

Indo-US: Dealing with the Trump Shocker

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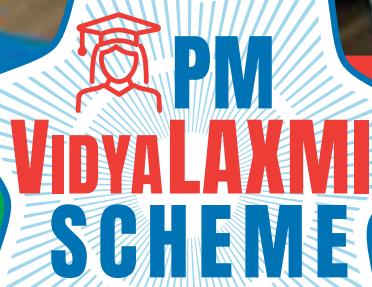
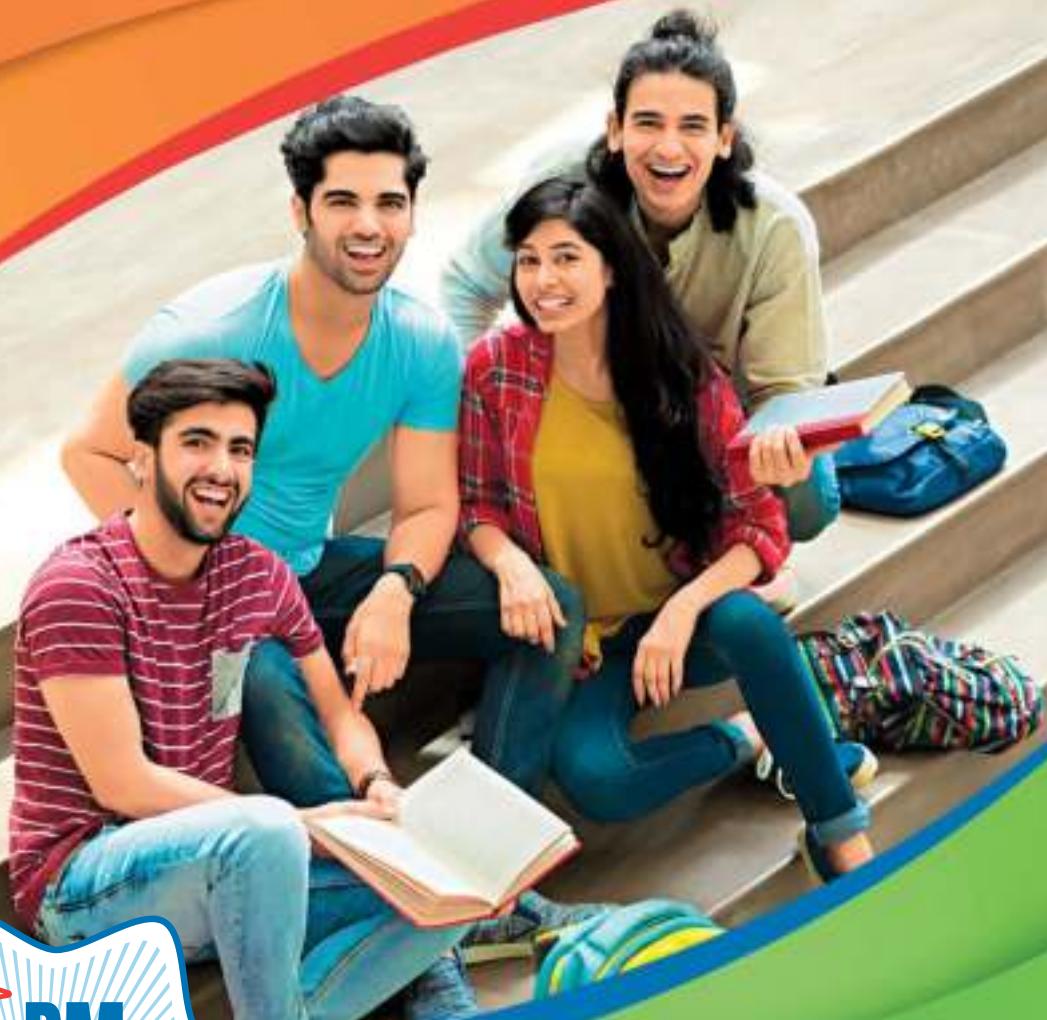


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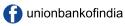
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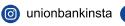
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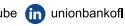
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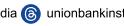
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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When the Indian cricket squad for England was announced in late May, expectations were low. Earlier that month, cricketing greats Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma had hung up their boots within five days of each other. The selectors felt it was a good time to experiment. It would be a new-look team, an untested combination under debutant skipper Shubman Gill. Tall and willowy, he was already an icon of swashbuckling strokeplay. Now, at age 25, he was being tested as captain in a prestigious away series. It was baptism by fire for both him and the New Gen XI he was leading. In the batting line-up around him, K.L. Rahul had class and copybook poise, young Yashasvi Jaiswal was a model of southpaw elegance, and vice-captain Rishabh Pant could stir up a storm. But they would need to stand on their own, not merely be flamboyant add-on flavours. On the bowling side, India had the world-class Jasprit Bumrah, but he was injury-prone. That left only a second line of defence in Mohammed Siraj, Akash Deep and Prasidh Krishna. So, when the series began, no one foresaw that Indian cricket was heading for a historic rite of passage.

Like India, the England team, too, was 'under construction', so to speak. Joe Root, who became the second most prolific run-scorer in Test history in this series, was the only elder statesman. Headed by the highly talented Ben Stokes, it was essentially a team of spunky rookies who thrived on the aggression of 'Bazball'—a spiffy name for T20-style tactics deployed in Test cricket. As it happened, the battle of the colts turned out to be what Bollywood calls a full *paisa vasool* entertainer. There was heartbreak and tears, plenty of twists and thrills, arcs of redemption and scenes of delirious joy. There were innings of magnificent beauty and true grit with bat and spells of magic with ball. It was as vital and thrilling an advertisement for Test cricket as any we have seen in the age of T-20 cricket. A total of 7,000+ runs were scored across the five Tests, the second highest aggregate in history. India scored 3,807 runs in all, the most by any team in a five-match series. Three Indian batters—Gill, Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja—crossed 500 runs, a first in India-England Tests. A total of 21 centuries came about, the most in any India-England series. Again, India had 12, England 9.

This glut of runs came because the home team had prepared a series of flat tracks, shorn of grass. Often, there was no mystery of the moving ball to solve, a feature of cricket in England. Yet, Indian pacers extracted more

life out of those unhelpful belters than their English counterparts. Alion-hearted Siraj bowled an incredible 185.3 overs, with nip, swing, cut and some unseen laser guidance system that kept him on the stumps. Topping with 23 wickets, Siraj deservedly starred in the heart-stopping climax at The Oval, with Krishna getting his share of scalps. Akash Deep's 10-wicket haul helped India to its first win, at Edgbaston. Jadeja and Washington Sundar are in reality both batting all-rounders, and got crucial centuries at crunch moments, but their tight, disciplined spin gave cover fire. Together, incredibly, this bowling collective filled in for the in-and-out maestro, Bumrah, not letting the team feel the weight of his absence when he couldn't take the field, as in the final match.

Both teams had a higher-than-usual share of newbies on apprenticeship, so the cricket may have been sometimes short of the highest calibre. But the competitiveness was so intense, and the spirits so unflagging, that it produced the most engrossing Test cricket. Even though the series ended with the honours shared at 2-2, the heart-stopping narrative lurched towards that happy ending in such a way that it felt like a win for India. That's why former

India captain Sunil Gavaskar called India's six-run triumph in the final match at The Oval "the greatest of wins in Indian cricket history".

Above all, there was Gill himself. His all-time record of 754 runs became emblematic of the summits that were being scaled. It's also the way he made them, digging deep into hitherto untapped reservoirs of patience, crafting his runs around time. He was thinking not only as a batsman, but as a captain, the two faculties fused in him like mature wine. Mirroring him was an entire team that now appears like a full starburst. In

each of its new components, one saw cricketing skills adapt and grow in stature as well as depth, while passing the test of temperament. India's generation next is unfazed by pressure and expectations, and ready for a challenge. There's depth in batting and an abundance of fast bowlers. And there's the never-say-die spirit, the gamesmanship and the ability to hold one's ground.

In this week's cover story, Nikhil Naz, Consulting Editor, Sports, India Today TV, who was following the series, honours this epoch-turning moment where, under rainy English skies, grit and character glowed in the furnace, turning our boys to men.



▲ July 15, 2024



(Aroon Purie)

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THE NEW GEN XI

A fresh breed of tenacious youngsters led by Shubman Gill come of age in England



GETTY IMAGES

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► INDO-US TIES

DEALING WITH THE TRUMP SHOCKER

As Trump hands out a punitive 50 per cent tariff on India, the government crafts a measured response while protecting Indian interests

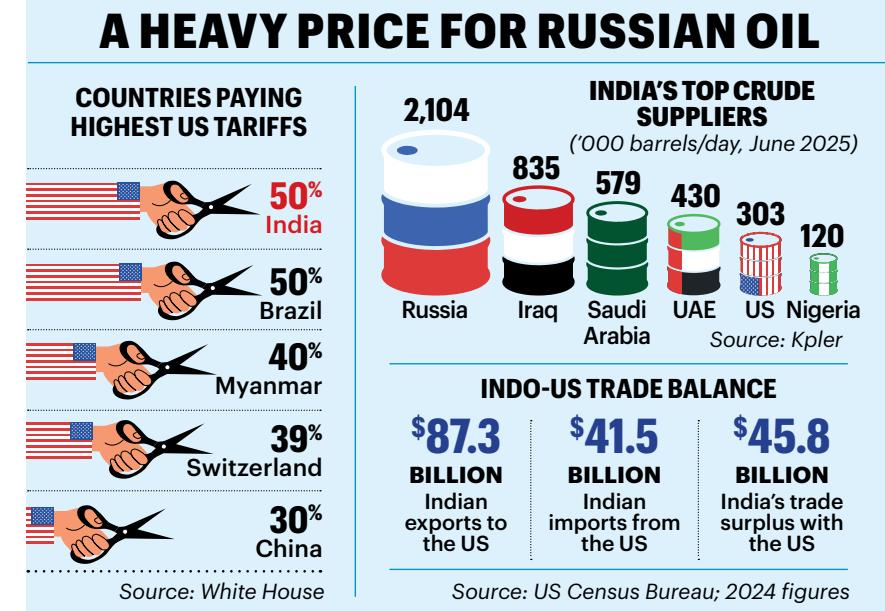
By RAJ CHENGAPPA

NOT SINCE BILL CLINTON IN 1998, WHEN he threatened to “come down like a ton of bricks” after India conducted its nuclear tests, has a serving US president spoken so derogatorily about India as Donald Trump did in a series of posts on Truth Social recently. On July 30, Trump accused India of having “the most strenuous and obnoxious non-monetary Trade Barriers for any Country” and then went on to add that India is “Russia’s largest buyer of energy, along with China, at a time when everyone wants Russia TO STOP THE KILLING IN UKRAINE – ALL THINGS NOT GOOD!” Trump then slammed India with a tariff of 25 per cent—to kick in on August 7—and warned that he would be imposing an additional penalty if India continued to buy oil from Russia. A day later, in yet another post on social media, Trump said he did not care if India and Russia “take their dead economies down together”. On August 6, Trump

went ahead and imposed an additional 25 per cent ad valorem duty, to apply within 21 days, pushing the average duty on Indian exports to the US to 50 per cent. Along with Brazil, India now has the highest trade tariffs imposed on it, with even China, whom Trump regards as his archrival, facing tariffs of only up to 30 per cent.

The only saving grace for India is that key exports to the US, such as electronics, pharmaceuticals and petroleum products, which constitute around 40 per cent of India's total merchandise exports of \$87.3 billion (approx. Rs 7.6 lakh crore), are still exempt from such tariffs. Nor is there any indication so far of Trump calling off trade negotiations with India, with the US team likely to visit New Delhi in the last week of August for the sixth round of talks to clinch a larger deal. This prompts Ajay Srivastava, founder, Global Trade Research Institute, and a former Indian trade negotiator, to say, "These are just pressure tactics that Trump is well known for. He is not fed up with India, otherwise he would announce the termination of the deal. I see this as a pause in the negotiations, a comma, not a full stop."

The Modi government, though, was understandably peeved with Trump speaking disparagingly of India and slamming it with such heavy tariffs even as he claimed that India was a "friend". India's response was measured but firm, with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a statement denouncing the 50 per cent hike as "unfair, unjustifiable and unreasonable", and that it would take "all actions necessary to protect India's national interests". But with the 25 per cent tariff coming into effect from August 7, Indian exporters were deeply concerned about their ability to absorb the hikes and remain competitive. The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) described it as "a severe setback" that would impact over 55 per cent of Indian shipments to the US. Once the additional 25 per cent penalty tariff comes into effect,



they fear, it could result in a 30-35 per cent competitive disadvantage vis-a-vis India's peers. The textile and apparel market is likely to be the one to feel the immediate impact, given the heavy competition it faces from China and Vietnam for the US market.

BOLT FROM THE BLUE

For India, Trump's hostile approach came as a nasty shock, as only this February, the US president had invited Modi to visit him at the White House

last month, there was talk of a mini-deal that would enable India to get a lower tariff from the blanket 26 per cent Trump had imposed on most countries that was to come into effect on August 1. India had indicated its willingness to lower its high tariffs on manufacturing and industrial goods that averaged 17 per cent as compared to the 2 per cent the US imposed on similar goods that India exported to it. But it baulked when the US insisted on India opening its agricultural and

Indian exporters fear the additional tariffs will result in a 30-35 per cent competitive disadvantage vis-a-vis their peers

and the two leaders exhibited a rare camaraderie, pledging to raise Indo-US ties to a new high. Both sides committed to pushing bilateral trade to a record \$500 billion annually by 2030 from the current \$212 billion (approx. Rs 18.6 lakh crore) and agreed to negotiate a comprehensive trade deal by Fall. The two countries also decided to enhance their strategic cooperation in defence as well as critical and emerging technologies. Trade negotiations began in earnest soon after and, till

dairy sector to American farmers for crops such as maize and soya, besides butter and cheese.

India's agricultural concerns are twofold: one, US farmers use Genetically Modified (GM) crops that India has never permitted save cotton; two, with agriculture accounting for close to 40 per cent of the labour force in India, massive imports would result in job losses and be detrimental to the sector. As for US dairy products, India is concerned with the feed practices



THE OTHER HANDSHAKE

Russian president Vladimir Putin with NSA Ajit Doval in St Petersburg, Sept. 12, 2024

American farmers employ for cows—it has in its mix byproducts like blood, meat and bone meal, all of which violate Indian food safety and cultural norms. While India had agreed for concessions on horticultural imports like apples and dry fruits, it drew clear red lines on grain and dairy products. A day after the Trump tariffs came into effect, PM Modi at an agriculture conference in Delhi asserted, “For us, the interests of our farmers are the highest priority. India will never compromise on their interests. I’ll personally have to pay a very heavy price for this, but I am ready.”

Most experts regard Trump's trade offensive as part of a high-stakes gambit: hustling India into reducing its trade barriers or agreeing to higher US tariffs is also a tangential attack on its import of crude oil from Russia, and choking that flow is a means to get a recalcitrant Russia to agree to a quick end to the Ukraine war. The MEA was only too quick to point out the double standards of Trump's moves, revealing how both the US and Europe till recently had encouraged India to buy Russian oil at prices they had capped, in a bid to reduce the volatility in global oil prices. Also, China was buying over 2 billion barrels a day from Russia, a little more than what India was buying and yet

Experts advise India to keep its cool, avoid counter-tariffs and continue to negotiate while finding alternative markets

Trump did not force Beijing to cut supply as US manufacturers depend heavily on imports from it.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE LATEST TRUMP STORM

So, how should India deal with a Trump on a global rampage? Syed Akbaruddin, India's former Permanent Representative to the UN, points out that Trump pushing India to cut back on oil from Russia was “more tactical than strategic”. According to him, “In the past too, trade disputes have resulted in debilitating battles between the US and Europe and even Japan but rarely led to a rupture of ties. India and the US have strategic convergence, including on defence and taking on China, so there is a lot more that binds the two nations together.” The best-case scenario for India is for Russia and the

US to reach an early deal on Ukraine, which could see India get off the hook. His advice: if it doesn't happen, India should keep its cool, not retaliate with counter-tariffs and continue to negotiate while finding alternative markets.

The Modi government has been clear that India is not going to roll over and yield to the US. The MEA indicated that Modi is likely to attend the August 31 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Tianjin, his first visit to China since 2018. He is likely to have a bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping, which should send a strong message to Trump about India's policy of strategic autonomy.

Meanwhile, in the US, there was visible discomfort among experts over Trump's India-bashing. Sumit Ganguly, senior fellow at the Hoover Institute, says, “The US president's current approach to India is short-sighted and counterproductive. It risks undermining all the progress that has been made in US-India relations in the past couple of decades. India shouldn't yield on US demands to open up agriculture; we all know it would be disastrous.” Ganguly also points out how India is a potential market for America's high-end weaponry and is certainly not a “dead economy”. So, there is a limit to how much Trump can undermine such an important economic and strategic relationship.

Other experts believe that India needs to do some heavy lifting by coming up with an investment package for the US that has a long gestation period. That would give Trump a short-term win, and may induce him to ease the tariffs. The overall expectation is that while Indo-US relations would be bumpy and painful in the short run, with costs to the Indian economy, this also provides India an opportunity to find other trade partners and expand its sphere of influence instead of keeping all its eggs in one basket—the American one. ■



SHADE OF SAFFRON

The acquittal of all seven accused in the 2006 Malegaon blast case by a special NIA court on July 31 has put the spotlight back on two once-powerful officers. As Union home secretary in 2013, **R.K. Singh** had backed the UPA's claims of right-wing extremist involvement; indeed, Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed says he had coined the term "saffron terror". Ironically, RK later joined the BJP and was a Union minister (2019-24). His defence now is that he was only repeating what the NIA told him. Meanwhile, former ATS officer Mehboob Mujawar has alleged that then ACP **Param Bir Singh** had ordered the arrest of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in the case. Param Bir, who rose to become Mumbai police commissioner and was later suspended in an extortion case, got a clean chit in 2022 when the Shiv Sena (Shinde)-BJP government revoked his suspension. Guess your fate depends on which side of history you are on.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ WASHINGTON LOBBY

PAYNE POINT

Stephen Payne, a Bush-era Republican lobbyist with deep West Asia connections, has emerged as Islamabad's go-to man in Washington—and a growing headache for New Delhi. Since landing a \$1.5 million-a-year contract with Pakistan's Islamabad Policy Research Institute in October 2024, Payne has quietly steered Islamabad's D.C. narrative, especially during Operation Sindoor. With back



channels to Trumpworld, he has shaped talking points on Afghanistan, arms and the diaspora, often leaving South Block scrambling. From oil exploration buzz to crypto-friendly pitches to even a Nobel Peace Prize plug for Pakistan, Payne's is believed to be the invisible hand. The showstopper Trump-Gen. Asim Munir lunch? That was his masterstroke. Indian lobbyists are now under pressure to deliver.



CAR SEVA

A roadside chat while at a stop in Neem ka Thana left ex-Rajasthan CM **Ashok Gehlot** chuckling. Young dhaba owner Shambhu Dayal Saini suggested he trade in his white Tata Safari, a loyal companion of 15 years, for a Land Rover Defender. "Leaders change cars often these days, everyone's into Defenders now," Saini opined. Gehlot, momentarily puzzled, asked, "What's a Defender?" When he got the drift, he broke into a laugh, saying: "Old is gold."

PLUG THE LEAK

Patidar quota stir face and later BJP MLA **Hardik Patel** is in the news for threatening an agitation over the "leaky infrastructure" in his Viramgam constituency. Since joining the saffron side, Hardik had been reduced to just another face among the BJP's 156 MLAs, often mocked for losing his bite. The protest call, though, has stirred local officials into action, more because urban body polls are near and the party is scrambling to save face with complaints aplenty.



DYNASTIC DRIFT



Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader **K. Kavitha** launched a hunger strike in Hyderabad on August 4, demanding 42 per cent reservation for the Backward Classes, but the action hasn't gone down well in her own party. BRS insiders are calling it a "solo act", yet another sign of Kavitha's growing isolation. Meanwhile, father, ex-CM and party chief K. Chandrashekhar Rao, under fire over irregularities in the Kaleshwaram Lift Scheme, seems unable to rein in the rebellion.

Kaushik Deka with Anilesh S. Mahajan, Rohit Parihar, Jumana Shah and Amarnath K. Menon

SCIENCE WATCH

By **Amarnath K. Menon**

THE R&D DEFICIT WHERE ARE THE SCIENTISTS?

Nobel laureates and physicists Duncan Haldane and David Gross have just pointed out a huge mismatch: India has the talent, but is not benefitting because there's not enough funds for scientific research. Speaking at the Quantum India Summit in Bengaluru on July 31, Gross, who chairs an advisory board at the International Centre for Theoretical Sciences here, says India's lack of investment in R&D doesn't bode well.

India's GDP is up, but its contribution to 'investments to the future', which will drive new technologies and industries, is low. In 2009, India's R&D spend was 0.84 per cent of GDP; it fell to 0.64 per cent by 2021 and is estimated to be 0.7 per cent in 2025. This is much less than what the US (3.5 per cent) and China (2.4 per cent) spends.

The Rs 1 lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) fund, announced in this year's budget, should help. It will be operationalised this year, with Rs 20,000 crore already allocated. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, launched last year, also has a fund, but will primarily invest in academic research

and research labs. The RDI fund is meant for private sector R&D, with its Deep Tech Fund 1.0 focusing on strategic autonomy in critical sectors like clean energy and advanced materials.

Last year, India was ranked 39th in the Global Innovation Index of 133 countries, up one spot from 2023. The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) researchers per million people in India is 255, abysmal when compared to the USA (4,452), China



SHUTTERSTOCK

(1,307), Korea (7,980), and far below the global average of 1,198. The trend of fewer FTE researchers and minimal spends points to an underlying crisis in the R&D sector. As one researcher at the summit put it: "Cutting-edge research is so fast; if we lose the first few years [due to cost-cutting], we are behind our colleagues abroad already." ■

► **BURST OF FURY** This twin video grab shows debris-laden waters of a flash flood barrelling into Dharali, Uttarakhand, Aug. 5; (right) in the aftermath, buildings of the village are submerged in sludge



► **UTTARKASHI FLASH FLOODS**

NATURE'S FURY TURNS DEADLY



THE HILLS HAVE AGAIN ERUPTED IN FURY.

On August 5, torrential rain over the high-altitude Uttarkashi district in Uttarakhand triggered landslides and flash floods, swelling the Kheer Ganga, which then hurtled down its course, freighted with a mass of debris made of boulders, vegetation and mud loosened from surrounding mountains. This cascading, frothing wall of sludge slammed into Dharali village around 1.50 pm, engulfing houses, hotels and vehicles, smothering many souls. Further downstream, Harsil, then Sukki, stood in its destructive path. Over 100 people were missing at last count, including 10 Indian army soldiers from their camp in Harsil. However, scores were saved by rescue operations mounted by personnel of the army, the state disaster response force, the administration and the police. Still, urgently required relief

100+

NUMBER OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING 10 ARMY PERSONNEL, MISSING IN UTTARKASHI FLASH FLOODS; FIVE DEAD

190

NUMBER OF PEOPLE RESCUED FROM DHARALI VILLAGE

work is impeded by destroyed roads. Indian Air Force helicopters have been pressed into service. Search teams have been dispatched with rescue equipment; populations in downhill towns Bhatwari, Maneri, Gangotri and Uttarkashi alerted. The next few days will be crucial. The tragedy is the latest in a series of calamities in the Garhwal Himalayas. In June 2013, thousands of people were lost to floods and landslides following a cloudburst in the upper reaches of the Mandakini. In the Chamoli Disaster of February 2021, an avalanche in the headwaters of the Rishiganga triggered landslides, killing some 200 people. The frequency of these incidents has triggered concerns about 'anthropogenic factors' such as climate change, unregulated development of towns, hydel infrastructure and haphazard road construction as a catalyst for 'natural' disasters.



▼ VIEWPOINT

FOR A LOWER AGE OF CONSENT

Instead of moral panics over sex, we should prioritise the health and safety of adolescents in consensual relationships



BY MANJIMA BHATTACHARJYA

The age of consent, or the age at which a person's consent to sexual activity is valid in law, has a long, eventful history in India. Over 165 years, it moved from the age of 10 to 12 to 16, where it remained for about 73 years. Then, in 2012, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO) was passed. Baked into the law was the definition of a child as anyone below 18, and any sexual activity under this age was deemed a crime. The law thus raised the age of consent, without discussion or explanation, from 16 to 18. At best, it was a hardline expression of concern for children's safety. At worst, a moral stance that aligned age of consent with age at marriage, signposting the invalidity of premarital sex.

Over the past decade, evidence has shown that the impact of this move has predominantly been the criminalisation of consensual sex between adolescents, used by their families to punish rebellious teens who fall in love and transgress caste, class, religious or social norms. A public interest litigation, led by senior advocate Indira Jaising, recently brought these submissions before the Supreme Court, asking it to read down the statutory age of consent from 18 to 16.

This comes as a long-due and welcome move. The raised age of consent has not only criminalised boys as 'rapists' in consensual relations, it has resulted in brutal natal family violence, denied young people access to sexual health services and compounded the culture of silence and fear around sexuality.

Taking a stand that the age of consent should be brought down to 16 does not diminish the commitment to protect



Illustration by RAJ VERMA

WE MUST LOOK BEYOND SEX TO QUESTIONS OF CONSENT, ADOLESCENCE AND SHAME TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

children from abuse. Instead, it would acknowledge the fact that sexual activity exists amongst adolescents and create a less fearful space to build systems responsive to these needs. National Family Health Survey (2019-21) data shows that young people across urban and rural areas are involved in sexual activity from the age of 15 onwards. The age of consent varies across countries, with many at 16 or below. It is currently 18 in Nepal and 16 in Sri Lanka. The sexualisation of culture as well as the influence of the internet and social media have changed sexual mores and increased permissiveness, albeit unevenly. What we need is the implementation of sex-positive sex education in private and government schools, and easy availability of contraception and information

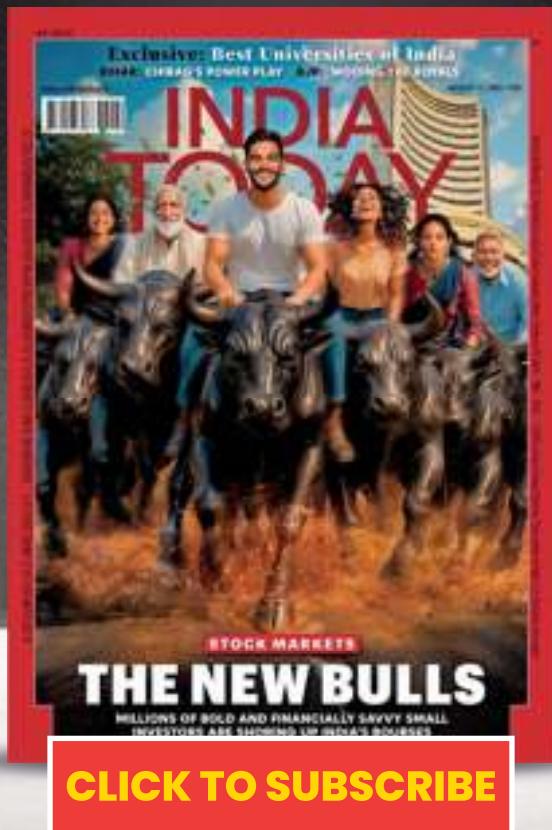
to youth. Reducing the age of consent could reduce or manage teen pregnancies due to safer access to contraception and abortion.

It would also force us to look beyond sex at questions of consent and adolescence. How can we support young people to understand and articulate consent, something that is so difficult given the social stigma and taboos around premarital sex, especially the shaming that society accords to girls who say yes to sex? Shame unfortunately cannot be banned, but a reduced age of consent could lighten the cloud of confusion and shame surrounding sex.

Sex, in fact, is a red herring. It becomes the thing around which anxieties converge, blurring the focus on other important elements. Rather than the exceptionalism of sex, it is more useful to look at the exceptionalism of adolescents. Adolescence, increasingly an area of study, especially the 16-18 age group, is a period that needs attention differently from children requiring protection at younger ages. Reducing the age of consent could compel us to apply an adolescent-friendly lens to important institutions, be it education, health or justice. In practice, adolescent girls who approach the police station or hospitals for sexual concerns encounter judgement and blame. We don't need hardline, stone-jawed laws designed to discipline young people to express our protective impulse for them. We need to do the hard work of creating systems that listen to—and believe—their stories. ■

The writer is a sociologist and author of Intimate City (Zubaan, 2021)

SMALL PLAYERS BIG MOVES: THE NEW BULLS OF STOCK MARKET



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INDIA
TODAY
MAKING SENSE OF INDIA



Hon'ble Chief Minister of Karnataka Shri Siddaramaiah unveiling the Karnataka Quantum Roadmap at the inaugural session of the Quantum India Bengaluru Summit 2025.

KARNATAKA'S QUANTUM LEAP: FROM INNOVATION HUB TO GLOBAL QUANTUM POWERHOUSE

Bengaluru, long celebrated as India's Silicon Valley, is now scripting a new chapter in the country's technological journey.

The successful hosting of the Quantum India Bengaluru Summit 2025 has catapulted Karnataka to the forefront of the global quantum technology landscape. The two-day event, held on July 31 and August 1, was not just a conference—it was a declaration of intent: Karnataka is ready to lead the world into the quantum era.

By ARUN KUMAR HV

A Historic Beginning

The summit, inaugurated by **Chief Minister Siddaramaiah** and **Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar**, brought together an unprecedented gathering of **1,951 delegates from 19 countries**. It featured **Nobel Laureates Prof. Duncan Haldane and Prof. David Gross**, global experts, policymakers, and industry leaders. Over 24 sessions, 75 speakers engaged in in-depth deliberations on quantum computing, cryptography, sensing, AI, and their applications in sectors ranging from healthcare to defense.

"Karnataka has long been India's innovation capital. Now, we are taking a quantum leap towards becoming a global leader," said **Minister for Science & Technology N.S. Boseraju**, the driving force behind this initiative.

The Rise of Q-City

One of the most ambitious projects announced is the establishment of **Q-City** near Bengaluru—a futuristic hub integrating academic institutions, R&D centers, manufacturing clusters, and data centers. "Q-City will do for quantum what Bengaluru once did for IT," said Minister Boseraju. The city will also host a **Quantum Hardware Park** and the country's first to manufacture quantum processors and components.

KARNATAKA QUANTUM ROAD MAP:

4-Phase Quantum Roadmap!

During the inaugural ceremony of Quantum India Bengaluru Summit, Hon'ble Chief Minister Siddaramaiah unveiled the **Karnataka Quantum Roadmap**, a strategic blueprint aimed at positioning the state as a global quantum leader by 2035.

The roadmap focuses on:

- Phase 1: Foundation & Capacity Building
- Phase 2: R&D & Pilot Deployment
- Phase 3: Manufacturing & Commercialization
- Phase 4: Global Quantum Powerhouse

The **Government of Karnataka** will soon establish a **Quantum Task Force** to implement the Karnataka Quantum Roadmap and provide guidance on policy interventions and strategic collaborations.

Major Announcements from Quantum India Bengaluru 2025

- ₹1,000 crore Karnataka Quantum Mission Fund for infrastructure, R&D, startups, and skilling.
- Quantum Innovation Fund to nurture 100+ startups in quantum technology.
- Q-City (Quantum City) to be established near Bengaluru with a Hardware Park, FabLine, and Innovation Hub.
- Quantum Skilling Programs in 20+ Colleges, Support for 150 Phd Fellowships.
- Indigenous development of 1,000-qubit processing capacity.
- Target: \$20 billion quantum economy and 20% share of global market by 2035.

Global Partnerships, Local Strength

The summit also served as a platform for forging international collaborations. Countries including **Germany, Japan, Israel, Singapore, and the USA** expressed keen interest in partnering with Karnataka on quantum ventures. A notable highlight was the **MoU between IIIT Dharwad, Raichur institutions, and QpiAI** to establish the Q-Vidya 8-qubit quantum

computer—a critical step towards indigenous capacity building.

Building a Quantum Workforce

Recognizing that talent is the backbone of innovation, Karnataka announced **quantum skilling programs** in over **20 colleges**, with plans to scale further. Through the **STREAM Labs initiative**, quantum

Interview with SHRI. N. S. BOSERAJU, Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science & Technology, Karnataka.

1. Why was the Quantum India Summit 2025 significant for Karnataka and India?

The Quantum India Summit 2025 is the first of its kind summit in India. Hosting over 1,950 participants from 19 countries far exceeding the expected 600–700 the event brought together Nobel Laureates, Consulate Generals, scientists, industry leaders, and startups under one roof. We used this platform to showcase our Quantum Vision and Roadmap to the world which included the formation of a Quantum Task Force and the announcement of a dedicated Quantum City. The summit has positioned Karnataka on the forefront of India's global quantum journey.

2. What is the role of the Karnataka Quantum Task Force?

The Karnataka Quantum Task Force will function as the apex advisory and coordination body guiding the implementation of our quantum roadmap. It will include experts from academia, government and industry. This body will be pivotal in building a complete supply chain from R&D and talent to manufacturing and global partnerships, ensuring Karnataka doesn't just adopt quantum tech, but exports it.

3. How does Karnataka's approach differ from other state initiatives like Amaravati?

Bengaluru is the ideal location for India's quantum ecosystem because it already hosts a thriving quantum base along with robust R&D Infrastructure. We are home to India's first commercially operating quantum computer which was built indigenously and a quantum chip manufacturing facility is starting shortly. While some states focus primarily on data centers or digital warehousing, we are focussed on building a holistic deep-tech ecosystem from fundamental research to full-stack manufacturing. Karnataka is not

competing with other Indian states we are benchmarking against global leaders.

4. What is the idea behind Quantum City and how will it enable industry development?

Quantum City is envisioned as an integrated hub that will bring together R&D, component manufacturing, system integration, skilling, and incubation. The government plans to provide infrastructure for Hardware park, plug-and-play incubation support, and incentives to foster startups. Our strategy is to build an ecosystem where the entire quantum value chain coexists from labs to fabs.

5. Isn't \$20 billion quantum economy vision by 2035 too ambitious?

We believe governments must dream big and build structured pathways to achieve ambitious goals. After the success of the Quantum India Summit we are confident that this vision is not only feasible but necessary. Globally, the quantum market is projected to exceed \$150 billion by 2035. We aim to capture a meaningful share by becoming an innovation and export hub.

6. What were the most valuable takeaways from the roundtable conference at the summit?

The roundtable chaired by Hon'ble DCM Shri DK Shivakumar brought together Industry leaders, academic researchers, startup founders, policymakers, Consul Generals and representatives from trade councils. This meet provided key insights into India's current Quantum gaps, particularly in manufacturing, IP creation, start-up ecosystem and skill development. This meet has helped us to understand the shortcomings and build our Quantum Strategy to solve the current infrastructure and academic gaps and create a more

product-based approach. A strong aspiration to achieve indigenous manufacturing capabilities has emerged. We must move fast and this should be the priority going forward. Several countries expressed their willingness in cross-country collaborations. Looking at the positive response, we are planning to take up roadshows across the world and conduct the summit annually.

7. Nobel Laureates at the summit said India has talent, but lacks science funding and opportunities. How does Karnataka respond to this concern?

We deeply value this observation by the Nobel Laureates; it's a reminder that nurturing talent must go hand-in-hand with providing institutional and financial support. The Union funding for R&D compared to the GDP is not sufficient, but Karnataka has already taken concrete steps to address this gap. We've sanctioned India's first dedicated Quantum Research Park at IISc and plan to establish a Quantum City with a dedicated Quantum Hardware Park. Honorable Chief Minister has announced ₹ 1,000 crores which will be dedicated towards developing this Infrastructure and also includes an innovation fund which will support at least 100 startups and deliver 100 patents with the goal of developing 1000 qbit processing power indigenously. We are developing academic quantum nodes across regional universities and incorporating activity-based quantum curriculum at the high school level. An MoU has been already been signed between IIIT Dharwad and QpiAI to host an academic quantum computer. Most importantly, we are aligning our education and skilling policies to empower youth in this space. We have learnt our lessons from the Semiconductor industry, where India lagged in leveraging it, Karnataka is committed to not repeating the same mistakes with quantum technology.

education will be introduced at the senior school level in both **English and Kannada**. Additionally, the **DST PhD fellowship program** will be expanded to train a new generation of quantum scientists.

A Catalyst for Startups and Industry

The state is backing quantum startups with a **Quantum Innovation Fund** and venture capital support. With plans to nurture **100+ startups** and facilitate **100+ patent filings**, Karnataka is building an ecosystem that encourages risk-taking and innovation. Several private players, including **IBM, AWS, Infosys, XeedQ, and L&T**, showcased their quantum initiatives at the summit, further cementing industry-government collaboration.

Why Quantum Matters

Quantum technology promises breakthroughs that can redefine industries. From early **disease detection to secure communication, smarter agriculture, and national security**, its applications are vast. Globally, countries are racing to dominate this field, and Karnataka is positioning itself as India's spearhead.

Looking Ahead

The success of the **Quantum India Bengaluru Summit 2025** is only the beginning. The state has

announced plans to **host the summit annually**, making it a recurring platform for global thought leadership. Roadshows across India and abroad will further showcase Karnataka's readiness to lead the quantum revolution.

As Minister Boseraju aptly concluded, "Quantum is not just technology—it's about inclusive progress, dignity, and development. With our roadmap, Karnataka will not only lead India but shape the future of quantum innovation globally."

The Road to 2035

With its **clear roadmap, funding support, and ecosystem advantage**, Karnataka is on course to achieve its **Quantum Vision 2035**. If successful, the state will not only capture **20% of the global quantum market but** also create **over two lakh direct jobs**, making India a formidable player in the next technological revolution.

Global Roundtable Drives Collaborative Quantum Future:

A key highlight of the Quantum India Bengaluru 2025 Summit was the high-level roundtable meeting chaired by Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar. The session brought together representatives from 19 countries, including the USA, UK, Germany, Japan,

and Israel, along with leading global organizations in the quantum sector. Participants discussed strategic collaborations, investment opportunities, and policy frameworks to accelerate Karnataka's quantum growth. Several nations expressed interest in forming joint ventures and setting up research centers in the state. The discussions underscored Karnataka's readiness to serve as a global partner in shaping the future of quantum technologies.



Hon'ble Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science & Technology Shri N.S. Boseraju delivering his address at the inaugural session of the Quantum India Bengaluru Summit 2025.

STATE SCAN



ODISHA: AN EITHER/OR QUESTION FOR BJD PG 19

UP: THE GODS OF SMALL JINKS PG 20

MINORITIES REPORT Muslims protest against the Waqf Bill in Mumbai, November 2024; (right) a Christian rally in Mumbai, Jul. 11



HINDUSTAN TIMES

► MAHARASHTRA/ GOA

THE HOLY WRIT OF STATUTE

As Maharashtra and Goa move to enact laws to block 'love jihad' and 'rice bag' conversions, minorities voice a lack of faith in the intent and foresee a chilling effect on society

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

LOVE JIHAD AND 'rice bag' conversions are an odd pair of slogans. The Church was party to coining the first charge against Muslims, but continues to find itself stalked by the second, as the recent arrest of two nuns in Chhattisgarh showed. The two sources of incrimination now get fused all over again as BJP-ruled Maharashtra and Goa—the latter one-quarter Christian—prepare to bring in anti-conversion laws.

Their objective: to prevent change of faith induced via 'fraudulent' means. Given the general run of things, minority groups say they have reason to fear the law may be misused

to vilify and target them, and warn against the ongoing 'Hindutva creep' into the realm of sanctified law.

RISING TENSION

It's not come out of the blue. BJP leaders in Maharashtra—fisheries and ports minister Nitesh Rane, for one—have been campaigning for an anti-conversion law. Christian groups across the state had been driven to protest in mid-July when party MLA Gopichand Padalkar offered up to Rs 11 lakh as bounty for Christian pastors allegedly proselytising among his OBC Dhangar (shepherd) community. An anti-conversion law

will enshrine that sentiment on the street. In July, MoS home (rural) Pankaj Bhoyar told the legislative council that the bill would be tabled in the winter session. "Already, 10 states in India have an anti-conversion law. We will be the 11th. Our law will be more stringent than those in the other 10 states...." he warned.

Chief Minister Devendra

Takeaways



► CMs Fadnavis, Sawant cite need for law to block 'fraudulent' conversions



► 10 states—including UP, MP, Odisha, Karnataka—have similar laws already

► But minorities doubt the governments' intent, claim the law will be misused

Fadnavis, who also holds the home portfolio, says the law is meant to prevent conversion through dubious means. "Many such instances have come to light," he says, adding that a committee under the director general of police had been formed to suggest how the law could be fortified. In the Goa assembly, his counterpart Pramod Sawant said he had felt the "need for a law against forcible conversions". Also the home minister, he talks of "several instances (of) targeted" love jihad. For those who came in late, that's a pejorative term suggesting Hindu (or non-Muslim) women are being deliberately entrapped by Muslim men for the purpose of religious conversion in the guise of a relationship or marriage.

In Goa, despite the BJP's new inroads into the Roman Catholic segment, sections of the Hindu right have used the state's troubled history—the razing of temples and the Inquisition under the Portuguese—to stir up sentiments. What's left unsaid is that, besides the persecution of Hindus, the Inquisition was primarily aimed at neo-Christians, who were suspected of having reverted to their old faith and its practices. And even Christians challenged Portuguese exploitation. Authors Sharmila Pais and Prajal Sakhardande list how Goan priest Matheus de Castro (1594–1678) exposed the racial prejudice of the colonials towards locals, and how the Pinto Revolt (1787), led by local clergymen, sought to overthrow Portuguese rule for similar injustice.

NEEDED OR NOT?

"There are no conversions taking place in Goa. Where's the need to bring in a law?" asks Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco, independent MLA from Curtorim who supports the Sawant-led state government. "We (the Catholics) are not involved in anything like this. Goa is a peaceful state where people live in harmony." In Maharashtra, Samajwadi Party MLA Rais Shaikh echoes that wariness: "No one supports forceful conversions, but the government's intent is doubtful. Any law will be used to defame communities." Milind Parande of the VHP, on his part, calls for the law to be replicated nationwide, saying: "Hindus don't convert others. The expansionist tendencies of Christianity and Islam put Hindus at a disadvantage."

Past state legislations have laid down procedures for conversion, often mandating an advance declaration to the authorities. In effect, say critics, that has a chilling effect even in genuine cases since law enforcement often ascribes guilt *prima facie*—while instilling an air of collective fear for the minorities. ▀

► JAMMU AND KASHMIR

OMAR RAISES THE PITCH ON STATEHOOD

CM Omar Abdullah is forced into hyperactive mode on statehood demand by a spurt of Congress protests

By **Kaleem Geelani**



ANI

► RESTLESS Omar Abdullah

NO OTHER STATE OR Union territory would wait so desperately for a Parliament session. But then, no parallel exists for Jammu and Kashmir's misfortune: of being demoted from state to UT, and having to solicit New Delhi's benevolence to have its full statehood being restored.

Nearly ten months into its ascent to 'moth-eaten' power, the Omar Abdullah government seems to have hit the threshold of waiting. A striking image became emblematic of this: the 55-year-old CM scaling the wall of the Martyrs' Graveyard like a young parkour freak, after defying house detention and dodging barriers in Srinagar's downtown on foot to reach the site.

It was the eve of the monsoon session in New Delhi, and he had to



AFP

act. Pressure had been building on Omar for having failed to prevent a coup from above: a capture of powers in general administration and other departments by Raj Bhawan. Looming large was the risk of losing relevance as a ruling party and among his flock, turning into a de facto lame-duck government, stuck in a statutory limbo that reduced Delhi to a quasi-state.

THE SOFT PATH

Back in the saddle in October 2024, the CM has till now been walking a tightrope with New Delhi so as to enable a smooth, consensual delivery of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise to return J&K to full statehood. He extended a friendly hand on most fronts, eschewing a direct faceoff even on flashpoints like the Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025. He treaded cautiously in his run-ins with Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

Within the National Conference (NC), he dodged exhortations to go into protest mode and preferred to pedal softly. Right up to subtly nudging Modi about his commitment during the Sonamarg tunnel inaugural, the CM did all he could to get his ghee with a straight finger.

With all that affability going waste, the tone is getting dialled up.

"Some people have the misunderstanding that we don't talk in a high-pitched voice. We don't issue threats, or engage in *gundagardi* [hooliganism]," Omar said on July 15. That was a signal, first of all, to his own restive flock of NC legislators who had preferred confrontation from the start. What triggered this turn towards the rockier path? Pressure tactics—deployed to express anger over his detention just ahead of the monsoon

Takeaways

➤ **Omar takes a louder stance on statehood, departing from his tack of soft persuasion**

➤ **His ally Congress makes a unilateral push which Omar feels has upset his apple cart**

session of Parliament.

There's also an unforeseen spurt of activism from INDIA ally Congress: protests over statehood in Srinagar and Jammu, followed by a dharna at Delhi's Jantar Mantar. Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi also wrote to the PM on July 16, urging him to redeem his promise

► **POWER PUSHBACK** A Congress protest in Srinagar demands immediate restoration of statehood, Jul. 19

during the monsoon session.

Caught off-guard, the NC now suggests the Congress's unilateral push may be counter-productive, aborting what may have come about naturally. Since the Modi regime is not known to relent easily on Opposition demands, it may have foreclosed an ajar door, in this view. Others speculate that New Delhi may have already opted to move on statehood in some way, and an announcement was imminent.

INTRIGUE IN PARADISE

If that gets subverted into a step that does not favour Kashmir, it's being insinuated that having precisely such an effect—to frustrate Omar's sugar-coated diplomacy just when it could have borne fruit—is the very intention of the Congress. Outwardly, the NC is feigning a softer kind of hurt. "We read about it in newspapers. No one reached out to us. Even during the recent INDIA meeting, there was no mention of these things. Had they informed us, we would have joined," Omar says. "We've been struggling for statehood, overtly and covertly. By moving without consulting us, the Congress has poured water on our efforts," an NC senior told INDIA TODAY. Ghulam Ahmad Mir, AICC general secretary and MLA, is taunting in his counter: "What's stopping them from launching protests or joining us? They should call a special assembly session. We'll support it."

Relations between the Congress and NC—or Rahul and Omar—form a mystery wrapped within the statehood riddle. The two fought the 2024 assembly election together, and won a famous victory against the BJP. But the Congress didn't join the government: the unkind version is it wished to keep its slate 'clean' ahead of the Haryana and Maharashtra polls. Now, the rising mutual tension has become an unlikely obstacle in a common objective. ■

AN EITHER/OR QUESTION

The BJD faces a near-existential dilemma in taking on the BJP in the state



► TO DO OR NOT TO DO? BJD president Naveen Patnaik

women. Following the shocking self-immolation of a girl student in Balasore and other high-profile incidents of gender-based violence, Das has urged the BJD to move a no-confidence motion in the upcoming assembly session against the Mohan Majhi-led BJP government. The Congress has just 14 MLAs in the 147-member House, so it's daring the BJD, which holds 51 seats, to play the lead—it would offer full support. Das frames it as a matter of moral urgency, invoking the Supreme Court's criticism over the incidents.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Das's 'offer' has created a strategic dilemma for the BJD. If it moves or backs a motion, it risks being painted as an ally of the Congress, a party it displaced and has historically opposed in Odisha. Resisting could reinforce the perception that the BJD acts as a "friendly Opposition" to the BJP, a charge it often incurs for its selective support to the Centre on key bills, most recently the controversial Waqf Bill.

Senior BJD leaders like Debi Prasad Mishra and Arun Sahoo have maintained a guardedly elusive, non-committal stance. "No official notification has been issued yet," says Mishra, stating a final decision would be taken by the legislative party once the assembly session is formally announced. Sahoo accuses the BJP of dragging its feet on convening the session itself, claiming "negative public opinion is the real no-confidence motion".

The BJP has responded with a mix of bravado and provocation. State chief

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

THE BIJU JANATA DAL (BJD), which lorded over Odisha for over two decades, finds itself in a bind. Looming in front of it are two near-existential choices: whether to support or move a no-confidence motion against the BJP-led state government, and which side to back in the upcoming vice-presidential election.

Both decisions could inflect the BJD's political destiny. Its old stance of equidistance from both the Congress and the BJP had value and strategic sense in the past. Would it be wise to tread the same line now? Or would it be the deepest folly, exposing it to allegations of opportunism or, worse, irrelevance?

The immediate pressure comes from the Congress, led by new state president Bhakta Charan Das, who has aggressively taken on both the BJD and the BJP over rising crimes against

Manmohan Samal and minister Suresh Pujari say the government isn't scared of a no-trust vote. Pujari even dared the Opposition to "bring it on". Deputy CM Pravati Parida also highlighted how cases were promptly registered and investigated, something she claimed did not happen under the BJD's watch.

Even if the debate is lively, the numbers would ground any Opposition flight of fancy. The ruling alliance has a comfortable majority of 81 seats: 78 BJP MLAs plus three Independents. The BJD and the Congress, pooled, muster only 65—well short of critical mass. Hence, the move would lack any material benefit. What can be gained is only symbolic. So is what can be lost.

Takeaways

► **The Odisha Congress has dared the BJD to move a no-confidence motion**

► **Agreeing means being led by old rival Congress. Evading would be pro-BJP**

► **Strategic ambiguity has been useful till now, but now BJD has to choose a side**

On the upcoming vice-presidential election, too, the party is treading the same ambivalent ground it occupied during the Waqf Bill vote, where no whip was issued, and 'vote by conscience' was allowed. That episode triggered internal rumblings and external criticism, complicating the BJD's already enfeebled image of regional autonomy. The spur in its side now is a resurgent Congress under Das, positioning itself as the "real Opposition" through statewide bandhs and vocal assembly theatrics. Under such circumstances, how far can strategic inertia last? ■

THE GODS OF S

Call them the political version of MSMEs—micro, small and medium-sized enterprises crucial to the BJP's gameplan in UP. Why are they suddenly restive?

By Avaneesh Mishra

In Uttar Pradesh, the smallest players always punch above their weight—and often land the meatier cuts. It's a function of the high-value political real estate market they operate in. So why are the tiny NDA allies who make up the BJP's retinue suddenly acting up? Well, panchayat elections are due next year and the crucial assembly polls follow in 2027. So, they can smell good meat, and piqued appetites have got them all restless. The Apna Dal(S) has begun airing its grievances in public. The Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal (NISHAD) party is threatening to walk out if its demand for SC status for fisherfolk is not met. The Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), which has made fickleness its calling card, has turned up the volume on increasing the OBC quota share for Rajbhars. These parties have historically stayed afloat and thrived by sensing which way the wind is blowing—shifting sides is an innate skill, a tradition. With the BJP facing a two-term anti-incumbency and the Samajwadi Party out shopping for affections, these allies know their bargaining power is at its peak. Where they choose to go could redraw the political map of India's most consequential state.

NISHAD PARTY

Sanjay Nishad, President ➤

Sanjay Nishad, UP's fisheries minister, warns that his party might reconsider its support in 2027 unless the BJP delivers on its promise of Scheduled Caste (SC) status to OBC fisherfolk. The intent was made clear with a bold hoarding outside Nishad's Lucknow home. He has reasons to worry—the SP's

► **The BJP has found solutions to all difficult issues. So what's keeping it from fulfilling its promise to the fisherfolk? ■**

ship had loomed large on its waters in the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

Founded in 2016, NISHAD represents 22 riverine sub-castes that make up 12-18 per cent of UP's OBC population. Concentrated in eastern and central UP where the Ganga and Yamuna crash the banks, they have a say in 160-odd



assembly seats, making them crucial to the BJP's plans. NISHAD feels ill-compensated for what it brings to the table—a couple of dry bypasses even led to a statewide show of strength. Legal hurdles make the SC status demand hard to fulfil, but the BJP will be wary of fishing lines on the opposite bank.

MALL JINKS



Photographs by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

SUHELDEV BHARATIYA SAMAJ PARTY

Om Prakash Rajbhar, President

Om Prakash Rajbhar, UP's panchayati raj minister and expert political weather forecaster, is one of those who gets away with free speech on even saffron icons. Now, he's on the prowl again, having recently met CM Yogi Adityanath to demand

showed in 2022: with the SP, it contested 19 seats, won six, and hurt the BJP in 33. The lotus failed to bloom in Ghazipur (seven seats), Azamgarh (10), won only one of four in Mau, one of seven in Ballia, two of nine in Jaunpur.

Rajbhar was urgently wooed back into the

Only a few dominant OBC castes are reaping quota benefits. Most backward and extremely backward communities remain excluded

a quota within the OBC quota for the Rajbhars.

If that gives the heebie-jeebies to the BJP, history explains it. The SBSP, formed in 2002, draws on the Rajbhar footprint in Purvanchal. Its damage potential

NDA in 2023—restoring the status of 2017, when the SBSP was an ally and he served briefly in the Yogi cabinet. But it was like inviting a thorn back into the flesh. Now, Rajbhar wants his pound of it—and more.

APNA DAL (SONELAL) Ashish Patel, ex-Working President



Perhaps the BJP's most crucial ally in UP, the AD(S) seems profoundly cheersed off with big brother. Tensions arose in July, after Brajendra Patel and other founding members split to form 'Apna Morcha', claiming the support of nine of the party's 13 MLAs. The main party, led by Union minister Anupriya Patel, calls them oustees, expelled

They show daily that the AD(S) is falling apart. Don't go through this hassle. Today, once and for all, break it into as many parts as you want



Anupriya and Ashish Patel

in 2022 for anti-party activities. Yet, the new front says it will contest the upcoming panchayat polls while, surprise, still backing the NDA. So, who's in?

Anupriya's husband Ashish Patel, who has stepped down as party working president, is threatening to quit the UP cabinet itself. He questions the BJP's intentions, suggesting the rebels are being encouraged to fragment the AD(S) base. Fragmentation

Pallavi even defeated current deputy CM Keshav Maurya in the 2022 election on an SP ticket. But again, she's also said to be close to CM Yogi Adityanath, a link that blurs party lines further and keeps everyone guessing.

To map the AD(S)'s restiveness, contrast it with the quietude of the RLD, which rejoined the NDA in 2024. That its latest ally seems the most solid suffices to describe the BJP's state in UP.

► MADHYA PRADESH

MOHAN YADAV'S MERRY-GO-ROUND

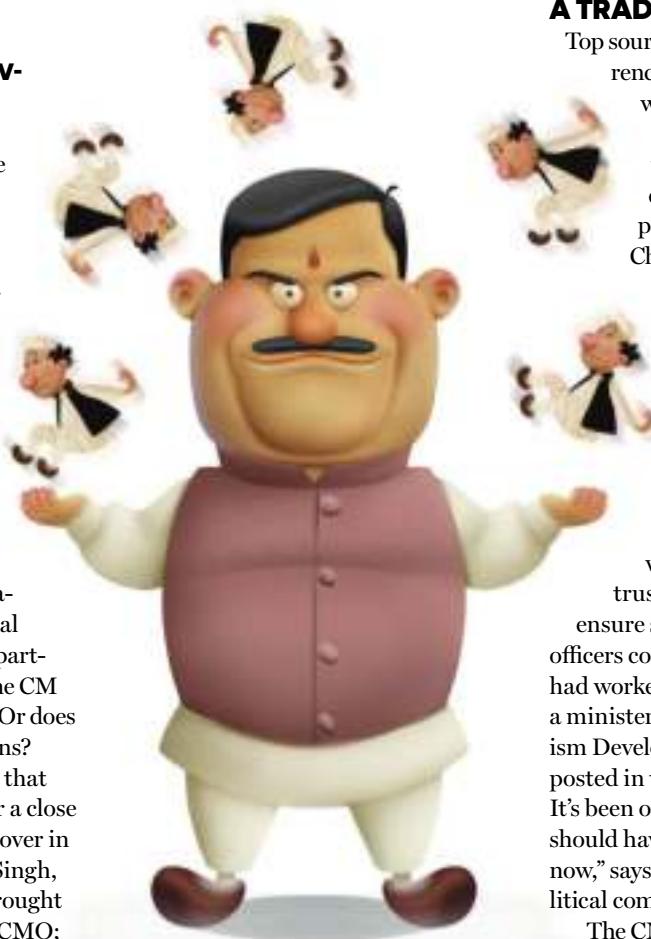
The equation is: 19 months, 19 bureaucrats. That's how busy the turnstiles have been at the CMO. But why?

By **Rahul Noronha**

STABILITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT may be a foregone conclusion in Madhya Pradesh, where the ruling BJP holds 164 out of 230 seats in the assembly, but the same cannot be said about stability of bureaucratic tenures. Even in the chief minister's secretariat, where the occupants are usually handpicked by the CM himself.

A total of 19 IAS officers have been shifted in and out of the CM secretariat in as many months of the Mohan Yadav regime, both at the top and middle levels of the organisation. That unprecedented tenurial instability in an all-powerful department prompts the question: is the CM unable to find a team he trusts? Or does he defer to other people's decisions?

It's a fast-paced chronology that may still leave you clueless after a close perusal. Soon after Yadav took over in December 2023, Raghvendra Singh, a 1997 batch IAS officer, was brought in as principal secretary in the CMO; Bharat Yadav, a 2008 batch IAS officer, became secretary. A couple of months later, reports emerged of a lack of coordination between the two. In June 2024, two more loops were added to the knot: Rajesh Rajora and Sanjay Shukla as additional chief secretary and principal secretary, respectively. In October, Anurag Jain, a 1989 batch IAS officer, joined as chief secretary—



Takeaways

► **19 bureaucrats have been shifted in and out of the CM secretariat in 19 months**

► **The instability impacts work beyond CMO; Yadav handles as many as 11 ministries**

the buzz at the turnstiles suggested the hand of New Delhi. Soon afterwards, Singh and Shukla were transferred out. In January 2025, secretary Yadav was replaced by batchmate Sibi Chakravarthy. In early July, Neeraj Mandloi, a 1998 batch IAS officer, replaced Rajora. Two weeks later, Chakravarthy also exited; in came Chandramauli Shukla.

A TRADITION OF TRUST

Top sources affirm the CM's concurrence on all these postings. But why is the CMO not a settled affair? Contrast this with the tenurial stability that characterised the reigns of past CMs. In the Shivraj Singh Chouhan years, Iqbal Singh Bains did two stints in his CMO. Digvijaya Singh, on his part, had R.N. Berwa and R. Gopalakrishnan in his CMO for substantial durations.

Some crucial ingredient of durability is clearly missing. "The CM would have to firstly develop trust with his bureaucrats to

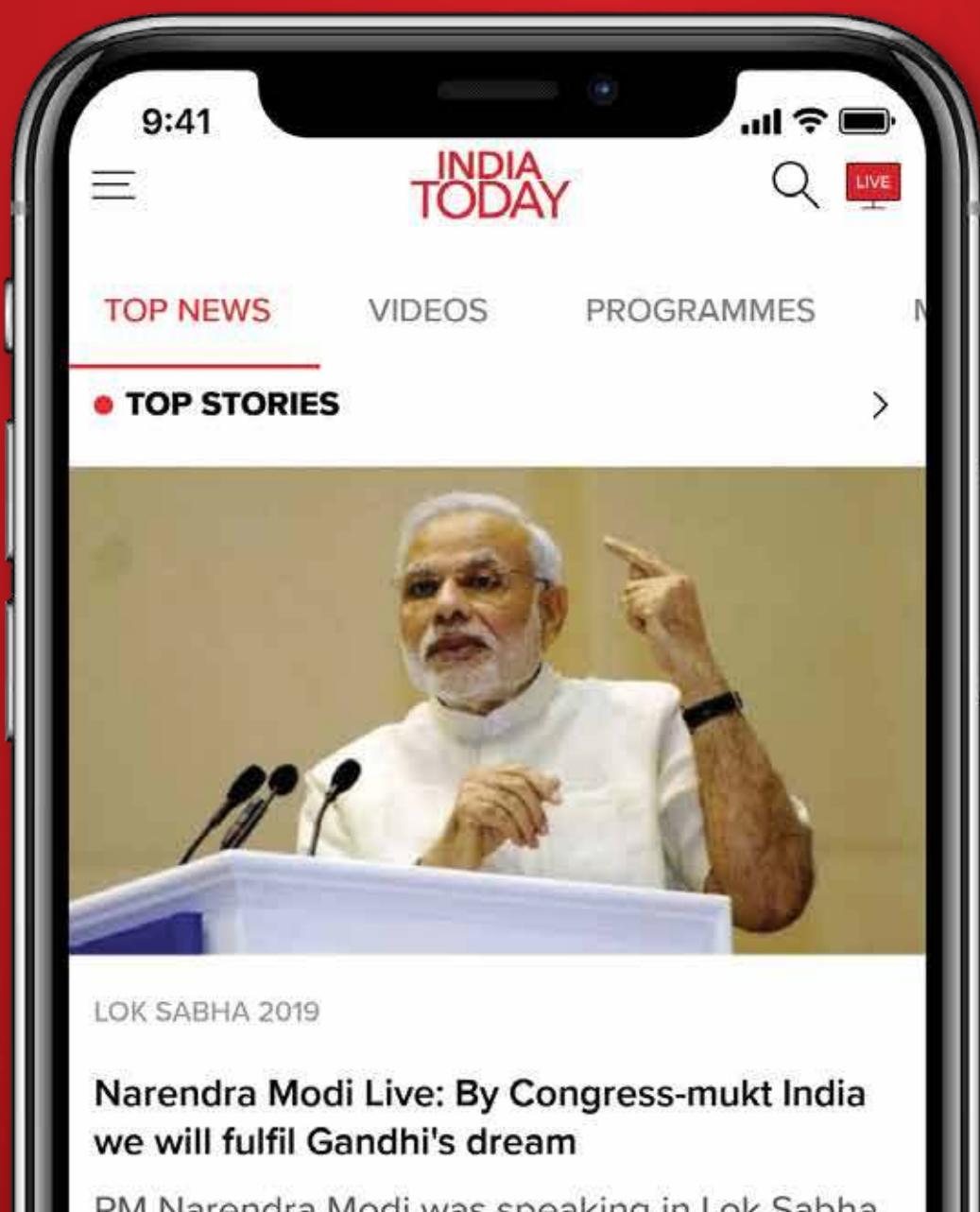
ensure stable tenures. Most of the officers considered for key assignments had worked with the CM when he was a minister or chairperson of the Tourism Development Corporation or were posted in the CM's hometown Ujjain. It's been one and a half years and he should have had a team of his own by now," says Girija Shankar, veteran political commentator and MP watcher.

The CMO is a critical office in all states but more so in MP right now because CM Yadav holds as many as 11 key portfolios: Home, Forests, Mining, Industries, General Administration, Civil Aviation, Jail, Public Relations, Public Services Management, NRIs and Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA). So the CMO has to function as the minister's office for these departments as well. ■

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TRANSFORMING BIHAR

THE UNTOLD TEXTILE REVOLUTION

Once primarily known as the land of ancient wisdom and spiritual heritage, Bihar is undergoing a significant industrial revival. In a transformative journey marked by visionary leadership and robust policy innovation, the state has rapidly emerged as a thriving textile and leather manufacturing hub which have been categorised as a "High Priority Sector".

From Exodus to Homecoming: The Emotional Core of Reverse Migration

When thousands of skilled workers returned to Bihar during the COVID-19 pandemic, West Champaran's administration seized the moment. In Chanpatia, a start-up zone was rapidly established in government-provided premises, enabling returnee migrants—many previously employed in textile hubs like Surat and Delhi—to launch their own ventures with robust state and district support. Mritunjay Sharma, once employed by a clothing firm in Delhi, founded his own clothing brand "Lisso" after accessing a ₹25 lakh loan under the Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP). Within months, his business achieved transactions in the crores and began receiving orders from across India and abroad—including markets in Spain, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

Entrepreneurs like Archana Kushwaha, who returned from a Surat textile mill, teamed up with local authorities and her husband to set up new production units. Today, over 58 textile units are thriving in Chanpatia, producing everything from school uniforms and T-shirts to Kashmiri shawls and soft toys. This start-up zone has created thousands of jobs and become a model for similar zones in Muzaffarpur, Dhaka (East Champaran), and Fatuha (Patna). Similarly, the Muzaffarpur Bag Cluster stands as India's largest bag manufacturing hub, with a majority of units owned and run by women entrepreneurs, many of whom returned to Bihar during the pandemic. To boost cluster

capacity and empower rural women entrepreneurs, the department partnered with JEEViKA, selecting 39 didis for financial aid—₹10 lakh each under "Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyami Yojana 2022," plus ₹5 lakh grant from JEEViKA and free transport for three months. Leveraging the state's textile and leather policy incentives, plug-and-play infrastructure, and targeted skill training, these women set up units capable of producing 700,000 bags per month, supplying regional and national markets.

Surging Investment Intent and Export Growth

Following a series of targeted investment roadshows and two flagship "Global Bihar Business Connect (BBC)" events—in December 2023 and December 2024—Bihar has witnessed an unprecedented surge in industrial interest and export momentum. The 2023 summit saw nearly 300 companies sign MoUs worth over ₹50,530 crore, making significant investment commitments. As of now more than 50% of the MoU's has been grounded. Building on this momentum, the 2024 edition registered a record-breaking ₹1.81 lakh crore in fresh investment intent with 423 MoUs spanning sunrise sectors from textiles and food processing to renewable energy and logistics. Major conglomerates such as Sun Petrochemicals, Adani, Reliance SLMG Beverages, BPCL, and NHPC announced large-scale projects, reinforcing Bihar's growing industrial appeal. As of

now, out of the 423 MoUs signed during the summit, 317 projects with a cumulative proposed investment of ₹82,584 crore have already been grounded.

In total, the state has now attracted investment intent pegged at ₹2.31 lakh crore over these two consecutive summits—a feat made possible by proactive government engagement, policy reforms, and a "CEO-style" approach to industrial facilitation. State officials have emphasized that the majority of MoUs signed in 2023 have already been implemented or are being grounded with exceptional speed, setting national benchmarks for project execution and business ease.

This investment wave is directly translating to jobs, new manufacturing bases, and rapid export growth, particularly in apparel and leather, where Bihar outpaced national trends with a 58.6% export increase in 2023-24, even as other states saw declines. Investors and trade bodies have hailed Bihar as India's most promising new investment destination, crediting business-friendly governance and a uniquely positive, action-oriented climate for the state's remarkable rise.

The Game-Changer—Policy, Incentives

Bihar's textile resurgence isn't just built on ambition; it's powered by a game-changing policy framework



"Getting such an opportunity to work at home is something I was looking for years. The officials provided the platform needed to develop the business initially. Now, we are getting huge orders and working continuously to fulfill demand from local markets."

Aamil Husain, Sufiya Textile

and infrastructure overhaul that has won applause from industry stalwarts and entrepreneurs alike. At the heart of this transformation lies the Bihar Textile & Leather (Amended) Policy 2025—a blueprint combining visionary incentives and ground-level practicality. Investors are drawn by a compelling mix: 100% State NET GST (SGST) reimbursement, full waiver of stamp duty and land registration for textile units, and a robust 30% capital subsidy on plant and machinery (capped at ₹30 crore). Additional benefits—such as electricity tariff support and a logistics subsidy—slash operating costs and boost competitiveness, while employment subsidies and ₹20,000 annual skill grants per worker fuel training and staff retention.

Comprehensive Export Oriented Units: SEZs and Plug & Play Industrial Sheds

Bihar is ready to fully support new industries by offering extensive incentives and industrial infrastructure. Key developments include the creation of a 6,000-acre land bank and 30 lakh square feet of ready-made, plug-and-play industrial

sheds in key districts such as Patna, Muzaffarpur, Begusarai, Champaran, Purnia, Vaishali, Bhagalpur, Saharsa, and Nalanda. These industrial sheds are equipped in advance with essential facilities like warehouses, electricity, roads, water supply, and restrooms, removing common barriers to starting industrial operations in the state. All sheds are ready for allocation and instant operationalization. After allotment, investors can install machinery and start production without delays. Sheds are offered with long, 15-year leases at low rents, making them accessible to a wide range of entrepreneurs and businesses. The government emphasizes its proactive approach and commitment to industrial growth, urging businesses to partner in Bihar's development by leveraging the state's ready infrastructure and favorable policies.



31st July 2024 - Government of India, approved two Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Bihar focusing on export-oriented industrial units—including textiles—marking a significant leap in its bid to become a major textile export hub. Located at Kumarbagh in West Champaran and Nawanagar in Buxar, these SEZs are slated to host units specifically targeting exports, with priority sectors including textiles, IT, electronics, and auto components. With ₹500 crore being invested jointly across the two SEZs, these are designed to attract investors interested in leveraging liberalized laws, streamlined clearances, and strong incentives geared toward international trade. Companies in these SEZs will benefit from Single-window clearances, Tax breaks and other fiscal incentives; allocation of industrial land by the state, with all basic infrastructure planned in advance. The government envisions



these SEZs as catalysts for export-led growth, major job creation, and a new business-friendly climate in Bihar's textile sector. The initiative is also closely aligned with Bihar's broader Export Promotion Policy 2024 and Textile & Leather (Amended) Policy 2025, offering additional benefits to export-oriented units. These zones are expected not only to boost exports but also to provide large-scale employment, attract fresh investment, and transform Bihar into a competitive destination for textile manufacturing on a national and global stage. Bihar's first dry port, located in Bihta, Patna, is operational now, marking a significant development for the state's logistics and trade infrastructure. The dry port, officially known as the Inland Container Depot (ICD) Bihta is boosting export-import activities, enhancing connectivity, and promote economic growth in the region.

Leading the Way: Top Fashion and Apparel Brands

Bihar's textile revolution has found champions in some of the most respected names in global fashion and apparel, underlining the state's ascent as a premier manufacturing hub. **Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Limited** is setting a new benchmark with a ₹35 crore ethnic women's wear unit in Begusarai, utilizing over 96,000 square feet of industrial space allotted under Bihar's plug-and-play scheme. The project is creating 750 direct jobs—most for local youth—and the company has publicly lauded Bihar's business-friendly environment, applauding the speed and transparency of state approvals as a model for the ease of doing business in India.

Moreover, **R K Shirts Private Limited** is engaged in the production of men's garments, including shirts, T-shirts, and school uniforms. The company was allotted Shed No. B1, covering an area of 37,056 square feet, in 2024 for the purpose of shirt manufacturing. The unit commenced production on the allotted land in April 2025. With a project cost of ₹7 crore, R K Shirts is manufacturing garments for prominent brands such as **Polo, Lucky, J. Crew, Calvin Klein, Hackett, Woolrich, Lauren, and**





Tommy Hilfiger, all from its facility in Patna. The unit currently employs over 180 local youth—both men and women—engaged in skilled tasks such as machine operations, designing, stitching, and packaging. It is set to gradually expand and employ up to 1,200 workers. The facility reflects Bihar's growing capabilities in textile manufacturing and is regarded as a key step towards building a self-reliant textile ecosystem within the state.

Furthermore, **Saavi Leather** is making a transformative impact on Bihar's textile and leather industry, setting up a massive, state-of-the-art factory in Paudaul, Madhubani. This facility, featuring 6,000 modern machines, is expected to generate employment for nearly 10000 to 12000 people—making it one of the largest job-creating projects in the sector. The unit focuses on leather garments and accessories and has received wide attention for bringing high-skill manufacturing back to Bihar, especially benefitting local communities with new economic opportunities.

Cosmus Lifestyle Pvt. Ltd. in Muzaffarpur's Bela Industrial Area, launched with a ₹37 crore



"Bihar is stepping confidently onto the global stage as India's next textile hub. Decades of skilled workforce legacy, accelerated by our forward-looking policies, plug-and-play infrastructure, and rapid industrial growth, have set us apart. The robust support for returnee entrepreneurs, our women-driven clusters, and new-age manufacturing zones demonstrate the new Bihar—innovative, inclusive, and globally competitive.

And with the recent successful signing of India UK's Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), Bihar's textile industry is aligned for international standards and seamless global supply chains. Our textile sector is prepared to leverage emerging trade opportunities, backed by best-in-class incentives, modern training programs, and robust logistics connectivity. We are ready to meet—and lead—the demands of the next generation of textile exports.

Nitish Mishra,
Minister of Industries, Bihar

investment, has become a beacon for industrial excellence. Employing 1,200 workers—40% women—the company demonstrates how the state's proactive policies and incentives are fueling quality-driven, local job creation at scale. Other Industry Leaders such, **RSCS International, High Spirit Commercial Ventures, Competence Exports** (notably manufacturing & exporting safety shoes to European countries), **Pearl Global, RMP fab, Devknit Textiles**, and more are drawing attention from traditional textile strongholds—Ludhiana, NCR, Tiruppur, and Kanpur—who are exploring large-scale investments in Bihar.

The Big Picture: Bihar in the Indian & Global Market

Bihar's strategic location, at the crossroads of eastern and northern India, provides it with unrivalled access to one of the country's largest consumer markets—from West Bengal, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh & Northeastern States to bordering countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan . The state's proximity to major ports, the Eastern Freight Corridor, and strong road and rail links greatly reduces transit times and costs for manufacturers, making it an ideal logistics and export hub for the textile sector. Bihar is leveraging its own strengths—abundant, cost-effective skilled labour, proximity to raw material sources, and a vast untapped domestic market—to forge a unique identity as the leading textile manufacturing hub for Eastern India. As recognized by industry leaders at recent national investor summits, Bihar's policies, infrastructure, and human capital are setting it apart.

Bihar is creating its own space, positioning itself as the gateway to India's eastern market and as a bridge to neighbouring countries. This fresh approach is fostering collaboration with brands seeking new, business-friendly destinations and enabling Bihar to emerge as a regional leader in textiles and apparel manufacturing. Entrepreneurs and industry bodies consistently highlight that Bihar's rise isn't just about cost advantage or



As part of a diversified industrial conglomerate, the Aditya Birla Group has had the privilege of working with several State Governments across India. We are pleased to share that the professionalism, responsiveness, and facilitative approach demonstrated by the Government of Bihar and BIADA have been truly exemplary.

Swaminathan Ramachandran

Chief Supply chain officer

Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Limited



The Department of Industries, Bihar, has been instrumental in the successful setup of our bag manufacturing unit in the Muzaffarpur Bag Cluster. Their efficient services allowed us to start our business in just 55 days, showcasing their commitment to industrial growth. We value their support and look forward to growing in Bihar's dynamic industrial landscape.

Tushar Jain, MD

High Spirit Commercial Ventures Pvt. Ltd.

incentives—it's about capturing the opportunity to serve millions of new consumers across East India and beyond, and providing manufacturers with a sustainable, strategically located base with strong government backing.

Culture of Facilitation: The New Business Climate

Not long ago, manufacturing in Bihar invoked images of frustrating paperwork and endless delays. Today, entrepreneurs tell a remarkably different

story—one where the state plays a proactive, enabling partner at every step. “We couldn’t believe how quickly we went from application to operation,” marvels a first-time business owner in Muzaffarpur, recalling how plug-and-play sheds—pre-equipped with water, electricity, and storage—cut down setup times from months to mere weeks.

Women entrepreneurs in the Muzaffarpur Bag Cluster echo this optimism, describing state officials who not only expedited their paperwork but guided them through every phase of starting up. For many, the most surprising change isn’t just infrastructure or incentives—it’s the attitude shift: “There’s a real sense that the government wants us to succeed—urgently and transparently,” one business leader emphasizes.

Behind these voices is a vibrant blend of robust policy, rapid response, and genuine support, forming an ecosystem where ambition is met with action. Rather than empty slogans, Bihar’s transformation is carried by thousands of entrepreneurs who now lead with confidence—testament to a new business culture reshaping the state’s industrial destiny.

The “Wow” Factor: A Call to Reconsider Bihar

Pause for a moment and consider what’s unfolding in Bihar. From a land once defined by its ancient heritage, the state is now scripting a new chapter—one of ambition, inclusion, and astonishing progress. In just 32 months, over 90 new textile



and leather enterprises have set up Units, delivering 13,000 fresh jobs and drawing an unprecedented ₹476 crore in investments.

This is not a change born quietly or by accident; it is the product of determined leadership, bold policy innovation, and a relentless focus on empowering people at every level. Entrepreneurs, once skeptical, now consistently laud a supportive and responsive government—one that is setting global benchmarks rather than chasing old industrial models.

As factories in Bihar export to Europe and Asia and as clusters employ thousands of locals, the story is no longer “Can Bihar do it?” It’s a resounding recognition: Bihar has already arrived on the industrial map, redefining what’s possible—on its own terms, and with a human touch that is both surprising and inspiring.



COVER STORY

TEST CRICKET

THE NEW



A FRESH BREED OF TENACIOUS YOUNGSTERS LE

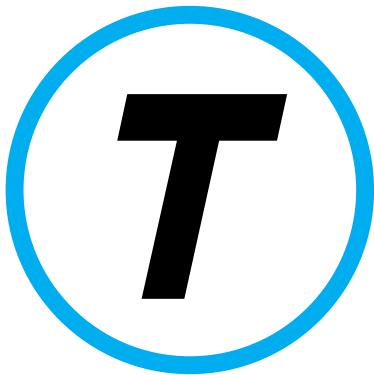
GEN XI



ALL SQUARED
The Indian
team cele-
brates a famous
victory at The
Oval, London,
Aug. 4

D BY SHUBMAN GILL COMES OF AGE IN ENGLAND

By NIKHIL NAZ



The sound of leather crashing into timber behind him, India's No. 11 Mohammed Siraj sank to his haunches, inconsolable on the last day of the Lord's Test. His 30-ball vigil was over, and so too India's hopes of taking a 2-1 lead in the five-match Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy. Needing 192 to win, India had folded up for 170, falling short by the thinnest of margins. Three weeks on, the ball was in the other hand, so to speak, and this time the sweet sound of it pegging back the off-stump on the fifth day heralded an improbable Indian victory, with Siraj in the thick of things once again. As the Indian pace spearhead swivelled 180 degrees, his hands sweeping the air in a victory celebration reminiscent of his footballing hero Cristiano Ronaldo, there were ecstatic scenes all around London's Oval ground.

The win—by six runs, the merest sliver and the closest in India's Test history—is already being spoken of as one of the country's best overseas. Not quite Gabba 2021 perhaps, a Test win that won us an Australia series, but clearly from the same strain: epic in scale, forged through resilience, and shot through by drama. A series finale, a record chase in the fourth innings, a spicy surface, and a comeback from the brink—all the ingredients of cricketing folklore bubbling under the London sky.

THE FIRESTARTER

There is no denying that this fairy tale at the Oval was born out of the grim determination the side showed in Manchester. When England set the visitors an eye-watering 669 runs to chase down in the fourth Test—leaving open only the chance of losing—the Indians opted for resistance rather than resignation. Across five gruelling sessions, India battled time, and fought to stay in the game. What transpired was not a thrilling chase, but a gritty draw. And while stalemates are usually viewed as Test cricket's biggest offenders, India's stoic resilience steeled its core, and eventually gave us equal claim on the inaugural Anderson-Tendulkar trophy—a prospect that had often seemed perilously out of reach.





Leadership isn't about runs and rants, it's about trust. And Shubman Gill earned it in spades. With a mammoth tally of 754 runs, Gill surpassed Sunil Gavaskar's milestone of most runs by an Indian captain (732 vs West Indies in 1978) in a series

**Test
Matches: 37
Runs: 2,647
Avg: 41.35
Highest score
269**

SHUBMAN GILL 25

Captain; Right-handed batsman

What the world saw as a young, inexperienced side was deemed by coach Gautam Gambhir as a "gun team". And in that squad, only Shubman Gill could have taken on the role of the tank gunner. In his first stint as captain and No.4 bat, Gill scored a century and followed it up with two stellar knocks of 269 and 161 in Edgbaston, setting India up for a comprehensive win. When he faltered at Lord's, so did India. But it was the series-saving century in Old Trafford

that demonstrated he could handle pressure and step up when it mattered most. With each passing match, Gill settled in, showing his ease at taking on dual responsibilities. "I have more clarity on the areas that we need to work on as a team and as a captain," he said at the conclusion of the series. "I was thinking more for the team, which helped me to take the pressure off myself." This consummate self-awareness offers proof that the future of Indian cricket is in safe, reliable hands. It helps that they also unleash strokes that run bowlers ragged.

—Suhani Singh

Watching from afar, India's former offie mainstay Ravichandran Ashwin articulated it best on his YouTube channel: "Somebody will rise up. When we're pushed to the wall, this Indian team becomes a different beast." And that beast roared at The Oval. From a dominant 301/3, while chasing only 374, England capitulated, losing seven wickets for 66 runs. Pressure changes sides. India smelled blood, and Siraj delivered the final blow. After the last rites were performed, a question was asked: what have you learned about yourself and the team in the past six weeks? "Never give up," captain Shubman Gill said, almost instinctively. Those three words captured the ethos of this young side that had stared down adversity, injury and the weight of expectation—and never blinked.

Nothing summed up the spirit of Gill and Co. better than Siraj, bowling his fourth fastest ball of the series, at 146 kmph, at the fag end of a two-month-long tour, having already hurled 1,100-plus deliveries during the series. And

what of Rishabh Pant, who refused plaster for his broken toe till the Old Trafford Test was over, so that he would not be found wanting while batting to save the match.

Former Indian captain Sunil Gavaskar, when asked whether this Indian team had displayed a certain character as the series rolled on, told INDIA TODAY, "Yes, you could certainly see that, with the way they fought back from difficult situations." He reserved special praise for skipper Gill: "The captain was the one that never gave up. He never gave his wicket away even after he got a 100, even after he got a double hundred, even after he got 250. And that is the spirit with which this team played. Hanging in there irrespective of the situation...that's how in tough situations they found that extra piece of energy that took them over the line."

A LEADER EMERGES

For new captain Gill, this was a baptism by fire. And he came through with flying colours. Although there were errors—the under-bowling of Washington Sundar at Old Trafford, the strangely defensive fields at Headingley, the revolving door at No.3 between Sai Sudharsan and Karun Nair, and the inexplicable dropping of Prasidh Krishna for an untested Anshul Kamboj (again at

Indian batsmen, powered by 12 centuries, plundered 3,807 runs against England—the most ever scored by a team in a five-match Test series

Old Trafford)—the net takeaways were positive. The 25-year-old came through with his reputation much enhanced.

When you appoint your best batter captain, there is always the chance of losing him as a run-scorer. Cricketing history is littered with such casualties. But Gill, with 754 runs in the series, has put those concerns to rest emphatically. His purple patch from the IPL, where he was among the top five scorers and also captain of the Gujarat Ti-



YASHASVI JAISWAL 23

Left-handed batsman

Yashasvi Jaiswal plays cricket with fearless exuberance. A prodigy forged on the unforgiving maidans of Mumbai, in England, he faced his first true test against quality seam bowling with the Dukes ball—and emerged with distinction. He amassed 411 runs at an average of 41.10, with two centuries and two half-centuries. His 101 at Leeds came after weathering a hostile opening burst. His second, a measured, second innings 118 at The Oval during the series decider, showcased his growing

maturity. It was a spring-loaded innings of grit. Occasionally undone by early swing, he never retreated into a shell. The touch of rawness in his technique is counterbalanced by natural timing and an electric sense of purpose. A luminous career awaits him.

—Amitabh Srivastava

**Test
Matches: 24**
Runs: 2,209
Avg: 50.20
**Highest score
214***



MOHAMMED SIRAJ 31

Right-arm fast bowler

The destiny's child of the India-England Test series, Siraj was the protagonist of some of its key moments—the brazen brush against Ben Duckett after dismissing him at Lord's; his crestfallen state after the ball rolled back to dislodge the bails on day five of the same game, giving England a 2-1 lead; the botched catch of Harry Brook on the boundary on day four of the fifth Test that nearly handed England the match. It seemed fate was playing a cruel game with the 31-year-old Hyderabad. But 'BELIEVE' is not just a screenshot on his phone, it's part of his DNA. Siraj never stopped believing in himself. With Bumrah sitting out two Tests, Siraj had to lead India's pace attack. He stepped up—1,122 balls to be precise—and has 23 wickets to show for it. "You play for the country...you don't think too much on how many overs [you] bowled," he said after the final Test at The Oval was won, and he was named Player of the Match for his nine wickets. It is befitting then that Siraj had his moment of glory. In him, a nation now believes.

—Suhani Singh

**Test
Matches: 41**

Wickets: 123

Avg: 31.05

**Best bowling
6/15**

tans, continued. The dual responsibility seemed to have galvanised him. More than the numbers, it was Gill's temperament that made an impression. Usually seen as gentle and self-contained, this series brought out a rawer version of him. His verbal volleys at the English batters for their time-wasting tactics at Lord's—delivered with a fire reminiscent of Virat Kohli—signalled a young man growing into the job. Questions arose: would going against his natural temperament affect his batting rhythm? The answer came soon enough: a gritty century at Manchester in the very next Test, and a Player of the Series award at the end of the tour, put those doubts to rest.

But leadership isn't just about runs and rants, it's about trust. And Gill earned it in spades. Many in the squad had more Test experience. Some were

contenders for the captaincy themselves before being overtaken by the boy from the frontier town of Fazilka, southwest Punjab. Yet, they synchronised perfectly to the conductor's tune, aligning their personal targets to the team's goal, ready to give their all when the occasion demanded. This was the biggest approbation of Gill the captain.

Opener K.L. Rahul's insights on the dressing room air jive perfectly with what the world observed from the sidelines: "Shubman has been phenomenal. He has led from the front, really worked hard with the boys behind the scenes as well as in forming connections...which a lot of people don't see. He'll take this Indian team to great heights." Gill's captaincy will still need refining—tactically, he's a work in progress. But while a captain can be appointed, a leader must rise. And rise he did, in the summer of 2025.

Never give up was the ethos of the Indian team that stared down adversity, the weight of expectations, and never blinked

UNSUNG, UNBREAKABLE

India's campaign wasn't just about fight; it was also about form. This was a showcase of skill and adaptability across the board. There was Sundar, overlooked for much of the series with the ball, but invaluable with the bat, a true three-dimensional cricketer. There was Ravindra Jadeja, ever reliable, punching above his weight in both departments. And Akash Deep, all sinew and control, chipping in with crucial lower-order runs and bowling tireless spells. Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rahul were stoic at the top, navigating the Dukes ball under heavy clouds and pressure. Prasidh Krishna, briefly dropped, showed his nous by baiting set batters with seemingly innocuous lengths before pulling the rug from under their feet. Pant's scores (134, 118, 65 and 74) weren't just counter-attacks, they were statements.

India's six-run win in the final Test at The Oval was also its slimmest margin of victory ever in a Test

And then there was Siraj, the series' heartbeat. His stamina was matched only by his craft—cross-seam deliveries that jagged in or seamed away, subtle angle changes, and a motor that simply refused to stop. India, for once, weren't carried by a single messiah. This was a relay of heroes. Nearly a dozen different players stood up at different moments—a hallmark of healthy team dynamics. As Rahul, one of those heroes, put it after the final Test: "This is where the change begins. This Indian team will win a lot more outside India in coming years."

TESTED AND TEMPERED

In what finished as one of the best Test series of the 21st century, all five Test matches went down to the wire on the final day (the last time this happened was in the 2017-18 Ashes series in Australia). It wasn't just cricket, it was war, playing out one session at a time. And in that war, India proved they weren't just talented, they were tempered in steel.

That six-run margin at The Oval separated a drawn series from a historic defeat. But its ripple effect may be far greater. Because had India lost 3-1, the knives would have been out, questions would have been raised: was Gill too green to lead? Had India moved on too soon from Kohli and Rohit Sharma? Could the IPL generation handle Test cricket's grind?

But those knives have been sheathed, at least for now. A drawn series now feels like a triumph—because



**RAVINDRA
JADEJA** 36

Left-handed batsman/bowler

Test Matches: 85
Runs: 3,886
Avg: 37.72
Highest score: 175*

Wickets: 330
Avg: 25.16
Best bowling: 7/42

Ravindra Jadeja has long defied easy definition. Once caricatured for his flamboyance and nicknamed 'Sir Jadeja', he has transformed into one of Indian cricket's most valuable assets. At 36, he has completed perhaps his most defining series as a batting all-rounder—compiling 516 runs at an average of 86.00—the highest among all batsmen. Batting mostly at No.6 or lower, he scored either a half-century or century in four matches. His unbeaten 107 in Manchester was a masterclass—with India staring down the barrel, Jadeja's composure and craft salvaged a draw. Innings after innings, he shepherded the tail, absorbed pressure, offered lower-order muscle. With the ball, he claimed 7 wickets—modest returns by his standards—but his ability to hold up one end allowed India's pace attack to operate in shorter, more incisive bursts. In a summer of bold narratives, Sir Jadeja's mastery stitched India's campaign together. He didn't just contribute, he punched above his weight.

—Amitabh Srivastava



K.L. RAHUL 31

Right-handed batsman

**Test
Matches:** 63
Runs: 3,789
Avg: 35.41
Highest score
199

Kananur Lokesh Rahul embodies the understated grace of India's batting tradition. His supple wrists and acute judgement outside off stump allow him to adapt across formats and batting positions. In the fierce cauldron of the Test series against England, Rahul reaffirmed his class with 532 runs at an average of 53.20—including two masterful centuries and two crucial half-centuries. He was India's batting metronome—measured in de-

fence, precise in strokeplay. Moreover, it was the manner in which he absorbed pressure and built partnerships that defined his contribution. Rahul's ability to read conditions and guide younger players is a hallmark of his maturity. Also, compared to his modest career average of 35.41, Rahul is clearly in a higher orbit now, vis-a-vis consistency and impact. He was one of only two players in the series to face over 1,000 deliveries, underlining both his patience and resolve.

—Amitabh Srivastava

of the context, the fight and the promise it held. Perhaps the most lasting takeaway was the silence that fell like a blanket over the other side. There was hardly a mention of 'Bazball' all through the summer. England's reckless spirit had been laid bare.

FUTURE READY

As India now gets into white-ball season, marked by the all-important T-20 World Cup early next year, they will do well to keep building on their Test squad for the future. For starters, what place will Jasprit Bumrah hold in it? The biggest match-winner in India's ranks, he has struggled with injuries in the recent past, a bequest of his unusual action. That means India needs to manage his workload carefully or run the risk of losing him for even white-ball cricket. Not having him for two of the three Tests in England did hamper India's plans for the hosts. Perhaps, then, it's time to look beyond Bumrah in the game's longest format. This would allow more clarity when making pre-series plans and also enable Bumrah to operate at his optimum at other international cricket stages.

But this would only be possible if the BCCI can get a pool of pacers that can handle the rigours of five-day cricket, especially in this age of batter-friendly pitches.

The England tour has built an Indian team full of character. It wasn't just a Test series, it was a rite of passage. From boys to men

Not too long ago, under Kohli, India had a pace-pack that was the envy of the world, featuring the likes of Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umesh Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah. In Siraj, Prasidh, Akash Deep, Arshdeep and, possibly, Mukesh Kumar and Harshit Rana, Gill has the opportunity to recreate such a posse. An uninterrupted run, backed by the team management, is all that is needed.

The next question is over the No. 3 position, and India is still searching for an answer on this. It's a coveted spot held previously by renowned names such as Gundappa Vishwanath, Dilip Vengsarkar, Mohammed Azharuddin, Rahul Dravid and Cheteshwar Pujara. Unfortunately, Karun Nair and Sai Sudharshan have failed to grab the opportunities provided in England. So, does India repose faith in Sudharshan or do they look elsewhere, return to the reasonably successful Sarfaraz Khan perhaps?

India's next series is at home against the West Indies, followed by another domestic two-match series with South Africa, the current World Test Champions—a perfect opportunity to test the applicants. The England tour has built a young team full of character. It wasn't just a Test series, it was a rite of passage. From boys to men. ■

78.9

MILLION

Total voters on Jan. 7, 2025

6.56

MILLION

Total voters removed

2.23

MILLION

Declared deceased

THE BIG STORY

BIHAR POLLS

RUCKUS OVER THE ROLLS

The ECI's special intensive revision (SIR) and draft voter lists have led to charges that millions in Bihar might be disenfranchised. It's still unclear how it will pan out

By KAUSHIK DEKA and AMITABH SRIVASTAVA



It

is a sultry August morning in Patna, and the Sadar block office wears the quiet, composed air of a still life portrait. Three officers sit at their desks, a laptop loaded with draft electoral rolls before them, a wall pasted with printed lists...and zero visitors. Not a single elector has walked in to check their status or file a complaint. "We'll wait," mutters Dhamendra Kumar, one of the officials, resigned to the tedium. Five days later, his station finally sees movement. Two men walk in, saying their names are missing from the draft list. The lethargy bears no hint of the storm brewing in Bihar's polity: the state's electoral rolls have shed 6.56 million names, a staggering 8.3 per cent reduction that has shrunk the electorate from 78.9 million voters in January 2025 to 72.4 million in seven months.

This massive pruning emerged from the Election Commission of India's (ECI) special intensive revision (SIR), a month-long exercise

that deployed some 84,000 booth-level officers across 90,712 polling stations, backed by 160,000 booth-level agents from 12 political parties, 3,000-odd electoral registration officers (EROs) and thousands of volunteers.

The deletions appear to follow an administrative method and logic. Of the 6.56 million names, 2.23 million are classified as deceased, 3.63 million as having permanently migrated or absent/untraceable, and 700,000 as duplicate entries across multiple locations. Only 120,000 names, a mere 1.8 per cent of the total, are stated to have been deleted for not submitting enumeration forms by the July 25 deadline. These individuals have been conferred the right to apply for reinstatement with proper documentation, potentially making their exclusion temporary. This benign picture is in stark contrast to the Opposition's narrative of mass disenfranchisement, produced by design via a hectic

3.63
MILLION

Fixed as permanently moved/ absent

0.7
MILLION

Enrolled in multiple places

27,013
DELETIONS

Avg. per constituency



but chaotic bureaucratic quickie.

To put this in perspective, the previous electoral roll published in January 2024 had deleted 1.6 million names while simultaneously adding 2.8 million new voters to the rolls. That exercise now appears extremely modest compared to the current purge. The sheer scale of the SIR deletions, four times larger than the previous revision, has turned it into a political flashpoint that threatens to reshape Bihar's electoral landscape just months before the state heads to polls.

THE MILLIONS MORE AT RISK

The real impact of the SIR will begin with who may yet be removed.

The Election Commission has celebrated the fact of 80 per cent of the 72.4 million voters included in the draft roll submitting their supporting

THE ECI'S LIST OF 11 ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTS HAS BECOME THE MOST CONTENTIOUS ISSUE

documents alongside their enumeration forms, the verification of which has just begun. But that also leaves out a chunky 20 per cent, approximately 14.5 million voters, for whom the clock is ticking with a September 1 deadline to submit documents that prove their eligibility. Political analyst and Swaraj Abhiyan founder Yogendra Yadav warns that voters who fail to submit documents—or fail the

subsequent verification—are also at risk. The fall-off could swell the overall deletions well beyond the current 6.5 million.

The controversy over acceptable documentation has emerged as the most contentious aspect of the entire exercise. The Election Commission's list of 11 acceptable documents conspicuously excludes Aadhaar, voter ID (issued by the ECI itself) and ration cards, the three most common forms of identification for Bihar's poor and marginalised populations. Instead, the ECI demands documents such as birth certificates, passports, matriculation certificates, land ownership papers, or pre-1987 government employment IDs, documents that are out of reach for many in Bihar, particularly those from rural areas.

Recognising that millions of voters lack conventional documentation,

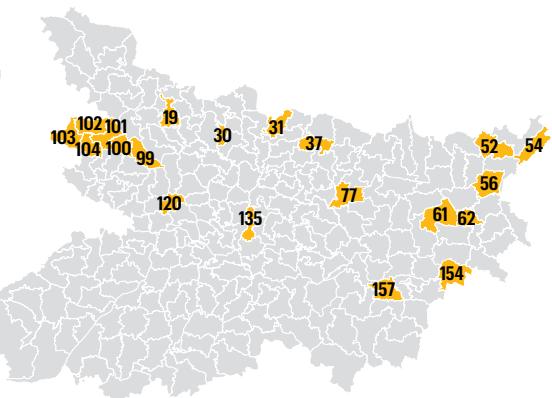
authorities have created ‘*vanshawalis*’ or family trees linking current voters to ancestors listed in the 2003 rolls. These genealogical records, authenticated by panchayats, have enabled approximately 49.6 million voters to establish their eligibility without producing birth certificates or educational documents. This creative solution illustrates the adaptability/absurdity of the entire exercise—the ECI simultaneously insists on documentary proof of citizenship while accepting village-level authentication of family trees.

The Supreme Court, hearing petitions challenging the SIR, has advised the ECI to accept Aadhaar and voter ID cards as valid proof of eligibility. Yet, the commission has steadfastly refused to expand its documentary requirements, maintaining that these commonly held documents do not adequately establish citizenship. The apex court has warned that it will intervene if there is evidence of “mass exclusion”, but has not specified what threshold would trigger such intervention. This ambiguity has left millions of voters in a limbo, uncertain whether their names will survive the final cut when the electoral rolls are published on September 30.

SEATS THAT LOST THE MOST

20 constituencies with the highest share of deletions

■ Constituency (district)
% OF DELETED VOTERS



101 Gopalganj (Gopalganj) 18%	62 Purnia (Purnia) 13%	30 Belsand (Sitamarhi) 12%	61 Dhamdaha (Purnia) 11%
102 Kuchai-kote (Gopalganj) 17%	104 Hathua (Gopalganj) 13%	157 Sultanganj (Bhagalpur) 12%	31 Harlakhi (Madhubani) 11%
19 Motihari (East Cham-paran) 15%	37 Rajnagar (SC) (Madhubani) 13%	120 Amnour (Saran) 12%	52 Bahadur-ganj (Kishanganj) 11%
54 Kishanganj (Kishanganj) 11.8%	56 Amour (Purnia) 13%	103 Bhorey (SC) (Gopalganj) 12%	135 Morwa (Samastipur) 10%
100 Barauli (Gopalganj) 14%	99 Baikunthpur (Gopalganj) 12%	154 Pirpainti (SC) (Bhagalpur) 11%	71 Mahishi (Saharsa) 10%

Source: ECI; VoteVibe (comparison based on electoral roll released on Jan. 7, 2025, and draft roll released on Aug. 1, 2025); percentages rounded off

WHILE HIGH DELETIONS IN MUSLIM MAJORITY AREAS NEED EXPLANATION, THEY COULD BE DUE TO FACTORS LIKE MIGRATION ETC. TOO

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Despite the scale of potential disenfranchisement, the ECI’s claim-and-objection process has been met with an almost eerie silence. As of August 7, 5,015 individual complaints had been filed. More remarkably, not a single claim or objection had been submitted by any of the 160,000 booth-level agents deployed by political parties. The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that no name can be deleted from the draft roll without an ERO or assistant

ERO conducting an inquiry and providing the affected voter a fair hearing. Orders for deletion must be written down and reasoned out, with provisions for appeal first to the district magistrate and then to the chief electoral officer. But there are huge doubts over whether this elaborate process can handle the potential challenges to millions of names in the limited time-frame, for elections are due in October-November.

Meanwhile, Opposition press conferences, led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal

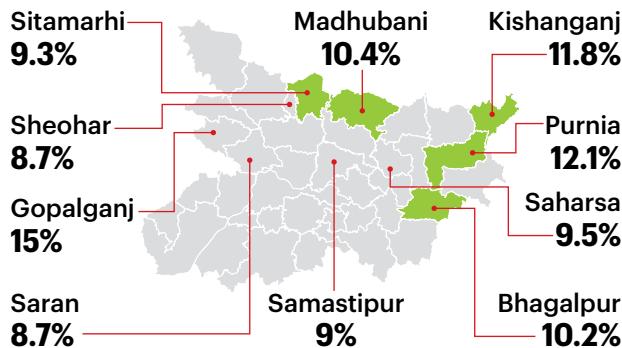
(RJD) and the Congress in Bihar, thunder with accusations of “*votebandi*” and deliberate disenfranchisement aimed at helping the ruling NDA, particularly the BJP. They want the ECI to provide comprehensive data on deleted voters so that patterns on how the exercise unfolded across constituencies can be analysed.

The Opposition’s predicament was apparent in a moment of political theatre when RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav brandished a voter ID card bearing the number RAB2916120, claiming his name had been struck off the rolls. The ECI’s swift rebuttal, confirming that his legitimate card (RAB0456228) remained intact and that the displayed number had never been issued, not only embarrassed the leader of the Opposition in Bihar but also exposed the challenge that political parties are facing: without verified cases of wrongful de-

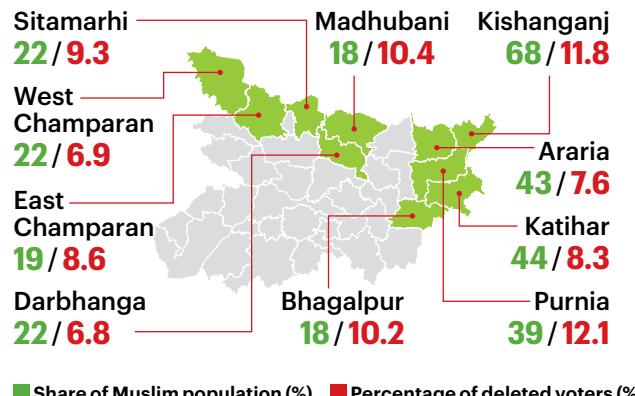
IS S.I.R. AN ANTI-MUSLIM EXERCISE?

Of the 10 districts with the highest deletions, five—Purnia, Kishanganj, Madhubani, Bhagalpur and Sitamarhi—have the biggest share of Muslims...

PERCENTAGE OF DELETED VOTERS



...but four of the 10 districts with the highest Muslim population also saw deletion rates lower than the state average of 8.3 per cent



Source: ECI, Census 2011 (comparison based on electoral roll released on Jan. 7, 2025 and draft roll released on Aug. 1, 2025)

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

letion, their protests lack the ammunition needed to mount legal challenges or mobilise public opinion.

MYTHS AND PARALLELS

A persistent narrative surrounding the SIR is that it targets Muslim voters, particularly in the frontier districts where communal rhetoric often paints them as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. The data presents a more nuanced picture. Among the 10 districts with the highest deletion rates, five—Purnia, Kishanganj, Madhubani, Bhagalpur and Sitamarhi—do have significant Muslim populations (see *Is SIR an Anti-Muslim Exercise?*). Yet, this correlation is muddied on closer scrutiny.

Kishanganj, Bihar's only Muslim-majority district (68 per cent of the population), did indeed see deletions of 11.8 per cent, higher than the state average of 8.3 per cent. But Katihar and Araria, with Muslim populations of 44 and 43 per cent, respectively, saw deletion rates of 8.27 per cent and 7.59 per cent, below the state average. Tellingly, Gopalganj district, which recorded the highest deletion rate at 15 per cent, does not have a particularly high Muslim population. Anyway, these variations suggest that while the overlap between Muslim concentration areas and high



FALSE ALARM
RJD's Tejashwi Yadav's presser in Patna after EC released the draft voters' list, Aug. 2

deletions warrants investigation, other factors like migration, documentation unavailability, or even administrative efficiency may be equally significant. "No direct correlation can be ascribed as yet," says poll analyst Amitabh Tiwari.

Another pattern shows how difficult it is to make out a narrative of targeted disenfranchisement. In 112 of Bihar's 243 assembly seats, voter deletions exceed the victory margins from the 2020 election, a statistic that suggests nearly half the state's constituencies could see their electoral outcomes altered by the

revision exercise. But a deep dive shows that the NDA partners—BJP with 27 seats, Janata Dal (United) or JD(U) with 29 seats, and the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) with 1 seat—collectively hold 57 of these 112 vulnerable constituencies. This could mean the NDA's own MLAs are as exposed to the electoral impact of the SIR as their opponents. "Without a caste-wise breakdown, particularly on whether deletions are high among Muslims and Yadavs, it's impossible to determine if the BJP stands to gain from the exercise," says Tiwari.

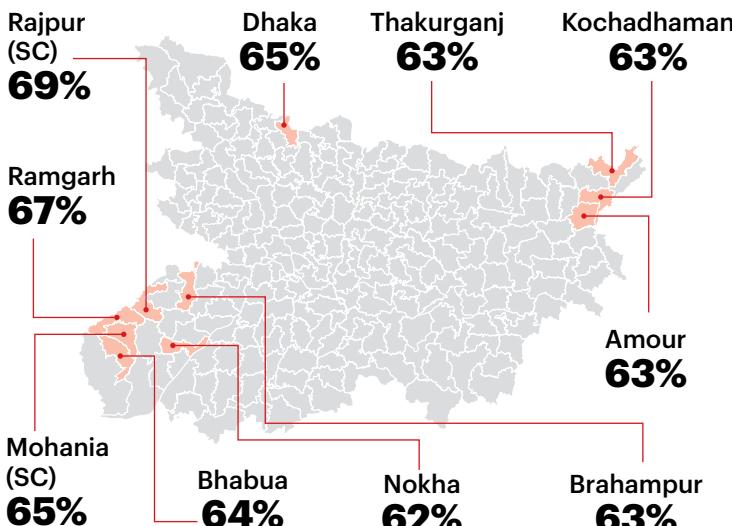
THE MISSING WOMEN

Across Bihar, they form an alarming 55% of the excluded

THE BIG STORY

BIHAR POLLS

PERCENTAGE OF DELETED NAMES



Source: ECI (comparison based on electoral roll released on Jan. 7, 2025 and draft roll released on Aug. 1, 2025)

GIRL, DELETED

What the data conclusively reveals is a shocking gender disparity—women constitute 55 per cent of all deleted voters despite making up only 47.7 per cent of Bihar's electorate. In fact, in 43 of Bihar's 243 assembly constituencies, women account for 60 per cent or more of the deletions. The most extreme case is Rajpur, a constituency reserved for Scheduled Castes in Kaimur district, where 69 per cent of the deleted voters are women. The figure for Kaimur—a hilly, forested outback—as a whole is 64 per cent, followed closely by Buxar at 63 per cent.

This gendered pattern of exclusion reflects the deeper structural inequalities in Bihar society. Women, particularly those in rural areas, are less likely to possess the documentary proof required by the SIR. They also migrate after marriage, often lack education certificates due to lower literacy rates, and have limited interaction with government institutions that issue official documents. The irony is particularly bitter given that women voters are credited with playing a decisive role in recent Bihar elections, forming a crucial vote bank for both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

IN 43 OF THE 243 ASSEMBLY SEATS IN BIHAR, 60% OR MORE OF THOSE EXCLUDED FROM THE DRAFT ROLL ARE WOMEN

Their systematic exclusion threatens not just individual voting rights but the democratic legitimacy of any mandate emerging from the upcoming election.

GRAVE CONCERN

Perhaps no aspect of the SIR has generated more controversy than the 2.23 million voters classified as deceased. Opposition parties have time and again demanded transparency about the methodology used, questioning how the ECI verified such a massive number of deaths in a state where, by the government's own admission, death registrations remain woefully low.

This opacity has fuelled speculation about arbitrary deletions, with Opposition leaders suggesting that many "dead"

voters might be very much alive but temporarily absent during the SIR drive. The fear is particularly acute among families of migrant workers, estimated at over 7.4 million, who often spend months or years in other states and may have been marked deceased simply because they weren't present when officials visited.

On the ground, the SIR has also been a tragicomedy of errors at times. Booth-level officers racing against impossible deadlines have recorded fathers' names as simply 'Father', wives with the surname 'Husband'. On the flip side, in Dhanarua block of Patna district, a government clerk embroiled in a marital discord case had submitted a falsified death certificate to have his wife declared deceased and struck off the rolls. Only the diligence of an alert BLO exposed this 'electoral murder'.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has now moved the Supreme Court, seeking directions to the ECI to publish names and specific reasons such as death, relocation or duplication for those excluded from the draft roll. While the July 20 lists shared with booth-level agents of political parties included names, EPIC ID numbers and reasons for deletion, the August 1 lists omitted the last detail.

Yet, in a state where power cuts can spark spontaneous protests, the deletion of 6.5 million names from voter rolls has been met with an uncanny stillness. Even in districts like Gopalganj, where one in six voters has been struck off the rolls, the streets remain calm. Many analysts attribute this to Bihar's voter apathy, characterised by chronically low voter turnout, barely 60 per cent in recent elections. Which, in turn, means 40 per cent of the voters have limited investment in their electoral rights. The ECI's month-long window for filing objections has also provided a safety valve, allowing voters to believe they can reclaim their names through proper procedures. While the silence at the draft roll offices may feel deceptively serene now, democracy itself is perhaps undergoing a decisive churn in Bihar. ■



ANI

BJP GOES HEAD HUNTING

To reset the ideological compass and manage a transition to a post-Modi era, the BJP-RSS are taking their time over choosing a national president

By ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

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JUST WHEN IT SEEMED THE BJP WAS FINALLY getting set to elect a president, the needle moved backward again, with the imperative of finding a new vice-president for the country first. Never mind that it has been more

than a year since current president Jagat Prakash Nadda's term came to an end—this after an extension of a year and a half from the original retirement date of January 20, 2023. The vice-presidential election is due on September 9, followed perhaps by a cabinet reshuffle and, of course, the Bihar election.

What is holding up the process? The ideological hand of the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) perhaps, which seems to have reclaimed its position behind the steering wheel after the BJP's underwhelming 240-seat tally in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. That setback prompted the Sangh to demand a course correction. No longer content to watch from the sidelines, it has also been pressing for more say in appointments, campaign narratives and transitions at the top. So it is with

IN SEARCH OF A PRE

SOME NAMES DOING THE ROUNDS, THOUGH THE FINAL CHOICE COU

THE FRONTRUNNERS

the choice of president for the party.

The organisational elections that began in December 2024 were originally meant to be routine, but have now acquired a new salience. The RSS is certain that the president this time must be one of their own. Not just a charismatic campaigner, but a disciplined organiser, a Hindutva loyalist with deep roots in the Parivar ecosystem. An insider, not an import. Someone who can seamlessly lead the party into a post-Narendra Modi era. So, who fits the bill?

THE PROBABLES

Dharmendra Pradhan, the current Union minister of education and earlier in charge of petroleum, is one contender. His rise from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) stable, his ability to push the BJP's OBC outreach without alienating the core, and his rapport with Dattatreya Hosabale, the current #2 in the RSS, make him the most ideologically aligned and politically agile candidate. He has worked closely with past party presidents: Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari and Amit Shah. At 56, he offers a generational shift without provoking rebellion.

Then, there's Bhupender Yadav, the Union environment minister and a seasoned organisation man. A lawyer by training, he rose through the ranks of the Sangh's Adhivakta Parishad and earned his stripes as a shrewd poll manager, especially in Rajasthan and Maharashtra. In 2019, when Nadda was picked as party president, Yadav was in serious contention and was even coordinating calls to key partymen before the announcement.

Manohar Lal Khattar, former Haryana chief minister and current Union housing minister, is another possibility. A committed pracharak before entering electoral politics, Khattar ticks many ideological boxes. He enjoys proximity to Prime Minister Modi and holds favour among Sangh pracharakas like Arun Kumar. Howev-



**Dharmendra
Pradhan, 56**

*Union Minister
of Education*

His ABVP back-ground, ability to push BJP's OBC outreach and rapport with Sarkaryavah Dattatreya Hosabale make him the most ideologically aligned and politi-cally agile candidate



**Manohar Lal
Khattar, 71**

*Union Minister
of Housing and
Urban Affairs*

Bhupender Yadav, 56

Union Minister of Environment

Organisation man, lawyer by train-ing who rose through the ranks of the Sangh's Adhivakta Parishad. Played a crucial role in both the Rajasthan and Maharashtra assem-bly elections. Was a contend-er in 2019 too



A lifelong pracharak, the former chief minister of Haryana ticks many an ideo-logical box. He is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as Sangh pracharakas like Arun Kumar Khanna. Age, though, may not be on his side

THE RSS IS SURE THE PRESIDENT THIS TIME MUST BE ONE OF THEIR OWN. NOT JUST A CHARISMATIC CAMPAIGNER, BUT A HINDUTVA LOYALIST WITH DEEP ROOTS IN THE PARIVAR

er, Khattar's tenure as CM ended amid murmurs about his inaccessibility and a top-down style that alienated both party workers and allies. His low-key presence in the cabinet has done little to reverse that perception.

There could be dark horses too. Shivraj Singh Chouhan, former Madhya Pradesh CM and now Union agriculture minister, is one of them. Still popular within the BJP base, Shivraj has quietly built goodwill within both the cabinet and Sangh ranks. His backers include veteran pracha-rak Suresh Soni—who also supports

Pradhan—and he is seen as a man who can rally disparate factions. His governance record and mass connect remain his trump cards. But his age could count against him: Shivraj is 66. In a party increasingly nudged toward generational change, he may be seen as a transitional figure—good for now but not in a post-Modi scenario.

Then, there is the wild card: Sanjay Joshi. A Nagpur boy, former general secretary (organisation) and an ideological purist. Joshi's relations in Nagpur remain strong; he shares old ties with Mohan Bhagwat, Manmohan

THE DARK HORSES

Shivraj Singh Chouhan, 66

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare



His governance record as MP CM and his mass connect remain his trump cards. Also seen as a man who can rally disparate factions

Sanjay Joshi, 63

Politician

A Nagpur boy, former general

secretary (organisation), who retains his ties with the likes of Mohan Bhagwat, Manmohan Vaidya and Nitin Gadkari



Vaidya and Nitin Gadkari. At 63, he is in the acceptable age bracket as well, but his run-ins with Modi when he was Gujarat chief minister may be a downer.

There were some rumours of a woman contender to helm the party. But no serious woman leader has emerged as a consensus candidate, and the idea may die a quiet death.

PREDICT AT YOUR PERIL

Both organisations have a history of springing surprises and, often, the more intense the speculation, the greater the likelihood that the eventual choice will be someone outside the frame. The elevation of Nitin Gadkari as party president in 2009 is a prime example. Just 52 then, Gadkari was relatively unknown outside Maharashtra, having served as state BJP president and minister in the Shiv Sena-BJP govern-

ment. He had almost no experience in national politics. Yet, the Sangh—disenchanted with the infighting and stagnation of the Delhi old guard—pressed for his appointment to inject youthful energy into the party and bring ideological alignment. Gadkari's appointment blindsided the Delhi leadership, upended power equations and marked a shift in balance in the BJP organisation.

The RSS-BJP are also not always bound by public logic or apparent credentials. They prefer consensus, not contest. And that can take weeks, even months, of deliberations and behind-the-scenes persuasion. They have also been busy, first as the party pushed their muscle for the Delhi polls, then to build the political outreach to complement Operation Sin-

ment for Governor Anandiben Patel, a cabinet reshuffle and new national council nominees. The state delivered only 37 out of 80 seats in the 2024 parliamentary polls, prompting serious introspection. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath remains popular and a key ideological figure, but the BJP's caste arithmetic and candidate strategy need urgent recalibration ahead of the 2027 assembly election. Similar exercises are underway in Haryana, Delhi, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Karnataka.

THE POST-MODI TEST

The RSS is well aware that Narendra Modi's mass appeal helped the Parivar reach newer demographics—urban aspirational classes, youth, women and marginalised castes. His popularity gave cover for ideological boldness and delivery on crucial agenda, be it the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya or the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. But it also fostered top-down decision making, weakening internal debate. Now, with both Modi and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat approaching the retirement threshold of 75, a new chapter is about to begin. No one in the BJP-Sangh expects the PM to hang up his boots anytime soon and it is agreed that he is needed to maintain their ideological and political trajectory. The next party chief will be the bridge. He will have to command the Sangh's trust, Modi's confidence, and the cadre's respect. His mandate will be as much to win elections—Opposition-ruled West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala go to polls in 2026—as to restore ideological depth, forge new caste coalitions, prevent factionalism and manage transitions both within and outside Modi's shadow.

As one party insider quipped recently: "We're not just choosing a party president, we're deciding who holds the map in a post-Modi landscape." The Sangh may hold the ideological compass. But the journey ahead will depend on whom it hands that compass to. ■

THE NEXT PARTY CHIEF WILL HAVE TO COMMAND SANGH'S TRUST, MODI'S CONFIDENCE AND THE CADRE'S RESPECT

door and now to identify a candidate for the vice-presidential election.

As of August 2025, the party has achieved the quorum necessary to elect a new national president. According to the BJP constitution, the party must complete its internal elections in at least 50 per cent of the states and Union Territories. That threshold has been crossed, with 18-plus state units having completed the exercise, though critical states such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Delhi have yet to deliver. Punjab had by the first week of August named only its first six district presidents, making it last in the queue, barring strife-torn Manipur.

In UP—a state crucial for both the party as well as the Sangh's ideological balance—four key changes are pending: a new state president, a replace-



LEADING LADIES

At the India Today Woman Summit, participants from diverse fields showed that women aren't waiting for a seat at the table; they are setting the table and changing the conversation



► SPEAKING FOR ALL
Delhi CM Rekha Gupta
(right) with India Today
Group's Anjana Om Kashyap

“

REKHA GUPTA
Chief Minister, Delhi

I believe that courage and decision-making ability have no gender. If you have courage, if you can take decisions, if you can work hard, then the sky is the limit; you can go anywhere

Rekha Gupta does not shut herself in her home; she is on Delhi's streets 24/7, among the people, attending social and religious events, meeting delegations, and conducting public hearings

”

I cannot spend public money on luxury like them, I cannot waste the public's time. Every moment and every atom of my being is dedicated to the public. I make policies in the public interest, not self-interest

B

e It pioneering a scientific breakthrough, winning an Olympic gold, running a government or transforming a business idea into a successful venture, there is no limit to what women can accomplish. To celebrate this ‘she power’, the India Today Woman Summit 2025, held recently in Delhi, brought together some outstanding women from diverse fields.

Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta set the tone early in her session, ‘She’s the Boss: Governing the Capital of the World’s Largest Democracy’, putting across the message that ‘courage and decision-making have no gender’. Legal luminary Pallavi S. Shroff made a powerful case for equity, saying that it isn’t about being pampered but about being trusted with tough decisions.

Senior IAS officers Mugdha Sinha and Anju Sharma spoke of the hidden tax on women in bureaucracy and the emotional toll of over-performance. Wing Commander Vyomika Singh said “the sky became mine because someone believed in me” while Colonel Akriti Sharma highlighted that “women no longer just join—they lead, command and transform”.

The summit also amplified voices in science and social change. Poonam Muttreja of the Population Foundation of India called out gender imbalances in reproductive rights; Dr Dhriti Banerjee of the Zoological Survey of India spotlighted the ecological and institutional gaps women leaders continue to bridge. Panels on sports, OTT, entrepreneurship and safety showcased how women aren’t just demanding space, they’re creating them. The summit made one thing clear: females are not the future, they are already the present. ■

—Shelly Anand



ARUN KUMAR

◀ THE FUTURE IS FEMALE: REWRITING RULES, REIMAGINING POLITICS

“ We are not only fighting for our ideology but also pushing back against patriarchy. It’s a battle on two fronts, and it demands both courage and resilience ”

SHAMBHAVI CHOWDHARY, MP, Lok Sabha

“ I aspire to be a good parliamentarian. I want to be remembered for bringing more women into politics and inspiring women from all walks of life to step forward and lead ”

SAAYONI GHOSH, MP, Lok Sabha

“ I’m a strategic feminist. I never covered my head, but I do now because in my rural constituency, women across caste and religion do. It helps me connect with them better ”

IQRA HASAN, MP, Lok Sabha

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

► THE MARCH FORWARD: WOMEN AND OUR ARMED FORCES

“ Be fearless. Believe in yourself, you will be able to achieve whatever you think. Believe in your thoughts, believe in your capabilities. Yes, you will need to build them up. Make a roadmap, have a dream ”

WING COMMANDER VYOMIKA SINGH →
Helicopter pilot, Indian Air Force

“ Coming from J&K, the journey to becoming a commanding officer in the Indian Army has its own pluses and minuses. I learnt that leadership in the armed forces is not defined by comfort but by presence during adversity ”

COLONEL AKRITI SHARMA
Commanding Officer, Indian Army



SHE POWER: WOMEN IN SCI-TECH

▼ CIVIL BUT TOUGH: WOMEN WHO RUN INDIA'S STEEL FRAME

“ Find your purpose and let it be power. Powerful is when you are comfortable in your skin. If your purpose in life can become your power, you will be a good lever for society ”

MUGDHA SINHA, Managing Director, ITDC



RAJWANT TRAWAT

“ You have to be seen as fair, honest, impartial and positive. If you have destructive tendencies, people are not going to like you ”

DR ANJU SHARMA, Additional Chief Secretary, Agriculture, Farmers Welfare & Cooperation, Gujarat

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



◀ LEADERSHIP AND LAW: FIRESIDE CHAT ON NEGOTIATING POWER

“ Equality isn't about being pampered for being a woman. It's about being trusted with the hard decisions and held to the same standards ”

PALLAVI S. SHROFF
Managing Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas

POWER OF CHOICE CHAMPIONING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS



POONAM MUTTREJA
Executive Director, Population Foundation of India

“ India's deep-rooted culture of silence around sex and reproductive health limits open conversation and awareness. Media and education play a significant role in transforming mindsets ”

MISTRESS OF SPECIES: GUARDING INDIA'S BIODIVERSITY



DHRUTI BANERJEE
Director, Zoological Survey of India

“ India contains roughly 7% of the world's biodiversity while covering only 2% of the Earth's land area. This diversity faces many threats, one of which includes the dangers of bringing foreign species into the country to be kept as pets ”

▼ FIELDS OF GLORY: TRAILBLAZERS OF BIHAR

“ Archery taught me patience and precision. Each arrow I release is a message from Bihar to the world—that we too can aim high ”

ANSHIKA KUMARI, Archer



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

“ Rugby demands grit, teamwork, and breaking stereotypes. Playing for Bihar's team, we've shown what resilience looks like ”

ALPANA KUMARI, Rugby player

“ I never thought I'd be here. Coming from a small town in Bihar, the odds were stacked against me. But my parents believed in me. Today, as a javelin thrower representing India on bigger stages, our journey has just begun ”

NISHI KUMARI, Javelin thrower

▼ BEGUMS OF BINGE: HOW STREAMING IS EMPOWERING WOMEN



“ Streaming allows narratives that wouldn't have hit the big screen or TV because we have the luxury to depict stories, subjects and characters in a very lovely, complex way. I think that's what women are—layered and beautiful ”

TANYA BAMI

Series Head, Netflix India

► BRANDING YOURSELF: MASTERING THE ART OF PERSONAL IMAGE AND PRESENCE

“ When you talk about personal branding, simply put, it is about each interaction, whether online or offline... There is a proactive approach to come out as powerful brands for yourself ”

RADHIKA KHANNA

Soft Skills trainer & Pageant coach



“ If *Delhi Crime* was a film, it'd probably have considered getting an A-list star to play Vartika Chaturvedi, but because it was on OTT, it was more story- and character-oriented. All that matters is what an actor can bring to the table”

SHEFALI SHAH, Actor



“ OTT gives me an opportunity to play around with nuance. If there's a season two, it allows you to better yourself. When do you get that? That never happens. Anybody who loves performing, this is your playground”

BHUMI PEDNEKAR, Actor



GLOW-UP: THE MANY FACES OF BEAUTY

“ A cutting-edge technology that has regained popularity is hyaluronic acid filler in a different composition. It basically improves your skin, minimising ageing as much as possible”

DR SRIDEVI RAICHUR
Dermatologist



▼ SHE ECONOMY: MARKETS THAT WORK FOR WOMEN



ARUN KUMAR

“ Unless we feel safe, we don't actually allow ourselves to access opportunities that are there for us. As women, we know that safety is much broader, deeper and elusive ”

DR KALPANA VISWANATH

Co-founder & CEO, Safetipin

“ We are addressing a need gap and solving for what people (women) want and need, and if we have that, be it legacy brands or start-ups, we will be able to solve ”

AYUSHI GUDWANI

Founder & CEO, FS Life

“ If you are able to solve a problem, there are more consumers who are happy to pay the price ”

DEEP BAJAJ

Co-founder, Sirona Hygiene

▼ WOMEN@WORK: BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES



“ Workplace biases are there because the policies are made by men.... Sometimes they are not empathetic or sometimes they are just ignorant about women's issues ”

SUSMITA NAG, Chief Marketing Officer, Fenesta



“ Research says when you have one lady who's sitting on a board or any group, that's tokenism.... When you put three women in a group, that forms a cohort, a cluster ”

KANIKA SINGAL, Lead Govt Practice, The Udauti Foundation; Independent Woman Director

Photographs: CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



▼ LADY RAGA

“ It is not easy to be a woman musician, but if you have dedication and passion, you are unstoppable ”

KAMALA SHANKAR

Musician & inventor of Shankar Guitar

आज तक

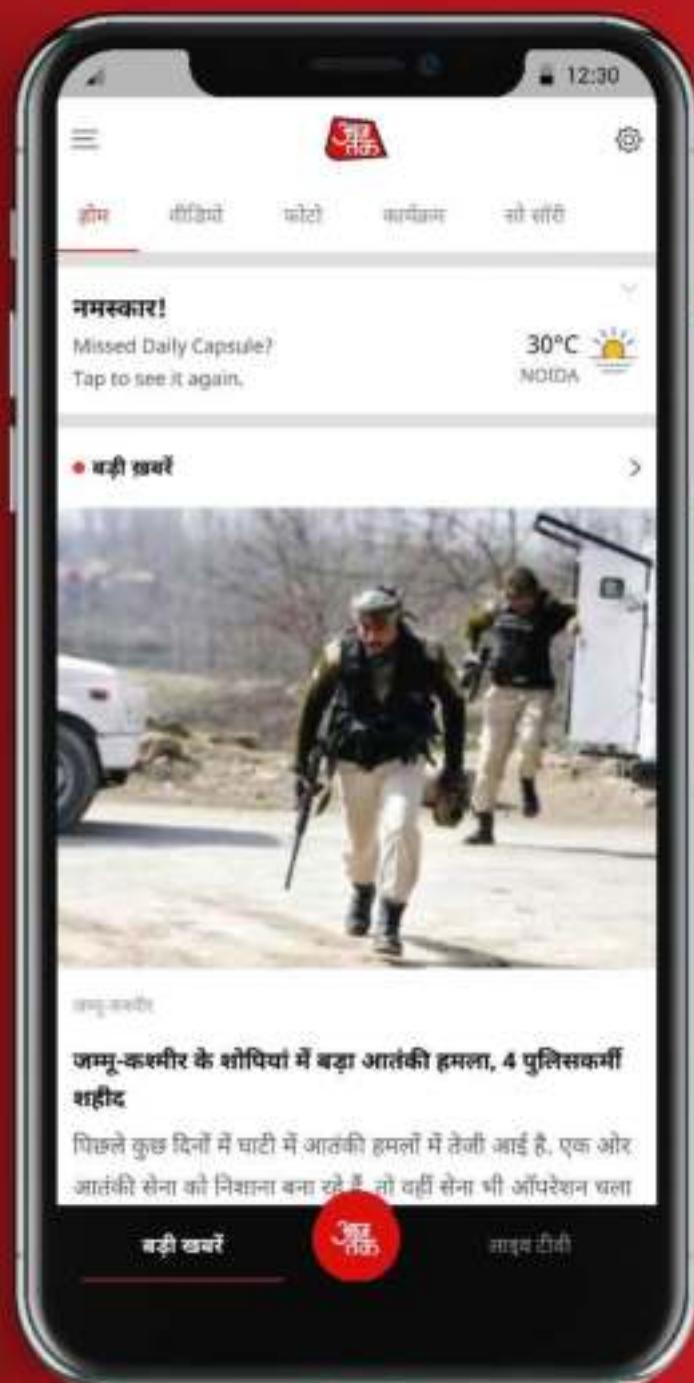
देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

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उपलब्ध है





सबसे भरोसेमंद खोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

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

अपनी पसंद के सब्सक्रिप्शन को टिक करें और फॉर्म को इस 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%
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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

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LE ! SURE

ART: EXHIBITIONS TO LOOK OUT FOR PG 56

BOOKS: TAKING ON TECH CAPITALISM PG 58

VISUAL ARTIST ▶

NO ROOM TO PRAY

A NEW EXHIBITION BY
ARTIST **PUSHPAMALA N.**
BOLDLY CHALLENGES
MAINSTREAM IDEAS OF
FOLKLORE, RELIGION
AND MYTHOLOGY



DOING IT HER WAY

'Motherland:
The Festive
Tableau' (2009)

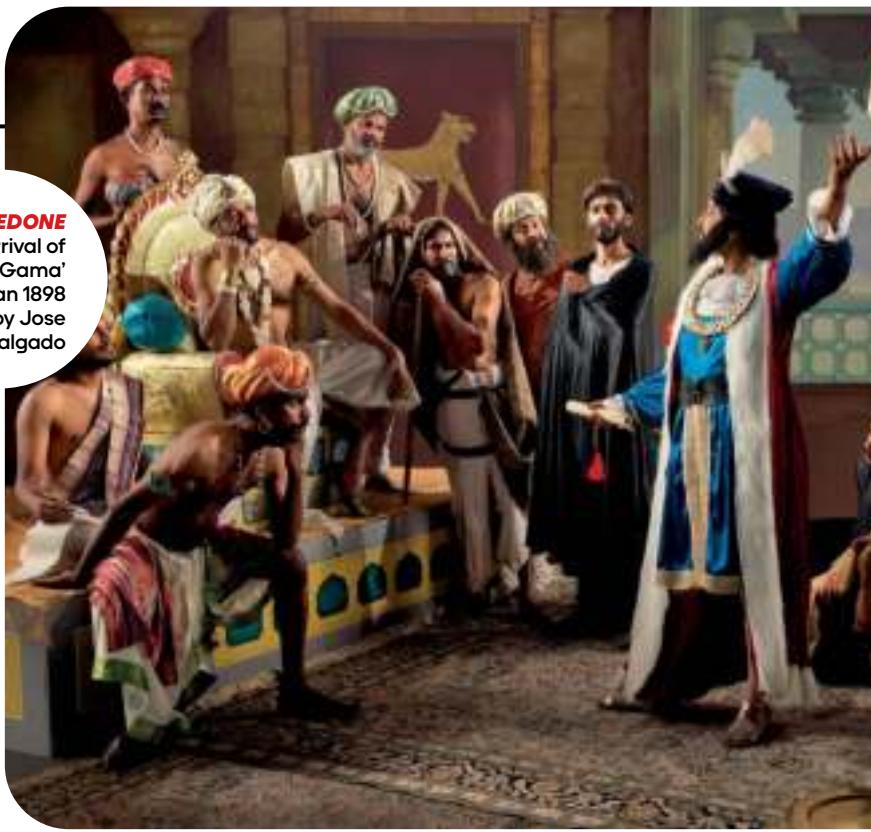
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"The most entertaining artist-iconoclast of contemporary Indian art." Read any article or write-up on Pushpamala N. and chances are that you will come across this line to describe the photo and video performance artist, sculptor, writer and curator. In fact, her own website uses the line in her biography. Ask the artist about its origins and she says she doesn't recall who said it first, but agrees with it enough to use it in her bio. "I use a lot of humour in my work and I want to be entertaining. My work is iconoclastic because I'm trying to deconstruct icons and critique the mainstream," she says.

Her exhibition *Dressing Up: Pushpamala N* is currently on display at CHANEL Nexus Hall in Tokyo, marking her first major solo exhibition in Japan. Earlier this year, she showcased three of her works—including 'Mother India', 'Avega—The Passion', and 'The Arrival of Vasco da Gama'—at Kyotographie 2025 in Japan. The current exhibition features three of her celebrated series 'Phantom Lady or Kismet', 'Return of the Phantom Lady', and 'The Navarasa Suite', which explore archetypal female characters inspired by the 'Golden Age' of Indian cinema, with the works drawing from mythology, folklore and popular culture, and examining how visual language shapes cultural memory and national identity.

Interestingly, 'Phantom Lady' was Pushpamala's first 'photo-performance' work, which she worked on between 1996 and 1998. Shot in Mumbai, the 25 black-and-white photographs were inspired by popular Hindi films that depicted the masked character of Fearless Nadia. "I was always a fan of Fearless Nadia and thought I could have some fun with it. I got a 'hunter-wali' outfit stitched and asked (photojournalist) Meenal Agarwal

ROBES REDONE
'The Arrival of
Vasco da Gama'
(2014), after an 1898
painting by Jose
Veloso Salgado



THE NEW SHOW,
INSPIRED BY FEMALE
CHARACTERS OF INDIAN
CINEMA'S 'GOLDEN AGE',
IS ON VIEW AT CHANEL
NEXUS HALL, TOKYO,
UNTIL AUG. 17

to shoot me in it," she recalls. The early shots excited her and she decided to develop them further into a story. In these photographs, the artist plays two roles—that of the Phantom Lady, who is a Zorro-like character, and the vamp, who is the lost twin sister. "I chose a psychological kind of style for the photographs, which was film noir. There is a play of light and shade and people have often remarked that my work is sculptural," she says.

This isn't surprising, considering the multidisciplinary artist initially trained in sculpting at MS University of Baroda and has won numerous awards for her sculptural pieces.

'Phantom Lady' was a photography and video project that started as a lark for a show on Indian cinema but soon turned into an interest that only grew with time. "It suits a lot of my interests—I like to use humour and storytelling in my work," says Pushpamala.

It is not just popular culture that inspires her, though. A lot of the humour also stems from daily life and her observations. Popular imagery is sourced from films, calendars, postcards, photographs, posters and advertisements. She uses sources from theatre and art history as well. "I'm interested in history and memory because I want to understand the present," she says. Pushpamala is particularly interested in the 19th century because she believes it was a significant period in history that marked a multitude of things—colonialism, the nationalist movement, imagery

ART WORK ▼

LETTERS AND LANDSCAPES

An exhibition at MAP, Bengaluru, explores Ram Kumar's dual identity as painter and writer



To mark the centenary of Ram Kumar—one of India's most celebrated modernists—the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bengaluru, is presenting *Shape of a Thought: Letters from Ram Kumar*, on view till October 26, 2025. This exhibition pairs Kumar's contemplative abstract canvases with personal letters, inviting visitors to pause, reflect and experience his work beyond traditional interpretation.

Curated by Arnika Ahldag, director, curation & exhibition, and Priya Chauhan, associate curator, the exhibition explores Kumar's identity as painter and writer. Rather than treating abstraction as a problem to solve, the exhibition encourages viewers to dwell in the space between image and text—where feelings, ideas, and memories intersect.

"Ram Kumar was not

only a painter but also a deeply expressive writer. He stayed in close touch with friends through letters: vivid, introspective pieces of writing that reveal his emotional world," says Ahldag. "In this exhibition, we paired his writings with paintings by searching for resonances between a feeling captured in a phrase and the mood of a canvas."

Ram Kumar's journey into art was unplanned. Born in Simla in 1924, he initially studied economics and wrote short stories. After enrolling in art

classes at the Sarada Ukil School in Delhi, he studied in Paris under André Lhote and Fernand Léger. His works depict barren landscapes and abstract cityscapes, evoking solitude, alienation and existential reflection. "Ram Kumar believed that art should be felt, not explained," Ahldag continues.

"We've tried to honour that by offering gentle ways in: through quotes, personal writings and open-ended questions that invite contemplation rather than dictate meaning."

For MAP, the exhibition furthers a mission of accessibility and emotional connection. Founder Abhishek Poddar explains, "Abstract art can often feel intimidating. With *Shape of a Thought*, we wanted to counter that idea. Ram Kumar was a storyteller. Long before he began painting, he wrote. Some of his books are on display too, his letters are excerpted throughout, and it invites visitors to see his art as a continuation of that impulse to express." ■

—Nikhil Sardana



MELANCHOLY ON CANVAS
Clockwise, Ram Kumar, 'Benaras' (1960), Untitled (1970)



—Deepali Dhingra

from photography and cinema—that continue to impact us till today.

What is remarkable about her work is that while most photographers like to remain behind the camera, she is often the protagonist in hers. So, in the photograph titled 'Kali', which is part of the ongoing 'Mother India' project, she appears as the fierce Hindu goddess, whereas in 'The Arrival of Vasco da Gama', she plays her first male role as the celebrated navigator. Pushpamala believes that by becoming a part of the narrative, the meaning of the narrative automatically changes. "If I was not the central character, the meaning would be different," she states simply. ■

—Deepali Dhingra



ART ▼

A NEW ECOSYSTEM

NIKHIL CHOPRA, CURATOR OF THE SIXTH EDITION OF THE KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE, WANTS TO MAKE IT A LIVING EXCHANGE OF ARTISTIC PRACTICES

What we're really thinking about is how to collapse the distance between studio and exhibition, rehearsal and performance, process and object," says multidisciplinary artist Nikhil Chopra, curator of the sixth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Titled *For the Time Being*, the edition invites artists to engage with Kochi and create site-specific work. Alongside static works like paintings, sculptures and installations, there will be sound, movement and choreography, creating a dynamic relationship between audiences and artworks. "No matter which day an audience visits, there will always be a live element to encounter, allowing for a constantly shifting, interactive experience," elaborates Chopra, who put up a 52-hour immersive live performance for the Biennale's 2014 edition. The Biennale is co-curated by HH Art Spaces, a

Goa-based artist-led organisation co-founded by Chopra.

Kochi's location along key trade routes historically connecting Europe and Asia put it in the unique position of becoming a melting pot of ideas, languages and cultures. The city will be fertile ground for the Biennale's invited artists to create works *in situ*. "It becomes particularly interesting to bring in contemporary art as a way to mirror and reflect on the histories that have shaped this internationalism, especially within the context of

contemporary practice. It allows us to think openly from a position of hospitality," says Chopra.

As with past editions, the historic Aspinwall House will be at the heart of the Biennale. Built in 1867, it is one in a chain of warehouses that line Kochi port where goods—spices, minerals, timber and even labour—were collected, stored and shipped out to Europe and America. "These spaces are thick with history, holding the ghosts of what came before. Aspinwall allows us to create dialogues that transcend time, place and geography, addressing not only current systems of trade and commerce but also how their legacies have reshaped Kochi," says Chopra. "By de-emphasising the finished object and prioritising process, we're inviting audiences to witness the making of a Biennale in real-time," adds Chopra. ■

The exhibition in Kochi marks the city's history as a trade hub, as a melting pot of cultures, ideas and arts

—Prachi Joshi

The Biennale will run from Dec. 12, 2025 to Mar. 31, 2026

THE LISTICLE

Interesting art exhibitions to look out for this month

MUMBAI ▼

A FINE BALANCE



Mumbai's urban tapestry and his native Bihar collide in artist Naresh Kumar's solo exhibition titled *Act of Republic*. His migrating life is at the core of these works, with a striking element in many being old telephone directories.

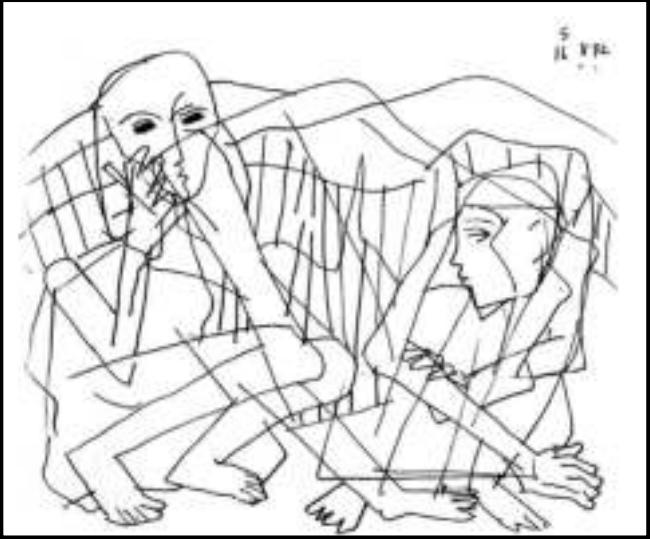
On view at **CHEMOULD PRESCOTT ROAD** till Aug. 28

KOLKATA ▼

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

Mark, Material, Memory at Kolkata's Art Exposure showcases recent works by artists Asim Paul and Surabhi Chowdhary. While both artists approach image-making through processes of quiet construction, they work with different mediums. Paul's work is monochromatic while Chowdhary's bristles with colour.

On view at **ART EXPOSURE** till Aug. 31 are two complementary mediums: sketches and paintings



NEW DELHI ▲

The Hunger Frames

In association with the Seagull Foundation for the Arts, Kolkata, Delhi's Vadehra Art Gallery is holding an exhibition of drawings by the late artist couple Somnath Hore and Reba Hore. Somnath Hore's preoccupation with the Bengal famine is palpable in the featured collection of drawings, the figures depicted marked by scarcity and starvation. As for Reba Hore, an announcement by the gallery states that her "observations of the same sociopolitical space further open a repository of stylistic multiplicities in political observations and locate an artistic temperament in political narratives of hunger and colonialism". Food for thought.

NEW DELHI ▼

SPIN A YARN



On view at **THE CRAFTS MUSEUM** from Aug. 7-17

Presented by the ministry of textiles, and opening on National Handloom Day, *Weave the Future 2.0* focusses on regeneration this year, celebrating a return to nature-aligned practices in Indian textiles. The showcase brings together 30-plus grassroots initiatives and brands dedicated to building circular, low-impact textile systems anchored in indigenous knowledge and ecological responsibility. Another highlight is a sound-to-spectrogram installation.

BOOKS ▾

OUR DIGITISING SELFHOOD

In *Searches*, **Vauhini Vara** examines decades of digital progress and subjects tech capitalism to a social, moral and personal scrutiny



Ecze. That's one of the first things author Vauhini Vara searched in the early days of the Internet, so early that Yahoo was her search engine of choice. That search assumed a special significance as I Googled my way through an eczema attack, searching every random piece of online wisdom.

In *Searches*, Vara trawls through three decades of technology, right from when there were just 10 websites in the world (imagine that), when Jeff Bezos and his wife had just started a business out of their garage (imagine *that!*). On the long, experiential road to ChatGPT, she sees the invisible webs that gird our digital lives: how social media is a site of performance by the “sanitised digital simulacra of selfhood”, how online norms are resulting in subtle self-modifications, how technological capitalism is transmuting our very sense of selfhood.

Vara imagines a world where **TECH PRODUCTS** don't require exploiting others

This is a big book. Big in its ideas, its ambition, its formal daring. For starts, it's not a straight-up non-fic history of tech through a critical lens. It's a memoir of sorts, built like a double helix, with two intertwined strands: one strand is personal, pivoting around the early death of Deepa, Vara's sister. And grazing on her marriage, seeded in a series of missed texts. Another strand is technological, recording the problematic rise of surveillance capitalism through Meta's Zuckerberg, Amazon's Bezos, and OpenAI's Altman.

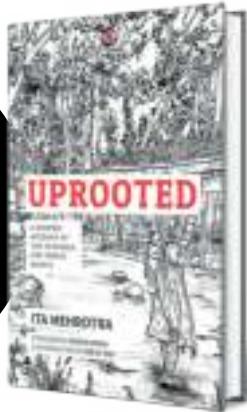
The two strands combine as Vara co-writes a chapter with ChatGPT about her sister's cancer and death. The chapter, also the book's emotional core, starts with Vara writing a single sentence in bold: “My sister was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma when I was in my freshman year of high school and she was in her junior year.” ChatGPT responds to the prompt with some anodyne prose.

The back-and-forths continue, with Vara adding more and more of her own text in each prompt; by the ninth prompt, she is able to complete the story in her own voice. In her own words.

“GPT-3 couldn't satisfy me as a writer,” notes Vara, for whom technological capitalism is both a promise and the perverse betrayal of its own promise. As she feeds each chapter to ChatGPT for its comments, Vara acknowledges the ambiguity in her own relationship with technological capitalism. “I could live without ChatGPT, but I don't,” she writes, imagining a world in which tech products don't require exploiting others. It is this yin-yang of convenience and conscience, experience and ethics, that also makes this a big book—in its ability to embrace the ambiguity and paradoxes of the digital everyday. ■

—Bishakha Datta

UPROOTED
A GRAPHIC ACCOUNT
OF THE STRUGGLE FOR
FOREST RIGHTS
By Ita Mehrotra
WESTLAND/ CONTEXT
₹599; 144 pages



BOOKS ▼

The Forest People

ITA MEHROTRA documents the embattled relationship between Uttarakhand's Van Gujars and their forest home

Rich with information, perspective and detail, *Uprooted* is an intimate opus focusing on the Van Gujars: semi-nomadic Muslim buffalo herders of Uttarakhand's forested foothills. It is narrated through their voices, and evokes their struggle for land and forest rights. The artist touches all aspects of the issue: its colonial background, the nature of the forest department, the law on forest rights, the marginalisation of pastoral communities,

the gender perspective, the ecological context....

Noorjahan builds her home with dried leaves, dead branches and earth; it has spaces for small birds to nest. A girl lops branches atop a tree, explaining, "We leave each tree for two years... so it grows back fully." An activist bemoans the planting of harmful invasive tree species by the forest department. Meanwhile, 'junglaat' (the forest department) and 'sarkar' (government), who

allow forest resorts, highways and commercialisation, blame the pastoralists for destroying jungles. Dislocated Van Gujars are 'resettled' on agricultural land they do not know how to farm. Activists struggle to put together old papers that may prove the rights of their community.

The pervasive injustice would be dispiriting but for the agency shown by the Van Gujars. Educated youngsters teach children, help women

earn through their craft, and struggle for livelihood and rights in the context of a healthy forest ecology. Aamna says that pastoral communities maintain the relationship between nature and human settlements, going between these two with their animals. And Ameer hopes that the world will see that "our communities can show the way, especially when it comes to combating climate change". ■

—**Juhি Saklani**

BOOKS ▼

A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Benyamin's *The Second Book of Prophets* is a fictional account of the life of Jesus Christ

In Benyamin's novel *The Second Book of Prophets* (a re-imagining of the lives of Jesus Christ and his followers), there's a scene where Jesus is struggling to overcome a moment of self-doubt. The Jews think of

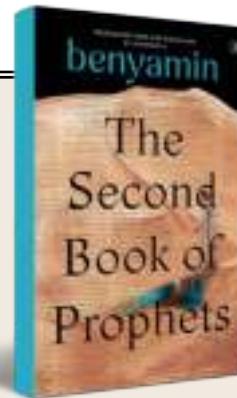
"For a man burdened with agony and suffering, there's no liberation," he thinks. The scene signals the central conceit of the book—writing the character of Jesus Christ as a young, angst-fuelled revolutionary who

There is a sense that Benyamin is focusing on the parts of Christ's journey that are applicable to modern socio-political contexts

him as a saviour foretold. But Jesus himself doesn't believe that true freedom (religious or political) can be achieved without a transformation of society, in a way that protects the poor masses.

wants social reform not as a means to power but as an aspirational goal all by itself.

Talking about the novel during an interview, Benyamin says, "This novel happened after I read studies



THE SECOND BOOK OF PROPHETS
By Benyamin
TRANSLATED BY MINISTRY S.
SIMON & SCHUSTER INDIA
₹599; 240 pages

on recent discoveries related to the history of Christianity, like the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi library. These new texts challenge our preconceptions of what that time would have looked like." In previous novels like *Yellow Lights of Death* (2015) and *Body and Blood* (2020), Benyamin had used Christian theology and history as pivotal plot points. With *The Second Book of Prophets*, he has joined Anatole France, Jose Saramago, Norman

Mailer et al, writers who produced fictionalisations of the life of Christ. There's a sense you get that Benyamin is focusing on the parts of Christ's journey that are readily applicable to modern-day socio-political contexts. "When readers get something relevant to the current context, it's easier for them to stay invested in the story," he says. "I wanted to show how Jesus was...also a social reformer. He wanted to change the way we live and not just change the way we pray." ■

—**Aditya Mani Jha**

STORIES FIND ME

Oscar-winning producer **Guneet Monga**

Kapoor celebrates the National Award

win for her film *Kathal*

Q. Where were you when you got news of the National Award?

I was in a narration with Tahira Kashyap Khurrrana and, initially, I couldn't believe it. It took a long time for it to sink in that *Kathal* won Best Hindi Feature. It's a huge honour. Very often, it feels like that in our fast-paced world, there is no space for storytelling that takes its time to unfold. *Kathal* is all about *thehraav* [pause].

Q. Have your reasons for backing a film evolved over the years?

What hasn't changed is my child-like fascination for how movies are made. I believe that stories find me instead of me going out to look for them. At our production house Sikhya, we are in service to a story and it's our responsibility to present it in its best form.

Q. What do you remember about Yashowardhan Mishra pitching this film to you?

I love the way Yashowardhan works. *Kathal* wasn't written in an airconditioned home in Mumbai—and it shows. He belongs to a village in Chhattisgarh and spent months doing research on the ground. When he narrated it to me, it was almost like a stand-up routine.

Q. You launched the India chapter of the Women in Film fellowship this year. Why is this important for you?

The stats are stark—less than 3 per cent of our directors are women; overall, they make up less than 10 per cent across all areas of film-making, be it writing, editing or cinematography. We need to create opportunities for women, so things can change.

—with Karishma Upadhyay

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



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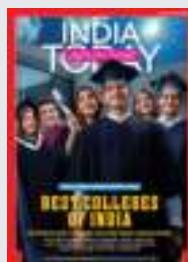
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close to nature.
I need Switzerland.

A photograph of a man cycling on a path through a forest. He is wearing a blue and white helmet, a bright yellow short-sleeved shirt with a small logo on the chest, and black pants. He is looking towards the camera while riding his bicycle. The background shows dense green trees and foliage.