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MAY 5, 2025 ₹100



INDIA TODAY

PAHALGAM MASSACRE

PAIN AND PUNISHMENT

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WHAT INDIA CAN DO NEXT**



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with her slain
husband Vinay in
Pahalgam



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Terrorism is war by other means. It's a war waged by cowards, especially when they attack unarmed innocent civilians. This is what happened when four armed terrorists murdered 25 tourists and one local on the green meadows of Pahalgam. In Kashmir's long tryst with violence, it marks the worst terror attack on civilians in the past two decades. The hand of Pakistan's ruling establishment is evident. What goaded Pakistan into this misadventure is easy to see. Internally, it faces insurrection along two fronts. The Pakistani Taliban is raising hell on the Afghan border, and Afghanistan is no friend either. Adding to its troubles is the Balochistan situation. This is at its most incendiary phase ever, with militant violence and state crackdowns claiming over 1,000 lives since 2024. Pakistan has also dropped off the list of America's geostrategic favourites, and its economy lives hand to mouth on an ongoing \$7 billion IMF bailout. China's vision of using Pakistan as a transit zone, too, is now hampered with its highways running into the Baloch quicksand. As for the political process, it has not entirely recovered from the charismatic Imran Khan's troubled exit from the stage. The present army chief Gen. Asim Munir's tenure has seen the deposed premier's arrest but has done nothing to arrest the dip in the army's popularity on the street.

Even so, from a logical perspective it is surprising that Pakistan should undertake such a high-risk gamble over whose outcome it will have little control. It was once called a bonsai democracy but is now a broken state which simply cannot afford a war with its bigger and more prosperous neighbour. But Gen. Munir seems to have his own agenda in ratcheting up the temperature with India. In a speech just a week before the massacre, he provocatively called Kashmir Pakistan's "jugular vein". Perhaps the logic behind the Pahalgam attack was to create a 'spectacular' diversion in Kashmir. The timing with US vice-president J.D. Vance's visit to India would attract global attention. There is a pattern to this. In 2000, during President Bill Clinton's visit to India, 35 Sikh villagers were killed by Lashkar-e-Toiba gunmen in the Chattisinghpura massacre. Domestically, such incidents appeal to the hotheads and create an illusion of purpose. India's narrative of normalcy on Kashmir was also hurting Pakistan, especially with a long lull in violence and the beginning of the tourist season registering an unprecedented boom.

Pakistan may expect India to repeat the pattern of retaliation it adopted after Uri and Pulwama. It might even want it. But a hard military action by no means exhausts India's strategic canvas. India has already acted on a range of non-military punitive steps. A day after Pahalgam, the Modi government suspended the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-bor-

der terrorism. No one has turned off the tap just yet, but Pakistan's two key provinces, Punjab and Sindh, can hurt in the long run if India expedites its dam projects. An informal naval blockade of ports, or the targeting of oil supplies, is another option. Diplomatic ties have been downgraded from cold to frozen.

The occasion demands there be a demonstrative nature to the response. One option is a kind of 'Balakot Plus', combining a 2019-type air strike on terror camps inside Pakistan with a surgical strike across the LoC, like the one after the Uri attacks in 2016 in which our commandos killed an estimated 150 militants. India's target would be the 42 active terrorist launch pads across the LoC, with squads of about 110-130 gunmen. One can also assume the ceasefire on the LoC is now defunct and it will probably be lit up with an aggressive exchange of fire. The Modi government has acted with maturity and not taken any hasty action despite emotions running high and the outcry from the public for revenge. The prime minister has issued a stern warning. He said: "India will identify, trace and punish every terrorist and their backers." The use of the word 'backers' was deliberate. It clearly refers to the Pakistan army. The Pakistan establishment should remember that Modi does not flinch from taking bold decisions. These may not be immediate but are likely to be conclusive. Covert operations can neutralise terror capabilities with precision. A notch or two above that would be a tactical missile strike on the headquarters of the main terror outfits. But that needs a calculation of its own effect: an escalatory ladder where

Pakistan's fingers too will hover nervously over buttons that can fire everything from conventional missiles to tactical nukes. New Delhi may calibrate its steps away from the threshold of full-scale war. It wouldn't want to cede the initiative to world powers, which Pakistan's suspension of the Simla Agreement can enable, and thus miss its objectives. The idea is to design a response that delivers lasting and absolute deterrence.

Pakistan must realise the ground has shifted. Even Kashmir has seen protests against terror. Pahalgam perhaps represents a turning point that old-school merchants of violent jihad have failed to notice. New Delhi must ensure the strategists at Islamabad and Rawalpindi are never again emboldened to repeat this. India has been placed in a position where a response is inevitable. How the government proceeds with its many options will shape the subcontinent's immediate future. If it succeeds, it could become Prime Minister Modi's greatest legacy.



October 29, 2001



(Aroon Purie)

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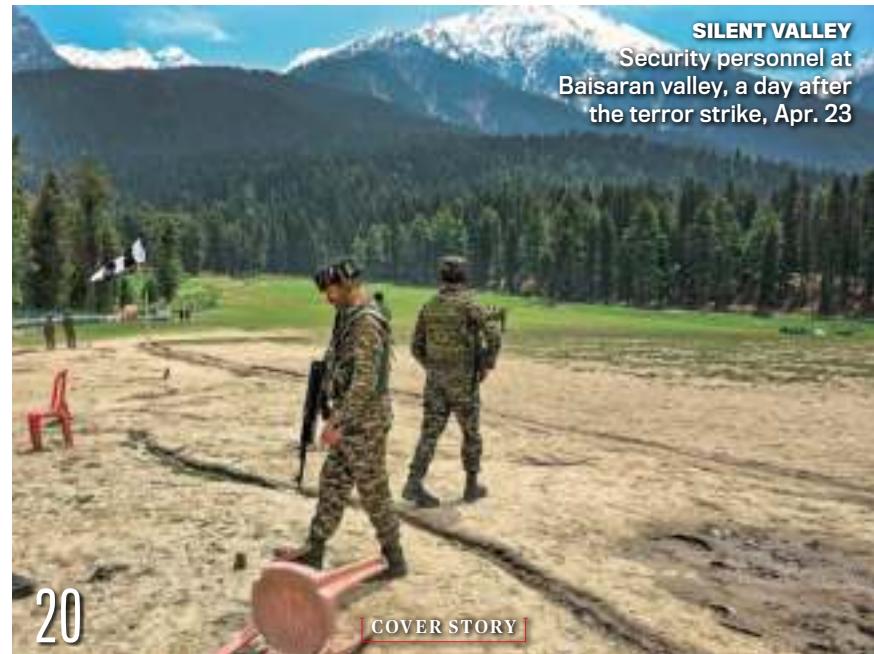
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Security personnel at Baisaran valley, a day after the terror strike, Apr. 23



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WELLINGTON MEWS
AL MARJAN ISLAND

TAJ WELLINGTON MEWS AT AL MARJAN ISLAND CRAFTED FOR THE CONNOISSEUR OF GRANDEUR

*Set against the pristine backdrop of Al Marjan Island, **Taj Wellington Mews by BNW Developments** is a sublime expression of limitless luxury, where the grandeur of Taj's legacy seamlessly fuses with contemporary brilliance. This ultra-luxurious residential marvel is not just a structure but a narrative, artfully told through two curvilinear towers rising from a circular podium. Its architectural rhythm reflects India's regal heritage, reimagined with modern precision and purpose.*

From the moment one arrives, the project emanates a quiet sophistication. Thoughtfully sculpted balconies enhance the silhouette of the façade, while panoramic sea views and a curated landscape lend a sense of uninterrupted serenity. Interiors are defined by refined craftsmanship, Calacatta pink marble, antique brass, oak and walnut accents come together to form spaces that are equal parts regal and restful. Expansive French

windows usher in the golden island light, illuminating neutral palettes adorned with jewel-toned highlights and spiritual undertones.

*At Taj Wellington Mews, luxury is not just aesthetic, it's experiential. Every corner is designed to nurture wellness, foster tranquility, and evoke a deep sense of harmony. Residents can unwind in the spa, meditate in the Zen garden, or savour curated cuisine by the pool, all within an ecosystem that elevates **holistic living**.*

*With proximity to RAK Central, residents enjoy both seclusion and seamless connectivity. A paragon of modern elegance and cultural richness, Taj Wellington Mews is an heirloom in the making. For the discerning few who seek not just residence but resonance, this is **island living at its finest**, crafted with grace, grounded in heritage, and destined for legacy. Every corner echoes sophistication and the sea's rhythm.*

"BNW DEVELOPMENTS HAS PLAYED A TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE IN RESHAPING RAS AL KHAIMAH'S REAL ESTATE LANDSCAPE."

Arch. Abdulla Al Abdouli,
CEO of Marjan

A COASTAL ASSET WITH GLOBAL APPEAL

*Taj Wellington Mews is more than a luxurious residence, it is a rare investment opportunity positioned at the confluence of beauty, profitability, and long-term value. Located on **Al Marjan Island** in Ras Al Khaimah, a rapidly ascending global tourism destination, this development is strategically placed to deliver high rental yields and consistent demand. With the UAE's central location offering seamless access to Europe, Asia, and Africa, Ras Al Khaimah is steadily becoming a magnet for international visitors, luxury travelers, and investors alike.*

*This oceanfront development stands as a symbol of resilient, future-forward investment—offering panoramic sea views, curated **wellness amenities**, and architectural elegance that appeals to both short-term renters and long-stay residents. Its tranquil setting combined with close proximity to RAK Central and Dubai ensures year-round desirability, while the government's robust infrastructure growth and visa reforms further solidify **RAK's stature as a luxury real estate hotspot**.*

*At the heart of this landmark project is **BNW Developments**, a leading UAE-based firm with a proven track record of creating exceptional urban sanctuaries. With an impressive portfolio of upcoming ultra-luxury developments across Ras Al Khaimah and Dubai, BNW is not only shaping skylines but also setting new benchmarks in value, innovation, and craftsmanship, making Taj Wellington Mews a wise addition to any discerning investor's portfolio.*



08 Minutes
Wynn Resort



10 Minutes
Al Hamra Mall



14 Minutes
Al Hamra Golf Club



16 Minutes
Royal Yacht Club, RAK



34 Minutes
RAK Airport



KERALA: PINARAYI'S
MAN UNDER
SCANNER PG 11

BIHAR: A
TENSE
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UPFRONT



TALKING
BUSINESS US
vice president
J.D. Vance with
PM Narendra
Modi in New
Delhi, Apr. 21

INDIA-US RELATIONS

GOING BEYOND TRADE TIES

By Pradip R. Sagar

Cynics could say the surrounding sound wasn't too auspicious. Within a day of his touchdown, US Vice President J.D. Vance had the mortification of seeing his India visit being cited in the same breath as a tragedy in Kashmir. Correlation,

not causation, was a maxim already in play—sorrow had enveloped the Vatican soon after a pit-stop by the veep en route to India. Not to speak of the grief his boss had given to the world economy, the only one that could be directly addressed to Vance, and which he was pre-

pared to answer for. "We're not here to preach that you do things a certain way," he said in the only public engagement of his four-day visit, at the Rajasthan International Centre in Jaipur, on April 22. "We come to you as partners, looking to strengthen our relationship."

DHANUKA: THE KEY TO FARMERS' PROGRESS, BRIGHTENING INDIA'S FUTURE

Dhanuka Agritech Limited's technological solutions have transformed farmers' lives nationwide. With increased production and income, they are becoming self-reliant, contributing to food security and exporting products globally, which positions India as a potential food hub. This change reflects Dhanuka's dedication alongside the power of entrepreneurship and innovation.

LEADING INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Dhanuka Agritech, a leading agri-input company in India, is globally renowned for innovation and quality. Forbes has recognized it thrice as one of Asia-Pacific's "Best Under a Billion Companies." Listed on BSE and NSE, it received "Company of the Year" from FICCI in 2018. Founder Dr. R.G. Agarwal's visionary leadership has propelled Dhanuka to heights, earning him an honorary doctorate from Amity University.

EXTENSIVE NETWORK AND EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE

Dhanuka's extensive network in India includes four manufacturing units, 39 warehouses, over 6,500 distributors, and 75,000 dealers. More than 1,500 techno-commercial staff assist farmers with application methods, training, and solutions, boosting production capacity and quality. The Dhanuka Agritech Research and Technology Centre in Palwal, Haryana, features advanced facilities for crop protection, biostimulants, drones, precision tech, and modern spray techniques. Former Haryana Chief

Minister Shri Manohar Lal inaugurated the centre, which provides vital soil and water testing for local agriculture.

FROM A SMALL DREAM TO GLOBAL SUCCESS

Dhanuka's success story began with a dream of global reach. Founder Dr. Agarwal switched from textiles to agrochemicals in 1968. A Shri Ram College of Commerce graduate, he promoted fertilizers and pesticides across the country. His vision established Dhanuka as a leading agrochemical company. In 1980, he acquired Northern Minerals Private Limited in Gurugram, marking Dhanuka's inception. Dhanuka offers over 321 products, including insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, and plant growth regulators for crop safety and development. NABL-accredited labs provide technology and eco-friendly agricultural solutions.

DR AGARWAL: INDUSTRIAL VISIONARY AND PHILANTHROPIST

Dr Agarwal is a successful entrepreneur and inspiring philanthropist focused on social upliftment and rural development. He has significantly contributed to water conservation, education, and healthcare. Under his leadership, Dhanuka prioritizes business ethics and transparency, enhancing its social impact and values. Dr Agarwal established four senior secondary schools in Rajasthan, transferring them to Vidya Bharati Adarsh Shikshan Sansthan, Jaipur. He built seven check dams, improving rural lives. He regularly conducts social projects through CSR and family trusts, showcasing his broad vision. At the Indian Phyto Pathological Society and ICAR-CCRI conference in Nagpur, Hon'ble Union Minister Nitin Gadkari awarded Dr. Agarwal the "Best Corporate" prize.

DHANUKA: FARMERS' INDISPENSABLE ALLY
Dhanuka's primary goal is to enhance farmers'

income and make India a developed nation by 2047. The company empowers farmers through the latest technologies and environmentally friendly chemicals. It promotes advanced green chemistry technology over highly toxic pesticides, making these solutions effective in minimal amounts per hectare. This technology is delivered to farmers through partnerships with six Japanese companies. Dhanuka is leading in modernizing agriculture in India and is committed to elevating it to new heights through strategic plans.

CALL FOR A RISE IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

According to Dr. R.G. Agarwal, India lags behind developed nations despite being agrarian. Our GDP is only one-third of China's. He stated three primary reasons for this delay:

1. Lack of Latest Technology: Cutting-edge technologies like precision agriculture, IoT, IT, and drones are not reaching farmers on a large scale. However, Dhanuka is working with VKVs, research institutions, and ICAR, partnering with over 15 agricultural universities to disseminate these technologies.

2. Lack of Suitable Prices for Farmers:

Farmers face financial difficulties without proper value for their produce. The government has initiated solutions through e-markets and private investments. Agriculture requires long-term stable policies to break free from constraints and attract private investments.

3. Issue of Fake Agricultural Inputs: Counterfeit insecticides, fertilizers, and seeds threaten farmers' livelihoods and food security. Dr. Agarwal has called for stringent laws and collaborations with the agriculture ministry and state governments to address this issue.

By tackling these challenges, Dhanuka strives to elevate the agricultural sector to prominent national and international platforms, initiating a new revolution in India's agriculture.

■ RG AGARWAL



TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VEEP'S VISIT

Those words may have been reassuring for Indian audiences. Most would have watched his live TV joust with Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky, some may have harkened to the take-no-prisoners approach in his February speech to European leaders. But equations with India are different, and New Delhi's tactical nous, too, is considerable. By all parameters, Vance's India sojourn was deemed a successful one for both sides, with all the optics and signalling on relevant issues entirely in place. The primary mood-lifter was Vance's assurance that his government is committed to buttressing trade relations with India through the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) that both sides agreed to work on during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's US visit in February.

Things had seemed on course—there was a broad directionality. But that was before President Donald J. Trump pulled out his 'Liberation Day' blitzkrieg of reciprocal tariffs on April 2. Even if it got off lighter, India, too, copped a 26 per cent tariff. Then Trump put a 90-day pause on the whole exercise, but that didn't end the uncertainty over what the landscape would look like once the fog lifted. For India, that meant a whole lot more heavy lifting would be required to get its BTA on favourable terms. It's against this backdrop that Vance's April 21-24 visit helped soothe nerves, signalling that an autumn deal is on its way.

Within a day of his arrival, statements from the Prime Minister's Office and the White House put out that the terms of reference for the BTA negotiations had been finalised, thus laying down a roadmap. The second round of face-to-face talks, in fact, kicked off in Washington DC on April 23—the Indian delegation, led by chief negotiator Rajesh Aggarwal, exchanged preliminary views with US officials on the scope and scheduling of sector-wise tariff reduction. Expectations are that India would be able to talk tariffs down on some of its merchandise exports in lieu of lower import tariffs on a few US

► **Vance's visit gets the optics right, assures Delhi that the Bilateral Trade Agreement is on course**

► **PMO, White House say a roadmap is set for BTA; talks start in US**

► **It will help achieve bilateral goal of reaching \$500 million trade, lower tariffs on US goods, help India protect its farm sector**

► **Vance urges**

India to buy more defence and energy products; offers F-35 jets, Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stryker armoured vehicles

► **India-US cooperation in Indo-Pacific, West Asia, Ukraine also part of Modi-Vance talks**

► **Vance says India-US ties will shape 21st century, admires "tough negotiator" Modi**



ANI

▲ **FAMILY TIME** J.D. and Usha Vance with their children at Delhi's Akshardham temple, Apr. 21

goods. Back in India, Vance echoed Trump by calling PM Modi a "tough negotiator", saying that was the reason why the US respected him.

The bonhomie will be important if the multi-sector partnership deal is to bear fruit. Its original plan was to eliminate US angst over India's trade surplus by boosting overall bilateral trade to \$500 billion (Rs 43.4 lakh crore), including both merchandise and services, by 2030, from \$194 billion (Rs 16.6 lakh crore) in CY 2023. Trump's tariffs put a blip on that, and industry players say only a BTA can salvage at least a part of India's present trade with the US. If India is to protect its agricultural sector and push for greater

access to the US market, there will be a quid pro quo—perhaps in energy. The US seeks greater access for its energy exports (LNG, crude, ethanol, coal) to India's rapidly growing energy market. India had increased purchases of US energy during Trump's first term and there have been hints that New Delhi could hike it further as part of measures to reduce India's trade surplus.

Trade, of course, is not merely about commodities, it has a geopolitical correlate. During their April 21 meeting, Modi and Vance reviewed US-India cooperation in areas such as energy, defence and strategic technologies. Partnership in the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad, China's military presence, the Ukraine-Russia war and the West Asia situation—all the macro topics figured in the talks. In his Jaipur address, Vance urged India to buy more American defence products and ramp up energy purchases and, echoing Trump, offered India the F-35 stealth aircraft. US-made Javelin anti-tank missiles and Stryker

BESIDES A TRADE PACT, MODI AND VANCE ALSO REVIEWED US-INDIA COOPERATION ON ENERGY, DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGIES

Pinarayi's Man Under Scanner

By Jeemon Jacob

armoured vehicles were also on offer, so were co-production of munitions and equipment, signalling that defence ties can go beyond a buyer-seller relationship.

Dr Harsh Pant, vice president, Observer Research Foundation, says the biggest takeaway from Vance's visit was that India and the US remain committed at the highest levels not only to concluding an early trade agreement but also to using that emblematically to foster bilateral ties. Vance, he tells INDIA TODAY, has signalled that "India will continue to play a very important role in the foreign policy matrix of the Trump administration".

Vance arrived in New Delhi with his family on April 21, and toured popular destinations in Jaipur, Agra, and Delhi over the next few days. Vadluru village in Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district is the ancestral village of the VP's wife, Usha Vance. But despite the personal flavour, Vance's visit involved significant behind-the-scenes diplomacy—it comes weeks after that of the US Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, for a geopolitical conference.

Vance's focus in Jaipur on sectors like data centres, pharmaceuticals and under-sea cables also signals a targeted approach to deepen economic interdependence in critical tech-driven industries. India's data centre market is projected to grow from \$6 billion (Rs 51,306 crore) in 2023 to \$10 billion (Rs 85,510 crore) by 2028 and US tech giants like Amazon, Google and Microsoft are investing in the infrastructure. Both nations also collaborate on semiconductors et al in the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). Also, the US seeks to diversify its pharmaceutical supply chain away from China, and Indian pharma—which supplies 40 per cent of the US generic drugs market—is a natural investment destination.

Vance's upbeat comments—like "India-US ties will shape the 21st century"—were tempered by hard business sense. But the frostiness in ties in the last phase of the Joe Biden presidency (post the assassination attempt on Khalistani leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun) is clearly dispelled. Now for both sides to make it count in a stable, mutually profitable way. ■

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's favoured bureaucrats just can't seem to stay out of trouble. After the gold smuggling through diplomatic channels racket that landed his ex-principal secretary M. Sivasankar in jail in an Enforcement Directorate (ED) case in 2020, it's the turn of K.M. Abraham, the 66-year-old retiree redrafted as Pinarayi's chief principal secretary and CEO of the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board, to face the heat.

The Kerala High Court has directed the CBI to register a disproportionate assets case against the former chief secretary. The 1982 batch IAS officer is perhaps known more for his

2008-11 tenure in the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), where he was instrumental in investigating the alleged fraudulent dealings of Sahara Parivar Ltd and indicting its chief, Subrata Roy.

Now he stands accused in a case filed by self-styled public crusader Jomon Puthenpurackal. The HC order states that, *prima facie*, "there are enough materials on record to register an FIR" against Abraham. The petitioner's case rests on three properties in the accused's name that are alleged to be beyond his known sources of income—a flat in Thiruvananthapuram now said to be worth Rs 1 crore, another apartment in Mumbai claimed to

ON YOUR MARKS CM Pinarayi Vijayan presents a T-shirt to his chief principal secretary K.M. Abraham (left) at a sports event



JOIN THE PROBE

► CM's chief principal secretary K.M. Abraham faces a disproportionate assets probe

► Kerala HC says there is "prima facie evidence" to merit a probe

► In 2016, Abraham had got a clean chit from

the state vigilance department in the case



► CM Pinarayi is in some bother with an SFIO case against his

daughter Veena Thaikkandiyil, involving fraudulent payments to her IT firm

► Kerala faces an assembly election in early 2026, and Pinarayi, looking for a third term on the trot for him and the CPI(M), can ill afford the controversies

probe by CBI or any other agency". He points to how after the Sahara Parivar indictment in 2009, the CBI and I-T department had looked into his assets and even verified family members' banking transactions. He claims they had not found any discrepancies in the accounts then. "I've listed all my income and submitted records. Now, it's my 43rd year in public service and I don't mind another scrutiny," the 66-year-old told INDIA TODAY.

For CM Pinarayi, the Abraham case must bring a strong sense of déjà vu. A year before the 2020 assembly election, the Kerala CM had been battling the gold smuggling allegations against Sivasankar. And now with the 79-year-old chasing a historic third term in 2026, there is not just the Abraham case but also a Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) probe against his own daughter, Veena Thaikkandiyil. The MD of Exalogic Solutions Pvt Ltd, a Bengaluru-based IT services provider, she is accused of receiving Rs 2.7 crore from the Kochi centred Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd without offering any services. The high court has ordered status quo for two months on a sessions court ruling taking cognisance of a complaint in which Veena and 12 others are accused. The SFIO has charged her under Section 447 of the Companies Act which deals with punishment for fraud, with stringent penalties, including jail, for up to 10 years.

Legal circles are of the view that unlike the charges against Veena, the CBI probe against Abraham is a ploy to attract Enforcement Directorate (ED) action and get the Kerala CM embroiled in an investigation by the time the state election rolls up in early 2026. Pinarayi is no stranger to such tactics, but how he tackles the latest mess will also affect the future of his party, the CPI(M), which can ill afford to slip up in the only state where it is in power. ■

be worth Rs 3 crore, and a shopping complex in Kollam, Kerala, said to be worth Rs 8 crore.

The state vigilance department had investigated the same case and given Abraham a clean chit in 2016. Their report says that the IAS officer took the flat in Thiruvananthapuram in 2002 by paying Rs 13.5 lakh in instalments; purchased the Mumbai flat for Rs 1 crore with a loan from the State Bank of India in 2009; and that the shopping complex was jointly owned with his two NRI brothers, and was built for Rs 2.5 crore. The vigilance department had fixed the 'check period' for Abraham's assets from Jan. 1, 2000 to Dec. 31, 2009, but the HC calls that a "farce". It wants the check period to be from Jan. 1, 2003 to Dec. 31, 2015.

Meanwhile, Abraham has met the CM and offered to quit his posts. He has also written to him, implicating two people, a trade union leader and a former civil servant who served during the Congress government (2011-16), saying they were behind the conspiracy along with the petitioner. Their phone conversations, sourced by the vigilance department during its probe, were listed to prove his point. Fingers

"I WELCOME THE PROBE BY CBI OR ANY OTHER AGENCY... THIS IS MY 43RD YEAR IN PUBLIC SERVICE AND I DON'T MIND ANOTHER SCRUTINY"

K.M. ABRAHAM
Chief Principal Secretary,
CMO, Kerala

have also been pointed at ex-DGP Jacob Thomas (who's now with the BJP), saying he was in league with the petitioner. Abraham is moving a special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the HC order.

The former IAS officer also has friends batting for him. "I have known Abraham for a long time," says Sheela Thomas, a retired additional chief secretary and now MD of the Kottayam-based Hindustan Newsprint Ltd. "He is an officer with high integrity and, unlike many others, someone who does not yield to pressure from corrupt people. It's most unfortunate that he's being investigated in such a case."

Abraham says he "welcomes the

A Tense Alliance

By Amitabh Srivastava

A pointed remark made by Congress general secretary Sachin Pilot in Patna on April 11 was enough for Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav to reach out to his key ally's top leadership. Pilot had said that the chief ministerial candidate of the RJD-Congress alliance in Bihar would be decided only after the election later this year. Widely seen as a message to the RJD not to take the Congress for granted, the statement appeared to signal a shift in tone.

By April 15, Tejashwi was in New Delhi, meeting Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi. Behind closed doors, he is learnt to have revisited the bitter memory of the 2020

election, where the alliance missed power by just 12 seats. The RJD had emerged as the single largest party, winning 75 of the 144 seats it contested; the Congress, however, won just 19 out of 70, dragging the coalition short of a majority. Even the Left had done its bit, winning 16 out of 29.

As a concession, on April 17—just two days after the New Delhi meeting—Tejashwi was named the head of the INDIA bloc's coordination committee, responsible for seat-sharing and other poll strategies in Bihar. It signalled that the Congress is not looking to rock the boat—yet.

Meanwhile, the Grand Old Party is allowing itself a spot of bullishness: it has embarked on a spirited revival in Bihar after years of

dormancy. Rahul Gandhi has already visited the state thrice this year, aligning himself with pro-backward and Dalit causes, including joining Kanhaiya Kumar's 'Palayan Roko, Naukri Do' (stop migration, give jobs) march in Begusarai. Insiders say the RJD leadership is not entirely nonchalant about Kanhaiya's attempt to garner popular appeal.

The Congress's leadership shuffle speaks volumes too. In February, Rahul favourite Krishna Alavaru, a bright young spark with an INSEAD degree, was made the AICC state in-charge, signalling a clear break. A month later, Dalit leader Rajesh Kumar—from the numerically significant Ravidas community—replaced forward-caste veteran Akhilesh Prasad Singh as the Bihar unit chief. Clearly, the Congress is keen to reclaim space in a state it once dominated, and step out of its partner's shadow.

It won't be just a matter of turning up with good intentions, though. The RJD has to give right of way. How generous will it be? Well, Tejashwi's hopes of securing power, flowing from incumbency fatigue after two decades of Nitish Kumar, also stand buoyed by a potential Muslim consolidation as a result of Waqf Bill amendments. In this climate, the RJD may be less willing to risk indulging a Congress experiment at resurgence.

But the Congress looks determined. After some 35 years in the boondocks, the 2024 Lok Sabha election gave it a glimmer of respectability—the Congress won three of the nine seats it contested, while the RJD won just four of 23. Not only that, Rahul's second cross-country yatra, which passed through Bihar, also pretty much set the narrative with its caste-plus-livelihood focus. The party, expecting that street cred to bear fruit, appears unwilling to settle for crumbs in the upcoming assembly election.

But despite the new energy, the Congress faces structural chal-



SHOW OF HANDS

Rahul Gandhi joins Kanhaiya Kumar's 'Palayan Roko, Naukri Do' march in Begusarai, Apr. 7

CONGRESS HAS EMBARKED ON A SPIRITED REVIVAL IN BIHAR WITH RAHUL GANDHI ALREADY VISITING THE STATE THRICE THIS YEAR

lenges. It lacks a strong local leadership, organisational muscle and a dependable vote base. Unlike in Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan, where the Congress remains the principal challenger to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in Bihar, it is still a minor player—piggybacking largely on the RJD's Muslim-Yadav support. In fact, over the years, Congress stalwarts such as Akhilesh Singh have been accused of being overly pliant toward the senior ally.

Internal Congress dynamics haven't helped. Former party chief Ashok Choudhary defected to Nitish's Janata Dal (United) in 2018 and now adorns his cabinet. Even a promising ally like Pappu Yadav, who merged his party with the Congress, was left in the lurch—denied a Lok Sabha



TEJASHWI YADAV HAS BEEN NAMED THE ALLIANCE'S COORDINATION COMMITTEE HEAD, SIGNALLING THAT THE CONGRESS IS NOT LOOKING TO ROCK THE BOAT YET

ticket in Purnia last year, allegedly due to Tejashwi's reservations. He contested as an Independent and won. Firebrand leaders like Kanhaiya were also kept on the sidelines until recently, furthering deepening the disconnect between the Congress and potential voters.

When Kharge addressed a gathering in Buxar on April 20, the modest turnout told its own story. Intent alone won't win elections. For now, both parties are bound in a tense embrace—aware that a split could be fatal, but also wary of ceding too much ground. As one Congress leader put it, "Our alliance is a double-edged sword. The RJD's base may support us, but others may stay away because of them." It's a dilemma the party will have to resolve. ■



WORLD AUDIO VISUAL & ENTERTAINMENT SUMMIT

SOFT POWER TO MAKE WAVES

By Suhani Singh

The Indian media and entertainment (M&E) sector is set to showcase its growing soft power at the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES), an initiative by the Union ministry of information & broadcasting to position the country as "an unparalleled global powerhouse" in the cultural and creative domain. The summit, scheduled from May 1-4 at the Jio World Centre in Mumbai, will bring together prominent figures like industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Adar Poonawalla, Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, film stars Amitabh Bachchan, Rajinikanth, Mohanlal, Chiranjeevi, Shah Rukh Khan,

Aamir Khan, Akshay Kumar, Allu Arjun and Alia Bhatt, and filmmaker S.S. Rajamouli.

Early this month, at a media summit in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said WAVES as a platform intends to empower Indian artists to create and take their content to the global stage. "WAVES should reach every home and every heart," he emphasised. The summit, too, will kick off with a keynote address by the PM, celebrating India's rich, diverse and growing M&E landscape.

Panel discussions, master-classes, workshops and dance and music concerts fill what's a loaded line-up of popular stars, industry stalwarts and powerful honchos.

CENTRE STAGE
Fountain of Joy
at the Jio World
Centre in Mumbai



They include a masterclass by Bollywood star Aamir Khan; filmmaker Karan Johar in conversation with Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan; tributes to yesteryear actors Manoj Kumar and Smita Patil; and performances by Oscar-winning music composers A.R. Rahman and M.M. Keeravani, as well as singers Shreya Ghoshal and Shankar Mahadevan. The event will also champion the generation next of Indian creators in 32 categories, including animation, gaming, broadcasting, comics, radio, advertising and film, through an award ceremony on day two.

One of the key objectives of the summit is to have global M&E leaders invest in India through the platform as well as encourage discussions, generate ideas, facilitate innovation and collaborations with heavyweights in the sector from across the world. This week, at a roadshow in Hyderabad to promote the summit, Sanjay Jaju, secretary, I&B ministry, said WAVES would be the first-ever global summit covering the entire gamut of the

ON THE AGENDA

■ **Amitabh Bachchan, Rajinikanth, Chiranjeevi, Mohanlal, Hema Malini and Mithun Chakraborty in a session moderated by Akshay Kumar**

■ **A masterclass on 'redefining Indian cinema' by Aamir Khan**

■ **Karan Johar in conversation with Shah Rukh Khan**

■ **Performances by A.R. Rahman and M.M. Keeravani, and Shreya Ghoshal and Shankar Mahadevan**

■ **The generation next of Indian creators in 32 categories will be awarded**

■ **India Today Group's AI news anchor Sana to moderate a session**

A KEY OBJECTIVE OF WAVES IS TO HAVE GLOBAL M&E LEADERS INVEST IN INDIA AS WELL AS ENCOURAGE DISCUSSIONS, GENERATE IDEAS, FACILITATE INNOVATION AND COLLABORATIONS

M&E industry.

The international outreach of the summit is evident by a line-up that boasts Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen, YouTube CEO Neal Mohan, Instagram head Adam Mosseri, Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos, marketing agency WPP's CEO Mark Read, Spotify's chief public affairs officer Dustee Jenkins, and NVIDIA's vice president Richard Kerris—all of them will be part of the programming roster.

The purview of WAVES is not limited to films; it considers the fast-growing M&E scene. Apart from traditional media like print, TV and radio, there will also be participation from stakeholders in streaming platforms, AI (artificial intelligence), AR and VR (augmented and virtual reality), e-sport athletes, content creators and influencers. In fact, India Today Group's own AI news anchor Sana will be moderating a session titled 'The Hyper-Personalised Ad Revolution: Connecting One-to-One'. Other highlights of the event include Waves Bazaar, an industry-led global marketplace that seeks to identify business partners for tie-ups and bring together buyers and sellers from different countries, and Bharat Pavilion, a space that celebrates #KalaToCode by charting the country's journey from its ancient heritage to a future-ready avatar.

The ministry hopes that the summit will promote India as a "one-stop destination" for content creation, drive the country's creative economy through intellectual property creation and develop its M&E infrastructure, as also build the industry's capacity to create a skilled workforce for global needs. ■

BIHAR CALLING

At 11.39 am on April 19, LJP (Ram Vilas) state president Raju Tewari extended the first overture—a quote from party chief Chirag Paswan—on X: ‘Bihar is calling me.’ Three hours later—time enough, some murmured, to test the waters—he fired off a second communiqué: ‘Chirag ke swagat ko Bihar hai taiyyar’ (Bihar is ready to welcome Chirag). This one raised a few eyebrows, but more among the ruling coalition colleagues. After all, in 2020, Chirag had gone rogue, fielding candidates against the JD(U) and consigning Nitish Kumar to his party’s lowest tally since 2005. Now, with whispers of a home-state candidacy, and Chirag’s recent avowal that, unlike his father, he intends to return to Bihar state politics at some point, analysts say the signs point to a credible tilt at the top job in Patna. One suspects the Nitish camp has taken due note.



ANI

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

THE PURGE IS ON

It's only April, but the Gujarat Congress is already feeling the heat. Rahul Gandhi made a second visit here in a week and the overarching chorus was to identify the ‘gaddars’ (traitors) working as the BJP’s B-team. Rahul has given an ultimatum—the rogue elements must be purged. Several informal lists of suspected turncoats are now doing the rounds, but the question remains—were state leaders such as PCC chief Shaktisinh Gohil, legislative party leader Amit Chavda and AICC in-charge Mukul Wasnik unaware of the goings-on in the state? Conversely, if they knew, why wasn’t action taken?

THE CM'S MAN

Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis’s move to appoint ex-IAS officer Praveen Pardeshi as chief economic advisor has led to buzz that it is an attempt to clip the wings of deputy CM and finance minister Ajit Pawar. Already, the other deputy CM, Eknath Shinde, seems a shadow of his former self. Is it Ajit’s turn now, and is Pardeshi, the man seen as the CM’s blue-eyed boy, the cat’s paw in the finance department?

ALL SHOOK UP



In a late-night shake-up on April 21, the Uttar Pradesh government transferred 33 IAS officers. But it’s the exit of **Shishir Singh** as director, information, that created all the buzz in Lucknow. A long-time Yogi Adityanath confidant, Shishir’s transfer comes days after a fiery outburst by state minister Ashish Patel, husband of Union minister and Apna Dal chief Anupriya Patel, who accused him of running a smear campaign. The Patels are said to be quietly celebrating, their political muscle seemingly flexed to full effect.

A SECOND INNINGS

In an unexpected romantic turn in Bengal’s political theatre, ex-BJP state president **Dilip Ghosh**, 60, married party colleague Rinku Majumdar in a quiet ceremony in Kolkata on April 18. Dressed in traditional Bengali attire and a topor, Ghosh and his bride thanked well-wishers—including CM Mamata Banerjee—for their blessings. The couple first met during morning walks at Eco Park in 2021; the friendship gradually turned into love. In a film twist, it was Rinku who proposed—during an IPL match this April. Senior BJP leaders turned up to greet the couple (though party rival Suvedu Adhikari chose silence), and even TMC leaders extended good wishes. And the honeymoon? Ghosh said, “Somewhere in the country.”



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DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF INDIA

Habitat Architects' Dual Focus on Residential and Commercial Excellence

In the shifting landscape of Indian architecture, where tradition intersects with innovation, Habitat Architects has carved a distinctive voice—one that is elegant, efficient, and deeply rooted in purpose. Co-founded by Zafar and Monika Choudhary, the multidisciplinary design studio has evolved into a leading force across residential, commercial, and hospitality design. With a design language shaped by thoughtful storytelling, craftsmanship, and environmental responsibility, the firm's work speaks not only to the eye but to the soul.

Residential Design: Spaces That Breathe and Belong

Habitat Architects brings exceptional intentionality to its residential projects—each home is envisioned as a living narrative, shaped by the site, the climate, and the people who will inhabit it. From luxury villas perched on Himalayan hilltops to urban retreats

and group housing designed for the future, every dwelling is approached as a sanctuary.

At the heart of these homes lies the seamless integration of Zafar Choudhary's architectural discipline and Monika Choudhary's wellness-centered design ethos. Together, they craft spaces that are as calming as they are intelligent—balancing aesthetics, performance, and emotional resonance.

The next generation brings a distinct technological edge. Sahir Choudhary, an alumnus of Cornell University, infuses each project with digital sophistication—leveraging tools like parametric design, modular innovation, and AI integration to create future-proof homes. Meanwhile, Sarah Choudhary adds depth and material narrative to the interiors, combining hospitality sensibilities with

cultural nuance, ensuring that each home tells a story that is both personal and universally relevant.

Across all residential work, the studio's material palette reflects a commitment to eco-conscious living. Reclaimed timber, ethically sourced stone, and native crafts are used with precision. Passive cooling strategies, adaptive lighting systems, and natural ventilation design are layered into every floor plan. These are homes that breathe, respond, and evolve with their users.

Commercial and Retail Design: Intelligent Architecture for the Next Era

In the commercial realm, Habitat Architects creates spaces that are as strategic as they are sensorial. From research and development campuses to mixed-use hubs and high-street retail, the firm's portfolio is defined by clarity, efficiency, and user-centric innovation.

Here, Zafar's background in architectural engineering provides a solid technical foundation, while Sahir's approach introduces algorithmic thinking and modular adaptability. The result is architecture that is highly performative—where every square foot is optimized, and every design move is purposeful.

Sarah's role in interior environments ensures that these projects are not just smart, but human. Whether it's a retail experience that flows intuitively or a corporate space designed to foster creativity and connection, her perspective ensures each space feels considered, coherent, and complete.

Functionality is never compromised—but it is always elevated. From integrating technology seamlessly to embedding brand identity into spatial planning, the firm's commercial work stands as a model for thoughtful innovation.

A Contextual and Cultural Lens

Whether designing for a single family or a large corporation, Habitat Architects works with a consistent philosophy—architecture must be contextual, responsive, and culturally attuned. The team begins each project by understanding its physical and social environment. This means considering the lay of the land, the direction of the sun, the materials that feel native, and the stories embedded in the local culture.

This sensitivity to context is brought to life through artisanal collaborations and indigenous materials. Metalwork from Moradabad, stone from Rajasthan, and handcrafted detailing enrich even the most

contemporary projects. These elements are not nostalgic flourishes—they are bridges between heritage and progress.

In their hospitality work, such as the award-winning Havelli, this design ethos is especially visible. The firm blends architectural grammar from historical Indian havelis with modern programming, offering guests an immersive experience that feels both luxurious and rooted in identity. Similarly, their multi-residential projects prioritize community, sustainability, and wellness through passive design, green spaces, and shared amenities.

Urban developments—including high-rises and masterplanned communities—are designed for the future. Clean-lined aesthetics, pedestrian-friendly planning, and environmentally conscious infrastructure allow Habitat Architects to shape India's next-generation urban fabric without losing sight of its cultural anchors.

Legacy in Motion: A Multi-Generational Vision

What makes Habitat Architects singular is its ability to operate across generations without dilution of vision. Zafar and Monika's leadership is driven by depth and discipline, while Sahir and Sarah bring dynamism, digital fluency, and global exposure. Together, they form a rare design collective—anchored in legacy but open to constant reinvention.

Their projects are not dictated by a fixed aesthetic. Instead, they are driven by a belief: architecture must be lived, not just looked at. It must answer questions of place, purpose, and possibility. The studio's approach is never about replication—it is



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about translation. About understanding a client's vision, listening to the land, and crafting something original yet timeless.

Designing Tomorrow, Today

As India accelerates towards a new future—urbanizing, digitizing, and diversifying—Habitat Architects stands at the forefront of this transformation. Their work is not just about adding buildings to a skyline, but about adding meaning to the built environment.

By combining architectural rigor, narrative interiors, cultural intelligence, and next-gen technology, Habitat Architects is shaping a blueprint for how Indian architecture can evolve—gracefully, intelligently, and sustainably.

Team Habitat is creating more than architecture—they're building a design legacy where beauty meets purpose, and innovation becomes heritage.





@AmitShah/X

COVER STORY | PAHALGAM ATTACK

MAKING PA

THE HARD OPTIONS THAT INDIA CAN EXER



A NATION MOURNS

Home minister Amit Shah pays his last respects to the 26 people killed in the Pahalgam terror attack, Apr. 23

KISTAN PAY

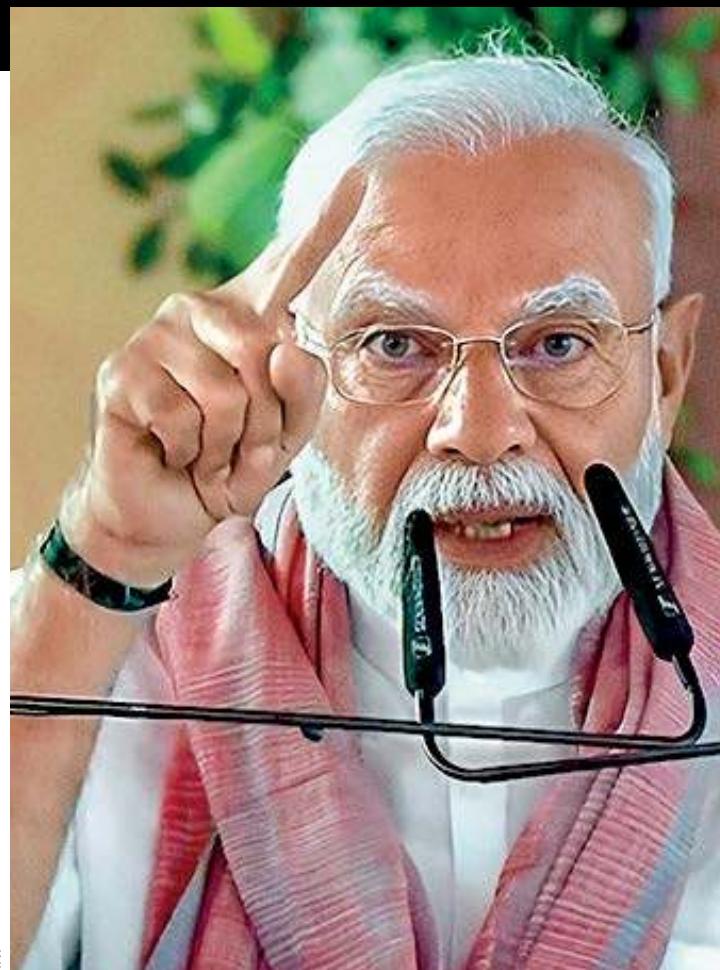
CISE AFTER ITS DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

Vinay Narwal, a 26-year-old lieutenant in the Indian Navy, and his wife, Himanshi, had been really looking forward to their dream honeymoon in idyllic Pahalgam after they

failed to get a visa for Switzerland. They had flown into Kashmir soon after their wedding reception in Karnal, Haryana. The next day, on April 22, they joined hundreds of other tourists to visit the alpine meadows of Baisaran. "We never thought this trip would turn into a nightmare," recounted a dazed and teary-eyed Himanshi, her hands still adorned with henna and the bridal *chura* (bangles). "I was eating bhelpuri with my husband," she is heard telling locals in a video. "A man came over and asked my husband if he was Muslim. When he said no, the man shot him dead." Screams filled the meadow as 26 human lives were taken with that same suddenness, on that merest pretext, in the space of a few unending minutes. Soon after, a photographer captured the distraught Himanshi seated beside her slain husband with blood stains on her clothes, framing the horror for a nation. The next day, when Vinay's body was flown to his hometown for cremation, Himanshi broke down before his coffin, draped in the national flag. "I pray that his soul is in peace, and he has the best time wherever he is," she managed to say through her tears.

These haunting, heart-wrenching scenes played out across the country as the coffins of the others slain in the Pahalgam attack came home for their last rites. The brutal killing of innocent tourists in Kashmir, the worst terror attack on civilians in the Valley in over two decades, forced Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cut short his official visit to Saudi Arabia and return to New Delhi. But not before posting a stern message on X: "Those behind this heinous act will be brought to justice...they will not be spared! Their evil agenda will never succeed." On his return, the prime minister immediately convened a session of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which included home minister Amit Shah, defence minister Rajnath Singh, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. They were briefed about the cross-border linkages of the terror attack with Pakistan.



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THE INDIAN COUNTER

The question then arose of what was to be done. A range of steps presented themselves as options before New Delhi—and each may finally find its own time and space. As an instantaneous punitive measure, foreign secretary Vikram Misri announced that the CCS had decided to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 with immediate effect, until, as he put it, "Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism." The 65-year-old treaty, which has survived four wars between the two countries, allots the eastern rivers of the Indus system—the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi—for India's unrestricted use. Pakistan receives much of the waters from the western rivers—the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab. The treaty decrees that any move by New Delhi to alter the flow of the rivers through dams or other means needs to be negotiated with Islamabad.

India had threatened to revoke the IWT after the 2019 Pulwama attacks as well, but stopped short of executing the threat. It did reiterate its intention to do so in September 2024, though, when it sought a "review and modification" of the treaty. However, by suspending the treaty now, with stringent clauses for reinstatement, India is shutting the door completely. The move holds serious implications for Pakistan's water security, especially in the populous and politically powerful provinces of Punjab and Sindh. While the

“

India will identify, trace and punish every terrorist and their backers. We'll pursue them to the ends of the earth. They will be punished beyond their imagination”

— PM NARENDRA MODI
at a public rally in
Madhubani, Bihar



suspension will not disrupt the current flow of water to Pakistan, any future unilateral steps by India, like building canals or dams to divert the water for its own use, could seriously affect the lower riparian regions downstream in Pakistan. Islamabad has already called India's action tantamount to an "act of war". One disadvantage for India is that while Pakistan's demand for Kashmir has so far been on religious grounds, any threat to its water supply could shift popular opinion in the country in favour of war over Kashmir. Meanwhile, Pakistan also restricted Indian access to its air space, and suspended the Simla Agreement of 1972 as well.

In addition to the IWT suspension, the CCS announced a series of other diplomatic sanctions, including the closure of the border check-post at Attari in Amritsar, the expulsion of defence attaches and their senior advisors in the Pakistani High Commission in Delhi, and the revocation of SAARC visas issued to Pakistani citizens. It also made it clear that more punitive measures would follow. At a public rally on April 24 in Madhubani in Bihar, the PM himself sent out a message intended for the world. Switching to English midway through his Hindi speech, he declared, "Today, from the soil of Bihar, I say to the whole world, India will identify, trace and punish every terrorist and their backers. We will pursue them to the ends of the Earth. They will be punished beyond their imagination."

Modi is sending out a clear signal to Pakistan that India will not hesitate to explore all options, including military force, to punish it for crossing a dangerous red line. Kanwal Sibal, former foreign secretary, believes that by choosing to suspend the IWT over exercising military power as in the past, India has sent out a powerful message that it is going to hit where it hurts. At the same time, Sibal reasons, "It is a wrong time geopolitically and otherwise for India to get into a military conflict with Pakistan. We can talk about it to satisfy our emotions, but just when our growth story is becoming more credible, we will get deflected. We have also held that this is not an era for war, and dialogue and diplomacy are the way out. So, we would lose our credibility internationally." Sibal notes that while India has viable military options, suspending the IWT will be more effective because water or the lack of it is a significant issue for Pakistan. "It's a strategic blow to Pakistan."

Others argue that punitive measures that have a slow burn, such as suspending the IWT, will not satisfy the Indian public,

“

Kashmir was our jugular vein, it will be our jugular vein, we will not forget it. We will not leave our Kashmiri brothers in their heroic struggle”

— GEN. ASIM MUNIR
Chief of Pakistan army

OPTIONS TO PUNISH PAKISTAN

India has a few options on the table to make Islamabad pay, and pay heavily, for their long-standing support to cross-border terrorism. However, each comes with consequences, and not just for our recalcitrant neighbour

AIR STRIKES ▼

The obvious reference point is India's air strike in 2019 following the Pulwama attack, where 12 Mirage jets fooled the Pakistan Air Force, made a deep ingress and bombed a JeM camp in Balakot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, inviting retaliatory air strikes from Pakistan in J&K. The IAF's Rafale jets (*in pic*) are one of the best multirole fighters, so this is an option. India's strike can be at the LeT headquarters in and around Muridke.

Fallout: After the Pahalgam incident, Pakistan is said to have moved more of its air assets to Lahore and Rawalpindi. Its Airborne and Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft are also watching the Indian airspace.



which is outraged at the brutal killing of their countrymen and wants the Modi government to avenge the attacks through military force. India had done exactly that after the terror attacks in Uri in 2016 and in Pulwama in 2019. In Uri, after four Pakistan-backed Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorists stormed the Indian Army brigade unit on September 18, 2016, killing 19 soldiers, India retaliated strongly. Ten days later, Indian army commandos crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and conducted a series of retaliatory surgical strikes on militant launch-pads and camps, claiming to have killed over 150 militants. In 2019, after a suicide vehicle bomb attack by a JeM operative in Pulwama killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force men, India struck back by sending 12 Mirage 2000 jets into Pakistan territory and bombing the JeM camp in



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

MISSILE ATTACKS ▲

Instead of mobilising for a conventional conflict, India could target terror launch-pads/ training centres in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and elsewhere with surface-to-surface short-range tactical missiles like Prithvi, Pralay (*in pic*) and Shaurya, all of which are ideal for hitting strategic targets across the border.

Fallout: Pakistan's terror infrastructure can be in camps in proximity to those of the armed forces. If an Indian missile strike hits a Pak army unit, it will lead to a wider conflagration. Also, the worry is that Pakistan has missiles with tactical nuclear weapons.



ABID BHAT

Balakot. It was the first time since the 1971 war that India had deployed its air force for a cross-border strike.

Tilak Devasher, a former senior officer of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and author of several books on Pakistan, says, "Public opinion demands retribution and once you have set the bar so high after the Uri and Pulwama retaliatory strikes, the Modi government will have to act very decisively for people to feel reassured. What manner it should take is for the government to decide but, in this particular case, the more irrational you are, the more effective you are going to be."

While the Modi government has a range of kinetic (military) options, experts emphasise the need for clarity on objectives and outcomes. Lt Gen. Syed Ata Hasnain, who has served extensively in the Valley, says, "Starting from a low calibration of letting the current ceasefire go up in flames, which to my mind will achieve nothing, we have a range of options." Hasnain is clear that the response should go beyond just giving Pakistan a bloody jaw to appease public sentiment.

REDUCING FLOW OF INDUS WATERS

India has already suspended the Indus Waters Treaty that apportions the rivers of the Indus system among the two countries. While this wouldn't immediately affect Pakistan, if India does disrupt or divert the flow of water by building canals or dams, lower riparian regions in Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh would be seriously affected.

Fallout: Pakistan has declared that any attempt to divert Indus waters would be "an act of war".



SURGICAL STRIKES

The Indian army's special forces or commando units can cross the LoC, attack Jaish-e-Mohammed/Lashkar-e-Toiba terror camps. This is exactly what happened after the Uri attack in September 2016, when Indian commandos conducted a series of strikes and claimed that they had taken out 150-odd terrorists.

Fallout: Once bitten already, Pakistan army units along the border will be on high alert to such an eventuality. A surgical strike could actually be employed in conjunction with an air attack on the terror infrastructure.

DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE

Pakistan, with its long, dubious record in harbouring terror groups, has spent three periods in the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global watchdog on terror financing and money laundering, the latest being 2018-22. Pakistan is surviving on IMF loans, so another spell on the FATF list would be calamitous.



Fallout: After Pahalgam, India has the support of all major countries; our diplomats are briefing them too. Pakistan has reason to expect a diplomatic blitzkrieg. Another option is to paralyse their economy by enforcing a blockade by the Indian Navy on its ports. But that would be considered an act of extreme hostility, akin to declaration of war.

PAKISTAN'S ACTION WAS PROMPTED AS MUCH BY ITS OWN POLYCRISIS AS BY THE NEED TO TELL INDIA AND THE WORLD THAT IT WAS STILL A STAKEHOLDER IN KASHMIR

"We must be clear whether we are messaging Pakistan or the world about our capability. We upped the ante in Uri with surgical strikes and in Balakot with air strikes. Do we do both this time but confine it to terrorist hideouts as we did in the past, or do we expand the ambit and target the Pakistan army directly, which would amount to war? So, it is a question of calibration and what you want to achieve in the end."

THE TURMOIL IN PAKISTAN

To calibrate and control the escalation ladder in response to such a strike, India must first understand Pakistan's internal dynamics, say experts. Especially what prompted it to launch such a major terror attack and the targets it chose, knowing India would retaliate. According to Sharat Sabharwal, a former high commissioner to Pakistan, the timing of the attack could not have been more strategic—US Vice President J.D. Vance was in India and Modi was on a bilateral visit to Saudi Arabia. An audacious attack was certain to grab worldwide attention and signal that Pakistan cannot be ignored. The other reason, Sabharwal believes, was to shatter the sense of normalcy ushered in first by the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and then the recent assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir. It was most evident in the return of tourists to the region, with J&K attracting 23 million visitors last year compared to 17 million in 2018. By targeting tourists

20 MINUTES OF MAYHEM

In the shadow of past fatal attacks on civilians, another terror strike leaves **26 dead and 17 injured**, this time in Pahalgam on Apr. 22—raising fresh fears in a scarred valley

Graphic by **NILANJAN DAS**



2 PM

Over 1,000 tourists are gathered at the picturesque meadow in Baisaran valley, 6.5 km from Pahalgam town

2:15 PM

At least four terrorists clad in camouflage outfits converge from the surrounding pine forests, open fire with M4 carbine assault rifles and AK-47s



After the attack, the terrorists disappear back into the dense forest

The terrorists approach the meadow in a V-formation

A CHRONICLE OF VIOLENCE

Some of the major past terror attacks targeting pilgrims, tourists and minorities in J&K

MAR. 21, 2000

Chattisinghpura, Anantnag

36 members of the local Sikh community shot dead, on the eve of then US President Bill Clinton's India visit

AUG. 2, 2000

Nunwan base camp

32, including 21 pilgrims and seven shopkeepers, killed and 60 injured during Amarnath Yatra

OCT. 1, 2001

Srinagar

36 people killed as fidayeen attack the state legislature complex

NOV. 23, 2002

Lower Munda, South Kashmir

19 people, including nine securitymen, killed in an IED blast on Jammu-Srinagar National Highway

MAR. 23, 2003

Nadimarg, Pulwama

24 Kashmiri Pandits, including 11 women and two boys, massacred

**2:20 PM**

As people run helter-skelter, the attackers stop firing, approach various groups, demanding their identity. Men are targeted, many shot point blank; women and children are spared

**2:35 PM**

After the mayhem ends and terrorists escape, victims start calling for help; vendors, guides, pony handlers offer water, tend to the injured

**3:15 PM**

More locals rush to the spot—reachable only on foot, ponies or all-terrain bikes—and begin the rescue operations

**3:45 PM**

Police and medical teams arrive, retrieve bodies and escort the stranded tourists. Simultaneously, forces start searching for attackers

**5 PM**

The Resistance Front, a shadow outfit of the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) founded by the now-jailed militant **Hafiz Saeed**, claims responsibility

9 PM
Home minister **Amit Shah** reaches Srinagar, is briefed by senior J&K Police officials



Source: J&K Police

WHO ARE THE ATTACKERS

► The J&K Police have identified three of the attackers as (L-R) Ali Bhai a.k.a. Talha Bhai, Adil Hussain Thoker, and Hashim Musa a.k.a. Suleiman. Thoker is from Anantnag and the other two are Pakistani nationals

► According to Indian defence sources, Brigadier Faisal, Kashmir desk operational in-charge of the ISI, is the mastermind, with the conspiracy allegedly going right up to the Pakistan army chief, Gen. Asim Munir

JUN. 13, 2005 *Pulwama*

13 civilians and three CRPF officers killed and over 100 injured as an explosives-laden car detonates outside a crowded market

MAY 25, 2006 *Batapora, Srinagar*

Four tourists killed and six injured in grenade attack hours after a conference attended by then PM Manmohan Singh

JUL. 21, 2006 *Beehama, Ganderbal*

Five pilgrims killed while returning from Amarnath Baltal base camp in an attack on their bus

JUL. 10, 2017 *Anantnag*

Seven Amarnath devotees killed, 21 injured as their bus is ambushed

JUN. 9, 2024 *Reasi*

10 Vaishno Devi-bound pilgrims killed, 33 hurt as their bus comes under terrorist fire and falls into a gorge

THE EXPERTS' VIEW



“India can consider abandoning the existing LoC ceasefire pact and launch surgical strikes on select targets. It could also simultaneously deploy IAF assets as it did in Balakot”

Lt Gen. DEEPENDRA SINGH HOODA (RETD)

Former chief, Northern Command, Indian Army



“INDIA COULD GO FOR COVERT OPTIONS, TARGETING HIGH-VALUE FIGURES IN PAKISTAN, INCLUDING TOP LEADERS OF THE JeM AND THE LeT, WHILE ENSURING DENIABILITY”

SHARAT SABHARWAL

Former high commissioner of India to Pakistan

“BY TAKING UP THE KASHMIR CAUSE, GEN. MUNIR WAS HOPING TO STRENGTHEN HIS INTERNAL POSITION BESIDES BOLSTERING THE MULLAH-MILITARY ALLIANCE”

AJAY BISARIA

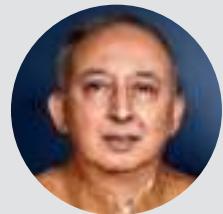
Former high commissioner of India to Pakistan



“PUBLIC OPINION DEMANDS RETRIBUTION AND ONCE YOU HAVE SET THE BAR SO HIGH AFTER THE URI AND PULWAMA RETALIATIONS, THE MODI GOVT WILL HAVE TO ACT VERY DECISIVELY FOR PEOPLE TO FEEL REASSURED”

TILAK DEVASHER

Author & former RAW officer



Lt Gen. SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)

Former military secretary, Army HQ

“We must be clear whether we are messaging Pakistan or the world about our capability.... So, it is a question of calibration and what you want to achieve in the end”



“By choosing to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, India has sent out a powerful message... It is a wrong time geopolitically and otherwise for India to get into a military conflict with Pakistan”

KANWAL SIBAL

Former foreign secretary

in Pahalgam, Pakistan was not only hitting at this economic revival but also letting India, and the world, know that it remained very much a stakeholder in the Valley's future.

But the timing has as much to do with Pakistan's own failings, especially the growing disillusionment with its all-powerful army chief General Asim Munir and his ability to navigate the polycrisis in the country. The daring hijack of the Jaffar Express train by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) on March 11, in which 31 people, including 18 armed forces personnel, were killed, was a serious setback for Munir. The Pakistan army has long accused India of actively backing the Baloch rebels and many in the establishment see the Pahalgam attack as a forceful warning

from Islamabad asking India not to meddle in its internal affairs. Meanwhile, Pakistan faces mounting pressure on its western front from the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). A Pashtun movement that wants to overthrow the Pakistan government and form an Islamic emirate, it is backed by the Taliban in Afghanistan. As Sibal notes, “Pakistan created the Taliban in Afghanistan, was gleeful when it returned to power and, now, they are bombing each other. That is a strategic failure of policy.”

On the political front, despite being in jail for various charges, Imran Khan continues to be Pakistan's most popular politician. In 2023, supporters of his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaf (PTI), even stormed the house of the Lahore



SHOW OF SOLIDARITY
Kashmiri traders observe
a candlelight vigil at Lal
Chowk in Srinagar, Apr. 23

former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan, puts it, “The economy has moved out of the ICU but is still in the critical care ward. But it may sink again as, so far, there are no structural reforms to ensure sustained growth.” Munir seems to have extended his influence here as well, becoming a member of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) Shehbaz formed last July. Such a council, the Pakistan premier had argued, was necessary for “a unified approach” to steer the country out of the economic crisis, as he mandated it to frame economic policies.

Members of the army brass will be national coordinators for both the apex and the executive committee.

Munir, who took over as army chief in November 2022, has also ensured that he will continue for five years instead of three through a specially enabled legislation in Parliament last November. But with the army’s credibility wanting, especially after the train hijack by Baloch rebels and rising terror strikes across Pakistan by others, he is leveraging the Kashmir issue to deflect attention from the country’s own internal crises. In a speech to the Overseas Pakistanis Convention in Islamabad on April 16, six days before the Pahalgam attack, Munir invoked Kashmir, saying, “Our stance is absolutely clear, it (Kashmir) was our jugular vein, it will be our jugular vein, we will not forget it. We will not leave our Kashmiri brothers in their heroic struggle.” In the same speech, Munir also revived the two-nation theory and its continued relevance, which for Bisaria is reminiscent of the Islamic orthodoxy of General Zia-ul-Haq’s reign in the 1980s. “General Munir was basically trying to rally people around the flag and break Imran’s support among overseas Pakistanis,” he says. “He was also garnering support with the army and, by taking up the Kashmir cause, hoping to strengthen his internal position, besides bolstering the mullah-military alliance.” Experts see it as a key reason for Munir taking the huge gamble of escalating tensions with India and perhaps authorising the Pahalgam attack.

Sabharwal believes there were clear signs of Pakistan getting ready to attack. In the run-up to the strike, the establishment had issued strong statements accusing India of interference in Balochistan and warning of action against the militants and their backers. Despite a ceasefire at the LoC in place since 2021, there has been renewed volatility and border transgressions in recent weeks. Last year, too, ahead of the assembly election in J&K, Pakistan-backed militants had

corps commander in protest. Munir responded with a harsh crackdown and also sacked PTI backers in the army, but considerable damage was done to the military’s credibility. Meanwhile, the Shehbaz Sharif-led coalition government is seen as completely indebted to the army for its survival.

More trouble is building with the infighting among the ruling coalition’s main partners, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) or PML(N), to which Shehbaz belongs, and its one-time arch-foe, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), of which President Asif Zardari is the co-chairperson. Differences between the two political frenemies came to a head recently over a canal project to supply Indus river water to Cholistan in southern Punjab. The PPP, which rules the Sindh province, complained that the project would deprive them of their share of water; its leader Bilawal Zardari Bhutto even threatened to pull out of the coalition if the issue was not resolved. In this situation, India’s move to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty can exacerbate these divisions and prove an effective punitive measure that will give Pakistan pause.

If there is any consolation for Pakistan, it is in the modest signs of recovery the economy is showing, helped in large part by the first few tranches of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s \$7 billion bailout. In a positive sign, the country’s GDP grew at 2.5 per cent last year; it was \$337 billion in 2023 compared to India’s \$3.5 trillion. As Ajay Bisaria,

**IN A MAJOR TURNING POINT,
MUCH OF THE VALLEY
HAS CONDEMNED THE
PAHALGAM ATTACK AS HAVE
POLITICAL PARTIES ACROSS
THE SPECTRUM**

launched a series of terror strikes in the Jammu region, including the killing in Reasi of nine pilgrims travelling by bus. Another strike followed Omar Abdullah's swearing in as chief minister in October, when six migrants and a doctor were targeted in Ganderbal. Experts say security agencies should have been alert, particularly in a popular tourist location like Pahalgam, and beefed up presence in these areas. Ground forces in the Valley, therefore, need to analyse both the failure in intelligence as well as in what army calls 'area dominance' to prevent future attacks by Pakistan as India ups the ante. Lt Gen. Vinod Bhatia, former director general of military operations, stresses the need for an immediate and focused counterstrike. "The security forces must first hunt out the four militants who carried out the attack and eliminate them," he says. "Time, surprise and space are the key elements in the military domain. Action has to be pre-emptive, pro-active and punitive. And a punitive strategy must be at a time and place of our choosing."

THE OPTIONS BEFORE INDIA

According to a key military strategist, India should consider launching a multi-pronged offensive against Pakistan, one that spans the diplomatic, economic, military, political and informational domains. Given that the two countries had already expelled their respective high commissioners after the abrogation of Article 370, the current punitive action of reducing the staff strength of their missions is minimal. Two-way trade between the two countries is also a mere trickle, so there is not much India can do by way of economic sanctions.

What India can do is to rally major powers to penalise Pakistan for backing terror groups, using global watchdog FATF (Financial Action Task Force) which monitors terror financing. That, in turn, can restrict Pakistan's access to international financial institutions such as the IMF. Sabharwal also advocates for covert options targeting high-value figures in Pakistan, including top leaders of the JeM and the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) while ensuring deniability. After all, it is The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy for the LeT, and the Peoples Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), a front organisation of the JeM, that have claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam carnage. Pakistan's vulnerability to internal militants was evident when in 2009, local terror groups stormed the highly fortified General Headquarters of the army in Rawalpindi. They held armed forces personnel hostage for a while and killed a brigadier and a lieutenant, before the army killed the militants and regained control.

India has a broad range of options when it comes to overt punitive military action. According to Lt Gen. K.J.S. Dhillon, former GOC 15 Corps, Srinagar, "The military has prepared

EXPERTS SAY WE MUST RESIST JINGOISTIC DEMANDS TO 'TAKE BACK POK' AS IT MAY LEAD TO A PROLONGED WAR, LIKE RUSSIA IS FACING IN UKRAINE

area-specific and depth-specific options, ranging from shallow to deep strikes, involving single or tri-service operations. These are pre-planned, rehearsed, and ready for execution upon approval. The response will be strategic, timed and aimed at delivering a disproportionate, crushing retaliation to inflict significant pain on Pakistan." Lt Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda, who led the 2016 surgical strikes in Uri as Northern Army commander, believes India can consider abandoning the existing LoC ceasefire agreement to begin with and launch surgical strikes on select targets. It could also deploy air force assets as it did in Balakot to hit terror infrastructure. According to

the latest Indian intelligence reports, there are 42 active terrorist launch-pads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) near the LoC, with 110-130 terrorists, including Pakistan nationals. Some strategists advocate a 'Balakot Plus' option, which would involve the use of India's short-range tactical ballistic missiles such as the Prithvi series and Pralay, the hypersonic Shaurya missile and the BrahMos cruise missile. All these systems are designed for battlefield use and can effectively strike strategic targets near the border. Hooda, though, cautions against the use of missiles given that Pakistan has a range of tactical missiles, both conventional and nuclear, and the situation could very rapidly escalate into a full-scale war.

Experts also warn against yielding to jingoistic demands by the political class to take back PoK. Military experts who have gamed the option say while India can capture a few features close to the LoC, seizing all of PoK could well be a three-year war as Russia is discovering with Ukraine. According to Hooda, "It would be a long-term campaign, with the Pakistani deployment matching the Indian one on the LoC." The problem may not end there either, he says. "Once you occupy it, it's not as though the people living there would welcome India. You could end up with other problems, including insurgency."

Pakistan also remains a nuclear-armed state that has shunned the 'no first-use' doctrine. It would not hesitate to exercise the option if its territorial integrity is under threat. The risk of a nuclear war, therefore, remains high. As such, India's response must be calibrated, encompassing strategic restraint and precision. In another significant turning point, much of the Valley showed no support for Pakistan's attack on the innocent tourists in Pahalgam. Political parties across the spectrum universally condemned the act; many joined public protests to express their outrage. With the public and political sentiment in its favour, India must exercise even greater circumspection so that it can deliver a befitting reply to Pakistan while retaining the moral high ground. ■

—with PRADIP R. SAGAR



INSPIRING & SUCCESSFUL INDIAN PERSONALITIES

NITIN SACHDEVA, TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER

With over two decades of expertise, Nitin Sachdeva has driven innovation in finance, technology, and entrepreneurship. As a transformative leader, he led Delaplex Limited to global success, overseeing its IPO in record time and expanding through strategic acquisitions. Recognized for his leadership at TiE Con 2023, he champions AI, cybersecurity, and

digital transformation while mentoring young entrepreneurs. His philosophy—resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking—continues to shape industries, empowering future leaders to embrace challenges, push boundaries, and redefine success through innovation, collaboration, and perseverance.

MARUF AHMED, CEO OF DEXIAN

Maruf Ahmed, CEO of Dexian, leads with a “people first” philosophy, fostering

a culture of integrity, transparency, ingenuity, authenticity, and empathy. He co-founded SIS Inc., later merging with DISYS, where he held key leadership roles. With a background in engineering from George Mason University, Maruf began his career at IBM and Mobil Oil before shaping Dexian's vision. Recognized among Staffing 100's Most Influential People, he is dedicated to unleashing human potential. Outside work, he enjoys golf, reading, and spending time with his wife Sonal, children, and dog, Bali.

ASMA KAHALI, FOUNDER, RIMBAA OAK GLOBAL PTE LTD

Asma Kahali, Co-Founder of Rimbaa Oak Global Pte Ltd, is a trailblazer in global trade, defense procurement, financial structuring, and corporate recruitment. With expertise in high-value transactions, she drives trade finance strategies and military equipment procurement, including TNT, munitions, and advanced defense systems. A recipient of the BRICS CCI Women Trailblazer Award, she is recognized for her impact in international business. Asma also spearheads executive hiring initiatives, leveraging her vast network across BRICS nations and global markets, shaping the future of defense, trade, and corporate recruitment worldwide.

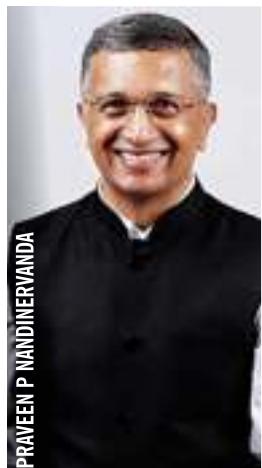
PRAVEEN P NANDINERVANDA, VASTU EXPERT

Praveen P Nandinervanda, founder of Vastu Praveen, is a leading

Vastu consultant, numerologist, and agriculturist with over 24 years of expertise. Renowned for energy diagnostics and Vastu-compliant designs, he integrates modern technology with ancient wisdom. Honored with awards like Rashtriya Prathiba Samman 2024 and Vastu Ratan Samman 2023, Praveen is dedicated to preserving Indian occult sciences. His teachings, consultations, and agricultural innovations continue to transform lives, making ancient knowledge relevant in today's world. His legacy embodies harmony, balance, and spiritual enlightenment, inspiring future generations to explore these sacred sciences.

SREEKANTH EREPALLI, MD OF GIOSUN

Sreekanth Erepalli, Co-Founder & MD of Giosun Healthcare Pvt. Ltd., blends tradition with innovation in Ayurveda and herbal cosmetics. With over 30 years of expertise, he pioneers herbal solutions for migraines, arthritis, thyroid disorders, and immune support. Under his leadership, Giosun Healthcare, an ISO-certified facility, delivers high-quality Ayurvedic, nutraceutical, and herbal cosmetic products. His commitment to research-driven product development, stringent quality control, and continuous innovation has positioned him as a leader in the industry. A visionary entrepreneur, he is shaping the future of Ayurveda and holistic wellness with groundbreaking, science-backed solutions.



NITIN SACHDEVA

MARUF AHMED

ASMA KAHALI

PRAVEEN P NANDINERVANDA

SREEKANTH EREPALLI

RISE OF THE VEGGIELANTES

RELIGIOUS VIGILANTES ARE OPENING NEW FRONTS OVER MEAT-EATING EVEN THOUGH MORE THAN HALF THE COUNTRY IDENTIFIES AS NON-VEGETARIAN

By DHAVAL S. KULKARNI

Photo illustration by NILANJAN DAS

Tucked into the bustling lanes of College Street in Kolkata is an unassuming meat shop that old-timers say is more than a hundred years old. Inside it sits an idol of Maa Kali, the fierce and beloved goddess of Bengal. Each morning, she is propitiated with flowers, incense and chants; later in the day, she presides over business—the fresh mutton and other cuts sold over the counter. Outsiders may find this form of ‘Kasai Kali’ jarring but, for Bengalis, it’s a seamless expression of faith and co-existence. As Bantu Singh, a shop fixture now, explains, “People don’t understand our culture. When videos of our shop were posted online, many asked, ‘How can there be an idol in a meat shop?’ It’s hard to explain to them.”

But that which needs no explanation within Bengal—a riverine civilisation that has long celebrated its fish, meat and goddesses—is increasingly coming under scrutiny outside it. A recent incident in New Delhi’s Chittaranjan Park, a predominantly Bengali locality, has ignited a fierce debate over culture, food and faith. Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra put out a video on social media showing a group of saffron-clad men confronting fish vendors near a Kali temple, telling them that selling fish near a place of worship was an affront to ‘sanatan dharma’.

Moitra condemned the incident, calling the individuals “BJP goons” and accusing them of imposing a homogenised cultural norm alien to

Bengal’s ethos. “Never in 60 years (of CR Park) has this happened,” she commented below the video before wading into how food habits are now being policed by right-wing elements.

The ruling BJP, however, rejected Moitra’s allegations. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva called the video “fake and manipulated”, and accused Moitra of attempting to sow disharmony. He also demanded a police investigation into the video’s “authenticity”.

The Bengali residents of CR Park, though, say that such confrontations are becoming common, with reprobate elements even issuing warnings against eating meat and fish during Navratri. Notably, the fish market in the video falls under Market No. 1 in CR Park,

and the adjacent temple was built by the market’s shopkeepers—including the many fishmongers themselves!

Food as Battleground

The CR Park incident is part of a broader trend across states where food habits—especially those involving meat and fish—are being dragged into the domain of identity politics. Large sections of forward castes, especially in the north of the country, have traditionally looked down on meat-eating and considered it ‘impure’. However, despite these ham-handed attempts to impose cultural mores, India remains a largely non-vegetarian nation. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21, 83.4 per cent of men and 70.6 per cent of women in the 15-49 age group are non-vegetarians. Indeed, the corresponding numbers for ‘pure vegetarians’ were just 16.6 per cent and 29.4 per cent, respectively.

The fault lines stem from caste-based orthodoxy and manifests in thinly-disguised dog-whistling against minorities. Mumbai, once known as a melting pot and exemplar of cosmopolitanism, is a prime example where you could be denied accommodation in parts of the city if you are a meat-eater. The gentrification of Mumbai—with its soaring skyline and real estate prices—and the rise of gated



DELHI

April 2025: 'Sanatanis' threaten fishmongers of CR Park market as it abuts a Kali temple

WEST BENGAL

March 2025: TMC-run Nabadweep municipality in Nadia district urges meat-sellers to close shops during Holi

April 2025: Purulia municipality, also run by TMC, asks meat-sellers to close shops during Ramnavami

MAHARASHTRA

February 2025: Govt withdraws funding for eggs in school mid-day meals, critics cite impact on child nutrition

April 2025: Clash between 'dirty' non-vegetarian Maharashtrians and Gujaratis in Ghatkopar, Mumbai

MADHYA PRADESH

December 2023: Govt. bans open sale of meat/fish in state

September 2024: Calls for closure of meat/liquor shops in all religious towns along Narmada river

March 2025: Bans sale of non-veg food in Maihar town during Navratri

UTTAR PRADESH

November 2023: Govt notification bans halal-certified food products (except for export)

March 2025: Raid on illegal slaughterhouses, ban on meat sales within 500 metres of all Hindu religious places ahead of Chaitra Navratri festival

April 2025: Ban on animal slaughter and sale of meat for Ramnavami

THE NATION POLITICS OF MEAT

communities catering to vegetarians and Jains means that Maharashtrians and others who love their mutton and fish are often pushed to the margins.

Devendra Tandel of the Akhil Maharashtra Macchimar Kruti Samiti, an organisation of fisherfolk, claims the Koli (fishermen) community, the original inhabitants of Mumbai, are the ones suffering the most. He says it's not uncommon to see residents of the "vegetarian towers" demanding the removal of fish markets in the vicinity. "Religious practices are a private affair...they must not affect the constitutional rights of the people," says Tandel. On the other side are people like Shiv Sena leader (Eknath Shinde faction) and ex-MP Sanjay Nirupam who have sought action against the sale of non-vegetarian street food during the Navratri festival. "The question of cultural imposition doesn't arise...we are only seeking action against the cooking and sale of it on the roadside during Navratri," he says, pointing to a Supreme Court ruling banning roadside eateries (which, incidentally, applies to vegetarian vendors as well).

Right is Might

In Yogi Adityanath-ruled Uttar Pradesh, meat often becomes a political, cultural and religious flashpoint. Over the past few years, the state has witnessed a rising wave of anti-meat and anti-halal sentiment among the people. Moves like banning halal-certified meat products, cracking down on slaughterhouses, removing eggs in school mid-day meals and restricting or banning meat sales during Hindu festivals are often enforced through vigilante action, blurring the lines between government authority and public policing. "What's worse is the hypocrisy," says a meat trader in western Uttar Pradesh. "Many of those leading these bans enjoy non-vegetarian food behind closed doors. This is not really about religion or purity, it's about power, control and creating divisions," he says.

The trajectory can be traced back to one of the first major decisions of the Yogi Adityanath government in 2017. Days after assuming office, the administration launched a sweeping crackdown on 'illegal abattoirs', triggering widespread



“WE HAVE TO MAINTAIN THE SANCTITY OF MAA NARMADA [THE RIVER]. WE ARE GOING TO BAN THE SALE OF MEAT AND LIQUOR IN ALL THE RELIGIOUS TOWNS ALONG ITS BANKS”

MOHAN YADAV, Chief Minister,
Madhya Pradesh

“The question of cultural imposition doesn't arise...we only want action against cooking and sale of meat on the roadside during Navratri”

SANJAY NIRUPAM
Shiv Sena (Shinde faction)



“In our teerth sthals, there can be no consumption of meat or liquor... we'll build milk stalls for them [those selling meat/liquor], they can sell milk, that will bring back the age of Dvaparyug”

YOGI ADITYANATH
Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh,
in Mathura, 2021

A PUNE-BASED BUTCHER SAYS THERE HAVE BEEN MORE INQUIRIES ABOUT JHATKA MEAT FROM HINDUS AFTER THE MALHAR BROUHAHA

panic among those in the meat trade. Cloaked in the guise of implementing a 2015 National Green Tribunal order, the action also fulfilled a key campaign promise of the BJP. In November 2023, the UP Food Safety and Drug Administration issued a notification banning the manufacture, sale and distribution of halal-certified food products, except those meant for export. The latter stipulation exposes the duplicitous nature of state policy, as UP accounted for over 60 per cent of the 1.3 million tonnes of buffalo meat India exported in 2024.

Meanwhile, the state justified the halal ban as a move to protect 'public health' and enforce uniform standards.

It claimed that certain organisations were using halal certification to gain unfair commercial advantage while pushing a divisive agenda. For good measure, after a complaint by a BJP youth wing member, a case was also registered against Muslim entities, including the Halal Council of India (Mumbai), accusing them of exploiting religious sentiments.

Symbolism has continued to drive policy. Since 2023, the state has observed November 25 as 'No Non-Veg Day' to mark the birth anniversary of sadhu T.L. Vaswani, an advocate of vegetarianism. During the Kanwar Yatra in the Hindu holy month of Shravan, the



“WHEN BANNING MEAT SHOPS, WHY NOT BAN KFC TOO? MANY OF THESE BJP LEADERS ALSO RUN RESTAURANTS WHERE MEAT IS SERVED. WILL THEY SHUT THOSE DOWN? THEY WANT TO SHOW THEIR BRAVADO BY DESTROYING A POOR MAN'S FOOD CART”

SANJAY SINGH
AAP leader and
Rajya Sabha MP

“The calls for meat bans reflect the duplicity of the Hindu right-wing. Hindutva icon Savarkar himself said that cow worship is superstition. Meat ban demands are just to put minorities in their place”

ABHISHEK CHOWDHARY
Author of *Vajppaye: The Ascent of the Hindu Right*



“IT'S A PROVEN FACT THAT OVER 70% OF INDIA IS NON-VEGETARIAN, SO THE VEGETARIAN HINDU-HINU-MANUVADIS HAVE NO BUSINESS SHUTTING DOWN NON-VEG FOOD OUTLETS”

JAWAHAR SIRCAR
Ex-bureaucrat and
ex-Rajya Sabha MP



'sale and purchase of meat in the open' has been banned along pilgrimage routes. Last year, a new order added another layer of tension—businesses and eateries along the yatra route were told to display the owners' names, which critics saw as a bid to single out Muslim establishments.

Beyond formal policy actions, UP has also been witnessing frequent incidents of vigilante justice. This is reflected in the educational spaces too. In 2016, the Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar University (BBAU) in Lucknow banned non-vegetarian food in its mess despite students protesting the "anti-Dalit move", signalling institutional alignment with broader cultural pressures. Last year, the principal of a private school in Amroha suspended a nursery student for carrying non-vegetarian food in his lunchbox. The case drew widespread attention after a video posted by the child's mother went viral. In 2019, an FIR was filed against 43 people in Mahoba district for allegedly

serving non-vegetarian biryani during an Urs without 'prior consent'.

Cow vigilantism, spearheaded by self-styled *gau rakshaks*, remains the most violent manifestation of anti-meat sentiment in the state. Often operating with impunity, their targets have predominantly been Muslims and Dalits suspected of cow slaughter or beef consumption. UP has seen several such episodes in the past decade, the most infamous being the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri in 2015 over rumours of beef possession.

Neighbouring Madhya Pradesh has been trying to keep up with UP on this front of late. The first order Chief Minister Mohan Yadav issued after taking office in December 2023 was to ban the sale of meat and fish in the open. The administration in various districts acted with alacrity on the orders of the newly appointed CM.

Small fishmongers who had set

A HIGHER CALLING

► Indologist N.P. Bhaduri says the Valmiki Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas have references to meat consumption

► Scholar Lakshmanshastri Joshi's 'Hindudharma Samiksha' highlights instances where Vedic Gods are pleased with sacrifice of goats, horses and cows

► In Bengal, Maa Kali has historically been worshipped with meat offerings. In the old days, dacoits would offer a human sacrifice—Dakate Kali—before going on raids

► Maharashtra's warkari tradition refers to saint Sajan Kasai, who was a butcher and devotee of the sect's deity, Lord Vithoba

► Animal sacrifice and consuming the meat as food has been part of religious rituals across India, even at temples such as the Kamakhya (Assam), Kalighat (Kolkata) and Tulja Bhavani (Maharashtra)

up temporary sites on pavements were chased away, and curtains began to appear on the entrances of meat shops. Municipal bodies dialled down the drive over the months, but meat shops remain in the government's crosshairs. From April 1, 2025, liquor shops have been shut in 19 towns of 'Hindu significance' in MP. Now, some right-wing groups also want a ban on the sale of meat in these towns.

Earlier, former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had been vehemently opposed to the introduction of eggs in children's diet at the anganwadis in the state, despite MP having some of the worst indices in malnutrition. The state has a 21 per cent tribal population that is mostly non-vegetarian, yet anganwadis in tribal areas still do not serve eggs—which nutritionists consider as the best and cheapest source of protein for children. Malnutrition is the highest among tribal communities in the state, compared to other groups.

A GROWING TASTE...

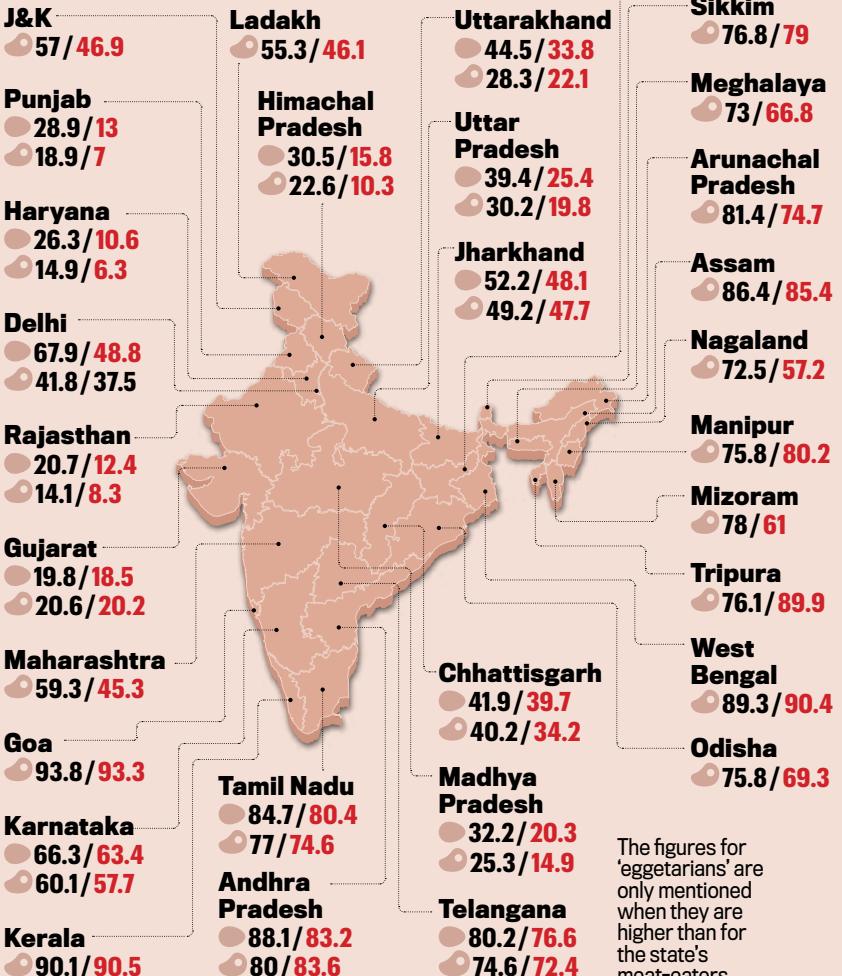
Across India, more and more people now identify themselves as non-vegetarian

An Impure Logic

Economist and professor Dr Neeraj Hatekar says “notions of purity and pollution are related to the caste system, with those engaged in ‘impure’ occupations being relegated to lower positions in the social order”. Empirical data reveals that India is now a predominantly non-vegetarian country (see box *A Growing Taste*). Shahu Patole, the author of *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, says the community was traditionally burdened with a sense of shame and inferiority due to their food choices. “Now, the larger Bahujan community has begun to think likewise when it comes to eating non-vegetarian food,” he feels.

Indeed, it's still an uphill task for the Bahujan samaj to get their case heard. A case in point, the Delhi fish market incident in upscale CR Park got a lot of press and blowback, but the nearby Indira Fish Market in Govindpuri, which caters to the lower middle class community, wasn't so lucky. The stalls were asked to close for Navratri; 10 days later, it was levelled to the ground. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) says the market was “illegal”, but the vendors say they had licences from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Any which way, the market is no more.

Akshaya Mukul, author of *Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India*, notes that the Hindutva right-wing's campaign against meat is not new. It began in the first quarter of the 20th century with the rise of competitive politics between Hindus and Muslims. “During this period, there were riots in north India, and Hindus were consolidating. The binary between meat-eaters and those who had satvic food was used to distinguish themselves and display a sense of superiority,” notes Mukul. He added that publications of the Gita Press spoke out against beef-eating while ignoring the corpus of literature by Hindu scholars on the subject. “From the cow, this was extended to vegetarianism. However, leaders of the Hindu Right like B.S. Moonje used to eat and encourage the consumption of non-vegetarian food,” he explains. On the right-wing campaign against halal meat, Mukul says, “They are perfecting the art of putting Muslims



The figures for 'eggetarians' are only mentioned when they are higher than for the state's meat-eaters

Figures in %; ● Eggs ○ Fish, chicken, meat ● Men ● Women

The data is for men/women in the 15-49 age group consuming non-vegetarian food every week

Source: NFHS 2019-21

in their place.” Food historian Chinmay Damle approaches the argument from another angle. “Vegetarianism in India is often linked to purity. Groups like Brahmins and Jains form a minuscule part of the population but assert superiority on grounds of their caste and culinary choices,” he explains.

AS THE INDIRA FISH MARKET CASE IN DELHI SHOWED, IT'S STILL AN UPHILL TASK FOR THE BAHUJAN SAMAJ TO GET THEIR CASE HEARD

Halal vs Jhatka

A new front seems to have opened up in the meat wars debate, with the push for animals or fowl slaughtered using the jhatka method instead of halal. Maharashtra has even seen the launch of ‘Malhar certification’ for Hindu butchers supplying jhatka meat. In jhatka, the animal is decapitated using a swift blow to the neck while in halal, the windpipe and arteries are cut to ensure the animal bleeds out. BJP leader and minister Nitesh Rane, who inaugurated the Malhar certification platform, says it was aimed at creating an alternative. “There were complaints about halal meat being forced on people,” he alleged.

“Jhatka is a part of Hindu culture,

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21, 49.3% of men and 39.3% women consumed fish, chicken or meat every week

The numbers for those who had never consumed non-vegetarian food was just 16.6% and 29.4%, respectively

83.4% men and 70.6% women in the 15-49 age group eat non-vegetarian food

Data shows 'gradual rise' in non-veg consumption. NFHS 2015-16 had 43.2% men and 36.6% women as meat-eaters

Meat now a big contributor to economy. Exports of animal products in FY24: \$4.5 billion (Rs 38,424 cr.), of which buffalo meat contributed \$3.7 billion (Rs 31,593 cr.)

A 2023-24 Gol report says India is No. 5 globally in meat production, with 4.5 million tonnes produced a year; in egg production, it's No. 2 behind China with 142.8 bn eggs

while halal comes from Islam and was forced on us," parrots Akash Palange, spokesperson of the Hindu Dalit Khatik Mahasangh, which has launched the Malhar certification. He alleges that around 90 per cent of the Hindu Khatiks, who are Dalits, had to quit their traditional meat business due to the insistence on halal meat. "We are not opposing halal...we are just calling on Hindus to consume jhatka meat as a form of economic support for Hindu Khatiks," he says. So far, around 150 meat-sellers across Maharashtra have registered for the certification, and Palange claims the numbers will rise. They are asking the government to allocate space for them in city slaughterhouses. A Pune-based butcher who

did not want to be named says traditionally, only the Sikhs and Punjabis asked for jhatka meat, adding that there had been more inquiries from Hindus after the Malhar brouhaha.

Shabbir Ahmed Ansari of the All India Muslim OBC Organisation notes that while Muslims may be slaughtering the animals, they had only a small role in the larger pink economy. It was the Hindus and Jains who were in the export business, running factories making products from animal bones. Ishaque Khadke, secretary of the Muslim Khatik Samaj, Maharashtra, points out that many Hindu butchers sold halal meat slaughtered by their Muslim counterparts. "Around 80 per cent of society

other meats (\$0.8 million), and poultry products (\$184.6 million). Meat production grew 4.9 per cent year on year to 10.3 million tonnes in the same period. Egg production also rose 3.2 per cent to 142.8 billion. Per capita egg consumption has also grown from 101 to 103 per annum.

Past is Not the Past

The politicisation of food contrasts starkly with India's historical relationship with meat. Indologist Nrisingha Prasad Bhaduri points out that meat consumption has deep roots in Indian culture, dating back to the Vedas. "The Rig Veda mentions the sacrifice and consumption of horse, ox and sheep," he says. "Which part of the animal was to

EVEN AS THE MEAT BATTLES CONTINUE, NO ONE SEEMS TO BE COMPLAINING ABOUT HOW ITS EXPORT BROUGHT IN \$4.5 BN IN FY24

is being held hostage to the whims of a handful," he says.

The halal versus jhatka debate is also gaining traction on the margins in Bengal, but in other subtle ways. The BJP frequently invokes the memory of Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, better known as Gopal Pantha, a butcher remembered for his role during the 'Direct Action Day' riots in 1946. While the BJP holds him up as a hero who faced up to Muslim aggression, many others consider him a hoodlum whose legacy is mired in bloodshed. The 'beef ban' doesn't have many takers in Bengal, although the right-wing ecosystem continues to weave subtle narratives linking its consumption to Muslim appeasement by the ruling Trinamool Congress.

But even with all this, no one, especially in the government, seems to be complaining about how meat is also now a huge contributor to the economy, with buffalo meat dominating exports of animal products at 82 per cent in 2023-24. Exports in FY24 was worth \$4.5 billion (Rs 38,424 crore), of which buffalo meat was \$3.7 billion (Rs 31,593 crore), followed by sheep/goat meat (\$77.7 million),

be consumed by whom is also detailed. The switch to milk was a nutritional choice, not a religious mandate." These references are also found in the Valmiki Ramayana, and many Puranas even describe meat being offered during funeral rites. According to Bhaduri, vegetarianism began to take deeper roots with the advent of Buddhism, which strictly forbade the killing of animals.

In Bengal, the culture of meat/fish-eating is deeply intertwined with spiritual life. The goddess Kali has historically been worshipped with 'offerings'—in extreme cases, even human sacrifices. "In the old days, dacoits offered human sacrifices before going out on raids," Bhaduri notes, referring to the 'Dakate Kali' tradition. His view is that faith has always accommodated regional custom. Quoting from the Ramayana, he says: "*Jadanya purusha rajan, tadanyastysa devata* (As is the man, so is his deity)." Unfortunately, ancient wisdom is lost in the din of the politics of the day where even a person or community's dietary habits can become easy meat for vigilantes. ■

-with Arkamoy Datta Majumdar, Avaneesh Mishra & Rahul Noronha

WHO'S IN, WHO'S OUT? Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah with Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar in Bengaluru, Mar. 5



THE NATION
KARNATAKA

PITFALLS OF THE CASTE COUNT

THE CONGRESS ENTHUSIASM FOR A CASTE CENSUS NOTWITHSTANDING, THE SIDDARAMAIAH GOVERNMENT'S TABLING OF THE KARNATAKA SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SURVEY 2015 IS NOW A POLITICAL HOT POTATO

A

long-gestating item on Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah's policy wishlist finally made it to the agenda of a cabinet meeting on April 17. The consternation among the Congress's own legislators, the aggravated tones in community debates in the state, perhaps beyond, all that had been building up. For, on the table was the 306-page report of the Karnataka Social and Educational Survey (KSES) 2015—the first caste census of recent times, predating that

By Ajay Sukumaran

ON THE BOIL

➤ **The Karnataka Caste Census report 2024 recommends reservation for state's OBCs raised from 32% to 51%. This will take total quotas to 85% (including 24% for SC/STs and 10% for EWS groups)**

➤ **Dominant OBC groups, Veerashaiva-Lingayats and Vokkaligas, say the survey was 'unscientific', claim undercounting of their populations**

➤ **They fear their political clout will weaken; 16 of Karnataka's 23 CMs have been from these two communities. The 33-member cabinet has 13 Lingayats and Vokkaligas**

➤ **The assigning of the most backward 'I-b' slot to Kurubas raises eyebrows. CM Siddaramaiah, who commissioned the survey in 2015, is a Kuruba, while Deputy CM Shivakumar is a Vokkaliga**

of Bihar and methodologically more comprehensive, to see the light of day. The report gives a detailed break-up of the caste composition of Karnataka's population and, based on a weighted assessment of socio-economic, educational and employment parameters, recommends a hike in reservation quota for the Backward Classes, a demographic segment now confirmed as accounting for about 70 per cent.

The survey was commissioned in 2014, a year into Siddaramaiah's first term in office, and remains the first such door-to-door survey conducted by Karnataka since 1984. (The Union government's own 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census famously stayed under wraps.) Prior to that, the only caste-based demographic data had come from the 1931 all-India census, which had included a caste count. A decade behind the veil, the KSES 2015 report has always been a political minefield. Once made



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**MUTUAL FUND INVESTMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO MARKET RISKS,
READ ALL SCHEME RELATED DOCUMENTS CAREFULLY.**

public, resistance to its results came from various quarters, most vocally from Karnataka's two biggest caste groups—the Veerashaiva-Lingayats and Vokkaligas—who cast doubt on the accuracy of the exercise that covered 59.8 million people, or 94 per cent of Karnataka's estimated 63.5 million citizens. A purported 'leak' in 2016 of the numerical strength of major communities had aggravated their fears of an undercount, causing a furore. The actual survey data, however, did not make it to the open then—in fact, its report was never submitted to the government. It was not until 2023, when Siddaramaiah returned to power, that an order was issued tasking K. Jayaprakash Hegde, the then chairman of the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission, to prepare a full report utilising data from the 2015 survey.

He gle handed over his new report in February 2024 but it remained in its sealed boxes—till it was sprung on everyone at a cabinet meeting on April 11. The April 17 meeting was set to formally discuss its implementation but, amidst much gnashing of teeth, it remained inconclusive and a new date, May 2, has been set for the discussion. There are two theories about the problematic passage the report is facing even within the Congress government. One contains motives worthy of a political thriller.

This more dramatic script focuses on the fact that the report's unveiling coincides with Siddaramaiah completing two years of his second tenure. From the start, it's been a stint defined by his rivalry with deputy D.K. Shivakumar, who has been biding time for a shot at the top job. Talk of a mid-term change-of-guard has been one of the enduring intrigues in Karnataka, giving rival parties ample chance to target it. "The CM uses the caste census as a distraction whenever his

chair is under threat," said the BJP's R. Ashoka, Leader of the Opposition in the assembly, in a post on X.

That April 16 post also reeled off a volley of 12 posers on the report, which Ashoka termed "unscientific". He also pointed out that Shivakumar, a Vokkaliga, was a signatory to a 2023 demand by a caste body, the Raja Vokkaligara Sangha (RVS), to reject the report. Like other Vokkaliga leaders, he implied, Shivakumar will be answerable to the community. That he went into a huddle with party MLAs ahead of the April 17 meeting, and that it stayed inconclusive, did not disprove that line.

THE WELFAΡIST LOGIC

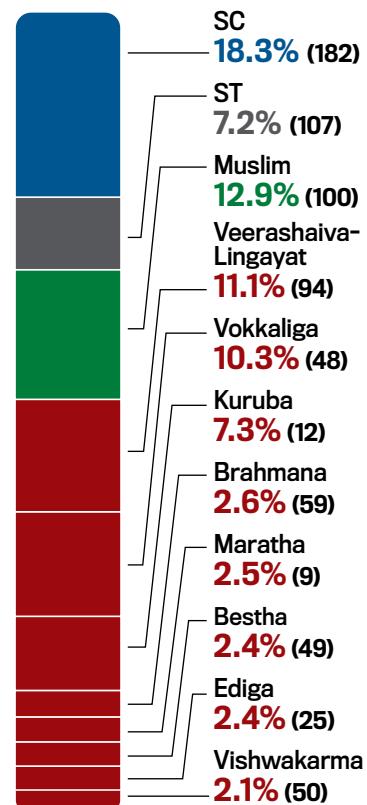
The other theory is more anodyne. The caste census has been a key plank of the Congress in recent times—Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, is now one of its chief votaries. Building up momentum around the theme, Bihar had released its own caste survey in October 2023. Congress-ruled Telangana came out with its own census in February 2024. In fact, during the recent All India Congress Committee meeting at Ahmedabad, Telangana chief minister A. Revanth Reddy came in for praise for the accomplishment. The caste census was also a key promise in the Congress manifesto for the 2023 Karnataka assembly election. By this token, Siddaramaiah had procrastinated for a year, and had little choice but to table the long-pending report now.

Karnataka has a long history of seeking to assess community-specific markers of socio-economic progress

Some have not missed the fact that the report release comes ahead of the half-way mark of Sidda's tenure, when he was 'slated' to cede his chair to DKS

THE NEW DATA

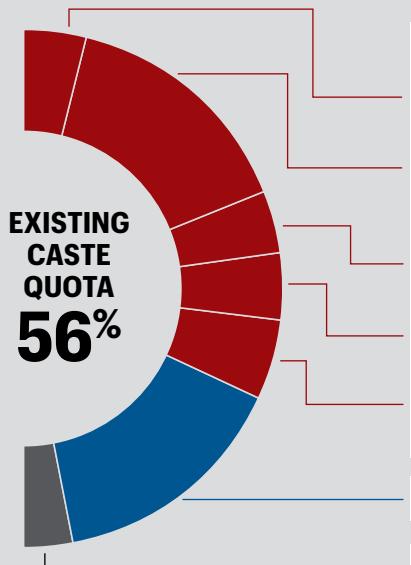
The KSES 2024 report, based on data gleaned from a 54-point questionnaire, has rejigged some key caste group numbers in Karnataka



Numbers denote % of population; No. of sub-castes in (); above 2% of population considered

and working those into affirmative action. The princely state of Mysore was among the pioneers of backward class reservation. A committee set up by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV recommended in 1921 that all communities other than Brahmins should be regarded as backward. In the past 50 years, there have been three committee reports that guided the state's backward quotas: the Havanur report of 1975, the T. Venkataswamy report of 1986 (which was rejected), and the Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy report of 1990. However, in 1994, the Karnataka government formulated a reservation policy that exceeded the 50 per cent cap set by the Supreme Court, and therefore had to be revised following a legal challenge. Thus evolved a categorisation of backward classes into five groups that is still being followed. The categories—I, IIa, IIb, IIIa and IIIb—account for 32 per cent reserva-

THE STATUS QUO(TA) IN PLACE



51%
Recommended reservation for the Backward Classes, up from 32% now

70
Percentage of the Karnataka population covered in the Backward Classes

1,351
Castes enumerated in the Karnataka caste survey; **94%** of the population covered, including **13.5 mn** households.
Cost: **Rs 165 crore**

Veteran Congress MLA and president of the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha, Shamanur Shivashankarappa, has warned of a backlash if the report is implemented, saying that the Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities will fight together

tion. Since quota for Scheduled Castes and Tribes was enhanced to 24 per cent in 2022 under a BJP regime, the total reservation in Karnataka stands at 56 per cent now. Barring the SC/STs, Brahmins and a handful of other small castes, all others, including backward Muslim and Christian sub-groups, are part of the Backward Classes, who form approximately 70 per cent of the total.

The KSES Report 2024 backs this up with data collected via a 54-point questionnaire during the 2015 enumeration. According to it, the SCs and STs formed 18.3 per cent and 7.2 per cent of the state's population, respectively. Of the other segments, the biggest were Muslims, with a population of 7.6 million (12.9 per cent); Veerashaiva-Lingayat at 6.6 million (11.1 per cent); Vokkaliga at 6.1 million (10.3 per cent); and

the backward Kuruba at 4.4 million (7.3 per cent). The report recommends increasing the state's backwards quota from the existing 32 per cent to 51 per cent. It also advises dividing an existing OBC quota category into two, moving some castes from one to the other.

Veteran Congress MLA Shamanur Shivashankarappa, also the president of the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha, has warned of a backlash if the report is implemented, saying the Lingayats and Vokkaligas will fight together. Arguing that the data is flawed, the Mahasabha points out that the Veerashaiva-Lingayats had been estimated at 6 million, then 17 per cent of the population, by the Chinappa Reddy Commission in 1990.

BACKWARD CLASSES: 32%

Category I: 4%

Most backward castes

Category II (a): 15%

Includes Kuruba, Idiga, Vishwakarma

Category II (b): 4%

Muslim

Category III (a): 4%

Includes Vokkaliga

Category III (b): 5%

Includes Veerashaiva-Lingayat

SCHEDULED CASTES: 17%

SCHEDULED TRIBES: 7%

Claiming an undercount, saying the 2015 enumeration left out as many as 16 sub-castes within the community, it has called for a fresh survey.

The RVS has taken a similar stand, and calls on Vokkaliga legislators to resign if the report is implemented. It's not just the Vokkaliga numbers—the figures for Lingayat and other communities, too, "have left me shocked," said Union minister H.D. Kumaraswamy, a Vokkaliga and state president of the Janata Dal (Secular), in a post on X on April 15. Accusing the CM of using the caste census as a political tool against some communities, Kumaraswamy asked: "There are 101 castes under the IIa category, and there's a 15 per cent reservation. Who has taken the largest share of this?" The veiled reference was to Siddaramaiah's own Kuruba community, which is currently in the IIa category. The report recommends that it be moved to the 'most backward category' of Ib, where, critics say, it would get a bigger slice of the quota pie.

CUT AND THRUST

K.M. Ramachandrapappa, president of the Karnataka State Backward Castes Federation, and a Kuruba leader, has a ready riposte. "Let them bring information about Kurubas. I, too, will bring information about how Vokkaligas have benefited. Let's both discuss publicly," he says. Each of the previous commission reports, he points out, had faced resistance from forward castes. The government, he says, should release the full data of the 2024 report to remove ambiguities, if any. "There are many small communities that still don't know where they stand. We don't have clear information about whom all the state's programmes have reached over the past 50 years," says Ramachandrapappa.

Detailed data is exactly what many ministers had sought at the April 17 cabinet meet, according to law minister H.K. Patil. Even if the Siddaramaiah government is treading cautiously, that perhaps is the only real long-term cure for confusion. Caste is a political hot potato, but the Congress has taken it upon itself to peel it for the greater good. ■

**WINGS
UNLEASHED**
A Dassault Rafale
Marine takes off
from the French
aircraft carrier
Charles de Gaulle,
Nov. 28, 2024



DEFENCE | RAFALE-M

NAVY'S NEWA

INS VIKRANT'S DECKS WILL SOON HAVE ADVANCED RAFALE MARINES, PROMISING TO

F

Finally, the Indian Navy has got its weapon of choice. In a move to bolster its maritime dominance, India has set its sights on the Dassault Rafale Marine (Rafale-M), a game-changing addition to the navy's arsenal. On April 9, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), the highest body on security matters led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the procurement of 26 Rafale-M fighter jets worth Rs 63,000 crore. It is India's biggest foreign defence procurement to date;

the 36 Rafales bought for the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2016 cost Rs 59,000 crore. A government-to-government deal with France will be signed by the end of this month in the presence of French defence minister Sébastien Lecornu in New Delhi. The advanced 4.5-generation jets are destined to operate from the decks of INS *Vikrant*, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier. The delivery is expected to start from 2029, with all 26 jets expected to arrive by 2031.

The deal is for 22 single-seater jets and four twin-seater trainer variants, along with weapons, simulators, spares, crew training and five years of logistics support. Under the agreement, 10 of the IAF's 36 Rafales will also be retrofitted for buddy-buddy refuelling—transfer of aviation fuel between airborne aircraft—extending their operational range.

The Rafale-M deal underscores India's commitment to counter the rising naval ambitions of China and any misadventures by its strategic partner Pakistan in the Indo-Pacific. Naval experts believe that as tensions simmer in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the Rafale-M—considered the world's most advanced carrier-borne fighter jet—will redefine India's strategic reach, equipping the navy with unmatched capability in terms of strike, air defence and reconnaissance missions. The Rafale-M can also be deployed from land-based airfields. After all the aircraft are delivered, India will have 62 Rafale fighter jets.

As carrier-borne aircraft, the Rafale-M will complement the navy's existing Russian-origin Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-29K fleet. Though it increases the carrier force's operational arc, the procurement

**26**

RAFALE-Ms TO BE ACQUIRED BY THE INDIAN NAVY

₹63,000 CRORE

TOTAL COST, INCLUDING WEAPONS, SIMULATORS, CREW TRAINING, ETC.

IR POWER

BLUNT THE THREAT FROM ADVERSARIES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

PACKING A PUNCH

► A carrier-based, multirole fighter jet, the Rafale-M will equip the Indian Navy with advanced strike, air defence and reconnaissance capabilities

► Its need was felt especially due to multiple issues with the existing MiG 29K fleet and delays in developing indigenous fighter jets for the navy

► With its ability to operate from IAF bases along India's northern borders, it will also bolster the air force's existing fleet of 36 Rafales, helping India project power across multiple fronts

is seen as an emergency measure, as the navy does not have enough jets for its aircraft carriers. It has been using the MiG-29K after the British-made Sea Harriers were phased out in 2016.

Armed with advanced weaponry like the SCALP 560-km-range cruise missile, AM39 Exocet anti-ship missile and Meteor air-to-air missile, the Rafale-M is a multirole jet capable of long-range precision strikes against ships, air targets and land-based threats. The French navy has been operating it since 2004 and has a fleet of around 48 aircraft. Operating from the carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, Rafale-Ms were actively involved in Operation Chammal (2014-2022) in Iraq and Syria as part of the US-led coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

"Its versatility extends beyond the seas, with the ability to operate from IAF bases

along India's northern borders, bolstering the IAF's Rafale fleet. This dual-role capability ensures India can project power across multiple fronts, from maritime chokepoints like the Malacca Strait to contested Himalayan borders, countering China's carrier-driven power projection and Pakistan's asymmetric naval threats," explains a senior defence official.

Admiral Arun Prakash, former navy chief, who was also a naval aviator, tells INDIA TODAY that the Rafale-M, with its advanced multirole capabilities, positions India to effectively counter challenges from adversaries, especially China's expanding naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. Naval experts claim that the Rafale-M can also deploy India's air-delivered nuclear bombs, bolstering the survivability and credibility of its second-strike capability from sea.

A key official of the defence ministry reveals that the fact Rafale-Ms share high commonality with the IAF's Rafale fleet went in their favour. Inducting a new aircraft type, he adds, would have introduced complex maintenance and supply chain challenges; the Rafale-Ms leverage existing infrastructure, reducing costs for spares, repairs and inventory and adding to its operational performance.

COUNTERING THE CHINA-PAKISTAN THREAT

This synergy not only strengthens the navy's carrier strike group but also enhances India's deterrence against China's *Shandong* and *Fujian* aircraft carriers and Pakistan's advanced submarines and frigates. From 2020-2025, the China-Pakistan naval collaboration has strengthened their combined maritime capabilities. Pakistan's Type 054A/P frigates (Tughril-class) are Chinese platforms equipped with sophisticated radar systems, anti-ship missiles and air defence capabilities. Additionally, its Hangor-class submarines, based on China's Yuan-class Type 039A, are part of an eight-submarine deal, with deliveries expected by 2028. These submarines, featuring air-independent propulsion—that enable them to stay submerged for long periods—and Babur cruise missiles, enhance Pakistan's ability to conduct stealthy operations in the Arabian Sea.

As India asserts itself in the IOR, the Rafale-M's interoperability—the ability to operate in conjunction with other militaries—with platforms of allies like France and QUAD partners position it as a linchpin in countering the 'String of Pearls' strategy and Pakistan's Chinese-backed naval build-up. With China bolstering its carrier strike groups and deploying long-range naval aviation assets with an intent to project power far beyond its shores, the Rafale-M's technological edge will enhance deterrence, and ensure robust defence of Indian interests in contested maritime zones across the IOR. Regular Chinese patrols near critical Indian Ocean chokepoints, such as the Malacca Strait, combined

MEAN MACHINE

Besides nuclear capability, the Rafale-M possesses specialised avionics, sensors and communication equipment for maritime operations and comes equipped with a variety of weapons systems

1,912

KMPH

Maximum Speed

1,000

KM

Combat Radius

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

SPECTRA

Integrated electronic countermeasures, including radar jamming, missile warning, infrared decoy systems

FRONT SECTOR Optronics

Infrared search and track for passive target detection

RBE2-AA

Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar with 200 km detection range for air targets



CARRIER COMPATIBILITY

- » Folding wings to optimise deck storage

- » Anti-corrosion coating for maritime environments

- » Microwave Landing System (MLS)—precision carrier landing assistance

- » Reinforced airframe and landing gear for catapult-assisted takeoff and arrested recovery

with strengthened maritime partnerships with nations like Sri Lanka and Pakistan, coupled with its naval base in Djibouti and access to Gwadar Port, underscore the evolving threat landscape India must navigate.

A naval officer reiterates that the Rafale-M's technological superiority is crucial for countering the PLA Navy (PLAN). With its advanced AESA radar, SPECTRA electronic warfare and weapons package, the Rafale-M excels in fleet air defence, maritime strike, and area-denial operations that would enable it to neutralise Chinese carrier strike groups, long-range naval aviation assets and surface vessels. Its low-observable features enhance survivability against China's advanced air defence

systems, ensuring India can maintain a qualitative edge over its J-15 fighters and future carrier-based aircraft.

At the same time, the Rafale-M's anti-submarine warfare capabilities and precision-guided munitions allow it to counter Pakistan's submarine threat, while its air-to-air combat prowess, bolstered by the Meteor missile, ensures air superiority over the Arabian Sea against the Pakistan Air Force's JF-17 and F-16 aircraft.

WHY THE RAFALE-M

Beyond its operational advantages, the Rafale-M aligns with India's broader strategic goals as a net security provider in the IOR. Its compatibility with India's aircraft carriers, INS *Vikrant* and the planned INS

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

AIR-TO-AIR MISSILES

- » Meteor (Ramjet-powered, >100 km)
- » MICA (Medium-range; infrared & radar-guided variants)



AIR-TO-SURFACE MISSILES

- » AM39 Exocet (Anti-ship missile, ~70 km)
- » SCALP (Long-range cruise missile, >560 km)

PRECISION-GUIDED MUNITIONS

- » Hammer (Navigation system-guided bombs with rocket booster)
- » Paveway (Laser-guided bombs)

WHAT IT IS UP AGAINST

The induction of Rafale-Ms will redefine India's strategic reach against its key adversaries

CHINA

- » People's Liberation Army Navy operates around 600 aircraft, comprising both fixed-wing jets and helicopters



SHENYANG J-15

Primary carrier-based 4.5-gen multirole fighters, also known as Flying Shark;
59 in service

SHENYANG J-11

Air superiority 4th-gen fighters;
50 in service

- » The fleet also features J-15D electronic warfare variants and J-15T models equipped for catapult-assisted takeoff

PAKISTAN

- » India's other key adversary has no aircraft carrier, and thus no naval jet
- » Rafale-Ms will ensure superiority over the Arabian Sea against the Pakistan Air Force's JF-17 and F-16 jets besides striking capabilities against its naval frigates/submarines

Vishal, also ensures operational flexibility.

With their smaller size and lighter weight, marine fighter jets maximise efficiency while utilising the limited space available on aircraft carriers. Experts claim that, unlike their air force counterparts, naval jets possess specialised avionics, sensors and communication equipment for maritime operations. Built to withstand the challenges of saltwater environments, they have corrosion-resistant materials and coatings.

The Rafale-M has an exceptionally strong airframe and a reinforced undercarriage for carrier operations. It is a twin-engine, single-seat aircraft with folding wings that is capable of undertaking 'quick reaction alert', air defence

and air policing missions, nuclear deterrence duties, power projection, deep strike missions, air support for ground forces, reconnaissance and pilot training sorties. Adept at both air-to-ground strikes and air-to-air attacks and interceptions during the same sortie, the service ceiling of the Rafale-M—the altitude at which an aircraft can no longer rise faster than 100 feet per minute under standard air conditions—stands at 50,000 feet.

According to Dassault, the Rafale-M has the RBE2-AA electronic scanning radar and Front Sector Optronics (FSO) to detect and track targets, while the SPECTRA internal 'electronic warfare' (EW) system enables long-range detection and identification of hostile radars,

missiles and lasers. Rafale-Ms' unique data fusion capability yields a simplified and consolidated picture to the pilot. All these helped it beat the other naval fighter in contention for the Indian Navy's multi-role carrier borne fighters (MRCBF) programme—the US-made Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornet.

The need for a platform like the Rafale-M was also felt urgently due to issues with the 40-45 fourth-generation MiG 29K jets that are operated from INS *Vikramaditya*. The jets—shore-based aircraft modified for the navy—and associated equipment were ordered for \$2.2 billion (Rs 18,750 crore, at current exchange rate) in two tranches in 2004 and 2010 from Russia. But the MiGs have a terrible record of accidents, with multiple crashes making them not entirely reliable. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), in a report sometime back, had also flagged issues with the MiG-29K's airframe, its RD MK-33 engine and its fly-by-wire system. Moreover, the Russians are still heavily engaged in a conflict with Ukraine, and ceased to be reliable suppliers of spares and new platforms.

Compared to the MiG 29K, the Rafale is a vastly superior machine. "Its sensors and weapons are certainly technologically superior, and it will provide much more punch to the Indian Navy's striking abilities. Moreover, the Rafale-M is a proven aircraft, and even in small numbers, it will provide additional sorties as its serviceability is very good," says Admiral Prakash.

However, since INS *Vikrant* was designed for the LCA Navy (the naval version of the Light Combat Aircraft) and MiG 29K, the shipbuilder has to make some changes according to its requirements. Currently, the LCA Navy is superseded by the Twin Engine Deck Based Fighter (TEDBF), which is being developed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) for the navy. Its first test flight is expected by 2026 and induction by 2031. Till the time this indigenous TEDBF is ready and gets inducted in good numbers for long-term operational sovereignty, the Rafale-Ms will be the Indian Navy's aerial workhorse. ■



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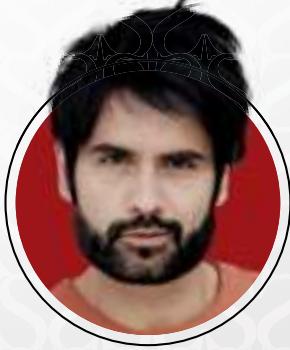
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A Burst of **PATRIOTIC FERVOUR**

Filmmakers are **revisiting India's colonial past** to bring our forgotten stories and heroes to life for future generations

By SUHANI SINGH

F

For the past few years, all Nikhil Advani has been doing is directing dhoti-kurta-clad men rallying for freedom. He doesn't mind being labelled the chief chronicler of India's colonial history. It started with SonyLIV's *Freedom at Midnight* (2024-) whose second season will drop later this year, and continues with Amazon Prime series *Revolutionaries*, which he is currently shooting. "History fascinates me, especially this period. We cannot erase history. We should allow people to understand it and not take it for granted," Advani says, as he gets ready for a night shift of *Revolutionaries* unfolding on a sprawling set in Madh Island in Mumbai. If *Freedom at Midnight* captured how India's greatest leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel banded together for India's independence, *Revolutionaries*, Advani says, centres on a group of young boys with a more straightforward mission— "We will not ask them [the British] to leave, we will just throw them out."

Advani is not alone in mining India's colonial past for inspiration. Others, too, are focusing their lens on pivotal events and figures of the era. Recently, Ram Madhvani directed *The Waking of a Nation* (also on SonyLIV), a courtroom drama that documents the events leading up to the Jallianwala Bagh killings and follows one man's pursuit of truth and justice in its aftermath. Akshay Kumar's *Kesari Chapter 2* revisits the same incident, but tells it through the eyes of lawyer C. Sankaran Nair, "the forgotten hero" who "dared to take on the British Empire". Akshay plays Nair in the film, which has been in the news as BJP leaders target the Congress for ignoring Nair's contribution despite him being a former president of the INC (Indian National Congress). Later



"We cannot erase history. We should allow people to understand it and not take it for granted"

NIKHIL ADVANI
Filmmaker

this year arrives Hansal Mehta's epic *Gandhi*, featuring Pratik Gandhi in the titular role. Rumour has it that a leading streaming platform has acquired the rights to the show. This spate of stories suggests that filmmakers are keen to take ownership of a troubling period of Indian history and revisit it with a fresh perspective. Through their work, they



THE
WAKING
OF A
NATION
(2025)



“**The idea that you cannot actually rule yourself... how did we believe that and let it happen? We got brainwashed”**

RAM MADHVANI, Filmmaker

are acquainting viewers with events that deserve in-depth examination and the unsung heroes who merit recognition.

For Saugata Mukherjee, head of content at SonyLIV, the platform behind *Rocket Boys*, *Freedom at Midnight* and *The Waking of a Nation*, the ambitious dramas are completely aligned with their goal to “tell the big stories of India” and fill the gaping void in the Indian



“We have a treasure trove of forgotten stories. It’s important for filmmakers, writers, studios and platforms to find them”

SAUGATA MUKHERJEE
Head of Content, SonyLIV

narrative landscape. “I don’t think we have mined and celebrated our history enough,” he says. “We have a treasure trove of forgotten stories. It’s important for makers, writers, studios and platforms to find them. But they need to tell them in a fashion that is contemporary, entertaining, and doesn’t become so niche that people stop watching history.”

Historicals are by no means easy to make or view. Ask Advani, who is in the midst of directing hundreds of extras in *Revolutionaries* and overseeing edits of *Freedom at Midnight*, season two. Research is

pivotal to the making of these shows, and the budgets are big, since locales, sets and costumes have to be authentic. The challenge is to imagine how these national icons would speak and behave; there is only so much creative licence you can take without the risk of offending public sentiment. Still, Advani found a way to make *Revolutionaries* different from *Freedom at Midnight*. “I’m treating it like *Gangs of Wasseypur* meets *Inglourious Basterds*,” he says, as he focuses on youth like Kartar Singh Sarabha and Ras Behari Bose, who revolted against the British Raj. “The idea is to have fun with history.” And also to expose the younger generation to figures beyond the ones in school textbooks or popular cinema. Think Bhagat Singh, Mangal Pandey, Udham Singh or Jhansi ki Rani.

For others, delving into the past is more than just reviving forgotten heroes or recounting colonial atrocities. *The Waking of a Nation*, says Madhvani, was also a way to examine how racism and prejudice were fundamental to the British colonising project. “The idea that you cannot actually rule yourself... how did we believe that and let it happen?” asks Madhvani. “We got brainwashed.” Given an opportunity, Madhvani would continue *The Waking of a Nation* series by looking at another defining moment in India’s freedom struggle—the Revolt of 1857. He is particularly interested in the Peel Commission that was appointed to investigate the mutiny.

Shedding light on lesser-known heroes was also the impulse behind *Kesari Chapter 2*, Karan Singh Tyagi’s directorial debut. A student of law and politics, Tyagi was deeply moved by *The Case that Shook the Empire*, a book by C. Sankaran Nair’s great-grandson Raghu Palat and

“Kesari 2 is important because the empire went into overdrive after Jallianwala Bagh to laud General Dyer as a hero”

KARAN SINGH TYAGI
Filmmaker



KESARI CHAPTER 2 (2025)



his wife Pushpa. “Sankaran Nair was knighted by the British Empire and resigned from the council [after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy],” Tyagi said in a statement to the press. “For him to then take on the British in the most dramatic of ways is a story of valour.” Among the triggers, Tyagi said, was watching a documentary by General Dyer’s great-granddaughter, in which she defends his actions and calls the assembled gathering “looters”. “That interview really angered me,” Tyagi said. “*Kesari 2* is important because you’ll be shocked to know that the empire went into overdrive after the massacre, going to extreme lengths in order to laud General Dyer as a hero.”

Feature films set in the colonial era have been made before. But they have either been biopics or entertaining spectacles like *Lagaan* or *RRR*. When it comes to Gandhi, it’s still the Richard Attenborough production, a predominantly English-language feature, which remains the reference point. Will Hansal Mehta and Applause Entertain-

ment’s *Gandhi* change that and finally give Indian audiences a local story celebrating their greatest leader?

“The world needs Gandhi now more than any other time,” Pratik Gandhi had told INDIA TODAY last year while shooting the show. “We have taken him for granted and there’s a generation that’s understanding him very weirdly and differently. It is very easy to criticise him. The beautiful thing is Gandhi let people judge him. He had the guts to reveal his flaws and mistakes.” The film aims to tell the story of the man that was Gandhi, more than the Mahatma.

And even as Advani embarks on the “crazy adventure” that is *Revolutionaries*, which follows the youngsters who were part of the Ghadar movement, he clarifies that it wasn’t a calculated move to become a genre specialist. He admits that these are time-consuming exercises and carry tremendous responsibility, but he wouldn’t have it any other way. “I like to tell stories of nation-building and non-jingoistic patriotism,” he says. It is a worthy endeavour. ■

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PG 60

LEISURE

CULTURE

Beacons of Parsi Heritage

A NEW BOOK ON A HISTORIC WELL, A FRESHLY REOPENED MUSEUM AND THE REINSTALLATION OF THE PARSI GATE ON MARINE DRIVE GIVE US THREE REASONS TO CELEBRATE MUMBAI'S **ZOROASTRIAN** COMMUNITY



THE CHRONICLER OF
MUMBAI Journalist and
author Bachi Karkaria at the
Parsi Gate on Marine Drive



PRESERVING THE IDENTITY

Bhikha Behram
Well at Churchgate;
(below) Framji
Dadabhoy
Alpaiwalla Museum
in Kharegat Colony



P

Parsis, Zoroastrian immigrants from what was once Persia, have contributed much to the warp and weft of Mumbai's fabric. But what does it mean to be a Parsi today? Three recent celebrations of their culture will help to understand the community's ethos better.

WHERE HOPE AND FAITH WELL

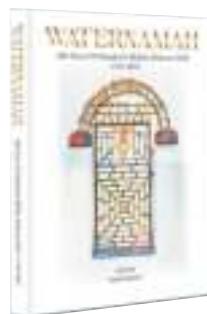
Waternamah, a gorgeous new book put together by Bachi Karkaria, inimitable author and chronicler of Mumbai, is centred around the Bhikha Behram Well at Churchgate. The book captures the well's atmosphere and extends its scope to encompass the universal sacred and secular significance of water through the eyes of various experts. While non-Parsis cannot enter this sacred space since its stained-glass panels were vandalised by miscreants in 2004, we can nevertheless admire its beauty while passing by. The well has been restored by conservation architect Kirtida Unwalla in 1999 and again in 2023.

Karkaria, a regular visitor to the well, speaks about the 300-year-old structure's serenity despite being in the bustling heart of the city. "Touching its stone, I get an instant connect with history and community," she says. "The well feels like a friend I can casually

drop in on without ritual formalities. I walk in, give a token contribution, light a *divo* (lamp), say a short prayer and then lose track of time gazing into its dark depths, fascinated by the terrapins paddling on the surface, and the silver and gold fish which silently surface."

Parsis believe a divine voice came to 18th-century merchant Bhikha Behram Panday in a recurrent dream, commanding him to build a well at that specific spot. The phenomenon of its sweet water despite its seashore location adds to the mystique of how Zoroastrianism's powerful water spirit, Ardvisura Anahita, grants the wishes of those who pray to her here. On the auspicious day of Avan Roz (usually around March every year), the city's Zoroastrians worship this powerful yazata.

THE 'GATEWAY' RETURNS TO GIRGAON
Girgaon is where the next stop on our story of Parsi revival takes us. To the recent restoration and reinstallation of the 'Parsi Gate' on Marine Drive.



WATERNAMAH: 300 Years of Mumbai's Bhikha Behram Well 1725-2025
Edited by Bachi Karkaria
THE BHIKHA BEHRAM WELL TRUST
₹750; 151 pages



Dedicated to yazata Avan, this is also an important spot where people pay her respect. The two obelisks built of Malad sandstone that date back more than a hundred years, each five metres tall and bearing Zoroastrian motifs, were removed in April 2021 when the construction of the coastal road began. The process of replacing them 75 metres to the north of their original location (so that the canopy to the entrance of the underwater segment of the coastal road does not block the view of these columns) started after its completion last year. The newly built steps and the refurbished pillars stand testament to the enduring faith of the Parsi community and the intertwining of their fate with the city.

A MUSE AND A MUSEUM ON MALABAR HILL

Lastly, we stop by the freshly reopened Framji Dadabhoy Alpaiwalla Museum in Kharegat Colony at the foot of Mumbai's tony Malabar Hill. It was first set up by the Bombay Parsi

WALK IN THE CLOUDS

Mumbai's elated with its **elevated walkway** at Malabar Hill

Punchayet in 1954, just after the avid collector Alpaivala passed away leaving behind his considerable collection that reportedly didn't even fit into his 11-room mansion! According to the Punchayet, the archaeological and ethnographic museum has two overall goals: 'To preserve the identity, culture and religious history of the Parsi Iranian Zoroastrian community and to reach out to the larger world and present the diversity of India within which the Zoroastrians have lived and flourished.'

Curator Kerman Fataki shows us around the well-displayed collections divided across seven 'stories' that connect the origins of the Zoroastrians to their material and spiritual progression and their subsequent life on the subcontinent. Right from the community's early migrations to their evolving attire, and even their success in the opium trade resulting in Chinese influence on their daily lives (think silk *gara* sarees elaborately embroidered with oriental motifs or exquisite porcelain objets d'art). There's a beautiful recreation of a fire temple with all the symbols and accessories that non-Zoroastrians aren't allowed access to in the real ones in India.

While the celebration of culture is wonderful, Karkaria issues a timely warning: "Like many threatened minorities, we are trapped between pride and paranoia over the bequests of past glory being grabbed by 'outsiders'. The young especially need to get off their butts and their bikes and reclaim our old place in the larger professional and social landscape, not wallow in deadening comfort zones." ■

-Priya Pathiyam

You book a slot online, arrive on time, scan the QR code at the turnstile, and unlock a whole new level of Mumbai magic at the newly opened Malabar Hill Walkway. Every day, from 5 am to 8 pm, 200 enthusiastic visitors fill each hourly slot, taking their time to explore the walkway, reading the plaques introducing them to the large variety of trees, birds and other creatures that live in the lush forest, breathing in the fresh air, feasting their eyes on the vibrant

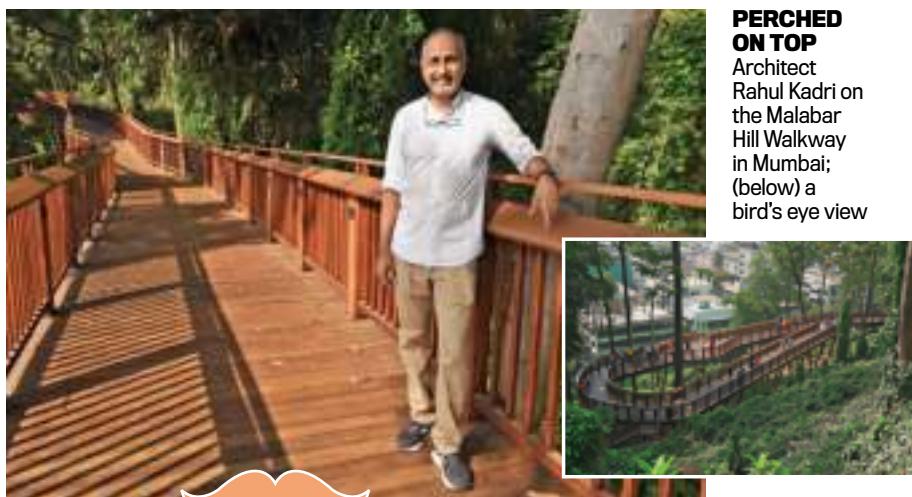
at a height that ranges from 2-10 metres, adapting to the natural terrain. Rahul Kadri, partner & principal architect at IMK Architects, who conceptualised the walkway, is especially proud that the trail was built without harming a single tree.

Having spent many decades strolling through the same forest as a child and later with his dog, Kadri had an 'aha!' moment when he visited it with his wife Shimul (a fellow architect), coming up with the idea of an elevated

the JSW Foundation; and Aditya Thackeray, former cabinet minister, Government of Maharashtra. After that, the project was greenlighted, and things progressed very smoothly.

While the planning took just 3-4 months, they wanted it to be executed slowly, without using any heavy machinery in the forest. It took them about three years to build the walkway onsite. The cost of Rs 26 crore was borne entirely by the BMC. The foundations are concrete,

Photographs by MANDAR DEODHAR



colours of nature, and (of course) taking plenty of photographs to document their experience on the elevated forest trail.

Funded by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the 482-metre walkway follows the path of two older ground-level trails that were carved through the forest in pre-Independence times, but

Every day, from 5 am to 8 pm, 200 visitors fill hourly slots, taking their time to explore the walkway

walkway that would help preserve the natural water flow and wildlife movement

by regulating visitor access and minimising concrete use on the forest floor. Deciding to take it up as a CSR (corporate social responsibility) project through his firm, he created three designs and then got the support of the Nepean Sea Road Citizens' Forum; Sangita Jindal, chairperson of

while the main structural system is made of steel columns with struts for support. The walkway itself is made of Merbau wood, an Indonesian variant that is now grown in Kerala. "It only needs to be oiled once a year, and the epoxy-coated steel structure needs a repaint every five years or so. And that can be done from below the walkway, so it won't disturb the forest walk at all," says Kadri. ■

-Priya Pathiyam

REFLECTION AND RESISTANCE

Artist Vibha Galhotra's new show explores the overlapping issues of climate change, political breakdown and rapid urbanisation

Delhi-based artist Vibha Galhotra's solo exhibition of new works, *Solastalgia: The Weight in the Air*, draws from philosopher Glenn Albrecht's term used to express the distress caused by environmental change. The sculptures, installation and mixed media on view explore the overlapping crises of climate catastrophe, political breakdown, spiritual confusion and rapid urbanisation.

Central to the show are four large-scale works made from patinated ghunghroos—small metallic bells used by classical Indian dancers. In Galhotra's hands, these bells are stripped of their sound and reassembled into tapestry-like surfaces. 'I Don't Know', 'Temper', 'Fire in the Sky' and 'Fractured', each evoke different facets of collapse and transformation. As the artist notes, "What initially drew me to ghunghroos was their sonic quality, but in my work, they are muted. That silence becomes symbolic—a way to bring attention to stories often ignored or unheard."

Among the most powerful pieces in the exhibition is 'Pieces of Memory', an installation built from rubble collected across Indian cities. This concrete detritus is rearranged into a contemplative monument, asking viewers to reckon with the environmental and emotional costs of progress.

In 'Vanishing of Flags' and 'Rise of Roots', Galhotra juxtaposes fragile architectural outlines with creeping organic forms, suggesting the eventual triumph of the natural world over human ambition. "There's grief, yes," she says, "but also the possibility that something new might rise from the ruins." Elsewhere, in a series titled 'New Age Noise', Galhotra plays with perception: images of everyday violence, etched onto glass, only become visible when



SONIC SILENCE

(From left clockwise) 'Fractured', metal ghungroos sewn on fabric, board and metal; 'The Weight' metal ghungroos, fabric and stainless steel; 'Untitled', Testimonies from the displaced and found rubble



**SOLASTALGIA:
THE WEIGHT
IN THE AIR,**
artist Vibha Galhotra's
solo exhibition, is
on at Nature
Morte Mumbai,
Apr. 24-May 31

illuminated by a phone flashlight—underscoring the omnipresent yet often invisible brutality of modern life.

Galhotra, trained at Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, has long been interested in the intersections of art, activism and environmental consciousness. Her works are part of major collections including the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, the Gates Foundation and the Singapore Art Museum.

The exhibition is accompanied by programming developed in collaboration with Carpe Arte and OpenCall India—two women-led initiatives fostering conversation and access within India's contemporary art scene. Talks, workshops and public events will amplify the show's themes. In *Solastalgia*, Galhotra does not pretend to offer solutions. Her work confronts us with uncomfortable truths—about the systems we are complicit in, the damage we have normalised and the future we fear. And yet, amid the noise and the rubble, it also allows space for reflection, and perhaps a glimmer of redemption. ■

Nikhil Sardana

A

Abanindranath Tagore's *Khirer Putul* in Bangla, published in 1896, is one of the first printed children's books in India for leisure reading. Tagore, his protégé Nandalal Bose, Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury (who founded the Bangla children's magazine *Sandesh*), his son Sukumar Ray and grandson Satyajit Ray were the pioneers of children's book illustrations in India.

A new exhibition in the

capital celebrates 130 years of illustrations in children's books in India. Curated by award-winning children's author and Pickle Yolk Books publisher Richa Jha, *Becoming* includes more than 100 illustrations from books published by 24 publishers. It features artworks by 75 of some of the most loved and acclaimed artists and illustrators, contemporary and past, whose illustrations in books for children have fed and delighted generations of young minds in the country.

"The curation is arranged to reflect the many

'becomings' of the spaces in our lives, and of the self, and those of their nebulous intersections with time, to look at the many aspects of becoming," explains Jha. Though not a chronological and historical exposition, it is an apt lens from which to soak in the changing contours of children's book art through the decades in terms of the illustrations' evolving sensibilities, styles and scope. "So, while we have illustrations by late veterans like Mickey Patel,

Jagdish Joshi and Pulak Biswas, we also have those by some brilliant contemporary artists, all sitting equally tall and happy next to one another," adds Jha.

Several events have been planned as part of the exhibition, including curatorial tours, panel discussions, book reading sessions and a reading zone. There will also be two workshops for art students on picture book making and illustrations for children's magazines, facilitated by award-winning artists Ruchi Shah and Taposhi Ghoshal, respectively; an art workshop for senior school students facilitated by acclaimed illustrators Suvidha Mistry and Mistunee Chowdhury; as well as a workshop on the many journeys of an artist's sketchbook facilitated by Habib Ali and Shubham Lakhera.

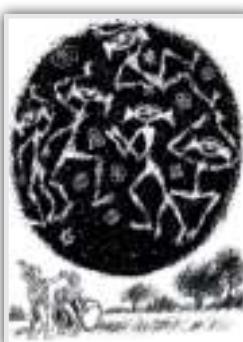
Apart from this, there will be a few interesting installations to engage visitors with the exhibited illustrations. There will also be a small wall dedicated to the Bengali pioneers who first introduced the idea of illustrations in children's literature. "The exhibition is meant as a huge celebratory shoutout to our bustling community of illustrators, designers, art directors, editors, authors, translators and publishers who are pouring their love and passion into creating fabulous illustrated books for children," concludes Jha, who plans to make *Becoming* a travelling exhibition in the future. ■

-Neha Kirpal

EXHIBITION

PICTURE PERFECT

'Becoming' celebrates 130 years of art, illustrations in Indian children's books



FINE LINES (Clockwise from above) Sukumar Ray's illustration in *Abol Tabol*, Anitha Balachandran for *Mister Jeejeebhoy and the Birds*, Upendrakishore Roychowdhury in *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*

Even to an ex-IFS civil servant watching from the sidelines, the publication of the third volume of Mani Shankar Aiyar's autobiography (if you count his second book on Rajiv Gandhi also as a memoir), *A Maverick in Politics*, covering his political career and life from 1991 to 2024, must rank as an event in political biography in India. Part self-defence in the court of public opinion, part confessional, part living historical record, it is unusual in many ways.

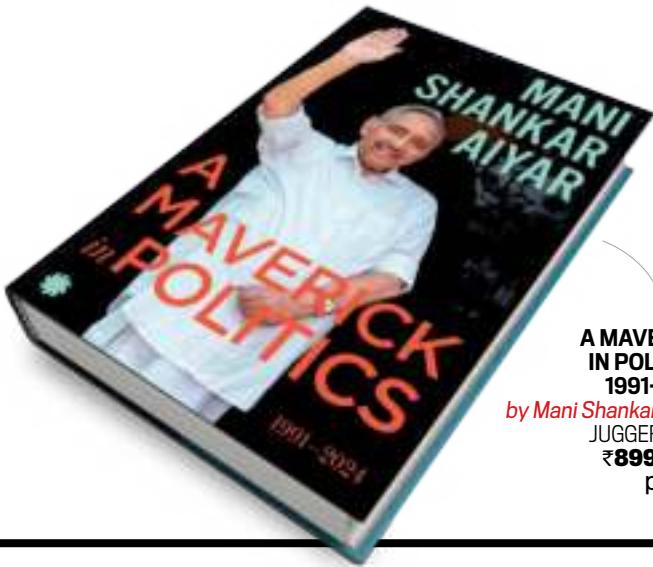
First, there are not many like Mani in public or political life, a product of a well-to-do if tragedy-prone apolitical family, with an elite education and career who joined a vocation where caste, social and political moorings are more typical than qualifications or the principles of socialism, secularism and internationalism that he passionately espoused.

Second, his wit, irreverence and willingness to cross swords for party and principle on the one hand, and on the other, his candour, intellectual integrity and ability to look at himself in the mirror in an ethical jungle better known for its venality, opportunism, corruption and hypocrisy. Mani just could not pretend to be what he is not.

BOOKS

The Road Less Travelled

A Maverick in Politics by Mani Shankar Aiyar offers instructive ringside lessons in mainstream Indian politics



A MAVERICK IN POLITICS 1991-2024
by Mani Shankar Aiyar
JUGGERNAUT
₹899; 428 pages

BOOKS

A MOMENT OF TRIUMPH

Amitabh Kant's How India Scaled Mt G20 provides an insider's view of India's G20 presidency



India's G20 presidency was a striking success both internationally and domestically. Prime Minister Narendra Modi seized the opportunity to showcase rising India with all its diversity to the world, and also involve the country at large in celebrating this "coming out party". Our presidency was converted into a massive national

event, and consistent with India's global foreign affairs vision of friendship with all, was purposefully given a civilisational character by its theme: "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—One Earth, One Family, One Future".

Our media coverage of the event was commensurately massive, before, during and after, reaching saturation point. Amitabh Kant has himself commented extensively in public on the organisational and negotiating challenges that India faced and the herculean efforts made to achieve success. Notwithstanding all this, in choosing to write the

book, Kant has wanted to give the readers a comprehensive and definitive view from inside the eye of the storm, as it were.

Amongst the goals of India's presidency was to shift the G20 agenda away from the priorities of the

How India succeeded in producing a consensus document despite acute differences on Ukraine is the most engrossing part of the book



And third, but most of all, his unconventionality and willingness to stand up, fight for, and even fail, for what he considered good for people and country. With no political godfather before he joined his junior school mate, Rajiv Gandhi, when he became prime minister by chance (the original 'accidental PM'), he upheld Tagore's exhortation to walk alone: *'ekla chalo re'*.

His loyalty to his political mentor, his debt and devotion to his highly accomplished family that stood by him through thick and thin, and his searing sense of failure at being unable to close many lofty initiatives that he threw his heart and soul into, come out poignantly through this book. I can think of no more instructive ringside lessons in mainstream Indian politics for aspiring young politicians fired by idealism than this.

What stands out is his total

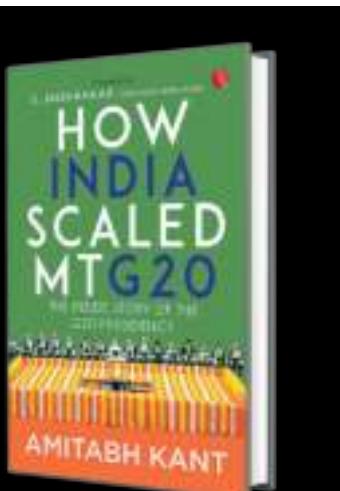
commitment to secularism, his stubborn advocacy of better India-Pakistan relations, his suspicion of the liberalisation programme post 1991 and his compelling conviction that secularism and socialism had to go hand in hand to counter the juggernaut of Hindutva communalism, a caution that the Congress party failed to grasp.

Equally compelling are the numerous controversies that he inevitably triggered, his media presence and role as a public intellectual; his scathing intolerance of those he considered unworthy, and his irrepressible tongue that often got him into trouble; his strangely formal relationship with 'the family', and his feeling of devastation at being cast into political oblivion seemingly for off-the-cuff statements that were deliberately distorted by his opponents. Mani tries to set the record straight from his point of view on many of these.

What stands out is **MANI'S** commitment to secularism, and his conviction that socialism and secularism must work together

Curiously, for an association that he regards as one that gave him the most satisfaction, Mani devotes one of his briefest (and flattest) chapters to his tenure as minister for DONER (Development of North Eastern Region). Tasked by PM Manmohan Singh to draw up a 'Vision Document' for the Northeast, the chapter is mostly a summary of the document and its follow-up. It was an ambitious agenda that he pursued with characteristic gusto, reinvigorating the North-Eastern Council (NEC), holding meeting after sectoral meeting and organising outreach events to canvass their findings to society at large. It offers a tantalising glimpse into a model of development for the Northeast that is not based on the extractive and plantation industries in force since colonial (and into present) times. Sadly, before he could embark on its implementation, Mani lost the 2009 election and entered a period of political wilderness from which he never really recovered. ■

-Gautam Mukhopadhyaya



HOW INDIA SCALED MTG20: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE G20 PRESIDENCY
by Amitabh Kant
RUPA
₹595; 256 pages

G7 and reflect instead the expectations and concerns of the Global South, including a Green Development Pact. India also wanted to showcase its remarkable success in creating digital public infrastructure as an inclusive development tool for developing countries.

How India succeeded in producing a consensus document despite acute differences on the Ukraine issue is the most engrossing part of the book. With repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to find agreed language on the Ukraine conflict, with

Russia and China hardening their positions post-Bali and the western group unwilling to yield on its position, India's decision to cut the knot, draft its own compromise text and present it to the G20 members on a "take it or leave it basis" under Modi's direction proved a tour de force.

Success is heady. Kant's claims sound a bit hyperbolic when he says that the G20 presidency showed that "India could manage international engagements on a scale that surpassed mere perfection", or that his

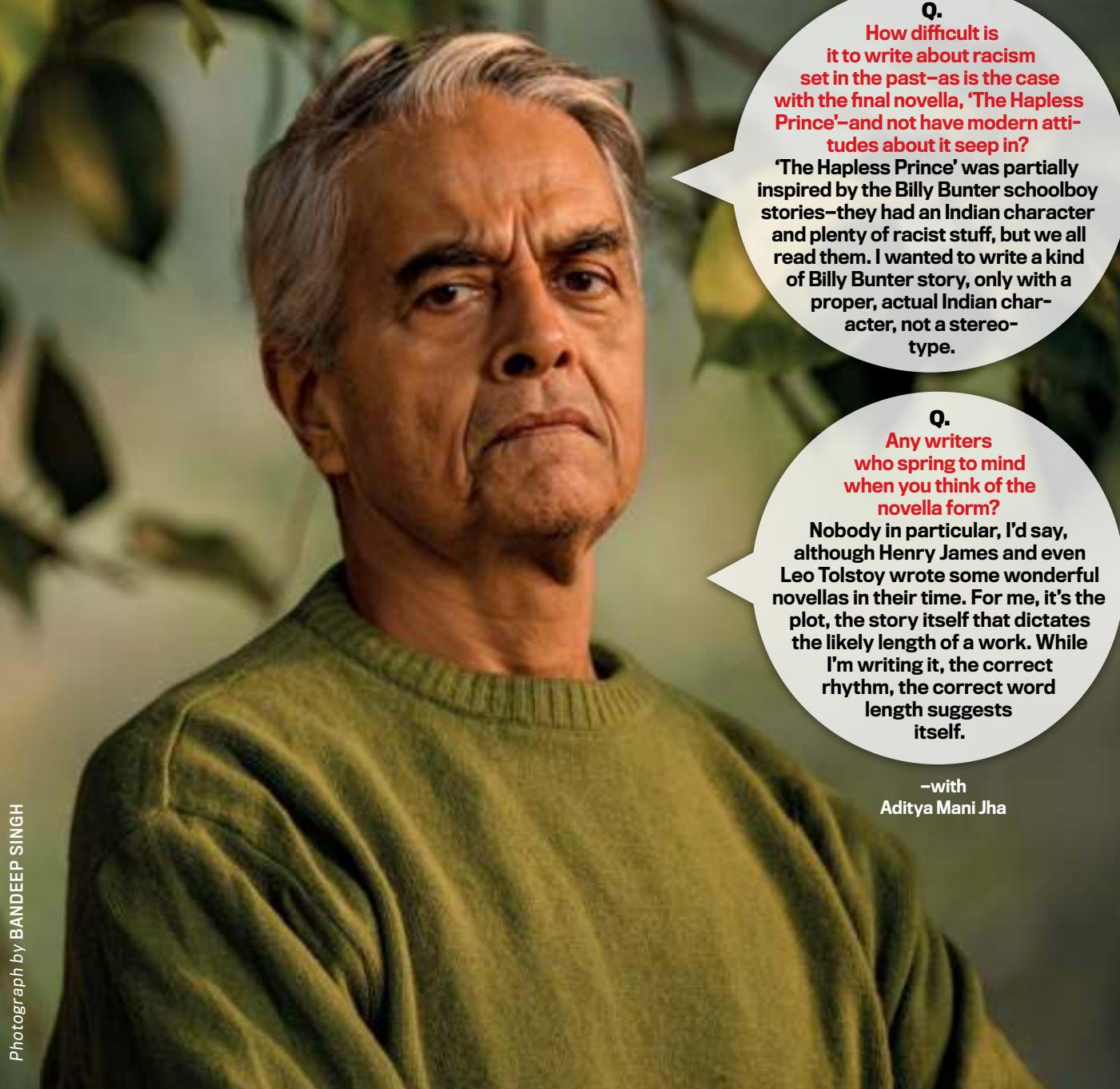
book "chronicles the pivotal role India played in reshaping global governance", or, indeed, that our G20 presidency was comparable to the lasting impact on the global landscape such as that of Kennedy's firm stand on the Cuban Missile Crisis or Deng's sweeping economic reforms in China. This reflects Kant's characteristic exuberance, which is infectious. But Kant (and others) did not anticipate Trumpian disruptions.

Altogether a well written and readable book. ■
-Kanwal Sibal

Q+A

LITERARY QUARTET

Upamanyu Chatterjee
is out with *The Hush of the Uncaring Sea*, a collection of four novellas



Q.

The titular novella 'The Hush of the Uncaring Sea' is about a Bengali Everyman who, after a series of misfortunes, gets marooned at sea. Tell us about the origins of this story.

My brother Beetashok has been a 'shippie'-30-plus years as a sea captain. Since retiring, he has been writing nautical stories, which I enjoy. The protagonist Abani's story came out of two paragraphs in one of his stories.

Q.

'The Revenge of the Non-Vegetarian' was written in 2018, but feels eerily topical...

It does feel that way, yes. But I wasn't trying to make a political point when I had written the story. Conflicts over food habits, veg-nonveg is something as old as this land itself and I wanted to use that framework to tell a story about my character Agastya Sen's father, Madhusudan Sen, who's also an IAS officer.

Q.

How difficult is it to write about racism set in the past—as is the case with the final novella, 'The Hapless Prince'—and not have modern attitudes about it seep in?

'The Hapless Prince' was partially inspired by the Billy Bunter schoolboy stories—they had an Indian character and plenty of racist stuff, but we all read them. I wanted to write a kind of Billy Bunter story, only with a proper, actual Indian character, not a stereotype.

Q.

Any writers who spring to mind when you think of the novella form?

Nobody in particular, I'd say, although Henry James and even Leo Tolstoy wrote some wonderful novellas in their time. For me, it's the plot, the story itself that dictates the likely length of a work. While I'm writing it, the correct rhythm, the correct word length suggests itself.

—with

Aditya Mani Jha

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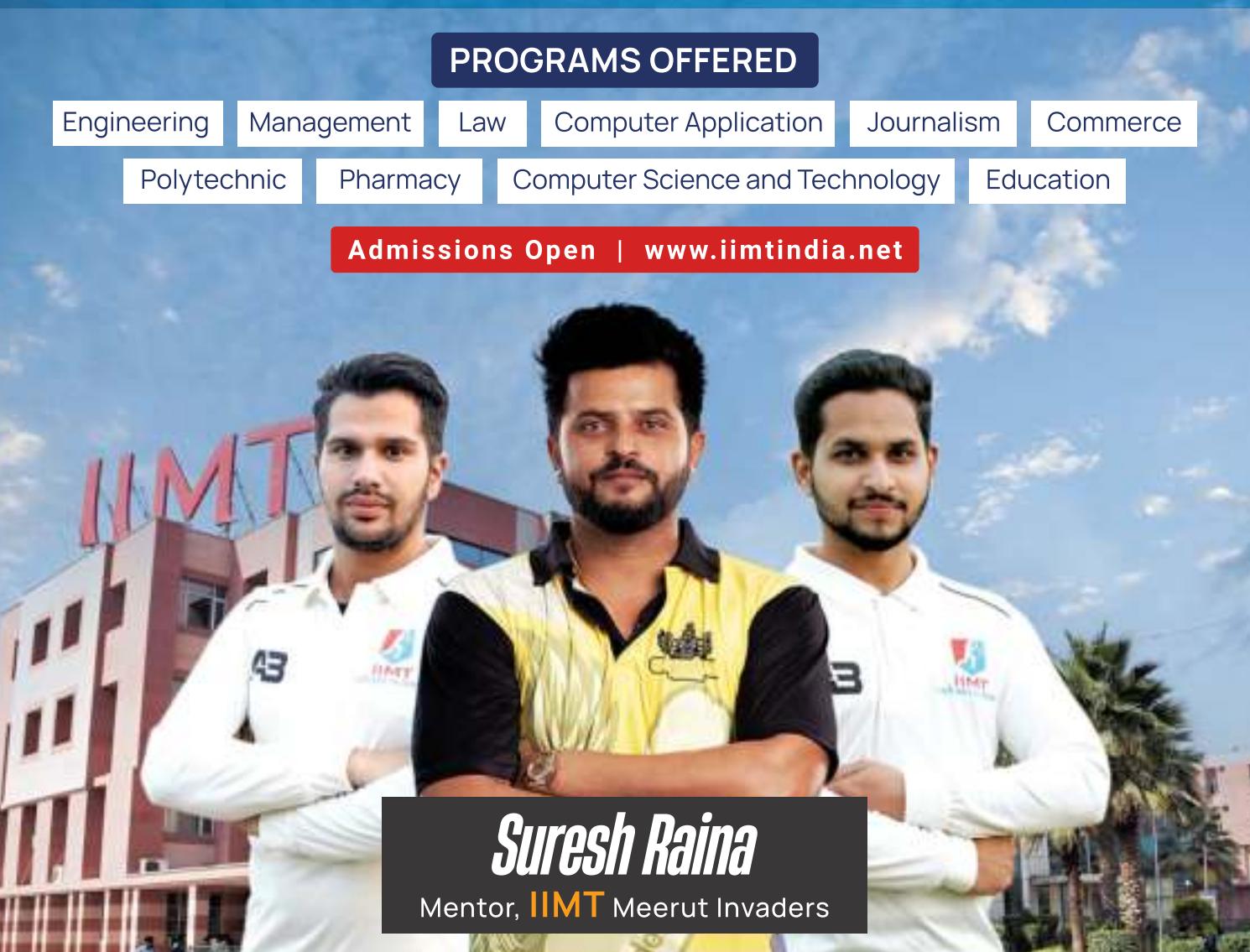
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