

Indo-Pak: Battle For Air Superiority

BANGLADESH: THE ARMY PUSHBACK / SIKKIM@50: THE BIG VISION

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JUNE 9, 2025 ₹100



INDIA TODAY



(L to R),
Revant Himatsingka,
Usha Bishayee,
RJ Karishma,
Aaditya Shukla,
KL Bro Biju

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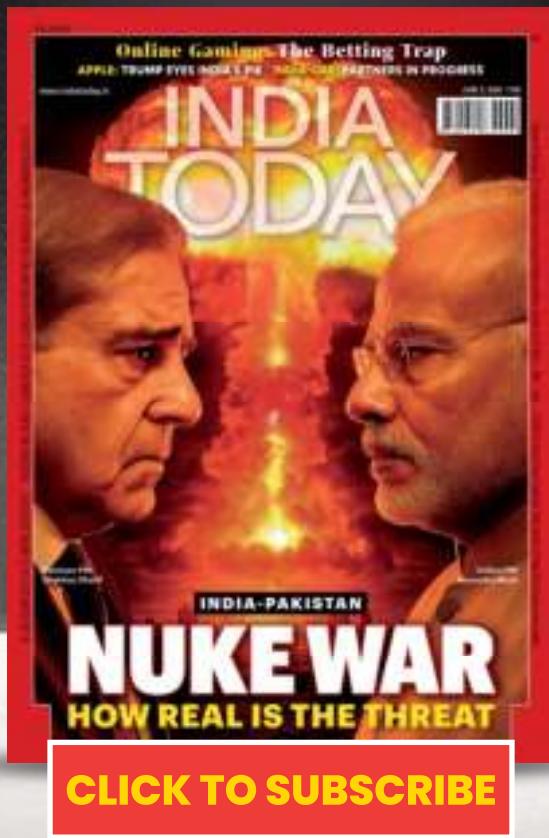


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**INDIA
TODAY**
MAKING SENSE OF INDIA

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

They are not born artists or entertainers. They did not go to film school. Or learn fancy video editing and scriptwriting at an elite institute. They turned to the dross material of their own daily humdrum lives, and alchemised that into pure gold. Take Usha Bishayee, 51, who shares traditional Bengali recipes. One reel won her 430,000 hearts and 4.7 million views. It was simplicity itself, but encapsulated the meteoric rise to fame of her breed. She was describing her first trip outside of West Bengal; the first flight that took her to Mumbai, where she'd eventually meet, and dance alongside, Instagram head Adam Mosseri. You have the likes of podcaster Raj Shamaani, whose 10 million YouTube subscriber base persuaded Bill Gates to sit down for an interview with him. And also to have tea made by the flashy Dolly Chai Wala of Nagpur (5 million Insta followers). There are those with a mission. Santosh Jadhav and co-founder Akash Jadhav created @indianfarmer in 2018 to make YouTube videos on sustainable agriculture. This side hustle turned out to be much more 'sustainable'. They now have 4.94 million subscribers, an annual turnover of Rs 1.5 crore through ad revenue and brand deals, and a production team. That's why Ajay Vidysagar, MD, YouTube South East Asia, calls all this "extraordinarily inspiring". YouTube alone paid out Rs 21,000 crore in 2022-24 to those who create content in India: the sector now includes not just traditional media giants but also a burgeoning band of solo creators and artists. It plans to invest Rs 850 crore in the coming two years to accelerate growth.

We are calling it the New Creator Economy. At its heart is digital content. Such torrents of it that it's become the common Indian's gold rush. The world's most populous nation makes each number related to this new economy a jaw-dropping one. India has 4.6 million digital

content creators, and counting. They make the most number of Instagram reels in the world. About 6 million a day! It also has the most YouTube channels—over 100 million of them. More than 15,000 of these have a subscriber base exceeding a million. It helps that Indians are second only to Brazilians and Indonesians in spending time online. They log a daily average of five hours, of which 70 per cent is spent on social media, video platforms and gaming. In 2024, that made for a total of 1.1 trillion hours, according to EY. No wonder digital channels eclipsed television to emerge as the biggest segment of the Rs 2.5 lakh crore media and entertainment (M&E) industry. Their total valuation, Rs 80,200 crore in 2024, is expected to touch Rs 90,300 crore



▲ June 10, 2024

this year. Within that, the value of the rising Indian influencer marketing industry alone is Rs 3,600 crore and it's expected to grow at 25 per cent in the coming year. Calling it a sunrise sector would be a misnomer. It's like a billion sunrises dawning every second on a billion smartphone screens.

Behind this boom, there are no moguls or magnates. No master plan from a management whiz. Instead, you have a motley crew of unlikely self-born megastars who have crashed the party of the old, established M&E behemoths. They are in fact the new mainstream. What else do you call a regular, moustachioed Malayali mister like KL Bro Biju, who puts up simple family videos and gathers an unearthly subscriber base of 72.7 million! And all of it organic. Some of them churn out 'timepass' videos that are even intended to be 'so bad that they're good'.

Like Rajkumar Thakuria, aka Raku Da, a 70-year-old retired banker from Assam, whose 'cringe pop' has earned him 236,000 followers on Instagram.

No wonder that, at the recent World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) in Mumbai, creators and digital platforms were as much the centre of attraction as Bollywood celebrities. All of it flows from the sheer, unaffected joy with which these new-age products are made, distributed and consumed. Likes, heart signs, thumbs-ups and shares are their currency, not glitzy advertisements. Make no mistake. What we are witnessing is a phase of transition. All traditional M&E platforms are a touch out of breath and behind the curve. Films are struggling. Print and TV lean on the digital 'platform economy' to ply their wares. On the other hand, a complete newcomer can attain virality because the means of production have been democratised. Today's smartphones come with reliably advanced features even at price ranges within reach for most. And the WiFi revolution since Jio was launched in 2016 has spawned entire digital communities who have grown up on YouTube and Instagram. The Covid-19 pandemic only deepened everyone's immersion. So this is how the 21st century is panning out. Not on a 70 mm silver screen, but on a miniaturised canvas that everyone carries around with them.

Deputy Editor Suhani Singh takes a break from her regular cinema and entertainment industry beat to look at how Indians are fundamentally shifting to this new mode of producing and consuming content. With her twin focal lengths, she spots and appreciates the contrasts straight off. "There are no entry barriers, no cliques or dynastic cabals to navigate as in Bollywood, no degree or special knowledge required. All you need is an authentic self," she says. Our cover story this week tips its hat at this new digital exchange for dreams and desires.



(Aroon Purie)

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Volume 50-Number 23; For the week
 June 3-9, 2025, published on every Friday

Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group

Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100

Subscriptions: For assistance contact, Customer Care, India Today Group,

C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP) - 201301, email: wecare@intoday.com;

Phone / WhatsApp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Friday, 10 am - 6 pm).

Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP).

Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indubells Centre,

(Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013;

Phone: 022 69193355; Fax: 66063226

E-1, Ground Floor, Videocon Towers, Jhandewalan Extn, New Delhi.

Door No: 610, 610A, 612, 5th Floor, Block A, Imperial Chaitanya Building, Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai, Tamilnadu-600018.

201-Sai, Techmowin Towers, 2nd Floor, 12, Roshan Road,

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52, Jawaharlal Nehru Road, 4th Floor, Kolkata-700071; Phones: 22825398;

Fax: 22827254; 6-3-885/7/B, Somajiguda, Hyderabad-500082;

Phone: 23401657, 23400479, 23410100, 23402481, 23410982, 23411498;

Fax: 23403484 • 39/1045, Karakkatt Road, Kochi 682016; Phones: 2377057,

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House, Panchwati, Office C.G. Road, Ahmedabad-380006; Phone: 26560398,

26560929; Fax: 26565293 • Copyright Living Media India Ltd. All rights

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Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media

India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited,

18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana)

and at Rajhans Enterprises, 134, Industrial Town, 4th Main Road, Rajajinagar,

Bengaluru-560044, (Karnataka).

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

Editor: Raj Chengappa.

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

All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only

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The New Creator Economy

**A RISING WAVE OF DIGITAL STORYTELLERS
AND INFLUENCERS ARE TURNING PASSION INTO
PROFIT ACROSS ONLINE INDIA**

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Photographs by **MANDAR DEODHAR, DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY, BADUSHYA P.T.**



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STORM WITHIN An IndusInd Bank branch in Delhi; (inset) ex-CEO Suman Kathpalia



► INDUSIND BANK

UNDER A CLOUD OF FRAUD

Revelations of suspected fraud have cost India's fifth-largest lender, promoted by the Hindujas, more than just a Rs 2,300 crore quarterly loss. The bank's reputation has taken a severe hit, raising questions about its corporate culture

By M.G. ARUN

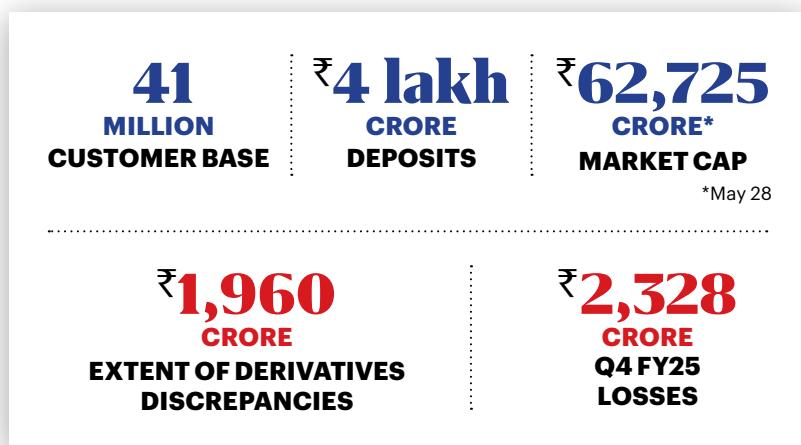
MAY 22 WAS INDEED A GRIM DAY FOR 76-YEAR-OLD ASHOK P. HINDUJA, chairman of IndusInd International Holdings Ltd (IIHL) and promoter of IndusInd Bank. For the first time in nearly two decades, the bank reported a quarterly net loss—an alarming Rs 2,328 crore. The causes: accounting discrepancies, suspected fraud and mounting stress in its microfinance portfolio. Spooked investors sent the bank's shares tumbling. Both CEO Suman Kathpalia and deputy CEO Arun Khurana had stepped down in April. On May 28, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) passed an interim order against the duo over alleged insider trading, restraining them from accessing the securities market. Six days before, Sebi chief Tuhin Pandey had said the matter was actually "RBI's remit"—the central bank was already on the case since March. Sebi would concern itself only "if there are any egregious violations by anyone", Pandey said. Subsequent events imply something on those lines may have indeed gone on.

Before all the ash started flying, Hinduja had put on a brave face on the disappointing quarterly results, saying the bank's board has taken "appropriate, swift" action. But the scale of losses, and more so the suspected fraud behind it, have shaken up what is India's fifth largest lender, with over 41 million customers and deposits of over Rs 4 lakh crore. Though the bank has claimed it is well capitalised, the recent events have threatened to erode its reputation, even as more instances of accounting errors and discrepancies keep surfacing. "Every line of defence at IndusInd Bank seems to have failed to detect these discrepancies," says financial consultant Ashvin Parekh. "A detailed investigation will certainly be conducted, particularly so if it is suggesting intentional non-compliance."

Conceptualised by Srichand P. Hinduja, the eldest of the Hinduja brothers and erstwhile chairman of the Hinduja Group, and established in 1994, IndusInd Bank was the first among the new-generation private banks in the post-economic liberalisation era. Ashok, the youngest of the deceased Srichand's three brothers, chairs the Hinduja Group of companies in India. IIHL holds around 16 per cent stake in the bank, and has the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) consent to raise it to 26 per cent (*see chart*). Its key customers include large corporates, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as retail clients, with a focus on commercial vehicle financing. The bank had a network of 2,984 branches and 2,956 ATMs as of FY24.

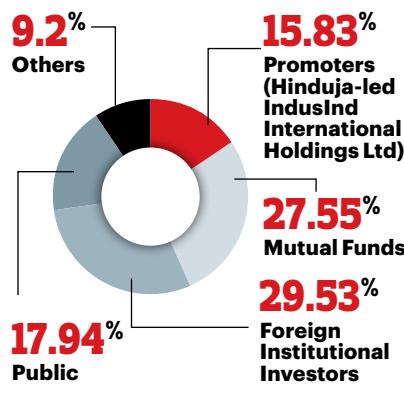
DISCOVERY OF A 'FRAUD'

No one could have predicted such a drastic turn of events at the bank. It came under the RBI's radar in early March, when the central bank denied Kathpalia a three-year extension and granted only a year instead. On March 10, the bank's senior management held a conference call with analysts, stating discrepancies had been found in the derivatives trading portfolio and that the bank expected to take a financial



SHAREHOLDING PATTERN

A look at who holds how much of the bank



hit of Rs 1,900-2,000 crore as a result. Derivatives are financial contracts whose value is determined by the price of an underlying asset, such as stocks, bonds, commodities or currencies. They are used for various purposes, including hedging risk, speculating on price movements and potentially earning profits. At that stage, Kathpalia said the problem was specifically in the internal deals for foreign currency liabilities.

It is standard practice for banks to hedge currency risks to minimise potential losses from exchange rate fluctuations. IndusInd Bank, too, used derivative instruments to manage such

risks. However, during a review of its processes to comply with RBI guidelines on investment portfolios—effective April 2024—the bank discovered "some gaps" in the positioning of its derivatives. It found the anomalies around October-November last year, and hired an external agency to investigate the matter, in addition to an internal enquiry, Kathpalia told the media. Strangely enough, Gobind Jain, the bank's CFO, resigned in January, to "pursue opportunities outside the bank", following which Khurana stepped into the role.

"Derivatives are complex instruments. Usually, there are multiple underlying assets which are at risk, resulting in complex valuation as well as accounting treatment," says Parekh. "The underlying risk may include interest rates, market rates or exchange rates, which are dynamic and volatile. The combination of such underlying risks requires proper assessment of value at risk." On March 20, the bank announced that it had appointed a new external agency to conduct a root cause analysis and assign accountability. On April 27, it said the agency found that the discrepancies would lead to a financial hit of Rs 1,960 crore. Khurana resigned the next day, and Kathpalia, a day later, taking moral responsibility.

The bank has said that a committee of executives will manage

operations at present and that it is on the hunt for a new CEO. On May 9, it issued a fresh disclosure, stating it was investigating insider trading allegations against Kathpalia and Khurana. This was followed by disclosures of Rs 674 crore in “incorrect interest income” recorded in the microfinance division, and Rs 595 crore in unsubstantiated balances under other assets. Both issues, however, were closed as of January, the bank said. J. Sridharan, executive vice chairman of the microfinance arm, Bharat Financial Inclusion, has also tendered his resignation.

Experts believe the bank failed on several fronts. “There seems to be a culture and governance breakdown. The bank was trying to grow at any pace,” says Abizer Diwanji, founder, NeoStrat Advisors. “Whenever cyclical issues hit it, they chose to ignore them.”

Mid-sized banks are always vulnerable to market perceptions. Given the high cost of doing business, they often engage in riskier activities than their larger counterparts. In such cases, banks should consistently make provisions in their books for creditors. “IndusInd tried to grow in the high-yield, unsecured SME segment, and when things hit the roof, they did not have provision cover, and had to do things like derivative accounting,” Diwanji says. “When you tend to compromise on accounting, you tend to compromise on governance.” As it happens, the Hinduja brothers were also borrowing against IndusInd shares to finance the Reliance Capital acquisition, and may not have wanted the share prices to crash.

Had the bank valued its assets dynamically and regularly, with proper quantification of the value at risk, it could have identified the “gap” and taken appropriate measures to address the loss in value. “But here, the underlying valuation itself is a question mark, giving an impression that all the three offices were involved—the front office that does the trade, which holds the instrument or decides to buy the



“It is RBI’s remit, but if there are any egregious violations by anyone, in its capacity, Sebi is looking into it”

TUHIN PANDEY

Chairman, Sebi



“Though the capital adequacy of the bank is quite healthy, for business growth, should any further equity be required, IIHL, as the promoter of IBL, remains committed to supporting the bank, as it has done over the past 30 years”

ASHOK P. HINDUJA

Chairman, IndusInd International Holdings Ltd

executive directors. It remains unclear whether they implemented proper controls or were prevented from doing so. Beyond these three layers, one would expect the audit committee, along with the internal and external auditors, to examine valuation and accounting practices—followed by oversight from the board of directors and the promoters. IIFL estimates that IndusInd has taken around Rs 4,700 crore hit on its profit and loss statement due to all the “frauds”. The brokerage has downgraded the IndusInd Bank stock. The bank’s shares closed at Rs 804.75 on the BSE on May 28, nearly half of its highest level of Rs 1,550 a year ago.

STEADYING THE SHIP

Although the issues at IndusInd Bank point to serious corporate governance failures, there is no worry yet on its financial health. Hinduja has clarified that the bank is adequately capitalised, with a capital adequacy ratio of 16.24 per cent as of March. The RBI also said on March 15 that the bank was “well-capitalised and the financial position of the bank remains satisfactory”. Sunil Mehta, the bank’s chairman, told analysts on May 21 that they are “taking further measures to improve internal controls and processes to prevent such lapses from occurring again.”

Diwanji says the bank should look at its own business model of high-cost lending. Moreover, the board should oversee internal developments and pay closer attention to whistle-blower complaints. For instance, red flags should have been raised when Jain resigned in January. Last but not the least, the management has to rebuild trust—that begins with a change in work culture. They should allow information to flow and act when necessary, rather than stall the flow of information, he adds.

instrument; the mid-office, which is expected to evaluate the risk regularly and dynamically; and the back office, which is supposed to account for it,” says Parekh. “All the three seem to have either failed or connived.”

Many are surprised that such practices went undetected by the senior management for years. The first line of defence is the trader; the second is the senior managers, who may not have asked the necessary questions. The third level comprises the bank’s

With more and more skeletons tumbling out of its closet, IndusInd Bank has to methodically work to resolve its current issues besides building new systems to prevent a recurrence and restore the confidence of its investors and customers. ■

THE REAL TOLL OF COVID IN INDIA

Fresh Covid cases draw attention, but it's the undercounted deaths from 2021 that demand urgent scrutiny and systemic reform



BY K.
SRINATH
REDDY

Covid-19 is back in the news because of a rise in the number of persons testing positive in different states of India as well as the release of government data on deaths that occurred in 2021, when the country was devastated by the Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The recent spike in cases due to the less virulent JN.1 and BA.2 sub-lineages of Omicron is not a cause for panic, as no deaths have been reported. However, there is concern about the underestimation of Covid-related deaths in earlier official reports. Questions have been raised about why previous estimates were low and the marked interstate variations in the gap between reported Covid deaths and Covid-attributable excess deaths in 2021.

Official estimates of Covid-related deaths in 2020 and 2021 differed from modelled estimates of the World Health Organization (480,000 versus 4.7 million). Data released by the Registrar General of India (RGI) now reveal an excess of 2.1 million deaths in 2021 compared to 2020—a 26 per cent rise. The usual causes of death would not have substantially changed over the year, and road accident-related deaths would have actually decreased due to mobility restrictions. So, it is likely that many of the unexplained excess deaths were Covid-related. That would suggest that earlier official estimates were low. We must bear in mind that those estimates were made when usual data-gathering systems were under siege by a pandemic, which demanded action on many fronts.

While the fact of death is relatively easy to document, the cause of death may be difficult to ascertain due to poor

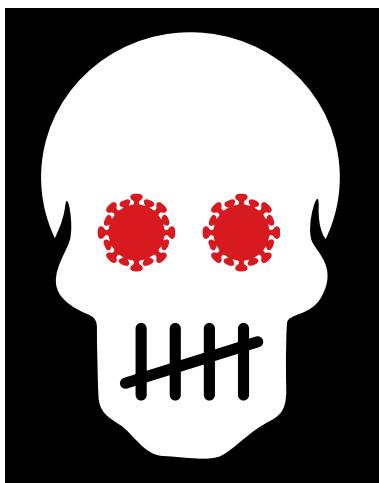


Illustration by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

FROM THE OFFICIAL DATA SHOWING 2.1 MN EXCESS DEATHS IN 2021 OVER 2020, IT CAN BE DEDUCED THAT MANY WERE LIKELY DUE TO COVID

certification practices of doctors, especially for out-of-hospital deaths. When there are associated conditions like cardiovascular disease or diabetes, death is often attributed to them even if Covid had supervened to cause serious complications. Healthcare providers, in public and private sectors, need better training to improve certification practices. Where certification is dubious, 'verbal autopsy' studies can be conducted to identify the probable cause of death with standardised questions. These can be performed by trained frontline health workers and women's self-help groups with guidance from staff and students of nearby medical colleges. Central and

state governments must mandate, promote and institutionalise such partnerships between the district health systems and co-located medical colleges.

Getting the total death counts right is important too. Both the Civil Registration System (which gathers data on a continuous basis) and the Sample Registration System (which conducts periodic sample surveys) need to be strengthened through better training. Accuracy and timeliness can both be improved through the introduction of algorithmically guided digital registration methods. Mathematically estimating 'excess deaths' through year-to-year comparisons can help overcome ambiguities on the cause of death and fill data gaps. Even for measuring heat wave-related deaths, estimation of excess deaths is proving useful.

Judging by the recent RGI data, northern and western Indian states exhibited large data discrepancies, appearing to have underreported Covid deaths. Kerala was the best performer, with the least gap between reported Covid deaths and estimated excess deaths. The state would have drawn strength from a well-functioning primary care system, high population literacy, strong community engagement, active role of panchayats and NGOs during the pandemic, as well as gearing up of health system efficiency during the 2018 Nipah virus outbreak. Even as we debate the Covid numbers, we must strengthen community-connected health systems across India. ■

Prof. K. Srinath Reddy is a cardiologist, epidemiologist and public health advocate

UPFRONT

LION CENSUS

GROWING PRIDE

The Asiatic lion population is on the rise in Gujarat and its habitats are expanding, reveals the 16th Lion Population Estimation carried out in May. Spanning 35,000 sq. km, the survey also throws up sobering facts about challenges this upswing poses

Text by JUMANA SHAH

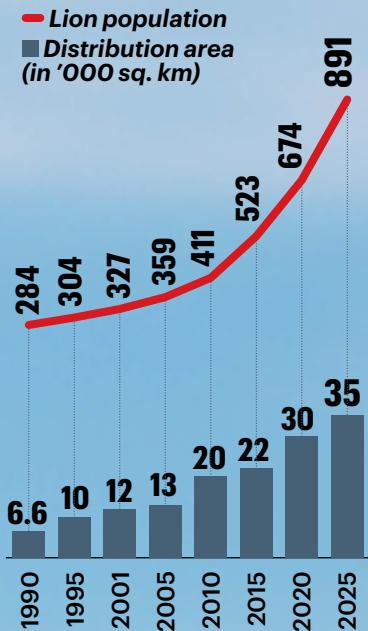
Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

FINDING 1

While the lion count went up by 32.2 per cent since 2020, their distribution area expanded by just 17 per cent

WHAT IT IMPLIES

The capacity of wildlife sanctuaries is long exhausted. Most prides now live in adjoining areas, near villages. If lion density increases beyond a point, the fine balance could become a casualty



TOTAL

● 674 ● 891
(↑32%)

Lion population
● 2020 ● 2025
Change in (%)

ADULT MALE

● 161 ● 196
(↑22%)

ADULT FEMALE

● 260 ● 330
(↑27%)

CUB

● 137 ● 225
(↑64%)



FINDING 2

As many as 395 lions, i.e. 44.2 per cent of the total, live outside forest areas

WHAT IT IMPLIES

Human-lion coexistence is hailed as a unique success story of Saurashtra, but incidents of conflicts are rising as lions venture beyond the forest boundaries—35 human deaths in 189 lion attacks since 2015

FINDING 3

For the first time, it has been reported that the big cats regularly move through the so-called 'lion corridors', which are not 'protected areas'

WHAT IT IMPLIES

This 'floating population' of 22 lions, the report claims, has a 'significant potential for future'. The identification of these corridors makes it imperative to prioritise conservation efforts over urban and industrial development

FINDING 4

A new satellite population of 17 lions recorded in Barda Wildlife Sanctuary

WHAT IT IMPLIES

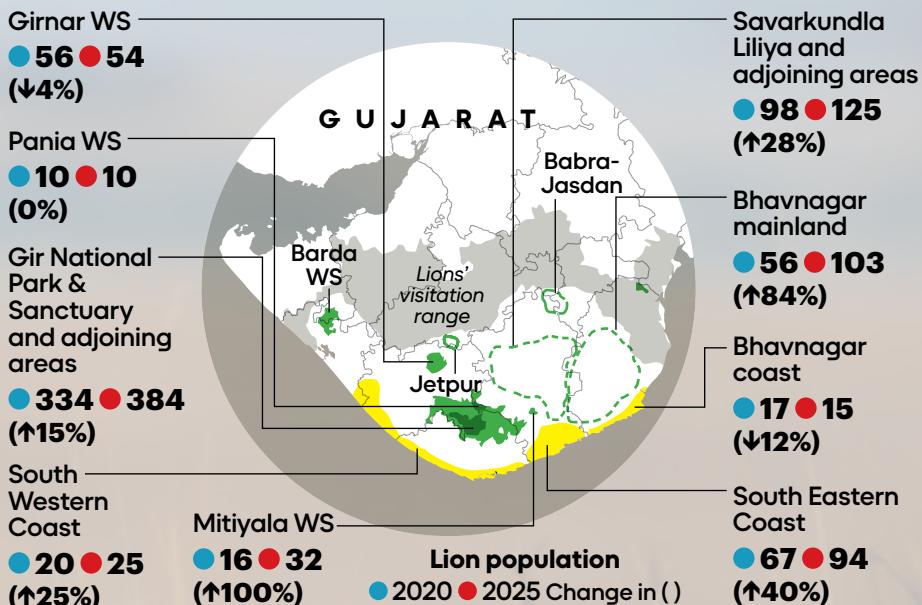
Barda near Porbandar is being touted as a 'second home' for the big cat, which could help in their genetic diversity. But biologists argue that the aerial distance of 50 km from the source population in Gir is too little to insulate the lions from disease outbreak or natural calamity

CAT SCAN IN GUJARAT

In 2020, Gir accounted for half the lion population. Now, it's down to 43% even as new satellite populations come up in three more districts

SUB-ADULT

● 116 ● 140
(↑21%)



NEW SATELLITE POPULATION

Barda WS: 17

Jetpur and adjoining areas: 6

Bhabra-Jasdan and adjoining areas: 4

WS: Wildlife Sanctuary

DISTRICT-WISE DISTRIBUTION

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Junagadh | ● 176 ● 191 (↑9%) |
| 2. Gir Somnath | ● 184 ● 222 (↑21%) |
| 3. Amreli | ● 233 ● 339 (↑45%) |
| 4. Bhavnagar | ● 81 ● 116 (↑43%) |
| 5. Porbandar* | ● 0 ● 16 |
| 6. Rajkot* | ● 0 ● 6 |
| 7. Devbhoomi Dwarka* | ● 0 ● 1 |

*New habitats



▼ GLASSHOUSE



DEFENDERS FROM THE EAST

Assam CM **Himanta Biswa Sarma** has really taken to his role as the BJP's rhetorical assault weapon, firing verbal salvos at will across borders. After 'Operation Sindoor', Sarma gleefully reminded anyone in range of India's might, even endorsing the Balochistan freedom struggle to needle Islamabad. And when Bangladesh interim chief Muhammad Yunus crossed the line over the "chicken's neck" linking the Northeast to the rest of India, Sarma sent a shrill reminder that they, too, have two vulnerable corridors. But now the Assam CM has competition near home—Tripura's titular king and Tipra Motha chief **Pradyot Debbarma** has taken the tit-for-tat with Dhaka a step further, saying India could carve out a new nation if push comes to shove. Looks like the Northeast netas are walking around strapped, ever ready to rain hellfire with just enough plausible deniability.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ FAMILY TIME

DYNASTY RELOADED

Guess blood is thicker than water. The return of **Akash Anand**, the nephew of BSP chief Mayawati, and his appointment as the party's Chief National Coordinator, a new post that makes him the "second most powerful leader in the party", is giving a few of the old guard sleepless nights. Sources say Akash has been tasked with leading the BSP programmes and yatras across states and, pertinently, overseeing



all national coordinators and state unit presidents. This time around, Behenji may have stopped short of calling him her political successor, but there is little doubt the young 'un has his hands on the party reins. Already there's a diktat that 'non-performing' mandal in-chargers will be axed, and sources say the purge may include those responsible for Anand's earlier ouster.

A VIRAL PROBLEM

One viral video is a scandal, but four in quick succession? That's a headache the **BJP** can do without in the states it rules. From local heavy Manoharlal Dhakad's highway antics in Mandsaur, MP, to district president Amar Kashyap's shenanigans at the party office in Gonda, UP, a string of BJP leaders have recently landed in hot water over viral clips showing them in...let's just say, not-so-sanskari situations. The high command is not amused, and an unofficial warning has gone out to the leaders in problem states: clean up your act, or else....



Two Strikes

Rajasthan law minister **Joga Ram Patel** is under fire again, this time over his grandchild being booked for alleged cheating during an engineering exam on May 22. The flying squad flagged it, but the exam centre superintendent gave her a pass, which the Opposition is none too pleased about. Patel insists he's open to even a "CBI probe", but this is the law minister's second family-related fracas. Last year, his son had to quit as additional advocate general after the Opposition questioned the propriety of his appointment.



MR RECONCILIATION

New Tamil Nadu BJP president **Nainar Nagendran** is a sharp contrast to predecessor K. Annamalai, for he has openly backed the alliance with the AIADMK (possibly because his roots lie in the 'Two Leaves' party). Indeed, unlike Annamalai, whose lacerating jibes had led to the alliance breakdown earlier, Nagendran has warned the BJP cadre against publicly criticising the AIADMK, even proposing tracking social media posts to ensure they stay in line. With assembly polls due in a year, he knows the party can ill afford any mis-steps.



Kaushik Deka with Avaneesh Misra, Rohit Parihar and Kavitha Muralidharan

SCI-TECH WATCH

By Ajay Sukumaran

TRACKING EARTH, INCH BY INCH

WHAT: The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite, to be placed in a low earth orbit soon, will scan the Earth's surface every six days measuring minute changes down to a centimetre. With each pixel capturing an area about half the size of a tennis court, it will track how quakes, volcano eruptions and landslides occur; measure the advance or retreat of glaciers and ice sheets; and monitor the growth/loss of forests and wetlands.

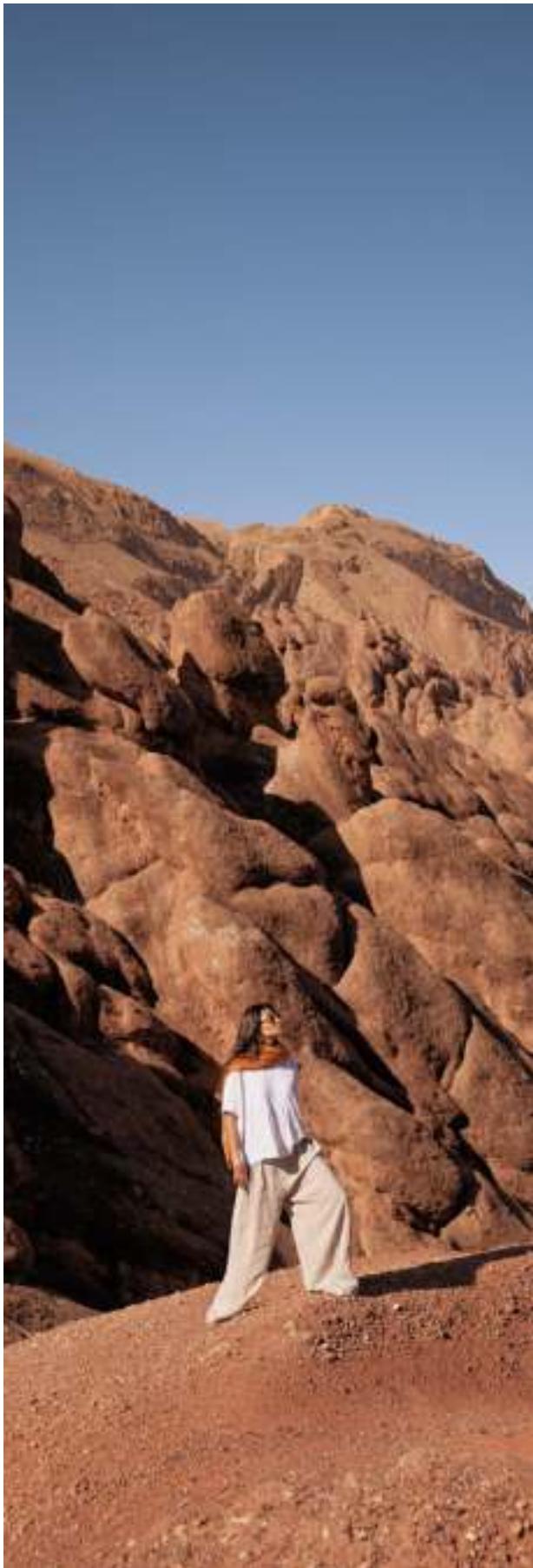
HOW: NISAR will be the first earth observation satellite with two kinds of radar—an L-band synthetic aperture radar (SAR) from NASA, and the S-band SAR built by the Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad. The instrument's imaging swath is greater than 240 km, which will allow it to image the entire planet every 12 days. The NISAR mission will run for five years. Estimated to cost \$1.5 billion (Rs 12,765 cr.), NISAR will be among the most expensive earth observation satellites.



WHY: To help prepare for natural or man-made disasters. Earth's surface is in constant flux, NISAR will measure changes in three disciplines:

- Ecosystems, involves vegetation, carbon cycle
- Major changes in the Earth's crust
- Cryosphere sciences which pertain to icy regions crucial to climate change studies.

THE COLLABORATION: An equal collaboration between NASA and ISRO, the NISAR mission marks the first time the two agencies have cooperated on hardware development for an earth-observation mission. The mission is currently targeted for a June 2025 launch. The 2,800 kg NISAR satellite will be launched on a GSLV Mk-II rocket from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota.



ELLINGTON PROPERTIES: WHERE TIMELESS DESIGN MEETS CONTEMPORARY LIVING

In a city known for its soaring skylines and architectural ambition, few developers manage to balance bold vision with the quiet precision of delivery. Dubai-based Ellington Properties does just that –building homes that not only reflect refined aesthetics but also deliver exactly what they promise, down to the last detail. Ellington's completed residences have earned a reputation for exceeding them, both in design fidelity and in the lived experience they offer.

At its core, Ellington is more than a real estate brand; it's a philosophy of living. Each residence is thoughtfully crafted, from materials to layout, to ensure every moment spent inside feels intentional. The brand's signature lies in the details: clean lines, sophisticated finishes, and a natural flow between form and function. Its design quietly elevates your everyday life without ever shouting for attention.

But what truly sets Ellington apart is how it puts people at the heart of every project. Homes aren't treated as products –they're viewed as places where families grow, traditions are celebrated, and memories are made.

Across its growing portfolio, the company nurtures vibrant communities through curated events that bring residents together. Whether it's a festive celebration or cozy family gathering, Ellington invests in creating a genuine sense of belonging.

That sense of community is complemented by a strong integration of art and culture. Here, art isn't just decorative –it's embedded into the very architecture. Sculptures, installations, and bespoke design elements are thoughtfully woven into shared spaces to inspire, uplift, and add depth to the visual story of each development.

Ellington's developments span some of the UAE's most sought-after neighborhoods, from the vibrant heart of Dubai to the tranquil shores of Ras Al Khaimah. Whether it's a beachfront residence, a gated villa community, or a design-forward apartment in a city hub, each address is defined by the brand's hallmark traits: timeless design, exceptional quality, and a focus on resident wellbeing. Best-in-class amenities –from resort-style pools and wellness spaces to play areas and yoga studios – are thoughtfully integrated to support holistic living.

Ellington is creating more than real estate. It is shaping a new standard for what it means to live well, delivering timeless spaces that speak to the global citizen, the design enthusiast, and the community-seeker alike. In every detail, in every decision, Ellington builds with purpose.

This is what it means to live by design. This is Ellington.



STATE SCAN

BENGAL: THE BANERJEES IN A BALANCE PG 20

PUNJAB: BATTLE OF THE TAKHTS PG 22

► **THE CHALLENGER** Gaurav Gogoi during the panchayat poll campaign; (right) CM Himanta Sarma



ANI

► ASSAM

THE GOGOI GAMBIT

The Congress is going all in with MP and legacy heir Gaurav Gogoi in the battle for Assam against Himanta Sarma's BJP in 2026

By Kaushik Deka

T MAY HAVE BEEN A CORONATION WAITING TO HAPPEN, but when it came—on May 26, with a year to go for the 2026 Assam assembly election—it rang out like a call to a duel from the days of feudal chivalry. Gaurav Gogoi, like a prince who had the throne snatched from him, has got his chance for avengement. Elevated as state Congress president by the high command, his formal investiture sets the stage for a most intense political slugfest, for Gogoi will be in the ring against a very combative incumbent CM, Himanta Biswa Sarma of the BJP, the mutineer who felled his father.

It's a classic setpiece, meant to end a frustrating decade of eclipse for the Congress, marked by utter BJP dominance over a state it had made a fresh conquest of only in 2016. Part of it rests on legacy. The late Tarun Gogoi's 15-year stint as CM is often associated with Assam's fitful passage out of its old militancy-hit phase into a measure of stability and prosperity.

But the package also offers a 'new, improved' version of his son, Gaurav, reimagined as the Grand Old Party's "face of revival", a charismatic challenger". What aids this is the rise in Gaurav's own stature since his decisive win in the 2024

ANI



Takeaways

► **Gaurav Gogoi made Assam PCC chief, will lead party in '26 poll**

► **Congress out of power in Assam for a decade, since 2016**

► **CM Himanta Sarma and BJP pursuing Gogoi with 'Pakistan connection' charge**

Lok Sabha election, and his visibility—and audibility—as the party's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha thereafter.

ELECTORAL MATH

The Congress is also seeking to solve Assam's complex electoral math in its usual way. Three new working presidents represent key demographics: Jakir Hussain Sikdar (Bengali-origin Muslim), Roselina Tirkey ('tea garden' tribal) and Pradip Sarkar (Bengali Hindu). Gaurav is from the Ahom community, historically crucial to electoral success in the state. With him positioned as de facto CM candidate, the party is also sending a powerful message—that

they're backing him to the hilt despite Sarma lobbing allegations of a 'Pakistani connection' at Gaurav's British wife Elizabeth Colburn. Sarma's campaign over the past few months has included claims that Elizabeth worked for Pakistani agencies and that Gaurav visited the country on ISI invitation. Gaurav has called it a "C-grade Bollywood movie plot" and questioned Sarma's "mental state" while offering a nuanced refutation.

The 2024 Lok Sabha election marked a definitive turning point in Gaurav Gogoi's political career and his rivalry with Sarma. Delimitation had eliminated the old Gogoi pocketborough of Kaliabor, forcing him to contest from Jorhat, where his prospects appeared slim. Sarma arrayed the entire state apparatus against him, turning it into a prestige battle. So, when Gogoi won by 144,000-plus votes, it was more than just another LS seat win for the Congress—it shattered Sarma's aura of electoral invincibility.

Within the state unit, there's a mix of enthusiasm and pragmatic acceptance, with veterans aware that Gogoi is their best bet at the top. But his feet aren't planted too solidly: the Congress had a scare show in the recent panchayat polls, not winning a single zilla parishad seat in Jorhat, Gogoi's stronghold.

It's on this perilous turf that Gogoi stages his 2026 challenge. It's a clash of personalities. Also, a choice between two visions: Sarma's muscular, growth-focused approach vs Gogoi's social justice alternative. ■

► BIHAR

PK BIDS TO BE A THIRD FORCE

Prashant Kishor reshapes core team, blending caste calculus with credibility to position Jan Suraaj for the big poll fight

By Amitabh Srivastava

IT'S A PRASHANT KISHOR encore, so none of the mainstream parties had exactly wished for it. The October 2024 birth of Jan Suraaj Party was preceded by a good bit of labour: two full years, about 5,000 km, of pacing up and down the natal ward of Bihar. That hard-earned paternity is now entering its logical phase: the JSP aims to make it good in the coming state election. Prashant ('PK') has hit the ground running—with a rerun. He plans to criss-cross all 243 assembly constituencies before October-November with his '*Bihar badlaw yatra*'.

Bad law is just about right, as a spot of start-

ANI



► **WALK THE TALK**
PK at the Patna leg of his yatra, May 23

► **PRICKLY HEAT**
JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar and RJD's Tejashwi Yadav



ing trouble proved. On May 18, under a blistering sun in Nalanda, PK found himself stopped on way to Kalyanbigha, CM Nitish Kumar's ancestral village. "Yahaan koi British Raj hai jo gaon mein jaane ke liye aapka permission chaahiye?" he was heard fulminating, at a stone-faced SDM and a phalanx of officials. PK's caravan was out to test Nitish's three pledges on his own home turf. Had Rs 2 lakh been really given to each of the 9.4 million low-income families identified in Bihar's caste survey? Had Mahadalits been allotted land? Have land records been digitised and freed from corrupt local babus?

In the event, those remained a mystery. PK turned back, and instead held a rally at Bihar-sharief on May 20 where he formally launched his Yatra 2.0. As his caravan rolls into each village gathering, it unfolds with the same refrain: "You vote by caste or for 5 kg of grain. When was the last time you considered your children's future? Lalu Yadav is plotting his son's rise; what of yours? For once, look beyond the immediate." Bihar's villagers, long habituated to transactional voting, listen in rapt silence. Something resonates.

His vocabulary brims over with the promise of a post-caste politics, but as PK revs up for the hustings, the chess moves he's making show he's not without a keen eye towards the electoral potential of caste. On May 18, he secured the merger of Ramchandra Prasad 'RCP' Singh's Aap Sabki Awaaz Party into JSP. Who's RCP?

An ex-bureaucrat and Nitish favourite, once his principal secretary, who leapt to great heights: JD(U) president, Rajya Sabha MP, and towards the end of that 2010-22 phase, even Union steel minister. More crucially, he's a Kurmi from Nalanda, like Nitish. "RCP's entry will fortify our appeal among a key demographic," admits a JSP insider.

NUMERICAL NUANCES

Simultaneously, Kishor anointed Uday Singh. Resume: younger brother of the estimable ex-bureaucrat N.K. Singh, resourceful man from a prominent family who was twice BJP MP from Purnea and, after a bitter falling out and detour in the Congress, turned a benevolent patron for JSP in its salad days. Also, a Rajput face—so saffron territory. Counting Manoj Bharti, the

Takeaways

► **Prashant Kishor is revving up for polls, with a new yatra and a new set of lieutenants**

► **RCP Singh, former Nitish favourite, merges party with JSP; Uday Singh is president**

Dalit state chief with an IIT/IFS bio, that's three caste boxes ticked. With top-tier lieutenants in place, Kishor can devote himself to the trail, promising governance over identity politics.

Numerical nuances frame his strategy as he goes tilting at the nearly four-decade-long RJD-JD(U) duopoly, with the BJP playing the long game. As many as 40 of Bihar's 243 assembly seats had victory margins lower than 3,500 votes in 2020. In November 2024, JSP contested four bypolls and finished third in two seats. In Imamganj, its 37,103 votes ensured the RJD's defeat. Overall, JSP got approximately 10 per cent of the votes. So the sight of PK wading through rice paddies and dusty lanes, talking his new talk in cramped huts and at bustling chaupals, can't be too soothing for the entrenched powers. ■



► **A STITCH IN TIME** Mamata Banerjee with Abhishek

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

A LIST OF DISTRICT presidents and suchlike may seem like a fairly ho-hum HR matter for the Trinamool Congress (TMC), a party that has 'grassroots' right there in its name. But this new roster was expected soon after the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The one year of no-show was marked by visible strain between West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and nephew Abhishek Banerjee. A "balanced" reset is what they're calling it—a truce between Mamata's old guard and Abhishek's 'reformist' bloc.

It arrives at a politically delicate juncture. The 2026 assembly polls loom ever closer, and a long-pending organisational reshuffle would seem basic to prepping up for combat. That aspect of urgency has acquired a keener edge than one would have presumed for a party that



► WEST BENGAL

THE BANNERJEES IN A BALANCE

Mamata's old guard and Abhishek's reformist bloc strike a deal on who mans the districts to gear up for the uphill task of winning 2026 state polls

had a handsome score of 29 out of Bengal's 42 Lok Sabha seats last summer, with a 2 per cent vote swing in its favour, and ramped that up to a knockout-worthy 14 per cent-plus in November bypolls, where it swept all six seats in play, even plucking two out of the BJP's kitty.

NEW COAT OF TAIN'T

Why so? Because, while corruption has historically not inflicted electoral damage on the TMC, a new nervousness is now evident. Just a day before the list was announced, there was public backlash over a police crackdown on protesting

School Service Commission (SSC) teachers in Salt Lake. The situation worsened when former TMC MLA Sabyasachi Dutta was allegedly seen assaulting demonstrators and journalists. Fired SSC teachers, who see themselves as unfairly victimised in a 2016 recruitment scam, are only one piece of collateral damage in what has been a barrage of scandals over the years—from the Saradha and Rose Valley chit fund scams to the coal and cattle smuggling rackets.

In 2021, the BJP's vociferous campaign centred around "cut money" and "syndicate raj" failed to stop a resound-

Takeaways

■ The TMC finally announces a vital list of district heads, with 2026 polls looming

■ The roster was stuck for a year due to differences in approach between Mamata, Abhishek

■ The final choices reflect a belated but careful compromise

■ Nervousness has grown due to the barrage of scams

ing TMC victory. But this time, the party's apparent inertia, prolonged decision paralysis and a growing perception of arrogance have contributed to a sense of strategic drift.

The negotiated settlement on the district personnel aims to change that. Among the most notable examples of compromise is Howrah Urban organisational district, where veteran leader and minister Arup Roy has been appointed president. Roy was not the preferred candidate of either faction, but with no other consensus leader available, Mamata pressed for the selection of her cabinet colleague, and Abhishek agreed.

In North Kolkata, the newly constituted nine-member core committee reflects a more evenly distributed balance of power. It includes figures from both camps—such as Jibon Saha, widely seen as close to Abhishek—while MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay has been accommodated as chairperson. Birbhum is the only other district to get such a committee and designated chairperson. Across the state's 35 organisational districts, 16 have received new appointees. Two are pending: Darjeeling (Plains) and North 24 Parganas (Barasat). For all other districts, both a president and a chairman have been named.

"It was high time the ball was set rolling. We were all getting worried. Unless the reshuffle was done, nothing else would have moved," says a senior TMC functionary. Yet many feel it has come too late. Says political analyst Biswajit Bhattacharya, "By this time in 2020, if you remember, the TMC was in full campaign mode for 2021. It had the campaign song and theme ready—even amid the pandemic. But this time, they are already very late. The PM and home minister begin their campaign soon." ■

► PUNJAB/BIHAR

BATTLE OF THE TAKHTS

A bitter clash between two seats of Sikh authority exposes deep ideological and institutional rifts within the faith

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

IN A FAITH WHERE FIVE THRONES symbolise unity, two just went to war. On May 21, a religious cannonball was fired from the east: Takht Sri Patna Sahib, one of Sikhism's five revered seats, located in Bihar. The Panj Pyare or 'five beloved' leaders of Patna have declared as *tankhaiya*, i.e. guilty of religious misconduct, two of their senior clerical peers back in Punjab: the acting jathedar of Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikh authority in Amritsar, as well as the Takht Damdama Sahib head.

The flashpoint? A decision by the Akal Takht to reinstate a controversial former jathedar, Giani Ranjit Singh Gauhar, without so much as consulting Patna Sahib, which had dismissed him in 2022 amidst a welter of corruption and other allegations.

The response from Amritsar was instant. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which controls the Akal Takht's management, thundered its disapproval and demanded that Patna Sahib retract its edict. The latter refused to blink. What started as a personnel shuffle is now an all-out turf war. At stake: not just

religious authority but the very idea of Sikh unity. The battlelines are blurring faith, power and politics in a way that's left the global Sikh community rattled.

If this feels unprecedented, it's not. In 2008, then jathedar of Patna Sahib, Giani Iqbal Singh, had openly challenged the Akal Takht's supremacy. That spat was hushed up via backchannel

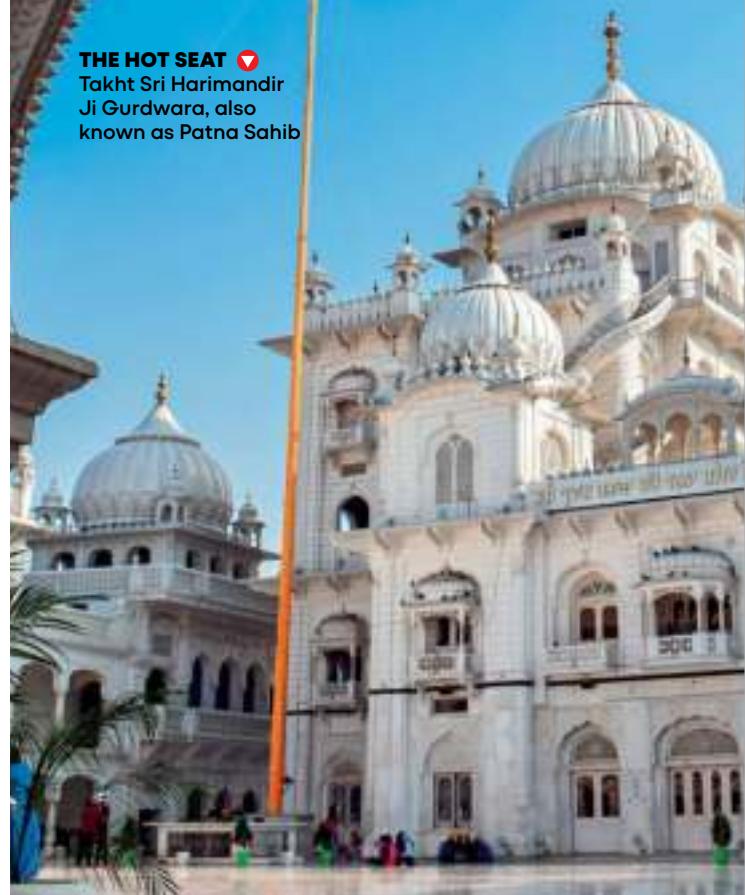
Takeaways

► **Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikh authority, reinstates a controversial former Patna Sahib jathedar without consultation**

► **Patna Sahib's Panj Pyare declare the acting Akal Takht jathedar and Takht Damdama Sahib head guilty of religious misconduct**

diplomacy. This one is being livestreamed—on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram. Every edict, every insult, every act of defiance is now a global push notification. The timing couldn't be worse.

THE HOT SEAT 
Takht Sri Harmandir Ji Gurdwara, also known as Patna Sahib



Sikh institutions are already reeling from the recent sacking of three jathedars—the previous Akal Takht chief and heads of two other Punjab-based Takhts—by the SGPC, in a move seen by many as politically engineered. It was supposed to be a course correction. Instead, it has triggered a free-for-all.

OLD FAULT LINES

For the faithful, the crisis is more than administrative. And it's exposing fault lines long buried under the surface. The Akal Takht, established by Guru Hargobind in 1606 as a seat of power and justice, has operated as the first among equals: issuing *hukamnamas* (edicts), settling disputes, excommunicating those deemed out of line. That moral supremacy was sanctified not just by tradition, but by proximity to power—the SGPC and Punjab's political aura that itself drew from its centrality to Sikhism.

Patna Sahib is no upstart. It was formally accepted as one of the five Takhts by the SGPC in the 1950s, but its sanctity predates that by centuries. It is the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh—the tenth Guru and founder



SHUTTERSTOCK

of the warrior Khalsa order—and has long been revered as a spiritual centre for Sikhs in Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal and eastern Uttar Pradesh. The tensions with Takht Hazur Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra, are another powder keg. Nanded has often bristled at attempts by Amritsar to assert supremacy: on calendar reforms, clergy appointments, even on rituals. It, too, has been known to issue independent edicts.

For the global Sikh diaspora, this is nothing short of disillusionment. The schism isn't just geographic—it's ideological. Sikh preachers from California to Calgary are offering counter-narratives—filling the vacuum left by dithering Takhts. This doctrinal free market may be democratising discourse, but it's also breeding chaos. With no clear line of command, contradictory edicts are now routine. The current stand-off may still be walked back through closed-door parleys. But some damage seems to have been done already. ■

► KARNATAKA

CASTE METER 2025

Karnataka undertakes a survey of the state's Scheduled Castes using a digital app developed in-house

By Ajay Sukumaran

BY JUNE 1, A NEAR FOUR WEEK-LONG Comprehensive Survey of Scheduled Castes 2025 is set to come to a close in Karnataka. Some 59,000-odd enumerators have fanned out across the state to carry out the door-to-door survey using a digital app. "We wanted it to be on a digital platform from start to end," says Yatish R., who heads the Directorate of Electronic Delivery of Citizen Services, the e-governance department wing which developed the app.

The data was necessary to sub-divide the 17 per cent SC quota into internal categories for a more equitable distribution of reservation benefits among the 101 SC castes in Karnataka. A 2011 census had put

their numbers at 2.1 million households but a one-man commission under retired judge H.N. Nagamohan Das recommended a fresh survey, citing "ambiguities" in it that had hindered sub-classification.

The survey had a 42-point questionnaire to be filled up on the mobile phone application using drop-down menus where answers were selected. The state e-governance department's database, Kutumba, came in handy here as it stores information on 11.8 million ration card-holding families (52 million citizens). Kutumba is integrated with all state departments, which means any service provided was automatically synced with the data. So, when an enumerator logged into the app and entered a ration card number, all available details of family members got filled in automatically. Once the form was completed, it was e-signed by the resident who could also log into a portal to review it. Each interview was geo-tagged, the family surveyed issued a unique number and their photo captured. A separate online self-declaration facility was opened up too to ensure maximum coverage. ■

Takeaways

► **State SC survey to lead to a more equitable subdivision of the 17% community quota**

► **For the first time, a mobile digital app used for survey with a 42-point questionnaire**



► **DIGITAL HAVES** The surveyors in Karnataka's Survey of Scheduled Castes fills in details on the special app

WHOSE LEGACY? A JJP poster, showing Dushyant with family icons, that angered INLD's Abhay (below)



► HARYANA



A DYNASTIC DIN

The fragmented Chautala brood fights over his Jat legacy, but it's a grim hedge against irrelevance

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

REMINISCENT OF THE competing claims on Bal Thackeray by the two Shiv Senas, a *dangal* is unfolding in Haryana's heartland. At stake is a face—that of Jat patriarch Om Prakash Chautala. It's not even been six months since the ex-CM's demise. But just like farmland gets fragmented as families grow and drift apart, the son of the iconic Devi Lal has become the subject of a family feud: on who gets to use his turbaned visage as a heraldic emblem.

Both the legacy party, son Abhay Chautala's Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), and the splinter Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) of grandson Dushyant Chautala, lay claim to his political estate—image, sway, electoral turf.

Takeaways

■ **Dushyant's JJP and Abhay's INLD fight over who is the real Chautala political heir**

■ **Neither was able to leave a mark in 2024 assembly poll, heredity may not build future**

On May 17, the JJP said Chautala's face would adorn its posters. The INLD reacted sharply. "You have no right to appropriate his legacy after betraying it," Abhay thundered. "We are his blood," Dushyant fired back, "we honour his vision." The heated words frame a larger source of desperation: both sides are fighting for relevance in a state where their influence is rapidly waning.

Look no further than the 2024 assembly election. The JJP had a pristine tally of zero; Dushyant, ex-deputy CM, finished fifth in his seat. The INLD barely bettered that, with just two seats in Sirsa. Upshot: beyond that home turf, the magic is fast fading.

Chautala had seen this coming. The 2018 family split had left him heartbroken—he tried to make peace, and eventually sided with his son, seeing Dushyant's exit as a betrayal. But voters see this as a tired soap opera: young Jats prefer the BJP over sub-regional politics. If the Chautalas have one hope, it's the Congress's shambolic state. Ex-CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda's age and tenuous rapport with New Delhi present an opening. But instead of party work, much less ideology, the Chautalas are relying on nostalgia. ■

By Kavitha Muralidharan

IN TIMES when historical controversies can raise enough dust to bury entire civilisations, the ancient Tamil site of Keezhadi has re-emerged as a flashpoint. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has asked the site's lead archaeologist to revise his final report of January 2023—essentially, to locate the site on a much later timeline than the 6th-8th century BC originally suggested by the evidence.

This has sparked fresh allegations of political interference in historical research. 'Post-dating' the site would take away all the excitement from a discovery that had conferred greater civilisational depth to Tamil Nadu, pushing back its Sangam era by three centuries.



► TAMIL NADU

THE AGE OF DISAGREEMENT

The ASI issues a stern decree to Tamil Nadu: do not travel too far back in time with ancient Keezhadi

Archaeologist K. Amarnath Ramakrishna, who led the early phases of excavation, has rejected the ASI's demand, stating that he stands by his 982-page report. His conclusions, he says, were based on unimpeachable scientific methods like stratigraphy and accelerator mass spectrometry. The state of the art in radiocarbon dating, the latter method has a precision of 40 years for recent antiquity.

A MATTER OF TIME

To be sure, Keezhadi still awaits full scholarly consensus, specifically on whether the prime evidence for antiquity—potsherds with early Tamil inscriptions—are coeval with the

carbon-dated charcoal layers. Also, whether its ceramic style accords with ancient Tamil Nadu's pottery chronology. But the ASI's May 2025 letter doesn't just seek corroboration. It calls for "necessary corrections" and insists the earliest layer not be dated before 300 BC. Ramakrishna isn't the only one who spies a prejudicial edge in the ASI adopting such an approach to "well-reasoned findings". For many in the South, it's part of a broader pattern—one where "science is subordinated to ideology, and archaeological evidence inconvenient to the dominant historical narrative is sidelined".

Keezhadi offers signs of a literate, urban Tamil civilisation along the

Vaigai river dating back over 2,600 years. Nearby sites like Agaram and Konthagai buttress that idea, with some lines of inquiry even suggesting possible evolutionary links of early Tamil-Brahmi to the Indus script. The trouble this runs into, of course, is that it challenges the Centre's Vedic-centred view of antiquity. Hence, the ASI missive is seen by many experts less as pure academic scrutiny, more as a formal curb on the kind of story Keezhadi can tell. If fully unfurled, that narrative can subvert the privileged space conferred on the Vedic/Sanskritic lineage, suggesting a parallel civilisational track in the South—with its own language, script and cultural norms. A putative continuum with Harappa would deepen that further.

Just as Keezhadi's findings were gaining national and international attention, Ramakrishna was abruptly transferred from Tamil Nadu to Assam in 2017 and ASI-led excavations slowed, later declaring no significant discoveries. In response, the state archaeology department took over Keezhadi work. Over time, that unearthed over 7,500 artefacts that buttressed Ramakrishna's conclusion.

That hasn't been enough, it seems, to persuade New Delhi. "The ASI has never been eager to acknowledge Keezhadi's truths," says CPI(M) MP and writer S. Venkatesan, who has written extensively on Keezhadi. "The BJP pushes mythology as history, but it works just as hard to erase our real past. But Tamil antiquity cannot be erased by government order."

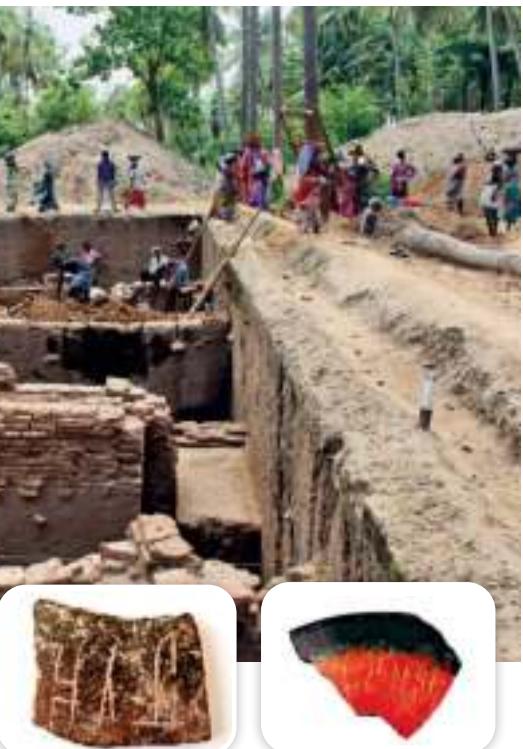
BJP leader Tamilisai Soundarajan counters that the Centre had funded the initial excavation. "The report was likely returned for administrative reasons, perhaps to avoid future questions," she says. In response, Venkatesan asks: "Why did you stop funding? If an excavation yields nothing, you may stop. But Keezhadi yielded everything. You stopped because what was discovered unsettled the very history you have been narrating." ■

Takeaways

► **ASI says Keezhadi should not be dated earlier than 3rd c BC**

► **Lead researcher stands by findings, which had created waves globally with a 6th-8th c BC vintage**

► **MEASURING DEPTH**
The Keezhadi site, and the potsherds with inscriptions in early Tamil-Brahmi (left)





COVER STORY

The New Creator Economy

A RISING WAVE OF DIGITAL STORYTELLERS AND INFLUENCERS ARE TURNING PASSION INTO PROFIT ACROSS ONLINE INDIA

By Suhani Singh | Photo-montage by Mandar Deodhar

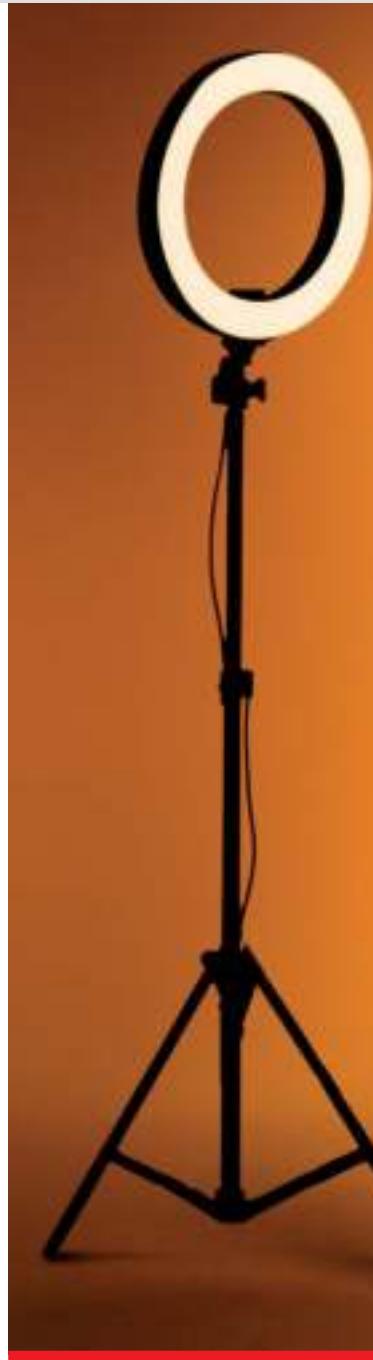
“I

never saw the world beyond my home. I never wished to because I was content with what I had. But, one day, my son said, ‘Ma, you cook so well, why don’t you share it with the world?’ I was shy, afraid of facing the camera, afraid to speak. But, slowly, social media taught me to be seen, to be heard, to be loved.” Fifty-one-

year-old Usha Bishayee, better known by her digital moniker @oldays_kitchen, won 430,000 hearts and 4.7 million views with this reel, in which she describes her first trip outside West Bengal, the first flight she took to Mumbai, where she’d eventually meet, and dance, alongside Instagram head Adam Mosseri.

Usha is one of India’s 4.6 million creators aka influencers for whom video-sharing platforms like YouTube and Instagram have been life-altering. Viewers couldn’t get enough of Usha’s scrumptious Bengali recipes and soon brand collaborations started streaming in. Today, Usha quotes the price of an iPhone 16—a neat Rs 75,000—to big brands. Son Suprabha handles daily operations, and the duo is looking to hire a manager given the explosion in Usha’s fandom.

The rise of creators like Usha is evidence of how Indians are warming up to individuals who want to show their authentic selves, often from the comfort of their homes. It helps that we are second only to Brazilians and Indonesians



**Crafting
Her Own
Universe**



As a child, Karishma loved dressing up in her mother's saris and copying characters from TV shows in front of a mirror. Two decades later, in front of her phone camera, she plays characters she dreamt up, including the popular Mummyji and Vicky. One of India's top comedy content creators, Karishma was a popular radio jockey in Indore before moving to Mumbai in 2023, juggling her

KARISHMA GANGWAL, 31

||RJ KARISHMA►
MUMBAI

8.21 MILLION subscribers

6.9 MILLION followers

job and her real interests—writing, shooting and editing original video content. About her "risky vocation", Karishma says, "You cannot be lax... It cannot be 'Main toh OG [original] hoon. Nope, you are replaceable." Karishma is broadening her horizons by writing, acting and producing a digital micro drama. *Bright Bhavishya Loading* is a "Karishmaverse" of multiple characters. ■

Suhani Singh



Illich, Quite Delish

The Bishayee family ran a sweetmeat shop, which took a hit during the pandemic. Financial struggles mounted, with a home loan weighing heaviest. In 2021, the mother-son duo Usha and Suprabha tried launching a YouTube channel. It failed. "But we couldn't give up," says Suprabha, who has studied hotel manage-

ment. Next time, they staked it all—selling their house to clear the loan and using the rest to buy an iPhone 14. "It was a leap of faith," says Usha.

Oldays Kitchen began as a humble venture—a mother in her old-world kitchen, cooking traditional Bengali dishes. By the third video, Suprabha had an idea: food-based rhymes. That formula—a short, fun-

**USHA BISHAYEE, 51
SUPRABHA BISHAYEE, 28**

**OLDAYS KITCHEN ►
MOHANPUR WEST BENGAL**

**3.2 MILLION subscribers
532,000 followers**

ny rhyme (*chhora*) at the outset, related to the recipe of the day, cooked in a rustic oven—struck a chord.



Their first viral hit came with a demo for *simuyier payesh* (vermicelli pudding). One day, Suprabha asked her to taste the food on camera and react. "Daarun!" (wonderful), she smiled—a word that is their signature now. The dream now? To open a café—perhaps in Kolkata, but more likely in Digha, Usha's windy hometown by the sea. ■

Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

WHAT IS CREATOR ECONOMY?

It is a collective of creators, platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat et al), brands and third-party intermediaries like talent management agencies who come together to generate revenue via content-driven models such as advertising, sponsorships, subscriptions, commerce, live-streaming, among other things

4.6 MILLION
Strength of creators in India in 2024, according to the Goat India Influencer Marketing Report, 2025

₹30-34 LAKH CRORE
Creator-fuelled consumption/creator-influenced spend in 2024, as per a BCG report titled 'Mapping India's Creator Economy'

₹3,600 CRORE
Value of the Indian influencer marketing industry in 2024, according to the Goat report

₹1.7-2 LAKH CRORE
Size of India's creator economy, as per the BCG report



COVER STORY DIGITAL CREATORS

in time spent online—1.1 trillion hours in 2024 as per consulting firm EY, an average of five hours a day glued to mobile screens, of which 70 per cent is spent on social media, video platforms and gaming. The most populous nation in the world also makes the highest number of Instagram reels and has the most YouTube channels (over 100 million, with over 15,000 having over a million subscribers). Little wonder that digital channels eclipsed TV to emerge as the biggest segment of the media and entertainment (M&E) industry, generating Rs 80,200 crore in revenues in 2024.

India's creator economy is now seen as a sizeable part of the M&E ecosystem. At the recent World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) in Mumbai, creators and digital platforms were as much the centre of attraction as Bollywood celebrities. TechnicalGuruji aka Gaurav Chaudhary moderated a panel, food and travel influencer Kamiya Jani aka Curly Tales was part of one; and there was Creatorsphere, a pavilion devoted to the fast-growing industry. In his opening speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the creator community, saying, "As the orange economy booms, I will tell every young creator in India, whether you are a musician in Guwahati, a podcaster in Kochi or designing a game in Bengaluru, you are all bringing a wave in Indian economy, a wave of creativity." He also met the 750+ finalists of the Create in India Challenge and announced the establishment of an Indian Institute of Creative Technology in Mumbai, to train a new generation of creators with new skills.

Anybody Can Be a Creator

"You can say that India has become a creator nation without batting an eyelid," says Ajay Vidyasagar, managing director, YouTube South East Asia and Emerging Markets. "The sheer energy and speed at which Indian creators are finding their voice and thereon succeeding on a platform like YouTube is extraordinarily inspiring." In 2022-2024, YouTube paid Rs 21,000 crore to those who create content in India: a sector that includes not just traditional media giants but also a burgeoning band of solo creators and artists. It plans to invest Rs 850 crore in the coming two years to accelerate growth. The magic of India's content creation revolution, feels



Vidyasagar, lies in how “diverse, ambitious and complex” it is and driven by youngsters hungry to learn and grow. “It’s not just one vector, one type of content shining. The plurality of formats and verticals and languages has led to this extraordinary inflection,” he adds.

What's driving this creative explosion? The widespread access to affordable internet and cheaper smartphones certainly, making it easier to consume content on social media. But it is also the lightning speed at which content is being created and going viral, leaving you with no choice but to take note. Take, for instance, the delightful “Prashant” meme. In this short split-screen English tutorial

video—titled “What is this called?”—young creator Ayush mispronounces an AI-generated enunciation of croissant as Prashant. Ever since it broke the internet in March, the quirky video has amassed over 17 million views, even landing Ayush an ad with Philips Home Living

**BEING SEEN WITH
CREATORS IS A MEANS
TO KEEP UP WITH POP
CULTURE TRENDS.
PERHAPS WHY YOU
SEE BILL GATES
HAVING TEA WITH THE
FLAMBOYANT DOLLY
CHAI WALA**

where he relishes, what else, a croissant while promoting an air fryer.

What's fascinating is that creators don't even have to follow any logic or lofty standards for their content; anything and everything goes. How else does one explain the virality of Assam's Rajkumar Thakuria, popularly known as Raku Da? A 70-year-old retired banker, his 'cringe pop' renditions with titles like 'You are a doctor, I am a driver', have struck a chord way beyond Northeast India, winning him 80,000+ subscribers on YouTube and 236,000 followers on Instagram.

Being seen with creators has now become a means to keep up with pop culture trends and remain relevant. And so it is that Bill Gates is sitting down for an interview with one of India's most

Food Inspector General

Revant Himatsingka is an anomaly among creators. Best known as the nutrition influencer who pulled up Bournvita for its high sugar content in his very first video, prompting a legal notice; compelled Lay's to switch from palm to sunflower oil in India; and started the campaign 'Label Padhega India', Revant is better known as a 'de-influencer'—someone who criticises brands for falling short on delivering the healthy food they ardently promise.

"The first year, I didn't make any money," says Revant, who put in his savings from

a job in the US into his creative foray. "I have one policy—don't do any food brand deals. I have been offered insane amounts...." These days, financial services firm Zerodha is sponsoring the production cost of his latest podcast, *The Simple Health Series*. Happily, a plywood brand has also approached him because he stands for "trust and credibility". ■ SS

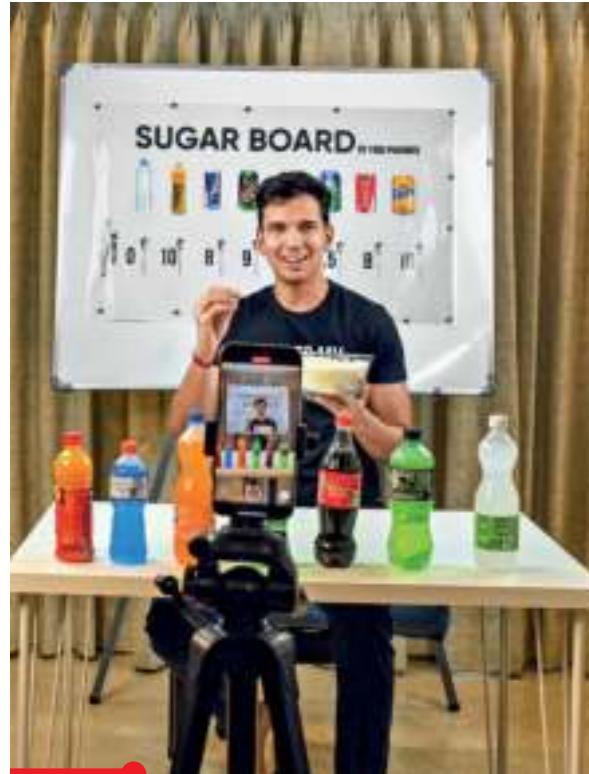
REVANT HIMATSINGKA, 33

IF FOOD PHARMER

MUMBAI

1.25 MILLION subscribers

2.8 MILLION followers



MANDAR DEODHAR





The Romance of Youth

Amazingly, Aaditya Shukla doesn't have a phone...yet. But naturally, the teen who has over a million people hooked to his reels knows how to make optimum use of those belonging to his mother and elder brother Akash. Aadi, as he is known in creatorsphere, has used the device to document his life—preparing for the CBSE boards, hanging out with his friends—that offers a peek into the minds of Generation Alpha. No concerns about his screen time have been raised, for he ain't a bad student. He recently scored 88 per cent in Class 10.

"If I had been doing badly in academics, teachers would have objected," says Aadi. "I'm proof that even while creating content you can study and do other activities." It helps that his content is squeaky clean

AADITYA SHUKLA, 15

II AADI ►

NEW DELHI

1.6 MN followers

and his demeanour one of disarming teenage amiability.

Shukla's creativity on Instagram has resulted in him scoring collab deals (SaReGaMa and Domino's, to name just two) and a DM (direct message) from casting director Shanoo Sharma's office, which resulted in a part in the Netflix series *The Railway Men*. "I had no idea one can make money from it," says Shukla, whose first sponsor deal earned him Rs 2,000. That's when he had 10,000 followers. Simple schoolmath suggests a far, far meatier pie now. ■

SS

popular podcasters, Raj Shamani (10 million YouTube subscribers and growing), as well as having tea made by Dolly Chai Wala (5 million Instagram followers), a Nagpur-based tea-seller known for his flamboyant style and signature way of serving tea.

Indian creators are also going places. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, Instagram dispatched Barkha Singh and Karan Sonawane (@focussedindian) as part of its creator squad to create a buzz for the Games with behind-the-scenes content and engaging videos. At Cannes, you now see more creators than film stars on the red carpet. This year, lifestyle creator Sakshi Sidhwani made waves with her Cannes-do spirit and style.

But Indian curiosity is not restricted to frivolous or "so-bad-it's-good" videos. Thousands of creators are leveraging digital platforms to share content, build communities, inspire change and earn a sustainable livelihood. Santosh Jadhav, a farmer from Karve village in Maharashtra, for instance. Known online as @indianfarmer, he has uploaded 5,000+ videos since 2018 as part of his mission to make farming a "respectable business". "I realised *kheti* [farming] isn't seen as a business. *Paisa milta nahin. Shaadi hogi nahin. Market haath mein hai nahin* (You won't earn money, won't find a girl to marry and the market is not in your hands). Climate is an issue," he says. "Let's change that image. Let's make videos that educate and benefit others." He and co-founder Akash Jadhav are leading the change. It has got them 4.94 million subscribers on YouTube, a production team in Pune and an annual turnover of Rs 1.5 crore in ad revenue and brand deals. Despite his success, Santosh still works in the fields, growing sugarcane, capsicum, cucumbers and more. "Our vision is to encourage sustainable and profitable residue-free farming," he says. The Jadhavs have also pivoted to educational content, launching their first online course—on growing tomatoes—for Rs 2,000.

Show Me the Money

In 2017, one already saw sure signs of evolution, with all the popularity inevitably being leveraged and marketised. That year, Viraj Sheth and Ranveer Allahbadia (@

TURNING POINTS IN THE CREATOR ECONOMY

FEBRUARY 2005

► Launch of YouTube; Google acquires it next year. India launch in 2008

2010

► The Viral Fever (TVF) starts a YouTube channel. Its spoofs and sketches garner millions of views, making it one of the first Indian success stories

2014-15

► Video-sharing app Dubsmash launches. Users share clips of them lip-syncing and acting to songs and dialogues
► India's first wave of content creators emerges, with CarryMinati, Bhuvan Bam, Ashish Chanchlani, Prajakta Koli aka Mostly-Sane and BeYouNick striking a chord with the youth

SEPTEMBER 2016

► Jio launches its 4G broadband service, giving millions access to the internet for free. The same month, TikTok launches in India

AUGUST 2020

► Instagram launches Reel, enabling its users to share short video content; the next month, YouTube joins the 'small is good' bandwagon with its own feature, Shorts

MARCH 2024

► A month before the general election, the Union ministry of electronics and IT hosts the National Creator Awards. Prime Minister Narendra Modi awards creators like Ranveer Allahbadia aka BeerBiceps

BADUSHAP.T.



Working-Class Hero

Biju has seen life from the hard angles—as a labourer at a quarry, as a helper in a lorry and, later, as a mini truck and jeep driver. Rendered jobless during the pandemic and stranded at home, he decided, on a whim, to shoot videos on a Samsung phone bought with money a friend gave him.

His first YouTube video, uploaded in 2021, was about a young man's hunt for a bride in neighbouring state Karnataka. That video became a viral hit. He has

KL BRO BIJU, 38

KL BRO BIJU RITHVIK ►
KANNUR, KERALA

 **72.7 MILLION** subscribers
 **1.2 MILLION** followers

not looked back since. His videos, in which only Malayalam is spoken, are centred around simple, workaday domestic activities or, say, a short trip, that features his family—wife Kavitha (28), mother



COVER STORY

DIGITAL CREATORS

beerbiceps) set up Monk Entertainment aka Monk-E, a creative digital media organisation aimed at bridging the gap between influencers and brands. Today, it represents some 120 creators across domains that include food, beauty, fashion, travel, lifestyle, podcast and technology. Among them is fashion creator Nancy Tyagi, who turned heads at Cannes last year with a striking pink gown that she designed herself. “Content creators are like five companies packed into one,” says Sheth. “For brands, it reduces their cost significantly, gives them better relatability with audiences and facilitates far more ease of communication.” It’s why they are choosing creators over the pricey, even fussy, Bollywood and sports celebs for

for campaigns across brands such as Dove, Simple, Ponds and Vaseline. "It's no longer just about follower count," Ved adds. "We look for influencers whose values align with the brand, who speak authentically, and who have a meaningful connection with their audience."

According to industry insiders, a beauty, fashion and lifestyle creator with a million followers and engagement of 50,000-700,000 views can earn Rs 5-10 lakh for a reel and Rs 2-3 lakh for an Insta story. Meanwhile, a popular entertainment creator with the same reach can earn Rs 80 lakh-1.5 crore a year. Instagram also has 'Born on Instagram', which connects brands

INDIA'S CREATOR ECONOMY IS NOT AN EXCLUSIVELY GEN Z PHENOMENON OR A PREDOMINANTLY METRO TREND—IT'S AN INDUSTRY THAT WELCOMES EVERYONE

quicker, targeted communication.

The Covid pandemic deepened the trend, opening up a wealth of opportunities for creators, primary among them a captive audience seeking to escape the dystopia outside. With access to celebrities restricted, brands increasingly turned to creators who not only acted, directed and distributed their content, but also had an active online presence and highly engaged communities.

Influencer marketing is not just empowering creators but also translating into money. The Goat India Influencer Marketing Report, 2025, valued the industry at Rs 3,600 crore in 2024, projected a growth of 25 per cent in 2025. “The new marketing model has evolved from just building brand salience to capturing attention and driving engagement. Influencers have been central to this shift by creating authentic, relatable relationships with their followers,” says Pratik Ved, vice president—skin care, Hindustan Unilever Limited. HUL has collaborated with digital creators like Ankush Bahuguna and Komal Pandey

to creators, and a Creator Marketplace to further strengthen the partnership.

Among its beneficiaries is Pune's Madhura Bachal (@madhurarecipe Marathi), 45, who best demonstrates the entrepreneurial streak of India's creators. One of the earliest to join YouTube back in 2008 with the goal of putting Maharashtrian cuisine on the world map, the former banker began by shooting videos when her baby was asleep. In 2016, she realised she would gain subscribers far more quickly if she went local, and so started another channel in Marathi. Today, apart from running three channels and writing 12 books, Madhura has her own line of spices and kitchen appliances, which she retails online. "I am making more as a content creator than I did as a banker," she says, revealing how she makes a six to seven-figure sum monthly from brand collaborations and content monetisation. It is a matter of intense pride and joy when she sees popular food creators like chef Ranveer Brar, YourFoodLab and Kabita's Kitchen post Maharashtrian recipes.

Karthiyayani (68), children Rithvik (8) and Rishvik (3 months), and his niece Anu Lakshmi (14). For Biju, an idle pursuit has led to fame and a livelihood; indeed, his days now revolve around chronicling his family life.

Rithvik does not reveal numbers, but says he earns "enough" to support his family as a content creator. Says Biju, "I do not know who invented YouTube and other platforms, but they are a blessing for people like me." ■

M.G. Arun



Not everyone is in it for the money, though. For 'changemaker' influencers, it's about doing the right thing. Take environmentalist Malhar Kalambe, for instance, who organises beach clean-ups. Or Siddhesh Lokare (@sidiulously), who ties up with brands to help those on the fringes and spotlight stories of everyday heroes. In the case of Revant Himatsingka (@FoodPharmer), revenue comes less from brands and more from speaking engagements for corporates and colleges. More than the views, it's the impact his videos have that matter more to Revant, his most recent success being the CBSE mandating a 'sugar board' in all its schools—highlighting the sugar content in soft drinks—in response to his #SugarBoardMovement. The move even merited a mention in an episode of PM Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* programme.

CREATORS DON'T NEED TO FOLLOW ANY LOGIC OR HIGH STANDARD. ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING GOES. THE TRICK IS TO BE AUTHENTIC

The More the Merrier

It's a myth that India's creator economy is primarily a Gen Z phenomenon or that it has a predominantly metro presence. It's an industry that welcomes everyone. Have a shooting device, an internet connection and a modicum of talent, good or bad, and you're on. Rupali Singh (@sad_rupaa) from West Medinipur in Bengal is happiest when she is creating Insta reels and YT shorts dancing to Hindi songs—her 'Tauba Tauba' jig with her two sons notched up 88.2 million plus views.

Chandni Bhabda's mimicry skills are so impressive that L'Oreal placed her with its brand ambassador Alia Bhatt on a couch and had her imitating the actress pitch-perfectly, to much laughter. "Once I have cracked the voice and the character, I just start rolling," says the 25-year-old, whose love for impersonations dates back to when she'd mimic her teachers at school. From living in rented accommodations for 18 years, Chandni's work on social media today has earned her enough money to buy her own pad in Mumbai suburb Andheri. Says Chandni, "I want to feel



As He Likes It

Madan Gowri's success proves that far beyond the crowded fields, there are millions of takers for content ranging from physics to politics. And that most prefer it in the vernacular. What started out as an English YouTube channel in 2017 has morphed into a wildly popular Tamil one. Well-researched and pared down without sacrificing complexity, Gowri's entries both slake and spur the thirst for knowledge. However, "you can't just talk about random things," he says. "I focus on what people want to know, like issues in mainstream media."

"Earlier, when you said you are a YouTuber, people thought it was a serious profession," he says. "But today...they are like... 'even my kid is a YouTuber'. The competition is way higher."

MADAN GOWRI, 31
IMG SQUAD ►
CHENNAI

8.17 MN subscribers
 2.6 MN followers

Proudly prolific, he has put up one video a day for the past 6-7 years. Courtesy his revenues from YouTube, Gowri has 40-50 people on his payroll and runs a digital marketing firm.

Like veteran creator Bhuvan Bam aka BB Ki Vines, Gowri is foraying into films, but says he will never forsake the badge of a content creator. "I'm getting this opportunity as I am who I am in content. The day I stop doing this, I won't have value." ■

SS

something and then make it. I want to tell stories. Brands love me for that. You give me a timeline, I will make it happen with no compromise on quality."

The democratic nature of the platforms has given wings to not just Gen Z-ers like Chandni but even Gen Alpha. Aaditya Shukla was 10 when he began making videos on Insta because he had "nothing to do other than studies" during the lockdown. His first earning was Rs 2,000, when his follower count was 10,000. Five years later, he has balanced studies and reel-making to have brands like Domino's wooing him to reach his teenage Insta audience of 1.6 million. Having lost his father in 2018, Shukla is happy to join his two elder siblings in helping his homemaker mother. "I have already built something, I won't have to suffer much later," says Aadi.

And it's not just shorts that sell, long format, too, has an audience of its own, emboldening creators like Raj Shamani to go from 45-minute interviews to 2-3 hour-long ones on his YouTube podcast show, *Figuring Out*. "I don't believe attention spans are getting shorter. I think the ability to judge content is getting faster," he says. The go-to podcaster currently has 50 people working for him in several capacities, allowing him to put out three episodes a week and 25 shorts a day across seven channels and several platforms.

And yet, most agree it's just the start for a young economy (just about 15 years old) that's hard to ignore. "In India, we don't have enough creators with critical mass yet. We are in the stage of building it," says Vinay Pillai, chief business officer at Pocket Aces, which runs Clout, a talent management wing that currently boasts 225 influencers. "Once it manifests itself, where we get creators like Kylie Jenner or Mr Beast, you will see the next step for the creator economy. Monetising the distribution they have built into commerce will radicalise the industry." Pillai believes the next set of creators will be different and interesting, for their inspiration will not

be film stars but their own kind. "The best creators even today and 10-15 years from now will be those who take their authentic selves and turn the volume up, not those following trends," he adds.

Artificial Intelligence will change the game even further, aiding the quick delivery of content. Tamil YouTuber Madan Gowri relies on tools like ChatGPT, Google's Gemini and DeepSeek for everything from research and

recent Influencer Compliance Scorecard showed that 69 per cent of India's top 100 digital stars failed to meet basic disclosure guidelines in brand collaborations. "This signals a widespread lack of awareness or willingness to comply, risking audience trust and regulatory action," says Manisha Kapoor, CEO & secretary general, ASCI. "Influencer endorsements in sensitive sectors like health, finance, gaming and virtual digital assets pose serious risks to public safety." The body expects influencers to disclose qualifications when promoting technical claims and more vigilance "not just from influencers but also from brands and agencies to prevent irresponsible promotions".

A crowded space of influencers has also meant more competition and creators having to keep their sleeves rolled up all the time. "It looks really easy to do, but difficult to sustain," says Sheth of Monk Entertainment. "Just try building distribution through short-form content for six months. I'll change my name if you don't feel disappointed at some point because you are not getting enough likes or views or don't have scripts to go along. It is a competitive space, because everyone with a phone is a possible creator." Even someone as popular as RJ Karishma, who has a community of millions on both YouTube and Insta, admits feeling the pressure of uncertainty. One month, it's brand deals a dozen, the next not so much. "When I started, there weren't that many creators and I had the power to say this is the amount I charge, I cannot go below this," she says. "Now, we are also compromising. There are more creators, so if not you, they will find somebody else."

Ultimately, it's the community they have built that fuels the creativity and keeps them going. Karishma cannot thank them enough. It was her enactments of saas-bahu characters on social media that earned her a viewership and enabled her to pay the bills for her mother's cancer treatment. "I am grateful to my audience. Because of them, my mother is alive." ■

UNDER THEIR INFLUENCE

Trust and authenticity are valued assets in influencers. Here is how they're categorised according to the number of followers

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| NANO | MICRO |
| *10-50,000 | 50-100,000 |
| CATEGORY C | CATEGORY B |
| 100-500,000 | 500,000-1mn |
| MEGA | |
| 1 million followers and more | |
| CELEBRITY | |
| Established figures in sports, entertainment, arts etc. | |

*Number of followers

scripting to editing and culling data on the issues that would drive audience engagement. "It has helped me increase viewership," he says. "All we have to do is find the right prompt and curate our content accordingly."

The Road Ahead

A growing economy likely calls for greater supervision. Given the influence creators now wield on consumer spend, there's talk of the harm they can wreak on vulnerable audiences, especially children and young adults. The Advertising Standards Council of India's (ASCI)

PAKISTAN

LY-80 OR HQ-16

Chinese medium-range Surface to Air Missile or SAM (40-70 km); mobile units integrated with radar and sensor networks

OP SINDOOR:
Countered Indian drones/missiles;
one likely lost to an Indian drone attack in Lahore; could not counter May 10 strike missiles



DEFENCE INDIA VS PAKISTAN

THE BATTLE FOR AIR SUPERIORITY

The four-day India-Pakistan conflict showcased modern aerial combat in all its dimensions. The Rafale vs J-10C face-off remains inconclusive, but India's multi-layered air defence system was a clear winner

By PRADIP R. SAGAR

AKASH

Indigenous short-to medium-range SAM (25-80 km)

OP SINDOOR:
Neutralised
numerous Pakistani
drones over
Jammu & Kashmir



ANI

A

S THE DUST SETTLES OVER THE INDIA-PAKISTAN CONFLICT—TRIGGERED BY INDIA'S MISSILE STRIKES on nine terrorist hubs in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Punjab province in response to the Islamabad-sponsored terrorist attack in Pahalgam in April—it is time for a reckoning of how the two adversaries fared. Uniquely, over four intense, dramatic days (May 7–10), the theatre of war was the skies on either side of the Line of Control (LoC) and the international border. Airpower was the key factor, manifested not in the dogfights of yore, but their modern equivalent, comprising precise strikes, electronic warfare and smart coordination between aircraft, ground radars and airborne early warning and control system (AEW&CS)/ Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft. Drones and missiles were used aplenty by Pakistan, and India's multi-layered air defence (AD) system rose to the occasion like never before. According to the Indian Army, its air defence units neutralised nearly 800–900 Pakistani drones during Operation Sindoor.

If, early on May 7, the Pakistani air defence had no immediate answer to the loitering munitions/kamikaze drones, and SCALP/ Storm Shadow air-launched cruise missiles and HAMMER bombs fired from the Rafales of the Indian Air Force (IAF) that destroyed the terrorist camps, the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) J-10CEs, F-16s and JF-17 fighter jets did pose a threat. Indeed, Pakistan has claimed—without definitive proof or explicit acknowledgement from India—that several Indian jets

were lost. Significantly, wary of each other's missiles, particularly those launched beyond visual range (BVR), both forces operated well within their respective air space. However, on May 8 and 10, after Indian missile and drone strikes took out vital Pakistani air defence radars in Lahore and Karachi—one precious PAF AWACS was reportedly lost too—its air defence systems were rendered toothless, largely driving the PAF from the skies. So, after Pakistan targeted Indian air bases and military installations with drones and missiles on May 9 and 10—almost all of which were intercepted and shot to pieces—it was helpless before India's retaliatory barrage of SCALP and BrahMos supersonic missiles, fired by aircraft and from the ground on eight Pakistani air bases, including the Nur Khan base near Rawalpindi, the general headquarters of the Pakistan army. Thus chastened, Pakistan is said to have called for a ceasefire.

Operation Sindoora was a demonstration of Indian precision and reach, and showcased India's capability to strike any target in Pakistan at will. Frank O'Donnell, senior research adviser at the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network and non-resident fellow at the Stimson Center, says that it signals India's ability for precision strikes on targets within each base and suggests its implicit capacity to incapacitate these bases if desired. "The very short flight time of India's air-to-ground missiles, and especially its reported use of the supersonic BrahMos, leveraged the continuing challenge for Pakistan of operationalising missile defence systems and the extreme difficulty of blocking cruise missile strikes. However, this challenge is also shared by India," he says.

OPPOSING AIR WARRIORS

Though in recent decades India has held a qualitative and numerical advantage in air superiority over Pakistan, the latter's acquisition of sophisticated Chinese aircraft has led analysts to suggest that the technological disparity is narrowing.

Among India's frontline fighter jets, the Mirage 2000H, armed with the Thales RDY radar (range: 100-130 km) and MICA missiles (both beyond visual range or BVR and short range or SR, with a reach of 60-80 km), excels in precision strikes but has an ageing airframe. The MiG-29UPG, with Zhuk-ME radar (range: 120 km) and R-77 missiles (BVR, with a range of 80-100 km) is agile, but lags in networking. The Su-30MKI, equipped with a Bars PESA radar (or a Passive Electronically Scanned Array radar with a 200 km range) and BrahMos missiles, offers long-range strike capability but has a large radar cross-section, meaning it can be detected by enemy radars. The Rafale has an RBE2 AESA (Active Electronically Scanned Array) radar and SPECTRA electronic warfare suite, which ensures data fusion across electromagnetic, laser and infrared domains to protect it from threats. Both PESA and AESA radars can track multiple targets at once. The Rafale, armed with Meteor and SCALP

SHIELDS UP AB

INDIA

S-400 TRIUMF 'SUDARSHAN CHAKRA'

Russian-made long-range surface-to-air missile system or SAM (400 km), intercepts aircraft, drones, missiles. Outclasses Pakistan's systems



OP SINDOOR: Reportedly downed 8 Pakistani missiles in Jammu (May 8-9)

BARAK-8

Developed with Israel, long-range SAM (70-100 km), AESA radar



OP SINDOOR: Countered drones/ missiles



ON TARGET A Pechora missile system

PECHORA, TUNGUSKA, OSA-AK

Russian-made short-range SAM/ guns (10-20 km); mobile and rapid-response weapons

OP SINDOOR: Effectively protected Indian air bases like Pathankot

BOFORS L-70, ZSU-23-4 SCHILKA

Radar-linked, self-propelled low-level air defence (LLAD) guns

OP SINDOOR: With MANPADS like Igla-M, Igla-S, shot down hundreds of Pakistani drones in swarms



LEGACY GUN The Bofors L-70 self-propelled gun is an old workhorse

PAKISTAN

HQ-9/P Chinese-made long-range SAM (100-200 km), less advanced than S-400

OP SINDOOR: Claimed to have downed 25 Indian drones; one likely lost to an Indian missile strike in Karachi



FM-90
Chinese short-range SAM (15 km); limited range, rapid response



OP SINDOOR: Tasked to protect frontline air bases like Nur Khan, ultimately failed to keep away Indian missiles on May 10

EYE ON INDIA
A TPS-77 MRR ground-based radar in Pakistan



"ABC" SYSTEM Tactical air defence linking ground-based radars, J-10C/ JF-17 jets, AWACS; enhances real-time targeting

OP SINDOOR: Claimed to have guided the PL-15 missiles that downed Indian aircraft

PAKISTAN'S INVESTMENT IN OFFENSIVE WEAPONS LAYS BARE ITS WEAK AIR DEFENCE CAPABILITIES, SAYS A DEFENCE EXPERT. DEVELOPMENT OF MISSILES LIKE BRAHMOS AND AKASH, TIMELY PROCUREMENT OF THE S-400 GAVE INDIA A BIG EDGE IN NON-CONTACT WARFARE

missiles and HAMMER precision-guided munition, is India's most advanced jet, but its small fleet size limits impact.

On the other side, Pakistan's Chinese J-10C fighters, armed with PL-15E BVR missiles, and equipped with dual-pulse motors and AESA seekers, mounted a challenge for the IAF. The J-10CE's AESA radar and its integration with Saab 2000 Erieye AEW/C enables long-range engagements, while the JF-17's KLJ-7A radar is less capable but still effective with networked support.

Operation Sindoor drew global attention to a possible aerial duel between the Rafale and J-10C fighters—both 4.5-generation multirole fighters. "Rafale is a proven platform, as it has been used in combat in Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, Iraq and Syria, while J-10 C has not seen any combat," says a key IAF official.

Military aviation experts claim that Pakistan's J-10C, manufactured by the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group, lags behind the Rafale, made by the French firm Dassault, in armament. The J-10C has 11 hardpoints (mounting points to carry weapons) and a six-tonne load capacity. The Rafale has 14 hardpoints and a nine-tonne capacity, including nuclear-capable munitions. The Rafale's 24-tonne take-off weight exceeds the J-10C's 19 tonnes, offering greater payload flexibility, though the J-10C reaches a higher 18,000-metre ceiling, compared to the Rafale's 16,000 metres. The J-10C excels in high-altitude performance; the Rafale dominates in versatility and range. Experts say that the Rafale holds a slight edge in terms of sensor fusion and missile performance. However, uncertainty persists over Pakistan's unverified claims of downing Indian jets, including Rafales.

"Public evidence does not confirm that a Rafale was downed by a J-10C-fired PL-15E missile. However, the loss of at least one Rafale demands an urgent review of technical and tactical vulnerabilities," notes O'Donnell. He adds that Pakistan and China have valuable combat data about western aircraft, aiding their fighter modernisation, while Pakistan's swift acquisition of Chinese platforms outpaces India's sluggish defence procurement, exacerbating the IAF's declining squadron strength.

THE SHARPEST EDGE

Features and performances of the Rafale and the J-10C, India and Pakistan's most advanced fighters

INDIA



PAKISTAN

RAFALE VS J10C

RAFALE
Used SCALP missiles, Hammer bombs with precision, destroying terror hubs in Pakistan on May 7; hit Pak air bases on May 10

Rbe2 Aesa
(200 km)

RADAR

Meteor
(150–200 km)

MISSILES

Spectra

EW SUITE

Netra, Phalcon

AEW&C SUPPORT

Multirole, Precision Strike

ROLE

36

NUMBERS

AESA Radar
(200–250 km)

Mica PI-15e
(145 km)

Chinese EW system

Indigenous Chinese EW

Multirole, BVR

25

J-10C
Pakistan claims to have shot down Ra-fales using PL-15s from J-10Cs; later, without AD support, they kept away as India hit air bases

Defence analyst Shreyas Deshmukh, research associate at the Delhi Policy Group, says that the Rafale vs J-10C comparison reflects a contest for battlefield superiority, given their similar capabilities. Though debris, including PL-15E remnants and possible MICA missile fragments from an IAF jet, were reportedly recovered, Deshmukh asserts that "no concrete evidence supports claims of aerial losses on either side".

INDIA'S AIR DEFENCE EDGE

For India, the real positive to have emerged from Operation Sindoora is the overwhelming success of its integrated air defence system. The two units that synergised perfectly to nullify all projectiles hurled at India are the IAF's Integrated

Air Command and Control System (IACCS) and the army's AkashTeer. The IACCS is an automated command and control system that integrates data at its control centres from air defence assets like ground-based radar, airborne sensors, AWACS/ AEW&CS, communication nodes and IAF command and control centres. The consolidated data along with real-time updates gives commanders of air defence units an overall situational awareness and full battlefield picture to respond to incoming aerial threats. Similarly, the army's AkashTeer is an air defence control and reporting system comprising radars and sensors that are connected to units of its air defence.

With the integration of the resources of IACCS and AkashTeer, the Indian air defence threw up a layered grid.

A DRONE WAR

Hundreds of drones were deployed in the conflict. Here are some Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that the adversaries used



INDIA

● **HAROP:** Israeli-made loitering munition/ kamikaze drone for precision strikes

HERON: Israeli ISR (Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance) drone

SKYSTRIKER: Israeli loitering munition

NETRA: Indian-made (IdeaForge) tactical ISR UAV

SWITCH: Indian tactical ISR/ strike UAV

OP SINDOOR: Indian Harop drones destroyed a Pakistani LY80 radar in Lahore. Other UAVs conducted strikes and cued aircraft—by providing real-time intelligence and surveillance—thus limiting manned aircraft at risk



PAKISTAN

ASISGUARD SONGAR: Turkey-made 300–400 surveillance/strike drones.

BAYRAKTAR TB2: Turkish armed ISR/ strike drone

● **BAYRAKTAR AKINCI:** Turkish advanced ISR/ strike drone

YIHA-III KAMIKAZE: Loitering munitions used in swarms, from Turkey

OP SINDOOR: Pakistan used 300-400 Songars, 400-500 YIHA-IIIIs in swarms to attack India early on; later, Bayraktar & Akinci drones targeted air bases/ installations. India's AD system shot most down

DEFENCE

INDIA VS PAKISTAN

EXPERTS SAY INDIA MUST NOT BE COMPLACENT DESPITE ITS STRONG SHOWING. THE IAF'S FALLING SQUADRON STRENGTH, AND THE SLOW INDUCTION OF FIFTH GENERATION JETS LEAVE GAPS THAT CAN BE EXPLOITED

Pakistani drone and missile attack.

In contrast, Pakistan's Chinese HQ-9 and HQ-16 air defence systems failed to detect and intercept the devastating Indian strikes on its air bases on May 10. Early on May 10, Indian strikes took out a Chinese-made LY80 air defence system using a Harpy kamikaze drone at Lahore, while a missile destroyed an HQ-9 system in Karachi. Comparative analysis also suggests that the S-400 surpasses the HQ-9 in performance. "India's multi-layered air defence systems exhibited greater effectiveness in deployment and integration than their Pakistani counterparts," a key defence official said.

Defence analysts say that for the past two decades, as a probable counter to India's Cold Start Doctrine, which envisages short, swift strikes into Pakistan that would avoid a nuclear escalation, Pakistan has been buying mostly offensive weaponry. "In contrast, India's strategic focus was on technological advancement and indigenous production, leading to investments in radars such as the ADTCR, Ashwini and Indra (electronically scanned array radars), sensor processing systems, jamming devices, and electronic warfare systems, including drone jammers as well as counter-battery radars," says Deshmukh. The

development of missile systems such as BrahMos and Akash, coupled with the timely procurement of the S-400, has provided India with a significant advantage in non-contact warfare, he adds. Thus, Pakistan's investment in offensive weapons lays bare its weak air defence capabilities, leaving its command and control exposed.

Ultimately, the conflict reaffirmed that modern warfare is driven by air power, not merely in terms of aircraft but through sensors, missiles, data networks, electronic warfare and unmanned systems. "Operation Sindoor is a testimony to the power of a capable air force," notes a senior defence analyst. "But no country can win future wars without continuous investment in modern air platforms and integrated defence networks." Despite its strong showing, experts argue that India must not become complacent. The IAF's thinning squadron strength and the slow induction of next-gen air dominance fighters leave gaps that adversaries may exploit in the future. ■

The first layer comprises counter drone systems like D4 and MANPADS (Man-Portable Air Defence Systems) like Igla-M and Igla-S, while the second layer has low-level air defence (LLAD) guns like Bofors L-70 and ZSU-23-4 Schilka self-propelled system, and short-range surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) like Pechora, Tunguska and OSA-AK. The third and fourth layers have medium- and long-range SAMs like Pechora, SPYDER, the indigenous Akash and the long-range S-400 Triumf and Barak-8 missile defence systems. India's counter-unmanned aerial system (UAS) technologies also played a major role in detecting and neutralising Pakistani drones. This multi-layered air defence network not only protected Indian air bases, army installations, airports and cities, but also protected Amritsar's Golden Temple from a



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|--------------------------|--------|---------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 वर्ष | 52 | 3120 | 2699 | डिजिटल+प्रिंट | 14% |

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..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



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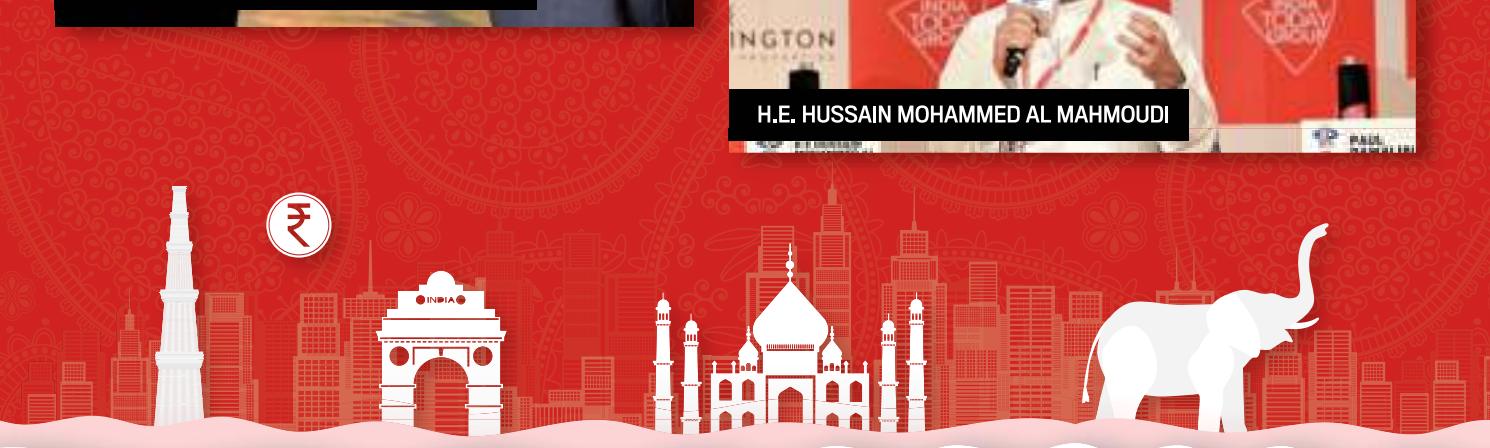
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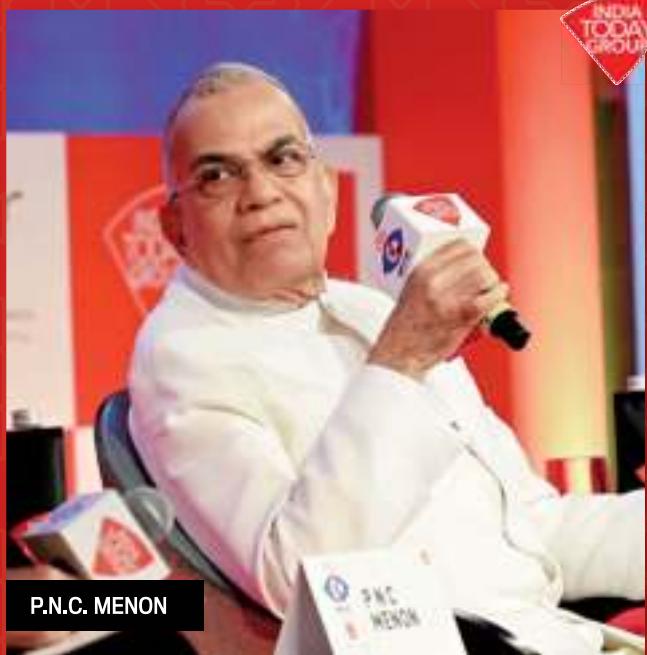


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THE ARMY PUSHES BACK

THE BANGLADESH ARMY CHIEF'S CALL FOR AN EARLY ELECTION SPARKS FRESH SPECULATION ON THE FATE OF THE PROF. MUHAMMAD YUNUS-HEADED INTERIM GOVERNMENT

By **Arkamoy Datta Majumdar**



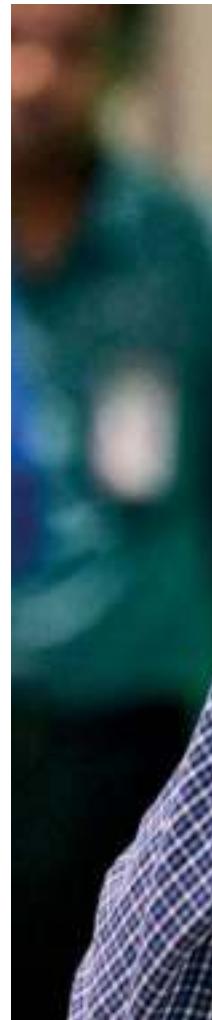
hen General Waker-uz-Zaman, chief of the Bangladesh army, addressed a durbar at Senaprangan, the army central auditorium in Dhaka, on May 21, speculation was rife that he might call for the ouster of the country's 'Chief Advisor' Muhammad Yunus. But that didn't happen. Instead, Gen. Zaman reportedly told senior officers that he hoped that by "January 1, 2026, Bangladesh will be governed by a new elected government". The statement, interpreted as a gentle ultimatum rather than a threat, did not sit well with Yunus's interim government.

By the evening of the next day, the pressure showed. Yunus reached out to former cabinet colleague Nahid Islam, one of the faces of the July uprising last year and convenor of the National Citizen Party (NCP), and reportedly expressed a desire to step down. Islam, of course, dissuaded him. Sources in the NCP, which was born out of the student-led protests that ousted the Awami League regime last year, claim that Islam opened unofficial discussions with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami to defuse the situation. On May 24, Yunus convened a cabinet meeting to address the growing tensions between his administration, the army and political parties, followed by meetings with BNP and Jamaat leaders. Later, Yunus's press secretary Shafiqul Alam sought to calm the waters. "All political parties have expressed their faith in Yunus," he said. "He is a man of his word. Between December and June 30 (2026), elections will be held. Dr Yunus will not remain [in power] after June 30."

It did little to clear the air. The BNP was already on record demanding an election by December. At the meeting with Yunus, party leaders had reiterated this position and also demanded the removal of three key figures in his administration: National Security Advisor Khalilur Rahman, and advisors Asif Mahmud Bhuyian and Mahfuj Alam. Rahman, in particular, has been in the thick of it of late, facing allegations of holding US citizenship, and rumours that he's out to depose Gen. Zaman—all of which he has denied. As for Bhuyian and Alam, both former student activists-turned-advisors, the BNP has long viewed them as conduits between the government and the NCP.

There is also resentment over the interim government's 'reinstatement' of some Awami League beneficiaries. These individuals, accused of acts of violence and corruption during the Sheikh Hasina regime, were to face inquiry or removal. Instead, their re-entry into the administration has invited accusations of betrayal from activists who had helped bring down the old order. That said, the Awami League itself has now been banned, under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

This disenchantment is mirrored within the civil administration and business community too. Among the many sources of frustration is the Yunus government's reform proposal, targeting the National Board of Revenue (NBR). The plan, aimed at overhauling tax assessment, auditing and compliance mechanisms, has met with fierce resistance from mid-level bureaucrats and the influential trade bodies. Business



▲ **COLD VIBES**
Gen. Waker-uz-Zaman and Prof. Yunus at the latter's swearing in as 'Chief Advisor' on Aug. 8, '24



AFP

**WAKER-UZ-ZAMAN IS A UNIQUE CASE.
HE'S NOT TRYING TO STAGE A COUP.
RATHER, HE WANTS FAIR ELECTIONS, WHICH
IS THE DEMAND OF MOST BANGLADESHIS.
SOUTH ASIA HAS NEVER SEEN SUCH A CASE”**

ALTAF PARVEZ, Political researcher and historian

leaders argue the reform is hasty and punitive, while civil servants see it as an attempt to impose top-down control without consultation.

BNP-NCP Friction

While both BNP and the student activists played a key role in the July uprising, things have now soured between the two. The NCP's primary target has been BNP veteran and former minister Salauddin Ahmed for his “rigid” stand; he is even accused of being an “Indian agent”. BNP insiders say the rebel stu-

dent leaders had reached out to Tarique Rahman, party chief Khaleda Zia's son and the party's acting chairperson, last year before they floated the NCP. “They admitted we were the most powerful political force and requested us to give up some seats for them,” says a source. “Our chairperson asked them to speak to Mr Ahmed. But when he asked which seats they wanted, they named 12 but wanted nearly 100.”

Tensions escalated further over the appointment of BNP leader Ishraque Hossain as mayor of Dhaka South City

Corporation. The interim government has resisted the move with a petition in court arguing that all polls held under the previous Hasina regime should be declared invalid. The standoff has now literally put the corporation in limbo, with BNP protesters locking the gates of the Nagar Bhaban office. Meanwhile, on the other side, government advisor Bhuyian has greenlit the appointment of environmentalist Mohammad Azaz—who is alleged to have past links with the banned extremist outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir—for the Dhaka North City Corporation, prompting fresh alarm.

Beyond elections, Gen. Zaman has also taken a firm stand against several contentious policies floated by the interim administration. These include the proposed privatisation of the Chattogram Port and plans to establish an aid corridor to the conflict-hit Rakhine region of Myanmar. At the durbar, the army chief reportedly said, “Corridor, ports and other policy-related decisions

will be taken by a political [read elected] government." Sources say he was particularly incensed about "foreign actors" attempting to influence sensitive national decisions—an apparent jab at NSA Rahman.

This isn't the first time national sovereignty has entered the spotlight. Even before her ouster, Sheikh Hasina had alleged that "a nation of white individuals" was pressuring her to cede control of the St. Martin's Island area, a charge she has been repeating in her voice messages to party loyalists, claiming that Yunus was "trying to sell off the country".

A Tense Standoff

Zaman and Yunus have been circling each other since the latter took over. The army chief was appointed on June 23 last year, just weeks before the uprising. To top it off, he is married to a distant cousin of Hasina's. Many believe Yunus has tried to neutralise the general's influence by elevating Rahman from 'high representative' to NSA. As a government source notes, "Gen. Zaman has been firm in thwarting a probe into the military's activities. Yunus was hoping to bring him under scrutiny via Rahman."

Yet Zaman's cautious handling of the political transition has won him some respect. His critics, though, point to how he refrained from stopping the violence and, indeed, detaining the Hasina leadership. A source close to the general, though, justifies the actions. "By allowing safe passage to Hasina, he helped prevent bloodshed. Neither were people murdered on the streets nor was Hasina attacked by the mob," he points out.

Mainstream politicians—including from the BNP—are also appreciative of his call for timely polls. As political researcher and historian Altaf Parvez put it, "Waker-uz-Zaman is a unique case. He's not trying to stage a coup. Rather, he wants fair elections, which is the demand of most Bangladeshis. I don't think South Asia has [ever] seen such a case." But he does add a note of caution. "This is a crucial time for the people of this country, he says. "Any small incident can snowball into some-

GENERAL DRAWS THE LINE

► Declares that Bangladesh must have a newly elected government in place by January 1, 2026

► Opposes interim government's plans to privatise Chattogram port, establish a Myanmar aid corridor; insists such decisions must be taken by an elected regime

► Warns against "foreign influence" on national policy-making, indirectly criticising advisors like Khalilur Rahman

► Signals disapproval of rising Islamist influence, flags controversial appointments linked to extremist networks

which, according to reports, doubled up as recruitment drives for the extremists. The Islamists got a shot in the arm when, on May 27, the Bangladesh Supreme Court acquitted Jamaat leader A.T.M. Azharul Islam, a death row convict charged with crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War. The verdict has sparked outrage among the pro-liberation and other political forces.

Meanwhile, India has also been making strategic moves, widely seen as a response to Dhaka's growing proximity to China and Pakistan. On May 17, it redirected all land route imports from Bangladesh—worth \$770 million annually—through seaports, effectively pricing them out of its border markets. For Dhaka, the impact may be severe: small exporters relying on cheap, fast land routes to India's eastern states now face delays and higher costs. The message is clear—India will weaponise trade to assert its strategic priorities and signal that market access hinges on political alignment. On the other side, Yunus is also amplifying the bad neighbour narrative, alleging an 'Indian conspiracy' to destabilise his government at a meeting with the political party Nagorik Oikya.

Even the ousted Awami League appears to be recalibrating. Speaking from an undisclosed location, party general secretary Obaidul Quader says, "I do not want to blame the army or the army chief...let us look forward." He refused to call Zaman a traitor unlike many of his colleagues and believes the current turmoil may turn out to be "a blessing in disguise for the Awami League and the people of Bangladesh".

Whether the Yunus administration holds credible elections and step aside by December 2025 is debatable. But with the military drawing clear red lines, resurgent Islamists pushing their agenda, political stakeholders growing restless, and cracks emerging within civil institutions and the economy, Bangladesh's future remains in ferment—calm on the surface, but pregnant with peril. ■

thing big. People here have accepted that, for some time, we will have a period of uncertainty."

Islamist Undercurrents

Indian observers have seized upon these developments across the border. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, former ambassador to Bangladesh, says, "Today, through the guise of a students' movement, Islamists have come to power in Dhaka. Prof. Yunus is the face, but the real force is an Islamist agenda hostile to India's security."

Recent intelligence assessments support this view. A core group of Islamist extremists are reportedly operating out of Dhaka, with active links to Hizb ut-Tahrir, Islamic State and the Ansarullah Bangla Team. Reports say they organise street protests under the Towhid Janata banner and orchestrate blockades targeting police stations and prisons. Over 50 public religious seminars have been held in the past six months,



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Sikkim CM
Prem Singh
Tamang

HIGH ON AMBITION

THE SIKKIM@50 CONCLAVE REFLECTS ON THE STATE'S TRANSFORMATION AND ITS FUTURE

PREM SINGH TAMANG
CHIEF MINISTER OF SIKKIM

Photograph by ARUN KUMAR

POLICY TALK

Tamang in conversation
with Raj Chengappa and
Arkamoy Datta Majumdar



A SMALL STATE WITH BIG VISION

The Sikkim@50 conclave showcased the Himalayan state's transformative journey, bold ambitions and its model of sustainable, inclusive development

Photographs by ARUN KUMAR



PREM SINGH TAMANG

Chief Minister, Sikkim

“ Our GDP is Rs 52,555 crore; our per capita income is the highest in India. With the blessings of the Indian government, we'll do a lot more work, so that Sikkim sets an example of how even a small state can achieve greatness ”

“ Now our literacy rate is over 90 per cent. We want to become a fully literate state by 2027.... Our vision is to establish one university in every constituency so that our students do not have to go outside the state. We aim to create an ecosystem where they get world-class education at home ”

“ We are fourth in terms of poverty alleviation. We will work to make Sikkim poverty-free.... We want to continue as a model for environmental protection, inclusive growth and innovation ”

T

The INDIA TODAY State of the States—Sikkim@50 conclave, held in New Delhi on May 22, marked 50 years since the Himalayan state's accession to the Indian Union. Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang—re-elected with a near-total mandate last year—hailed the moment as historic not just for Sikkim, but for the nation.

Tamang outlined three core governance priorities: national security, connectivity and human develop-

ment. He cited the transfer of the Sevoke-Rangpo stretch of the NH-10 from West Bengal to the central authority and upcoming railway connectivity by 2026 as transformative for trade and tourism.

On health, he shared that dialysis services have now reached every district hospital, cancer treatment has begun in the state, and a new 500-bed referral hospital is set to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 29. Education, aligned early with the National Education Policy, is also central. The state already has a literacy rate exceeding 90 per cent, and the government aims for universal literacy by 2027. Tamang also envisions at least one university in every constituency to stem youth migra-

tion. His flagship 'One Family, One Entrepreneur' scheme has disbursed Rs 240 crore in collateral-free loans to over 25,000 applicants, fostering grassroots enterprise. Environmental stewardship remains core to Sikkim's identity. The 'Mero Rukh, Mero Santati' (My Tree, My Family) scheme links afforestation with financial security for newborns.

The conclave also featured insights on strategic policy, sustainable development and Sikkim's vision for 2047. From women changemakers to educationists, from MPs, ministers and top officials to entrepreneurs and football icon Bhaichung Bhutia, the event showcased a 50-year-young state determined to scale new heights.

—ARKAMOY DATTA MAJUMDAR



To watch the full session,
scan the QR code

▼ **SIKKIM: A STRATEGIC VANTAGE POINT FOR INDIA**

HARSH VARDHAN SHRINGLA

Former Foreign Secretary

“Sikkim is your sentinel in the Himalayas...so strategically important for maintaining connectivity between mainland India and the northeast”



RAJWANT RAWAT

“Infrastructure development is linked to Sikkim’s strategic importance—the state has seen huge investments in roads, railways...airfields and supply lines from the rest of India. Sikkim has greatly benefited from this”

“The great power game is playing out right at our doorstep, and nothing is certain...so we must be agile and focus first on getting our immediate neighbourhood right”

▼ **BUSINESS**



M. RAVI KUMAR

Director, MSME, Commerce & Industries Department, Sikkim

“We are targeting around 30,000 MSMEs by 2030...working in multiple sectors. Emerging sectors like 3D printing and animation are also coming up”



DR KAJAL, Director,

Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Gol

“Under Unnati scheme, we have proposed an outlay of Rs 10,000 crore; for Sikkim, it is Rs 514 crore...it can really change the shape of Sikkim in the coming times”

▼ **NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
SIKKIM: A BIRD’S EYE VIEW**

D.T. LEPCHA, Rajya Sabha MP, Sikkim

“The way the Union government is overseeing Sikkim’s development since 2014, the state will become a model for other states”



INDRA HANG SUBBA

Lok Sabha MP, Sikkim

“We aspire to create good leaders who will not only follow us but outdo us in every aspect. This is how we grow as a society”



SANDEEP TAMBE, Principal Secretary, Science & Tech., Sikkim

“Sikkim is a pioneer in assessing and mitigating the risks of glacial lakes in the Himalayas.... Others are learning from our model”

CRAFTING ENTERPRISE IN THE HIMALAYAS



RAJ LAMA, Chief Coordinator,
Sikkim Entrepreneurship &
Economic Development Cell

“Till now, no firm from Sikkim has been listed on national exchanges.... If we can attract just 10% of the [funds] invested in start-ups nationally, that would be transformative”



REWAJ CHETTRI, Founder,
NE Taxi; OSD to CM for Skill
Development & Entrepreneurship

“In 2021, our company raised private equity from northeast venture funds. By 2030, Sikkim could have 100 start-ups raising money and significantly growing the ecosystem”



VIPUL GUPTA, Vice President & Head,
Corporate Affairs & Policy, Cipla

“Compared to other states, Sikkim offers a very friendly environment where problems can be quickly resolved. Improvements in transportation and road infrastructure have boosted the industry”

▼ TOURISM: SIKKIM'S GLOBAL MODEL

C.S. RAO
Additional Chief
Secretary, Tourism,
Sikkim

“NH-10 is undergoing final development...once it is fully functional, Sikkim can comfortably handle annual targets of 2-3 million tourists. This is a dream destination”



SRADHA SHARMA, Founder & Director,
Skipping Stones Private Limited (SSPL)

“The journey of the tourism industry in Sikkim has spanned over four decades, etched with hard work, blood and sweat.... Today, we are poised to push this further and put a target of about 20 per cent [of the GDP]”

KARMA T. BHUTIA
MD, Tashiling Residency,
Hotel & Spa, Gangtok,
and Marco Polo World Travels; Advisor, Travel Agents Association of Sikkim

“I've divided tourism into four As—Attraction, Amenities, Accessibility, and Atithi [Guest]...and as we get into the next 50 years, what I see is a Golden Sikkim”



RAJ KUMARI THAPA, Deputy Speaker, Sikkim

“In Sikkim, 50% of the HoDs are women... 50% reservation for women even in police recruitment”

ANNAPURNA ALLEY, IPR Secretary, Sikkim

“We have 1,333 women and 2,021 men in gazetted posts...that's truly a role model”

RINZING CHODEN BHUTIA, CEO & Founder, Agapi Sikkim

“Digital transformation has given entrepreneurs access to global markets at very minimal cost”

SERNYA PALMO, Founder, Palmo Handicrafts

“The younger generation is taking a very active role in promoting and preserving our heritage”

MANITA PRADHAN, Mountaineer

“There is no gender in the mountains. Whether you are male or female, you have equal capability to go up”

▼ FUTURE: SIKKIM@47

“Citizen participation is essential for a thriving democracy.... Transparency and accountability have strengthened trust”

YOUGAN GAMANG, Press Secretary to CM

“We must ensure that the benefits of development reach even the most remote corners of the state”

BIKASH BASNET, Political Secretary to CM



MINGMA NORBU SHERPA, Speaker, Sikkim Legislative Assembly

“Good governance means delivering on promises and ensuring inclusive growth for all sections of society”

PROF. MAHENDRA P. LAMA, Development economist; Founding Vice-Chancellor, Sikkim University

“Unless connectivity improves, Sikkim cannot fully realise its potential or contribute meaningfully to India's 2047 vision”

▼ SIKKIM'S SPORTING SPIRIT



RAJWANT RAWAT

BHAICHUNG BHUTIA, Footballer

“Football is like a festival in Sikkim... the problem is, after it ends, nothing happens for the rest of the year”

“Sikkim is green and beautiful—we can't spoil it in the name of development. We need sustainable development that protects forests and our cultural identity”

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▼ SPOTLIGHT: EDUCATION IN THE HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS



RAJU BASNET

Minister of Education, Sikkim

“We used to send children from humble backgrounds to affluent schools outside Sikkim, but their integration was difficult. That's why our CM started our own residential model school—fully free”

SONY VIRDI, Founder, Zion Education Trust, and Chairman, CII, Sikkim State Council

“Let's think about the year 2045.... If our children are not technologically driven, they will be left behind. Government jobs may not exist by then—they must be market-ready”

PROF. ASHIS SHARMA

Vice-Chancellor, Khangchendzonga State University, Gangtok

“[Under] the Chief Minister Internship Scheme, graduates are given hands-on experience.... Colleges and universities are also following the scheme”

▼ GREEN GOVERNANCE: SIKKIM'S GLOBAL STANDARD IN ORGANIC FARMING AND SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

PRADEEP KUMAR

Forest Secretary, Sikkim

“Sikkim is an example for the entire country—not only how to go organic, but how to stay organic...it has also managed to increase its forest cover”



BUDHA HANG SUBBA

Progressive kiwi cultivator

“Kiwi is the king of fruits—full of vitamins and potassium.... The challenge is marketing. That is the gap we need to fill”

DR S. ANBALAGAN

CEO, Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency

“We've shifted from production-side policies to marketing...linking producers to buyers and ensuring fair price discovery”



SWAPAN MEHRA

Founder & CEO, IORA Ecological Solutions

“Sikkim can earn over Rs 150-200 cr. annually through carbon and biodiversity credit markets just for maintaining its ecosystems”

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CINEMA ▶

MUTED MASTERPIECE

FILMMAKER **DIBAKAR BANERJEE** TALKS ABOUT HIS YET-UNRELEASED FILM **TEES**

A DISTINCT OEUVRÉ
Banerjee has been making Hindi movies for nearly two decades

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

It

had all the makings of a triumph—an acclaimed director, a powerhouse cast, and a standing ovation at the film's first Indian screening at the Dharamshala International Film Festival (DIFF) last year. Dibakar Banerjee's *Tees* drew cinephiles from across the country. Yet, the celebration carried the weight of heartbreak. In 2023, Netflix—the platform that had commissioned *Tees* in 2019 and to whom Banerjee delivered it in 2022—had quietly pulled the plug on its release, effectively locking away a film that deserved to be seen.

Led by Naseeruddin Shah, Manisha Koirala, Huma Qureshi, Shashank Arora, Zoya Hussain and Divya Dutta in pivotal roles, the 55-year-old filmmaker's triptych of stories follows three generations of a Kashmiri Muslim family. Across three different timelines—political unrest in 1989 Srinagar, communal violence in 2030 and censorship in 2043—*Tees* unfolds as its protagonists grapple with their identity, voice and systemic excision in an increasingly dystopian India.

With the film's commercial release in limbo, Banerjee spent the months since its DIFF premiere hosting private, non-ticketed screenings across India. Yet, it's not something he has done by choice. "The screenings are a way of generating commercial and critical interest in the hope that somehow *Tees* lives by being seen," Banerjee tells INDIA

SPANNING GENERATIONS

Naseeruddin Shah in a still from *Tees*



Across three different timelines, *Tees* unfolds as its protagonists grapple with identity, voice and systemic excision in an increasingly dystopian India

TODAY. Otherwise, unplayed, sitting on a hard drive, the film is as good as extinct. "In such a situation, an audience connecting deeply with the film is gratifying and saddening. You love the fact that it moves someone but rue the fact that it can't move more."

To explore *Tees*'s complex themes—rising communalism, generational trauma and queer marginalisation under a surveillance state—Banerjee, who co-wrote, directed and produced the film, pulled from both the personal and the political. This included memories from his childhood and neighbourhood, Indian television epics like *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad*, Ashapurna Devi's *Prothom Protishruti* trilogy and Robert Harris's speculative historical novel *Fatherland*, which he claims influenced him "subconsciously". But the film's urgency came from the filmmaker watching young couples, especially Muslims, trying to rent a flat in Mumbai and from the murder of Gauri Lankesh.

Banerjee has been making Hindi movies for nearly two decades—boasting an oeuvre that is both distinct and impossible to replicate. He debuted with *Khosla Ka Ghosla* (2006), a sharp satire about middle-class aspirations; helmed *Love Sex Aur Dhokha* (2010), a found-footage style anthology; and went on to direct a segment in Netflix-backed anthologies *Bombay Talkies* (2013) and *Lust Stories* (2018). In many ways, the expansive ambition of *Tees* was meant to be a culmination of Banerjee's evolution as a filmmaker. But with *Tees* buried, he became the very figure his film mourns: an artist muted by the system.

In between, the filmmaker kept busy, directing a short film and releasing a potent sequel to *Love Sex Aur Dhokha*. Yet, Banerjee still found himself grappling with waves of anger and frustration. Navigating the emotional toll of the film's shelving while continuing to move forward as a filmmaker was

Healing in the Himalayas



SUBHADRA MAHAJAN'S B&W FEATURE—SECOND CHANCE—is finally hitting Indian theatres

a “gradual” process—one he credits to therapy and a drive for inventive solutions. “Choosing your workmates well is virtually half the battle won,” adds Banerjee.

The disappearance of *Tees* may be best understood in the context of the controversy that surrounded *Tandav* (2021), the Prime Video series that drew right-wing ire for its portrayal of dissent and religious imagery. Despite edits, legal cases mounted, and fear took hold. It sent a clear warning to streamers, who became increasingly cautious about supporting projects that might provoke similar backlash. In such a fragile climate, films like *Tees* have arguably become collateral damage.

According to Banerjee, filmmaking is an expensive art form that demands “mediated investment” but which become an easy target because of its ability to reach out to a massive audience. Suppressing art that focuses on truth-telling, questioning and challenging narratives is a surefire way to condition audiences in the practice of distraction. “A generation growing up on moving images can be better controlled if cruelty, misogyny and empty spectacle are provided through films regularly,” he argues.

Simply by existing, *Tees* defies that conditioning. Invisibilising it makes clear exactly which stories are unwelcome in India today. And yet, its disappearance has only amplified the urgency of what it had to say. ■

—Poulomi Das

Battling the trauma of an illicit abortion, a woman retreats into the cold white of her Himalayan hometown in Subhadra Mahajan's poetic feature debut *Second Chance*. It has been doing the rounds of festivals since last year. Starring newcomers and non-actors, and shot entirely in black and white, Mahajan's microbudget film is having an unlikely theatrical release across India on June 13.

“It was a dream that this could be seen in theatres,” says Mahajan. “Something like this could be released in European countries perhaps, but *Second Chance* getting an Indian theatrical release is all because of distributor Shiladitya Bora.”

Bora's resume includes backing bold works such as *Masaan* and *Newton*. *Second Chance* will first release in key cities

like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune and Kochi, and expanding in subsequent weeks. Bora says, “We used a similar model for Anamika Haksar's Sundance winner *Ghode Ko Jalebi Khilane Le Ja Riya Hoon*, which had a successful run for 56 days in Indian theatres.”

Second Chance was shot in January and February of 2022 in Himachal Pradesh's Naggar and Lahaul. The opening scene was shot when the temperature was -20°C. Battling the biting winter was a small 12-person crew, plus three actors and three drivers.

About shooting the film in black and white, Mahajan says that is how she envisioned it while writing. “The central protagonist is finding light at the end of a very long and dark tunnel,” the Shimla-born filmmaker explains. “We always see the Himalayas

in full colour in every season. As somebody born and raised there, and I do a bit of photography, I noticed that this particular valley in the winter is really beautiful.”

As inspirations, Mahajan credits Iranian New Wave filmmakers Majid Majidi and Abbas Kiarostami, particularly their use of non-actors. While lead actor Dheera Johnson is a newcomer, Thakri Devi and Kanav Thakur are non-actor locals. Mahajan also took inspiration from Ansel Adams's B&W photography and Andrea Arnold's films such as *American Honey* and *Fish Tank*, which have “imperfect, young, female protagonists”.

“Black and white should not be considered a limitation,” she says. “There are million shades of greyness and monotone that are the entire spectrum of life in a way.” ■

—Devarsi Ghosh

A NEW WAVE
Shot in Himachal Pradesh, the film stars newcomers and non-actors



NATURE ▼

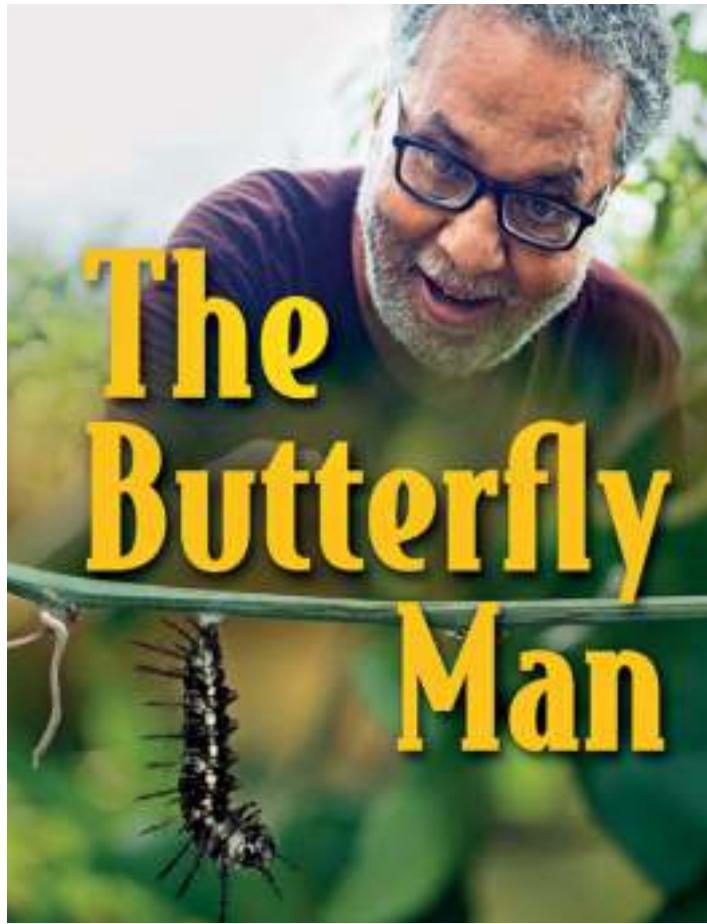
Chasing Wings

A new documentary puts the spotlight on the remarkable life and work of Isaac Kehimkar, the 'Butterfly Man of India'

The Dutch documentary filmmakers Sem Jones and Dennis Van Ooijen were busy filming in Maharashtra last year. Their documentary, *The Butterfly Man of India*, which is almost ready to hit the festival circuit now, centres around Isaac David Kehimkar, one of the country's premier experts on lepidoptera, especially butterflies. After a lot of to and fro online, the duo landed in Mumbai and headed to the hills of Karjat where he lives. "The film is about me and the

butterflies, and me using butterflies to make people fall in love with nature," says Kehimkar. What was special, he observes, was that they had him record his commentary in Marathi and have used it as is with English subtitles.

Growing up in a cottage in Govandi, a suburb of Mumbai, in a time before TV or the internet had taken over people's lives, Kehimkar had a childhood rich in pets, and plenty of pictorial books on American birds and African animals. When his dad gifted him a camera in the eighth grade,



Poster of *The Butterfly Man*; (right) Kehimkar's definitive field guide, *Butterflies of India*

Kehimkar started clicking his cats, which started him on the path of photographing nature. This love for nature later translated into his volunteering at an exhibition of snakes for the Bombay Natural History



It was the pre-quarterfinal at the WTT Star Contender Chennai in March and instead of celebrating his win Sreeraj Suravajjula simply stepped aside after the match. It was a moment to cherish for his defeated opponent, celebrated Indian paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal, as he called time on his glorious two-decade-long career. When they later teamed up in the doubles to make the semi-final, it was symbolic of the past and present of Indian table tennis coming together for an encore. "It was an honour to play against him as well as partner

SPORTS ▼

PADDLE TIME

The new guard of **Indian table tennis** is making its presence felt

him in his final tournament. I've grown up watching Sharath Anna, trained with him and reached out to him with all kinds of questions," says Suravajjula.

The tournament marked a transition of sorts, the new guard making their presence felt. Suravajjula, who recently broke into the top 100 of the world, reached the quarterfinal. India's highest ranked play-

"BANU WRITES IN A LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE"

Deepa Bhasthi on

translating Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*, which won the 2025 International Booker Prize

hand for yourself.

Q. Mushtaq's protagonists are often older women re-evaluating their lives. Is it fair to say redemption is a major theme of *Heart Lamp*?

That's a nice way to put it. These women, in their 40s or 50s, are really growing into their skins. They finally understand what they want and why, what are the things/people holding them back.

Q. Your win will inevitably put the spotlight on Kannada literature...what will new readers discover about this world?

Like a lot of Indian languages, Kannada has an extremely wide range of genres and styles, including a lot of experimental writing as well. I hope new readers arrive at

that kind of writing, eventually—novels and short stories that break new ground in terms of both form and content.

—with Aditya Mani Jha



AFP

Society (BNHS), which then led to an offer for a full-time job there. "There I was, right amidst a treasure of books as a library assistant! I was lapping up as much as I could from the library and watching people like celebrated ornithologist Dr Salim Ali at work when he visited BNHS," he recalls. "Working with the BNHS for 38 years

and *Butterflies of India*. It was Bittu Sahgal, editor of *Sanctuary Asia* magazine, who got him writing about butterflies. "While working on the story of the butterfly lifecycle, I became fascinated with them and, then onwards, butterflies took over my life," he says. Today, as co-founder and director of the iNaturewatch Foundation, Kehimkar works on improving urban biodiversity and encouraging 'citizen science'. "Butterflies are closely linked to the plant

"THE FILM IS ABOUT ME USING BUTTERFLIES TO MAKE PEOPLE FALL IN LOVE WITH NATURE," SAYS KEHIMKAR

until I retired as the deputy director (Natural History), I got the opportunity to travel to some of the places of my dreams," shares the author of six books, including the definitive field guides, *Common Indian Wild Flowers*

population. It's important to have areas left as wild patches for butterflies to flourish. Even the establishing of more open-air gardens would help the city's butterfly population," he points out. ■

—Priya Pathiyam

er, Manav Thakkar made a deep run into the semis, the first Indian male paddler to achieve the feat at a Star Contender tournament. By the end of the week, he achieved his career-best ranking of World No. 47, the mark of a rapidly improving player, who is also the World No. 10 in doubles alongside his partner, Manush Shah. "I was struggling in the initial matches. But over the last few months, I've been working on my mental preparations, for days when I'm not at my best," says Thakkar.

THE SIDESPIN
Suravajjula in action at a WTT event; (extreme left) Thakkar celebrates a win

Thakkar, Shah and Suravajjula have known each other since their junior days and have been mentored by Achanta at different moments of their careers. The trio has also been gaining vital exposure on the European club circuit—while Suravajjula plays in Austria, Thakkar and Shah ply their trade in France and the Czech Republic, respectively. "Manav and I train independently, but we've been playing together since our under-15 days," says Shah, who was crowned national champion in January. "If one of us beats a top player, it motivates the others also, pushes them to target similar results," adds Suravajjula. ■

—Shail Desai



AFP

COLONIAL WRAP
Some pre-independence paper labels with trademarks advertising British textiles

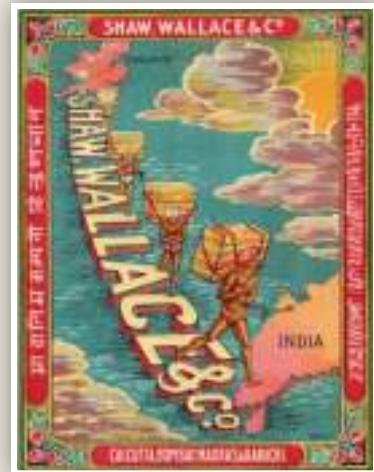
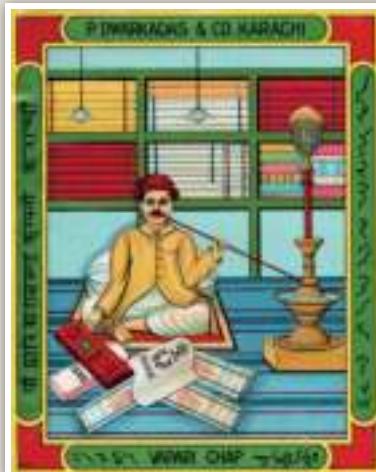
► ADVERTISING

What's in a Label?

COLONIAL-ERA ADVERTISEMENTS COME ALIVE IN **TICKET TIKA CHAAP**, AN EXHIBITION OF TEXTILE LABELS AT MAP BENGALURU

A woman in a gown riding a chariot pulled by four tigers. A king and queen perched on a globe surrounded by horsemen. Two elephants engaged in a tug of war. If you are wondering what they have in common—well, these are all chromolithograph prints of textile labels from the late 19th to the early 20th century. On display as part of the exhibition *Ticket Tika Chaap* at MAP Bengaluru, these paper labels are incredibly rich, detailed, colourful, and yet relatively forgotten. The labels were stuck on yardages of cloth that came to India from Britain.

MAP houses a collection of over 7,000 textile labels, and 300 have been selected for the show after two years of curatorial research by Nathaniel Gaskell and Shrey Maurya. “Manchester was the centre of this industrial mill revolution, and these labels came post the passing of the trademark act and the invention of



EACH PAPER LABEL HAS A TRADEMARK, AND REFLECTS LEGENDS, BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS. THE CORE IS ABOUT ADVERTISEMENT AND SHOWS THE APPEAL OF THE IMAGES

chromolithography that allowed mass printing,” explains Maurya.

Each of these paper labels is a trademark and has a striking image at the centre, a border space that has the name of the selling agent and their locations. The wide range of imagery on these labels were chosen to appeal to the customer. Impeccably designed, the core is about advertisement. “You appeal to people’s sense of devotion, their desire for a beautiful woman or man, to have a laugh, or feel part of

modernity,” says Maurya.

The images reflect legends, beliefs and traditions and show inspiration, imitation and appropriation. This exhibition tells a story of a world poised at the precipice of something new and the story of what inspired and appealed to people, making the labels invaluable markers of that time. ■

—Bindu Gopal Rao

On until November 2, at MAP Bengaluru, Citi Gallery, Third Floor, Kasturba Road

THE LISTICLE

Art and photography exhibitions to look out for this month



On view at **ART EXPOSURE**,
16/2, Lake Terrace, Kolkata-700029
till June 15

▼ KOLKATA TRYST WITH MODERNITY

Art Exposure's **Indian Modern Art: Evolution of Narratives** brings together a wide-ranging assembly of artists whose works trace the shifting contours of modern Indian art. It covers a broad swathe—from the early 20th-century revivalists in Bengal to the late-century modernists. The selection is anchored in movements like the Bengal School and extending to the radical modernism of the Bombay Progressives, featuring works by Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Amrita Sher-Gil, Ramkinkar Baij, F.N. Souza as well as Arpita Singh, Jogen Chowdhury, Bhupen Khakhar and Manjit Bawa.

▼ DELHI Pleasing Patchwork



On view at
HUMAYUN TOMB WORLD HERITAGE SITE MUSEUM
till August 30

On display currently at the Humayun Tomb World Heritage Site Museum are five Roman Mosaics—for the first time in India. Presented by the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre, the 2,000-year-old mosaics are from the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Accompanying them is *MOSAICO: Italian Code of a Timeless Art*, an exhibition that takes visitors on a journey through over 2,000 years of Italian mosaic craftsmanship, spotlighting iconic sites.

▼ AHMEDABAD NATURE OF MAN

Curated by art historian Uma Nair, **Purusha Prakriti** is a group show of 40 artists—from modern masters to installation artists—on the interplay of nature and the human form. Highlights include a dedication to Himmat Shah; sculptures by Dhananjay Singh and Jesús Curia; a centenary celebration of K.G. Subramanyan; works by Jyoti Bhatt and Bhajju Shyam; and Ankon Mitra's origami butterflies.

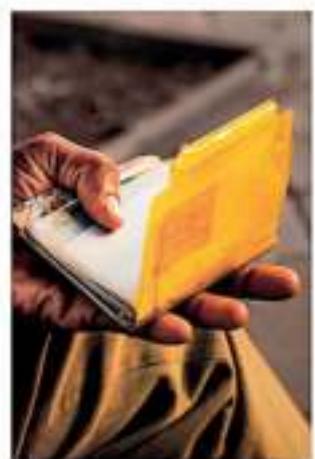
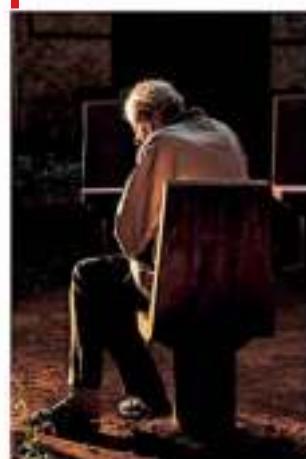


On view at **BESPOKE ART GALLERY** till June 10

▼ DELHI GLIMPSES OF MAXIMUM CITY

Jhalak, Shahid Datawala's exhibition of photographs at Gallery Espace, explores the architecture and street life of Mumbai, which he has been chronicling since the 1990s. The body of work on display is much more recent and showcases a year's worth of shooting. An exploration of intimacy, **Jhalak** offers thought-provoking pairings of images—"an ice cream cone juxtaposed with a shawarma spit...an earlobe placed next to a hand holding a red rose, and such like".

On view at **GALLERY ESPACE** till June 15



—Compiled by Amit Dixit

STILL SMASHING

Thirty-eight-year-old squash champion Joshna Chinappa's win at the National Doubles Championships shows she's still in fine form



Q. You recently won the women's final at the National Doubles Championships alongside Anahat Singh. Do you have a long-term plan with this pairing?

Anahat and I were casually discussing the doubles and decided to play together. We will be playing the Asian Doubles Championships in Malaysia in June. She is a solid player, so it makes it easier and more fun.

Q. How have you modified your game with age?

I have a deep appreciation and respect for my body and what it has done over the past three decades for me to be able to play squash professionally. I definitely have to put in more work in terms of how I prepare for a game with my strength training, fitness, diet, etc.

Q. You've been playing squash for three decades now. How has the game evolved over the years?

The game has definitely gotten a lot more intense physically and you have so many different players with amazing skill to add to that physicality. There are so many tournaments happening all around the world and in India.

Q. What do you make of the next generation of Indian players?

There are a good crop of young players doing well at the junior and professional level. It's so good to see about 6-7 of them playing the big PSA events consistently. I hope more juniors make the switch to go pro because that's where the real test is.

—with Shail Desai



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