Filo**' and '**Bioseal**' series. Since its launch, this new vector has grown at **2.4x of FY22 levels**.

The **Horizon 3** initiative focuses on complex, engineered high-quality Moulded Fibre Products made from renewable natural raw materials such as wood, bamboo, bagasse and wastepaper. ITC's state-of-the-art facility in Madhya Pradesh has recently commenced operations to manufacture and export these innovative products under the '**Fyba**' brand.

Your Company's core portfolio, together with the new vectors, holds immense promise given the headroom, growing consumer awareness and regulatory requirements.

Anchoring NextGen Agriculture

“ Your Company has spearheaded multi-dimensional interventions to build a future-ready portfolio that also empowers millions of farmers and addresses the urgent need to build climate resilience, a critical need to ensure food and nutrition security. Today, ITC's Agri Business is one of the largest procurers of agri-commodities in the country, supporting over 20 agri value-chains and sourcing over 3.5 million tonnes from 22 States. ”

While ITC is scaling up its core agri-commodity segment, comprising high-quality grains, oilseeds as well as its Leaf Tobacco business, a major

thrust is being accorded to **Horizon 2** initiatives in developing **value-added agri-products**, including categories like spices, coffee, horticulture and aqua products. In the last 5 years, this portfolio has registered a 2x growth demonstrating immense potential. Your Company's subsidiary, **Technico**, has become the world's largest pre-basic potato seed producer and is also working with 15 leading global breeders to develop climate resilient varieties.

As part of the **Horizon 3** initiatives, your Company is developing future vectors in areas with enormous potential such as biological extracts and ITCMAARS to usher in Next Generation agriculture. Substantive investments have been made to develop an ecosystem for Medicinal and Aromatic Plants in a 100-acre farm in Madhya Pradesh. Extensive farmer training to promote such traceable and value-added crops has led to its cultivation in 4,000 acres. While Ashwagandha and Turmeric extracts are being progressively provided to the nutraceutical and cosmetics industry, your Company's ongoing R&D endeavours are aimed at developing proprietary formulations for specialised value-chains.

The **ITCMAARS phygital ecosystem** has evolved, into a dynamic and integrated full stack solution for farmers and also as a robust marketplace. It has been spearheading the crucial need to empower farmers by promoting FPOs as dynamic collectives, enabling their transformation into progressive rural enterprises. ITCMAARS, building further on the physical network of your Company's **e-Choupal**, currently supports over **2,050 FPOs**, encompassing over **22 lakh farmers in 11 States** as well as **100 active partnerships** for specialised solutions.

“ Today, this vibrant platform provides AI-enabled hyper-local, personalised crop advisories, image-led diagnostics, access to credit, high quality inputs including biologicals and drones for nano nutrients, efficient market linkages and the expertise of agri-tech start-ups. ITC is also developing an ecosystem of local entrepreneurs inspired by the '**Drone Didis**' model to establish Farming as a Service. It is encouraging that focused interventions have already led to the reduction of fertiliser use as well as increase in crop yields by 15-20%, increasing net returns to farmers by 25-30%. ”

ITCMAARS is indeed poised to emerge as a robust business of the future, lending formidable competitive strength to the Company's agri and foods businesses and in shaping new opportunities, whilst significantly empowering farmers.

Building Supply Chain & Climate Resilience

“ Global turbulence has exposed the fragility of traditional supply chains, reinforcing the need to build agile, diversified and localised manufacturing and supply networks, whilst systematically addressing climate challenges. ”

ITC has over time invested in creating and nurturing several integrated supply chains in India that are today pillars of resilience and competitiveness, supporting large-scale livelihoods. These value chains from farm to fork, plantations to paper & packaging, together with their distributed manufacturing footprint, promote local entrepreneurship, MSMEs and domestic sourcing with multiple alternatives to provide resilience in an era of intense uncertainty.

“ The largest challenge of the century is the devastating global impact of climate change. While the world has rightly focused on long-term decarbonisation initiatives, the increased severity of extreme weather events makes it imperative that urgent focus is accorded to adaptation. ”

Therefore, sharper emphasis is today being accorded to the super critical area of adaptation, that focuses on climate-proofing physical infrastructure, building resilience of agri value-chains and promoting nature-based solutions. Accordingly, a **comprehensive climate-risk modelling exercise** across 140 sites and agri value-chains using AI-enabled tools and site-specific plans have been devised to address the identified decadal risks.

In line with this approach, your Company has spearheaded a large-scale **Climate Smart Agriculture** (CSA) programme to de-risk farming systems from both biotic and abiotic stress. The programme promotes high-yielding, climate-resistant seed varieties, developed by LSTC, along with best-in-class agro-chemical management and micro zone-specific agricultural practices. These practices have led to greater resilience, higher productivity and enhanced farmer incomes. The CSA programme today spans over **31 lakh acres**, **covers 100 districts** and benefits more than **12 lakh farmers**. Your Company is committed to expanding CSA coverage to over **40 lakh acres by 2030**.

ITC recognises the crucial need to enhance water security in its operations and catchments. Your Company has received the globally acknowledged **AWS Platinum certification** for all its prioritised vulnerable water-stress sites. Going beyond the

fence, ITC is actively engaged in the restoration of river basins in our factory catchments to strengthen water security and has already achieved **water positive status in 4 such basins**. ITC is also implementing measures in urban catchments, including Bengaluru and Tiruvottiyur. Recognising the critical role of water in agriculture, your Company has implemented **integrated watershed development** programmes to enhance supply as well as **demand-side interventions** to achieve more crop per drop.

“ Today, the rainwater harvesting initiative has cumulatively covered 18 lakh acres, while the demand-side efforts have enabled an estimated annual savings of 1,400 million KL across 15 crops covering 18 lakh acres in 12 States. These efforts have enabled your Company to create freshwater potential that is today 5 times more than its consumption in operations. ”

ITC is deeply committed to **building the long-term resilience of rural communities** through livelihood creation and future-ready capabilities. Towards this, ITC's CSR programmes cover 300 districts and follow a two-horizon approach. **Horizon I** focuses on strengthening current livelihoods and food security through natural resources management and income diversification, while **Horizon II** builds future capabilities through education, skilling, healthcare and women empowerment. These multi-dimensional programmes have reached out to **60 lakh women**, supported the education of nearly **28 lakh children**, trained over **1.2 lakh youth** and facilitated over **7 lakh healthcare engagements**. Over **95 Public-Private-People partnerships** have led to purposeful outcomes.

As I have often expressed, enterprises exist to serve both an economic and social purpose. These meaningful interventions at scale give me the confidence that enterprises can indeed shape a tomorrow which will be much more secure for future generations.

“ I must reiterate my unwavering belief that a company's most enduring asset lies in its inspired talent and powerhouse of diverse people that fuels innovation, drives transformation and anchors resilience in times of change. ”

Your Company is indeed privileged to earn the enduring trust and support of its stakeholders including shareholders, consumers, customers, farmers, local communities, partners and many others. On behalf of the Board and myself, I express our deepest gratitude to each one of you for your invaluable partnership in contributing to this exemplary institution of national pride.

UP FRONT

ECO WATCH: HISS HISS HURRAY PG 15

GRAPHIC: A WAR ON DELHI STRAYS PG 16



► OPERATION SINDOOR

AFTERRUNNER EFFECT

Three months after striking deep inside Pakistan, the IAF reveals a few surprises in its kill tally—raising questions about timing, politics and narrative control

By PRADIP R. SAGAR

THREE MONTHS AFTER THE GUNS FELL SILENT, the head of the Indian Air Force finally spoke. At the 16th edition of the Air Chief Marshal L.M. Katre Memorial Lecture in Bengaluru on August 9, the incumbent, A.P. Singh, broke months of speculation with a blunt averment: that Operation Sindoor had taken out at least six Pakistani warplanes in the air—five fighter jets and “one large aircraft”—and crippled key military installations deep

THE HITMAKER AND THE HITS

1. Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh;
2. Pakistan's Bholari airbase, where an Airborne Early Warning & Control aircraft sat inside a hangar that took a direct hit; 3. multiple F-16s were believed to be damaged after the IAF targeted the main hangar at Jacobabad airbase;
4. a radar destroyed at Chunian airbase, where a hangar was hit

inside enemy territory. It was the first official affirmation of what many in the military establishment had quietly hinted at since the 88-hour campaign ended on May 10. And yet, the timing raises the obvious question: why now?

The government has always insisted that Operation Sindooring met all its objectives. Supporters of the delayed revelation call it a reaffirmation of victory. Critics see it differently—arguing that such a long wait blunts the psychological and political impact, leaving space for doubt and enemy counter-narratives.

WHY THE DELAY

From the outset, the IAF had maintained—albeit quietly—that it had struck Pakistani jets, citing electronic signatures and strong intelligence. But with no photographic evidence of the wreckage—believed to have fallen on the Pakistani side—the force refrained from making an official statement. Also, electronic warfare data is notoriously difficult to declassify without revealing sensitive methods. But the Director General of Air Operations (DGAO) had mentioned the “kills” during his briefings, while insisting that they had to be confirmed before any final announcement. A senior IAF official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it took them considerable time to validate the “confirmed kills”, collating inputs from multiple surveillance and intelligence systems.

Now, the green light from “higher authorities” seems to have arrived as well. Politically, it couldn’t be more convenient. The revelation comes just days after a fierce two-day parlia-

THE AIR CHIEF SPEAKS

Key takeaways from Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh's statement

► **There were “no restrictions” on the military, which was given a free hand to plan and execute Operation Sindooring**

► **Five Pakistani fighter jets shot down by the IAF during Op. Sindooring**

► **“A large aircraft”, possibly an ELINT (electronic intelligence) or AEW&C (airborne early warning and control) aircraft, was shot down from 300 km away—“the largest ever recorded surface-to-air kill”**

► **The S-400 surface-to-air missile system was the game-changer for the Indian air defence, scaring off the enemy’s fighters**

► **Two command & control centres, six radars destroyed in Murid and Chaklala airbases; runways hit at Sargodha and Rahim Yar Khan airbases**

► **F-16 hangar at Jacobabad airfield hit; UAV hangar at Sukkur airbase damaged; AEW&C hangar at Bholari airbase hit**

► **Op. Sindooring was hi-tech warfare marked by perfect synergy between the services and other agencies**

tary debate on Operation Sindooring, where Opposition MPs questioned India’s own losses and hinted at limited success. Similar questions have been repeatedly raised by sections of the western press as well. The government can now point to an unequivocal tally.

Some analysts also note the strategic backdrop: western and Chinese fighter jets are increasingly compared in global military circles. Publicising the destruction of Pakistan’s US-supplied F-16s and Chinese-linked systems delivers a subtle message to both camps. It’s a replay of 2019, when Wing Commander Abhinandan’s MiG-21 reportedly downed a Pakistani F-16, sparking similar debates.

INSIDE THE STRIKES

At Bengaluru, Singh walked the audience through the strikes in almost cinematic detail, with new images showcasing the extensive damage inflicted upon Pakistani military infrastructure. The IAF chief described how a radar installation in Arifwala was destroyed, with the targeting symbology clearly visible in the imagery. At Bholari, an Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C) aircraft sat inside a hangar that took a direct hit, with Pakistani media admitting casualties. Satellite images showed structural damage at the Nur Khan airbase, while at Chunian, a hangar lay in ruins, its scorched frame confirming the strike’s precision. At Jacobabad, multiple F-16s were believed to be damaged after the IAF targeted the main hangar.

Singh also revealed what may be India’s longest-range surface-to-air kill—a large aircraft shot down at 300 km. It was possibly an ELINT (electronic intelligence) or AEW&C aircraft, the strike made possible by the S-400 air defence system, recently acquired from Russia and what the IAF chief dubbed a “game-changer”. Singh stressed that none of Pakistan’s jets came anywhere near India’s air defence systems such as the Akash and the MRSAM (medium-range surface-to-air missile). He said all enemy aircraft were engaged by

India's LRSAM (long-range surface-to-air missile) system as they tried to keep their distance, yet at times still entered Indian range. Underscoring the centrality of air power in modern warfare, the IAF chief said it can respond swiftly, strike with precision, and achieve objectives without causing collateral damage.

THE PERSONAL FRONT

For Singh, these were not just tactical victories; they were personal milestones. "We've grown up in the air force dreaming about days like this.... I got my chance just before I retired," he said, recalling the strike on the Sargodha airfield as a direct response to hard intelligence on F-16 missions planned against Srinagar and Adampur. The plan was not to wipe out a single base, he explained, but to send an unambiguous message: that India could strike anywhere, at will, and at a time of its choosing.

While detailing the IAF's "kills", Singh stayed silent on aircraft losses on the Indian side. Earlier, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan had acknowledged that India suffered air losses in the initial phase of the conflict, but dismissed Pakistan's claim of downing six Indian jets as "absolutely incorrect". The DGAO too had conceded that losses are part of any combat, while confirming that all IAF pilots had returned home.

A SUCCESS UNDERPLAYED?

Within India's military community, opinion is split. Some believe the disclosure should have been made immediately after the operation to dominate the narrative. "The entire world should have known of our capabilities then and there," one senior defence official told INDIA TODAY, arguing that the delay ended up ceding the information battlefield to Pakistan.

Former army chief Gen. V.P. Malik went further, calling the success "underplayed". Another officer, wishing to remain anonymous, speculated

Pakistan's arsenal is a mix of American and Chinese platforms.

**By implying
successful strikes
on both, India sends
a quiet signal to
multiple audiences:
your equipment can
be beaten**

**While detailing
the IAF's "kills", Air
Chief Marshal A.P.
Singh stayed silent
on aircraft losses
on the Indian side.
Earlier, the CDS had
acknowledged some
losses in the initial
phase of the conflict**

that Washington D.C.'s sensitivities over the loss of American-made F-16s might have influenced the caution.

Still, Singh stressed that during Operation Sindoor, the IAF faced no restrictions in planning and execution. "Forces decided what will be our rules of engagement...what will be the escalation ladder that we want to ride on," he said. Days earlier, army chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi echoed that sentiment at IIT Madras, calling it a "whole of nation" approach with unprecedented political clarity. To the troops, he said, such a "free hand" is a morale-booster. Without naming China, Gen. Dwivedi hinted that "other countries" had helped Pakistan make certain things "visible" during the operation—a veiled reference to Beijing's satellite intelligence sup-

port to Islamabad. The campaign, he warned, could easily have stretched from days to months.

Some critics, meanwhile, saw the "freedom of action" framing as a political shield for a government facing Opposition fire in Parliament for its handling of the four-day war.

SENDING SIGNALS ABROAD

Beyond domestic politics, there's an international dimension. Pakistan's arsenal is a mix of American and Chinese platforms. By implying successful strikes on both, India sends a quiet signal to multiple audiences: your equipment can be beaten. It's a double-edged warning aimed at two of Pakistan's closest defence partners. It comes against the backdrop of US-India tensions, as President Donald Trump has slapped India with steep tariffs, citing its ongoing purchases of Russian oil and defence equipment, even as he appears to be reviving ties with Pakistan through overtures to its army chief, Asim Munir.

Some observers believe the IAF chief's disclosure is meant to puncture Pakistan's misinformation campaign—a cognitive warfare playbook likely readied ahead of the Independence Day. Recently, the IAF also released a video montage of the first strikes on Pakistani terror camps after the Pahalgam terror attack, a not-so-subtle reminder of the reach and impact of Indian air power.

So, was this three-month silence a strategic masterstroke or a missed opportunity? On the one hand, the IAF chief's revelations blunt Pakistan's planned propaganda cycle and ties the announcement to a moment when the political debate at home was heating up. On the other, the absence of an immediate claim arguably weakened the psychological impact and allowed the other side to muddy the waters. In warfare, timing is often as critical as firepower. Operation Sindoor's battlefield victories were swift; its public victory is still being contested. ■

FROM BOYS TO MEN



CLICK TO SUBSCRIBE

1 YEAR UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS JUST FOR ₹999!

SUBSCRIBER BENEFITS

- 1 year unlimited access to all digital issues
 - Daily newsletter
- Ad-Lite access to premium web content
 - Multiple device access

**INDIA
TODAY**
MAKING SENSE OF INDIA



▼ GLASSHOUSE

JUDICIAL JABS

Judicial spats rarely spill out of the Supreme Court's storied chambers, the rare outage being the 2018 press conference when four judges revolted against then CJI Dipak Misra. But of late, the gloves seem to be off. First, a notice to former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud to vacate his official bungalow found its way to the media. Then, incumbent CJI B.R. Gavai, at a public event, took a swipe at his predecessor, saying he would move out the day he retired this November. Now, Gavai and his successor-designate, Justice Surya Kant, have publicly pulled up colleagues on the Bench, Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, for censuring an Allahabad High Court judge and directing that he be taken off the criminal roster, a move the duo later rolled back after protests from the HC.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ THE WAR THAT WASN'T

DARE DEVILRY

BJP MLA **Kantilal Amrutiya** of Morbi, Gujarat, and AAP's new legislator from Visavadar, **Gopal Italia**, have staged a drama fit for reality TV. After his June bypoll win, Italia boasted he could repeat the feat in Morbi. Amrutiya upped the ante with a Rs 2 crore dare. By mid-July, both parties



were even challenging each other to resign, overlooking the fact that Italia wasn't yet sworn in and couldn't quit even if he wanted. On the appointed day, Amrutiya arrived in Gandhinagar with supporters; Italia was a no-show. Cue the twist: the duo was soon spotted having a friendly chat outside CM Bhupendra Patel's office, the photos of which went viral. A leaked audio then suggested that the whole spectacle was staged. The question on everyone's mind is: for what purpose?

COMMUNICATION GAP

At Rahul Gandhi's much-publicised presser on the alleged "vote *chori*" in Karnataka's Mahadevapura seat, one absence was glaring—Congress communications chief and Kannadiga **Jairam Ramesh**. Insiders say the Rajya Sabha MP was miffed at being excluded from the months-long scrutiny of electoral rolls in his home state. He was apparently informed only just before Rahul went public. Even Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah and his deputy D.K. Shivakumar were reportedly out of the loop.



WELL-GUARDED SHOW



Peeved that Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu was not providing enough security on his district tours, YSRC chief **Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy** has stepped it up on his own. Since August 6, besides the state-provided Z-plus security, he also has 40 personal guards, including 10 ex-army personnel. The party claims it is to regulate the crowds gathering to greet Jagan at his public appearances. Strange, since the ex-CM is known to thrive on such exchanges.

WHIP CRACK

The TMC's veteran Lok Sabha chief whip **Kalyan Banerjee** quit soon after party chief Mamata Banerjee made nephew Abhishek party leader in the House. But it wasn't the latter's rise that stung Kalyan. It was Mamata's reported lament that MPs weren't "coordinating", perhaps a veiled jibe at Kalyan who has had a running feud with a couple of party MPs. For a man who'd long tended the flock, the jab cut deep. "If Didi feels I'm not doing well, I quit," he said. Mamata promptly accepted it, installing four-time MP Kakoli G. Dastidar in his place.



Kaushik Deka with Jumana Shah, Arkamoy Datta Majumdar and Amarnath K. Menon

ECO WATCH

By **Jumana Shah**

HISS HISS HURRAY BABY KINGS RELEASED

As tribal chants echoed softly in the forest, 30 King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) hatchlings were released in the dense areas near Valabu village in Alluri Sitarama Raju district in Paderu division of the Eastern Ghats, marking the first community-led initiative of its kind in Andhra Pradesh. As forest trackers updated that the hatchlings were dispersing, some already hunting, the tribal village celebrated quietly,



knowing their efforts had revived a predator vital to the ecosystem. This paves the way for a proposed 2,400 ha. king cobra sanctuary, which, if established, would be the world's first, making Andhra as a leader in species-specific conservation.

GRASSLAND AS CARBON SINK

A recent study cited in *Scientific Reports* reveals that Gujarat's 2,600 sq. km Banni grassland, purportedly Asia's largest, is a highly effective carbon sink. Researchers from the KSKV Kachchh University and others highlighted Banni's ability to sequester significant amounts of



carbon dioxide, crucial for mitigating climate change. Between 2019 and 2022, the grassland absorbed an average 136 grams of carbon per sq. m annually, comparable to some forest ecosystems. Unlike forests, which store carbon primarily above ground, Banni's carbon is predominantly sequestered in its soil, with 90 per cent stored underground in dense root systems and organic matter. Banni supports over 40 grass species and also sustains pastoral communities, apt measures of its ecological and cultural significance.

► STRAY DOGS

A War On Delhi Strays

On August 11, the Supreme Court ignited a heated debate with a blanket suo motu order that all stray dogs in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) be removed and rehabilitated in permanent shelters. Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan said the condition concerning dog bites is "extremely grim" and that children must not fall prey to rabies. A three-judge bench is now scheduled to take up the matter

Text by AVISHEK G. DASTIDAR

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY/AI

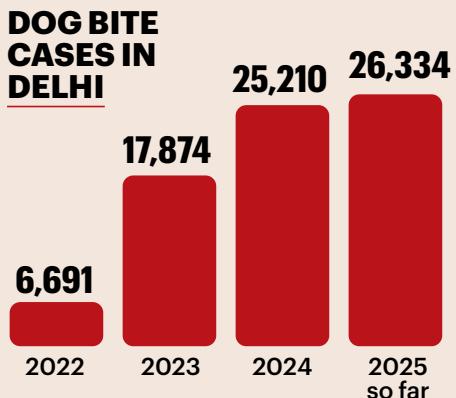
THE SC ORDER

- Civic bodies to ready shelters, pick up 5,000 dogs in Delhi-NCR in 6-8 weeks
- Each shelter to house 5,000-6,000 dogs, have CCTV cameras, sterilisation facilities, trained staff
- No release of dogs into public spaces, nullifying provisions of the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2001, that mandates release of dogs to their localities after sterilisation and immunisation
- "Absurd, unreasonable", judges call the ABC rule. "Why should that stray dog come back to that locality... for what?"

THE TRIGGER: A CHILD'S DEATH

On July 28, 2025, the SC took suo motu cognisance of a July 6 newspaper report about the death of six-year-old Chhavi Sharma from Pooth Kalan in Delhi after catching rabies from a dog bite





54

Rabies deaths in 2024 across India; one death for every 68,836 dog bites

3,715,713

Reported dog bite cases in India in 2024, a 22 per cent increase since 2023

RABIES DEATHS

While rabies is fatal, it can be prevented if vaccine is administered soon after a bite. There are vaccines for dogs to keep them rabies-free. Most bite cases do not lead to rabies. Before Chhavi Sharma, Delhi has had zero rabies death since 2022. There are 14 states with no rabies cases in the past two years

THE SOLUTION

India follows the globally accepted Animal Birth Control (ABC) method to regulate the population of strays through sterilisation

MCD'S FAILURE

Unlike in Jaipur, Visakhapatnam and Bengaluru, the MCD's rate of sterilisation/ vaccination of around 10,000 is far below the prescribed 70-80 per cent to balance Delhi's dog population of around a million (last surveyed officially in 2009)

THE CENTRE'S STAND

"The intensive implementation of the ABC programme by local bodies is the only rational and scientific solution..." — a statement issued to Parliament in April 2025

W.H.O. BATS FOR ABC

"There is no evidence that removal of dogs has a significant impact on dog population...or the spread of rabies"

CHALLENGES

- ➔ Money: Delhi's health budget is Rs 12,893 crore; estimated cost of SC-ordered exercise is Rs 10,000 crore
- ➔ Limited land, labour; overcrowding
- ➔ SC's no-release order may require changing of ABC Rules

How does the world do it?

UNITED STATES

Animal control agencies and shelters/ rescue groups follow no-kill protocols, spay/ neuter campaigns. Nationwide vaccination laws have nearly wiped out canine rabies



EUROPE

Western, Northern Europe have virtually eliminated homeless dogs by registration, neutering, anti-abandonment laws, free or highly subsidised spaying/ neutering



“It is not a doable order.... You'll have to find 3,000 places where no one lives”

MANEKA GANDHI

Former Union minister, animal rights activist



“People are fed up of stray dogs.... The SC's directions are important. We want to provide relief...”

REKHA GUPTA

Chief Minister, Delhi

WHY ARE ANIMAL WELFARE GROUPS PROTESTING?

They say the SC order undoes decades of sterilisation; adopts a method the world has moved away from while rejecting the scientifically proven/ humane ABC solution

WHERE DELHI STANDS

- ➔ No permanent govt/ MCD dog shelters in Delhi
- ➔ 20 ABC centres run by MCD and NGOs for post-sterilisation holding of 2,500-4,000 dogs, not for housing

STATE SCAN

GUJARAT: CHAVDA FACES UPHILL CHALLENGE PG 20

TAMIL NADU: DEGREES OF PARALYSIS PG 22



► BIHAR

NITISH'S TEMPLE TANGO

For the first time in his long political career, the Bihar CM adopts temple symbolism. A temple at Sita's storied birthplace aligns him to Hindutva

By Amitabh Srivastava

ON THE HUMID morning of August 8 in Sitamarhi, ritual and pomp both arrived as if by appointment. A bhoumi pujan, a foundation stone, cameras arranging the moment into the traffic of images. Nitish Kumar spoke of Sita's birthplace, with no seeming trace of irony. His words bore echoes in their womb, and they were

delivered right after, by Union home minister Amit Shah. He lauded "Nitish babu" for developing Purnaura Dham, before moving on to sharper polemic—accusing political rivals of protecting alleged Bangladeshi infiltrators. With two months to go for the Bihar assembly election, the NDA's thematic duet was in full sync.

In a political career spanning over

four decades, including nearly two as CM, this is perhaps the first time Nitish has so openly aligned himself with temple politics. If not exactly disengaging it under his reign, he had all through adhered to a personal political ethics that abjured it. Now here he was, tweeting and publishing full-page ads on the JD(U)-BJP government's Rs 882.87 crore project to redevelop the

Janaki Janmabhumi Temple complex.

To let rest any lingering doubt, it will be modelled on Ayodhya's Ram temple, including parikrama paths, spiritual gardens, museums, dharamshalas, cultural spaces and a 67-acre religious corridor. The symbolism is as potent as its scale—Sita, the daughter of Mithila, having the added resonance of being seen as a native cultural emblem.

THE MITHILA MANOEUVRE

Mithila is a cultural-linguistic region where regional identity and faith are tightly braided in everyday life. Its core districts—Darbhanga, Madhubani, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Vaishali, Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura—account for roughly 69 assembly seats, nearly 29 per cent of Bihar's total of 243. Here, a Sita temple serves as grand theatre that yokes devotion to

Takeaways

► Nitish launches the Janaki Janmabhumi temple project at Sitamarhi, mirroring Ayodhya

► It offers Nitish a platform to tap into Hindutva sentiment ahead of the Bihar polls

development: the state frames the scheme as heritage-led growth. It holds the promise of improved road and rail links, hotel capacity, a place on the national pilgrimage circuit, and livelihoods. It's culture as currency.

Institutionally, the state has sought to depoliticise the project by placing it under a trust headed by the chief secretary—here, the development commissioner and district magistrate will rub shoulders with religious representatives. That converts it into a public programme; operationally, it gives the government clearer mechanisms to move to land procurement, construction and tourism marketing. But that doesn't erase the political calculus. The promised benefits may take years to materialise, but elections demand immediacy. Hence, a stage for Nitish to attempt a sartorial change—a splash of saffron on a coat he has generally kept buttoned. ■

► GOA

ROOM FOR THE ORIGINAL GOANS

Goa's unheralded tribal communities see a long struggle for political reservations bear fruit

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

IT WAS PROVING A TOUCH INJURIOUS for the BJP to be holding out, as it had for over a decade. Conversely, it was also deemed safe enough and advantageous to concede—the demographic patterns are such. Thus comes about a resolution to the long-pending Adivasi demand for political quotas in Goa.

The Parliament has approved a tongue-twister of a legislation—the Readjustment of Representation of Scheduled Tribes in Assembly Constituencies of

► HERITAGE BEATS Goan tribals celebrating their traditional festival at Cotigao, Canacona

the State of Goa Bill, 2024—to accomplish that. It awaits an enumeration by the census commissioner. Based on the population, the Election Commission will make amendments to the delimitation order to provide for the reservation of seats in the state assembly.

ONE IN TEN GOANS

Goa's tribals—acknowledged as descendants of the state's original inhabitants—are currently estimated to number about 149,275, including those of Christian denomination. That's a notable 10.23 per cent of Goa's population. This ratio was reached after the Gauda, Velip



and Kunbi communities were recognised as part of Goa's tribal matrix and added to the ST list. The numbers may swell further, if the pastoralist Gouly Dhangar community's demand for tribal status is also granted.

Currently, they form 6.92 per cent of North Goa's population (56,606 out of 818,008) and as much as 14.47 per cent of South Goa (92,669/640,537). They have substantial numbers in the Priol, Nuvem, Quepem, Sangeum and Velim assembly constituencies.

The tribal question is not an

Takeaways

► **Parliament passes a bill to grant quotas in the Goa assembly for tribals**

► **10.23 per cent of Goa's population, the tribal vote sways at least five seats**

► **Political quotas will come, but the government is likely to chafe at other demands of tribal groups**

aside in Goa politics. Though the STs have 12.5 per cent quotas in jobs and education, political reservations had hitherto eluded them. This has long been an emotive issue, having spawned a two-decade history of protests.

A significant flashpoint came in 2011, when two tribal youth died in violence during a protest. That turned out to be a turning point for Goa, since the tribal backlash in the subsequent 2012 election is what sealed the fate of the then Congress government, bringing the BJP back to power. It has ruled Goa since, but had evaded the tribal question for a dozen-odd years. Tribal unrest

peaked again last year, and is said to have singed the BJP in the South Goa Lok Sabha seat, where its candidate Pallavi Dempo was trounced by Captain Viriato Fernandes (retd) of the Congress.

Govind Shirodkar of 'Mission Political Reservation for Scheduled Tribes of Goa'—among the groups that spearheaded the protests—says the quota must come into force in the 2027 assembly election. "They cannot take us for granted anymore," he adds.

Political quotas will come, but the establishment is likely to chafe at the group's other demands: implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, and declaration of Scheduled Areas.

THE RIGHT TO SPACE

Besides the Gauda, Kunbi and Velip continuum—numerically (and politically) more significant—it's these statutory protections that will be relevant to smaller indigenous groups like the Dubla, Nai-kda, Varli and Dhodia, besides the Siddis of African descent.

Capt. Fernandes, who raised the quota issue in Parliament, bats for justice and rights to the tribals. "They are the 'Niz Goenkars', the original inhabitants of Goa," he says. "Their contribution to Goa has been immense."

Damodar Naik, Goa BJP president, credits his party's governments at the Centre and state for enshrining this formally. "Political reservations will help transform the lives of Goa's tribal communities," he says, citing how the 12 per cent quota was given during the tenure of Manohar Parrikar as Goa CM. Of the state's four tribal MLAs, three (including Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar) are from the BJP and one independent also backs the regime. ■



By Jumana Shah

THE CONGRESS IN Gujarat was wont to send wedding horses to compete in the races, and vice versa, Rahul Gandhi famously said in April 2025. The unkind wag may have quipped in response that it hasn't owned race horses for a while, and those that it did acquire tended to bolt towards saffron stables. That wouldn't have been one bit untrue, and in fact was one of the Grand Old Party's chief headaches. Anyway, Rahul's metaphorical note set the tone for a process of reconstruction—its nth attempt in a state where it has not seen power since the 20th century.

Three months later, the burst of perestroika saw the state party reins going back to Amit Chavda, 49, an OBC leader and five-term MLA who performed the same role with some



► NEW HELMSMAN
Amit Chavda (centre)
takes charge as the
Gujarat Congress
chief, Jul. 22

► GUJARAT

CHAVDA FACES AN UPHILL CHALLENGE

Gujarat Congress, sunk in defeatism after serial losses and desertions, entrusts its future to a young OBC face

promise in 2018-21. In many ways, this reversion expresses the logic the party is now seeking to abide by strictly: going for ideological solidity first of all, and seeking to grow like grass, hugging the ground and spreading horizontally, instead of fostering rootless wonders that fly off at first wind.

Turning a desert into a savannah is an ambitious project, though, for what Chavda faces is a scenario of utter devastation. The mood in the party, just

before he took over from Rajya Sabha MP Shaktisinh Gohil in July, condensed all the gloom and frustration of decades. Gohil had resigned after the Congress lost two bypolls in June—one to its bête noire of decades, the BJP; one, embarrassingly enough, to the new challenger, the Aam Aadmi Party. It capped the phase of acute depression that set in after the 2022 assembly election. Unlike the 2017 edition, where it had put up its best show since 1985

with 77 seats and 41.4 per cent of the overall vote, the Congress atrophied miserably: it managed to put only 17 MLAs in a house of 182, less than one-tenth, with a measly 27.2 per cent vote share. Then, it went on to suffer a dramatic shrinkage in even those scanty holdings, plummeting to 12 seats. How? The usual route: five legislators defected to BJP.

THE FIFTH COLUMNISTS

So, to begin with, Chavda has to halt soil erosion and navigate deep credibility crises, as the precondition to a revival ahead of the 2027 assembly poll. The dramatic term ‘gaddaar’ (traitor) is often invoked in party meetings, referring to insiders in touch with the BJP, either with the intention of crossing over at the right time or to stay within as pro-BJP saboteurs. Rahul has publicly acknowledged this deep internal mistrust, calling for a purge of those “who work for BJP”. This is what has taken the form of a total organisational overhaul, which it calls *sangathan srijan abhiyan*.

This is where Chavda is believed to bring real value. He’s seen as wedded to the Congress ideologically, a bond sprung from old family ties, and thus unaffected by the BJP’s wooing. His long electoral experience and proven leadership is holding out a sliver of cautious hope to cadres after a long time. If a spurt in optimism seems misplaced, ascribe it to the low base effect: even an entrenched leader like former state unit chief and LoP Arjun Modhwadia had defected to the BJP in 2024.

A BUDDING ANTIPATHY

There’s another cause for optimism. “After three decades of the BJP, there’s considerable anti-incumbency,” says a Congress veteran. “Especially in the last decade, since Narendra Modi became PM, all three chief ministers were seen as ineffective placeholders.” The electorate is restless, and the Congress is aware that the need for an alternative is peaking. “Chavda’s task is to enable us to occupy that space urgently. AAP is often

brushed off as an inconsequential player, but 2022 showed it can damage the Congress by pooling in fence-sitting votes," he adds.

HIS FIRST TEST

Whether Chavda can stanch that will be tested in the next round of urban body elections in early 2026, where 16 out Gujarat's 17 municipal corporations—among the highest pools in India—and 81 out of 149 municipalities will be up for grabs. As of now, the BJP controls 148 municipalities; the Congress has one—Salaya, in Jamnagar. Saffron dominance over corporations, too, is near-complete, with outright control over nine.

Takeaways

■ Five-term MLA Amit Chavda is chosen as the Gujarat Congress chief

■ An OBC face known for ideological loyalty, he has to cleanse the party rolls

■ His challenge is to lift the party from the acute depression it has sunk into

This is a significant part of the state's political landscape, for Gujarat has a high urban density. At least 52 of its 182 assembly seats are considered 'urban'; the Congress won just three of those in 2022. The urban middle class is clearly its Achilles' heel. The party has not sorted out its outreach to this segment—its 'soft Hindutva' me-tooism, which saw Rahul visiting dozens of temples ahead of the 2017 election, won few converts. An Anand native like Chavda focusing instead on the state's urban decay, in a bottom-up narrative, could be a good start. ■

► TAMIL NADU

DEGREES OF PARALYSIS

Tamil Nadu's higher education stays stuck in a limbo while the state-governor legal turf battle drags on

By Kavitha Muralidharan

ON THE SPRAWLING campus of the University of Madras (UnoM), the silence of enforced inertia is hard to miss. Professors have to go out and queue up at Chennai's government departments to get salaries and promotions cleared. PhD theses await signatures that never come. Files gather dust. It's a picture replicated across Tamil Nadu's public universities—from Anna University down the road, to Bharathiar University in Coimbatore and Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU) in the south.

As many as 12 of the state's 22 public universities have been functioning without regular vice-chancellors (V-Cs) for over two years now, some for even longer. Not due to a lack of worthy candidates, or of funds. Blame it, instead, on a constitutional impasse. In less abstract terms, a bitter turf battle for control over universities between the state government and the governor that has become a big strand in debates around federalism.

THE FEDERAL QUESTION

R.N. Ravi, who took the gubernatorial office in 2021, has since impaled himself in a series of confrontations with M.K. Stalin's DMK regime. While mirroring the pattern in other Opposition-ruled states that

brought the Governor's role under sharp political scrutiny, Tamil Nadu differed in how prolonged the stalemate became—and the knotty legal imbroglio it spawned.

The dysfunction had become so marked that even the Supreme Court raised an eyebrow at the occlusionary pattern in Ravi's actions—or inactions. While the issue awaits a judicial solution, higher education stays in a state of paralysis in one of India's most academically advanced states, with its schools and universities performing consistently well in education indices.

TECHNICAL KNOCKOUT

In Tamil Nadu, the right to appoint V-Cs is vested in the governor, in their capacity as chancellor, and they are meant to act on a search committee's recommendations. Like the AIADMK before it, the DMK regime sought to change this status quo. Provocation: Ravi sat on a series of names finalised by search committees, sometimes demanding a central nominee on those committees. The state insisted on its autonomy in the matter.

At any rate, between 2020 and 2023, the state assembly passed 10 bills to effectively transfer the power to appoint V-Cs to the CM, removing the governor's nominee from the committees. "It's demo-



ANI

NOT AT EASE Governor R.N. Ravi and CM M.K. Stalin with PM Narendra Modi at a convocation in Tiruchirappalli, January 2024

cropic accountability," says a senior state education official. "The state funds and runs these institutions. It should also guide their leadership."

When Ravi persistently withheld his assent to the bills, Tamil Nadu took the matter to the SC. In April 2025, the court ruled that governors cannot indefinitely delay state legislation, effectively deeming the bills passed. But, in May, the Madras High Court stayed their implementation, holding that education falls under the concurrent list, and the bills fell afoul of UGC regulations. Also, that they had not received presidential assent either. "It's circular logic," says a Chennai-based constitutional lawyer, voicing the frustration. For, the governor has to first reserve a bill for presidential assent. Tamil Nadu has returned to the SC to challenge the stay.

Between this legal thrust-and-feint, universities are stuck in a limbo. Three-member 'convenor committees', made up of a senior professor, an external expert and a state

Takeaways

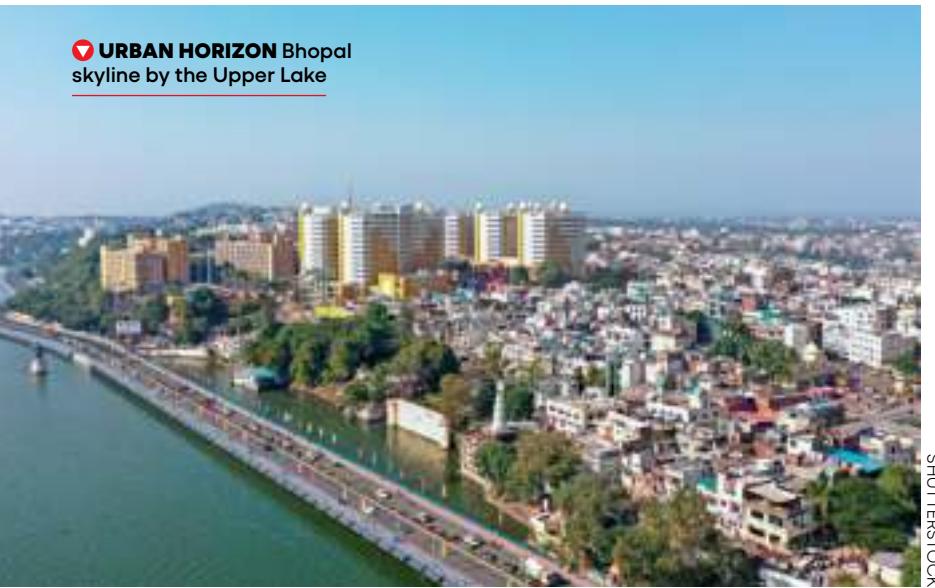
- A standoff between M.K. Stalin's DMK regime and Governor R.N. Ravi is roiling higher education in TN
- 12 of the state's 22 public universities are without V-Cs for over two years now
- SC effectively cleared TN's bills to wrest power to appoint V-Cs from the governor. But HC stayed implementation

official, are filling in for V-Cs now. But they lack statutory powers. The result: a maze of delays. At MKU, for instance, the convenor also oversees two other institutions. Says C. Muniyandi of the faculty association: "Even for routine matters like staff salaries, university officials have to travel to Chennai multiple times to get a single file cleared. Promotions

have stalled since 2022, for at least 85 faculty members."

The deadlock is also impacting students. Prince Gajendra Babu, an activist, says a scholar who completed his PhD in 2024 is unable to take up a postdoctoral offer in China. Only because there's no V-C to sign his degree. At UnoM, sources say, numerous PhD theses remain un-evaluated. "Jobs, fellowships, career growth...everything is at a standstill. Who will take responsibility for these lost futures?" asks Babu.

There's a larger context. Tamil Nadu is one of the states that opposes the National Education Policy (NEP), arguing it imposes a monoculture on a diverse country. Thirugnanam, editor of education journal *Punnagai*, suggests the Centre is moving indirect levers to undermine Tamil Nadu's autonomy—threatening to withhold Samagra Shiksha funds, estimated to be around Rs 2,150 crore, unless it falls in line on NEP. "Administrative paralysis is not accidental; it is by design," he says. ■



► MADHYA PRADESH

BEING BRUTALIST TOWARDS BHOPAL

Greedy realtors, politicos with personal stakes, greasy babus team up to deface a beautiful, planned city

By **Rahul Noronha**

HOW DOES A government ruin one of India's most scenic and planned state capitals? Simply by looking the other way when building norms are trashed. Bhopal—known for its undulating hills, wide roads and tree-lined avenues—has been lately gasping for breath. A cabal of greedy businessmen and politicians, supported by an allegedly corrupt bureaucracy, has allowed one of the most beautiful parts of the city to be ravaged through rampant violations of the master plan.

The effect: untamed commercialisation of residential areas, and its usual bequest of clogged roads and sound and air pollution. It's gotten so foul that the high court has roundly upbraided the authorities and laid down red lines. On July 29, hearing a PIL filed by Arera Colony resident Purnendu Shukla and environmentalist Subhash Pandey, a bench of Chief

Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva and Justice Vinay Saraf issued notices to the state government, municipal corporation and power utility. In the interim, it decreed a halt to all violative action.

The PIL expresses a universal dismay, even if the litigants have cited only Arera Colony, in South Bhopal, where the problem is acute. The colony was developed in 1968 with subsidised allotments to individuals with the specific purpose of constructing residen-

Takeaways

► **The HC issues notice to MP government et al on rampant breach of Bhopal master plan**

► **A rash of commercial realty at Arera Colony said to have become a sink for black money**

tial units. The Floor Area Ratio (FAR), fixed on the lower side then, continues at 0.75—meaning construction is allowed only on 75 per cent of plot area.

ALL OVER THE SHOP

Subsequent master plans consistently earmarked Arera for residential land use, eschewing commercial usage. Reason: its infrastructure could only support limited traffic and parking. The Bhopal Development Plan 1995–2005, in force now, adheres to that. So did the last draft of the proposed new master plan, since cancelled by the Mohan Yadav government, and a 2008 draft, also later cancelled. Only a draft floated in 2020 by the then Kamal Nath government, again later cancelled, had proposed mixed land use for it.

Even so, a mercantile beehive sprung up: restaurants, showrooms, banks et al. The Bhopal Municipal Corporation didn't miss the action: it merrily collects commercial rent from these illegal structures. In a similar bestowal of indulgence, the MP Central Region Power Distribution Company gave connections at commercial rates—milking the illegality. With de facto legitimacy, safety in numbers and the technical shield of a delayed master plan, breach of law nearly became law. Once, two commercial structures that got sealed were reopened after judicial relief.

The list of violators reads like a who's who of politics. Ex-CM/Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's son's dairy has its business office at Arera. Deputy LoP and Congress MLA Hemant Katare's family owns buildings that house a gym, two restaurants and a bank. A Bhopal-based minister's brother has a structure coming up. I-T sources speak of a rash of benami investments, since real estate is still the biggest sink for black money: numerous officials, doctors and suchlike are said to be drawing hefty rental incomes.

Over a fortnight since the halt order, work continues on many commercial structures. Top government sources let on that the new draft of the Bhopal Development Plan 2047 is ready and would be released soon—and that in all likelihood, Arera Colony will be declared a mixed land use area. ■

INDIA
TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

JUST A TAP AWAY



DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

AVAILABLE ON



RAHUL UPS THE ANTE

From the Opposition leader's "vote *chori*" allegation in Karnataka to Bihar's contested revisions, disputes over voter rolls deepen the crisis of confidence in the Election Commission's ability to safeguard electoral integrity

By KAUSHIK DEKA



ON AUGUST 7, AT THE CONGRESS HEADQUARTERS IN NEW DELHI, party leader

Rahul Gandhi stood in a room filled with cameras and anticipation, holding what he described as proof of India's gravest democratic crisis. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha raised a spiral-bound stack of papers, culled from a seven-foot pile of electoral rolls, and levelled a dramatic charge: the Election Commission of India (ECI) was overseeing "vote *chori*", an orchestrated theft within voter lists. As evidence, he pointed to the rolls of Karnataka's Mahadevapura assembly seat, under the Bangalore Central Lok Sabha constituency, alleging that over 100,000 fraudulent votes had been inserted in those rolls via systematic manipulation, skewing the 2024 Lok Sabha election result in favour of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The numbers Rahul presented were staggering: 11,965 entirely fake voters, 40,009 registered at non-existent addresses, 10,452

mysteriously clustered at single locations. His "exposé" quickly reverberated beyond Karnataka, hinting at a broader pattern of electoral irregularities across India. In Kerala's Thrissur, for example, a woman recently discovered that nine strangers had been added to the voter list using her home address. Thrissur, where the BJP secured its first-ever Lok Sabha victory in the state this year, had seen its voter count swell by 146,656 between 2019 and 2024, making it Kerala's largest constituency.

As expected, the BJP mounted a sharp counterattack to Rahul's charges and released a dossier alleging that constituencies won by key Opposition leaders in 2024 were themselves riddled with irregularities. It claims an audit of voter rolls in Rae Bareli, Wayanad, Diamond Harbour, Kannauj, Mainpuri and Kolathur—represented by Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Abhishek Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav, Dimple Yadav and M.K. Stalin respectively—found "massive discrepancies", including duplicate entries, fake addresses, fictitious relatives and bulk additions.

In Rae Bareli, the BJP lists over 200,000 "doubtful" voters: 19,512 duplicates, 71,977 with fake addresses, 15,853 from "mixed households" and 92,747 allegedly added en masse, some aged 85-92. In Diamond Harbour, it alleges 259,779 suspect names, including 3,613 duplicates, 155,000 with fake addresses and



► RAISING QUESTIONS
Rahul Gandhi during his press conference at the Congress headquarters in New Delhi, Aug. 7



ARUN KUMAR

booths with over 15 per cent voter growth in four years. Kannauj's rolls, it says, have 291,798 questionable entries, among them voters recorded as over 100 years old. In Kolathur, the BJP claims 19,476 suspect voters, including repeated names under multiple voter IDs in the same booths.

But the cut and thrust continued. Former Union minister and BJP MP Anurag Thakur even claimed that Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, who was born in Italy, was added to the voter list in 1980, three years before she became an Indian citizen. Even within the Congress, uncomfortable questions emerged. Karnataka cooperation minister K.N. Rajanna acknowledged that the irregularities Rahul highlighted had occurred while the Congress was in power in the state. He said it was a lapse, an issue the party should have pressed before, not after, the polls. Not surprisingly, he lost his job soon afterwards.

THE ECI STONEWALLING

All this while, the ECI has adopted an air of bureaucratic hauteur. Instead of countering Rahul's allegations with data, it insisted he file a formal, signed declaration—which would turn a political charge into a potential legal liability. Former chief election commissioner O.P. Rawat says such a demand is unnecessary, noting that the provision under Rule 20(3)(b) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, requiring claims and objections to be submitted on oath, applies only during an electoral roll revision. Since Rahul's charge was based on a political party's research, Rawat says, the rule doesn't apply, and the ECI should have begun a probe into his allegations immediately. Rahul refused to comply, and ECI officials insinuated he was unwilling to stand by his claims. The standoff culminated in high political theatre on August 11, when nearly 300 Opposition lawmakers marched from Parliament toward the ECI's offices.

Ironically, several BJP leaders claimed Rahul's exposé had done the ECI a favour. His criticisms of faulty rolls, they argued, were a tacit endorsement of the poll body's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar. The exercise, they said, was precisely about cleaning the rolls of bogus voters. Announced on June 24, 2025, the SIR is an unprecedented

attempt to overhaul Bihar's voter lists in just 90 days, ostensibly to remove deceased voters, duplicates and those who had permanently migrated. The questioning of its legality, at least initially, pertained mainly to its sudden rollout at the last minute.

BIHAR'S VANISHING ROLLS

But, on August 1, when Bihar's draft rolls were published, the doubts had spread to other aspects. For, 6.56 million names had vanished, a massive 8.3 per cent reduction that shrank the state's electorate from 78.9 million to 72.4 million voters. Of these deletions, 2.23 million are classified as deceased, 3.63 million as permanently migrated or untraceable, and 700,000 as duplicates.

The Opposition sees a deeper design at work. Throughout the monsoon session, the INDIA bloc staged daily protests in Parliament, calling the SIR a political purge meant to 'fix' the upcoming assembly election. Opposition leaders and activists petitioned the Supreme Court, arguing that the exercise exceeded the ECI's constitutional mandate by demanding citizenship documents that could disenfranchise millions. They cited Section 22 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which requires electoral officers to give anyone facing deletion "a reasonable opportunity of being heard". How, they asked, could 6.5 million people be granted meaningful hearings in just weeks? By forcing citizens to prove their eligibility, they argued, the ECI had shifted the burden of proof onto the people, turning voting from a right into a privilege that had to be constantly earned.

Their criticism especially focused on the ECI's list of 11 acceptable documents, which excluded Aadhaar cards, voter ID cards and ration cards, the forms of identification most common among Bihar's poor. Instead, it demanded passports, birth certificates or pre-1987 government job IDs, effectively placing the franchise beyond reach for millions. Political analyst-turned-politician Yogendra Yadav, drawing on government data and field surveys, estimated that only 45-50 per cent of Bihar's 18-to-40-year-olds

A CASE OF TRUST DEFICIT

Opposition parties have repeatedly questioned the Election Commission's impartiality. Many observers argue that, instead of hiding behind procedural rules, it must act to strengthen public trust in the institution

THE CHARGE: Rahul alleges that fake and duplicate voters helped the BJP swing the Mahaevapura assembly segment in the Bangalore Central LS seat during the 2024 general election

ECI'S RESPONSE: He should file a formal, sworn complaint under Rule 20(3)(b) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960

TRUST SAFE-GUARD: Experts say the ECI should have launched a probe and published the findings

THE CHARGE: Rahul says the ECI's refusal to provide machine-readable electoral rolls of the past 10-15 years convinced him of its collusion with the BJP

ECI'S RESPONSE: Political parties already had physical copies

TRUST SAFEGUARD: Electoral rolls contain sensitive data; publishing them digitally could expose them to hacking, say experts

Several BJP leaders claimed Rahul's exposé inadvertently aided the ECI, arguing his criticism of faulty rolls tacitly endorsed its SIR in Bihar

possessed one of the 11 documents demanded by the ECI. If enforced strictly, he warned, this "arbitrary decision" could strip at least 24 million of the state's 72.4 million registered voters of their franchise, making it "the largest disenfranchisement in the history of any electoral democracy". The SC, however, disagreed, rejecting the claim that most residents lacked the necessary papers. During the August 12 hearings, Justice Surya Kant also backed the ECI's position on Aadhaar,

ruling it could not be treated as conclusive proof of citizenship. On August 13, the SC observed that the allowance of any of 11 documents for the Bihar SIR makes the exercise more "voter-friendly" than a regular summary revision, which accepts only seven.

Following the ECI's disclosure that 6.5 million names had been deleted, the Association for Democratic Reforms petitioned for the release of both the names and the specific reasons for each exclusion. The commission initially refused, arguing it had no legal obligation to publish separate deletion lists or provide individual explanations. However, it reversed the stance after the SC ordered it to publish district-wise lists of all omitted voters with reasons for deletion. The ECI will now release booth-wise lists, to be displayed at district election offices, on social media and through





● UNDER OPPosition

ATTACK Chief election commissioner Ganesh Kumar (centre) with election commissioner Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu (left) and Dr Vivek Joshi at Nirvachan Sadan, New Delhi

THE CHARGE

After revealing the deletion of 6.5 million names from Bihar's rolls, those challenging SIR sought the names and reasons for each exclusion

ECI'S RESPONSE: No legal obligation to publish deletion lists or give individual explanations

TRUST SAFEGUARD: Following an SC directive, the ECI has agreed to publish the list of deleted names along with the reasons for deletion

THE CHARGE In Bihar's Special Intensive Revision (SIR), the Opposition accuses the ECI of restricting voter enrolment by excluding Aadhaar from the list of accepted documents, claiming most residents lacked other papers

ECI'S RESPONSE: Aadhaar cannot prove citizenship

TRUST SAFEGUARD: The Supreme Court has upheld the ECI's stand and rejected the claim that most residents lacked required documents

advertisements in newspapers, radio and TV. These will also be posted on notice boards at the offices of booth level officers (BLO), panchayats and block development offices.

CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

On paper, the ECI's safeguards appear robust: no deletion without prior notice, a hearing, and a written order, with the option to appeal up to the chief electoral officer. In practice, critics question how such procedures can be meaningfully applied to millions of cases within a compressed timeline. The SC has so far declined to halt Bihar's SIR, only cautioned the ECI against "mass exclusion". Justice Surya Kant described the controversy as "largely a case of trust deficit", urging the ECI to substantiate its assurances with transparent data, a request that, so far, has met only with

bureaucratic stonewalling.

On the issue of transparency, the ECI has offered no clear answers, even as reports surfaced of seasonal migrant workers being wrongly marked as permanently relocated. On August 12, Yadav even walked in for a SC hearing with two 'dead voters' to prove his point of methodological anarchy. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, for the ECI, said such minor errors are typical of a draft roll and can be fixed by BLOs. Justice Surya Kant agreed, noting that inadvertent mistakes are inevitable but correctable.

The ECI's standing as an impartial constitutional authority is doubtless under strain. In an era of instant digital sharing, it has been notably frugal, old-fashioned and bureaucratic about data. When the Congress requested machine-readable copies of Maharashtra's voter lists to conduct its own

analysis, the ECI refused, saying the party already had them in physical form. Rawat opposes making electoral rolls publicly available in digital form, calling it a sensitive database highly susceptible to manipulation. However, he maintains that the ECI must take every possible step to strengthen public trust in democratic processes, including conducting a thorough probe into Rahul's allegations.

For now, Rahul's "vote chori" allegations and Bihar's SIR remain separate sagas, one a sweeping political charge, the other a procedural tsunami in a single state. But they converge on the same fault line: whether India's electoral rolls, the bedrock of its democracy, can still command public trust. Once that trust erodes, it will matter little whether deletions were lawful or proofs sound. What will matter is that millions may believe the list itself is rigged. ■



COVER STORY

IT LAYOFFS

WHO MOVED MY JOB?

INDIA'S BIGGEST EMPLOYMENT GENERATOR SEES MASSIVE RETRENCHMENT, FORCING COMPANIES IN THE SECTOR TO RESTRUCTURE OR RISK OBSOLESCENCE

By M.G. ARUN & AJAY SUKUMARAN

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS / AI

7.3
million

No. of people employed in India's IT sector

72
per cent

Drop in new hirings in top six IT firms in Q1FY26 over the preceding quarter

50
per cent

Drop in big tech entry-level hirings from pre-COVID levels



Ankit Das (name changed), an employee with a top IT firm in Bengaluru, is losing sleep. In his 30s, he had recently moved his family to the city. He had spent four and a half years at the firm, working on the same project. He had been getting a satisfactory 'C' band at employee evaluations, and his Work From Office index, which tracks an employee's adherence to the company's mandated office attendance policy, was "100 per cent". But suddenly, without explanation, he has been 'benched' (i.e. not on any project) and put on a 'fluidity list'—if your name appears on this list, you will likely be subject to layoff or restructuring. "Initially, my project manager told me I am getting released from the project due to cost-cutting, but he told my delivery manager that my performance is not good," Das said in a Facebook post on August 12. "It's been 12 days in bench, not getting calls on domain (Linux, VMware, AWS, Ansible, GIT etc)," he says, fearful of his company's new 35-day bench policy after which one could face the axe.

As global uncertainty deepens, driven by the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Israel, trade disruptions caused by Donald Trump's tariffs, and the rapid upheaval led by Artificial Intelligence (AI), tech companies worldwide are going through a churn. In calendar year 2025 alone, large tech firms such as Intel, Microsoft and Meta laid off over 60,000 staff globally; tech pundits predict more layoffs in the coming days. The tremors have reached India, too, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), India's largest IT services company, letting go of 12,000 employees in July, nearly 2 per cent of its total workforce. According to talent solutions firm Xpheno, 7,700 other senior professionals with over 15 years of experience have exited from the top seven IT firms over the past 12 months.

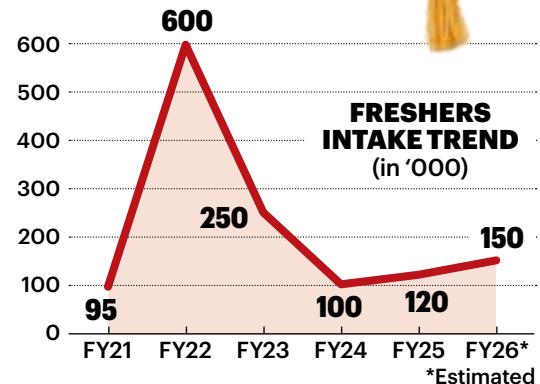
The storied Indian IT sector, which employs 7.3 million people, is facing strong headwinds that threaten to shake its foundation and mandate a structural reset. According to brokerage firm Kotak Institutional Equities, large IT services

THE HIRING AND FIRING RANGE

FY22 saw what is called 'revenge hiring' in the sector in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the exuberance has pattered out considerably since

AFTER THE GLUT, THE FALL

After massive hiring in a single year (FY22), recruitment in the next three years has been lukewarm



Source: XPheno



“In the earlier waterfall models, we had multiple leadership layers. That’s changing”

— K. KIRUTHIVASAN
CEO, TCS, in a media interview

60,000

Staff big tech firms like Intel, Meta and Microsoft let go in calendar year 2025

7,700

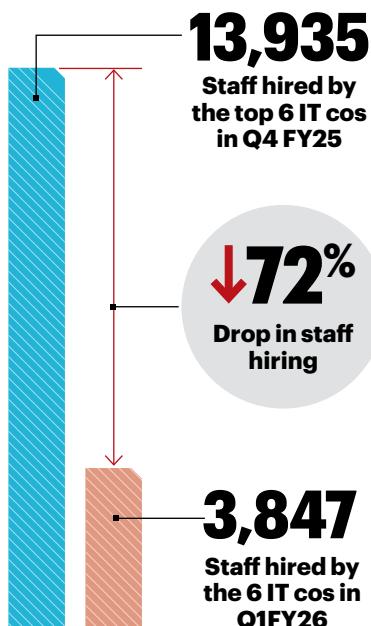
Professionals with 15+ yrs experience who have exited from top seven IT firms in the past year

12,000

No. of employees fired by TCS this July

THE BIG CUTS

The turbulence in the IT sector is prodding companies to slash workforce

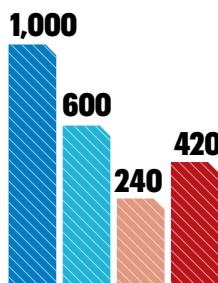


Source: Earnings statements of IT firms

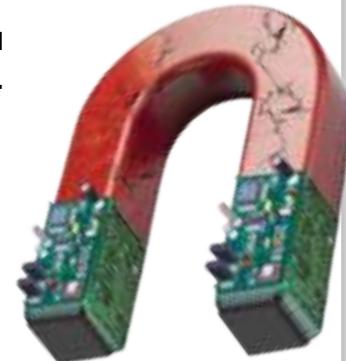
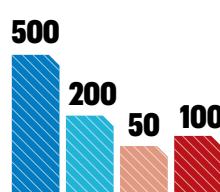
HOW HIRING SLOWED

IT firms, which added 1 million to their workforce in FY22, added fewer staff in most of the subsequent years due to geopolitical pressures and an AI-led tech churn

TOTAL NET ADDITIONS IN IT SECTOR (in '000)

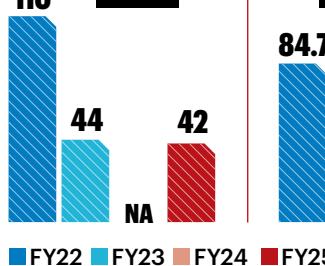


NET ADDITIONS IN IT SERVICES, THE BIGGEST COHORT (in '000)

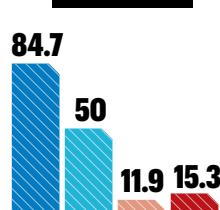


FRESHER HIRING IN TOP INDIAN IT FIRMS (in '000)

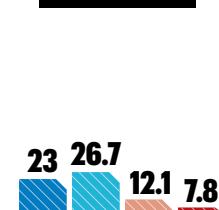
TCS



INFOSYS



HCL TECH



Note: only permanent employees are considered; NA: not available
Source: BT Research; XPheno

firms reported a sequential decline in revenue in the final quarter of FY25, a first since the COVID-affected June 2020 quarter. Margins across the board are under pressure, as intense competition forces companies to lower prices. Geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainties have led clients to pause their IT budgets, further straining the businesses of Indian IT companies in FY26. Analysts foresee retail, consumer, logistics, travel and manufacturing bearing the brunt of US tariffs, rendering them highly vulnerable to project delays, cancellations and cuts in discretionary spending. It is beginning to show in the market capitalisation of top IT companies. TCS's m-cap fell by 28 per cent to Rs 11 lakh crore as on August 4, 2025, from Rs 15.5 lakh crore a year ago, while Infosys saw a decline of nearly 19 per cent in the same period (see *An Ill Wind*).

The sector has indeed come a long way since visionaries like N.R. Narayana Murthy and his colleagues at Infosys, Faqir Chand Kohli of TCS, Azim Premji of Wipro and Shiv Nadar of HCL built it from scratch three to four decades ago. What began in the 1990s as a 'bodyshopping' model—where IT firms sent employees to client sites, mostly overseas—soon added cost-effective back-office operations, and has since morphed into a \$282.6 billion (Rs 24.7 lakh crore) behemoth

“The IT services industry derives its revenues from all the major economies of the world, except probably China. Hence **any perturbation in the global economy will have an impact** on the Indian IT services sector”

— KRIS GOPALAKRISHNAN

Founder, Infosys;
Chairman, Axilor Ventures



offering end-to-end business solutions and consulting. Today, Indian IT firms serve many of the world's large corporations, offering a broad range of services, from cloud computing and digital transformation to AI, data analytics and blockchain. The sector has become a key pillar of the Indian economy, contributing over 7 per cent to the GDP. In FY25 alone, IT services exports touched \$224 billion (Rs 19.7 lakh crore), nearly 60 per cent of India's services exports of \$387.5 billion (Rs 34 lakh crore).

Digitisation had long been on the IT sector's radar, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its adoption across industries. What followed was a hiring spree, with IT companies opting for 'revenge hiring', adding one million new recruits, half of them in IT services firms, in FY22. The euphoria proved short-lived, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the galloping advance of AI put the brakes on this expansion. According to Xpheno, just 1.26 million new recruits were hired in the next three years, from FY23 to FY25. The slowdown seems to be persisting into FY26. Staffing firms project a net addition of 520,000 new recruits, half the number hired four years ago. In the first quarter of FY26, the top six IT firms added only 3,847 employees, a 72 per cent drop from 18,935 in the preceding quarter. Growth is also stalling in core markets like the US, which accounts for 70 per cent of the business. Entry-level hiring in big tech has plummeted 50 per cent from pre-COVID levels; salaries have stagnated too.

However, even as legacy IT services face intense pressure, start-ups, end-user IT departments and Global Capability Centres (see *The Bright Spot*) are moving up the pecking order. GCCs, or offshore strategic units set up by multinational companies to handle specialised functions like IT, finance, HR and R&D, have, in fact, been one of the few bright spots in IT hiring. The broader sector, though, is seeing a structural reset, with the



“
Even before the advent of AI, a lot of automation was happening already. What AI has done is to **accelerate that process and also extend it to tasks that were not getting automated or not considered**

— **R. CHANDRASHEKHAR**
Former President, Nasscom



There's a shift from volume to value, from a head count-based approach to an outcome-based one. Skill development is no longer about coding skills but about agility, domain, industrial use cases

— **C.P. GURNANI**, Co-founder & Vice Chairman, AlonOS

traditional pyramid model—characterised by large-scale hiring and multiple layers of management—starting to show cracks. In its latest earnings call, TCS acknowledged that delays in decision-making and deferrals in discretionary projects had persisted and even worsened through Q1FY26. A leaner workforce has naturally helped firms sustain or improve their revenue-per-employee ratio, a key performance metric.

Shifting Ground

What is fuelling this seismic shift in the Indian IT landscape that primarily comprises IT services, GCCs, tech startups, IT products, consulting and tech jobs across industries? At the heart of it lies the IT services segment, the sector's largest employer, with 2.6 million working in areas like software development, system integration and infrastructure management. GCCs employ another 1.8 million, while IT product companies like Amazon, Microsoft and Meta employ 1.5 million. Then there is the business process management (BPM) or IT-enabled services (ITES) segment, which operates back offices and call centres. While Nasscom estimates 1.4 million to be working in this segment, researchers like Xpheno do not count them as proper tech jobs.

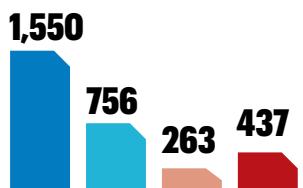
One obvious trigger for the layoffs is the geopolitical disruption. The uncertainties stemming from the Ukraine and Palestine wars, compounded by the re-election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2024, have rattled global markets, forcing clients to rein in spending significantly. A top-notch headhunter, who requested anonymity, recounted how Indian IT companies instructed her firm to freeze all hiring at the senior leadership level just days after Trump's re-election. "The IT services industry derives its revenues from all the major economies of the world, except probably China. Hence any perturbation in the global economy will have an impact on the Indian IT

AN ILL WIND

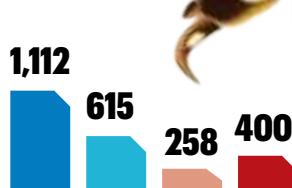
Geopolitical instability and Trump's tariff-led disruptions have eroded valuations of the Big 4 in the past year

MARKET CAP (Rs '000 crore)

AUG. 2, 2024



AUG. 4, 2025



Source: Ace Equity



THE BRIGHT SPOT

Why Global Capability Centres, or GCCs, the fully owned, offshore units that MNCs have set up in India to perform strategic, technical, and operational functions, are emerging as a bright spot in the Indian IT landscape



- ➔ The number of GCCs in the country has increased from 1,285+ in FY19 to 1,750+ in FY25
- ➔ Growth is majorly driven by mid-market GCCs (500-1000 employees) established by parent organisations with annual revenues between \$100 mn and \$1 bn (Rs 875 cr.- Rs 8,750 cr.)
- ➔ AI is a key focus for 68 per cent of GCCs while 54 per cent specialise in engineering R&D

- ➔ Many GCCs are increasingly adopting the 'GCC as a Service' model, which means that organisations turn to third party expertise and platforms to set up and manage these centres, as against building them from scratch

Source: NASSCOM Strategic Review 2025

services sector," says Kris Gopalakrishnan, co-founder of Infosys and chairman of Axilor Ventures, a start-up accelerator.

Another major disruptor, and one being viewed with a lot of interest, is the rapid advancement of AI, particularly the deployment of Large Language Models (LLMs). Trained on vast datasets of text and code, these powerful AI systems can perform a wide range of natural language processing tasks, significantly boosting productivity for individuals and organisations alike. The pace of their evolution is dizzying; new versions are improving every three to four months. Meanwhile, firms are also hitting the pause button on entry-level recruiting till they figure out the best way to envisage their organisational restructure. "Earlier, IT firms

had a pyramid structure; the new structure will probably be narrow at the top, and cylindrical at the middle and the bottom," he adds.

TCS, whose layoffs created a stir, admitted it was already on the cusp of that change. The company denied the layoffs were because AI had taken over jobs, attributing them instead to skills mismatch and lack of redeployment opportunities for mid- and senior-level employees. Its CEO K. Kirthevasan said that the company is in the midst of a structural shift, moving away from the traditional 'waterfall' project management method—a linear, sequential approach—to a more agile, product-centric model, thereby reducing the need for conventional project and programme managers. "In the earlier waterfall models, we had multiple leadership layers. That's changing," he said in a media interview.

"There's a shift from volume to value, from a headcount-based approach to an outcome-based approach in companies," says IT industry veteran C.P. Gurnani, co-founder and vice chairman, AIonOS, an AI enabling platform for businesses. "What we are seeing fundamentally is that you need to participate in the business not just as a routine coder, but by understanding it, making an impact in the ways businesses are conducted. It also means that skill development is no longer about coding skills, about learning (programming languages) Python or C++, but about agility, about domain, about industrial use cases."

Who's Afraid of AI?

"Everybody's job is in danger. It's how you adapt to it," is how a fortysomething techie working in a GCC in Bengaluru frames the pace of technological change that's upending not just his own industry but practically every business. When he joined, developers wrote software code from scratch, using online platforms such as Stack Overflow where programmers collaborated and shared knowledge that aided their coding tasks. But LLMs, powered by natural language interfaces, changed that fundamental approach. Now, developers can just 'prompt' a machine in conversational English and get a code they can copy-paste. "It's made life comfortable in that you don't have to code from scratch, you already have the boilerplate custom-made for you," he explains. One can even connect an existing code base and ask the AI application to crawl through it and flag issues, a job that would consume a significant amount of time for a developer. "But with the good comes the bad, right? Now, obviously, expectations have

increased. It has gone from one extreme to another."

Among these go-to coding assistants are the Github Copilot from Microsoft (not to be confused with its Copilot for general users); Cursor, developed by Anysphere Inc; Claude, built by Anthropic; and Windsurf, a California-based start-up co-founded by Indian-origin American Varun Mohan, who has been making waves this summer with his high-profile move to Google as part of a \$2.4 billion deal in July that came smack in the middle of OpenAI's \$3 billion bid to acquire the AI coding start-up. In fact, so fast is the pace of AI tools being released to the market that "there is a new model every week" on the tech platform Hugging Face, says the techie cited earlier. "A weekend is enough to see a new AI model surpassing an earlier one that had been doing good."

"There are multiple options in terms of what technology you want to use to write code with AI," says Srikanth Velamakanni, co-founder of Fractal, an AI and analytics firm. "If you think of the life of a software programmer, there are three kinds of activities: code writing, collaboration with other people to understand client requirements, and other activities like writing emails etc. The overall expectation is that if I am spending 100 hours doing software programming, I should be able to accomplish the same work in 75 hours right now."

Velamakanni believes 'no job in full' will go away. Instead, 30-50 per cent of them would be automated in the future. "Therefore, the same work you were doing could be accomplished in half the time. Also, the world will need more and more technology. In fact, the world is getting more 'techified,'" he says, citing data that suggests companies worldwide have moved from spending 3 per cent of their budget on technology a decade ago to 4.5 per cent today. "Therefore, tech jobs themselves may not go down," he says. "At an individual level, one will have to make oneself more capable and billable. Every one of us has to think of how to stay relevant in an industry that is moving very fast."

The Billability Factor

Among the factors that determine that relevance is 'billability'. This catchword measures what a client is willing to pay for a professional's time. In a vast majority of IT services, the billing rate of an executive per hour multiplied by the number of hours determines the cost of a project. Senior staff have a higher cost base but may not be as "billable". "If somebody is not billable, it means it will be hard to put their name in the list of members in a project whose time will be charged," says Velamakanni. "They become part of the cost but not of the revenue." By laying off 2 per cent of its workforce, TCS has sent a signal to the remaining 98 per cent to make themselves billable, he adds.

But bald economics is of scant comfort to someone who has been retrenched. Harpreet Saluja, president of the Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate (NITES), an employees' association taking up issues related to IT workers' rights and welfare, points to the 'vicious cycle' of hiring and firing by

PIVOT AND PROSPER

The Nasscom president advocates taking a long-term view of change rather than focusing on short-term pain



By RAJESH NAMBIAR

There is no doubt we are at an inflection point.

The reason is that AI and automation are integrating into how businesses operate, which has resulted in changes in the demands made on us.

Over the next several

quarters, we anticipate a major transition as organisations pivot towards a much more product-aligned delivery model, as opposed to the services- and people-based delivery model. This is being driven by client expectation.

The IT industry is

“Tech jobs may not go down; individuals will have to become more capable and billable, and think of how to stay relevant in an industry that is moving very fast”



— SRIKANTH VELAMAKANNI

Co-founder, Fractal Analytics

IT firms. "Entry-level salaries have been stagnant for more than a decade at around Rs 3.5 lakh a year. A firm can fire one person earning a Rs 10 lakh package, and hire two freshers, as well as get tax rebate for fresh employment generation," he alleges. TCS in its announcement said it was laying off mid- to senior-level management. But Saluja points out how the firm had earlier announced plans to recruit 40,000 freshers this fiscal. "If they can recruit 40,000 people, why are they laying off 12,000 experienced people?" Even candidates who got offers via lateral hiring haven't been onboarded yet, he says, a complaint NITES has made to the labour ministry.

"AI will play a significant role in a lot of jobs, including ones involving cognitive skills, which is a new thing," says R. Chandrashekhar, former president of IT industry body Nasscom.

at \$283 billion (Rs 24.75 lakh crore) in terms of net revenue now. We are a large industry, but our customer base is shifting, and it's reshaping some of the traditional service delivery frameworks. So, in the near term, this may lead to some workforce rationalisation.

For sure, we will have to go through this short-term pain. Every wave of disruption does this; we have seen it in the past. New roles are created, as are new value chains...but it presents a whole new opportunity. Industries will evolve, you will need to have continuous skilling, upskilling and cross-skilling; building a resilient workforce will be difficult. But once you pivot, you will find a hockey stick-like

rapid, exponential growth.

What is noteworthy is that the industry has taken significant steps in preparing the talent base. Roughly a million people

CREATING A STRONG WORKFORCE WILL BE DIFFICULT. BUT ONCE YOU PIVOT, A HOCKEY STICK-LIKE RAPID, EXPONENTIAL GROWTH IS POSSIBLE

have been trained in the new areas, whether it's AI, Generative AI or Agentic AI. Another 100,000 are now proficient in advanced AI, which covers AI Native Cloud, embedded AI, application AI, applied intelligence certification. Companies have been

active, for they know they will have to bear the brunt of this change. Those who are prepared will weather the storm, with the middle order perhaps a bit more under threat. I believe hiring trends will continue to evolve, given the increased demand for specialised expertise. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. You will need deep, specialised expertise. Companies will have to navigate this transition based on their unique needs—what is happening within, and what their customer base wants.

In the long run, it's a shared commitment. The industry will have to come together, as also academia, which has also been caught off-guard. IT is one of the largest

hirers in the university system, so it is important we carry them along, guide them in shifting to new-age categories, show appreciation for what is going on in academia. The government, too, must collaborate more deeply. Industry, academia and government are, in my mind, a triad.

How do you make sure the three of us come together? We need to bridge this divide, embed talent development as a national and business imperative to sustain our leadership. Globally, India leads in a lot many areas in IT, whether we can bring the same level of leadership to the AI Alliance is our biggest challenge today.

—as told to India Today

So, it is adjusting and adapting so much more in a way that humans do. Not all clients may be clued in to AI; its adoption in their own processes may be gradual. However, they would be curious to know from their IT services vendors how AI can be meaningfully used to impact bottom lines. "Even before the advent of AI, a lot of automation was happening already. What AI has done is to accelerate that process and also extend it to tasks that were not getting automated or not considered," he says. Moreover, business uncertainties are compelling firms to encourage IT providers to use more AI and deliver higher cost efficiencies. "Companies want either all of those services the IT firm had been providing in the past at a much lower cost, or a much bigger basket of services at the same cost," he adds. Gurnani feels that companies will tread the AI turf cautiously. "Technology at home is far superior to technology at work," he says. "Corporates are always cautious about data coming to them from various sources (by using AI tools). They will not use them unless they are sure about co-alliances, security and regulatory aspects (of that information)."

No doubt, IT firms are handling some of the most advanced technologies used to run complex businesses, like running an airport or a passport service. "Traditionally, it would have sufficed to excel in SAP or data warehouses, or Microsoft or Salesforce technologies, to solve and integrate the systems and datasets of an organisation in order to make things work. Now, the stack has moved to new sets of tools and techniques, especially AI," says Velamakanni.

In vogue now are tools from firms like cloud data platform company Snowflake, AI enterprise solutions firm Data-

bricks, Amazon machine learning platform AWS Sagemaker and Hugging Face, a community that makes machine learning accessible. Mid- to senior-level IT workers now need to know these rather than skills like Microsoft SQL Server or Oracle. They also need to learn to code with AI. Equally important are skills in application programming interfaces (APIs) that allow different software applications to communicate with each other. IT professionals will have to integrate these new foundation models into their products, in order to drive greater effectiveness.

The Great Indian Skill Gap

Companies like TCS are now realising they have too many people with skills that are becoming redundant and too few with new-age skills, leading to a skill gap. Not everyone is capable or willing to upskill, which explains why those laid off at TCS are in the 30-40 age bracket; many of them may have been doing 'legacy' work.

But AI is not the only factor driving the shift in the nature of IT jobs. "While everybody is focused largely on the disruption caused by AI, there are two other very significant factors: insourcing through GCCs, and the significant legacy systems baggage large IT companies have in older technologies such as mainframes and client server and the maintenance, testing and infrastructure support they require," says Ramkumar Ramamoorthy, partner at growth advisory firm Catalincs, and former chairman and MD of Cognizant India. A significant portion of the revenue, therefore, now comes from what is called 'run-the-business' as opposed to transformational work



which is ‘change the business’. The challenge, according to Ramamoorthy, is that while earlier shifts were in individual, monolithic technologies such as mainframe, client server, internet, mobile, etc., characterised by disruption followed by long periods of stability, current technologies are multiple—cloud, analytics, cybersecurity, AI, IoT, blockchain, 3D printing and quantum. “With such a high velocity of change, the challenges have been compounded,” says Ramamoorthy.

Rising to the Challenge

How can companies as well as job-seekers navigate this changing landscape? Indian IT firms have been quick to adapt to the changing environment. Wipro, for instance, said nearly all its employees have completed ‘foundation AI GenAI training’, while over 87,000 received role-specific programmes tailored to their domains. “We are actively building an AI-ready workforce covering over 230,000 employees by fostering an AI-first mindset and equipping them with essential AI skill sets and toolsets,” it said in its FY25 annual report. “We have enabled over 50 AI learning pathways tailored to varied proficiency levels for our business and technical associates... Across our delivery teams, we have over 20,000 associates leveraging AI developer tools to boost our overall productivity.”

Meanwhile, Infosys, whose digital reskilling programme includes the latest GenAI courses, says over 270,000 of its employees today (83 per cent) “are AI-aware”. According to the company’s FY25 annual report, it delivered over 400 GenAI projects via its generative and agentic AI-powered services and solutions platform called Infosys Topaz, including building four small language models for banking, IT operations, cyber and enterprises.

The Indian IT services industry has always been evolving and adapting to tech changes from the early ‘80s,” says Gopalakrishnan. “From mainframes to UNIX and midrange systems, to personal computers with DOS, Windows, mac OS, to Internet, to mobile technologies and social networks, the industry has adapted. It has grown from nothing to \$300 billion. It has strong balance sheets, is highly profitable, with mature and experienced management, loyal customers, and has experienced many downturns over the years. I believe it will survive this one too.” Experts advocate replacing the

“
IT firms are getting a significant portion of their revenues from ‘run the business’ work as opposed to transformational, ‘change the business’ work. While earlier shifts were in single, monolithic technology, current technologies are multiple, compounding the challenge”

— RAMKUMAR RAMAMOORTHY
Partner, Catalincs

existing legacy framework with lean, outcome-driven teams, AI automation and cloud-native delivery. They must pivot to product-led platform-first strategies or risk obsolescence.

Ramamoorthy believes companies need to do two things to participate in growth opportunities: be agile, and reinvest profits back into the business. “It calls for much more investment than before, given that we have to run multiple races at the same time.” Companies must take bold, unconventional decisions to ‘force-cannibalise’ revenues wherever appropriate, and invest their way out. Firms like TCS are boosting their conventional AI offerings via strategic partnerships, such as the one with AI firm Vianai Systems. “You can’t get stuck with old operating models when there are structural shifts in the marketplace,” says Ramamoorthy. “Now, every industry and their business, operating and financial models have to be reimaged. That’s why AI is more a structural force than a tool. And companies have to make investments beyond reskilling and upskilling their employees.”

Gopalakrishnan believes entry-level employees must be trained on AI tools. Universities have just begun introducing

ing these tools; including them in the curriculum and training faculty will take time. They need to design new pedagogy to teach using AI tools, giving assignments that allow students to use AI tools, and evaluating student skills. The skills-gap will persist given the rapid pace at which these technologies evolve. Learning, says the headhunter quoted above, is “a dual responsibility. I, as a professional, must learn to upgrade and upskill myself, apart from whatever training my organisation is giving.” Also, there is nothing called the ‘backend’ today; everyone will need competencies that make them holistic”. While the change is relentless, so are the learning avenues and flow of information, says Gurnani. “I strongly believe that learning to learn is what will differentiate you. Adapt to the new ways of thinking, learning and unlearning, and applying knowledge effectively. While tools will tell you what to do, don’t forget that it is an (entrepreneurial) instinct that creates big businesses.”

The Indian IT story continues to be robust; it needs to keep up with the pace of change and prepare for it. While companies need to shape up to sustain amidst the flux technology has unleashed, IT job-seekers as well as workers need to realise that their once-prized job may have either moved entirely or taken a new shape, for which they need to shape up. Or ship out. ■



► NOT ON OUR
LAND Tractor rally
by farmers in
Ludhiana, Jul. 31

Photographs by PRABHJOT GILL

THE NATION

PUNJAB

NO MANN'S LAND

The Punjab CM backs down, withdraws much-hyped land pooling policy after backlash from farmers and the HC

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

It

was mid-May, the time when the peak summer sun dries up all wellsprings of generosity. That's when the Bhagwant Mann-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab launched Land Pooling Policy (LPP), 2025. It was a striking idea: bunching together 65,533 acres for industrial and residential projects. In retrospect, though, someone should have foreseen that, in a state where land is scarce and has much symbolic and material

value, the move would generate enough heat to scald the government. The inevitable reversal took only a couple of months.

The LPP was marketed as a solution to revive the state's moribund economy while also benefiting the major donors, the farming community. The plan encompassed land parcels across 165 villages in some 27 cities, with around 21,550 acres earmarked for industrial zones. Owners were offered plots and annuities—Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh per acre till the land was developed—with promises of up to 400 per cent return on investment. The master plan projected huge inflows into infrastructure, logistics hubs and factories under India's Gati Shakti framework. Punjab's Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APUDA) and Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA) were drafting township-level layouts, hoping to attract Rs 10,000 crore in investments and create 150,000 jobs.

The only problem was, back in the villages, the farmers weren't buying it. Wary after the recent clashes over MSP (minimum support

price) for their produce, anger quickly built up. Even sweeteners like a 10 per cent annual increment in the annuity failed to seduce the farmer lobby. CM Mann's protestations that the LPP was "voluntary, this is not land acquisition...the farmer remains the owner, trust us" didn't go too far either.

BEGINNING OF THE END

On July 31, Ludhiana—a cornerstone of Punjab's industry and central to the 'land pooling' blueprint—woke up to 500 tractors roaring at the gates of the local administration. Farmer leader Harinder Singh Lakhowal of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lakhowal) thundered: "This isn't land pooling, it's backdoor acquisition. And we'll stop it, just like we did the farm laws." By then, the courts were also involved. On August 7, the Punjab and Haryana High Court ordered an interim stay on the policy after flagging the lack of social/ environmental impact assessments and the absence of concrete rehabilitation measures. It also expressed reservations against the diverting of Punjab's fertile agricultural land, citing the Land Acquisition Act, 2013.

Four days later, the Mann government caved in and rolled back the LPP. All related actions—letters of intent (LoIs), registrations, planning exercises—stood nullified. Sources say the realisation dawned, among the powers that be, that the policy may not stand up to the court's scrutiny. But the main cause for the retreat was the protests flaring up statewide by the farming community, cutting across class and ideological barriers—almost a replay of the 2020/21 action that had forced the Centre to repeal the farm laws. With the Opposition also up in arms and the AAP government losing the narrative, Mann had no other choice. But though he may have curtailed the fallout, there was no denying the dent to the government's image.



MANN, WHO IS FROM THE DOMINANT JAT SIKH COMMUNITY, HAD WON WITH THEIR BACKING IN 2022. BACKING OFF ON LPP WAS ALSO KEEPING THE RURAL VOTER IN MIND

Opposition leaders, such as BJP state vice-president Subhash Sharma, were quick to highlight the "core weaknesses" of the policy—lack of transparency and inadequate social safety provisions. For Mann, whose leadership persona was built on rural outreach, it became a big blow to his credibility, especially among farmers.

A DISILLUSIONED LOT

In the 2022 assembly election, the Jat Sikh community had helped propel AAP to 92 of the total 117 seats. Mann, a Jat Sikh himself, had captivated rural voters with promises of social justice, MSP protection for their produce and dignified governance. Jat Sikhs in Punjab are about 18 per cent of the population, but the 2015 agriculture census sug-

gests that they own about 94 per cent of the state's farmland. As a result, they have an outsized influence on any decision that impacts agriculture in Punjab. In recent years, they have been restive on a variety of issues: the drift in Akali politics, the lack of resolution in the 2015 sacrilege cases, the central farm laws and the impasse on diversification in the MSP product base.

The situation had been simmering since mid-March when the Mann government took action against the agitating farmers jamming the national highway at the Shambhu and Khanauri state border points with Haryana for the past year, demanding a legal framework for MSP procurement. The Haryana government had blocked them, stopping their progress to Delhi like during the 2020/21 the farm law

THE LPP INITIATIVE

Land pooling policy envisaged aggregating 65,533 acres across Punjab for industrial zones/ residential projects

Marketed as a solution to save state's faltering economy, boost industry

Farmers were to get plots and annuities—Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh per acre—till their land was developed

Master plan visualised whole new townships, hoped to attract Rs 10,000 crore in investments, create 150,000 jobs

WHAT WENT WRONG

LPP sparked protests from farmers' unions, Opposition, who called it a 'land-grabbing scheme'

Farmers had doubts about compensation plan, why so much land was needed

HC red-flagged lack of social/ environmental impact assessments, vague rehabilitation plans and diversion of fertile farmland

With court, farmers railing against it, Mann drops controversial LPP

protests. When the protesters were forcefully cleared in a midnight operation, it was perceived as a betrayal by the AAP government.

SLOWDOWN AHEAD

The Mann government is in a bind. Punjab's economy is not in the best of shape. An analysis of industrial performance of the past two decades reveals a troubling slowdown. The early 2000s saw strong industrial growth—nearly 7 per cent annually—but that had collapsed to about 2 per cent annually by the first part of the previous decade (2010-15). The next seven years saw only a partial revival, with growth creeping back to the 4.6-5.5 per cent range (manufacturing grew by 4.6 per cent) in 2024-25. Most economists believe industry in the state needs a fresh strategy and diversification.

Punjab had attracted export-oriented units in the past, but many of them have, over the years, moved to neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, or to Madhya Pradesh, whether to take advantage of tax breaks, the changed political ecosystem, or due to logistics requirements. Punjab's

GDP growth has hovered around 5-6 per cent, trailing national averages. Meanwhile, debt nearing 48 per cent of its GSDP and interest burdens consuming 23 per cent of revenues painted a picture of a state economically squeezed from every side.

However, for many landowners, these projections felt speculative. Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan) asks, "Why didn't they use barren government land? Why take our fertile soil?" Farmers remembered the defunct industrial zones, the Rajpura power plant and Mohali SEZ, projects that had left their land in a limbo.

ANGER MANAGEMENT

At the heart of the anger was the feeling of being dispossessed in the name of development. Unlike outright land acquisition, land pooling doesn't compensate farmers with market-linked rates or upfront payments—instead, it offers a future promise: small plots in developed areas, annuities spread over 15-20 years, and commercial sites based on a fixed formula.

Most pooling schemes till now have been enforced through administrative orders by the Punjab Urban Planning and Development Authority (PUDA) or GMADA, the farm union leaders allege, often bypassing the gram sabhas. With no statutory backing through state legislation, the entire framework operates in a legal grey zone. The farmers also question why the government could not directly acquire land under the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act of 2013, which at least mandates consent, social impact assessments and market-based compensation.

By the time the government order retracting the LPP came, 100-odd panchayats, including 43 in Ludhiana, had passed resolutions rejecting the policy. Even a few AAP functionaries had registered their protest. The party's Anandpur Sahib MP, Malvinder Singh Kang, went on social media to express his unhappiness (he later deleted the post), calling for dialogue and 'trust-building' before advancing the policy.

For the Opposition, the LPP offered another opportunity to show up the AAP government and score some brownie points with the farmers. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Badal had condemned it as a "land grabbing scam", while ex-Congress CM Charanjit Channi vowed to stop the ones that had "backstabbed Punjab's *annadaata*". Even the BJP was planning a 'Save Land, Save Farmers' yatra.

Those plans have come undone, but Mann still faces some vexing issues: with the state economy in a shambles, and trust levels of the AAP government at an all-time low, can he orchestrate a revival? The clock is ticking, assembly elections are due in Punjab in February 2027. The next few months will show whether the former stand-up comedian has it in him to pull himself and AAP out of the mess they are in and make a fight of it at the hustings. ■

Immersed in Uncertainty

The booming Ganesh idol industry in Mumbai's hinterland faces an ecological pushback over the use of polluting PoP. A high court ruling has come as a reprieve, for now

By DHAVAL S. KULKARNI in Pen, Raigad

In

a small workshop in Hamrapur village, 60 kilometres from Mumbai, Nitesh Daur stands quietly amid neat rows of white Ganesh idols. Crafted from Plaster of Paris (PoP)—a lightweight, detail-friendly material—the statues have been his livelihood since 2005. “If I shut down this business, what will I do?” asks the 35-year-old father of two. “I have no other skills.”

Daur’s anxiety stems from a long-running legal battle over the environmental impact of PoP idols, the genesis of which can be traced to a 2005 PIL by the late rationalist Narendra Dabholkar’s Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti. On January 30, this year, the Bombay High Court issued an interim order, directing civic bodies across Maharashtra to enforce the Central Pollution Control Board’s (CPCB) 2020 guidelines banning the immersion of PoP idols—even in artificial tanks—during the Maghi Ganeshotsav (January–February).

The rationale: PoP’s adverse effects on aquatic ecosystems. The result: a swift crackdown by municipal bodies and police. On June 9, the court modified its order, allowing the manufacture and sale of PoP idols—so long as they aren’t immersed in natural

water bodies. A CPCB expert panel has also clarified that its 2020 guidelines were advisory, not mandatory. The partial reprieve has given idol-makers like Daur some breathing room ahead of this year’s main Ganeshotsav, which begins in late August and is the most popular festival in Maharashtra. Then, on July 24, came further clarity. The court ruled that PoP idols under 6 feet in height must be immersed only in artificial water tanks, while taller idols may go into natural water bodies.

The court also directed the state government to ensure local bodies strictly implement these amended norms and to provide enough artificial tanks for immersions. Additionally, the state was told to form an Expert Scientific Committee within a month to explore ways to recycle and reuse PoP and examine eco-friendly methods for faster dissolution. These directions will remain in force for all immersion-based festivals till March 2026. Accordingly, the state government has issued comprehensive guidelines for the immersion of PoP idols.

Even so, not everyone is mollified. Naresh Dahibavkar, president of the Brihanmumbai Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav Samanvay Samiti, welcomes the relief but warns of uncertainty ahead. “This is only an interim order,” he says. “Next year, the issue will be back in court.” He wants a “permanent solution” to the issue of immersion of large idols—installed by more than 3,000 Ganesh mandals in Mumbai alone. Environmentalist Harshad Dhage, a petitioner in the case, too notes the “temporary” nature of the reprieve. Emphasising the need to strike a balance between faith and sustainability, he says, “This is not a fight against festivals, but against pollution.”



▲
GOD IN THE DETAIL
An artisan gives final touches to a Ganesh idol at a workshop in Pen



MANDAR DEODHAR

234,000

Ganesh idols immersed in Mumbai in 2024; over 200,000 of these were made of PoP

80

PER CENT
Proportion of PoP idols made in Pen taluka; rest are of clay

THE PoP PREDICAMENT

PROS

- Quick to mould and dry
- Idols are lighter but sturdier than those made of clay
- Cheaper and easy to transport

CONS

- Non-biodegradable, unlike clay idols
- Leach toxic paints, harmful to aquatic life

HUBBUB AT THE HUB

For decades, idol-making has been the lifeblood of Hamrapur and neighbouring villages like Kalave, Joha, Tambadshet and Dadar in Pen taluka of Raigad district. Anchored by Pen town, the region is the nucleus of Maharashtra's Ganesh idol industry and even got the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2023. Across the taluka, some 250,000 people are said to be employed in the Rs 200-crore industry, collectively shipping out millions of

clay and PoP idols each year, not only in India but to diaspora communities as far afield as the United States. Mumbai alone hosts some 12,000 public Ganesh mandals and over 200,000 household idols—most of them made from PoP and sourced from this region.

Historically, Ganesh worship in Maharashtra was a modest, private ritual, with small, hand-crafted idols made from local clay. But in the 1890s, nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak elevated the festival into a public spectacle—an

instrument of anti-colonial solidarity. Pen's transformation into an idol-making hub gathered pace in the 1950s, propelled by its location between Mumbai and Pune, and the availability of clay. A crucial shift came when local sculptor N.G. 'Rajabhai' Deodhar experimented with PoP, initially to embellish decorative images with finer detailing. Cultural cues added fuel. In V. Shantaram's 1959 film *Navrang*, an imposing 11-foot Ganesh idol made of PoP commanded the screen and was later immersed ceremon-

niously, foreshadowing a trend toward ever-larger images of the deity in households and mandals. The material proved easy to mould, light to transport and ideal for mass production. By the 1980s, Pen housed more than 500 workshops crafting idols from both clay and PoP, according to Shrikant Deodhar, Rajabhai's nephew and a fourth-generation sculptor. In the 1990s, outlying villages, with their cheaper land and abundant labour, joined the fray. In Hamrapur, farmlands long eroded by saline ingress have given way to gleaming bungalows—quiet monuments to the prosperity the idol trade has brought. In this belt, artisans are organically initiated into the craft as children.

The January court order, however, had sent tremors through the region. Many workshops suspended work entirely. "We lost three critical months," says Jagdish Patil, president of the Shri Ganesh Murtikar Utkarsha Mandal, representing about 600 workshops in Hamrapur. "We usually produce around a million idols every year. This time, it may drop to 800,000."

THE PoP VS CLAY DEBATE

The economics is unforgiving. Most manufacturers take loans to buy raw materials. For, while wholesale buyers settle dues post-festival, vendors supplying PoP, paint and coir insist on advance payments. "Customers are fewer this year. There's confusion and fear," says Neeraj Naik, an idol-maker in Hamrapur. In a neighbouring workshop, sculptor Kunal Patil gestures at a half-finished idol. "One person can make 10-15 PoP idols per shift. Clay? Maybe two or three," he shrugs.

Price is a key factor—while the retail rates of clay and PoP idols vary widely depending on the market and locality, a one-and-a-half-foot tall clay idol typically costs around Rs 3,000, compared to Rs 2,000 for a similarly sized PoP idol at the lower end of the product line. Patil and others maintain that PoP idols are not just more durable and cost-effective but more aesthetically consistent. "Clay idols are fragile—even a damp garland can cause them to flake, which many consider



DHAIRYASHIL PATIL

Rajya Sabha MP &
former Pen MLA

“ The issue has to be seen from the prism of employment. Even chemical industries pollute, yet we do not call for them to be banned. We ask for them to be regulated ”



HAMID DABHOLKAR

Activist, Maharashtra
Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti

“ We are not opposed to the festival but to the environmental impact of celebrations. Society is gradually realising the need for an eco-friendly Ganeshotsav ”

inauspicious," says Mahendra Kamble, a distributor who supplies Hamrapur idols to Dombivli, an extended suburb of Mumbai. "If I sell 1,000 idols, barely 150 are clay. This means people prefer PoP."

But traditionalists and environmentalists contest that logic. "PoP doesn't dissolve, and broken parts of these idols later wash up on the shore," says Mumbai-based clay sculptor Vasant Raje. "This is *vitambana* (sacrilege) of our religion." Raje points to the iconic 20-foot clay 'Girgaoncha Raja', installed every year in Mumbai's Girgaon neighbourhood, as proof that size isn't a constraint.

The bone of contention, i.e. PoP, is made by heating gypsum to remove water, resulting in a powder that hardens when mixed with water. A 2023 study on the Tapi river, which runs through Maharashtra's northern edge, found a clear correlation between PoP idol immersion and degraded water quality. The paints often contain toxic metals like lead and cadmium. PoP itself may take months—or even years—to dissolve, raising water hardness and harming aquatic life. Wildlife biologist Anand Pendharkar notes that the mate-

rial clogs the burrows of fish and crabs and damages mangrove roots. "It has affected the breeding of Bombay duck, sponges and other marine organisms," he says. The annual use of PoP across the state is about 4,500 tonnes, with Mumbai alone accounting for 675 tonnes, notes the 2023 study. Gradually, other states, like Goa, are banning the import and sale of PoP Ganesh idols.

Still, doubts persist about how viable a large-scale pivot to clay would be. Today, just about 20 per cent of the idols made in Pen taluka are clay-based. The supply chain isn't ready. Nor is the workforce adequately trained, say those in the PoP idol industry. Some stakeholders call for a middle ground. "The issue has to be seen from the prism of employment," says Dhairyashil Patil, a Rajya Sabha MP of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and former MLA from Pen. "Even chemical industries pollute. Yet, we don't call for them to be banned. We ask for them to be regulated." For now, the idol-makers of Hamrapur and nearby villages sculpt on, tracing divine forms in drying plaster, uncertain what shape their future will take. ■

आज तक

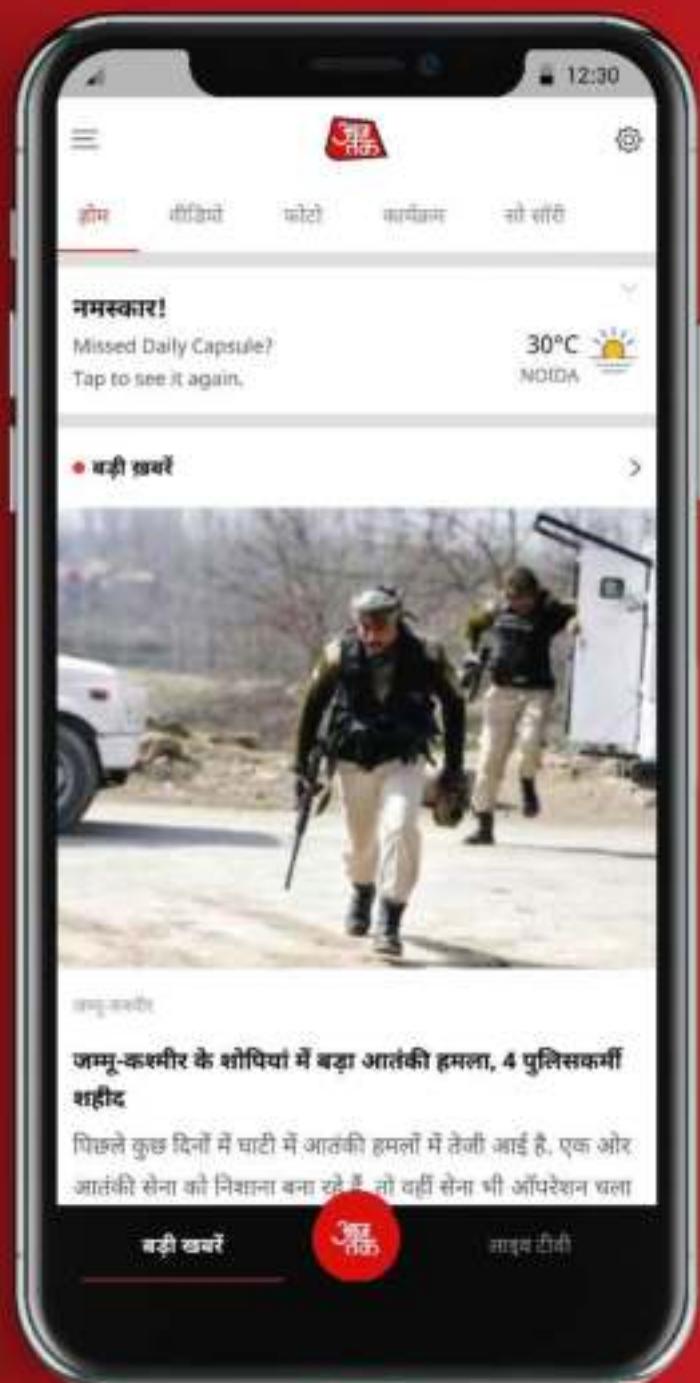
देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज ऐप

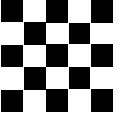
जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है





SPORTS

WOMEN'S CHESS

IT'S REIGNING QUEENS

Divya Deshmukh's feat demonstrates how far women's chess has come in the country but also how much farther it has to go, both in nurturing new talent, and in opportunities to compete with male counterparts

By SUHANI SINGH

IT was billed as a clash of generations, two queens contending for the same crown: on one end, Koneru Humpy, 38, the experienced, stoic millennial who has been India's top female chess player for two decades; seated across her, the spirited 19-year-old Divya Deshmukh, a Gen Z'er who wasn't even born when Humpy became India's first female grandmaster in 2002.

And July 28 turned out to be Divya's day. In a thrilling tie-breaker of rapid games, the Nagpur native won the third edition of the FIDE Women's World Cup 2025, the 107-player tournament that took place in Batumi, Georgia. That feat earned her high praise from grandmaster Vishwanathan Anand himself, who hailed it as a "historic step... that too, at such a young age". En route, Divya slayed four grandmasters, winning the biggest title of her career, and has now achieved the coveted top honour herself.



What Divya has also done is spark a shift in the conversation. Plenty has been written about the band of boys—D. Gukesh, Ramesh Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Arvind Chidambaram, Nihal Sarin—who have taken global chess by storm. It is now time to talk about the girls. Like the men, they, too, are 2022 Asian Games silver medalists and topped the 2024 Olympiad podium in the women's category. Leading the field is Humpy, from Andhra Pradesh, world-ranked #6 among women; followed by Harika Dronavalli, 34, also from Andhra, at #12; Divya, from Maharashtra, also reigning world junior girls champion, is #15; 24-year-old Vaishali Rameshbabu, from Tamil Nadu, is at #18. The quartet are India's sole female grandmasters. Tania Sachdev, 38, from Delhi, rounds off the top #50 bracket, though these days she's making waves more as a commentator. Vanitika Agarwal, 23, from Uttar Pradesh, played a crucial role in India's Olympiad victory and was one of the eight players competing in the FIDE Women's World Cup.



ANNA SHTOURMAN/FIDE



“Divya’s victory is a historic step, a big breakthrough... that too, at such a young age. I hope the extensive attention it has gotten in India will inspire a lot of girls to take to the game”

VISHWANATHAN ANAND
Chess Grandmaster



CHESS GETS ITS IT GIRL

Divya’s win, along with Vaishali’s in the 2023 FIDE Women’s Grand Swiss championship, says Anand, will hopefully “inspire a lot of girls to take to the game”. It has certainly infused new energy into chess. As Emil Sutovsky, CEO of The International Chess Federation (FIDE), noted in a chat with ChessBase India recently, “Humpy embodies the tradition of chess—very classy, very reserved, very dedicated—old-fashioned in a good way. Everything that chess has been cherished about. Divya has an absolutely different approach—she is a modern-day social media star.” Sharp not only in her play but also in how she presents herself, Divya is referred to as the ‘CEO’ for her stylish formal wear. A peppy teenager otherwise, she has an aggressive attitude on the board. Her latest win is sure to make her the poster girl for the golden generation of Indian chess.

Grandmaster Abhijit Kunte, who has led India’s women’s team since 2021, appreciates the Gen Z-ers not just for their talent but also their mentality. “Vantika and Divya have a lot of energy, tantrums and know only their way,” he says. “They don’t believe that things may not happen. The previous generation always came from an underdog mentality. This generation is tremendously confident, open to experimentation and not afraid of taking risks.”

They are also unfazed by the stature and rating of their opponents. For the past two decades, China and Russia have dominated the women’s field, with China occupying the top five spots in the FIDE ranking and boasting world champions like Hou Yifan and Ju Wenjun. That gap may now be closing, feels Anand, noting how Divya and Humpy each defeated two heavily-favoured Chinese players to make it to the World Cup finals. “This establishes India as a country that can hold its own against China,” said Anand. “The Chinese still have a lot of depth and are the number one country in the women’s section, but now we can field a full competitive team. The rivalry will be interesting to watch.” One may not have to wait for long, given that both Divya and Humpy have qualified for Candidates 2026, a tough tournament that determines the challenger to world champion Ju Wenjun.

For the moment, though, it is women’s chess that is the real winner. In an interview to *Sports Today*, Divya said, “I was very happy when Humpy reached the finals because, for Indian chess, it’s a great thing... Whether I win or Humpy wins, Indian girls would take inspiration either way.” For Humpy, the GOAT of Indian women’s chess and reigning world champion in the rapid chess format, the attention devoted to the FIDE Cup has been heartening and a stark contrast to when she competed. “I have reached the semis and won the bronze four times in this championship, but no one actu-

ally knew about it, or even bothered. Even when I was world number two for many years, there wasn't this kind of attention. Today, thanks to social media and live-streaming, there's increased passion for the game among the common man."

Women's chess in India has come a long way from the time of Bombay's Khadilkar Sisters—Vasanti, Jayshree and Rohini—recognised as pioneers of the game. The trio dominated the National Women's Chess Championship since its inception in 1974 up to 1984. The likes of Bhagyashree Sathe Thipsay, Anupama Gokhale née Abhyankar and Subbaraman Vijayalakshmi fared well at the Asia level, but it was with Humpy that an Indian woman made an impact on the global scene; she remains the only Indian to be a challenger to the world champion in 2011. She'd win the world junior title and become the second female player after the legendary Judith Polgár to exceed the 2600 Elo rating mark.

GETTING PAST THE GLASS CEILING

Still, her solitary exploits haven't made India a chess powerhouse. While Humpy has seen doors open for her female peers, be it with the number of dedicated tournaments, the increase in prize money or the rise in corporate sponsorships, chess remains out of reach for many. Training costs are high and tournaments are often held abroad, and women struggle to survive professionally. While Humpy is happy about the increase in accessibility to training resources with the internet, the ability to rope in top coaches and seconds (aides who help a player prepare for and analyse games) comes at a steep price. In an interview to INDIA TODAY in December 2024, Divya noted that progress has been made, but what is lacking is investment in "young talents who need it". Even a prodigy like her has no sponsors and depends on cash prizes and her doctor parents to foot the costs. The FIDE Cup win, one hopes, changes things for Divya just as it did for Gukesh.

The ratio of male to female players in India continues to be skewed in favour of the former. It's best reflected in how, out of India's 88 Grandmasters, only four are women. No Indian woman has been world champion. Much of this disparity boils down to opportunity, feels Kunte. "If you see the men's calendar, it is full. They don't have time with tournaments on the FIDE circuit, Freestyle Chess, open tournaments and leagues." Women-only tournaments with a decent winners' fee are few and far between. "For women to show their class, they have to wait," adds Kunte. "They don't have an option and have to fight it out with men in the open section—which is tough. Some people get dejected by the performances. It's not just about ac-



ANDREY ANOSOV/FIDE

“Even when I was world number two for many years, there wasn't this kind of attention. Today, thanks to social media, there's increased passion for the game among the common man”

KONERU HUMPY
India's first female chess Grandmaster

cumulating experience, you also want to build a career in the sport." There's hope, though, as tournaments like Tata Steel India, which have equal prize pools for men and women, show that gender parity may slowly be making its way into chess.

The onus falls on women, too, to improve their game. Ask any top female player and they all emphasise the significance of playing against men to raise their calculative power. "Having women-only tournaments is good for professional players to sustain careers but, to improve, you definitely need to compete with men [in open tournaments]," says Humpy. "Only playing women tournaments can lead to stagnation because the number of players is limited and you end up meeting the same ones often. The chances of the mind fighting further and finding an improvisational way is less." Divya herself competed in two open events in Prague and Wijk aan Zee in the Netherlands early this year and had a tough run of results, including losing a classical game to an 11-year-old. Anand agrees with Humpy's

assessment, saying, "Perhaps Divya playing these difficult tournaments is what culminated in this [World Cup] victory."

Efforts are being made to increase female participation in the game. The All India Chess Federation (AICF) runs The Smart Girl Project aimed at grassroots development and early engagement with the game. Additionally, in the first quarter, it distributed quarterly stipends ranging from Rs 60,000-1,50,000 to 21 top female players across the under-7 and under-19 categories to support players' coaching and travel needs, enabling them to compete globally. "Our goal is to create a robust, inclusive ecosystem, where every girl with a passion for chess finds opportunity, support, and recognition," says Nitin Narang, president of AICF. The Federation has hosted two editions of FIDE Women's Grand Prix events in recent years, giving Indian players the necessary international exposure.

In addition to equal attention, equal respect is another thing women chess players could do with. Much like their compatriots in cricket and football, they, too, have to strive for credence and to be taken seriously. In a viral post shared in January 2024, Divya detailed her frustrations about the excessive scrutiny women in the game face, particularly with regard to their appearance. "I got told by people how the audience was not even bothered with the game but instead focused on every single other possible thing in the world—my clothes, hair, accent and every other irrelevant thing," she wrote. "...The sad truth is that when women play chess, people often overlook how good they actually are... Women are underappreciated... [they] should start getting equal respect." With her latest win, Divya may have earned exactly that for her cohort. ■

IndiaContent

**SEARCH FOR
EDITORIAL IMAGES
ENDS HERE**





सबसे भरोसेमंद स्रोतों 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 पते पर भेज दें- वी केअर, लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लि. सी-9, सेक्टर-10, नोएडा 201301 (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 माव्य नहीं होंगे) के लिए बनवाया गया है।

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहां स्कैन करें।

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

कॉल और Whatsapp के लिए
+91 8597778778

ईमेल भेजें
wecare@intoday.com

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

LE ! SURE

ART EXHIBITION: SOUTH ASIA UNFRAMED PG 54

THE LISTICLE: OTT AND THEATRICAL RELEASES PG 59



SPEAK, INDIA
Truschke aims at including a greater diversity of voices than is usually found in South Asian history

BOOKS ▶

RETHINKING INDIAN HISTORY

AUDREY TRUSCHKE'S DEEP DIVE INTO 5,000 YEARS OF INDIAN HISTORY QUESTIONS SEVERAL PERSISTENT MYTHS ABOUT INDIA

The Panchatantra is possibly the second-most circulated book ever (behind the Bible). Shiva and Krishna became popular gods only after the Vedic period, displacing Indra, Varuna and Soma. Along with Buddhism and Jainism, the Ajivika tradition was the third major religion to emerge in the fifth century BCE, but did not survive, unlike the other two. These are some of the fascinating mini-stories in *India: 5,000 Years of History on the Subcontinent* by the historian and Rutgers University professor Audrey Truschke.

In this sweeping overview of five millennia, Truschke synthesises existing scholarship into an account that runs from the Indus Valley civilisation to the present. So why did an academic historian venture into popular history?

"I remain convinced that historians can and should write for broad audiences," says Truschke, in an email interview. This book emerged after she was approached by Princeton University Press. "I hope that the book introduces Indian history to an entirely new audience in the United States and contributes to the embattled project to maintain fidelity to history in India."

Part of that involves undoing persistent myths about India. For instance, Muslim rulers were not the only ones sacking places of worship, Hindu and Buddhist kings, too, frequently raided sacred sites. Or the idea that subcontinental rule is split into broad periods: Hindu rule until 1200 CE, Muslim rule until the 1750s and, finally, colonial rule. "The Hindu/Muslim/British periodisation of Indian history was designed to make the British look good and was, completely unsurprisingly, invented by the British," she says. "This dichotomy overemphasises the role of religion in Indian history and erases other religions. I think this triptych formulation should be discarded entirely, only men-

tioned as a point of intellectual history having to do with colonial domination and its long afterlives."

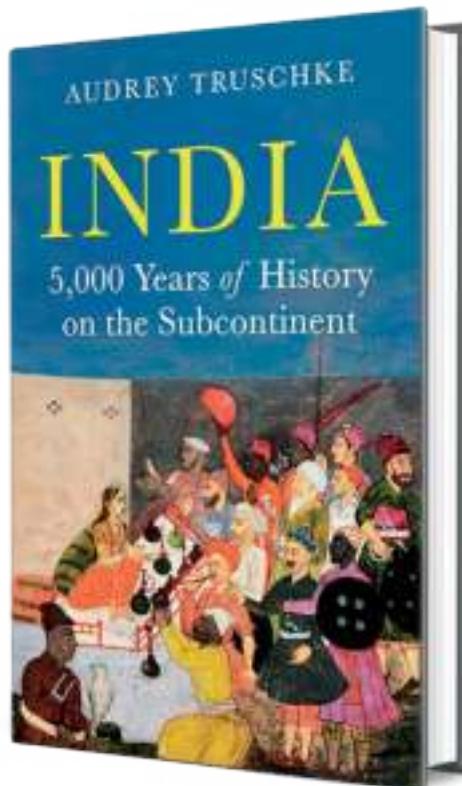
This ambitious narrative is an engaging overview, featuring many familiar dynasties, characters and polities. But part of the effort was to make the telling more inclusive through, Truschke writes, "a greater diversity of voices than we often hear in South Asian history in terms of gender, caste, class, region, language and religion." For instance, southern India gets as much space as the north; we are told that the Cholas were both builders of iconic temples and overseers of harsh slavery practices. We hear about an intercaste and inter-religious event from 1745 near Pondicherry as narrated in the private diary of a Tamilian working

for the French East India Company.

"The views, actions and ideas of dominant groups are nearly always more well preserved in the historical record, but I found riches of more diverse voices in Indian history," she says. "In part, I looked to under-used sources and, here, familiarity with the vast literary traditions of pre-modern India was helpful. I also read more well-worn sources against the grain. Such that, for example, I let Manu—a premodern Brahmin patriarch and law theorist—tell readers about his prize of inequality as the organising feature of a good society. I also read Manu's text through the eyes of those he condemns to lesser status and seeks to oppress, including women and Dalits."

Caste became entrenched in the

ONE OF THE SURPRISES THAT CAME TRUSCHKE'S WAY WAS FINDING OUT THAT THE ROMANTIC STORY BEHIND THE TAJ MAHAL WAS LARGELY TRUE

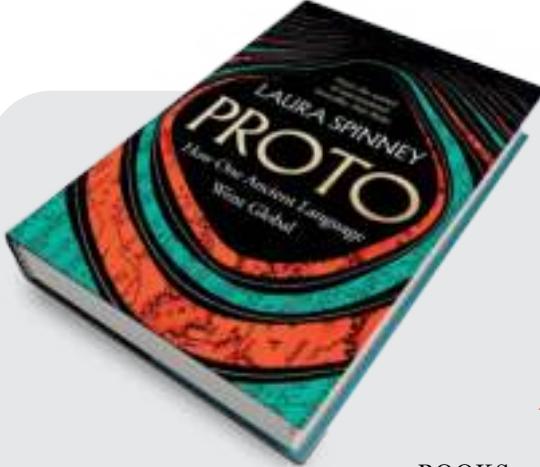


INDIA
5,000 Years of History
on the Subcontinent
By Audrey Truschke
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRESS
₹1,299; 712 pages

early to mid first millennium CE, around the same time temple-based practices, sati and widow remarriage prohibitions “emerged or were solidified”. “Even in 2025, Hinduism is a notably diverse religion, but nearly all of its signature features we know today emerged within the last 2,000 years, with a number occurring during the 18th and 19th-century Hindu reform movements,” says Truschke. “Two things that go back to the beginning (i.e., the Vedic period around 3,000 years ago) are an emphasis on ritual and an embrace of plurality. People ask how Hinduism has survived so long, and it is certainly an outlier in longevity. The answer is that Hinduism changed to survive, over and over.”

Even for Truschke, a professor of South Asian history, there were surprising revelations. “One that stands out in my mind concerns the love story around the Taj Mahal, which Shah Jahan built for his deceased wife, Mumtaz Mahal,” she says. “I had long discounted the romantic tale that they shared a genuine love. However, upon reviewing the evidence, I now think it’s more likely than not that they shared genuine affection, a rarity indeed among Indian royalty.” ■

—Bhavya Dore



PROTO How One Ancient Language Went Global
By Laura Spinney
WILLIAM COLLINS
₹599; 352 pages

BOOKS ▼

Mother Tongue

LAURA SPINNEY'S PROTO IS AN ACCESSIBLE GUIDE TO THE ORIGINS OF INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Are you the kind of reader who knows your R1a from their R1b? Your Yamanaya from your Sintashta? Corded Ware from Bell-Beaker? Your Cucuteni-Trypillia from your Hurrians? A ‘yes’ at any point in this inquisition is a dealmaker: Laura Spinney’s *Proto* is a book for you...Nerd.

In fact, this book joins a clutch of remarkably popular volumes addressing the seemingly arcane intersection of archaeological, genetic and linguistic research into the

of these, such as the Anatolian and Tocharian languages, are now extinct. Others such as the Indo-Iranian family, from which most North Indian languages derive, are still vital or even viral. A science journalist, whose prescient previous book, *Pale Rider* (2017), was about the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, Spinney is a confident narrator of complex subjects that require glosses of technical detail as well as expansive historical or geographical context.

marred by a small but persistent confusion about Sanskrit epigraphy. At several points in her narrative, Spinney informs us that the Rig Veda was ‘written’ in or around 1500 BC. While this is a date conventionally ascribed to the composition of this text, Spinney seems to suggest there is physical evidence of a Sanskrit/Vedic document of this antiquity. In fact, the earliest deciphered writing in India is in the form of the Ashokan edicts from 260 BC, more than a millennium later. And even these are not, of course, Vedic or in Sanskrit. (Nor, strictly speaking, are the 1500 BC texts from the Mitanni kingdom in Syria that Spinney also gestures at.)

PROTO ADDRESSES THE INTERSECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL, GENETIC AND LINGUISTIC RESEARCH INTO THE PEOPLING OF THE WORLD

peopling of the globe. *Proto* is an account of the origins and dispersal of Indo-European languages, now spoken by more than half the world. It’s a story that runs from the hypothesised ‘Ursprache’ (Proto Indo-European, or PIE), Urheimat (most likely the Eurasian steppe) and Urvoik (a fecund, fast-moving and arguably violence-prone community of early bronze age nomadic pastoralists) to several clusters of linguistic descendants. Some

In *Proto*, she has taken on a fast-moving area of research where work is often updated or superseded with brutal speed. Yet, she has an engaging conversational pace and a talent for the evanescent moment—whether it’s tea and conversation with the late archaeologist Colin Renfrew or witnessing the excavation of a Yamanaya kurgan (a Bronze Age burial mound) amidst the Russian offensive on Ukraine.

Unfortunately, *Proto* is

This puzzling lapse may be particularly disconcerting for South Asian readers, since it does disservice to the remarkable oral traditions surrounding the Vedic corpus, while also playing into the more recent tendency to exaggerate the antiquity of all things Indic. Hopefully, Spinney will address the confusion in a future edition of this otherwise absorbing and informative book. ■

—Kai Friesen

CREATING CONNECTIONS

The Serendipity Arts Festival announces a star-studded line-up of curators for its upcoming 10th edition



KNOWN FOR ITS SCALE AS WELL AS ITS INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURE, SAF WILL BE HELD BETWEEN DEC. 12 AND 21 IN PANJIM, GOA

The Serendipity Arts Festival (SAF), the first edition of which was held in Goa in December 2016, is approaching its landmark 10th edition later this year, to be held between December 12 and 21 in Panjim, Goa. SAF is known for its scale as well as its interdisciplinary nature; art, literature, music, theatre, dance, photography, etc. are all represented every year. In that vein, the festival has announced a star-studded line-up of 35+ curators across disciplines, all of whom have been involved with the festival in the past as well—musicians Ehsaan Noorani and Aneesh Pradhan, actor-director Lillete Dubey, curator Rahaab Allana, artist Sudarshan Shetty, poet and cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote, theatre director Anuradha Kapur and many others.

“As we mark the milestone 10th edition of the Serendipity Arts Festival,” said the festival’s founder and patron Sunil Kant Munjal during an interview, “we continue to focus on the values of inclusivity, ac-

cessibility, diversity, sustainability and collaboration in the arts. When I look at this festival’s trajectory, I see a nicely-paced evolution; a relatively modest-sized project (when it began) has become one of the largest interdisciplinary arts festivals in the region. Unlike conventional arts platforms or white-cube spaces that separate art forms, Serendipity encourages cross-pollination between music, dance, theatre, visual arts, craft, photography and culinary arts.”

Since the inception of the festival, accessibility has been emphasised at

SAF. In the 10th edition, writer and disability activist Salil Chaturvedi will curate acts led by deaf and mute artists and performers. There will also be workshops catering to special needs audiences. The COVID years, especially, were a learning

experience for the SAF team, particularly in terms of holding audience interest for sustained periods.

“People need human connection, especially in the digital world,” Munjal said. “While digital media and remote setups provide convenience, they’ve also caused digital fatigue. Conversely, a real journey with the arts can be immersive, restorative and transformative. Watching something on a screen can never quite match the rising heartbeat that comes from watching a moving performance by a person onstage. Yet, cultural events also need to harness the power of the digital world. This helps amplify their reach while staying true to the wonder and marvel of an in-person experience.” ■

—Aditya Mani Jha



EXHIBITION ▼

South Asia Unframed

DELHI CONTEMPORARY ART WEEK RETURNS

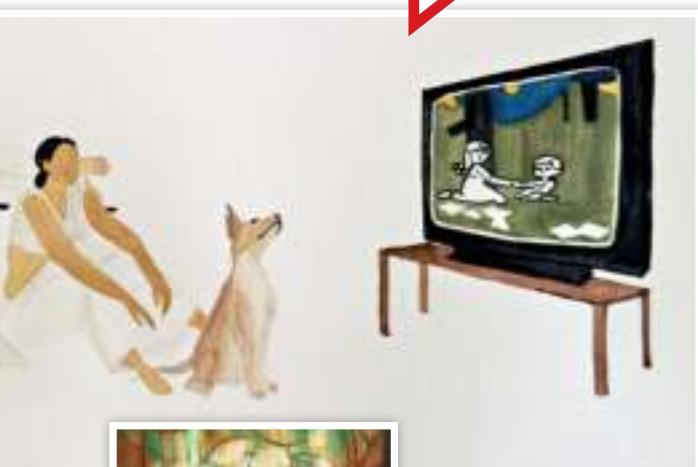
WITH DIVERSE CURATIONS EXPLORING MEMORY, IDENTITY, DISPLACEMENT AND THE INTERSECTIONS OF ART, DESIGN AND LANGUAGE

The 8th edition of the Delhi Contemporary Art Week—a creative alliance forged by six women-led galleries—will once again showcase the best of South Asian art and contemporary voices, with each gallery bringing its unique curatorial vision and artistic strengths.

Blueprint12’s presentation will bring together a group of emerging artists whose practices are rooted in a shared exploration of memory, place and the invisible structures—social, political and digital—which shape contemporary life. “We’re foregrounding artists who

LINES OF THOUGHT

'Women at Leisure - Yaadein' by Jayati Bose; (below) Anju Dodiya's 'Green Room'



defy binaries—of visibility and erasure, intimacy and politics, tradition and innovation,” says Mandira Lamba, director, Blueprint12. Exhibit 320 will present *Where the Dust Settles*, which traces the submerged roots of forced displacement and its reverberations in bureaucratic violence. “Our presentation explores how recurring motifs and techniques are not merely stylistic choices, but essential tools in shaping an artist’s visual language and articulating their unique vision within the broader discourse of visual literacy,” adds Renu Modi, founder-director, Gallery Espace.

Latitude 28 will present *In-Between/Beyond*, an exhibit that brings

together 17 contemporary artists from across South Asia who navigate shifting landscapes, embodied transitions and the porous boundary between truth and fiction. Vadehra Art Gallery will present *Intimacy/Ecstasy*, a curatorial exploration of the liminal nature of boundaries. Further, Shrine Empire will engage with themes that span community politics, urban migration, gender and identity, memory and nostalgia, and so on.

The show will be accompanied by a sculpture display and *Taqiya Kalam*, a curated, design-forward exhibition that reflects on the influence of language in shaping ideologies and realities. “The project brings together functional design and contemporary sculptural practices, exploring the intersection of form, materiality and spatial aesthetics, and expanding how we experience art and design in tandem,” explains Bhavna Kakar, founder-director, Latitude 28. ■

—Neha Kirpal

At Bikaner House, New Delhi, from Aug. 30-Sept. 4

EXHIBITION ▾

CRAFTING MODERN MYTHS

THREE ARTISTS REIMAGINE MEMORY, IDENTITY AND TRADITION TO CRAFT A MYTHOLOGY ROOTED IN THE PERSONAL

As Indian art continues to navigate the terrain between inherited traditions and modern complexities, *The Personal is Mythical* offers a timely and thought-provoking lens. On view at Latitude 28 in Delhi until August 31, the exhibition—curated by Bhavna Kakar—brings together three distinct voices: Bhajju Shyam, Neha Sahai, and Viraj Khanna. Each artist explores how personal memory and lived experience can evolve into mythologies of their own.

“Myth is often seen as distant or inherited,” says Kakar. “With this exhibition, I wanted to show how memory, identity and longing have the power to create myth—how the personal, often dismissed as anecdotal, holds collective resonance.”

Shyam, one of the most celebrated names in the Pardhan Gond tradition, transforms oral storytelling into intricate visual symbols that bridge

Clockwise from right, artworks by Viraj Khanna, Neha Sahai, Bhajju Shyam



ancestral knowledge and the contemporary moment. Sahai crafts surreal, feminine dreamscapes—moody, cross-species narratives that confront patriarchal ideals while offering alternative, intimate worlds. Khanna, known for his textile installations, presents bold acrylic portraits that interrogate the performance of identity in a hyper-consumerist world—a striking shift in medium that signals a new direction.

The Personal is Mythical prompts viewers to recognise the sacred in the intimate—to see memory, daily rituals and inner lives as myth-making acts. “Myth isn’t just something we inherit, it’s something we create,” says Kakar. “In this exhibition, it becomes something deeply personal and powerfully resonant.” ■

—Geetika Sachdev



BENEATH THE MASK

Pratik Gandhi on his role as a morally grey spy in period thriller *Saare Jahan Se Accha*

Five years ago, Pratik Gandhi had his career breakthrough with *Scam 1992*. He's been a busy bee since, casting a spell on both streaming and the big screen (*Madgaon Express*, *Do Dooni Chaar*). Which makes it all the more surprising that it's only now that he's making his Netflix series debut with *Saare Jahan Se Accha*. "We were both waiting for something to work on together," says Gandhi, who found the "perfect script" in the 1960s-set spy thriller. For Tanya Bami, Netflix India's series head, it was about time. "If we had our way, we would have had Pratik come on to a series way sooner."

Just don't bet on rooting for the spy he portrays. Gandhi quotes a line from the show to explain: "A good human being cannot be a good spy." "There's a constant conflict, a moral dilemma, a line that he wants to cross, but is not able to," notes Gandhi. "He wants to be the country's biggest asset and save it, but the other side of his character is difficult to ignore." A patriot he may be, but leading a duplicitous life takes a toll, especially on his marital life (Tillotama Shome plays the wife). Bami applauded Gandhi's "intensity", which was evident in *Scam* too. "Here, he is an earnest character, there's an emotionality, he's testing his limits and the cost at which

it comes," she adds.

Much like *Raazi*, *Saare Jahan Se Accha* also busts some tropes of the genre and aims for a not-so-lionising character study. There's no jumping off rooftops, fancy gadgets or gun battles here to highlight hypermasculinity. If anything, the show emphasises on the vocation's need to evade attention at any cost. Says Gandhi, "Spies lead complex lives. You are constantly driven by your intuitions. You have so much information and lots going on inside, but can't say

a single word." The ability to explore the deep intricacies is why Bami and her team felt the story lent itself well to the longer format. "There have been flamboyant takes of the genre, but we haven't delved much into a human-first, emotion-first way. That's the attempt."

Given the title, it's hardly surprising that Netflix opted for an Independence Day release, the long weekend offering an incentive for viewers to binge the six episodes. With Sunny Hinduja (of TVF's *Aspirants* fame)

as the ISI counterpart to Gandhi's R&AW agent, the hope is the cat-and-mouse game between the two keeps viewers hooked. Gandhi, who has already played social reformer Jyotirao Phule earlier this year and appears as Mahatma Gandhi in his next, *Saare Jahan Se Accha* enables him to essay another ideal Indian of sorts. "Spies are unsung heroes," he adds. "I feel we are celebrating their success, [something] that's traditionally never done." ■

—Suhani Singh

By not lionising its protagonist, the show focuses on how spies need to evade attention at any cost, busting the genre's hypermasculine tropes





LET LOOSE
A still from
Anurag Kashyap's
Bandar, starring
Bobby Deol

FILM ▼

India @ TIFF'25

In its 50th year, the **TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** packs a desi punch with titles that are deeply rooted in Indian identity

Anurag Kashyap's *Bandar* (Monkey in a Cage), Neeraj Ghaywan's *Homebound*, Jitank Singh Gurjar's *Vimukt* (In Search of the Sky) and Ramesh Sippy's much-celebrated *Sholay* are among the Indian films headed to

this year's Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). "We have a large selection from South Asia this year, in all formats—features, shorts and series—which doesn't happen

often at an A-list festival like Toronto," says Meenakshi Shedde, senior programme advisor, South Asia, TIFF. One of the big five film festivals in the world, TIFF 2025 will take place from September 4 to 14.

Among the 55 titles from nearly 50 countries in the festival's sprawling Centrepiece section is the Braj-language feature *Vimukt*. The film revolves around a

poverty-stricken couple and their mentally unstable son's journey to the Mahakumbh and explores themes of hope and liberation. Also premiering is *Bayaan*, a police procedural thriller helmed by writer-director Bikas Ranjan Mishra. The film is headlined by actor Huma Qureshi. *Bayaan* is the only Indian film in the festival's Discovery section, which, in the past, has launched the careers of acclaimed filmmakers like Yorgos Lanthimos, Alfonso Cuarón and Christopher Nolan.

In its 10th year, the festival's serialised storytelling section Primetime will feature the world premiere of Hansal Mehta's series *Gandhi*, headlined by Pratik Gandhi. The series is adapted from historian Ramachandra Guha's biographies that trace Gandhi's life from adolescence in colonial India to his transformative years in South Africa and beyond. ■

—Karishma Upadhyay

A FEMINIST LENS



▲ @ SAN SEBASTIAN FILM FESTIVAL

Shape of Momo

In Sikkimese filmmaker Triben Rai's debut Nepali feature, a young woman must choose between conforming to tradition or claiming her independence. A graduate of the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Rai travelled to her native villages of Nandok and Assam Lingzey for the drama revolving around women.

| Three female filmmakers will be unveiling their indie features internationally

▲ @ VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

Secrets of a Mountain Serpent

Funded by Venice's Biennale College Cinema programme, Nidhi Saxena's sophomore feature unfolds in a remote Himalayan town where a teacher Barkha (Trimala Adhikari) develops feelings for the enigmatic newcomer Manik (Adil Hussain).



▲ @ VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

Songs of Forgotten Trees



The only Indian film chosen for Venice's Horizons section, Anuparna Roy's feature debut stars Naaz Shaikh and Sumi Baghel as two migrants whose friendship tells a tale of survival and quiet rebellion.

—SS



IN THE CLOUDS

The Nilgiri tahr and (below) Great Hornbill pictured by director Sandesh Kadur in his film

DOCUMENTARY ▼

AMONG THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The award-winning film *Nilgiris—A Shared Wilderness* has been wowing audiences across India. We find out why...



The Nilgiris, southern India's majestic blue mountains spanning Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, are said to be among the oldest in the world. It's in this almost-mystical ecosystem that the film *Nilgiris—A Shared Wilderness* was conceptualised and created. The feature-length film—released in cinemas across India in mid-July—brings to life the trials and triumphs of wildlife in the Nilgiris like few have witnessed.

Director Sandesh Kadur, founder, Felis Creations, says, "While it's hard getting space and attention for a wildlife film in a country flooded by mainstream cinema, bringing wildlife stories to the mainstream is incredibly important." Executive producer Rohini Nilekani, who has deep ties to the Nilgiris, agrees. A conversation between her, her

husband Nandan Nilekani, and Kadur about the lack of full-length documentaries on the Nilgiris while walking in the forests of Coonoor a few years ago sparked the idea to make the film.

"Roughly 80 to 90 per cent of the Nilgiris has been transformed by human use. At first glance, you might wonder if any wild animals remain. But look closely, and you'll find gaur, leopards, black panthers, sambhar deer, barking deer... all quietly sharing space with humans."

It's the tolerance of local communities that makes this coexistence possible. Tea estate workers come in, animals move away. As soon as they leave, the animals return. It's an elegant ebb and flow," says Kadur. Supported by Dheeraj Films, the team felt they could push the boundaries of distribution. "Our goal was to go beyond the usual cities. In just the first weekend, we were able to screen

"WE WOULD WAIT AT A LOCATION FOR SEVERAL DAYS JUST TO GET ONE SHOT," SAYS DIRECTOR SANDESH KADUR

it to 20,000 people across the country. We're exploring an OTT release and translations into regional languages."

Nilgiris took about three years to complete, with over 500 hours of raw footage shot on Sony's top-tier gear—including the Burano, FX3 and their mirrorless systems. They also used RED cameras and a range of DJI drones to capture both sweeping landscapes and intimate wildlife moments. It was a labour of love. "We were going to the same location or waiting for that one shot for several days. We waited 70–80 days to get just one sequence of a hornbill chick fledging," says Kadur. It truly took a 'mountain of people' to make this film.

It's taken immense effort to shine a light on a region that is both deeply familiar and yet, in many ways, overlooked. "Stirring a sense of awe in the next generation is a key goal. Awe is what creates love. And if you can stir that emotion, it could lead to action," says Kadur, offering a ray of hope. ■

—Priya Pathiyam

▼ AUG. 29 |
Theatres

Param Sundari



A romcom starring the tall, dark and handsome Sidharth Malhotra, while Janhvi Kapoor brings the oomph factor. They play a North Indian and South Indian, respectively, in this Dinesh Vijan (*Stree* franchise) production shot in Kerala's backwaters. The music is by the hit-machine duo Sachin-Jigar. Will it be a retread of culture clash romances a la *2 States*, *Chennai Express* and *Aap Jaisa Koi*—or something fresh?

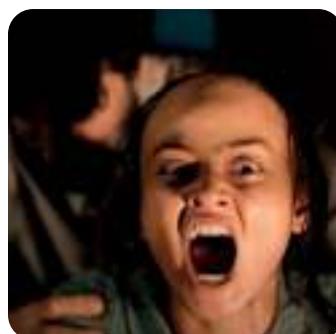
THE LISTICLE

Upcoming OTT and theatrical releases to look out for



▲ SEPT. 19 | Theatres
JOLLY LLB 3

The legal comedy franchise returns with its third installment in theatres. Arshad Warsi is back as buffoonish lawyer Jagdish Tyagi aka Jolly 1. Akshay Kumar joins him as the cunning Jagdishwar Mishra LLB aka Jolly 2. Saurabh Shukla, Huma Qureshi and Amrita Rao also reprise their roles.



▼ AUG. 29 | Theatres
VASH VIVASH 2

Krishnadev Yagnik's 2023 Gujarati horror film *Vash* earned its young star Janki Bodiwala a National Film Award. She reprised her role in its Hindi remake *Shaitaan* (2024), starring Ajay Devgn and Madhavan. It was a blockbuster. The sequel, releasing in Gujarati and Hindi, follows Aryaa (Bodiwala) encountering a new possession case in a girls' school.



▼ AUG. 14 |
Amazon Prime

Andhera

Amazon Prime Video has tasted blood after their hit release *Khauf*. A dark force is haunting Mumbai. A cop (Priya Bapat) and medical student (Karanvir Malhotra) want to know why. The Farhan Akhtar production, co-written by Karan Anshuman, also stars Surveen Chawla and Prajakta Koli.



▲ SEPT. 5 | Theatres
THE BENGAL FILES

Director Vivek Agnihotri's (*The Kashmir Files*, *The Tashkent Files*) fascination with post-independence political history continues. His new film tracks pre-Partition Hindu-Muslim riots in 1946 Bengal. Mithun Chakraborty headlines the ensemble cast.

Q+A

Entering Alien Territory

Adarsh Gourav has a juicy part in the latest edition of the *Alien* series, streaming on JioHotstar now

Q. *Alien* is an iconic franchise and Noah Hawley a top writer-director on streaming thanks to *Fargo*. Tell us how *Alien: Earth* happened.

For the past 2-3 years, I have been auditioning for parts in LA and London. I kept getting shortlisted, but nothing converted. When *Alien* went through rounds two and three of the audition and my agents said Noah wants to speak with me, I still wasn't thinking about getting it. When he called and said he was a fan of my work in *The White Tiger*, I didn't know what to say. He then offered me the part of Slightly. Next thing I knew I was in Bangkok shooting for six months.

Q. Are you a sci-fi geek?

Honestly, I wasn't, but now I am. I had only watched a few mainstream films, including Ridley Scott's *Alien*, when I was a child. When I got the part, I also watched the James Cameron and David Fincher versions and read about the entire universe. Otherwise, it'd be embarrassing if I went on set and just sat there clueless. After all I was also representing my country.

Q. The beauty of a good project in the genre is how pertinent it can be to the present. Is *Alien: Earth* doing that for you?

Absolutely. Noah is putting a giant-sized mirror in front of the audience to make them look at who they are, what they have done and what they are capable of. For me, it is a reflection of the direction society is heading in—and it's dangerous.

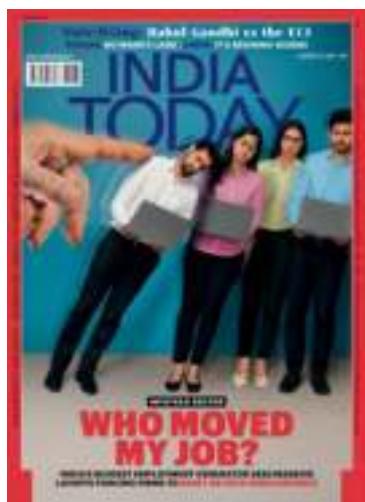
Q. It's your first international gig since *The White Tiger*. What do you hope it accomplishes?

I have been waiting in the wings for something like this. I am hungry to do better work and with directors who I respect and love, and who inspire me. The *Alien* IP and having Noah Hawley on board could hopefully help me get more exciting stuff in future.

—with Suhani Singh



Photograph by HARDIK CHHABRA



INDIA TODAY MAGAZINE ON THE WEB

INFOTECH SECTOR

WHO MOVED MY JOB?

India's biggest employment generator sees massive layoffs forcing firms to reset or face obsolescence

TO READ THE FULL ISSUE,
LOG ON TO:
www.indiatoday.in/magazine

INDIA TODAY SUPPLEMENTS ON INSTAGRAM



INDIA TODAY SPICE
[@indiatoday_spice](https://www.instagram.com/indiatoday_spice)



INDIA TODAY HOME
[@indiatoday_home](https://www.instagram.com/indiatoday_home)



INDIA TODAY MAGAZINE ON INSTAGRAM

KNOW IT AS IT HAPPENS

A go-to destination for news breaks and views on politics, sports, films and more

[@indiatodaymagazine](https://www.instagram.com/indiatodaymagazine)

INDIA TODAY DAILY NEWSLETTER

INDIA TODAY INSIGHT

Sharp analysis on topical issues by the editors of India Today magazine
www.indiatoday.in/magazine



INDIA TODAY BEST COLLEGES

YOUR CAREER GOLDMINE

India Today 2025 Best Colleges Survey — your guide to higher education in the country
<https://bestcolleges.indiatoday.in/>



INDIA TODAY ADVANTAGE
[@indiatodayadvantage](https://www.instagram.com/indiatodayadvantage)



INDIA TODAY PODCASTS



HEALTH IS WEALTH

Sonali Acharjee

A weekly podcast that promises to get you motivated about your health and well-being

<https://podcasts.indiatoday.in/health/health-wealth>

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

Raj Chengappa

A weekly podcast that dissects and simplifies a news story of significance

<https://podcasts.indiatoday.in/news/nothing-but-the-truth>





Amul Mithai



**The taste of homemade delight
in every bite.**



Kaju Katli 200 g	₹ 230	Milk Cake 200g	₹ 125	Kaju Modak 300g	₹ 299	Laung Lata 200g	₹ 105
Kesar Kaju Katli 200 g	₹ 250	Motichoor Laddoo 200g	₹ 110	Mathura Peda 200g	₹ 120	Prasadi Peda 100g	₹ 50
Gud Kaju Katli 200 g	₹ 250	Besan Laddoo 200g	₹ 120	Mysore Pak 200g	₹ 155	Kesar Modak 190 g	₹ 150
Gulab Jamun 500g Tin	₹ 130	Kaju Akhrot Plaza 200g	₹ 135	Kalakand 200g	₹ 120	Doodh Peda-Gold 200g 1+1 free	₹ 200
Sugar-free Gulab Jamun 500g Tin	₹ 210	Mohanthal 200g	₹ 115	Dry Fruit Burfi 200g	₹ 240	Rasmalai 500g	₹ 250
Gulabjamun 130g Tin (smart pack)	₹ 40	Sugar-free Malai Peda 200g	₹ 130	Gujiya 350g	₹ 290	Rasmalai 100g	₹ 50
Rosogolla 500g Tin	₹ 115	Kesar Kopra Pak 200g	₹ 120	Lal Peda 200g	₹ 130	Angoori Rasmalai 500g	₹ 250
Malai Peda 200g	₹ 120	Rajwadi Halwa 200g	₹ 120	Kheer 180g	₹ 45	Smart Pack Malai Peda 240g	₹ 160
Kesar Peda 200g	₹ 125	Kalajamun 500g	₹ 130	Rabri 85g	₹ 25		

Upcoming Products: Kunda 200g, Rabdi Jalebi 300g, Mawa Barfi 200g, Angoori Rasmalai 100g, Sweet Khoa 200g

Available on:

//shop.amul.com



zepto



Contact us for corporate
orders and gifting.
E-mail: amulsweets@amul.coop



SHOP NOW

and at all Amul Parlours and leading retail stores.