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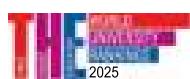


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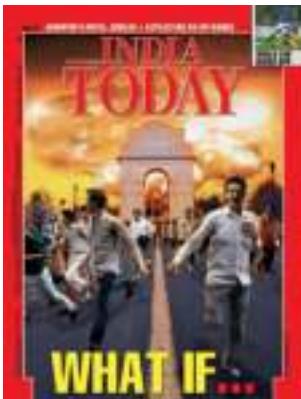
## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**I**t is unthinkable. But the threat of a nuclear war hangs over the subcontinent, with two nuclear-armed countries. At the heart of the simmering subcontinent lies a nuclear riddle. How and why did the sixth Indo-Pak war end so abruptly after four days of ferocious exchange of fire? The answer is still covered by a fog of half-revelations and circumstantial narratives. US president Donald Trump surprised India with his first out-of-turn ‘declaration’ of ceasefire on May 10, and subsequently made the claim, not once but serially, that he had saved millions of lives from a nuclear holocaust. India flatly denies any American mediation in the truce. Or of there being a nuclear dimension to the war. This does not entirely clear the mystery. Given all the unpredictable elements in play, we may never fully know whether the dramatic escalation of hostilities threatened to spiral out of control. The alarm could not be starker. You have two warlike neighbours with a combined nuclear arsenal of about 345 warheads: India 172, Pakistan 170. Enough to scorch the entire subcontinent and spread severe nuclear winter effects across the planet. Their relations frequently reach detonation point, but they yield to no formal process of dialogue to find non-military solutions to their differences. Making things even more perilous is the asymmetries in their respective political structures and nuclear doctrines, adding instability to an already combustible equation.

India maintains a No First Use (NFU) policy, committing to resort to nukes only in retaliation to a nuclear attack. Pakistan does not commit to an NFU. It has a policy of ‘Full Spectrum Deterrence’ that permits first use. Four conditions can trigger it: threat to its territorial integrity, military defeat, political destabilisation and economic strangulation. In short, anything perceived as a threat to its survival. Unlike India, Pakistan’s arsenal also includes scores

of tactical nuclear weapons. These are smaller nukes for limited battlefield use, to counter a possible land invasion by India. That makes for a decentralised command structure, dangerously leaving decision-making to the level of local commanders during a battle. A hair-trigger situation with no checks and balances.

Small or big, if Pakistan sets off even one nuke against India, Delhi promises a massive nuclear retaliation. It would mean annihilation at the city level. A Hiroshima-sized bomb dropped on a city like Karachi or Mumbai could result in over a million deaths. The fallout would spread well beyond borders. This is not speculation. It is the harsh arithmetic of deterrence theory and should serve as a chilling warning. There would be no end to this escalatory



▲ June 10, 2002

spiral. A horrendous scenario that should suffice to convince subcontinental leaders and their armed forces to desist from the unthinkable.

Unfortunately, conflict with India is always an existential one for Pakistan and the nuclear dimension is baked into every hostile confrontation we have had. Sadly, the two neighbours have rarely been able to sort it out without third party intervention, mainly the US. Counting over 35 years, this is the fifth time India and Pakistan have neared a flashpoint with nuclear overtones. Each time, America has stepped in to pour some coolant on the situation. It began with the Gates Mission of 1990, when the two nations weren’t yet formally nuclear, and the pattern

recurred during Kargil in 1999, the post-Parliament attack build-up of 2001-02 and Pulwama-Balakot in 2019. Everything about the four-day war of May 2025 evokes déjà vu. Something did indeed happen, or threaten to happen, on the intervening night of May 9-10. By most estimations, the final trigger for panic was India’s strike on the Nur Khan air base in Rawalpindi. Besides its own critical operational value, it lies very near the HQ of Strategic Plans Division, which oversees Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal. That proximity likely triggered concern in Washington. A regional nuclear exchange would hurt its interests and that of the world.

In Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa, who has chronicled India’s nuclear weapons history in a seminal book, we have inhouse expertise on the subject. Talking to top nuclear experts across the world and officials closely involved in the recent war, he pieces together a worrying narrative. With none of the triggers of war sorted out, including terrorism, the peace remains tenuous. In New Delhi’s own words, it’s only a “pause”.

We may have stepped away from the brink again, but the two sides cannot always rely on chance. Miscalculation is a constant threat. The two nations cannot keep playing the game of nuclear bluff. They must engage meaningfully and set up an architecture to address their respective grievances. Pakistan must realise terror is the way to end a dialogue, not start it. The US and the rest of the world must put pressure on Pakistan to stop nurturing terrorists, focus on its economy and strengthen its democracy. Its army calling the shots puts the subcontinent in a precarious state. The Modi government’s all-party mission to 32 countries, to sensitise the world to Pakistan’s perfidy, is a welcome step. For, there is no such thing as a limited nuclear war. There are no winners. Only regrets.



(Aroon Purie)

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# CONTENTS

**UPFRONT: TRUMP EYES INDIA'S APPLE PIE PG 14**

**STATE SCAN: NITISH PLAYS THE NAME GAME PG 20**



28

COVER STORY

**INDIA-PAKISTAN**

## NUKE WAR

HOW REAL IS THE THREAT

► REAL MONEY GAMING

### 40 A Nation at Stake

As the line between online gaming and gambling blurs, millions of Indians grapple with addiction, debt and fraud

► BLUSMART

### 46 The Ride is Over

From start-up darlings to symbols of its darkest flaws—the fall of the Jaggi brothers and their cab-hailing venture

► INDO-UAE CONCLAVE

### 66 Enduring Partners

The India Today Indo-UAE Conclave spotlights a future-ready alliance driving innovation, trade, talent and cultural ties

► LEISURE

### 77 The Art of Theory

Art critic Geeta Kapur's collection of essays reflects the complex impulses that shaped Indian Modernism

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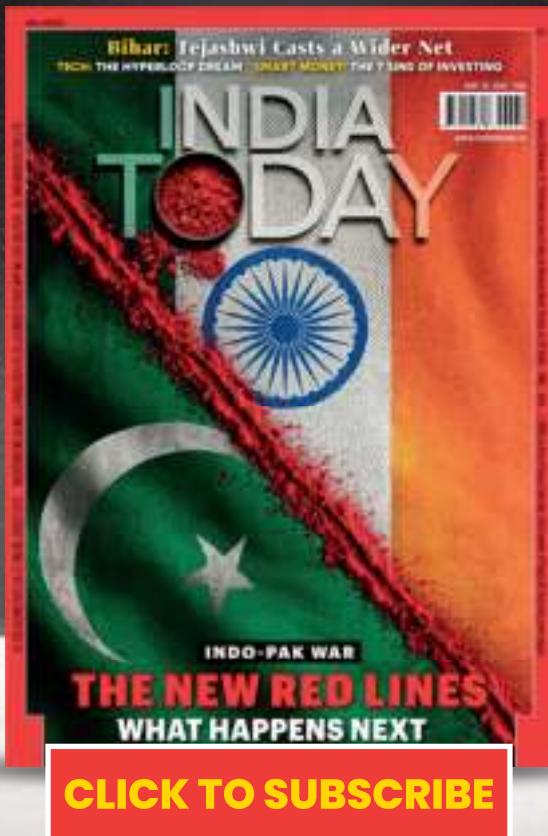


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INDIA  
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# UPFRONT

INDIA-TURKEY TIES: GOING COLD PG 18

VIEWPOINT: JOINTNESS WAS THE GAME CHANGER PG 19



► MAKE IN INDIA

## TRUMP EYES INDIA'S APPLE PIE

The US president's tariff tirade threatens Apple's India strategy, but the tech giant has few manufacturing alternatives beyond China

By M.G. ARUN / Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

“I don't want you building all over India.” Those are words that could crush a billion sleekly designed dreams. It's the Fable of the Forbidden Apple, repurposed for the 21st century. In starker words, US President Donald Trump doesn't want Apple Inc. to make its iPhones for the US market in India, which he calls “a very high-tariff nation”. The silver lining: experts feel the world's most valued company has few other options if it has to pack its bags and shift out of its long-time base, China.

This fresh twist of the knife, in the ongoing global trade wars set off by the US, came on May 15 as Trump spoke in Qatar during his Arabian Gulf trip. “I had a little problem with [Apple CEO] Tim Cook yesterday,” he started, loading

his off-the-cuffism with a lot of freight, as usual. "I said to him, 'Tim, you're my friend. You're coming here with \$500 billion but now you're building all over India. I don't want you building in India.'" That \$500 billion was an allusion to what Apple committed recently to invest in the US.

The Trumpist formula relies on the US soaking back a lot of the manufacturing it had lost over the decades to overseas bases, especially China. His reciprocal tariffs, considerably softened since April 2, were a shock tactic meant to prod the prodigals to



**"For the June quarter, we do expect the majority of iPhones sold in the US will have India as their country of origin"**

— TIM COOK, CEO, Apple Inc.



**"Tim, you're my friend... you're building all over India. I don't want you building in India"**

— DONALD TRUMP, US President

return. Apple is a prime exemplar. So any detour to India, while exiting China, sits ill with that plan. That came through in the tirade that followed. "You can build in India if you want to take care of India," Trump continued in his scattershot manner, "because India is one of the highest tariff nations in the world. So, it's very hard to sell in India." There was more sting left to come. Trump said India had offered a "no tariffs" deal with the US for American goods, without giving details. All this is while New Delhi is striving breathlessly to clinch a favourable trade deal with the US during the 90-day breather in Trump's tariff calendar. India had originally copped 26 per cent tariffs.

#### APPLE'S GROWING INDIA DEPENDENCE

Apple is a leader in the premium smartphone segment (above Rs 45,000) in India, with a 58 per cent market share in 2024. Research firm IDC reckons it sold 3 million units of iPhones here in January-March 2025, its highest quarterly figures, up from 2.2 million in the same period last year. This was driven by low-cost EMIs, cashback offers and discounts by online retailers. The newly launched iPhone 16 series made up over half of all iPhone sales, say reports. Globally, Apple posted revenues of \$391 billion in the fiscal ended Sep-

₹1.9

LAKH CR.

Value of iPhones  
assembled in India in FY25

₹1.5

LAKH CR.

Worth of 'Made in India'  
iPhones exported in FY25

3

MILLION

Number of iPhones sold  
during Jan.-Mar. '25 in India

tember 28, 2024. "For the June quarter, we do expect the majority of iPhones sold in the US will have India as their country of origin and Vietnam to be the country of origin for almost all iPad, Mac, Apple Watch and AirPods products sold in the US," Cook told analysts in the Q2 2025 earnings call on May 1. An Apple spokesperson in India offered no comments on Trump's statements on India.

In India, Apple assembles iPhones via contract manufacturers like Foxconn, Pegatron (both units of Taiwanese firms) and Tata Electronics. Foxconn has two large facilities at Sripurumbudur, Tamil Nadu, and a new plant at Devanahalli near Bengaluru. Tata

Electronics has acquired Taiwanese firm Wistron (at Kolar near Bengaluru), has a controlling stake in Pegatron's India operations (in Chennai), and has a plant at Hosur, Tamil Nadu. Now, Apple assembles the entire iPhone 16 lineup here, though most of the components are imported. In FY25, Apple assembled iPhones worth \$22 billion (Rs 1.9 lakh crore) in India. The production has surged 60 per cent in the past one year, and it now assembles 20 per cent of its total iPhones in the country, says a Bloomberg report. Union minister of IT and electronics Ashwini Vaishnav recently said Apple exported 'Made in India' iPhones worth Rs 1.5 lakh crore in FY25.

#### DECOUPLING FROM CHINA

China presently accounts for 80 per cent of Apple's total production capacity across products. This long-settled fact was first shaken during Trump 1.0. As he launched his first round of tariffs on China, Apple—like other US firms—began to de-risk itself by shifting operations to Vietnam, Brazil and India. Decoupling from China in favour of India won't be easy. An iPhone contains around 1,000 components: most are made in China. "It took almost a decade to build such a complex and high-quality supply chain," says Prachir Singh, a senior analyst at Counterpoint Research. As per a 2023 Bloomberg Intelligence estimate, it would take about eight years for Apple to move out just 10 per cent of its production capacity from China. "It has taken over five years in India for Apple to reach some form of capacity. (But) if not China, then India remains the only potential manufacturing destination for Apple, as the ecosystem is mushrooming, aided by lower-cost English-speaking skilled labour, world-class software talent, favourable government policies, and a huge domestic consumption market."

Trump's tirade may also be part-mock intimidation to gain leverage in trade talks, Singh feels, since it's known India needs 'halo' companies like Apple to foster a robust domestic supplier ecosystem. "This statement won't affect Apple's plans, which are already in motion, with India in the driver's seat as an alternative to China." Apple does not make iPhones in the US, and moving assembly units to that country would raise the cost of an iPhone by three times. Can Cook bite the Trump bullet? ■



## IT'S A SMALL WORLD

**O**peration Sindoor's global pitch comes with an elite twist. Seven members of India's diplomatic outreach squads are alumni of Delhi's St Stephen's College, including Congress leaders **Shashi Tharoor** and **Salman Khurshid**, diplomats **Harsh Vardhan Shringla**, **Taranjit Sandhu**, **Jawed Ashraf** and **Manjeev Puri**, and MEA supremo **S. Jaishankar**. But those aren't the only absolutes. All seven outreach delegations also have at least one Muslim leader, a symbolic counter to the communal criticisms swirling back home. Three teams are led by Opposition MPs—Tharoor (Congress), Kanimozhi (DMK) and Supriya Sule (NCP-SP)—making this perhaps the most bipartisan foreign mission since Narasimha Rao's gambit to send A.B. Vajpayee to Geneva in 1994.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

### ▼ WORDLE SCORE

## THE CASTE ALPHABET

**The Samajwadi Party's PDA formula** is fast turning into a linguistic Rubik's cube. Initially coined as a smart acronym for Pichhda, Dalit and Alpsankhyak (Backwards, Dalits and Minorities), it was party chief **Akhilesh Yadav's** attempt to rebrand his party, take it beyond the M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) baseline. But, of late, Akhilesh is stretching PDA to mean whatever he wants it to, so that A can be for



Agda (upper caste) or Apmanit (the humiliated), and P for Patrakar (journalist) and Pandit alike. Through all this, 'D' had been the one constant, signifying the Dalits, but even that changed at a recent press conference—PDA became Peedit, Dukhi, Apmanit (basically, anyone with a grievance). The shifting semantics has left even the party workers scratching their heads.

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

On May 15, Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** quietly took a seat at a Patna theatre to watch *Phule*, the biopic of 19th-century social reformers Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule. The timing was no accident; the film goes well with his social justice and OBC empowerment pitch. Interestingly, this was Rahul's fourth visit to Bihar this year. Groundwork for the assembly election ahead, or a belated response to the 2020 jibe of his being "more tourist than campaigner"?



## Man in Demand

His party may have got out for a duck in the assembly election, but Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief **Raj Thackeray** is much sought after by everyone these days. After Raj spoke about patching up with estranged cousin and Shiv Sena UBT president Uddhav Thackeray, Maharashtra industries minister and Shiv Sena (Shinde) leader Uday Samant met him at his residence at Dadar in Mumbai. Though Samant said he met the MNS chief for tea and *khichdi*, the buzz is that a whole new political *khichdi* is being cooked.



## ON TIME, PLEASE

A Railway Board circular that top officers must also adhere to biometric attendance rules to promote "discipline and accountability" has stirred up a debate in the power corridors, especially the part about a 9.15 am fall-in, and attendance records going for central review. In a world of flexi-hours and remote working, the old-school biometric scanner is also a sign of a tightening of the screws. Guess the Rail Bhawan clocks will get some extra shine in the coming days.



**Kaushik Deka with Amitabh Srivastava, Avaneesh Mishra, Dhaval S. Kulkarni and Avishek G. Dastidar**

## HEALTH WATCH

By **Sonali Acharjee**

## HEART ATTACKS PLASTIC TAKES A DEADLY TOLL

**I**t's common knowledge that plastic is killing us slowly, but now there's proof that they even cause heart attacks. And India is the worst affected, accounting for almost a third of the global fatalities linked to DEHP-related cardiovascular diseases. And what is DEHP? Di-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate is part of plas-

at NYU Langone Health analysed urine samples and environmental data from over 200 countries. They found that in 2018, DEHP exposure was associated with 356,238 deaths in the 55-64 age group. India accounted for 103,587 of these deaths. In comparison, China, also a major producer/consumer of plastics,



SHUTTERSTOCK

tic compounds known as phthalates, a group of synthetic chemicals used as plasticisers to increase flexibility and durability in plastics, particularly the popular PVC (polyvinyl chloride). DEHP is the most commonly used phthalate.

Till now, the medical community believed DEHP to be harmful for hormonal wellbeing. But a study published recently in *The Lancet's eBioMedicine* journal has identified a significant link between exposure to DEHP and heart disease-related deaths. Researchers

recorded 33,858 fatalities.

The researchers attribute India's high mortality to the rapid expansion of its plastics industry, widespread use of DEHP-containing products and weak regulatory controls. While the FSSAI has established specific migration limits for DEHP in food contact plastics, the amount that can 'migrate' into food is set at 1.5 mg/kg. In the EU, not only is DEHP banned in any material containing fatty food (where the leaching rates are higher), the migration limit is set at 0.6 mg/kg.



**BOYCOTT CALL**  
An SJM protest against Turkey in Delhi, May 16

ANI

▼ INDIA-TURKEY RELATIONS

# GOING COLD ON TURKEY

Economic leverage becomes New Delhi's frontline weapon against Ankara as it recalibrates its diplomatic battles

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

**O**N MAY 22, THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS CALLED OUT TURKEY, saying it expects Ankara to "strongly urge Pakistan to end its support to cross-border terrorism". For good measure, it added that "relations are built on the basis of sensitivities to each other's concerns". Those relations had been on a downhill track for some time but Turkey's overt support to Pakistan after the Pahalgam attack made matters worse. Post-Operation Sindoor, on May 15, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security had revoked the security clearance of Istanbul-headquartered Celebi Aviation Holding's Indian subsidiary which provided ground-handling services at nine key airports, including Delhi and Mumbai, citing "national security concerns".

The past year had seen a slow build-up of tensions. In April 2024, the defence ministry had scrapped a multi-billion dollar deal between Hindustan Shipyard Ltd and Anadolu Shipyard to build five fleet support ships for the Indian Navy, which some quarters impute to Turkey's 'ideological posturing'

especially invoking Kashmir at global forums and its narratives of Muslim persecution in India. Meanwhile, Ankara had become Pakistan's second-largest arms supplier after China. But it was the post-Pahalgam response that irked India the most. A Turkish warship docked in Karachi on May 5, ostensibly to strengthen maritime cooperation between the two countries even as the country's ambassador met prime minister Shehbaz Sharif to express "Ankara's solidarity with Pakistan".

India's response has been multifaceted. On one front is the deepening defence relationship with Turkey's regional rivals, such as Armenia, Cyprus and Greece. Domestically, the termination of the Anadolu ship contract and the squeeze on Celebi (a \$200 million

**THE SQUEEZE ON CELEBI OPENS UP A FLANK ON THE ECONOMIC WARS FRONT FOR INDIA. THE RIPPLES ARE BEING FELT IN THE INDUSTRY**

or Rs 1,711 crore hit to its bottom line) signal the opening of a flank on the economic wars front. Celebi, which allegedly has links with Turkish president Recep Erdogan's family, has now approached the Indian courts for redressal. But the recalibration is already rippling through private industry. Turkish construction firm Gülermak, involved in metro rail projects in Lucknow, Kanpur, Pune and Surat, faces uncertainties as industry sentiment turns hostile. Retail and consumer sectors have also aligned with the broader pushback. The boycott has even extended to Turkey's ally, Azerbaijan.

The impact on bilateral trade is inevitable. Even though, at \$8.7 billion (Rs 74,422 crore), trade with Turkey is less than 2 per cent of India's total global trade, we do enjoy a surplus of \$2.7 billion (Rs 23,096 crore). That will now be jeopardised, an undesirable outcome given the disruption Trump's tariffs have already caused. Tourism, too, has taken a sharp hit, with travel platforms reporting a 60 per cent dip in bookings to Turkey and a threefold spike in cancellations. Ankara has responded in kind, imposing a ban on defence exports to India and inviting Pakistan to join its next-generation fighter jet programme, KAAN.

## DECOPPLING MOTIONS

For India, the pushback fits a broader pattern of economic statecraft. "The Modi government cannot exercise diplomatic restraint while hostile entities make millions in Indian markets," says Ashwani Mahajan, co-convenor of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, the RSS's economic wing which is steering the boycott campaign.

Critics warn of rising costs and disrupted supply chains. The civil aviation ministry's move to review bilateral air traffic rights could affect Indian carriers like IndiGo, which use Istanbul as a transit hub. But Anil Trigunayat, ex-ambassador to Jordan and Libya, sees a sliver of light: "India won't tolerate interference that affects national unity. But ties can be recalibrated—if Ankara chooses pragmatism over posturing." India is only signalling that access to its markets is contingent on political alignment or, at least, political neutrality. ■

# JOINTNESS WAS THE GAME CHANGER

**Efforts to braid the three services across all domains into integrated war fighting bore fruit in India's precise actions in Operation Sindoor**

Operation Sindoor, India's calibrated response to the Pakistan-sponsored terror attack in Pahalgam, was characterised by precise and devastating strikes on Pakistani terror hubs and later on military infrastructure. One of the reasons for its successful execution was the very high level of jointness and integration within the three services, which was the result of a concerted effort led by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the HQ Integrated Defence Staff over the past few years. About 200 tasks and initiatives were identified for fostering jointness. These were distributed over eight clear domains—intelligence, logistics, training, capability development, communications, human resource, maintenance and administration—to be implemented in a time-bound road map.

Two parallel tracks have been at work. In one track, measures towards jointness have primarily been conceptual in nature, affecting changes in the cognitive domain, building understanding and confidence among the services. This has been made possible by picking the best practices of each service and fostering a unique joint culture aided by common planning and training, tri-service courses and cross-postings. In the second track, measures towards integration have been implemented by creating structures, networks, computer applications and protocols to enable synergy in application of combat power, communications, intelligence, logistics and administration. Formulation of the Combined Operational Planning Process, joint doctrines, integrated intelligence and communication network



## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INDIA'S AIR DEFENCE UMBRELLA WAS ALSO DUE TO THE INTEGRATION OF THE ARMY AND THE IAF'S NETWORKS

and establishment of joint logistics nodes have all contributed to operational efficiency and have been validated during tri-service exercises and war games.

Joint training has been the bedrock of this transformation, from cadets at the national level to the Defence Services Staff College at the mid-service level. For colonels and equivalents at the respective service war colleges, joint content, cross-attendance and joint faculty have been enhanced, resulting in a deeper understanding of integrated war fighting, further cemented as one-star participants at the National Defence College. These measures have been augmented by the establishment of new joint service training



BY LT GEN.  
VIPUL  
SHINGHAL

institutions in areas like intelligence, cyber and unmanned aerial systems.

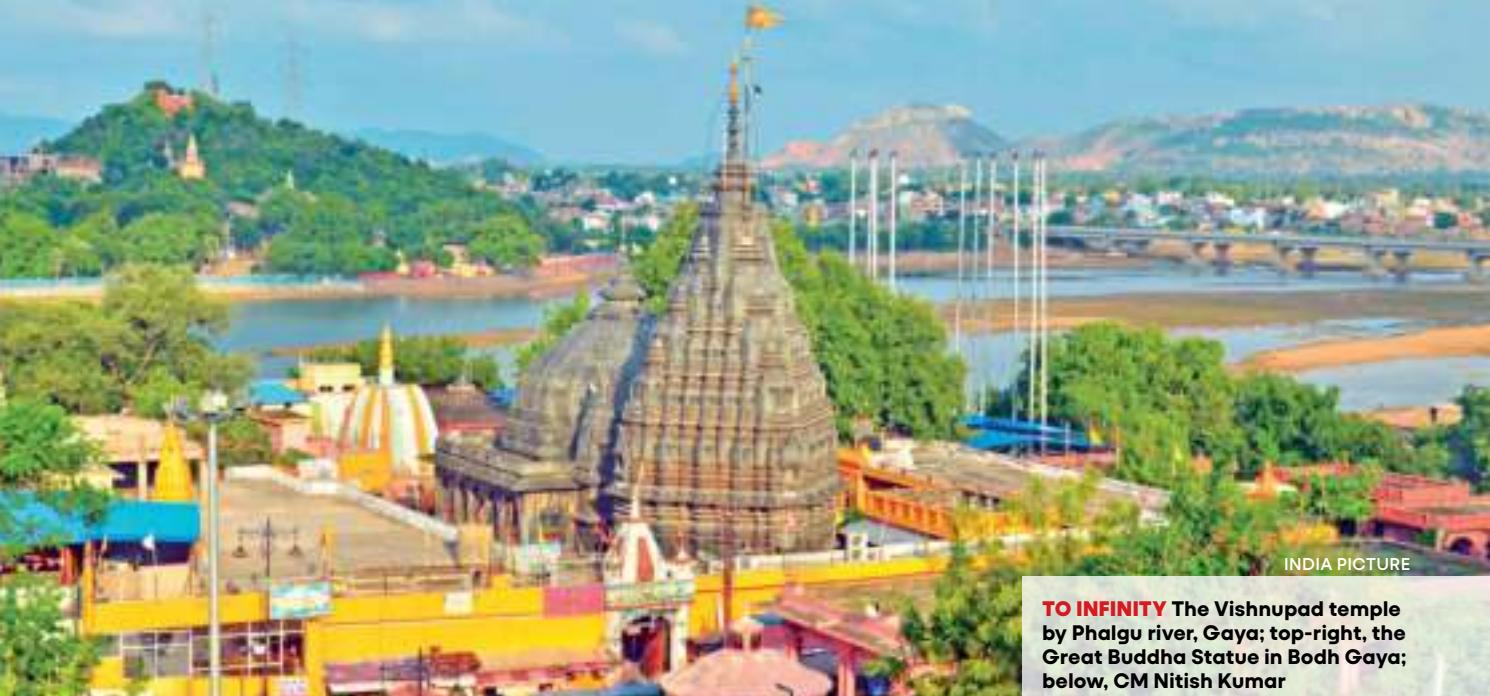
These efforts were a game-changer in the execution of multi-domain operations during Op. Sindoor. The empowered tri-services organisations, that is, the Defence Cyber Agency (DCyA), Defence Space Agency (DSA) and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) specialise in the new domains of cyber, space and information, respectively. Intelligence of the terror camps and Pakistani military sites was collated through the merging of multiple streams of intelligence fused under the DIA. Precision engagement of the targets was possible due to detailed satellite imagery coordinated by the DSA. The DCyA kept close watch over our cyber frontiers. The effective operationalisation of an Air Defence umbrella over the country was a result of the integration of two networks—the IAF's Integrated Air Command and Control System and the army's Akash teer, working seamlessly on the backbone provided by the tri-service Defence Communication Network. A coordinated response was also visible in communication through joint press briefings by the three directors general of operations of each of the services. 'Victory Through Jointness', the motto of HQ IDS, was on display during Op. Sindoor. Its unequivocal success vindicates the need for the Indian security structure to delve deeper into aspects of jointness and integration, indigenisation, capability development and capacity-building. ■

**Lt Gen Shinghal is Deputy Chief at HQ, Integrated Defence Staff who oversees the jointness**

# STATE SCAN

J&K: WATER AND IRE IN THE VALLEY PG 22

GUJARAT: RAZING AN ILLEGAL STORM PG 24



INDIA PICTURE

**TO INFINITY** The Vishnupad temple by Phalgu river, Gaya; top-right, the Great Buddha Statue in Bodh Gaya; below, CM Nitish Kumar



RANJAN RAHI

► BIHAR

## NITISH PLAYS THE NAME GAME

**Gaya changes its name to Gayaji, as renaming politics comes to Bihar. Nitish hasn't changed places with the BJP, yet. But his yielding maps an ongoing soil erosion**

By Amitabh Srivastava

**I**N INDIA, AND IN GLOBAL SPACES TO WHICH its heritage speaks, the name 'Gaya' is a suffix in 'Bodh Gaya'—and evokes the Buddha. A place of silence, under a pipal by the banks of the Phalgu, where Gautama attained Buddhahood. Yet, on May 15, something ruffled that quietude. 'Gaya' was being renamed as 'Gayaji'. The whole district. No criticism came, not even from the Opposition, as the Nitish Kumar cabinet cleared this old rechristening proposal. Some, though, noticed a striking departure from Nitish's own record. In over 20 years at the

helm of Bihar, he had never before approved the renaming of a single district. In yielding now, months short of an assembly election, he, too, has bathed in a different river.

For, Gaya has another layer of heritage, attached to Hindu belief and practice. In the city, 15 km north of Bodh Gaya, the banks of the Phalgu host the 18th century Vishnupad temple, built on a site swathed in sacred myth. On these sands, believers perform the *pind daan* to the departed: it's the final and holiest site prescribed for the

ritual. The appending of the honorific 'ji', connoting respect, is a nod to this stream of veneration.

In 2010, Nitish had quietly held out against even BJP titan L.K. Advani's passionate call for a restoration of Patna's ancient name, Pataliputra. After Gaya, that idea is in circulation again. What the currency of renaming politics in Bihar shows is Nitish's new vulnerability within the NDA. His once-junior coalition partner, the BJP, has clearly taken over the control room: it's scripting the narrative. BJP stalwarts, who had long lobbied for Gaya's renaming, made no secret of their jubilation. Even members of Nitish's JD(U) voiced public approval, nodding to tradition.

This is not the only sign of Nitish's recent deference to his ally. In a February cabinet expansion, he took in seven new ministers—all from the BJP, swelling the saffron contingent to 21,

SHUTTER STOCK



### Takeaways

■ Nitish cabinet clears the renaming of Gaya as Gayaji, as long demanded by BJP

■ The first renaming in his reign, it shows his diminished clout as NDA readies for polls

overshadowing the JD(U)'s 13 within the 36-strong ministry. That was both proof of a new ascendancy, and an accelerator of altered dynamics.

### THE BJP'S NEW DOMINANCE

What remains to be seen is the comparative tally after ticket distribution later this year. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, Nitish had wangled 16 seats and won 12—the same as the BJP's haul from its 17. Yet, in the assembly, 80 chairs are marked saffron (from 37 in 2005). The JD(U) has only 45. The BJP extracts valuable resources from Brand Nitish: his welfarist image, his loyal blocs of women and EBC voters. But it has left in pointed ambiguity the question of remuneration. Nitish still doesn't have the nod as a clear chief ministerial face. For now, he's a useful frontispiece. That the edifice behind him is Hindutva was only reconfirmed at Gaya. ■



► COURTING A SENTENCE? MP minister Kunwar Vijay Shah during the speech that brought an FIR on him

► MADHYA PRADESH

## PATRON OF ABUSE

**Why does BJP put up with the verbal iniquities of Vijay Shah, the minister who insulted Col. Sofiya? It's his cachet among MP's tribals**

By Rahul Noronha

**D**EENCE AND GEOPOLITICAL debates may saturate the space presently, but socially no one was in doubt that the post-Pahalgam landscape witnessed a rare degree of Hindu-Muslim solidarity. Of the organic, human sort. The April 22 massacre drew equal, unequivocal condemnation across communities. The Centre even parlayed it off into a wise piece of high-visibility symbolism: choosing

two women officers, Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wg Cdr Vyomika Singh, to brief the media on Operation Sindoor. ‘What’s in a name?’ is not a question anyone had to ask.

#### AN IMPUGNED FIR

If that evoked a sense of healing amidst a crisis, a most jarring note soon tore the sutures. On May 11, state tribal welfare minister Kunwar Vijay Shah took the mic near Mhow, and spoke filthily about Col. Qureshi. The speech, which expectedly went viral, was profane enough for the MP High Court to sit up and take suo motu notice. ‘Guttural,’ said Justices Atul Shreedharan and Aradhna Shukla on May 14, bypassing the state’s dilatory feints, and ordering its DGP to file a case under stringent sections the same day—or invite contempt.

With no wiggle room, the FIR was duly lodged, but the bench rejected its safe, anodyne phrasing. As the case escalated up the legal ladder, the Supreme Court echoed that tone of high indignation. “The entire nation is shamed,” it said on May 19, waving away Shah’s ‘apology’ and ordering an SIT to probe the FIR itself!

**I**t was no rare lapse for Shah. He’s a habitual offender when it comes to abasing women. In 2013, he was temporarily sacked after a comment on then CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan’s wife. Why does the BJP tolerate him? Context is useful here. Shah, an eight-term MLA, is a scion of the erstwhile feudals of Makdai, who were Gonds. That confers on him both local clout as well as Scheduled Tribe status.

Serious political capital, in short. Especially within the BJP, which is not necessarily the first love of MP’s tribals. That shows in how he has been cabinet minister continually since 2003, barring the brief Congress interregnum in 2018-20. The BJP dare not touch a ‘senior tribal leader’, and Shah uses this leverage to bully the party into accepting his behaviour. This time, he’s truly test-

ANI



#### Takeaways

- **MP tribal welfare minister speaks filthily about Col. Sofiya Qureshi. Video viral**
- **MP High Court takes suo motu notice, orders DGP to file FIR under tough clauses**
- **State police, forced to act, files a light FIR. HC rejects it. Case goes to Supreme Court**
- **SC echoes HC’s outrage, says speech “shamed the nation”, orders an SIT on FIR**

ing the limits of his power. He did nervously tap state BJP chief V.D. Sharma as his words went viral, and his apology ensued. But when the HC sought an FIR under sections that could even send Shah to prison for life, Sharma conferred with CM Mohan Yadav and asked Shah to resign. Insiders say Shah refused point blank.

The BJP soon dug in its heels, mounting a counter-offensive against other parties that had leaders continue in office despite FIRs. “We will do as the court instructs,” Yadav said. That protocol is being kept. The SIT was set up on May 19. Till May 21, Shah had neither been sacked nor arrested. Even if that point is reached, Shah has abundantly made clear his political—and nuisance—value. ■

**A**FTER TRADING plenty of hot lead and verbal artillery, India and Pakistan’s sudden retreat from a near full-blown war has put the spotlight back on a *casus belli* for the future: its six shared rivers. In its ceasefire acceptance, India said the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), put “in abeyance” on April 23, wouldn’t be restored. It invokes *rebus sic stantibus*, the principle in international law that allows abrogation of treaties due to a “fundamental change in circumstances”.

Jammu and Kashmir, meanwhile, is roiled by a major political divide on how IWT-related projects should move on the ground. J&K is a part of the theatre that bore the brunt of the recent Indo-Pak hostilities, with 22 deaths and damage to over 10,000 buildings. It also hosts the three contentious ‘western rivers’: Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.

For Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, this is the time he has been awaiting for long. What better than an aerial tour to put the focus on the abandoned Tulbul



► **NOT ENOUGH** The Baglihar dam on the Chenab river at Ramban; inset, Omar and Mehbooba

# WATER AND IRE IN THE VALLEY

**Having put a question mark over the Indus Waters Treaty, should India go ahead with stalled projects? The Indo-Pak debate flows into Kashmir's domestic politics**

By Kaleem Geelani

project on one of Asia's largest lakes, Wular, in north Kashmir? India had called it a pure navigation facility when launching it in 1984. Pakistan claimed it had a storage facility of 0.3 million acre feet (MAF), not permitted under the IWT. Abandoned in 1987, even 12 rounds of secretary-level talks yielded no result. A terror attack at the site in 2012 threw yet another spanner in the works.

Omar wants it revived. "It will give us the advantage of using the Jhelum for navigation," he wrote on X, with a video showing half-developed structures

## Takeaways

■ CM Omar Abdullah wants Tulbul navigation project, stalled since 1987, revived

■ Mehbooba Mufti calls it "weaponisation of water" in a fraught post-war situation

■ J&K's energy crisis and the damaging effects of climate change spark calls for a rational renegotiation of IWT

encircled by a barrage. It would also boost "downstream power projects", he wrote. That initiated his first major faceoff with arch political rival Mehbooba Mufti in this stint. The PDP chief said his wish amounts to "weaponisation of waters" in an already fraught scenario. Appeasement of Pakistan, he said. Speak for your party, she said, imputing such inclinations to Omar's grandfather and National Conference founder Sheikh Abdullah.

J&K, meanwhile, is crippled by an energy crisis. Six major hydel plants on its soil, with an annual capacity of 2,250 MW, were earmarked for the national grid in 2000. The 13 plants given over for local consumption, including Baglihar, generate only 1,197 MW, against a peak demand of 2,800 MW. That forces heavy reliance on power purchases, costing the exchequer up to Rs 10,000 crore a year.

The IWT, signed in 1960, allows only run-of-the-river projects, with total storage of 1.6 MAF for power generation in western rivers. Pakistan has blocked everything else. Negotiations, for instance, failed to resolve the 850 MW Rattle project, even after a 40-member global panel of experts from the US, UK, Australia, Russia and Canada, along with Indian and Pakistani representatives, visited Kishtwar in 2024.

But circumstances have altered since 1960, with less snowfall and erratic precipitation patterns. "It's essential to address emerging challenges unforeseen in 1960, such as climate change impacts on the cryosphere, groundwater depletion, water pollution and their consequences, either through supplementary protocols or within the treaty," a professor and expert on climate change and glaciology at the University of Kashmir told INDIA TODAY.

Away from the spotlight, the Inland Waterways Authority of India set foot here on May 13, with an office in Srinagar and a purse of Rs 100 crore. Its work is kosher, since IWT allows "non-consumptive use". Will that be scaled up? The best way would be a rational renegotiation, within an ecologically integrated Indo-Pak framework. Much blood has already flowed down these waters. ■



**► AFTERSHOCKS**

Ahmedabad's Chandola Lake slums face a second wave of demolitions, May 20

**► GUJARAT**

## RAZING AN ILLEGAL STORM

**Aftershocks of a terror attack in Kashmir are felt in the ghettos of Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat. Thousands displaced, land gets freed, amid a welter of charges**

By Jumana Shah

**A** SECURITY SWEEP SOUNDS like a good idea after a terror outrage. One came four days after Pahalgam. Targets? Over 6,500 people alleged to be illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in faraway Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat. Two days after Gujarat Police swooped down for this mass detention, it joined the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) to also demolish 12,500 shanties around Chandola Lake, one of the city's Muslim ghettos. Some 25,000 inhabitants were displaced as a total of 400,000 sq. metres was cleared. The demolition, done without notice, wasn't

stayed by the Gujarat High Court on the grounds that this was government land.

### A SHORT HISTORY OF SLUMS

After the 2002 post-Godhra riots, Muslims across rural Gujarat left their homes and farmland to seek safety in numbers in the city. Becoming invisible in these deep, dark urban catacombs was a survival reflex. Over the years, Ahmedabad saw Juhapura, Chandola Talav, Bombay Hotel, Citizen Nagar, Millatnagar, Shah-e-Alam etc. swell in open sight. Mirror images bloomed in Vadodara and Surat. Impenetrable, unlit, unserved, these attracted the most

### Takeaways

➲ Gujarat Police swoops down on Muslim ghettos; 6,500 detained

➲ Many let off: papers prove they are natives of UP, Bihar, Bengal, not 'illegal aliens'

➲ 12,500 shanties in Chandola Talav razed, 400,000 sq. metres cleared

➲ Intelligence inputs speak of terror modules, activists hint at real estate interests

underprivileged—economic refugees *sans frontières*. Politicians of all hues, aided by local goons, profited off their induction into the local ecosystem. No titles, no roads, no official electricity, sewerage or water. The basics were allowed to flow in. A classic house of cards. It fell, as the bullets at Pahalgam disturbed the air across India. Disquiet spread fast here. Cops barged into homes between April 24 and April 28 and made arrests. 'Illegal Bangladeshis', went the charge. More than half were let off; documents showed they were Indians from Bihar, UP, Bengal. Then the JCBs lined up before dawn at Chan-



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dola Talav. Folks collected their scanty belongings and fled, some to Mumbai, some back to their home states, most to nearby ghettos.

Intelligence inputs set up an omnibus incrimination: "harbouring Bangladeshi aliens and anti-national elements, large-scale prostitution... drug trade, money-laundering, forgery". Four Bangladeshis tied to an "Al Qaeda module" were picked up, the state told the court, arguing that pre-emptive

action to protect "public order" and "national security" cannot be "hounded by principles of natural justice".

**T**wo of the men typified the hold-all approach: Lallu Bihari alias Mehmood Pathan and son Fateh. The charges: forging electricity bills and rent agreements (to help procure Aadhaar cards), human trafficking, prostitution and, strikingly, 'encroachment in Chandola Lake'. Lallu,

audaciously enough, had built his house and a large parking shed by reclaiming land from the lake!

"It's just a mercenary move driven by real estate magnates eyeing the lakefront," says activist Mujahid Nafees. "They're persecuting poor Muslims for that." The AMC's 2025-26 budget has a Rs 600 crore waterfront development plan with a 4,000-unit PM Awas Yojana scheme. Pahalgam, unwittingly, has unmade and made homes. ■

#### ► RAJASTHAN

## BAPTISM BY FIRE

**As a Bharat Adivasi Party MLA lands in a graft case, the BJP lets loose its full artillery in tribal Banswara**

By Rohit Parihar

**L**IKE A KEEN-EYED kingfisher perched near the water in one of the bird sanctuaries of lake-rich Banswara, it was almost as if they were waiting to pounce on a straying fish. Jai Krishn Patel obliged, or so it looks like. The MLA from Bagdora, a young tribal leader of the Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP), was allegedly caught accepting Rs 20 lakh, as part of a putative bribe of Rs 2 crore. Reportedly in exchange for withdrawing, from the assembly, questions on a mining contract and related illegalities, and promising to keep mum on the matter. Patel got the rap, landed in prison. The cash was allegedly recovered, buried in the soil by kinfolk. Soon, the BJP was unleashing a full-spectrum fusillade of protests against the tribal leader all across the district.

It's not tough to discern why. Ban-



▲ **AGIT PROP** One of the many BJP protests against BAP's Jai Krishn Patel (inset)

swara, with its strong tribal flavours, is the deepest fortress of the BAP—a party that has successfully positioned itself as the primary magnet for Adivasi loyalties, distinguishing them from mainstream Hindu identities. That hurts the BJP's universally saffron-dyed politics. Theoretically, this also challenges the other political behemoth of Rajasthan, the Congress. But, after a wee bit of hesitation, the Grand Old Party had quickly pivoted to lasso the BAP into its INDIA bloc, along with the Left, ahead of the general election.

The rise of the BAP has been quite the striking phenomenon. Its birth dates only to 2023, but it made a



splashy debut in the ensuing assembly and Lok Sabha polls, emerging as the state's third-largest party with four MLAs and one MP. That Lok Sabha entrant was founder Rajkumar Roat, and he represents Banswara.

#### GRAFT AND STATECRAFT

Now the scandal has cast a shadow over its future. Granted 'state party' status only in January, BAP is drawing harsh censure. Speaker Vasudev Devnani noted that Patel had been warned before against withdrawing questions once submitted to the assembly. While 'cash-for-query' briberies are an open secret in Indian politics, this marks the first such arrest in Rajasthan.

The BJP's blitz is strategic. It aims to reclaim influence in the tribal regions of south and southeastern Rajasthan, where it lost ground to the BAP. In

# RAFALE KERFUFFLE

**Ajay Rai gets some chilli in his eyes after a satirical send-up of Rajnath. The Congress battles to wash off ‘sedition’ stain, as Rai remonstrates ruefully**

By Avaneesh Mishra

ANI

the November 2024 bypoll in the latter's Chauharsi stronghold, it was a matter of relief for the BJP when it narrowed BAP's win margin from 70,000 votes in 2023 to 25,000. But Patel still won Bagidora with over 50,000 votes. The seat was vacated by Congress MLA Mahendrajit Malviya, who defected to the BJP but lost to Rout in the LS faceoff at Banswara.

So this is sweet revenge. The BJP casts a cloud over the BAP's genesis, after splitting from the Gujarat-origin Bharat Tribal Party (BTP). Says BJP Banswara chief Punjalal Gayari, “The BTP supported the Gehlot regime in 2018–23, allegedly in exchange for cash. Its leaders dissolved the state BTP to launch BAP, driven by greed.”

## Takeaways

■ **Young BAP MLA arrested in ‘cash-for-query’ scam. BJP goes to town with charges**

■ **Since its 2023 debut, the BAP had emerged as a primary contender for tribal votes**

Rout says he'll move against Patel if the charges are proven, but hints at a conspiracy. “An MLA cannot withdraw a question once uploaded to the assembly portal. I need to determine whether Patel acted improperly or was falsely implicated,” he says. Patel had submitted two questions each to the forest and mining departments: on mining leases, illegal mining, and construction of farmhouses in Todabhim, a far east constituency 700 km from Patel's Bagidora. The assembly had already received replies to the questions.

In a twist, the complainant is the son of BJP leader Ram Niwas Meena, who had lost Todabhim to the Congress's Ghanshyam Meher in 2023. Meena, also a tribal, says Patel was acting at Meher's behest to frame him and extort a bribe. Meher calls it “the lies of a sore loser”. The BJP rejects this and is leveraging the case. There's also the BJP's track record of using threat and blandishment to wean worthy foes into its fold. So all eyes will be on whether the case is prosecuted in dead earnest—or whether there's a migratory bird on the horizon. ■

**T**HE FRONTS HAVE FALLEN SILENT, but a piece of pre-war parodising has come back to smite the Congress on its rear. On May 4, a dozen days of non-action had elapsed since Pahalgam, and UP Congress chief Ajay Rai felt time was ripe for a satirical send-up of his state mate, Union defence minister Rajnath Singh. He held up a toy Rafale, with a *nimboo-mirchi* evil-eye dangling from it, and waxed vitriolic: “I want to ask the government when this lemon and chilli will be removed from the Rafale to avenge the attack?” It was a direct jibe at Rajnath's televised *shastra puja* in 2019, where he had placed a lemon under India's first Rafale fighter jet before drawing an ‘Om’ with turmeric on its snout.

Maybe the rumours of Raftales being felled had touched off rawer nerves, but in the volatile and charged political climate, Rai's gestures and words have sparked a storm that the party is now struggling to contain. The BJP moved in with its artillery and drones, calling the Congress “anti-national”, and saying it was insulting India's military and aiding Pakistani propaganda. That knife got a keener edge after Pakistani media outlets gleefully swooped on Rai's parodic setpiece to play it up.

## EXTRA MIRCHI FLAKES

Then, while Operation Sindoor was being unfurled across the border, things were turning hot as a tandoor for Rai. Exactly on May 7, an FIR was filed against him in Varanasi for “statements prejudicial to national integration”, follow-



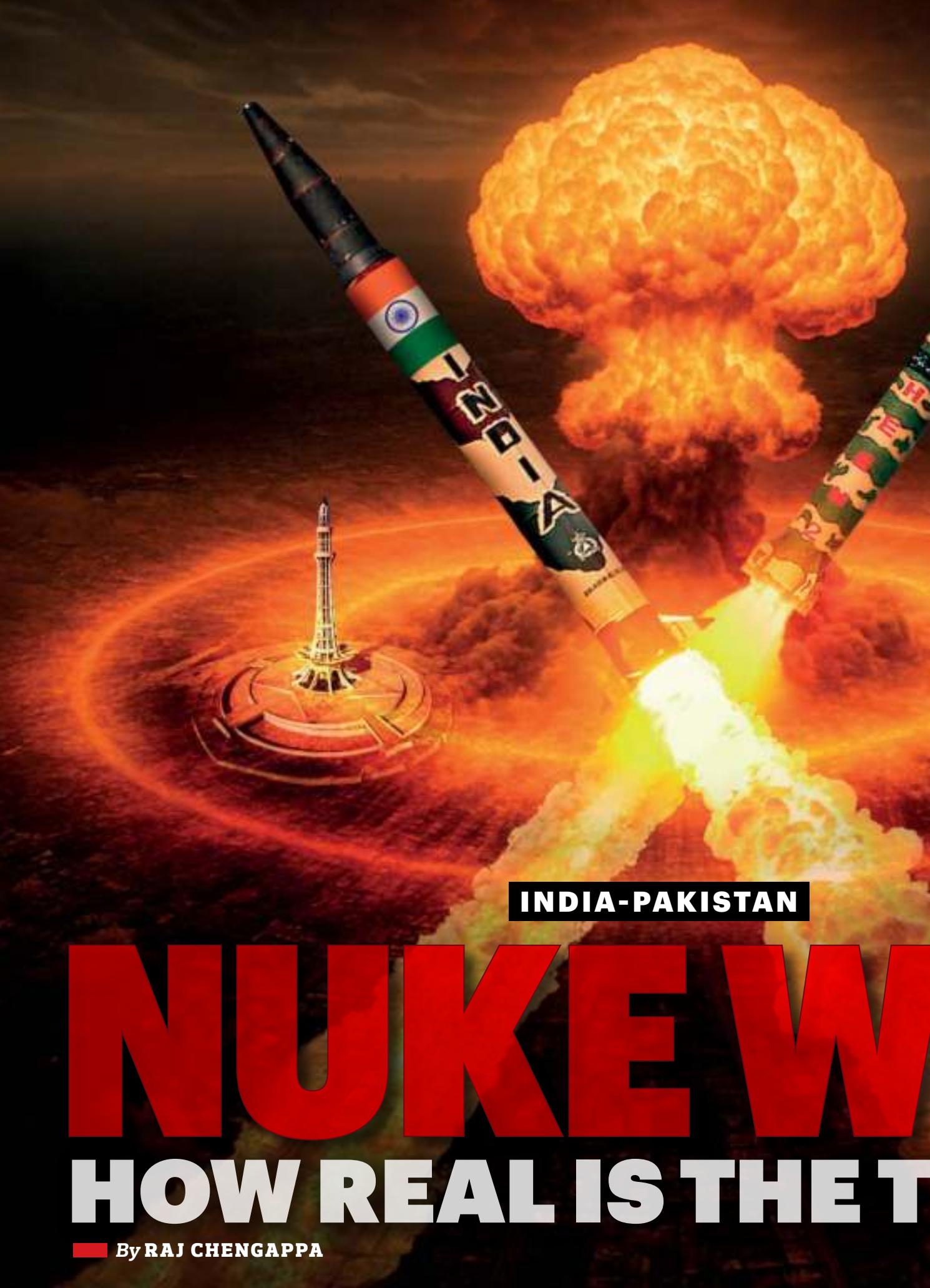
## Takeaways

■ **On May 4, just before Op. Sindoor, Rai holds up a toy Rafale to mock Rajnath**

■ **Slapped with FIR, faces taunts of aiding Pakistani propaganda at wartime**

ing a complaint by a Hindutva outfit. The complaint described his remarks as seditious. As wartime patriotism soared, the chronology proved particularly inauspicious for Rai. Politically, rather than a call for accountability, his statement was now being interpreted by many as undermining unity during a moment of national crisis.

Initially, he stood his ground, with fighting words like “I am just asking when Rafale will do its job”. But he was soon scrambling to defend his nationalist credentials, saying he was proud of the military's courage and that he was critiquing the government. In Delhi, the Grand Old Party played scrupulously by the book, saying leaders often “speak for themselves and don't reflect the INC's views”. ■



INDIA-PAKISTAN

# NUKE WAR

## HOW REAL IS THE THREAT?

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

# NO

**BATTLE PLAN EVER SURVIVES THE FIRST BULLET FIRED**

**IN A WAR.** That old military adage held true for the sixth war between India and Pakistan, which ended abruptly in a ceasefire on May 10, four days after it had begun. India planned to deliver a strong punitive deterrent to Pakistan's aiding and abetting terror strikes on our soil, including the attack in Pahalgam this April. It achieved that goal in its very first strike, in the early hours of May 7, when its armed forces launched precision attacks across the international border and the Line of Control, targeting the headquarters and training camps of key Pakistan-backed terror groups. Having deliberately avoided hitting military installations, India informed Pakistan that it had no interest in escalating hostilities further and only if Islamabad retaliated would it respond.

Pakistan, though, was in no mood to take India's blows lying down. Over the next three days, fighting intensified, with both sides chiefly deploying their air assets, including high-speed missiles as well as loitering, kamikaze drones to target each other's air bases and military installations. India claimed its superior firepower helped it get the upper hand in these exchanges, forcing Pakistan to call a truce. What it did not anticipate, though, was US president Donald Trump stealing its thunder and claiming victory for stopping the war. In a post on his social media account, Trump declared it was the US that helped mediate a ceasefire, announcing it even before the combatants could do so themselves. Two days later, at a White House briefing, Trump embarrassed India further, claiming, "We stopped a nuclear conflict. I think it could have been a bad nuclear war. Millions of people could have been killed."

Trump stuck to that line even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his address to the nation on May 12, asserted that Operation Sindoora had proved that "India would not be deterred by nuclear blackmail" and foreign secretary Vikram Misri denied any "nuclear signalling" during the war. In an interview to Fox News on May 16, Trump said, "These are major nuclear players...and they were angry. And the next phase was probably—did you see where it was getting? It was tit for tat. It was getting deeper and more missiles, that got stronger and stronger. To a point where the next one's going to be, you know what? The N word. The N word used in a nuclear sense—that's the worst thing that can happen. And I think they were very close. The hatred was great." With all three nations involved—India, Pakistan and the US—presenting differing versions of what really happened in

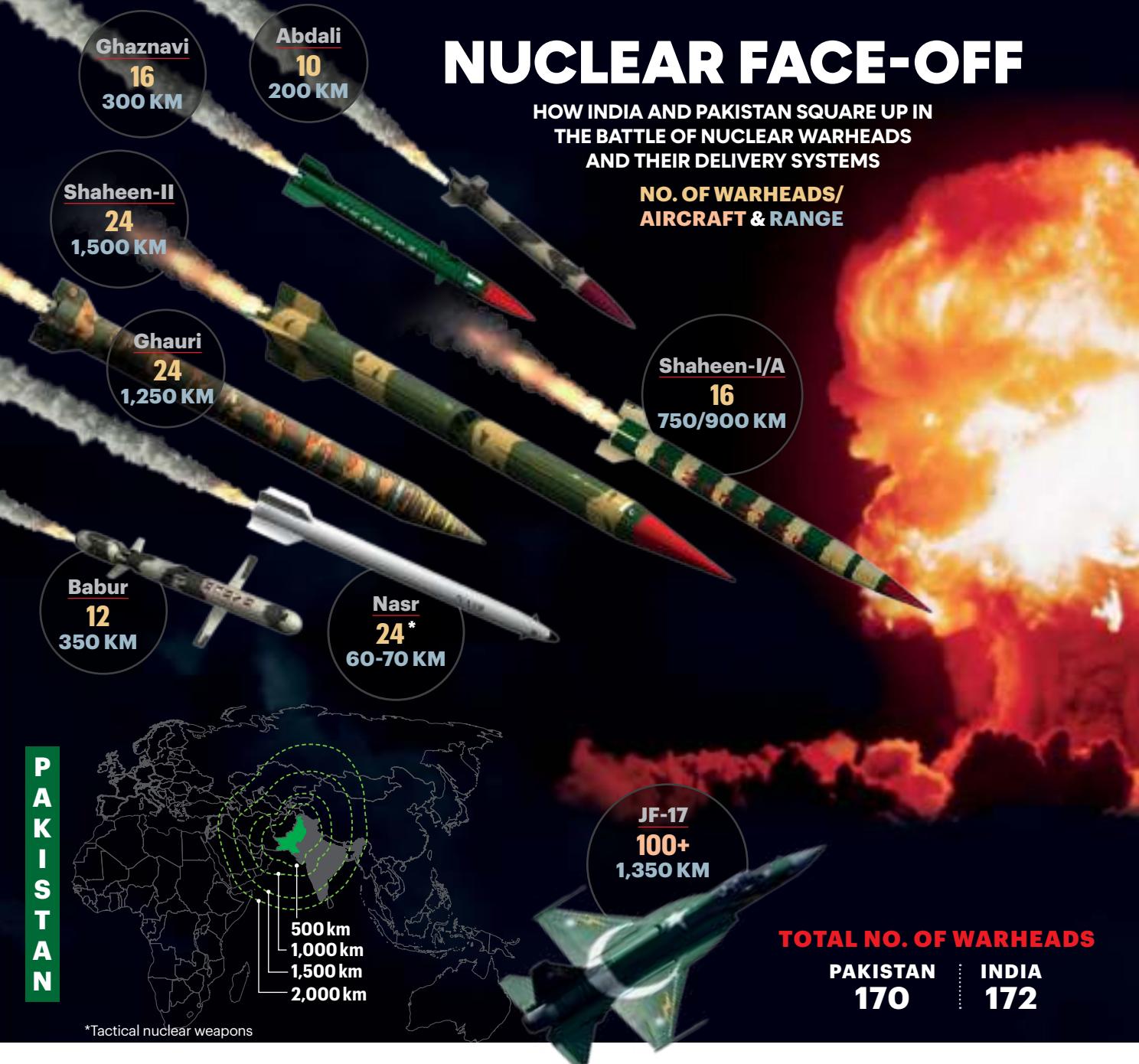


# WAR THREAT

# NUCLEAR FACE-OFF

HOW INDIA AND PAKISTAN SQUARE UP IN  
THE BATTLE OF NUCLEAR WARHEADS  
AND THEIR DELIVERY SYSTEMS

NO. OF WARHEADS/  
AIRCRAFT & RANGE



the final hours of the war, one question still hangs in the air: how real was and is the threat of a nuclear war?

## The Nuclear Equation

Not for nothing did Bill Clinton, as US president, describe the subcontinent as the most dangerous place in the world. Both India and Pakistan had conducted nuclear tests in the summer of 1998, when Clinton was in office, overtly demonstrating their recessed prowess. By then, they already had over 50 nuclear weapons each, a number that has trebled since. Both have perfected accurate supersonic ballistic missiles to deliver these weapons, with India relying on the Agni series and Pakistan on the Ghauri and its variants. Apart from air force jets, India has completed the triad of delivery systems for

nuclear weapons by equipping two of its nuclear submarines with a sea variant of the strategic missiles.

In terms of doctrine, India believes in no-first use of its nuclear weapons. But if Pakistan does use a nuclear missile against it, it will retaliate massively and destroy all its major cities. Pakistan, on the other hand, believes in using its nukes first if its territorial integrity or economy is under threat; it will apply the full spectrum of nuclear weapons in its possession in that eventuality. If either launches a nuclear weapon like the 15-kiloton bomb in Hiroshima on Mumbai or Karachi, the death toll, experts say, could exceed a million, while large parts of these cities will be rendered unfit for human habitation for decades because of the impact of the radiation.

Ashley Tellis, author of several seminal books on South Asia's nuclear conundrum, believes Pakistan has overtaken



**HAD INDIA  
INADVERTENTLY HIT  
A NUCLEAR STORAGE  
SITE, PAKISTAN  
WOULD HAVE TREATED  
IT AS FIRST STRIKE  
AND RETALIATED WITH  
NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

India and possesses the largest and most diversified nuclear arsenal in the region. This is because, he says, “Pakistan is increasingly driven less by what India is actually doing and more by its fervid imaginings of India’s capabilities coupled with an expansive—and expanding—notion of what its nuclear requirements entail.” In the past decade, Pakistan has added tactical nuclear weapons and missiles suited for battlefield scenarios to thwart an unexpected land invasion by India. It has thus introduced a hair-trigger complexity, as the command and control of tactical weapons have to be decentralised to the brigade level for effective use during crisis, leaving the so-called nuclear button in the hands of relative juniors.

Contrary to expectations that the possession of such dangerous weapons would reduce the risk of a confrontation for fear of mutually assured destruction, the two nations have found themselves on the brink of a nuclear conflagration on three major occasions. The first was

in 1999, a year after their respective nuclear tests, when the two countries fought a bitter border war in the icy heights of Kargil under the shadow of a nuclear umbrella. When both sides brandished their nukes, Clinton was forced to step in and tell Pakistan to withdraw its intrusion and restore status quo. The US had to intervene again after the 2001 terror attack on India's Parliament to prevent an all-out war between the two countries by forcing Pakistan to take strict action against terror.

The third nuclear confrontation took place as recently as February 2019, following the Pulwama terror attack that killed 40 paramilitary personnel, prompting India to send fighter jets to strike terrorist camps in Balakot, deep within Pakistani territory. However, when an Indian pilot was captured in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir after his fighter jet was shot down and he bailed out, the crisis, according to then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, came close "to spilling over into a nuclear conflagration". Pakistan accused India of moving its nuclear-armed submarine close to its shores and gave orders to keep its nukes in readiness. It took Pompeo and then US national security advisor John Bolton much jaw-jawing with leaders of the two sides to defuse the situation, with the pilot set free and both India and Pakistan claiming victory.

## Dangerous Brinkmanship

Despite the sixth war between India and Pakistan lasting just four days compared to the two-month-long 1999 Kargil war, Lisa Curtis, director, Indo Pacific Security Program, Center for a New American Security, in Washington DC, believes it was the most serious Indo-Pak conflict since the 1971 Bangladesh war. Her reason: "The scope and breadth of the territory involved in this war was vast compared to the limited border strikes in the 1999 Kargil war. I have been following India-Pakistan now for 30 years and the sight of two nuclear-armed states barraging each other with missiles and drone strikes over a four-day period, striking military installations deep inside each other's territory, was both shocking and alarming."

From US vice-president J.D. Vance telling Fox News on May 8 that this conflict was none of America's business to calling up PM Modi 12 hours later, asking India to de-escalate, is how rapidly the situation had escalated. According to American media reports, Vance had conveyed to Modi on May 9 that, as per US assessment, there was a high probability of Pakistan dramatically escalating violence, and pressed the Indian premier for a potential off-ramp to stop hostilities that would also be acceptable to the Pakistanis. But while the reports said Modi was non-committal, sources in India's external affairs ministry reveal that the Indian prime minister told Vance, "If the Pakistanis do anything, please be assured that they will get a response more forceful, stronger and more devastating than anything they did. Pakistan needs to understand this."

# THE NUKE BUTTON

**Who is authorised to press it in India and Pakistan, under what circumstances, the defences both countries have to thwart nuke attacks, and incidents of near-misses in the past**

## NUCLEAR DOCTRINES

### INDIA: 'NO FIRST USE' (NFU)

**India's conditions for using its nuclear weapons are:**

- ↘ It will use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear attack or a chemical/biological weapons (CBW) attack on Indian territory or on its armed forces
- ↘ Any nuclear/CBW

first strike could trigger a massive punitive hit-back to 'inflict unacceptable damage' on the aggressor

↘ India will not use its weapons on non-nuclear power states or those that do not have protective nuclear umbrellas provided by other countries

### PAKISTAN: 'FULL-SPECTRUM DETERRENCE'

**Pakistan can use its nuke weapons if it faces the following threats:**

- ↘ Spatial (any large loss of territory)
- ↘ Military (destruction/targeting of its armed forces)
- ↘ Economic (aggressive acts that could

choke the economy)

↘ Political (acts that lead to political destabilisation)

↘ In any of the above situations, it can use the full spectrum of its nuclear arsenal, from tactical nukes to mass scale strategic nuclear weapons

Modi's warning went unheeded by Pakistan. That evening, around 8.30, its armed forces launched Operation *Bunyan Marsoos* (literally, a wall of lead, but a phrase that symbolises unity, strength and discipline), unleashing a wave of retaliatory strikes using drones, heavy artillery and missiles on 26 sensitive Indian locations, including air bases and military installations. It even launched a Fatah-II missile, a supersonic guided artillery rocket system with 400-km range, to strike the Delhi airport, but India's missile defence system intercepted it near Sirsa.



## THE NEAR MISSES

Over the past four decades, India and Pakistan have experienced several crises with nuclear overtones

### 1999 KARGIL WAR

Conflict in the Kargil region raised concerns about potential nuclear escalation



### 2001-2002 STANDOFF

Following the Dec. 13, 2001, attack on the Indian Parliament, both nations mobilised forces, leading to heightened nuclear alert levels

### 2019 PULWAMA-BALAKOT INCIDENT

A suicide bombing in Pulwama led to Indian air-strikes in Balakot, Pakistan, bringing the two countries close to open conflict

### 2025 PAHALGAM ATTACK

Had it not been halted after four days, the war, the US president said, would have escalated into a nuclear conflict

## COMMAND AND CONTROL STRUCTURES

### INDIA: NUCLEAR COMMAND AUTHORITY (NCA)

#### POLITICAL COUNCIL

Chaired by the prime minister, the ultimate authority to give the go-ahead for nuclear strikes

#### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chaired by the National Security Advisor; provides inputs and executes directives

#### STRATEGIC FORCES COMMAND (SFC)

Responsible for management and security of nuclear weapons

### PAKISTAN: NATIONAL COMMAND AUTHORITY (NCA)

#### CHAIRMAN

Prime Minister

#### MEMBERS

Key military and civilian leaders

#### STRATEGIC PLANS DIVISION (SPD)

Responsible for the management and security of nuclear weapons

India claims to have neutralised most incoming Pakistani munitions with minimal damage.

India struck back ferociously in the early hours of May 10 around 1.10 am, using among other missiles the BrahMos, its hypersonic cruise missile. It targeted eight air bases, including the one at Nur Khan in Chaklala between Rawalpindi, the general headquarters of the Pakistan army, and capital Islamabad. India's armed forces released photographs, showing the damage to vital

infrastructure there. The Nur Khan base is also close to Pakistan's nuclear command and control headquarters. Pakistan prime minister Shehbaz Sharif later revealed that army chief General Asim Munir had called him up at 2.30 am and informed him of the attack on the air bases, including the one close to the capital. Meanwhile, sources disclose that the Indian navy, too, had by then positioned its strike fleet close to Karachi and had been alerted that orders to begin a blockade of Pakistan's ports were imminent.

# GAMING THE UNTHINKABLE

**Four scenarios that could result in a nuclear holocaust in the subcontinent**

Illustrations by NILANJAN DAS / AI

## ► SCENARIO 1

### USE IT OR LOSE IT

#### CAUSE

- A decisive Indian strike across the LoC to capture PoK, or across the international border in Punjab and Rajasthan to threaten Pakistani cities
- Also, threat of overwhelming Pakistani defences, including tactical nuclear weapons stationed near the border

#### EFFECT

- For fear of conceding territory to India and/or its tactical weapons being captured, Pakistan strikes India with tactical nuclear weapons
- India launches a devastating nuclear counterattack



## ► SCENARIO 2

### BOLT FROM THE BLUE

#### CAUSE

- In a limited war, in the one after Pahalgam, Indian air strikes inside Pakistani territory hit a road mobile dual-use missile launcher carrying a nuclear warhead, causing it to explode on Pakistani territory

#### EFFECT

- Pakistan sees it as deliberate nuclear escalation by India and responds with a debilitating nuclear counterattack. India responds by nuking major Pakistan cities

## The Tipping Point

Experts in the know say that on May 10 between 2.30 am and 10.30 am—for eight hours, that is—the fate of the subcontinent hung in the balance. Brig. Feroz Hassan Khan (retd), a research professor at the US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, who had earlier served in Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division, says, "The fact that Nur Khan was hit [near] the capital city would create more political pressure. Both India and Pakistan had climbed the rungs of the military escalation ladder so fast, it was evident that in the next 24-48 hours, the tipping point would have been reached

for an all-out war." That India had hit at strategic air bases such as Nur Khan, and Mushaf at Sargodha, meant that red lines were about to be crossed. "Had India inadvertently hit a nuclear storage site, Pakistan would have considered it as a first strike and retaliated with nuclear weapons. If the ceasefire had not been called on May 10, the next night would have been a terrible one," says Khan.

Tellis is among those who do not think the crisis was near nuclear boiling point. He believes the Indian air strikes of May 10 were extremely modest because, he says, "The fear of nuclear escalation is always baked into such conflicts. Destroying infrastructure is not something you can do in a single spasm of violence, it needs protracted targeting. In Nur Khan, India didn't set out to decapitate the nuclear command system. What they did was more of a psychological campaign of uncertainty, intimidation and fear, which is the real payoff rather

### ► SCENARIO 3

#### SPLENDID STRIKE

##### **CAUSE**

- ↳ Suspecting that Pakistan is going to launch its N-weapons or in response to a limited tactical nuke strike, India undertakes missile strikes to destroy Pakistan's N-facilities
- ↳ This includes command-and-control centres and underground vaults where it stores its nuclear arsenal

##### **EFFECT**

- ↳ Since Pakistan's nuclear weapons are spread across many facilities, some of them are likely to survive India's strike
- ↳ Pakistan will then use them to strike Indian cities resulting in India carrying out even more nuke strikes



### ► SCENARIO 4

#### BROKEN ARROW

##### **CAUSE**

- ↳ In the heat of a limited war, a dual-use supersonic missile is accidentally launched from India and hits a military target in Pakistan's Punjab but doesn't detonate
- ↳ For instance in March 2022, a BrahMos test missile was accidentally launched into Pakistani territory but the situation was defused by both sides

##### **EFFECT**

- ↳ Suspecting that India wants to carry out a nuclear strike, Pakistan retaliates with major nuclear strikes on Indian cities
- ↳ If the reverse happens, that is a Pakistan nuclear-tipped missile is accidentally fired into Indian territory and does not detonate, Delhi may presume the worst and launch a devastating strike

than physically destroying large portions of infrastructure.” Unless there is clear evidence of Pakistan moving to elevate its nuclear weapons readiness levels, Tellis finds it hard to believe the current crisis would have careened towards a nuclear war.

MEA sources, too, maintain the crisis never acquired nuclear dimensions, and that Pakistan climbed down after the air

strikes on its bases as it realised that another two days of war would have forced it into humiliating submission. They say it was Gen. Munir who got in touch with Rubio early that morning and requested him to get India to stand down. Soon after, Rubio called external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, who told him that if Pakistan wanted to cease hostilities, it needed to communicate it via the hotline between their respective director generals of military operations. Maj. Gen. Kashif Abdullah, Pakistan's DGMO, then called his Indian counterpart, Lt Gen. Rajiv Ghai, at 3.35 pm and told him that Pakistan wanted a ceasefire. India agreed and it was mutually decided that it would come into force at 5 pm that day. India denies US intervention in bringing this about.

This explanation flies against Trump's assertion that he had averted a potential nuclear conflict. Rubio, too, had several rounds of discussions with the key players—Jaishankar,

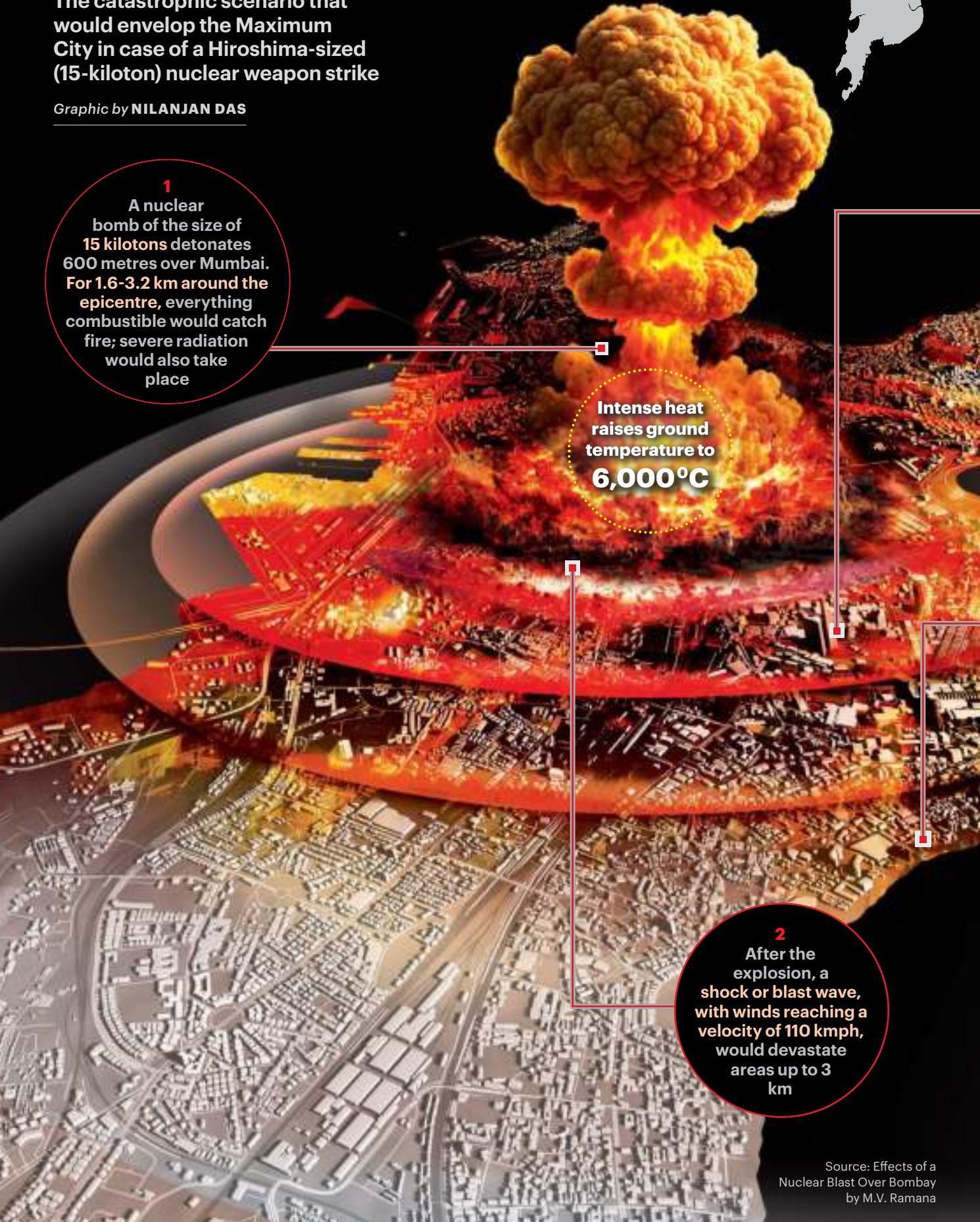
**ON MAY 10, BETWEEN 2.30 AM AND 10.30 AM, THE FATE OF THE SUBCONTINENT HUNG IN BALANCE. HAD A CEASEFIRE NOT BEEN DECLARED, THE WAR COULD HAVE GONE NUCLEAR IN 24-48 HOURS**

# IF MUMBAI IS NUKED



The catastrophic scenario that would envelop the Maximum City in case of a Hiroshima-sized (15-kiloton) nuclear weapon strike

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS



**1**  
A nuclear bomb of the size of 15 kilotons detonates 600 metres over Mumbai. For 1.6-3.2 km around the epicentre, everything combustible would catch fire; severe radiation would also take place

Intense heat raises ground temperature to **6,000°C**

**2**  
After the explosion, a shock or blast wave, with winds reaching a velocity of 110 kmph, would devastate areas up to 3 km



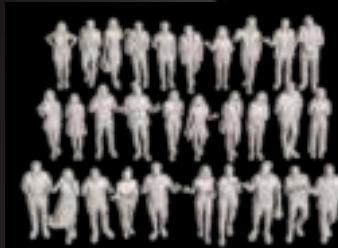
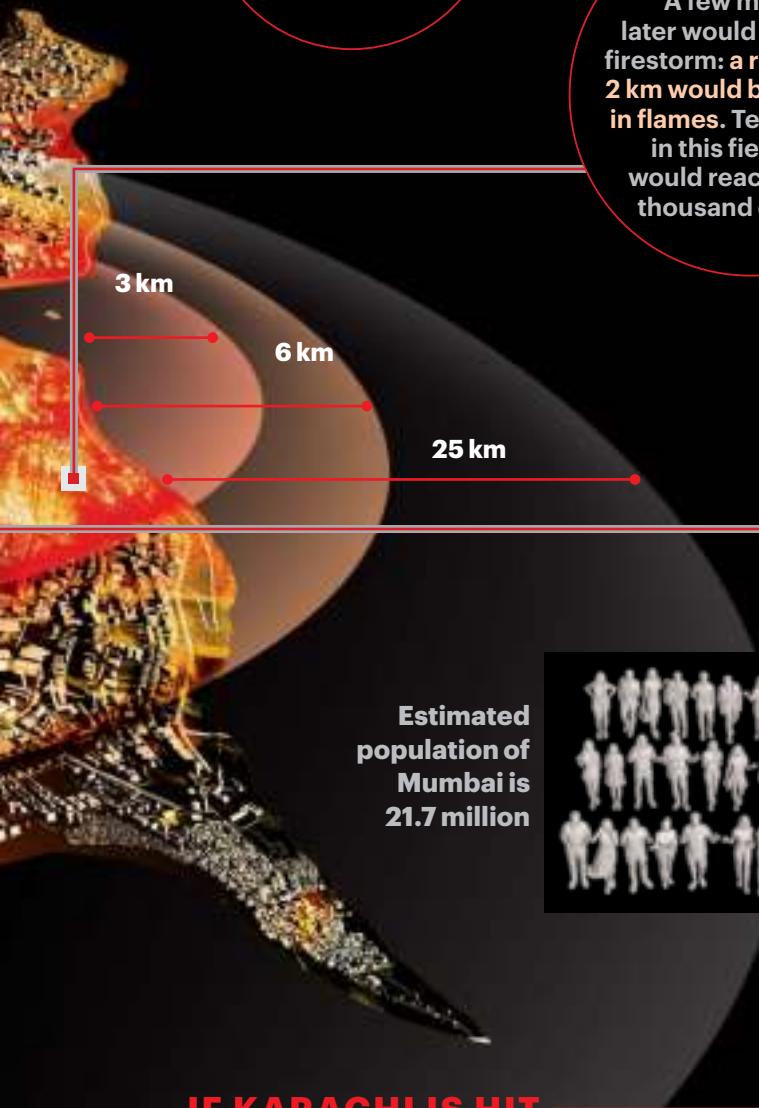
**3**  
The blast wave would destroy all houses within a radius of 1.7 km from ground zero



**4**  
A few minutes later would come the firestorm: a region up to 2 km would be engulfed in flames. Temperature in this fiery zone would reach several thousand degrees



**5**  
Winds of 50-80 kmph would fan conflagration. With water tanks destroyed and roads blocked with debris, the fire would not be brought under control. There would be few survivors



#### HUMAN CASUALTIES

- Mumbai has a population density of over 25,000 per sq. km; total casualties within a few weeks could be between 300,000 and 500,000 just from the blast/firestorm
- In all, the number of people who would die, including from the radioactive fallout, can cross 1 million

#### IF KARACHI IS HIT

➤ Karachi has a population of 20.3 million, with a population density comparable to that of Mumbai

➤ If a 15 kiloton nuke strikes it, human casualties would also be in a similar range: possibly well over 600,000 from the initial blast, shock and firestorm

➤ The total number of dead, including from radioactive fallout, will also cross 1 million





## THE TACTICAL NUKE'S THREAT

► **Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) are smaller nuclear weapons meant for battlefield use**

► **They have a smaller yield, starting from 1 kiloton, and a lesser range of around 100 km and above; delivered through artillery, short-range missiles and gravity bombs**

► **Once used, it will create a blast and fire, fol-**

**lowed by a radioactive wasteland, killing over 20,000 in blast effects and thermal radiation within a 1-2 km radius**

► **Pakistan reportedly has over 20 tactical nukes, meant to counter India's conventional superiority**

► **India, which believes in an overwhelming nuclear counter-strike, has deliberately not developed TNWs**

Pakistan turns off the terror tap. Christopher Clary, assistant professor of Political Science at the University at Albany, State University of New York, and an expert on South Asian nuclear issues, believes the truce came about through a combination of factors, including the likelihood of US intelligence agencies observing a change in the readiness status of Pakistan's nuclear assets. "My hypothesis," says Clary, "is that a combination of Indian military pressure combined with US inducements created a mix of carrots and sticks that made Pakistan indicate it could cease hostilities." Curtis agrees that India and Pakistan would not have agreed to a ceasefire on their own and needed third-party intervention to step back from the nuclear brink.

**P**akistan, though, saw Trump's observations and Rubio's comments as a significant victory. Not only did Trump, in a subsequent briefing, offer to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir, the US also told India to hold talks on key issues. Pakistan claimed they were able to internationalise the Kashmir issue again and get re-hyphenated with India. Gen. Munir got himself promoted to Field Marshal to demonstrate his clout and cement his status as the de facto czar of Pakistan.

The sense of triumphalism in the Pakistan military worries Curtis. "It makes it seem like this act of terrorism helped draw international attention to Kashmir and sends a wrong signal that could encourage more violence in the future," she says. "It doesn't help calm tensions in the region." She believes the US must quietly work behind the scenes to encourage the two sides to get some kind of bilateral dialogue going, including on the issues of terrorism and nuclear risk reduction.

Most admit the truce is tenuous, and another terrorist act could trigger a resumption of hostilities. Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistan ambassador to the US and senior fellow, Hudson Institute, Washington DC, says, "The jihadis may want to break the peace, but I think Pakistan will now put a leash on them as they don't want to go down this path again." The real problem, Haqqani fears, is that the public in both countries is jingoistic and seemingly unaware of the grave dangers of a nuclear miscalculation. "Our attitude seems to be that even if the plane we are travelling in is crashing, we are laughing and asking for more whisky," he says. Hassan Khan believes India and Pakistan need to build an architecture that can sort out such things immediately before they get into "a commitment trap" that pushes them towards a dangerous war. Tellis thinks the longer term challenge is now tied up with the future of India-Pakistan relations and cannot be resolved without actual engagement between the two countries. "To my mind, the question is how do you punish the enemy by minimising the risks to yourself," he says. Talking about nuclear war, a sci-fi movie from the Cold War era had this line: "It is a strange game. The only winning move is not to play." It could be a tactic worth practising. ■

Gen. Munir, Shehzad Sharif and India's national security advisor Ajit Doval. In a social media post, Rubio thanks these leaders and says that both countries had not only agreed to an immediate ceasefire but also "to start talks on a broad set of issues at a neutral site". This seemed in consonance with state department spokesperson Tammy Bruce's read-out of Rubio's conversations with Munir and Jaishankar. The one with Munir read, "He continued to urge both parties to find ways to de-escalate and offered US assistance in starting constructive talks in order to avoid future conflicts." The read-out with Jaishankar, on the other hand, went thus: "Rubio emphasised that both sides need to identify methods to de-escalate and re-establish communication to avoid miscalculation. He further proposed US support in facilitating productive discussions to avert future disputes." Posting his take on the conversation, Jaishankar's message on X read: "Had a conversation with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio this morning. India's approach has always been measured and responsible and remains so."

## The Endgame

In off-the-record briefings, however, the MEA says there was no such agreement to resume talks with Pakistan as it would run contrary to India's stated policy of no talks unless



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# A NATION AT STAKE

As the line between online gaming and gambling blurs, millions of Indians grapple with addiction, debt and fraud while the government scrambles to rein in a booming yet chaotic industry

By AVANEESH MISHRA and PRADIP R. SAGAR

*Photo illustration by NILANJAN DAS / AI*

## It's

**a sweltering afternoon in Brahimpur in east Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur district,** but 35-year-old farmer Surya Pratap Singh seems oblivious to it. He is sitting beneath a neem tree, furiously tapping his phone screen. Around him, a few plastic chairs and a charpoy make up what is probably Brahimpur gram sabha's unofficial gaming lounge. The game of choice isn't played with dice or cards, it's all digital instead, be it ludo, fantasy cricket or online rummy. The stakes? They are very real. "This has been our routine for years," says Surya Pratap. "No matter what I'm doing, I have to play. I need Rs 2,000-3,000 every day just to get by.... I know I won't win. But I cannot stop."

Surya Pratap's addiction has cost him not just money but peace of mind, familial ties and self-esteem too. He has logged some 19,500 games on his app, often wagering thousands in a single round. On one

particularly devastating day, he lost Rs 1.5 lakh, convinced that he was about to win it all back. "I thought I was having a heart attack," he recalls.

Surya Pratap is but one symptom of the digital gambling epidemic sweeping through India—from rural Uttar Pradesh to urban Hyderabad, from farmers to professionals, from students to pensioners—driven by smartphones, cheap data, quick online payments and the 'gamification' of aspiration. According to a report by WinZO Games and the Interactive Entertainment and Innovation Council (IEIC), India's gaming market stood at \$3.7 billion (Rs 31,500 crore) in 2024 and is projected to surge to \$9.1 billion (Rs 78,000 crore) by 2029, growing at a blistering compound annual growth rate of 19.6 per cent. A separate estimate by Statista Market Insights puts India's online sports betting market alone at \$2.19 billion (Rs 18,700 crore) in 2025. India now accounts for over 20 per cent of global gaming users and around 8.6 billion app downloads, more than the next two biggest markets—the US and Brazil—combined. The real driver of this growth? The phenomenon of Real Money

\$3.7  
BILLION

Size of India's online  
gaming market,  
projected to reach  
\$9.1 bn by 2029

86  
PER CENT

Real money gaming's  
contribution to total  
revenue in India's  
gaming market

180  
MILLION

No. of Indian users  
in \$2 billion fantasy  
sports segment

Gaming (RMG), which contributes 86 per cent of industry revenue. Millions are staking money on outcomes every day on these online platforms—it isn't just about games anymore, they are now entire economic ecosystems unto themselves. Digital ludo, for instance, matches users, often with similar skill or stake levels, and lets them compete for the pooled-in entry fees. Similarly, fantasy cricket—think Dream 11, My 11 Circle et al—involves creating virtual teams of real players; users earn points and money based on actual match performances (see *Major Online Players*).

The surge in RMG has not only fuelled widespread addiction, pushing many users into a debt trap, but also opened the door to more insidious threats: money laundering, cyber fraud and even terror financing. As this booming industry spirals beyond control, the government is beginning to take serious note. While several regulatory measures have been rolled out over the past few years, top officials in the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) say the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) is now preparing a report recommending a new central law. The proposed legislation could bring the entire spectrum of online gaming, gambling, betting and lotteries under one federal framework—with provisions for steep fines and prison terms of up to three years for violations.

### **The Skill-Chance Mirage**

The legal framework for gambling in India remains anchored in the colonial-era Public Gambling Act of 1867, which distinguishes between ‘games of skill’ and ‘games of chance’. The former—like rummy or fantasy cricket—are legal, while the latter, such as roulette or slot apps, fall in the ambit of gambling and are generally banned. In a 1957 ruling (*State of Bombay vs R.M.D. Chamarbaugwala*), the Supreme Court reinforced this principle, saying that only games

where success is predominantly determined by skill can avoid being classified as gambling. That preponderance test continues to shape legal interpretations even today.

But, in the online space, this divide has grown fuzzy. Platforms often promote themselves as skill-based to dodge regulation. Experts argue that even games requiring some level of skill can be manipulated with mechanisms like flashy visuals, near-misses

with RMG platforms out of curiosity, but gradually slip into what is called the ‘gambler’s fallacy’, or the hope that a win will follow a losing streak. “People getting addicted are often driven by their financial or psychological needs, after seeing someone else win,” he says. “They believe they can reverse their fortunes, and keep investing more despite mounting losses.”

The SHUT Clinic saw few such cases till 2017, says Dr Sharma. Now, at least one patient a month reports addiction to online gambling or high-risk trading. Advertisements glamorising “big wins”—often with celebrity endorsements—only reel the victims in deeper. “Such endorsements build a false sense of trust,” explains Dr Sharma. A 2022 study by the global consultancy KPMG supports this view, revealing that 40 per cent of young adults in India, aged 18–25, were influenced by such promotional content, with many coming to perceive online gambling as a safe, even lucrative, activity.

### **The External Threat**

A 2023 report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance warned that lax oversight is turning gaming portals into pipelines for terror financing, after the National Investigation Agency (NIA) traced laundered funds to extremist groups. Watchdog platforms such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism also warn that extremist groups are using in-game chats and forums to recruit and radicalise vulnerable users.

A report by India’s Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) in 2022 pegged money flow through gaming platforms at Rs 2,000 crore, much of it untaxed and untraceable. Many illegal betting platforms also allow users to place bets using cash, bypassing the digital record entirely, according to a 2024 report by the Security and Scientific Technical Research Association (SASTRA) of Rashtriya Raksha University, Gandhinagar. In one high-profile case in 2022, the Enforcement Directorate



**“People getting addicted to real money games are often driven by their financial or psychological needs. They believe they can reverse their fortunes, and keep investing despite mounting losses”**

**DR MANOJ KUMAR SHARMA**  
Professor of Clinical Psychology,  
NIMHANS, Bengaluru

and random rewards—known to trigger dopamine rushes akin to gambling.

“Hope is a powerful thing,” says Surya Pratap, a sentiment echoed by mental health professionals. Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma, a professor of clinical psychology at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, and coordinator of the SHUT (Service for Healthy Use of Technology) Clinic, says that many users initially engage

# MAJOR ONLINE PLAYERS

From fantasy cricket to online ludo, skill-based games with the chance to win real money are attracting millions of users to multiple digital platforms daily

DREAM11	ZUPEE	RUMMY CIRCLE	APP
<b>2008</b> <b>100 mn+</b> Fantasy sports	<b>2018</b> <b>50 mn+</b> Ludo, trump cards	<b>2009</b> <b>50 mn+</b> Online rummy	Year of launch Total downloads* Game type
			*from Google Play
<b>MY11 CIRCLE</b> <b>2019</b> <b>50 mn+</b> Fantasy sports	<b>RUSH</b> <b>2021</b> <b>50 mn+</b> Card/board games, fantasy sports	<b>WINZO</b> <b>2018</b> <b>10 mn+</b> Card/board games, fantasy sports, etc.	<b>MOBILE PREMIER LEAGUE</b> <b>2018</b> <b>10 mn+</b> Ludo, rummy, fantasy cricket, etc.
			

## THE BIG BETTING BUSTS

Offshore betting platforms thrive in the grey areas, often masquerading as skill-based games. Here are a few that have landed squarely in the ED's crosshairs

FIEWIN	PARIMATCH	MAHADEV
<b>Crackdown:</b> Sept. 2024	<b>Crackdown:</b> Dec. 2023	<b>Crackdown:</b> Nov. 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Lured users with promises of high returns on playing games</li> <li>➔ Had alleged links to Chinese operators</li> <li>➔ Laundered Rs 400 cr. via mule accounts/ crypto wallets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ A sports betting firm based in Cyprus</li> <li>➔ Expanded its operations in India in 2021</li> <li>➔ Accused of tax evasion, money laundering and surrogate ads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Offered illegal gambling on poker, cricket etc.</li> <li>➔ Had Indian promoters based in the UAE</li> <li>➔ The ED exposed an alleged Rs 40,000 cr. money laundering operation linked to it</li> </ul>

(ED) seized Rs 17.82 crore in cash and over Rs 22 crore in Bitcoin from a platform called E-nuggets, allegedly operated by Chinese nationals. According to Ananay Jain, director at risk advisory firm Grant Thornton Bharat, foreign-controlled apps, especially those from China, raise national security concerns due to potential ties with surveillance networks and data harvesting.

The avenue is proving a godsend for other devilish deeds as well. "As online gaming and betting platforms proliferate in India, so do the risks of financial fraud, data theft and phishing scams," says Jain. In a 2022 CERT-In report, online financial frauds linked to gaming platforms were found to have surged by 55 per cent.

**R**ohit Sharma, a research fellow at the Union ministry of defence's think-tank MP-IDSA, points to the 2024 Fiewin case—a gaming app run by Chinese operators that laundered nearly Rs 400 crore from Indian users—as a wake-up call. "The app used false promises of high returns to deceive users," says Sharma. The ED's probe into Fiewin revealed a web of international transactions routed through 'mule' accounts and cryptocurrency wallets—making detection and enforcement exceedingly difficult.

The jurisdictional grey zone these platforms operate in exacerbates the problem. Many are registered in tax havens like Malta, Cyprus and Curacao, well out of the reach of Indian regulators. They regularly violate multiple Indian laws, including the Foreign Exchange Management Act, Payment and Settlement Systems Act, Information Technology Act, and Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The very foundation of what counts as legal or illegal gaming remains blurred, says Kriti Singh, associate director and programme manager (online gaming) at The Dialogue, a tech policy think-tank. "Despite some legal clarity, regulatory ambiguity has created an environment where offshore

platforms thrive in the grey areas, often masquerading as skill-based games. This leaves consumers vulnerable to mental and financial harm,” she warns. “A comprehensive national framework that clearly distinguishes between games of skill and games of chance is essential to protect users and increase accountability.” Jain agrees. “We urgently need a SEBI-like regulator for gaming,” he says, “one that mandates licensing, audits and public education to curb addiction.” Sharma weighs in, saying, “Compliance with Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, such as publishing an Indian contact address and adhering to the ‘purpose limitation’ principle, is critical to preventing such abuses.” (Purpose limitation means personal data should be used only for the specific, legitimate purposes for which it was collected.)

### **Cracking the Whip**

Responding to the growing menace, the government has initiated a string of reforms. In December 2022, the Union ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) was appointed the nodal authority for online gaming. The ministry revised the IT Rules, 2021, in April 2023 to strengthen the regulation of online gaming intermediaries. Platforms must now conduct age verification, provide grievance redressal and comply with strict KYC (Know Your Customer) norms. Till February 2025, MeitY had also blocked 1,410 non-compliant websites/apps. Fresh measures introduced in March this year are designed to protect users from illegal gambling, data theft and addiction, while ensuring the industry remains accountable and transparent.

In addition, over the past two years, the government has imposed a 28 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) on the full value of bets, and a 30 per cent income tax on net winnings, aimed at both curbing casual gambling and ensuring financial transparency. The Centre is also working towards including RMG platforms under the PMLA,

# **Regulating the Digital Dice**

**A combination of regulatory measures by the government and self-regulation by industry is framing India’s response to the damaging fallout of real money gaming**

### **WHAT'S DONE**

► **The revised IT Rules (April 2023) mandate grievance redressal, KYC and age verification for RMG platforms. Non-compliance may lead to loss of intermediary liability protection**

► **Till February 2025, the nodal Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**

**(MeitY) had blocked 1,410 non-compliant websites/apps. Fresh measures introduced in March 2025 focus on preventing fraud, data theft and addiction**

► **A 28% GST was introduced on full bet value in October 2023 followed by 30% TDS on net winnings from 2024-25—**

effectively classifying them as ‘reporting entities’. When implemented, it would require these platforms to enforce stricter KYC norms, maintain detailed transaction records and report suspicious activity to the FIU.

**T**amil Nadu has gone a step further, rolling out detailed rules for its Prohibition of Online Gambling and Regulation of Online Games Act, 2022, in February this year. These mandate gaming curfews between midnight and 5 am, pop-up warnings after an hour of play and caps on user spending. States like Telangana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have launched similar crackdowns to impose a blanket ban on RMG while Kerala tried to outlaw playing rummy for stakes. Most of these efforts have either stumbled in the courts or been circumvented by virtual private networks (VPNs)—a backdoor access to banned sites.

The stricter measures have also driven many users toward offshore



**“While the law clearly creates a distinction between games of skill and chance offline, there is a lack of clarity on the legality of online betting and gambling services. We need a SEBI-like regulator for online gaming”**

**ANANAY JAIN**  
Director, Grant Thornton Bharat





**aimed at curbing excessive play and maintaining transparency**

■ The Advertising Standards Council of India's efforts led to the signing of a Code of Ethics by key industry bodies in March. Besides responsible advertising, self-regulation extends to spending limits etc.

platforms that dodge Indian laws, helped along by the jurisdictional maze. While online gaming is a digital industry, transcending geographical boundaries, gambling is a state subject under the Constitution. Most states exempt games of skill from gambling restrictions. While Goa permits licensed physical casinos (games of chance), states like Nagaland, Sikkim and Meghalaya have introduced licensing frameworks specifically for online gaming. This mismatch complicates enforcement, leaving grey areas for platforms to exploit.

When MeitY took charge of online gaming in 2022, IT minister Ashwini Vaishnav had called for "a central law" to regulate the sector. The I4C under the MHA is now working in this direction. Government insiders claim that several 'giant' platforms are under the lens for flouting existing rules. Once a new law is passed, accountability could also extend to the celebrities and influencers who endorse such platforms.

## WHAT'S PLANNED

■ The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the home ministry is preparing a report for a dedicated law to regulate online gaming, betting, gambling and lotteries, and curb offshore platforms; potential stricter penalties could include 3-year prison terms and heavy fines

■ The government is also working on bringing online gaming platforms under anti-money laundering laws, requiring stricter KYC compliance, maintenance of transaction records and reporting of any kind of suspicious activity

## The Self-regulation Push

To its credit, the industry has begun some self-regulation. On March 10, key industry bodies—the Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports (FIFS), All India Gaming Federation (AIGF) and the E-Gaming Federation (EGF)—announced a 'Code of Ethics' (CoE), as a culmination of efforts initiated by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI). The members of these bodies include popular platforms like Dream11, MyTeam11, Zupee, A23 and Junglee Games. The CoE is aimed at enforcing consistent standards of user safety across the industry through the implementation of responsible gaming and advertising policies. It also mandates annual third-party audits and comprehensive reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency.

Roland Landers, CEO of the AIGF, tells INDIA TODAY that one advantage of operating as a digital platform is the ability to monitor user behaviour. "If we detect patterns of excessive use, we

can step in and take preventive action," he says, while also stressing that "self-awareness and restraint from users are equally important". According to Landers, only 15-20 per cent of users of these skill-based gaming apps engage in monetary transactions; most stick to low-denomination games. "Serious losses are more often associated with illegal platforms," he adds.

Ravi Shankar Jha, director of public policy at Zupee, which offers RMGs like ludo and trump cards, believes regulation is key to addressing the issue. "The only way to address this imbalance is through regulations that separate legitimate skill gaming entities from illegal ones," he says. In the absence of clear recognition, Jha argues, users are unable to distinguish legal operators—who "promote responsible gaming"—from offshore betting and gambling sites.

**Y**et, the human toll of this epidemic is impossible to ignore. Many a time, the harmless-looking gaming apps become gateways to illegal betting apps—out of lack of awareness, financial need or sheer greed. On April 16, a 25-year-old MTech student in Hyderabad took his life after losing money in online betting, a grim reminder of the larger-than-life menace RMG is.

While the government's multi-pronged crackdown may rein in some abuses, enforcement remains a game of whack-a-mole. A Digital India Foundation report released on March 15 found that just four illegal betting platforms attracted a total of 1.6 billion visits in three months. Mirror sites, like those run by the Cyprus-headquartered sports betting giant PariMatch, alone contributed 266 million visits—dodging bans with ever-changing domains.

Without faster, smarter regulation, these platforms will keep thriving in the shadows. But the real battle isn't just shutting down rogue apps; it's changing the narrative—from addiction to awareness, from easy money to informed choice. Until then Surya Pratap, and millions like him, will remain prisoners of a costly addiction. ■

# THE RIDE IS OVER

**How the Jaggi brothers went from being the darlings of the start-up universe to becoming the exemplars of all that is wrong with it**

By SONAL KHETARPAL

**W**

**HEN ANMOL SINGH JAGGI SPOKE, YOU LISTENED.**

So it was this February, when the 39-year-old co-founder of ride-hailing app BluSmart declared at a conference in Gurugram: “Our aim for the next 10 years is that everyone in a metro city should get a BluSmart EV cab within five minutes.” For the investors and employees, it sounded not like a goal, but the very gospel. BluSmart had changed the ride-hailing game. It was built on a simple but powerful premise: reliable cabs with professional

drivers, fixed fares, no ride cancellations and a wholly EV fleet. Primarily serving metropolitan cities—Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru and, more recently, Mumbai—its focus on airport and office commutes won it user loyalty in no time. In 2024, it was clocking 25,000–30,000 daily rides, capturing over 10 per cent of the ride-hailing market in Delhi-NCR, and carving a niche for itself in the hypercompetitive mobility sector.

However, just as meteoric as their rise is the fall that Anmol, and his brother Puneet, now seem to have brought upon themselves. Allegations of funds diversion, delayed salaries, exit of their top leadership and, finally, the very worst—BluSmart ceasing operations. Where did it all go wrong?

Theirs was the stuff startup dreams are made of. Sons of an army officer, Anmol and Puneet, younger by two years, attributed their discipline and their daring to their defence upbringing. Bright to boot, both went on to study engineering—Anmol earned a BTech degree from the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, Dehradun; Puneet went to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee. The entrepreneurial bug bit both brothers early—Anmol was only 21 when he set up Gensol Group in 2007, spotting an opportunity in the carbon credit market during his internship at Reliance Industries. When the sector took a hit after the 2008 global financial crisis, Gensol pivoted to solar consultancy, a space Puneet had discovered meanwhile.



## SCREECHING HALT

About 10,000 BluSmart driver-partners have been left in the lurch

₹ 171  
CRORE

**BluSmart's total income in FY2024, a 142.3% rise since the previous fiscal**

10

**PER CENT**

**Market share in Delhi in 2024; overall daily rides: 25,000-30,000**

8,500

**BluSmart's fleet of EVs—leased from GEL and other partners**

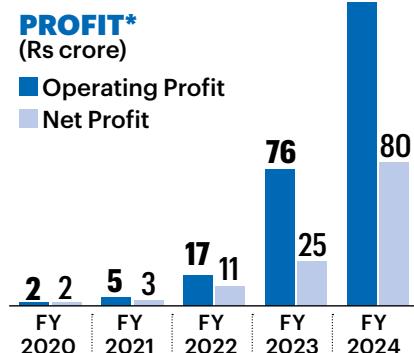
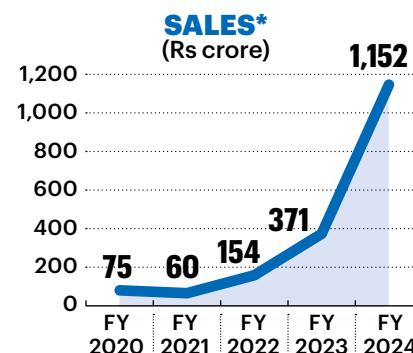


## THE REAR VIEW

In 2019, brothers **ANMOL SINGH JAGGI** (right) and **PUNEET SINGH JAGGI**, along with Punit K. Goyal, co-founded BluSmart, an electric cab-hailing start-up positioned as a cleaner alternative to traditional ride services. The same year, Gensol Electric Engineering (GEL), the Jaggis' flagship firm involved in solar and renewables, went public. The fundamental pillar of BluSmart's business model was its access to EVs. These mostly came from GEL, which SEBI alleges has indulged in fund diversion, stock manipulation and forgery

### A SUCCESS SQUANDERED

Gensol-BluSmart was a remarkable growth story, till it lasted. GEL's sales ballooned from Rs 75 cr. in FY2020 to Rs 1,152 cr. in FY2024. In February 2024, its shares were trading at Rs 1,376 apiece. On May 20, it was hovering around Rs 70



\*Standalone data for GEL; Source: SEBI's interim order

Over time, Gensol transformed into a full-fledged engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) player in the solar energy sector. The business grew fast. So did the brothers' ambitions. In January 2019, along with Harvard Business School alumnus Punit K. Goyal, they founded BluSmart Mobility. Anmol was the more public of the two—the bold, risk-taking visionary who charmed investors, bankers and bureaucrats alike. Puneet brought in a data-driven mindset. He was more analytical, focused on improving efficiency and building systems that scaled. Equity and debt funding, that marker of startup success, soon started flowing in—as prominent backers like BP Ventures, part of the British multinational oil and gas company BP, started buying into the brothers' dreams. The company's EV fleet grew to 8,500; the funding crossed \$220 million (Rs 1,870 crore). As their businesses grew, so did the brothers' families. Anmol married Mugdha, a 2009-batch Indian Defence Accounts Service officer, and had two sons. Puneet found his life partner in Shalmali, a budding entrepreneur who has recently started a cakes and cookies business. They have a daughter.

**J**ust when it seemed that things couldn't get any better for the siblings, they took a turn for the worse. On February 3, Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL), the group's flagship company, defaulted on a Rs 30 crore non-convertible debenture payment. Though paid later, swift downgrades from credit rating agencies CARE Ratings and ICRA followed. ICRA even accused GEL of submitting falsified documents, an allegation the latter denied later in an investor release. Then started non-payment of salaries—a 20-day delay in February payouts at on-demand logistics firm Wayo Logistics, another Jaggi-led venture. The following month, it was BluSmart employees who didn't get their salaries. "There was frequent chaos in the office as vendors arrived, demanding payments and contacts of the Jaggi brothers," a senior customer experience executive tells INDIA TODAY. "There was no communication from the leadership on what was happening." A leadership exodus followed: chief executive officer Anirudh Arun, chief technology officer Rishabh Sood, chief business officer Tushar Garg, and vice president of customer experience Priya Chakravarthy. Employees were asked to work from home. On April 15, market regulator Sebi (Securities and Exchange Board of India) came out with a 29-page interim order, alleging funds diversion, market manipulation and forgery at GEL. The Jaggis were barred from the securities market and asked to step down.

## A DREAM UNRAVELS

BluSmart employees—both current and former—describe a seemingly healthy workplace. It was Anmol, by all accounts, who had the final say on most decisions, just like at Gensol. Puneet started playing a more active role only after 2024 when Prescinto, an AI-powered solar monitoring and analytics platform he had co-founded and led since 2016, was sold to IBM.

## THE DAMNING ALLEGATIONS

Sebi in its Apr. 15 interim order highlighted a "complete breakdown of internal controls" at GEL



**FUND DIVERSION:** Over Rs 262 cr. earmarked to procure EVs for BluSmart unaccounted-for; nearly Rs 40 cr. diverted to related parties, kin or for personal expenses, another Rs 42.94 cr. to buy a luxury flat



**MARKET MANIPULATION:** Firm called Wellray used to inflate GEL's stock price between April 2022 and December 2024; also to fund its own preferential allotment



**FORGERY:** Loan defaults began in 2024-end, but GEL allegedly kept submitting "false statements" to credit rating agencies

## THE WARNING SIGNS

Even before Sebi's order, alarm bells had been set off in Jaggi-led ventures

➔ **GEL delays a Rs 30 cr. non-convertible debenture payment in early Feb. Downgrades follow from credit rating agencies**

➔ **Feb. salaries at on-demand logistics firm Wayo Logistics delayed by 20 days**

➔ **In mid-March, BluSmart's Dubai operations fold. Leadership exodus follows**

➔ **BluSmart employees don't receive their March salaries, told to work from home**

"Anmol did all the right things," says a former senior executive. "Not once did I question his decisions on moral grounds." He was considered accessible, hands-on and responsive to feedback. Attrition was low. Another senior executive from operations says the founders took care of their driver-partners too. "Our drivers weren't on our payroll, but we found ways to provide them with insurance. That was Anmol's idea," he says. Did they have any inkling that something was amiss? "Anmol did mention a funds crunch at the January town hall," says the senior executive. "But he assured us talks were on to raise capital." Except that the problems were more than a cash crunch.

In its order, Sebi alleges that GEL had become the Jaggi brothers' "piggy bank". Funds raised ostensibly for EV procurement were routed via a dizzying maze of "layered transactions", in what was a "complete breakdown of internal



# सबसे भयोसेमंद खोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

## सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

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

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

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

कृपया फॉर्म को ब्लॉकलेटर में भरें

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

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहाँ स्कैन करें।

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

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controls and corporate governance norms". On October 3, 2022, for instance, GEL received Rs 93.88 crore—part loan from the NBFC Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) and part promoter margin. That same day, it transferred the amount to Go Auto Pvt Ltd, its EV supplier, from where Rs 50 crore was moved to Capbridge Ventures LLP—a firm where the brothers are designated partners. Within three days, Rs 42.94 crore was used to book a luxury apartment in The Camellias, a DLF property that is one of Gurugram's priciest addresses. The apartment was later allotted to their mother, Jasminder Kaur.

**T**he Camellias apart, Sebi ticked other extravagances on GEL's expense: Rs 59 lakh in credit card payments, Rs 26 lakh on a luxury golf set and Rs 10.36 lakh on spa services. The list continues, extending to personal circles—a Rs 7 crore transferred to their mother and Rs 4.2 crore to their spouses. Another Rs 2.5 crore was used to buy foreign currency. In all, the brothers allegedly siphoned off nearly Rs 40 crore of GEL's funds by routing them to other related parties, family members or for personal use.

As a consultant who specialises in the cab-hailing market points out, "In the overall scheme of things, the issue is not so much about BluSmart as it is about Gensol." GEL had gone public in September 2019 and its annual sales leapt from Rs 75 crore in FY20 to Rs 1,152 crore in FY24. The fundamental pillar of BluSmart's business model was its access to EVs. These mostly came from GEL, which had raised Rs 977.7 crore in term loans from IREDA and the Power Finance Corporation (PFC). While Rs 663.9 crore was earmarked for 6,400 EVs to be leased to BluSmart, only 4,704 were procured for Rs 567.7 crore. GEL was also required to contribute 20 per cent in equity, bringing the total available funds for EV procurement to Rs 829.8 crore. Of this Rs 262 crore is unaccounted-for. "Fund diversion is the crux of most white-collar crimes in India," says Shriram Subramanian, founder and MD, InGovern Research Services, a proxy advisory firm. "Unfortunately, this is not just a story of a business gone wrong, it's one of deliberate fraud and document forgery to finance a flashy lifestyle."

Sebi also uncovered market rigging. The Jaggis allegedly used a firm called Wellray to buy GEL shares—99 per cent of its trading activity (Rs 160.5 crore) was focused on inflating GEL's stock price between April 2022 and December 2024. In one damning instance, GEL even routed Rs 10 crore through Wellray to fund its own preferential allotment, disguised as

promoter contribution. The lie didn't end there. On April 9, when National Stock Exchange officials visited a vehicle plant of a GEL subsidiary in Pune, they reportedly found no manufacturing activity, belying the company's claim that it had got pre-orders for 30,000 units of its newly launched EVs.

## END OF THE STORY?

The Enforcement Directorate has registered a case against the Jaggis under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). Puneet was even detained briefly on April 24. He has not been seen in public since then, and has got interim protection from a Delhi court. Anmol is believed to have fled abroad. The Bureau of Immigration has issued lookout circulars. Meanwhile, in compliance with Sebi's order, the brothers have stepped down from their leadership positions at GEL, which saw its share price plunge from nearly Rs 800 at the beginning of this year to just over Rs 50 in the immediate aftermath of the controversy. It was trading at Rs 70 on May 20.

GEL faces an insolvency plea filed by IREDA for an alleged

Rs 510 crore loan default. The two lenders—IREDA and PFC—have also filed a complaint with the Economic Offences Wing (EoW) of the Delhi Police over alleged falsification of documents related to debt servicing. The defaults reportedly began by the end of 2024, but GEL kept submitting "false statements" to credit rating agencies, denying delays. The Jaggis didn't reply to the emails sent to them for this story.

What of Goyal, the third element in the BluSmart equation? The BluSmart co-founder has publicly distanced himself from the Jaggis. The three together hold 35 per cent of the startup's equity. Goyal, who talked to INDIA TODAY on the phone on April 28, said that representatives of BP Ventures were in India at that time, trying to help revive the company. But it looks like an uphill battle. The London-headquartered VC firm says it is "monitoring the ongoing situation" concerning its "minority investment in BluSmart closely".

Anmol once sold a vision you would easily bet your money on. It delivered too. "The right strategy for any hyperlocal business, including a cab-hailing one, is to build enough scale and depth in a market before expanding to the next," says Rohan Agarwal, partner at Redseer Strategy Consultants. Anmol and Puneet were prudent that way, as they took their time to launch out of Delhi, building their fleet and charging hubs, before moving to Bengaluru and Mumbai. But then, greed seems to have got the better of them, and what was once a promising venture may now well be lost. ■

**"Unfortunately, it is not just a story of a business gone wrong; it's one of deliberate fraud and document forgery to finance a flashy lifestyle"**

— SHIRAM SUBRAMANIAN  
Founder & MD, InGovern Research Services

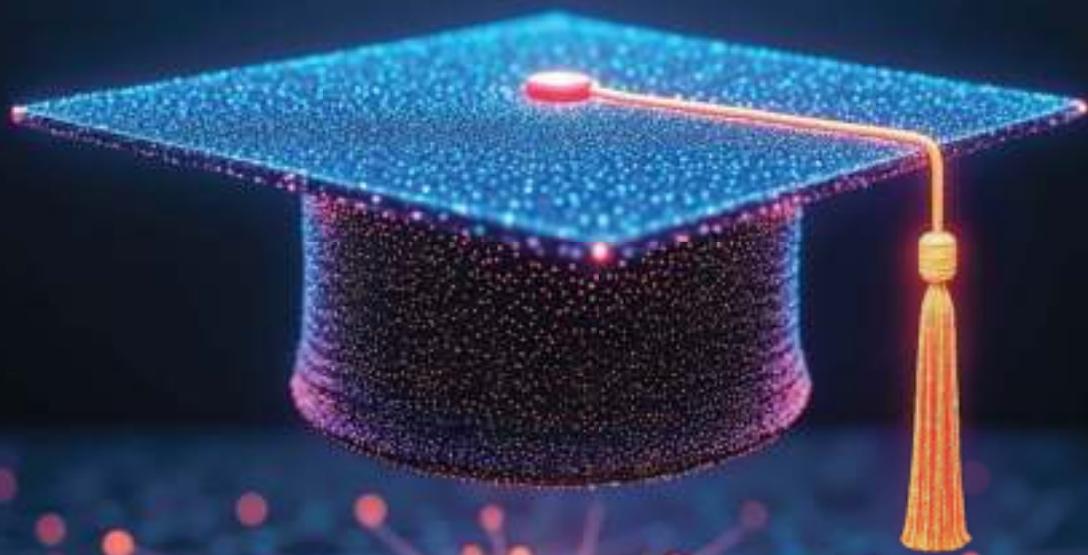


# SOUTH INDIA

## THE EMERGING GLOBAL EDUCATION HUB OF EXCELLENCE, DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION

With a rich historical legacy of renowned institutions, South India has long been synonymous with academic excellence. Its vibrant metropolises boast a plethora of esteemed universities and research centres, premier medical institutions dot the region, nurturing talent across diverse fields. Moreover, the emergence of technology parks and start-up incubators has catalysed innovation and entrepreneurship, transforming the academic landscape. South India is also witnessing a surge in educational opportunities in emerging fields such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, and renewable energy. The higher education institutions of South India are not only contributing to the intellectual capital of the region but the entire country. South India's pre-eminence as a hub of higher education is a testament to its commitment to academic excellence, research prowess, and fostering an environment conducive to innovation and learning.

An **IMPACT** Presentation



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**SIMATS**

Saveetha Institute of Medical And Technical Sciences



# SIMATS

## Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences

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The southern states of India—Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana—have transformed into centers of academic excellence, innovation, and inclusive learning. What distinguishes this region is its rise of educational institutions that have positioned South India as a globally recognized educational destination attracting students from across India and over 50 countries worldwide.

**E**ducation has long held a revered position in South India's cultural ethos. Rooted in centuries of scholastic traditions and strengthened by progressive social reforms, these states view education as an essential tool for empowerment. Government initiatives—Kerala's universal literacy campaigns, Tamil Nadu's extensive public school system and mid-day meal schemes, and Karnataka's emphasis on IT education—created fertile ground for world-class private institutions. The educational landscape transformed significantly in the 1990s during India's economic liberalization. Recognizing the demand for globally competitive professional education, South India's private sector responded with vision and agility. Within decades, the region established institutions offering globally benchmarked education emphasizing research capabilities, industry readiness, and international exposure.

“Our vision has always been to create educational institutions that can compete with the best while remaining accessible to Indian students.”

says Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan

Chancellor of Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences.

Today, hundreds of thousands of students from across India and over 20,000 international learners annually choose South Indian campuses. Institutions across these five states are shaping India's knowledge economy and contributing significantly to the global academic ecosystem.

#### **STATE-WISE EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE: A CLOSER LOOK**

##### **TAMIL NADU: THE PREMIER DESTINATION FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION**

Tamil Nadu stands as the crown jewel of South India's educational landscape, hosting an extensive network of engineering, medical, and arts colleges with one of the highest Gross Enrollment Ratios in higher education nationwide.

The state's educational excellence rests on prestigious public institutions like Anna University and IIT Madras, complemented by visionary private institutions that have elevated its profile globally. Institutions like VIT, SRM, Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences – SIMATS, Hindustan Group of Institutions (HITS) & Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham and exemplify this transformation.

VIT has grown into one of India's premier private

universities with campuses in Vellore, Chennai, Amaravati, and Bhopal, offering programs in Engineering, Management, Law, Sciences, and Design.

SRM has expanded with campuses in Chennai, Ramapuram, Vadapalani, Ghaziabad, and Amaravati, providing degrees in Engineering, Medicine, Management, Science, Humanities, and Law.

Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences (SIMATS) has evolved into one of India's comprehensive multidisciplinary universities, ranked among leading national institutions. Similarly, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology distinguished itself by successfully launching a student-designed satellite in collaboration with ISRO.

Tamil Nadu leads in attracting international students to India, with nearly 40% of all international students in India enrolled in Tamil Nadu institutions. These universities offer globally recognized degrees, English-medium instruction, and comprehensive international student support.

The state government's proactive initiatives to streamline student visas, recognize foreign qualifications, and ensure campus safety have enhanced Tamil Nadu's appeal. International students frequently cite the state's cosmopolitan

## FOCUS EDUCATION



cities—Chennai, Coimbatore, and Vellore—as offering an ideal blend of tradition, modernity, and affordability.

### KARNATAKA: THE INNOVATION CAPITAL

Karnataka has established itself as a global technology hub, particularly centered around Bengaluru. The state hosts elite public institutions like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), NIMHANS, IIM Bangalore, and NLSIU, alongside prominent private universities like Reva University and Presidency University.

The state attracts 150,000–200,000 students annually from other Indian states and overseas, particularly for advanced courses in technology, law, and management.

Karnataka's educational institutions have developed strong industry linkages, particularly with the IT sector, creating seamless education-to-employment pathways.

### KERALA: THE PIONEER OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Kerala, with India's highest literacy rate, has excelled in creating an inclusive education model through robust public funding and community participation. Institutions like Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham have made significant contributions to Kerala's higher education landscape.

Founded by Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham blends spiritual values with scientific excellence, earning NAAC A++ grade and consistently ranking among India's top universities.

The state's emphasis on equitable education has resulted in high female enrollment rates across disciplines, including traditionally male-dominated fields like engineering and technology. Kerala's educational model

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demonstrates effective balancing of quality and accessibility.

### ANDHRA PRADESH & TELANGANA: THE RISING STARS

Andhra Pradesh, known for having the highest concentration of engineering colleges in the country, has rapidly expanded its private education sector. Major institutions like VIT Amravati, SRM Amravati, KL University, GITAM, Vignan University attract students from across India pursuing engineering, law, and management degrees.

Telangana has quickly established itself as an important education and research destination, anchored by institutions like the University of Hyderabad and the Indian School of Business.

### DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUALITY: THE CORNERSTONE OF SOUTH INDIAN EDUCATION

South India's educational revolution is characterized by an unwavering commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equality embedded in the operational fabric of the region's leading educational institutions.

### GENDER EQUITY IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

The engineering sector has seen significant transformation across South Indian institutions. Universities like VIT, SRM, Hindustan Group of Institutions (HITS), Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences (SIMATS), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, and Sathyabama University (SIST) have led in promoting gender equity in STEM fields through targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, and women-focused initiatives.

Leading universities have achieved female enrollment in engineering programs consistently exceeding 40%—significantly higher than the national average. Initiatives like Saveetha University's Women in Engineering provide specialized support, mentorship, and networking opportunities for female engineering students.

"We believe in creating an ecosystem where women not only enter engineering but thrive and lead," notes Dr. Mariazeena Johnson, Chancellor of Sathyabama University (SIST). "Our women graduates are making significant contributions across sectors, proving that when barriers are removed, talent knows no gender."

### GEOGRAPHICAL INCLUSION

South Indian institutions have successfully attracted students from across India and internationally, creating diverse learning communities. Students from northeastern states, northern India, and international locations bring varied perspectives that enrich the educational environment.

Leading institutions have established dedicated centers for cultural integration, language support, and specialized counselling to help students overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.



# DR. N.M. VEERAIYAN

## THE VISIONARY BEHIND SAVEETHA'S RISE TO GLOBAL PROMINENCE

### A visionary. A reformist. An educational pioneer

Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan, Chancellor of Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences (SIMATS), is a pioneer in Indian higher education, known for his reformative leadership and global vision. His journey began in 1988 with the founding of Saveetha Dental College in Chennai, setting the stage for what would become one of India's largest and most respected private educational ecosystems.

### A Journey Rooted in Humility

From humble beginnings in Erode District, Tamil Nadu, with his dental degree from Madras Medical College, Dr. Veeraiyan has always been committed to excellence. In 1977, he established a multi-specialty hospital and nursing school in Erode - one of the first of its kind in the region. His passion for advancing education led to the expansion of Saveetha institutions over the years, including Medical, Dental, Engineering, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Law, Occupational Therapy, Management, Physical Education, Allied health Sciences, Liberal Arts, Pharmacy, Architecture & Design and Hospitality colleges. In 2005, Saveetha became Deemed to be University, marking a major milestone in his mission.

### A Legacy of Vision and Compassion

Today, Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan stands not only as the Chancellor of one of India's fastest-growing universities but also as a guiding force for thousands of students and faculty who admire his authenticity, foresight, and tireless dedication to the cause of education. His legacy continues to inspire a new generation of leaders, doctors, engineers, managers, scientists, and artists.

### Accolades and Recognition

Under his leadership, SIMATS has risen to national and international prominence. It consistently ranks in the top tier of India's MHRD-NIRF rankings, with nine NIRF rankings in 2023—more than any other university. Its dental program holds the No. 1 position in India and ranks within 30th globally continuously for the last 4 years QS World Rankings. SIMATS also secured 3rd place worldwide in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and boasts 35,000+ Scopus-indexed publications and 3,000+ patents.

Dr. Veeraiyan has been the recipient of numerous accolades including international awards like the "Global Asian of the Year," "Inspiration Leaders of India," and "Lifetime Achievement Awards" from prestigious bodies across the USA, Singapore, and Malaysia. Nationally, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by Shri. Pranab Mukherjee, Honourable President of India on the occasion of World Health Day summit at Delhi and he has been honored by many Governors of India, as well as reputed organizations like The Hindu and The Times of India.

He has made a significant impact on society by providing free medical services valued at over ₹2,000 crores. Each year, more than 50 economically disadvantaged students are granted full sponsorships, while thousands of merit-based scholarships are awarded to recognize and support academic excellence. Beyond academia Dr. Veeraiyan is a Tamil scholar and co-author of "Vaai Pal Maruthuvam," awarded by the Government of

Tamil Nadu. His lifelong dedication to education, innovation, and community development continues to inspire students and educators alike.

### Redefining the Future of Education

At the heart of SIMATS's success is its innovative, interdisciplinary curriculum—an inspired blend of traditional knowledge systems and cutting-edge educational practices. This holistic approach equips students with the skills, values, and global perspectives needed to lead in an ever-evolving world.

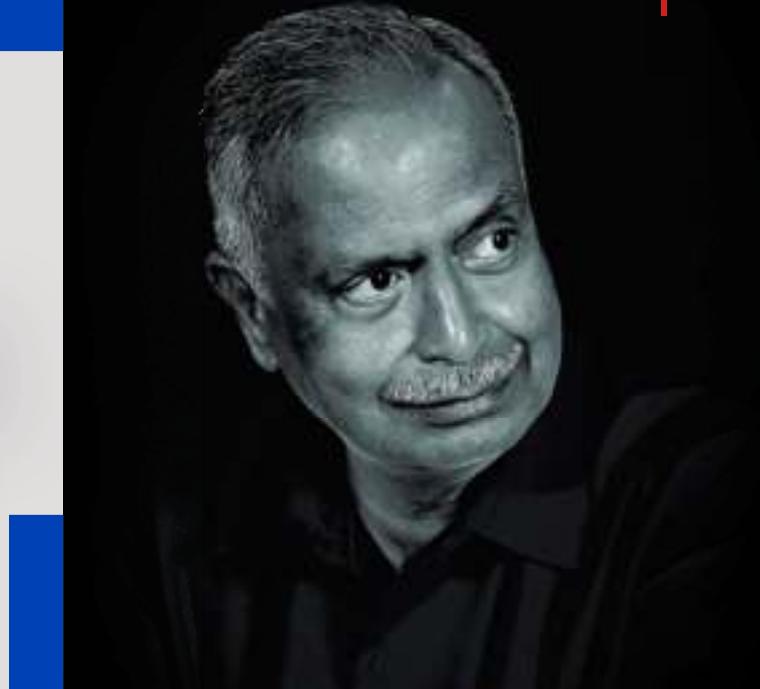
Whether through high-impact research, global partnerships, or its commitment to sustainable development, SIMATS continues to lead from the front—cultivating global leaders, changemakers, and innovators.

### A Journey of Purpose and Promise

Every accolade, every achievement, and every breakthrough at SIMATS reflects a deeper mission: to transform education into a tool for societal progress and global leadership. As the university propels into a new era of possibilities, it remains firmly rooted in its commitment to academic excellence, research innovation, and social responsibility.

SIMATS is not just a university—it's a movement shaping the future of global education. At Saveetha, we don't just educate—we build futures. And at the heart of it all stands the man who made it possible:

Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan—the architect of the Saveetha Empire, Good guide and friend to all faculty, staff and students of the University.



**"We believe in creating an ecosystem where women not only enter engineering but thrive and lead," notes Dr. Mariazeena Johnson, Chancellor of Sathyabama**

SSVM International School in Coimbatore exemplifies this commitment to diversity at the school level. Offering international curricula including Cambridge IGCSE and International Baccalaureate (IB), SSVM prepares students for global higher education opportunities from an early age. "Today's children need to be global citizens first, with strong roots in their own culture," explains Mrs. Manimekalai Mohan, Founder and Managing Trustee of SSVM Institutions. "Our approach integrates international perspectives with Indian values, creating students who can confidently navigate diverse environments while maintaining their cultural identity."

#### **ENGINEERING EDUCATION: PREPARING GLOBAL INNOVATORS**

Engineering education represents one of the strongest pillars of South India's educational ecosystem, with institutions consistently ranking among the nation's finest.

#### **CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT**

South Indian engineering institutions have pioneered curriculum innovations that respond dynamically to industry needs. At Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences (SIMATS), engineering programs feature modular curriculum structures allowing rapid integration of emerging technologies and industry practices.

"The half-life of technical knowledge is shrinking rapidly," observes Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan. "Our curriculum is designed to be dynamic, with regular updates based on industry trends and emerging technologies."

The emphasis on project-based learning ensures students develop practical problem-solving skills



alongside theoretical knowledge. Engineering students typically complete multiple major projects during undergraduate studies, addressing real-world challenges in collaboration with industry partners.

Sathyabama Institute has similarly revolutionized its engineering curriculum focusing on practical application. "Theory without application creates unemployable graduates," says Dr. T. Sasipraba, Vice Chancellor. "Our curriculum integrates hands-on projects, industry internships, and research opportunities from the first year."

#### **RESEARCH INTEGRATION**

Research integration at the undergraduate level distinguishes South Indian engineering education. Saveetha University's "Research from Day One" approach introduces first-year students to research methodologies and involves them in ongoing projects, cultivating analytical thinking and innovation capacity. This focus yields impressive results, with undergraduate students regularly presenting papers at international conferences and publishing in peer-reviewed journals. Several student-led research projects have evolved into successful startups.

At Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, research addresses societal challenges. "Research should not be confined to laboratories but should transform lives," emphasizes Dr. P. Venkat Rangan, Vice Chancellor. "Our students and

faculty work on projects addressing real challenges in healthcare, sustainability, disaster management, and rural development."

#### **EXCEPTIONAL PLACEMENT RECORDS**

The ultimate testament to South Indian engineering education quality is the exceptional placement record of its graduates. Companies like Google, Microsoft, Amazon, IBM, Infosys, and TCS actively recruit from South Indian campuses.

Engineering graduates from leading institutions have achieved remarkable success in the job market, with many universities reporting over 90% placement rates and competitive salary packages. Dedicated career development centers provide comprehensive support throughout the placement process.

Beyond placements, a growing number of engineering graduates are pursuing entrepreneurial ventures, higher studies at prestigious global universities, and specialized research roles in cutting-edge fields.

#### **INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND COLLABORATIONS**

South Indian institutions have received recognition through national awards for innovation, research, and educational practices. Numerous faculty members serve on national policy-making bodies, regulatory committees, and academic councils.

Internationally, South Indian institutions are gaining increasing visibility:

- SRM University has been recognized in international rankings, including THE and QS
- VIT is regularly featured in global university rankings, with its research published in IEEE Xplore.
- Hindustan Group of Institutions (HITS) is ranked 480th globally and 17th in India for sustainability.
- Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences - SIMATS features amongst the Top

**"The half-life of technical knowledge is shrinking rapidly," observes Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan. "Our curriculum is designed to be dynamic, with regular updates based on industry trends and emerging technologies."**





**WELL-FORMED  
MINDS, NOT JUST  
WELL-INFORMED  
MINDS**

A well-informed mind is necessary, but a well-formed mind is what truly distinguishes you. At Amrita, we don't just cultivate learners—we shape thinkers. Here, education is not passive absorption but an active process of synthesis, innovation, and deeper inquiry.

You learn to question, to connect, to create. You develop the ability to navigate complexity, unravel challenges, and construct meaningful solutions across any domain you choose.

Most importantly, this is where you don't just find your place in the world—you shape it, leaving an indelible mark in an ever-evolving landscape.



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR  
SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT / GENDER EQUALITY  
AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



## FOCUS EDUCATION



15 in QS World University Rankings by Subject, specifically for Dentistry.

- Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham has been recognized by UNESCO for humanitarian initiatives
- Sathyabama's satellite launch with ISRO earned international attention

These institutions regularly participate in global academic forums, host international conferences, and contribute to prestigious journals. The growing number of international students choosing South Indian campuses—over 20,000 annually—further testifies to the region's rising global reputation.

### FUTURE-READINESS: PREPARING FOR TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES

South Indian educational institutions are actively preparing for future challenges and opportunities through curriculum innovation, technological integration, and development of future-ready skills.

### EMBRACING EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Institutions across the region are incorporating cutting-edge technologies:

- Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning: Specialized centers established at universities like Saveetha Institute of Medical & Technical Sciences, Amrita, VIT, SRM, Sathyabama and IIIT Bangalore
- Virtual and Augmented Reality: Immersive learning environments enhancing student

**At Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, research addresses societal challenges. "Research should not be confined to laboratories but should transform lives," emphasizes Dr. P. Venkat Rangan, Vice Chancellor. "Our students and faculty work on projects addressing real challenges in healthcare, sustainability, disaster management, and rural development."**

engagement

- Blockchain and Cybersecurity: Specialized programs and research initiatives
- Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering: State-of-the-art laboratories supporting research and education

"The future belongs to those who can adapt and innovate," notes Dr. Anand Varghese George, Chancellor, Hindustan Institutions. "We're not just teaching today's technologies but fostering the mindset and skills needed to develop tomorrow's breakthroughs."

### INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

South Indian institutions increasingly emphasize interdisciplinary education through:

- Integrated degree programs combining engineering with management, healthcare with technology, or environmental science with policy studies
- Research centers focusing on complex challenges like climate change and sustainable development
- Collaborative projects involving students and faculty from diverse disciplinary backgrounds

At Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, this approach blends technology with humanitarian applications. "The most pressing challenges facing humanity cannot be solved through single-discipline approaches," explains Dr. Venkat

Rangan. "Our students learn to approach problems holistically, drawing insights from multiple fields."

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

South Indian institutions nurture the next generation of job creators through:

- Incubation centers providing mentorship, seed funding, and infrastructure
- Innovation labs equipped with advanced prototyping facilities
- Regular hackathons, ideathons, and business plan competitions
- Industry mentorship programs

Saveetha University's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Centre has supported over 100 student-led startups, many securing external funding. Similarly, Sathyabama's technology business incubator has fostered numerous ventures in healthcare technology and renewable energy.

### SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS

Environmental sustainability is increasingly central to educational practices:

- Green campus initiatives including solar power generation and water harvesting
- Academic programs focusing on sustainable development and environmental conservation
- Research centers developing eco-friendly technologies
- Student-led sustainability projects addressing local environmental challenges

### GLOBAL-STANDARD CAMPUSES: INDIA'S ANSWER TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The physical infrastructure of South Indian educational institutions has undergone remarkable transformation, reaching standards comparable to leading global universities.

Modern campuses feature:

- Smart classrooms equipped with augmented reality and hybrid teaching technology



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Dr Manimekalai Mohan  
Founder & Managing Trustee



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# SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
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Education Impact Rankings, 2024



WORLD  
UNIVERSITY  
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Sustainability  
Rankings 2025

Ranked 706<sup>th</sup>  
position in the QS Sustainability  
Rankings, 2025 Globally

Ranked 20<sup>th</sup>  
position among 78 Indian Institutions  
in the QS Sustainability Rankings, 2025



EXCELLENT  
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5 Stars Ratings by QS

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# Global and National Recognitions

## NATIONAL



NATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONAL  
RANKING  
FRAMEWORK

Ranked 51<sup>st</sup> Position  
among Universities in India by NIRF,  
Govt. of India 2024



12B Status is conferred to our Institution  
by University Grants Commission (UGC) for its  
Academic and Research Excellence



10 UG Engineering Programmes  
and 1 PG MBA Programme

is accredited by the National Board of Accreditation



Accredited with the highest  
**A++ Grade by the NAAC** with 3.73 score by  
the National Assessment and Accreditation council

## INTERNATIONAL



Accreditation  
Board for  
Engineering and  
Technology

**Internationally Accredited by Accreditation Board for Engineering  
and Technology (ABET)** for B.E. (Computer Science and Engineering), B.Tech. (Biotechnology)  
and B.E. (Electrical and Electronics Engineering) Programmes



Ranked 1201-1500  
in the world by Times Higher Education  
World University Rankings, 2025



Ranked 401-500  
in the world by Times Higher Education  
Young University Rankings, 2024



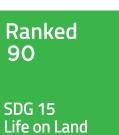
Ranked 501-600  
in the world by Times Higher Education  
Asia University Rankings, 2025

Our Institution is placed in very good positions in Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2025, which ranks the Universities across the world based on their contribution to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



Ranked 601-800

in the Overall Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, 2024



World University  
Rankings 2024  
by Subject

Ranked 601-800

by the Times Higher Education Subject Rankings 2024 for Clinical, Pre Clinical & Health

Ranked 801-1000 by the Times Higher Education Subject Rankings 2024 for Computer Science,  
Engineering & Technology, Physical Sciences, and Life Sciences



Ranked 1201-1400 in the world by QS World University Rankings, 2025. Sathyabama is one of the  
46 Institutions in India ranked by QS



QS Asia University Rankings | 2025

Ranked 373<sup>rd</sup> position in the QS Asia University Rankings, 2025



Awarded 5 Stars Ratings by QS for Academic and Research Excellence by assessing the  
Performance of Sathyabama in the core criteria like Teaching, Research, Internationalization and employability



SUSTAINABILITY RANKING 2025

Sathyabama is ranked in 706<sup>th</sup> position in the world in QS Sustainability Rankings, 2025

Ranked in 187<sup>th</sup> position in the QS Sustainability Rankings, 2025 among the universities in Asia

Ranked in 20<sup>th</sup> position in the QS Sustainability Rankings, 2025 among the universities in India

As South India continues to invest in quality, expand global connections, and evolve with the demands of the 21st century, its educational institutions are positioned to lead a new academic renaissance—one that is proudly Indian in spirit and universally admired in standard.

- Fully digitized libraries with access to global databases
- AI-powered research labs and industry-certified innovation hubs
- Student residences with international-standard amenities
- Dedicated international student lounges and multicultural clubs
- Entrepreneurship cells and startup incubators

"Campus infrastructure is about creating optimal learning environments," explains Dr. G V Selvam

Vice – President, VIT. "Every aspect of our campus is designed to nurture holistic development and facilitate world-class education."

These campuses offer academic depth, research drive, and innovation spirit while maintaining the Indian ethos of inclusive education and affordability.

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT

The rise of South India's education sector has generated profound socioeconomic benefits beyond campus boundaries. University-linked



incubators are nurturing job creators rather than just job seekers, with hundreds of student-led startups emerging from South Indian campuses. "Universities today must be crucibles of innovation, not just temples of learning," observes Dr. P. Sathyanarayanan, Pro-Chancellor (Academic), SRM. "When we transform students from job-seekers to job-creators, we multiply our impact on society exponentially."

## LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT DECADE

The next decade promises transformative developments in South India's educational landscape:

- Increased integration of artificial intelligence and adaptive learning technologies
- Expansion of transnational education through branch campuses and joint degree programs
- Greater emphasis on sustainability and green technologies
- Enhanced focus on liberal arts education complementing technical programs
- Deeper industry-academia partnerships driving innovation

## WHY CHOOSE SOUTH INDIA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION?

### ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE WITH GLOBAL RECOGNITION

South Indian institutions offer education comparable to international standards at a fraction of the cost. Degrees from leading institutions are increasingly recognized globally, opening doors to international career opportunities.

### INDUSTRY-READY SKILLS AND EXCEPTIONAL EMPLOYABILITY

The region's focus on practical learning, industry collaborations, and entrepreneurship ensures graduates possess workplace-ready skills, translating into impressive placement statistics.

### CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

South Indian campuses offer rich cultural diversity

in safe, welcoming environments. International students frequently cite the region's hospitality, inclusive atmosphere, and cultural vibrancy as key factors in their decision.

### AFFORDABILITY WITHOUT COMPROMISING QUALITY

South India offers world-class education at remarkably affordable costs compared to Western alternatives. International students can access quality education without the financial burden often associated with studying abroad.

### CONCLUSION: THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM OF TOMORROW—ROOTED IN THE SOUTH

South India's ascent as a global educational hub represents one of the most remarkable success stories in contemporary higher education—a result of strategic investment, visionary leadership, private sector innovation, and cultural reverence for learning.

Institutions across these five states have redefined the possibilities of Indian education, demonstrating that world-class learning environments can be created on Indian soil without compromising accessibility or inclusivity.

As South India continues to invest in quality, expand global connections, and evolve with the demands of the 21st century, its educational institutions are positioned to lead a new academic renaissance—one that is proudly Indian in spirit and universally admired in standard.

From attracting thousands of international students to producing groundbreaking research, from pioneering inclusive education models to fostering innovation ecosystems, South India's educational institutions have become beacons of excellence not just for India but for the entire Global South. Their continued success will shape India's knowledge economy and contribute significantly to addressing global challenges through education, research, and innovation.





**DR. UMA SEKAR**  
Vice-Chancellor, SRIHER

## **SRI RAMACHANDRA INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (SRIHER), CHENNAI**

# **A BEACON OF EXCELLENCE IN HEALTH AND ALLIED SCIENCES**

**S**ri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (SRIHER), located in the vibrant city of Chennai, stands as a distinguished leader in the field of health sciences education, clinical practice, and biomedical research. Founded in 1985 as Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute, it was declared a "Deemed to be University" by the Government of India in 1994. Over the years, SRIHER has earned a reputation for academic excellence, global collaborations, cutting-edge research, and compassionate healthcare delivery with the highest grading of A++ by NAAC.

Academically, SRIHER is home to a constellation of colleges and faculties in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, physiotherapy, public health, biomedical sciences, management, allied health sciences, Audiology and Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Sports Sciences, Behavioural and Social Sciences, clinical research and Engineering. The curriculum is competency-based, integrating clinical skills with scientific rigor, and ensuring early exposure to patient care. The university's focus on simulation-based training, digital health tools, and case-based learning empowers students to

become agile, future-ready professionals.

The sprawling 150-acre eco-friendly campus is home to nearly 9,000 students and faculty from across India and the world, fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

One of the cornerstones of SRIHER's success is its integrated approach to education that blends rigorous academic training with early clinical exposure and interdisciplinary learning. Our pedagogy stimulates critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and evidence-based practice. The NABH-accredited, 2518 bed teaching hospital with the multi-specialty and super-specialty services ensures that students are trained in a real-world healthcare setting under the guidance of experienced professionals.

The institute is also known for its unwavering commitment to research. With the advanced research capabilities, including those dedicated to genomics, molecular biology, regenerative medicine and environmental health, SRIHER is at the forefront of translational and interdisciplinary research. Collaborations with institutions such as Harvard University, Bentley University, Colorado State University, University of Glasgow, WHO, further strengthen our global academic standing and enabling joint research

projects and quality publications.

SRIHER's emphasis on values-based education and community engagement is reflected in its numerous outreach programs. From mobile health units (mammography, Cardiac Bus, dental) to rural health camps, it is deeply invested in public health and preventive care. In alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP), the university is also redesigning its academic programs to be more holistic, flexible, and learner-centric.

As the world grapples with complex health challenges, SRIHER envisions itself as a catalyst of change—shaping future-ready healthcare and allied professionals who are not just technically proficient but also socially responsible and emotionally intelligent. SRIHER is committed to leading the transformation of healthcare education and practice in India and beyond.

**The journey ahead is one of bold strides—where tradition meets innovation, and education meets impact. Sri Ramachandra Institute is not just preparing for the future—it is defining it.**

INDIA  
TODAY

# S2

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THE STATES

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**22<sup>ND</sup> MAY 2025**

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BHIKAJI CAMA PLACE  
NEW DELHI

## GOLDEN JUBILEE OF SIKKIM'S INTEGRATION INTO INDIA



**Prem Singh Tamang**  
Chief Minister of Sikkim



INDIA  
TODAY

# BREAKING NEWS

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# ENDURING PAR

THE MAIDEN INDIA TODAY INDO-UAE CONCLAVE SPOTLIGHTS

**“Together, we look to the future with optimism, confident that our collaboration will yield substantial benefits for both nations. These mutual gains inspire us to strengthen our partnership even further”**

**IN A WORLD OFTEN MARKED BY DIVISION AND STRIFE, WE ARE ESPECIALLY PROUD OF OUR STRONG POLITICAL, COMMERCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL LINKAGES WITH INDIA**

**India and the UAE are united in their determination to deepen political, economic, commercial and cultural ties. National leaders, business leaders and the general public alike are dedicated to this effort**

**H.E. SHEIKH NAHAYAN MABARAK AL NAHYAN**  
Cabinet Member, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, UAE

**T**he long-standing trade relationship between India and the United Arab Emirates is rapidly evolving into a sophisticated, multi-dimensional strategic alliance spanning technology, finance, education, tourism, retail and more. The inaugural India Today Indo-UAE Conclave held recently in Dubai underscored a decisive shift: this partnership is no longer transactional but transformational, shaping the economic and cultural futures of both nations.

Central to this evolution is the recently signed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which has already led to a 50 per cent surge in bilateral trade. Real-time cross-border UPI payments further reduce friction, empowering the 3.5 million-strong Indian diaspora in the UAE and accelerating seamless commerce. The shared ambition is clear—to increase non-oil trade to \$200 billion by 2030.

Technology now anchors the UAE's economic vision, with a focused road-map to build innovation ecosystems

# TNERS IN PROGRESS

A FUTURE-READY ALLIANCE DRIVING INNOVATION, TRADE, TALENT AND CULTURAL TIES

Photographs by HARDIK CHHABRA



**H.E. DR THANI BIN AHMED AL ZEYOUSDI**  
Minister of State for Foreign Trade & Minister in Charge of Talent Attraction and Retention, UAE

around infrastructure, talent, startup growth and venture creation.

Both nations recognise the imperative of an agile, AI-savvy workforce. The conclave highlighted hybrid education models combining classroom instruction, online learning and practical industry exposure to prepare youth for rapidly evolving job markets.

Tourism flows between India and the UAE extend beyond leisure; it drives cultural exchange, employment and regional development. Indian hotel groups are investing in the UAE. Meanwhile,

the UAE targets niche segments such as wellness and eco-tourism, moving from volume-driven to value-focused growth.

Retail is also undergoing a profound transformation. Indian giants like Titan and Apparel Group are integrating AI-powered inventory, smart mirrors and omnichannel experiences to serve fast-paced UAE consumers while preserving India's social shopping ethos.

The conclave captured this dynamic journey: a relationship fundamentally reimagined and poised for the future. ■

—ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

LET'S NOT  
REPLICATE OR  
DUPLICATE  
WHATEVER THE  
WEST HAS DONE....  
WE HAVE TO TAILOR  
THINGS TO OUR  
OWN ECOSYSTEM,  
CULTURE AND  
MINDSET

Don't depend on the conventional way. If it has not been successful for the last 20 or 30 years, it will never be, because it's already been tried. If it's been tried once or twice and failed, just come up with a new way of doing things

WHEN IT COMES TO  
IMPLEMENTATION,  
YOU HAVE TO HAVE  
A CLEAR VISION.  
YOU CAN CHANGE  
YOUR TACTICS, BUT  
IF YOU CHANGE THE  
VISION, YOU'RE  
JUST FOOLING  
YOURSELF; YOU  
WILL NOT BE ABLE  
TO ACHIEVE IT



**AROON PURIE**  
*Chairman & Editor-in-Chief,  
India Today Group*

“

**The UAE is a symbol of what ambition, vision, leadership and technology can do. I congratulate the rulers of UAE, past and present, for giving this miracle to the world**



For over two decades, the India Today Conclaves have hosted thought leaders, change-makers, and global voices to reflect on the India story. Today, that story is expanding its canvas from South Asia to West Asia

**We are here as participants in a growing partnership. One that has moved far beyond trade into shared aspirations, cultural embrace and geopolitical convergence**

”

## ▼ INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE: THE STATE IMPERATIVE



“

**Tamil Nadu has become No.1 in electronics goods export in three years from No.4. A lot of it actually is iPhone assembly...Hyundai's second biggest production centre is in Chennai... In that sense, it's a very conducive place for investment**

**We are at an inflection point. The world order is changing. In that context, I think India has a huge opportunity, not least because roughly a quarter of the working-age human population of the world is going to be Indian**

**DR PALANIVEL THIAGA RAJAN (PTR)**

*Cabinet Minister for Information Technology and Digital Services, Tamil Nadu*

”

▼ SECURING TOMORROW: THE STATE'S ROLE IN FUTURE INVESTMENT



Right now, we in Andhra Pradesh are very aggressive on securing investments. We have some commitments to fulfill, but after one and a half or two years, the offer may not remain

**Fixing accountability and having a time-bound approach help reduce the scope for bribes. This issue is not just in Andhra but all over India, and our approach will curtail it**

**T.G. BHARATH**

Cabinet Minister for Industries, Commerce and Food Processing, Andhra Pradesh

▼ FEDERAL STAKES: WHY STATES ARE THE NEW EL DORADO



**Speed of decision-making and also non-backtracking of decisions, these are two very important things which we have now with Chief Minister Mr Devendra Fadnavis at the helm**

We identify the constraints; land development, availability of alternative land, easy access to finance and credibility of implementation on the ground. That's what enables people to invest in Maharashtra

**PRAVEEN PARDESHI**

Chief Economic Advisor (Minister of State Rank),  
Government of Maharashtra

▼ INDO-UAE: EXPLORING NEW AVENUES FOR GROWTH



“ If 100 jobs are created in the UAE, 80 will go back to India. It helps us in employment, in remittances.... Because UAE is also at the cutting edge of technology, it is much more advantageous for our companies to link up better with global supply chains ”

**SUNJAY SUDHIR**

Indian Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates

▼ ENERGY: GREENER GRIDS, BRIGHTER FUTURES



“ Since most land here is owned by the government, it's factored in before the bid is issued. Unlike India, where right of way is a big issue for electricity transmission...here a mechanism is put in place to push projects to move fast ”

**P. RAJESH NARAYAN**, Head, Renewables - Gulf 2 and Africa Renewable IC, Larsen & Toubro Ltd

▼ BRICK & MORTAR IN A DIGITAL WORLD: RETAIL'S ROAD AHEAD



“ Retailers today work on an omnichannel model or what is called connected commerce. So, it's no more digital versus physical but how you catch the consumer where they are ”

**NEERAJ TECKCHANDANI**  
CEO, Apparel Group

“ The key thing to understand is that in every category, there's a price point below which people are very comfortable buying online, but beyond that, they want to see it in-store ”

**KURUVILLA MARKOSE**  
CEO, International Business,  
Titan Company Ltd

“ WHILE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AUGMENTED MUSCLE POWER, AI IS AUGMENTING HUMAN POWER... THE COMBINATION OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS GOING TO BREAK FRONTIERS AND BARRIERS ”

**RAJNISH KUMAR**  
Chairman, BharatPe,  
and ex-Chairman,  
State Bank of India

▼ DIVERSIFYING THE INDO-UAE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP



**“ As of March 2023, we have had a 50 per cent increase in trade thanks to the CEPA.... Today, \$65 billion of that is non-oil trade, and we are targeting \$200 billion by 2030 ”**

**SATISH KUMAR SIVAN**

Consul General of India to Dubai and the Northern Emirates

▼ DESERT BONDING: TAKING TOURISM TO NEW HEIGHTS

**“ Indians are the largest share of the diaspora that's present in the UAE. So, when you have these ingredients in play, you're already talking about two nations that are connected very deeply and the success of one nation is going to rub off on the other. I think India must be the largest source market for the UAE as far as tourism goes ”**

**DEEPIKA RAO**

Executive Vice-President,  
New Businesses, Hotel  
Openings and Corporate  
Communications,  
*The Indian Hotels  
Company Ltd*



▼ SEEDING TOMORROW: BIG IDEAS, SMART CAPITAL



**“ INDIA'S POTENTIAL CANNOT BE MEASURED IN TERMS OF PURE CURRENCY SYSTEMS, BUT ITS POTENTIAL IS REFLECTED IN EACH AND EVERY ASPECT OF THE 145 CRORE POPULATION BASE THAT WE HAVE ”**

**SIDDHARTH BALACHANDRAN**

Executive Chairman  
and CEO, Buimerc  
Corporation



**“ We have set up in Dubai, like what we have in India, a Centre for Applied Artificial Intelligence. It's a research centre and we have collaborations with a lot of industry here ”**

**DR VIDYA  
YERAVDEKAR**

*Pro-Chancellor,  
Symbiosis International  
University*



**“ Our curriculums have to now adapt and we have to understand what's happening in the service and manufacturing industry because we produce managers and leaders ”**

**PROF. BHARAT BHASKER**, Director, IIM Ahmedabad

### ▼ TECH TALK: TURBOCHARGING THE INNOVATION HIGHWAY

**“ TECHNOLOGY IS THE NEW OIL AND A CRITICAL PATH THAT THE UAE HAS CHOSEN TO GO INTO IN THE NEXT 50 YEARS. WE HAVE AN INNOVATION STRATEGY AND VISION WITH DIFFERENT PILLARS ”**

**H.E. HUSSAIN MOHAMMED AL  
MAHMOUDI**, CEO, Sharjah Research,  
Technology and Innovation Park (SRTI) Park, UAE



**“ Where are the people with the great ideas going to come from? Obviously, they need to come from around the world.... I think the UAE-India corridor is an essential piece of the puzzle ”**

**PAUL DAWALIBI**  
*CEO, Rak Digital Assets Oasis*



## SKILLING THE NEXT GEN



**“** AI, according to me, is an upskilling tool.... The corporate readiness comes based upon the preparation being done at the graduating institute itself **”**

**TARIQ CHAUHAN**, Vice-Chairman, EFS Facilities Services Group

## ▼ GEOPOLITICS: BRIDGING ERAS, BUILDING FUTURE



**“** UAE's biggest progress is going to be in technology and knowledge-driven industries, and in its determinant transition away from oil **”**

**NAVDEEP SURI**

Former Ambassador of India to UAE

## ▼ PORTS TO PROGRESS: THE LOGISTICS BONANZA



**“** Cargo and information have to actually either travel together, or information has to move first. So the speed of transaction is extremely important, and that cannot be achieved without digitalisation **”**

**RIZWAN SOOMAR**

CEO & MD, Subcontinent Region, DP World

**“** I just hope that secretariats don't become overwhelmingly bureaucratic. Too many people slow the process down. This is about improving economic activity and creating employment, not red tape **”**

**CAPTAIN SANDEEP MEHTA**

CEO - International Ports, Adani



## ▼ BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

**“ We don't depend on any supplier... contracting, designing, manufacturing. All that we do...(we have) total control of the project and that's the reason we are able to deliver before time ”**

**“ Even today that dream is there...build something which India has not seen. The only place which has got that opportunity is Mumbai, not even Delhi ”**

**P.N.C. MENON**

*Founder and Chairman Emeritus, Sobha Ltd*



## ▼ REAL ESTATE: THE NEW VISTAS



**ROBERT BOOTH**

*Co-founder and Managing Director,  
Ellington Properties*

**“ Real estate is not just about buildings. It's about building trust, building value and building communities that last ”**

**“ Indian investors are not just a significant segment. They are among our most loyal and engaged homeowners ”**





**“ Normally, it takes 16 to 20 days to set up a business in India, sometimes it might take a month... But in Dubai, you can set up a company in just three to four days, with zero bureaucracy and zero corruption ”**

**“ Luxury comes with durability and sustainability.... We have seen 37 times real estate growth in Macau when that casino got opened there ”**

**ANKUR AGGARWAL**  
Chairman & Founder, BNW  
Developments, UAE

**“ I am not going to lament. I am going to go out there, take control of my own narrative and choose the stories I want to tell and the filmmakers I want to work with ”**

**“ I feel like now we are in the 2.0 era of the OTT revolution where we need to rethink what kind of stories we are putting out there and who we want to reach ”**

**HUMA QURESHI**, Actor





INDIA  
TODAY



INDO-UAE  
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# LE! SURE

PHOTOGRAPHY: PRESS THE PLAY BUTTON PG 80

THE LISTICLE: MUSICAL PERFORMANCES PG 83



BOOKS ▶

## THE ART OF THEORY

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY THE VETERAN ART CRITIC **GEETA KAPUR** REFLECTS THE COMPLEX IMPULSES THAT SHAPED INDIAN MODERNISM

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

# A

Art and commerce are closely intertwined, so how can artists be truly free and radical? What is the relationship of the artist to the nation-state? How does decolonisation influence cultural practices? What are the modes of artistic dissent? These are some of the animating concerns in *Speech Acts*, a new anthology by the art critic, theorist and curator Geeta Kapur. The collection, featuring essays, talks and interviews, addresses and interrogates themes that Kapur has tackled in her storied career.

"The title, *Speech Acts*, refers to the spoken word and the elocutionary mode; to debates, dilemmas and dialogic exchange," says Kapur over email. "The book rests on my desire to address the *contemporary* through an authorial style that includes contradictions and ironies as well as a sustained poetics in the time of now."

Kapur unpacks the saturated valencies in that one word 'contemporary'. For instance, can it be seen as synonymous with 'modernity'? At a theoretical level, it is, she writes, a "coming together of certain historical forces at a certain moment". As art, the contemporary is showcased in spaces like the biennale or the modern museum. It can take the shape of avant-garde movements and indigenous responses to the existing canon.

A Padma Shri awardee, Delhi-based Kapur is considered one of the definitive thinkers in the fields of art criticism and theory. Her curatorial projects have been featured at the Johannesburg Biennale, NGMA, the Tate Modern and the Royal Academy of Arts in London. She has also

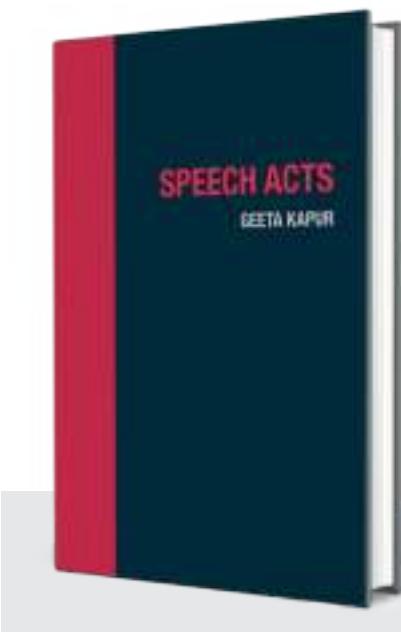
served as a jury member at the Venice, Dakar and Sharjah biennales.

Kapur is deeply interested in the revolutionary potential of cultural artefacts, and the politics and economics of art production. "To be realistic, the 'institution of art' will tend to become cautious in a market-driven world; its ideology will be conservative when increasingly faced with an uncontested reign of capital," she says. "Thus, institutional critique as well as alternative ideologies and resistant formations are essential." However, there is in India and elsewhere, "an efflorescence of collective, communitarian, 'marginally' positioned and environmentally grounded groups and practices".

Dissenting artists, she says in an interview, are a construct of 20th-century modernity. "While there are, everywhere, artists who conform or capitulate, a significant number of artists in the world—as also in the Third World and in India—have nur-

tured a democratic if not also a radical spirit to be played out through their artworks," she says. Kapur notes that dissent is "an a priori condition of art-making today". It could take the shape of outspoken politics or be encoded in terms of style, or vision.

In *Speech Acts*, Kapur does not focus on any single artist or movement as she has previously; the book does not contain a single image. In 'A Cultural Conjunction in India: Art into Documentary', first presented at a symposium in 2004, she examines the Indian documentary scene: and how filmmakers like Anand Patwardhan and Amar Kanwar engaged and have debated with the nation-state and history. How does she view the emerging crop of internationally feted documentarians from India? "Now... there is a new generation of documentarists who occupy and often opt for marginal spaces and use conspicuously different material, language and form," she says. "This infrastructure of



**SPEECH ACTS**  
By Geeta Kapur  
TULIKA BOOKS  
₹995;  
284 pages

# DIVINE ARTISTRY

**ASHOK VAJPEYI**, A CLOSE FRIEND OF S.H. RAZA,  
DRAWS AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST  
IN *CELEBRATION & PRAYER*



**CELEBRATION &  
PRAYER: Life and  
Light in Raza's Art**  
*By Ashok Vajpeyi*  
SPEAKING TIGER  
₹599; 184 pages

the expanded documentary has generated an explosion of independent filmmakers—Shaunak Sen, Nakul Singh Sawhney, Payal Kapadia, Prateek Vats and others—who scour the underbelly of the social order and produce dissent in an interrogatory, often ironic, mode.” In this new phase “of the documentary as genre”, she says, “it does not differentiate between the narrative and the anecdotal, the political and the hallucinatory”.

Kapur’s interest in the ‘canon’—what we think of as

**KAPUR IS DEEPLY INTERESTED IN THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL ARTEFACTS, AND THE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF ART PRODUCTION**

a category of important art—surfaces throughout. Art from non-western countries has traditionally been excluded from the canon. “My position is that canons come into existence through institutional and ideological endorsement in contexts of (western/imperial) privilege; non-western art is then automatically considered derivative,” she says. “The time for this is over. Canons are inverted, erased and substituted by artists within their own cultures. As often, and perhaps more unexpectedly, they incite a wager and produce linguistic paradoxes.” ■

—Bhavya Dore

If Raza rose from his grave and read the vast literature on his art, he would learn a lot about what he had never painted, not intended that to be the mission or message of his work! He was a quiet, wise man humbled by his own cosmic vision. A lot of irrelevance has been attributed to Raza’s art while his internal tapasya—meditation—was tuned more towards a spiritual reverence to colours and forms. Ashok Vajpeyi’s quiet little book scores some advantages: brevity, intimacy, and a poetic interpretation, which stays clear of art jargon. Raza would have been pleased, as his tale has been simply told. Nor does the octogenarian author overplay the proximity card to score points over other critics. Some incisive observations tell of this friendship, by suggestion. Vajpeyi’s narrative flows with a seasoned effortlessness of a poet with a confident facility for words. As a good biographer, he simply

**VAJPEYI  
EFFORTLESSLY  
HOLDS UP RAZA  
AS A SHADOW  
PUPPET, WITH  
THE SKILL OF THE  
PUPPETEER  
EVIDENT**

holds out Raza as a shadow puppet where the skill of the puppeteer is evident. His protagonist was similar. Raza quietly transformed geometry into art in a very profound way. The author suggests how “Raza’s own exploration of pure form as he sometimes called it, was influenced by his study of

Cézanne, Mondrian and Vassily Kandinsky. Later,

he got interested in the pure geometry, taken forward by Nicolas de Staël”.

Vajpeyi writes, “Susan Sontag once said, ‘What

good are one’s roots, if one cannot take them around!’” Raza took his

roots around, rich in memory and resonances, and planted them in his art. He became the plant that grew vast branches, immortalising his colours into forever sunsets and sunrises—with the palette of the rainbow at the beck and call of the Master’s innumerable geometries, evoking the ‘aspect of eternity, rather than history’. ■

—Aman Nath

**A BIG SPLASH**

Baliguali village children, Puri, from 'Bachpan'; (below) Ankush Yadav, 10, from 'Janwaar' series



**A** modernist whose work intricately weaves traditional tribal art forms with contemporary aesthetics, Jharkhand-based Haren Thakur's art reflects a deep engagement with nature, life and spirituality. "The relationship between man and nature forms an integral part of Haren's visual language," says show curator Dr Alka Pande.

**ART ▶**

## MODERNITY MEETS TRADITION

A myriad influences inform the art of **Haren Thakur** in his ongoing exhibition at Art Magnum, Delhi

Educated at Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan, Thakur studied under some of the most influential figures in modern Indian art. He draws significant inspiration from rural life, his visual language is deeply

influenced by Munda and Birhor rock art, and he also incorporates elements of Warli art and Cubism in his works. "I believe that when some pain, any kind of churning or intense feelings, is mixed with paint,

**PHOTOGRAPHY ▼**

## PRESS TH

Vicky Roy's exhibition explores childhoods and resourcefulness, from Delhi's streets to a skate park in MP

the eye, and is now paying homage to life on the streets through 'Bachpan' at Delhi's Vadehra Art Gallery.

The exhibition features 45 black-and-white photographs from two ongoing series, Bachpan, and the previously unseen Janwaar Castle, marking the gallery's second major showcase of Roy's work. The show is born of Roy's preoccupation with the resilience, courage and joy children often show in the face of adversity. "Simplicity and observation



'GODHULI, COWS RETURNING HOME', mixed media on canvas

# E PLAY BUTTON

define my attitude to photography. I would rather photograph my subjects in their natural surroundings so they can be who they are, free from intervention," says Roy, whose Bachpan series started to take shape informally from 2009. In this series, Roy examines the cultural patterns of childhood play by observing underprivileged children who, with limited access to toys, lean on community, creativity and found materials.

The Janwaar series, named after a nondescript village in Madhya Pradesh, was triggered after a German friend of Roy's wanted to construct a skate park there in 2015. The project was periodically documented, capturing not only

the building process but also the transformation it sparked among the children and wider community. "What caught my attention was how local kids embraced skating. There were no trainers; they fell and got back up, learning in the process. Two basic guidelines were soon adopted. First: no school, no skateboarding; and second, girls first. This produced strong, inclusive surroundings full of vitality and passion," says the photographer.

Roy writes his memories and observations on society and life through images. It's the only way he knows how to convey the "human experience" that shapes him and the realities around him. ■

—Arshia

it takes the form of a painting. It need not only be a physical pain, it could be the pain of creation itself," explains Thakur.

His watercolour, 'Cat and the Fish', reveals a profound connection to Bengal. Works such as 'The Musical Meet' portray couples in an intimate yet timeless

way. 'The Open Parlour' highlights intergenerational care, something that Thakur feels is disappearing in urban society.

Since 1974, his primary medium for acrylic and watercolour works has been Nepalese rice paper. Thakur's studies of Egyptian wall paintings inspired

him to integrate their geometric sophistication into his stylised human figures. "The modernistic approach conjoined with the interpretation of his environment creates a powerful, original language," adds Saurabh Singhvi, director at Art Magnum. ■

—Neha Kirpal

'DOMINUS AERIS' by Thukral and Tagra



EXHIBITION ▼

## INDIA ON CANVAS

Contemporary Indian art is in the spotlight at a major group exhibition at the City Palace, Jaipur

ROY'S 'BACHPAN' SERIES STARTED TO TAKE SHAPE INFORMALLY IN 2009. THE SHOW IS ON AT DELHI'S VADEHRA ART GALLERY TILL MAY 30

The Jaipur Centre for Art (JCA), in collaboration with *Whitewall* magazine, has an ongoing exhibition, *India in Dialogue: Tradition & Transformation*, at the City Palace in the city. "The exhibition was conceived as a dialogue between the enduring legacy of Jaipur's cultural heritage and the dynamic expressions of contemporary Indian art," explain Laurent Moisi & Michael Klug, co-founders of *Whitewall* magazine. It brings together a dynamic group of artists, spanning generations and practices, encompassing sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, installation and digital media.

Featuring both established and emerging voices, such as Asim Waqif, Biraaj Dodiya, Jitish Kallat, Mark Prime, Narayan Sinha, Prarthna Singh, Rana Begum, Shilpa Gupta, Tarini Sethi and Thukral & Tagra, the artists reflect a cultural moment shaped by questions of memory, materiality, identity and transformation. "We're exploring a new model of exhibition-making, one that places Indian artistic practices in direct dialogue with broader international conversations, while honouring the rich cultural lineage from which they emerge," says Noelle Kadar, co-founder, JCA. ■

INDIA IN DIALOGUE...  
IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AT THE JAIPUR CENTRE FOR ART TILL JUNE 8

—Neha Kirpal

# MOVING STORY

Nadir Khan's musical, *Mumbai Star*, showcases multiple dance forms on stage

**M**umbai Star will mark the first time in its seven seasons that Aadyam—the Aditya Birla Group's decade-old initiative to promote theatre—presents a "dance musical". Director Nadir Khan says the play, which will be staged at Mumbai's St Andrew's Auditorium on May 24-25 and Delhi's Kamani Auditorium on June 14-15, is unlike "anything I've ever done before".

He says this even though, on paper, the production sounds similar to his last collaboration with Aadyam, 2018's #SingIndiaSing. They both feature and are named after fictional reality TV competition series. However, in *Mumbai Star*, the contest forms just "10 per

cent of the story", which centres on aspiring dancer Dev who shifts from a coastal village to the titular city to follow his dreams. In Mumbai, he grapples with "the exhilarating highs and crushing lows" of chasing fame. Khan describes the Hindi play as a tale of "aspiration, hope and overcoming obstacles".

Unlike #SingIndiaSing, which was in English, with live singing, "85-90 per cent" of *Mumbai Star* is told through "movement" set to recorded music by composer Dhruv Ghanekar. Because of this, Khan says, it's very much "a co-creation" with choreographer Avantika Bahl and associate choreographer Surabhi Andrade. "It

wouldn't have existed without us getting onto the same page," says Khan.

Notably, there are only two actors, Rajit Kapur and Srishti Shrivastava, who serve as narrators, while the rest of the cast comprises 15 professional dancers who had to be "multifaceted in terms of their knowledge of dance and mastery of their bodies". That's because multiple forms are showcased on stage.

Written by Akash Khurana and Arghya Lahiri, with lyrics by Ishitta Arun, *Mumbai Star* was originally conceptualised by actor-producer Devika Shahani's The Dragon Rose Project for the Tokyo-based Min-On Concert Association, an organisation that

► **ALL SET FOR THE STAGE** The cast and crew of *Mumbai Star*

NEVILLE SUKHAIA



There are  
only two actors,  
who serve as  
narrators, while  
the rest of the  
cast comprises  
15 professional  
dancers

## THE LISTICLE

Upcoming musical performances near you

▼ MAY 24 |  
Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi

## Musical Movie Night



**D**elhi's renowned choir, **The Capital City Minstrels**, presents *An Evening at the Movies*—a lively summer concert featuring music from iconic films and television. Conducted by Nise Meruno, with over 60 singers and a full band, expect an eclectic mix of Indian cinema tunes, Disney hits, gospel, musicals, pop and western classical gems in one unforgettable performance.

▼ MAY 30 | Royal Opera House, Mumbai

## ALL LIT UP

**S**tep into the enchanting ambience of *Candlelight: Best Movie Soundtracks*, a live concert reimagining iconic Bollywood melodies, set aglow by hundreds of flickering candles. With Vanraj Shastri (sarangi), Harsh Gadkari (keyboard) and Om Pandey (tabla), the evening blends nostalgia with intimacy.



▼ JUNE 1 |  
Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru

## UNDAUNTED

**T**arangini is a moving tribute to tradition, resilience and the human spirit. Conceptualised by Grammy winner Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, the programme unites classical virtuosos, folk artists and courageous cancer survivors—Veer Mitras—on one powerful platform. From earthy Rajasthani rhythms to introspective ragas, the performances echo healing and hope.

▼ JUNE 5 |  
NCPA, Mumbai

## JAZZ RIFFS

**A**n Evening with **Jesús Molina** brings the gifted Colombian pianist and vocalist back to the NCPA with his dynamic ensemble. Blending jazz with Latin grooves and global inflections, Molina's virtuosic flair and soulful expression promise a night of rhythm, invention and emotional depth.



—Compiled by Nikhil Sardana

promotes international performing arts exchanges. The play comes to India after a 20-city tour across Japan, where it was performed for "more than 50,000 people" in 2023.

Part of the reason it translated so well could be that most of the story is conveyed non-verbally. "[The dancers] are acting, but just with their bodies," says Khan. "The challenge was for them to make us feel a scene, and not just show beautiful movement."

—Amit Gurbaxani



# The WIND GOD

**Flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia** is performing live with singer Hariharan for the first time. After a performance in Mumbai, Living Legends: Hari Se Hari Tak—A Soulful Night of Music is next taking place at Delhi's Siri Fort Auditorium on May 30

**Q. Your father wanted you to be a wrestler. How did you manage to become a musician?**

My father wanted me to carry on the family tradition. However, my heart followed music. I developed a keen interest listening to my neighbour, Pandit Rajaram, who was a dhrupad exponent and music teacher. My mother used to sing lullabies, so maybe there were some music genes as well.

**Q. How did you decide to start playing the flute?**

I started taking vocal lessons from Pandit Rajaram but my vocal range wasn't what is expected from singers. So, he suggested that I choose an instrument as a medium to pursue music lessons. For my limited resources, the flute was a perfect choice and I found it accidentally. That was the turning point of my life.

**Q. You have seen the music scene evolve over the decades. What is better or worse now for musicians compared to earlier?**

The music scene has expanded and become more inclusive, but it lacks depth. Today, musicians can reach out to the entire world sitting in their own space. However, it saddens me to see that the patience level has come down so much. There is an urgency to perform, excel and achieve success in the minimum time. This affects their learning, riyaz and understanding of music. Even listeners are not like the ones we had earlier, who could sit throughout the night listening to an artist.

**Q. What else can fans expect from you next?**

*Bansuri Jab Gaane Lage* is a new musical by my gurukul. It is based on my life story and music in Indian cinema. After being staged in Bengaluru recently, it is travelling to the National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai, on May 30.

—with Neha Kirpal

Photograph by HARDIK CHHABRA



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