

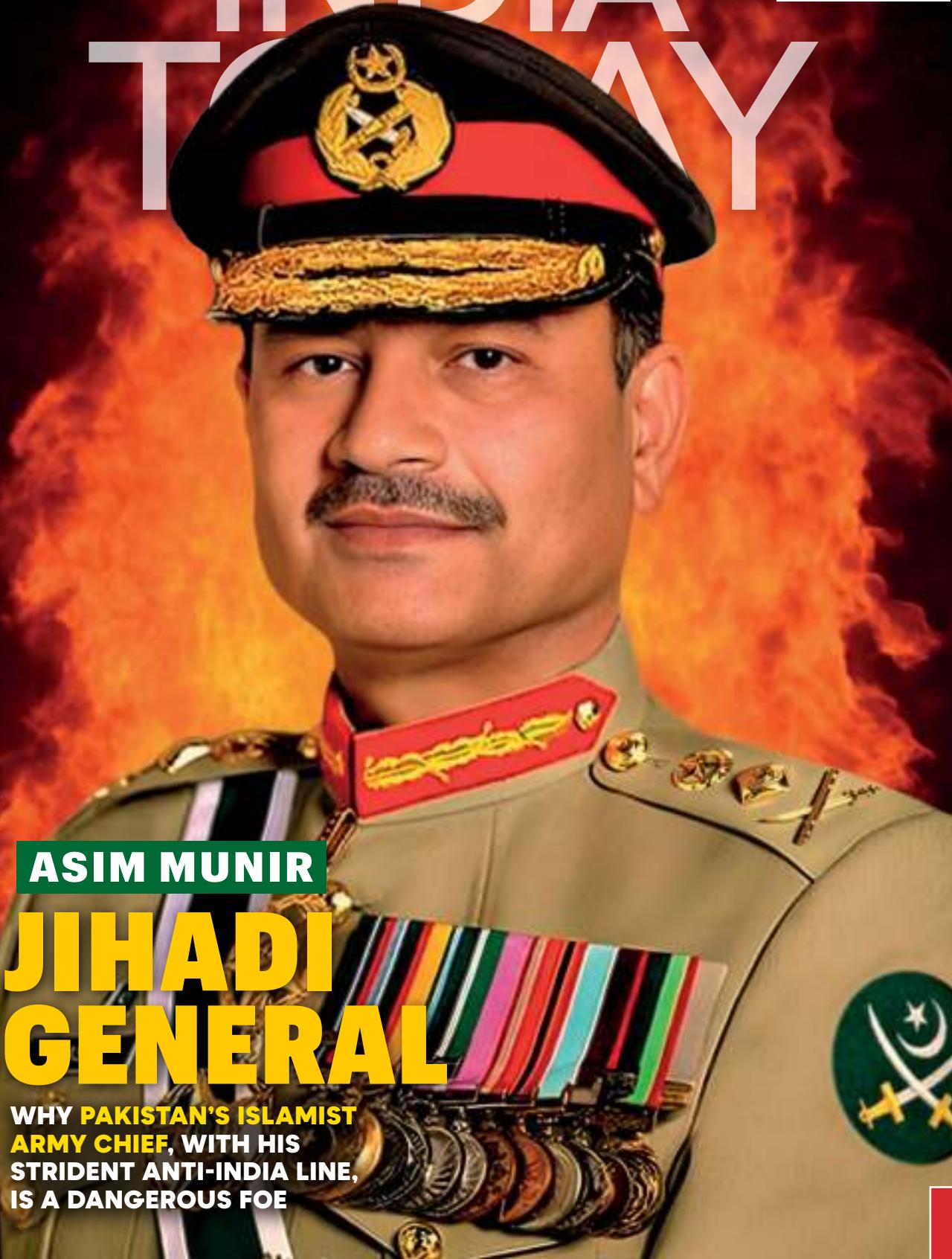
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INDIA TODAY



ASIM MUNIR

JIHADI GENERAL

**WHY PAKISTAN'S ISLAMIST
ARMY CHIEF, WITH HIS
STRIDENT ANTI-INDIA LINE,
IS A DANGEROUS FOE**





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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

With India and Pakistan going eyeball to eyeball after the Pahalgam terror attack, the threat of a military conflagration hangs over the subcontinent. This week, we focus on India's Antagonist No. 1, General Asim Munir. Not only because New Delhi deems Pakistan's army chief and de facto helmsman as the one who authorised the Pahalgam massacre. His thoughts and actions form a crucial variable. Unfortunately, despite proclaiming to be a democracy, the all-powerful nature of the army chief's post has been a defining feature of Pakistan. After Partition, the new Islamic state followed its own twisted tryst with destiny. Of the 77 years it has been in existence, Pakistan has been under direct military rule for 33 long years, in three phases. But that number is misleading, because the army has always reigned supreme, with only rare interludes where civilian leadership has dared to take on the bosses at the Rawalpindi GHQ. Like nine pins, each of those challengers who deluded themselves of being more powerful than the army were deposed. Imran Khan was the last prime minister who suffered this fate when he got into a conflict with the army and was summarily deposed in a 'parliamentary coup' in April 2022.

The incumbent prime minister, Shehzad Sharif, is seen as pliant. The ruling coalition of arch-rivals, the Pakistan People's Party lumped together with the Pakistan Muslim League of Sharif, is a device Munir concocted to keep out Imran, who remains Pakistan's most popular politician. So decision-making is by and large centralised in Munir. And he has not been hands-off or in an ivory tower. Since taking over in November 2022, he has worked toward resolving the polycrisis in Pakistan: a moving fireball whose elements include political disorder, economic collapse

and radical insurrections. Not content with just being a security czar, he has become economic troubleshooter and political arbiter.

Munir, though, is an exception in the long line of self-aggrandising Pakistan army chiefs. Almost a copy-book 'good boy', a far cry from the westernised, whisky-swilling generals of the country's early decades, he rose up the ranks the hard way, from outside the charmed circle, with no pedigree. He's an alumnus of the Officers Training School and not of the Pakistan Military Academy, the hallowed alma mater of eight of his predecessors. An accomplished soldier who served in Siachen and



▲ Sept. 13, 2004

also won his nation's highest military honour, Munir is also the first army chief who served as director-general of both Military Intelligence and ISI.

Not given to flaunting pelf, he has clamped down on the widespread corruption in the country. His falling out with Imran and subsequent sacking as ISI chief came after he brought to the then PM's notice allegations of his wife Bushra Bibi's ill-gotten wealth. Born into a humble but respected *hafiz* family, he carries forward its tradition of being able to recite the Quran by heart. And he brings its verses into geopolitics. To that extent, he is in the mould of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's first Islamist army overlord. Pakistan could have chosen a different course under him.

Munir's initial steps were in sync with the pragmatist line of his predecessor Qamar Bajwa, who by the end of his term in November 2022 was inclined to reconcile with India and focus on fixing Pakistan's decaying economy. Before Pahalgam, Munir did not seem to endorse radical Islamist terror; he was hostile toward the Pakistani Taliban jihadists and their Afghan brethren.

But he soon began to exhibit a troubling duality, equating the army's role with being a defender of the faith. In August 2023, addressing a grand jirga of Pashtun tribesmen in Peshawar, he said, "We are waging jihad in the path of Allah and success will be ours, Allah willing. The Pakistan army's objective and principle is to be *shahid* (martyr) or *ghazi* (one who takes part in jihad)."

Despite the tough talk, the army and Munir's reputation have suffered on the security front, specially after the Baloch train hijack. Political dissent and economic gloom accentuate that loss of stature. Kashmir's economic and political revival must hurt too. Feeling besieged, Munir reverted to the age-old tactic of Pakistani generals of raising tensions with India to divert attention from their own woes and rally support among the masses. In a speech in Islamabad a week before the Pahalgam attacks, he harked back to the two-nation theory, claiming Hindus and Muslims have irreconcilable differences, and vowed to free Kashmir, calling it Pakistan's "jugular vein". This was language even Zia did not use. That's why we are calling him 'Jihadi General'. In this week's cover story, Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa warns that Munir is mixing a deadly cocktail of religion, politics and terror with brinkmanship. India must heed this while giving Pakistan and its recalcitrant general a fitting response for its Pahalgam perfidy.

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Aroon Purie'.

(Aroon Purie)

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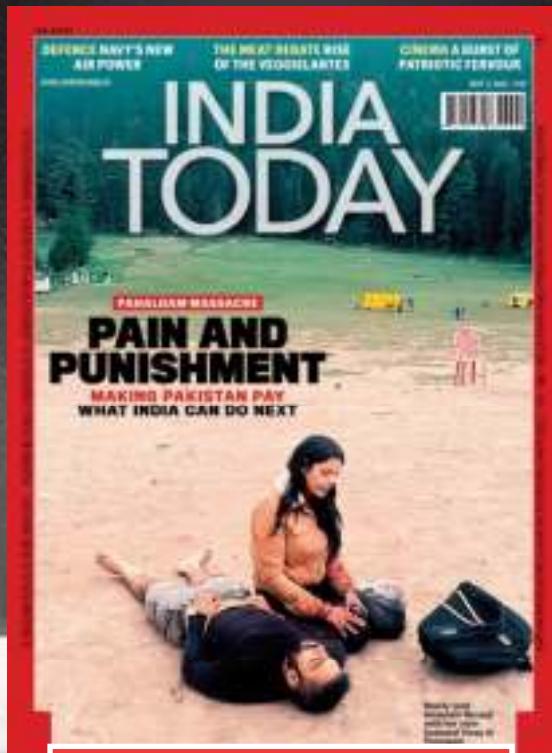


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PAHALGAM MASSACRE



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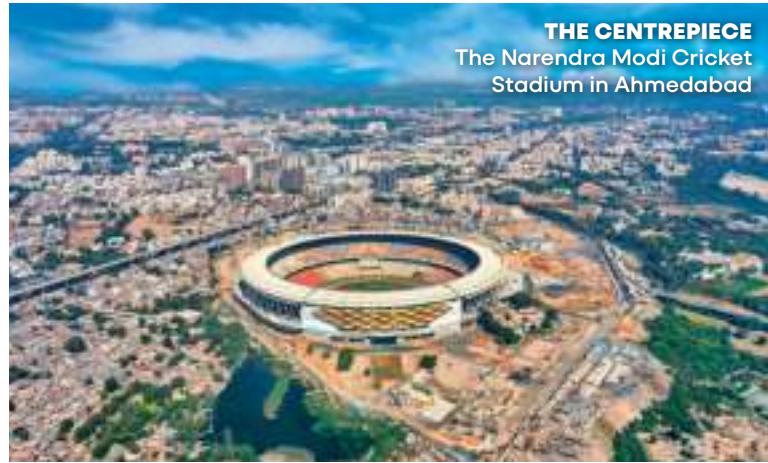
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KISS: A REVOLUTIONARY MODEL EMPOWERING TRIBALS THROUGH EDUCATION

The tribal communities in India are an integral part of the nation's social and cultural landscape. Yet, they have long faced neglect, marginalisation, and poverty. In Odisha, where nearly a quarter of the population is tribal, these communities are among the most vulnerable, lacking access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and government support. Their isolation has made them victims of industrialisation and displacement, pushing many into cycles of deprivation. Alarmingly, some have been drawn into Left Wing Extremism simply to survive.

Amid this bleak scenario, Dr. Achyuta Samanta, who himself faced poverty in childhood, envisioned education as the key to uplifting tribal communities. In 1992, while working as a lecturer, he established the Kalinga Institute of

Social Sciences (KISS) with just 125 students. His mission is to provide free, quality education to tribal children, an area often overlooked even by government efforts.

KISS started as a residential school offering not just education but also free food and accommodation. Over time, it evolved into a transformative institution with more than 40,000 students across its campuses and over 40,000 alumni. The institute not only focuses on academics but also promotes sports, music, dance, and skill development. It ensures that graduates leave with degrees and job-ready skills, while also preserving pride in tribal culture and identity.

Over the past 35 years, KISS has grown into a globally recognized model for tribal empowerment. It has received multiple national and international accolades, including UNESCO's International Literacy Prize (2022) and Green Gown Awards, and it has held Special Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC since 2015. KISS collaborates with several UN agencies to advance shared goals and fulfil the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030.

The impact has been far-reaching. KISS alumni have become doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, and athletes. The hardworking

students are not only securing impressive rankings in UPSC examinations, but they are also succeeding in competitive exams such as JEE with confidence. Most of them are first-generation learners and a source of inspiration for countless young boys and girls in the tribal communities. The institute has significantly reduced child labour, early marriage, dropout rates, and extremist recruitment by creating a nurturing, opportunity-rich environment. Its initiatives promote girl-child education, health, hygiene, scientific temper, and sustainable living. The sports wing has produced 5,000 athletes who've excelled in national and international events.

KISS also generates local employment and has catalysed regional development while preserving tribal heritage. Its success is fuelled by its sister institution, the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), which financially supports KISS, making it a self-sustaining model. KIIT is also helping the students realise their dreams in life.

Guided by a 3E mantra—Educate, Enable, Empower—KISS aspires to directly reach over 2 million children in the next decade, ensuring no child is deprived of education due to poverty. Dr. Samanta's visionary leadership and peaceful approach have created a legacy of transformation, making KISS a beacon of hope and a global model for inclusive education and social reform.



UPFRONT

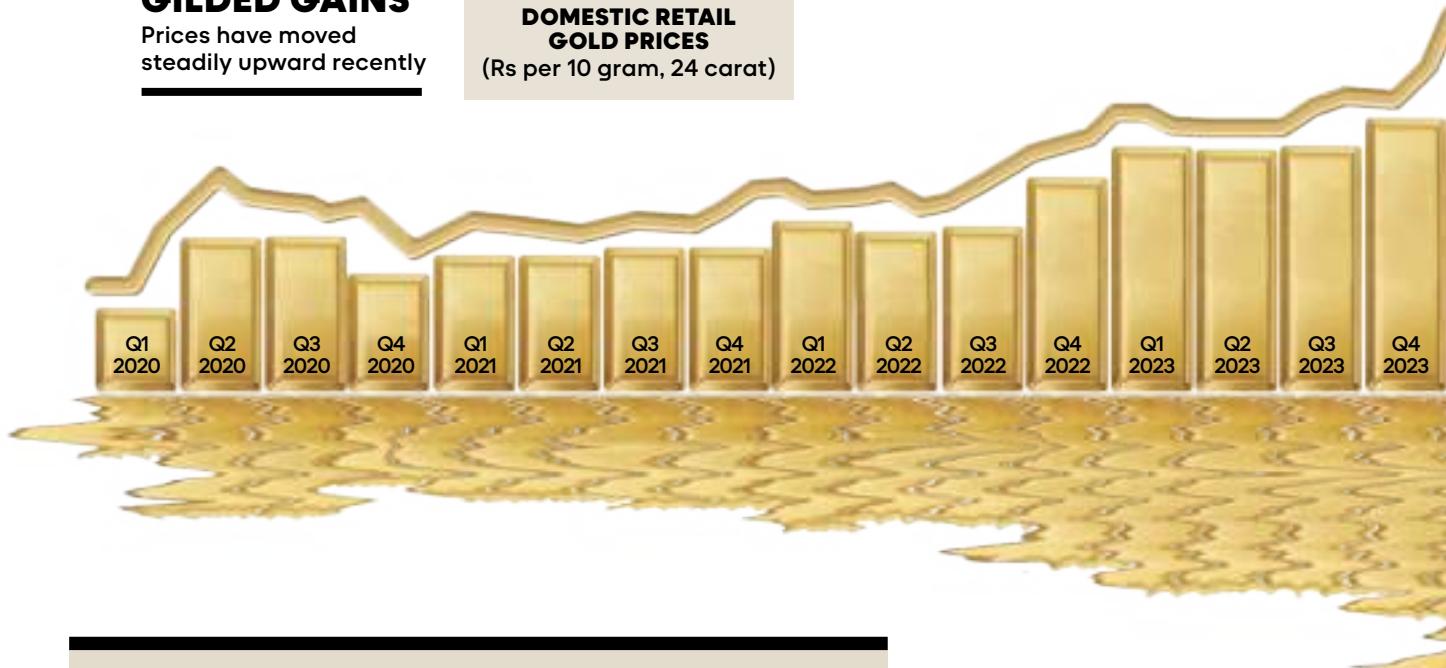
INDIA-PAKISTAN: WATER WARS PG 10

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GILDED GAINS

Prices have moved steadily upward recently

DOMESTIC RETAIL GOLD PRICES
(Rs per 10 gram, 24 carat)



► GOLD

BULLION BOOM

Gold prices skim Rs 1 lakh for the first time, fuelled by global turmoil. Investors bask in the glow, but jewellery retailers may see a temporary dip in sales

By M.G. Arun

Gold casts its glow on all of India's gilded centuries, but the 21st century has arched up like the proverbial rainbow. From a tinny Rs 4,400 for 10 grams back in 2000, it grew five-fold to Rs 20,728 in a decade, took the escalator to Rs 50,151 by 2020, and had crested Rs 78,245 by last year. A stormburst of geo-economic uncertainties has done no harm to the safe-haven asset thereafter. By April 2025, gold has executed a balletic leap all the way to Rs 1 lakh—a historic high

breached for the first time. It dipped a bit later, but nothing is likely to dim the allure of the yellow metal soon. For, in a global landscape roiled by trade wars, gold has implicitly reclaimed its psychological status as currency.

What studded its stunning rise is, of course, Donald Trump's tariff tsunami. The most proximate trigger came with the US president's salvos on Federal Reserve Governor Jerome Powell. On April 17, he said Powell's dismissal "cannot come fast enough", an index of his

desperation to see the Fed cut rates. What came fast enough was action in the Mumbai bullion market: the price of 24-carat gold surged to Rs 1,01,350 on April 22. The zones it hit were stunning even on short-term comparisons: a nearly five-fold jump from Rs 24,740 in 2015, and over double from Rs 48,500 as recently as FY22.

'BIRD OF GOLD'

This exponential boom in bullion has special resonance for Indian households. They hold over 40 per cent of their non-property wealth in gold, compared to just 5-6 per cent in equities. India is the world's second-largest gold consumer after China, with annual demand ranging between 700 and 800 tonnes. Of this, around 66 per cent goes into jewellery. Bars and coins—i.e. pure investment—account for the rest.

A PwC India report in August 2024



estimated that Indian households collectively own around 25,000 tonnes of gold, then valued at approximately Rs 126 lakh crore. (In April 2025, that would have touched a stratospheric Rs 211 lakh crore—or \$2.5 trillion—half of India’s GDP.) Media reports suggest, moreover, that nearly 5,000 tonnes of ‘idle’ gold lie in temple vaults across the country. India also has a thriving gold loan market: its organised segment alone is estimated at Rs 7 lakh crore. That’s the amounts of cash that comes into active play with gold as collateral.

THE SHINE OF JEWELLERY

Most of India’s gold demand is met through imports. Government data shows that gold rose 30 per cent in FY24 to \$45.54 billion (Rs 3.9 lakh crore), up from \$35 billion in FY23. Robust demand for jewellery spurs it along. Organised jewellery retail

GOLD FEVER

25,000
tonnes

Gold held by households in India. Worth Rs 126 lakh crore in '24—soaring today

\$45.5
billion

Worth gold India imported in FY24, up 30% from FY23

29%

YoY growth in gold investment demand, reaching 239 tonnes in 2024

9-11%

Projected dip in jewellery sales volumes in FY26 due to high gold prices

13-15%

Revenue growth likely for jewellery retailers due to higher prices, realisations

UPFRONT

margins are likely to break their declining trend, rising to 7.8-8 per cent in FY26. Two, their debt levels may rise due to higher inventory costs. Still, their “capital structure...will remain comfortable,” says Gaurav Arora, Associate Director at Crisil Ratings.

Investors, meanwhile, face a tough choice: whether to hold on to their gold as a hedge against inflation or cash in on the current rally. The jolts of geopolitics, beginning with the Ukraine war in early 2022, followed by the Gaza offensive in late 2023, kept adding lustre to gold prices. Trump’s April 2 tariffs lent a steroid rush. “Any disturbance in stability in the world impacts gold prices. That’s the safe-haven commodity people fall back on during times of uncertainty,” says Bhargav Vaidya of consultancy BN Vaidya & Associates. It’s often seen as the best hedge against currency depreciation and inflation.

Investments here typically take the form of gold ETFs (exchange-traded funds), gold mutual funds, digital gold via fintech platforms, gold savings schemes or sovereign gold bonds (issued by the RBI). A World Gold Council report stated in February that India’s gold investment demand stood at 239 tonnes in 2024—the highest since 2013, and a 29 per cent rise from 185 tonnes in 2023. A sharp import duty cut last July (15 per cent to 6 per cent) played its part. At this level, India accounted for 20 per cent of global demand. At 1,180 tonnes, that itself had registered a 25 per cent rise in 2024.

WHAT NEXT?

Is it unrealistic to look for higher peaks? That question smote everyone when prices corrected following the April 22 peak, after Trump seemed to soften on China (and Powell).

On April 30, gold was trading at Rs 97,030 in Mumbai. Vaidya feels global trends will help transcend Rs 1 lakh again. Incidents like Pahalgam also tend to firm up gold, as they drag down the rupee. And in gold, India trusts. ■

► INDUS WATERS TREATY

WATER WARS

WHAT THE SUSPENSION OF THE INDUS WATERS TREATY MEANS FOR INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Text by ANILESH S. MAHAJAN
Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

► The Indus system has six major rivers

► The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 allocates primary rights over the three eastern rivers—Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej—to India

► Under the IWT, primary rights over the western rivers—Indus, Jhelum and Chenab—are with Pakistan

168

MAF

TOTAL ANNUAL FLOW IN THE INDUS SYSTEM

135

MAF

Allocated to Pakistan (western rivers)

33

MAF

Allocated to India (eastern rivers)

(MAF=Million acre-feet)

WESTERN RIVERS

Indus, Jhelum and Chenab

PAKISTAN

135 MAF

Total annual flow, 99% of it flows into Pakistan

24

Hydel projects, with 10,400 MW total capacity

8

Hydel projects in progress, with 12,900 MW capacity

90%

Water feeding farmlands, domestic supply and industries

INDIA

3.6 MAF

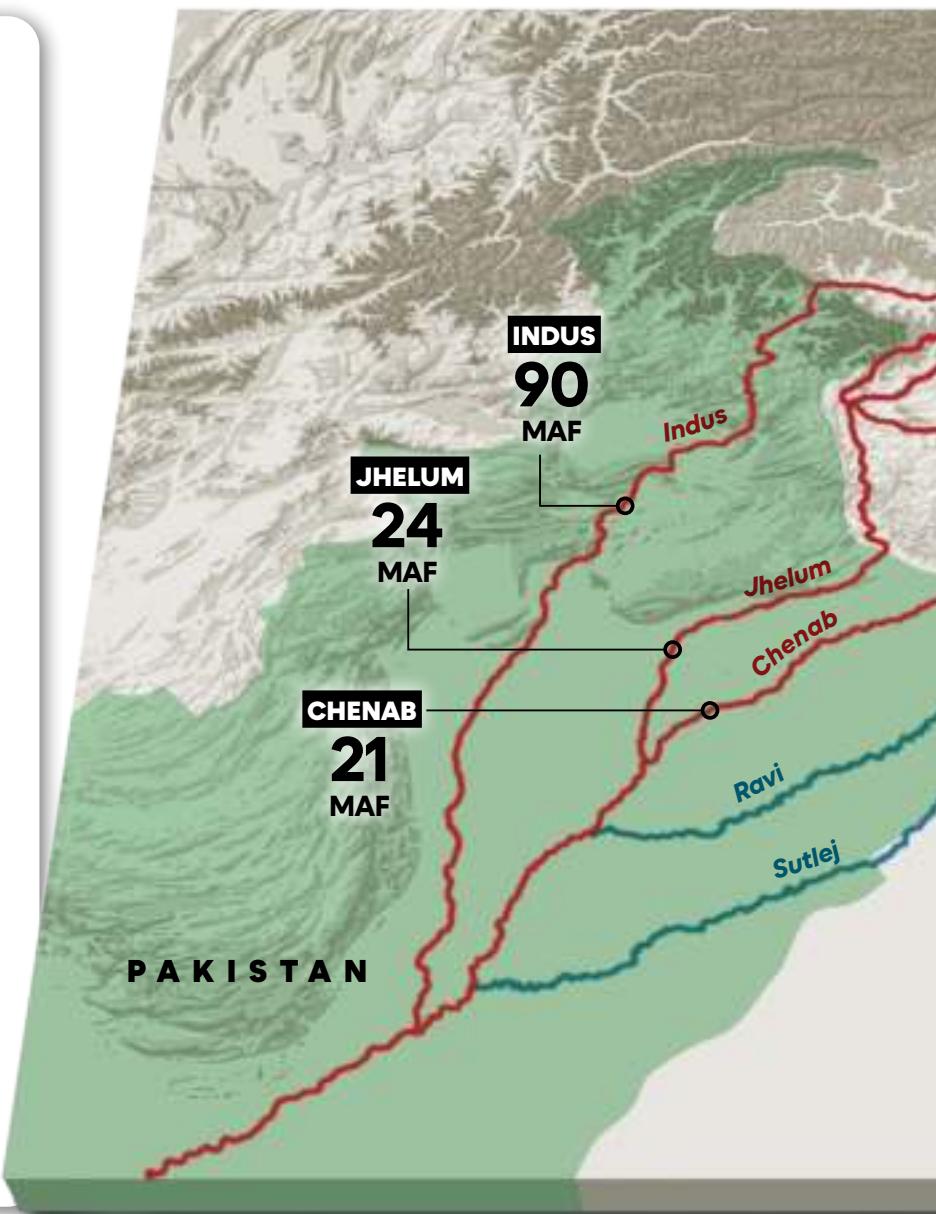
Current cap on water India can store for irrigation, power, etc.

12

Big hydel projects, with 2,600 MW total capacity

13

Big projects in progress, with 6,300 MW capacity

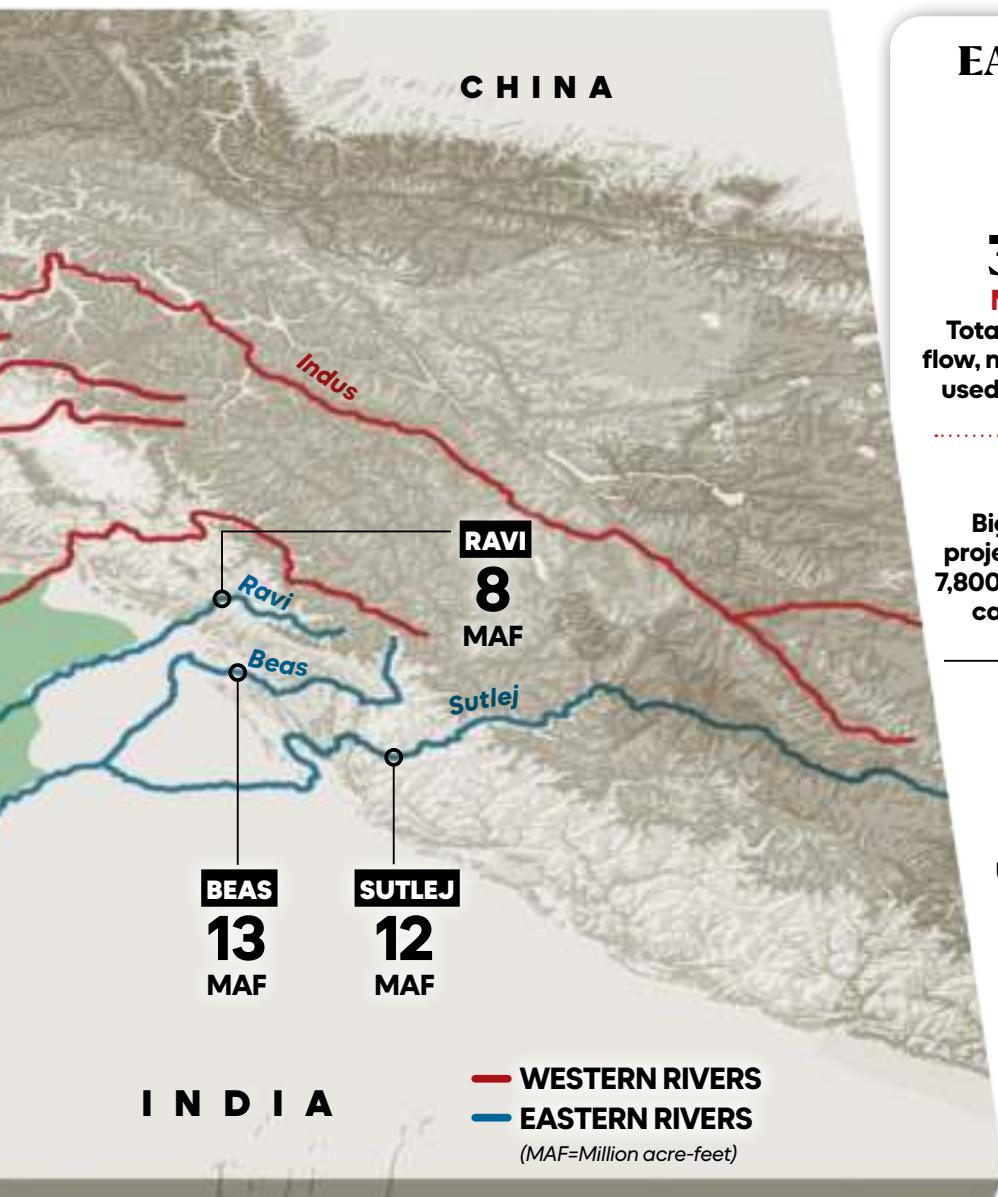


WHAT INDIA CAN DO TO PUNISH PAKISTAN

- ➡ After suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, India can refuse information-sharing on water flow, potentially triggering floods in Pakistan
- ➡ In the long term, India can divert more water from the western rivers by expediting 13 big hydel projects like Rattle and Pakal Dul and reviving Tulbul/Wular project
- ➡ Flow from eastern
- ➡ Rivers can also be further restricted by commissioning pending Malwa and SYL canals
- ➡ Reduced, disrupted or uncertain water flow can cause havoc for Pakistan's economy, hitting its sovereign credit rating
- ➡ In medium term, it could be looking at a potential loss of 500,000+ agricultural jobs and 10-12% spike in food inflation



COMING SOON Rattal (above) and Pakal Dul, both in Kishtwar, are major projects expected to become operational in 2026



EASTERN RIVERS

Ravi, Beas and Sutlej

INDIA

33 MAF
 Total annual flow, nearly 95% used by India

13
 Big hydel projects, with 7,800 MW total capacity

8
 Total canal projects with 13 MAF annual flow

7
 Big projects in progress, with 1,550 MW capacity

PAKISTAN

2-3 MAF
 Unutilised water flowing into Pakistan, crucial for Lahore, Multan, etc.

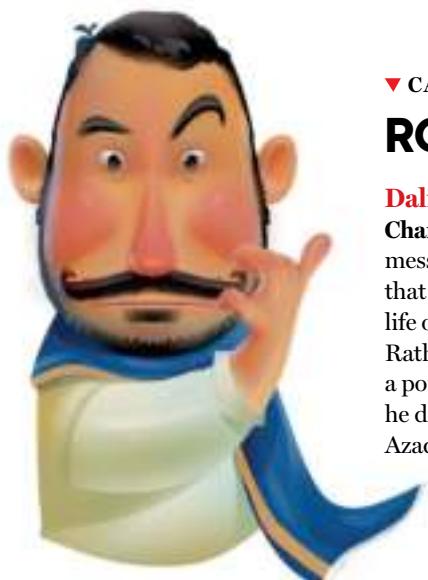
50 MW
 Combined installed hydel capacity; negligible due to limited supply



SAME OLD, SAME OLD

The 'old politician is dead', bring on the new politics of love, dialogue and democratic space, Rahul Gandhi had declared at his party's Bharat Summit in Hyderabad. But walking the talk? That has seldom been Congress's strong suit. And so AICC Telangana in-charge Meenakshi Natarajan recently decreed that district and mandal leaders be appointed next month, but with a caveat—they must include only those loyal since 2017. Many a recent entrant owes their rise to CM Revanth Reddy, who led the party to victory in Telangana not so long ago. Ergo, the clipped wings.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**



▼ CASTE ASIDE

ROLLING IN STYLE

Dalit leader and Lok Sabha MP Chandra Shekhar Azad may be a messiah of the downtrodden, but that doesn't cancel out living the high life occasionally. Nothing on the sly. Rather, the 38-year-old neta made a point of feting it with an Insta reel he dropped. On a recent US trip, the Azad Samaj Party honcho is seen

burning rubber around Indiana in a white Rolls-Royce, the beats of KGF firing up the background. The number plate: 'CHAMAR3'. Netizens were split. Some saw it as a proud flex for marginalised communities, others balked at the ostentation, yet others saw caste disdain in that reaction. CSA is sure cruising into the spotlight.

CAUSE FOR CHEER

What better way to raise a state's spirits than to promise a return to alcohol? If Prashant Kishor pledged to dump Bihar's nine-year-old alcohol ban should his party come to power,

RJD leader **Tejashwi Yadav** slipped in a caste card too. On April 27, he vowed to remove *taadi*, the traditional palm wine, out of prohibition's ambit, a move that should cheer Bihar's 1 per cent Pasi community. Cases against those arrested for selling *taadi* would be withdrawn and industry status also accorded. Could one possibly ask for more?



And that's a...Goal

TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee has scored a goal, without firing a shot. The Diamond Harbour Football Club (DHFC), of which he is the chief patron, has clinched the I-League 2 title this season without a single defeat. Winning 11 matches and drawing 5 out of 16, the club has now earned a well-deserved promotion to the I-League for the next season. Though a grand victory parade was planned, it was postponed as a mark of respect for the victims of the Pahalgam attack. There'll always be a next time.



ALL HAIL THE NETA

Newfound respect for their elected reps?

Call it what you will, the Madhya Pradesh police on April 24 asked its personnel to salute

MPs and MLAs when in uniform. The Opposition Congress was quick to quip that MPs and MLAs didn't need the privilege; the police could salute the people they serve. Perhaps stung, CM

Mohan Yadav convened a meeting of top cops on April 26 seeking the rationale behind the order. They also discussed withdrawing the order, given the muted opposition from within police ranks and the bad PR outside. Last heard, the MP police are going ahead.



Kaushik Deka with Avaneesh Mishra, Rahul Noronha, Amitabh Srivastava and Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

HEALTH WATCH

Yes, Malnutrition Diabetes Exists

By Sonali Acharjee

We are far from understanding diabetes, it seems. Last week, a new type was recognised—well, re-recognised. Known previously as malnutrition-related diabetes, the WHO had first put it on its list of diseases in 1985, and

obesity. Here, what's at play is very poor secretion of insulin.

"The exact cause is still not fully understood," says Dr Ashok Kumar Jhingan, senior director at BLK-MAX Super Speciality Hospital's endocrinology centre. Probable causes,



SHUTTERSTOCK

then dropped it in 1999 due to lack of research. Now, the International Diabetes Foundation has found work done by leading researchers, many of whom are from Christian Medical College in Vellore, compelling enough to accept it as a form of diabetes. It has a new name that validates it: Type 5.

Published in 2022 in the journal *Diabetes Care*, the research showed how its processes differed from the common Type 2, which is linked to insulin resistance caused primarily by

he says, are protein and micronutrient deficiency brought on by long-standing malnutrition, besides infections and environmental toxins.

"Poverty, limited access to healthcare, and poor sanitary conditions can exacerbate malnutrition and increase its likelihood," he adds. About 20-25 million suffer from it globally; being a poorly understood condition, there is no India data, but we can infer its scale. Treatment entails blood sugar management through medicine or insulin. ■

▼ VIEWPOINT

INDIA'S CHINESE PUZZLE

India-China relations have broken through the deep chill, but their future course depends on ongoing geopolitical shifts



BY SHYAM SARAN

India-China relations are in a slow crawl towards a new equilibrium as they respond to a new situation on their contested border and a vastly transformed geopolitical terrain. The Peace and Tranquility agreement of 1993, and subsequent confidence-building measures which were built on it, helped keep the border stable and peaceful for the past three decades. This came to an end with the aggressive Chinese military manoeuvres in eastern Ladakh in 2022. Thanks to the major improvements in border infrastructure by India since 2004, Indian armed forces were able to quickly deploy a comparable force to prevent Chinese ingress into Indian territory. While disengagement of forces has taken place in some segments of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and patrolling has resumed in other segments, the redeployment of forces back to their base locations inland has not taken place. Until this is achieved, one cannot say that the situation has returned to status quo ante.

Enough progress was achieved in the several rounds of bilateral negotiations between their military and diplomatic personnel to enable a summit meeting between PM Narendra



Illustration by RAJ VERMA

BEIJING'S SUPPORT FOR PAKISTAN'S CALL FOR AN INDEPENDENT PROBE INTO PAHALGAM MAY RETARD THE RESTORATION OF INDIA-CHINA TIES

Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at Kazan, Russia, on October 23, 2024, on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. The leaders, meeting bilaterally after a gap of nearly five years, agreed to resume engagement at the levels of their senior officials, their special representatives and foreign ministers. Pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar, border trade through Nathu La pass, direct flights and the exchange of media personnel are to follow. This is still far short of the scale of exchanges which the two countries had developed over several years.

The ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan

in the aftermath of the terrorist outrage in Pahalgam are a further complicating factor. China has supported Pakistan's proposal for an independent investigation which India rejects and this may retard the restoration of India-China ties.

While India has downgraded its political and security relations with China, it has been unable to put constraints on a still expanding economic and commercial relationship. This is not surprising, considering that China is an integral part of all key global supply and value chains. The dependence on China for critical components

and intermediates as well as finished products cannot be reduced overnight. This creates an economic and security vulnerability for India.

The prospects for India-China relations will be influenced by the trajectory of recent geopolitical shifts in the wake of US President Donald Trump's radical domestic and external policies. Trump speaks both about a relentless trade war with China and, at the same time, doing a "grand bargain" with it. He appears to be pulling back from US external commitments, but is this to free up resources to retain and even enhance its presence in the Indo-Pacific? Or is he likely to concede a Chinese sphere of influence in Asia while claiming dominance over the Americas, and adjacent territories such as Greenland, for the US? India's posture towards China will be determined accordingly, but long-standing rejection of Chinese hegemony and a preference for a multipolar Asia—and world—will not change. Even if there are positive but tactical improvements in relations, they will in essence remain adversarial. ■

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary

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STATE SCAN

UP: AKHILESH WIDENS HIS TENT PG 17

GOA: A BAN ON HOUSIE PG 20

► BANDRA OF ANDHRA

What the Amaravati 2.0 skyline may look like, in an artist's rendering



► ANDHRA PRADESH

REBIRTH OF THE DREAM CAPITAL

It will cost over Rs 45,000 cr. in the first phase, but Naidu's Amaravati is back on track, aiming to be one of the world's 'five best cities'

By Amarnath K. Menon

A FIVE-YEAR HIATUS IS NOTHING WHEN seen against the span of history. On May 2, Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's dream capital Amaravati renews its tryst with destiny, returning from the realm of imagination to that of brick and mortar. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who laid its foundation stone at Uddandarayunipalem on October 22, 2015, is again at hand as the greenfield capital goes into construction.

There's plenty on the drawing board. Naidu, chairing a huddle of the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) in March, sanctioned work for 59 development projects at a total cost of

Rs 37,702 crore. Amaravati 2.0, visualised as "a smart city with state-of-the-art amenities, efficient transportation systems and green spaces", will see Rs 64,721 crore invested in its first phase, which has a completion timeline of 30 months. In its final shape, with nine theme cities and 27 townships spread over 217 square kilometres, Amaravati is projected as a job-creating economic hub and tourist attraction.

Await a modern assembly, a 250-metre-tall structure, with 1.12 million square footage, on a 103-acre compound whose upper tiers will be open to tourists when not in session. Also, a 47-storey Chief Minister's Office, spanning 1.7 million square feet, which will

also house General Administration. The high court will be an eight-storeyed, 55-metre structure with 2.0 million square feet, expressing the grandeur of law on a 42-acre compound. And the secretariat? Five skyscrapers! Four new highways, totalling 580 km, will service the hub. The 73 pending projects cleared by a technical review include a statue of TDP founder N.T. Rama Rao, an iconic bridge, and the Krishna River embankment road. Most works are planned to be completed in three years.

INCOMING FLIGHT OF CAPITAL

The four-phase project, with the first one estimated to cost a grand total of Rs 45,249.24 crore, will not burden the state treasury, says finance minister Payyavula Keshav. Instead, the project would be largely funded by the 4,000 acres the government intends to auction. Besides, Rs 15,000 crore has

been borrowed from the World Bank; HUDCO will put up Rs 11,000 crore; other banks will lend Rs 5,000 crore.

Rhetoric is also part of the design, and luckily comes cheap. P. Narayana, municipal administration minister, says works assigned over 2014-19, during the previous TDP government, were left unfulfilled by the subsequent YSRCP

regime, causing financial losses to contractors. Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, the intervening CM, had backed a tripartite capital, with Visakhapatnam, Kurnool and Amaravati as the administrative, judicial and legislative hubs. The Supreme Court blocked that proposal.

That phase also saw huge protests from farmers who had given up their land to Naidu's massive land pooling effort. Some 33,000 acres had been aggregated, farmers being promised

property in the future city as well as monetary rewards. Assuagement is a key part of the script: May 2 has farmers being feted on stage by Modi. Narayana sunnily forecasts "one of the five best cities of the world". No one will be hyper if even half that hype is realised. ■

Takeaways

- ➲ Designed as a jobs and tourism hub, Amaravati will have nine theme cities and 27 townships
- ➲ Coming soon: a modern assembly, high court, CMO, a 'five-skyscraper' secretariat, highways

Chandrababu Naidu ▶



► UTTAR PRADESH

AKHILESH WIDENS HIS PARTY'S TENT



DALIT IS RIGHT

Akhilesh Yadav backs MP Ramji Lal Suman's firebrand speech

A pronounced Dalit tilt is the new script for the SP chief. The BSP and BJP, both rivals for that space, watch with alarm as the party rouses the rabble

By Avaneesh Mishra

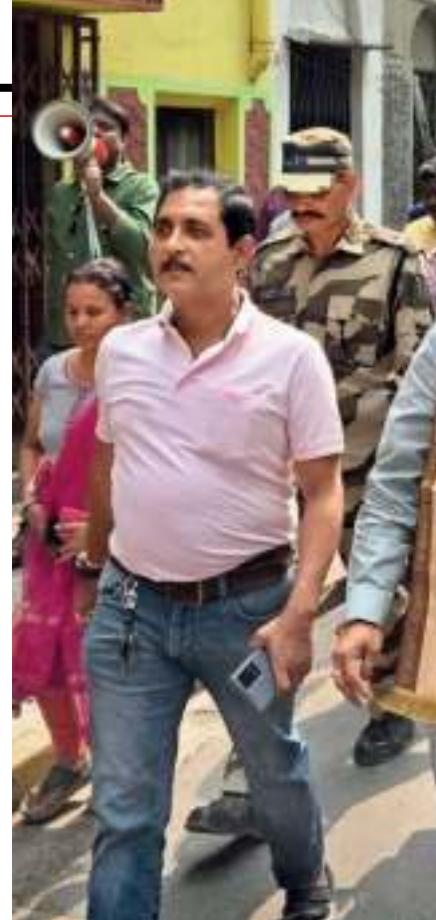
THE SAMAJWADI PARTY HAS NEVER ERRED MUCH ON THE side of subtlety. But its recent self-positioning bristles with such audacity—and in such a conscious direction—that a blueprint can be discerned. A series of remarks by its Dalit leaders has lit up Uttar Pradesh's charged political and social landscape with frequent sparks of outrage. Strikingly, however, instead of distancing itself, the party has doubled down on these statements. This combative stance suggests less a case of random, off-the-cuff remarks, more a strategic charge aimed at reshaping UP's fragmented



Indian Muslims, he said: "You are also Rana Sanga's descendants—a traitor." On April 15, SP MLA Indrajeet Saroj, also a Dalit, questioned the power of Hindu deities in the context of historical invasions. "If our gods and goddesses were so powerful, why didn't they destroy those who looted this country?" he asked, declaring Ambedkar as his "real god".

TURNING THE TABLES

The backlash was predictable enough to be banked upon. Lurid bounties were offered. A Karni Sena infantry, armed with sticks, stones, reportedly even bulldozers, led a charge on Suman's residence in Agra. One worthy threatened to shoot Akhilesh. If the SP boss didn't blanch, it's because anything than can be predicted in politics can be an asset. Not only did



RAJPUT RAGE

The Karni Sena celebrates Rana Sanga, whose legacy SP MP Suman contested

political landscape into a two-way contest, with the SP as the principal challenger to the BJP.

At the heart of it is a clear focus on consolidating Dalit support. This key voter base had swung in SP's direction in recent elections, but SP boss Akhilesh Yadav seems to realise he has no permanent lien on it—and that his 'PDA' ethos can be kept alive only through constant renewal. Those initials name a formula the SP used to expand its political force-field beyond the Yadav-Muslim base, with the 'D' putting Dalits at its centre. Needless to say, both the BSP—the original patent-holder on the Dalit vote—and the BJP have been edgy in their antagonism towards the SP's new vibe.

It first found a voice in the Rajya Sabha on March 21, when SP MP Ramji Lal Suman called 16th-century Rajput ruler Rana Sanga a "traitor" for allegedly inviting Babur to defeat Ibrahim Lodi, citing the Baburnama for good measure. A rebuttal to the "Babur's DNA" slur often hurled at

Takeaways

► **The SP is making a bold bid to consolidate the Dalit support that has swung its way in the past few elections**

► **Defending Dalit leaders, it's framing the issue as a right-wing attack on Dalits/OBCs**

he strongly defend his Dalit leaders, he called the Karni Sena acts "state-sponsored" and accused the BJP and UP CM Yogi Adityanath (a Rajput) of orchestrating caste-based attacks. Before the BJP realised it, the SP was framing the issue as a right-wing assault on Dalits/OBCs.

Political pundits spot a rationale here. When the BJP dipped from 62 to 33 seats in UP in the 2024 general election, it was ascribed to a Dalit-OBC swing towards the SP. It's a constituency the BJP needs badly to transcend its own elite-caste silo. Now it stands torn between the pizza base and the topping, where the real meat was. The delivery is threatening to go to a new address on the register. ■

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

A PECULIAR GAP BETWEEN ability and ambition has hobbled the West Bengal BJP for long. And that's after amassing acres of political space over the years. Its problem: the organisation that tends to this turf is wobbly on the inside. That's what Sunil Bansal, the party's minder for Bengal since mid-2022, aims to change ahead of the 2026 assembly election.

His ingredients—ideological commitment, grassroots connect, loyalty and systematic planning—may seem par for the course for any Sangh Parivar operation. But to see how it marks a strategic departure, simply contrast it to the chaotic legacy of Bansal's predecessor, Kailash Vijayvargiya: a controversial phase defined largely by the wholesale import of defectors. A spot of inorganic



► BACK TO THE BASICS

Sunil Bansal, the BJP's Bengal in-charge, at a door-to-door membership drive in Chowringhee, Kolkata

In the 2021 poll, the party banked on high-profile turncoats, particularly from the Trinamool Congress (TMC). The dividends were immediate: from three seats in 2016, the BJP catapulted to principal Opposition status with 77 seats. But it didn't take for that hastily erected minar to start shaking. Many victors defected right back to the TMC, reducing the BJP's effective strength in the assembly to the present 65.

FOREIGN INVASION

Old-timers blame Vijayvargiya's obsession with rapid growth for eroding organisational coherence and voter trust. Some cite the many defeated candidates and say his approach actually thwarted the potential for higher numbers. Even his main confidant, Mukul Roy, a TMC turncoat, famously returned to his old party within days of his 2021 defeat.

At any rate, Vijayvargiya became widely unpopular among the rank and file—he was alleged to have worked in collusion with the TMC, insulted and sidelined long-standing BJP workers, even apparently defied the RSS. Posters demanding his ouster surfaced across Kolkata, forcing him out of the frame for a while. He reappeared two months after the results—in an online meeting—only to face angry party workers.

Bansal marks a change even there. “There’s something about him. He looks like a man with a plan. Everyone listens to what he says,” a source lets on. He’s saying plenty of things, too, drawing lines in the sand. District units have been refurbished with clear, accountable, representative tiers. One new rule is a clear separation of party work and elections. He has barred district heads from contesting in 2026. Each district gets an oversight committee—its members, too, will sit out.

A booth-level outreach starts mid-May. Rallies will follow. A crescendo will be built up with mathematical precision. Bansal is keeping the books. ■

► WEST BENGAL

BJP Woos Loyalists Over Turncoats

No more defectors in Bengal—at least that seems to be the message as Sunil Bansal ushers in a strategic shift for saffron

growth was a necessity when starting from zilch, but it soon created a situation where instability was a structural feature, not a bug.

How to move through such a fog? Bansal has a compass. Identify two or three leaders in each assembly segment, he told district-level leaders gathered at the BJP's Salt Lake office recently. Criterion: they have to have stayed with the BJP through its highs and lows. Such loyalists, by nature unlikely to defect, must be brought to the forefront, he said. The hint: this set would form the core pool of candidates for 2026. Says a senior partyman present at the meeting,

“He did not say it explicitly, but the message was clear—the days of importing candidates may be over. Visibility won’t matter.” That is, only good apples.

Takeaways

► **Bansal's organisational clean-up prioritises party over personal ambition**

► **District units will identify loyal grassroots faces: a core pool of candidates for 2026**



► MAGIC LAMP?

The LJP (RV) chief makes a splash at a Patna event in April

CHIRAG'S TRICK SHOTS

The Paswan factor is in play again. Seeking a prince's share of seats, angling for CM's chair, the LJP heir's moves spook JD(U)

By Amitabh Srivastava

CHIRAG PASWAN IS quite the lamp that burns bright. A 5/5 tally in 2024, a berth in the Union cabinet, and Bihar's 5.31 per cent Paswan electorate safe in his black designer suit pocket.... And yet, when the 42-year-old chief of the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) turned heads in April, it was with a poetic invocation: "Bihar mujhe bula raha hai." You couldn't miss the rhyme. He was getting 'the call of Bihar' just in time for assembly polls, due by November. The keyword is ambition. "Do you think he'll come to Patna merely to serve as a minister? No, the only office that interests him is the CM's chair," says an aide.

The ruling JD(U)'s corps commanders are irked. Is it a solo quest for Bihar's top job? A ploy to secure more seats? Or, alarmingly, a chess move by the BJP to reshape alliance dynamics? The spectre of 2020 looms large. Then, Chirag had exited the NDA but only to do man-to-man marking on CM Nitish Kumar's party. As a classic spoiler, his party won only one seat but sliced off 2.38 million votes across 135

Takeaways

► Chirag aims to be back in the reckoning; LJP wants eight tickets each for its 5 LS seats. Nitish camp sees red

► Chirag had played spoiler for JD(U) in 2020, whittling down its seat tally to 43

others. Catastrophically for the JD(U), the runoff tilted the scales in 38 seats. Its tally collapsed from 115 to 43, the BJP surged to 74: the imbalance had spurred Nitish's last breakup.

Now, Chirag is in play again as a confounding variable. Landing on the scene with all his éclat, he has put up a stiff bargain: eight tickets for every LS seat he won, or 40-odd. His party argues that it is fair. But in NDA seat splits, the JD(U) has never settled for less than 115 of Bihar's 243 seats. It has reasons to be spooked by the BJP's strategic ambiguity, for Nitish has not even been declared the CM face. Watch this space. ■

A BAN

As a simple community game



By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

GIVEN A GAME OF CHANCE, CHANCES are it can always gather big stakes—all it needs is for the society around it to change. That's what happened to Housie, the cherished pastime that Goa banned in April. Once a harmless form of community entertainment, Housie—also called tambola or bingo—helped fund sports, cultural events and local festivals. But somewhere along the line, it got kissed by the gods of lucre, and metamorphosed into a multicrore business.

"Tickets are now priced at Rs 1,000 and some 9,000 tickets are sold per event," says a state official. A high-profile event in Margao recently had a total prize money of Rs 13 lakh; another promised Rs

ON HOUSIE IN THE HOUSE

mutates into big-bucks betting, Goa cracks down. But the state may have scored a cultural self-goal



15.15 lakh. Winning numbers are often manipulated to ensure no one hits the jackpot. “Eventually, the organisers are the real winners,” says the official, adding they pay neither income tax nor GST.

The business flies almost entirely under the radar. “They take loudspeaker permissions for cultural or musical events and hold Housie games instead,” says the official. Early April, South Goa collector Egna Cleetus held a meeting to address this camouflaged surge in gambling, and put a stop on such ‘soft’ permissions. Violations attract action under the Goa Public Gambling Act, 1976. The crackdown has the full backing of chief minister Pramod Sawant.

Capt. Viriato Fernandes (retd), Congress MP from South Goa, fondly recalls the game of his childhood: tickets cost just 50 paise or a rupee and prizes were a modest Rs 10. He admits the present version is a mutant, but objects to selective enforcement, asking why the gov-

ernment does not act against casinos.

The ban has dealt a harsh blow to another vital part of Goan tradition: its 200-odd football clubs. “They organise Housie events at half-time, with tickets of Rs 50-100, and prize money of Rs 2,000-5,000,” says Goa Football Association (GFA) president Caitano Fernandes. “These are crowd-pullers

Takeaways

■ A cherished part of Goan life originally, which funded sporting events and festivals, Housie had of late mutated into high-stakes mass gambling

■ The ban will affect 200-odd football clubs sustained by Housie proceeds

and clubs collect around Rs 3 lakh. This funds player fees, training, equipment, refreshments.” The ban may force the smaller clubs to shut down or sit out tournaments. The GFA has appealed to the CM to withdraw the ban; while welcoming the crackdown on mega events, it seeks a conditional exemption. But a senior official says that can come only after the gambling menace is controlled.

“Housie has been a fixture in Goa since my childhood,” says ex-MLA and activist Radharao Gracias, calling the ban a “completely thoughtless act”. He acknowledges the game has been sullied by high stakes, but prefers regulation. “Instead, an entire tradition has been annihilated,” he says, noting the wording of the ban notification would seem to cover “even lotteries, particularly in vogue during the Ganesh festival.”

WRONG NUMBER

Some welcome the ban. “It’s not an attack on culture but a necessary intervention,” says Peter F. Borges, assistant professor, Goa University, who once chaired the state’s commission for child rights. “It had turned into mass gambling, with children present and no oversight. It’s no longer about feasts and fundraising, it’s about normalising risk-based behaviour under the garb of tradition. If we allow it to grow, we risk another matka-style menace.” That form of betting has long seeped into Goa from its original home, Mumbai, and flourishes despite crackdowns. In Housie, Borges sees a kindred evil “that quietly seeps into our villages, our families and our children’s minds”.

Vijai Sardesai, Goa Forward Party MLA and ex-deputy CM, has another take. He alleges the ruling BJP’s men still hold Housie events, giving “political patronage for illegal business.” No ban seems likely on politics. ■

ASIM MUNIR

JIHADI GENERAL

The all-powerful chief of the Pakistan army is certainly not a man to be trifled with. But he just might have overplayed his hand with the terror attack on Pahalgam

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

T

he Pakistan army chief General Asim Munir is not just in the eye of the storm clouding the subcontinent, he is the storm himself. It is no coincidence that he was the head of the notorious Pakistani spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence or the ISI, when it orchestrated the vicious Pulwama terror attack that saw the deaths of 40 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force on February 16, 2019. Six years on, Munir, now de facto supremo of Pakistan, is once again in India's crosshairs as the alleged mastermind of the Pahalgam terror attack in which 25 tourists and one local were gunned down in Kashmir's alpine haven on April 22. As the Modi government readies a military riposte to the worst civilian massacre in the Valley in two decades, it must not underestimate the guile of Asim Munir.

Those who have done so in the past have learnt their lesson the hard way. Among them was Imran Khan who, as Pakistan's prime minister, cleared Munir's appointment as ISI chief in 2018, only to sack him nine months later, apparently because Munir was bold enough to brief him about the alleged corrupt dealings of his wife, Bushra Bibi. Munir never forgave Imran for the humiliation of being possibly the shortest-serving ISI chief and bided his time to hit back. The opportunity came after Imran was deposed



FOR GOD AND COUNTRY
Pakistan army chief Gen.
Asim Munir at the funeral
of a serving officer in
Rawalpindi, Jul. 9, 2024

in an army-engineered 'parliamentary coup' in April 2022, and Munir, backed by a ruling coalition opposed to Imran, became the army chief that November. Months later, Munir had Imran jailed on multiple charges of corruption that saw the former prime minister sentenced to 14 years in prison early this year.

Decoding Asim Munir

Studying Munir's personality traits, psychological make-up, strengths and weaknesses has become central to India's strategy to deliver a fitting riposte to Pakistan for the carnage it instigated in Pahalgam. Munir heads a formidable, half-million-strong, Pakistan army—the sixth largest in the world—which also has nuclear weapons and is evenly matched with Indian troops on the Line of Control.

INDIA WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO CONTROL THE ESCALATION LADDER, AS MUNIR'S RECENT ACTIONS HAVE BEEN FULL OF SURPRISES

As a top expert, who does not wish to be named, puts it, "This is not an asymmetric war like Israel vs Hamas or Azerbaijan vs Armenia. This is between two of the most professional armies who are equally matched and have nuclear capabilities. Anything we do, we should expect him to retaliate. Controlling the escalation ladder of conflict will not be easy. Judging by Munir's recent actions, we should be prepared for unpredictability and surprises, including him initiating something and blaming us for it."

With Munir being the rare Pakistani general to have been chief of ISI as well as the Director General of Military Intelligence, he is expected to

have thought through his strategy well. It was evident in Pakistan's instantaneous suspension of the 1972 Simla agreement in response to India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance. Another strategist familiar with the process of war gaming points out, "Munir would have gamed all options beforehand and is moving with greater caution than normal. We need to carefully gauge him, as he has extensive intelligence and operational exposure. It's like a game of chess in which we need to think 10 steps ahead of him along with our own contingency plans and punches. So, we have to keep second-guessing his moves till we have some tentative answers at least. Specialists also need to do a detailed psychological profiling based on his behaviour and statements."

There are enough clues in Munir's 17-month tenure that showcase his ability to take calculated and calibrated risks. In the beginning, he was on the back foot given the unprecedented internal dissent in the ranks over Imran's arrest. But Munir ruthlessly consolidated his hold over the army, purging even the corps commanders who opposed him and replacing them with loyalists. Since then, he

THE RISE AND RISE OF A GENERAL

BIRTH AND FAMILY

Syed Asim Munir Ahmed Shah was born in Rawalpindi. His father, Syed Sarwar Munir, whose family had migrated from Jalandhar after Partition, was a school-teacher, and also served as an imam, delivering Friday sermons at a local mosque. Asim Munir studied at Markazi Madrasa Dar-ul-Tajweed in Rawalpindi. Later, he would earn the title of a Hafiz-i-Quran for having memorised all the verses of the Quran in their entirety.



JOINING THE ARMY

Munir did not join the elite Pakistan Military Academy but entered service through the Officers Training School (OTS) at Mangla in 1986. As the best-performing cadet (in photo), he won the Sword of Honour. His first posting was in the 23rd Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment, an infantry unit.

MUNIR'S POWER



Asif Ali Zardari
President



Shehbaz Sharif
Prime Minister

KEY ARMY COMMANDERS

Lieutenant Generals Muhammad Avais Dastgir (V Corps), Shahid Iftiaz (X Corps), Syed Omer Ahmed Bokhari



STATE OF READINESS
Gen. Munir at an army outpost at the Line of Control, December 2022

ACADEMIC RECORD

In the army, Munir further pursued education, acquiring an MPhil in public policy and strategic security management from the National Defence University (NDU) in Islamabad. He also attended professional courses at Japan's Fuji School and Malaysia's Armed Forces Staff College

KEY COMMAND AND STAFF POSTS

► In 2015, as a brigadier, he was appointed Force Commander Northern Areas, commanding troops in Gilgit-Baltistan in PoK, where he impressed Qamar Javed Bajwa, his X Corps commander
► In 2017, when Bajwa was army chief, he made Munir Director-

General of Military Intelligence and, a year later, Director General, ISI, Pakistan's external spy agency

► In 2019, he fell out with PM Imran Khan and was shunted out as ISI chief because he is said to have presented Imran with intelligence on corruption involving his wife, Bushra Bibi
► He was then posted to command XXX Corps in Gujranwala for two years. In 2021, Munir was made the Quartermaster General at army headquarters

CONTROVERSY OVER HIS APPOINTMENT AS CHIEF

When Bajwa was to retire in November 2022, Munir was the

seniormost serving general. But Imran Khan, who had resigned as prime minister after Bajwa had engineered his ouster through a parliamentary no-confidence motion, protested Munir's selection. Critically, the Sharif brothers—Shehbaz, as prime minister, and Nawaz Sharif, his mentor—backed Munir and President Asif Alvi, who owed loyalty to Imran, was forced to endorse Munir's appointment as army chief

EXTENSION OF TENURE

Munir was to retire in November 2025 after completing three years in the saddle. But in November 2024, he got Pakistan's parliament to pass a bill extending the tenure of all service chiefs from 3 years to 5 years, removing the upper age limit for a four-star chief. Munir's current tenure will now end in 2027, after which he is still eligible for reappointment

PERSONAL TRAITS

A fitness freak and an avid reader of strategic books, Munir is said to have a keen sense of duty, discipline and deep religious faith. He is considered to be pragmatic but is ever willing to take on his opponents

CIRCLE



Khawaja Asif
Defence Minister



Mohsin Naqvi
Interior Minister



Gen. Sahir Shamshad Mirza
Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee



Lt Gen. Asim Malik
DG, ISI



Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu
Air Chief



Admiral Naveed Ashraf
Naval Chief

(XI Corps), Rahat Naseem Ahmed Khan (XII Corps), Syed Imdad Hussain Shah (XXX Corps), Numan Zakaria (I Corps), Ahmad Sharif Chaudhry, DG ISPR, Muhammad Shahbaz Khan, Commander, Army Strategic Forces Command, Syed Aamer Raza, Chief of General Staff, GHQ, Sarfaraz Ahmed, National Coordinator, SIFC

PAKISTAN ARMY CHIEFS: THE

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ARMY CHIEFS WHO WIELDED SIGNIFICANT POWER



GENERAL AYUB KHAN (1958-1969)

After a coup against President Iskander Mirza, Ayub, as army chief, imposed Pakistan's first martial law. He centralised power, pushed for secular modernisation with a "controlled democracy". He advocated state-guided capitalism, achieving fast growth but worsening inequality. Unleashed the 1965 war against India, which is seen as inconclusive.



GENERAL ZIA-UL-HAQ (1977-1988)

After overthrowing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in a coup, Zia Islamicised Pakistan's polity and military, and wove Islamic law into governance. His economic model relied on foreign aid, mainly from the US and Saudi Arabia. In return, he nurtured a jihadist infrastructure to thwart the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Ties with India remained hostile.



GENERAL PERVEZ MUSHARRAF (1999-2008)

The mastermind of the Kargil War, Musharraf came to power overthrowing PM Nawaz Sharif and sought to moderate Pakistan's Islamic identity. He pushed for growth through privatisation and foreign investment, but failed to reform structurally. He pivoted Pakistan as a key US ally after 9/11, pursued peace with India.



GENERAL ASHFAQ PARVEZ KAYANI (2007-2013)

The 2008 Mumbai terror attacks were sanctioned on Kayani's watch but after that, he withdrew the army from overt politics, preferring behind-the-scenes influence instead. His focus was on professionalising the army and moving from an India-centric defence towards counter-terrorism in Swat and Waziristan.

has gone beyond being just the security czar of Pakistan, and now controls all levers of political power, including tackling Pakistan's distressed economy through the army-manned Special Investment Facilitation Council. Munir has also adroitly 'cleansed' the Supreme Court of Imran backers by getting an amendment passed in Parliament that allows the supersession of judges. In one more unprecedented move, he got another amendment passed in Parliament that extended his three-year tenure to five. This has ensured he will be in the driver's seat till 2027, with no age limit for another extension.

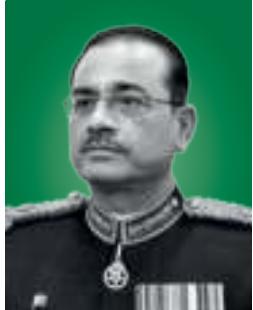
It's pretty telling the way Munir has handled the polycrisis he confronted after he became chief," says Michael Kugelman, a South Asian analyst based in the US. "There was severe political instability, the economy was on the verge of collapse, there was resurgent terrorism and a marked internal dissent in the army. He has addressed those problems better than others and has kept

things under control. He has his failures, but in terms of his actions, Munir is resolute and exhibits a supreme level of confidence in the way he has inserted himself in so many different aspects of public policy." But even as the army chief has consolidated his position in the institutional space, there have been real-world setbacks on the security front, particularly the recent hijacking of Jaffar Express by Baloch rebels, which have dented his and the army's credibility. There is also growing discontent among Pakistan's youth, who are unhappy with the way the country is being run.

The Pakistan army has always played an outsize role in running the country—in the 77 years of its existence, the country has been under martial law for 33 years, in three different phases. Munir, though, has emerged as one of the most powerful army chiefs in recent times without having to topple the civilian dispensation. He is the first army chief after General Zia-ul-Haq to invoke Islamist nationalism and even wear it as a badge of honour. In fact, he holds the

BRASS TACKS

ICANT POLITICAL INFLUENCE



GENERAL QAMAR JAVED BAJWA (2016–2022)

Bajwa promoted a vision of “geo-economics over geopolitics”, advocating stability and economic growth. But he resorted to political engineering, influencing elections, judiciary and media, thus damaging the army’s credibility. His peace moves with India (2021 LoC ceasefire) and Gulf outreach were seen as pluses.

GENERAL ASIM MUNIR (2022–)

Asim Munir reasserted army dominance after facing defiance from Imran Khan and his supporters. His vision of Pakistan is that of a ‘hard state’ that is militarised and centralised, as he deals with its multiple crises. He inserted the army formally into economic management. He promotes a moderate Islamic nationalism and is seen as markedly anti-India.

MUNIR HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL ARMY CHIEFS OF PAKISTAN WITHOUT HAVING TO TOPPLE THE CIVILIAN DISPENSATION

rare distinction of being a Hafiz-e-Quran, or someone who has memorised the holy book by heart, passing the test when he was posted as the army’s attaché in Saudi Arabia. It was a trait he picked up from his father, Syed Sarwar, who had migrated from Jalandhar after Partition. A schoolteacher in Rawalpindi, Sarwar also delivered the Friday sermon at a local mosque.

Munir himself studied in a madrassa in the garrison town

before winning a commission in the army through the Officers Training School (OTS) route rather than the more prestigious Pakistan Military Academy. But that didn’t stop his meteoric if turbulent rise to the top echelons of the army. Rana Banerjee, a former special secretary of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India’s external intelligence agency, and an expert on Pakistan, says, “Munir’s first name, Asim, means the great saviour, and the army chief seems driven by a deep sense of religious piety and purpose. He is meticulous, especially in bringing his rivals to book, but is not a visionary and seems hackneyed, even straitjacketed, in his thinking. Of late, he has adopted a deliberately insulting anti-India tone.”

A Study in Contrasts

All this is in sharp contrast to his mentor and immediate predecessor, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the army chief between 2016 and 2022. Bajwa was a powerful behind-the-scenes player in Pakistani politics when the mercurial Imran was PM and asserted the military’s dominance over public policy. It was under his tenure that the Pulwama attacks were authorised, and India responded with air force strikes on terror camps inside Pakistani territory. The first such air attack by India since the 1971 war, it was a move that set a new paradigm of deterrence, signalling to Pakistan that such cross-border terror attacks would not go unpunished.

However, toward the end of his tenure, Bajwa called for a dramatic shift in Pakistan’s focus from geopolitics to geoeconomics, arguing that his country must put its own house in order economically by pursuing regional connectivity, trade and development partnerships, even with India. As a sign of his earnestness, he entered into a ceasefire agreement on the LoC in February 2021, which held for four years before Munir engineered the Pahalgam massacre and destroyed the tenuous truce. As Ajay Bisaria, a former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, explains, “Bajwa was cut from a different cloth because he believed that the whole jihadi complex that the army had created had stopped serving Pakistan well and wanted to shift the focus to economic development. He wanted changes, but was a gradualist. Meanwhile, the marriage between him and Imran soured and he lost his nerve.”

Discarding the Bajwa doctrine, Munir’s vision of Pakistan is of a ‘hard state’, one that is strong and unyielding against both internal and external threats and ever ready for a robust military response. Internally, Banerjee says, Munir unsparingly quashed dissent in the army and across the political spectrum. Externally, he adopted a tough, no-nonsense approach,

especially towards the Taliban government in Afghanistan when it continued to shelter and fund the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a rebel group pushing for an Islamic emirate in Pakistan. In late 2023, Munir expelled more than 150,000 Afghan refugees in Pakistan, putting him in direct confrontation with the ruling Taliban in Afghanistan.

And while maintaining a pragmatic relationship with Iran, Munir did not hesitate to fire a missile into Iranian territory following Teheran's drone strike on an Iranian resistance group operating out of Pakistan. Munir has also cracked down severely on the Baloch rebel groups clamouring for an independent Balochistan. It's a different matter that they have regrouped and recently struck back with vengeance, undermining the Pakistani army's take-no-prisoners strategy. Munir has repeatedly blamed India for instigating and/or backing both the Baloch and the TTP rebels. Many experts in Pakistan offer it as the rationale for the Pahalgam attack. For India, these are clear signs that Munir is an unrelenting foe, one who is not afraid to retaliate even when the cards seem stacked against him.

The Jihadi Turn

There are other causes for concern for India. Since Munir took over as army chief, he has become more strident with his brand of religious nationalism. He has recast the army's role not just as defender of Pakistan's territorial integrity and sovereignty but also as the guardian of its ideological frontiers. Addressing a tribal *jirga* (council) in Peshawar in August 2023, Munir had declared, "No power in the world can harm Pakistan. We are waging *jihad* (holy war) in the path of Allah and success will be ours. The Pakistan army's objective and principle is to be *shahid* (martyr) or *ghazi* (one who takes part in *jihad*)."¹ His proclamation earned him the sobriquet of 'Jihadi General'.

What spooked Indian experts, however, was Munir's comments at an Overseas Pakistanis Convention on April 16, six days before the Pahalgam outrage, where he reiterated the two-nation theory but more crudely, highlighting the "stark difference between Hindus and Muslims" in a tone more extreme than even Zia's declamations. As T.C.A. Raghavan, a former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, points out, "Munir's ideological position on India remains the standard two-nation theory and he believes it is the Pakistan army that stands between the nation and its total domination by India. He thinks Kashmir is the unfinished agenda of the creation of Pakistan and that Pakistan is the victim of great injustice and it is the responsibility of the Pakistan army to correct that."

Experts believe that there are several reasons why Munir greenlit the Pahalgam attacks. Among them is domestic turmoil, including the failure to manage internal divisions and



EXPERTS IN PAKISTAN BELIEVE THAT MUNIR'S ISI STINT HAS MADE HIM RECKLESS; A WAR WITH INDIA IS THE LAST THING THE COUNTRY CAN AFFORD

rebellions that have dented the army's image. Feeling the heat, Munir brought India into the equation in order to rally the masses behind him.

The Pakistani general may have already succeeded in that endeavour, especially after India announced the suspension of the IWT, an act that threatens to impact water supply to the most populous and politically powerful provinces of Punjab and Sindh. "Munir wants to consolidate his power and emerge as the Supreme Leader," says Bisaria. "With the liberal and urban guys turning against him, he wants to win over the bulk of the right-wing establishment." A Pakistani expert, who does not want to be named, agrees. "There are two Pakistans," he says. "There is a Jihadi Pakistan which is all about creating a Pakistani identity based on an irreconcilable antipathy towards India. And there is a non-Jihadi Pakistan that believes it can exist as a federation and have normal relations with Afghanistan, Iran, India and China to do trade. Munir is appealing to the Jihadi Pakistan, which is around 60 per cent of the population. So, India needs to win over the non-Jihadi constituency."



PRIMED FOR ACTION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with defence minister Rajnath Singh, NSA Ajit Doval, CDS Gen Anil Chauhan and the three service chiefs at a meeting in New Delhi, April 29



TO DETER ANY FUTURE MISADVENTURE, INDIA HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT PAKISTAN WILL HAVE TO PAY A HEAVY PRICE AND BE PREPARED FOR A WAR WITH INDIA

IN

Strategists outline another reason for Munir to strike now—the perception that India was running away with the ball on Kashmir. With Article 370 abrogated, an elected government in place, and the return of tourists to the Valley, there was a fear that the situation in Kashmir would turn irrevocably in New Delhi's favour. Hence a Mumbai 2008 kind of attack on civilians became necessary to blow the illusion of peace and stability in the Valley. Experts also see the Pahalgam attacks as part of a concerted plan by the ISI to launch what is known as the K2 operation—unleash both Kashmir and Khalistan terrorists to destabilise the two frontier states. The terrorists in Kashmir are well-trained and equipped with the latest weapons. They are also using sophisticated communication technology, of Chinese origin perhaps, which India has found difficult to intercept and decrypt. With better command, control and coordination with each other, they first struck the Jammu region last year just before the assembly election in October, and have subsequently targeted the Valley. In Punjab, terrorists are pushing heavy amounts of drugs and also encouraging gang wars to unleash mayhem in the state.

Drumming Up International Support

Kugelman points out how Munir has been preparing the ground for international support for the jihad he is waging against India. When Donald Trump took over as US President, he cosied up to him by getting ISIS-K commander Mohammad Sharifullah, who was hiding in Pakistan, arrested and deported to the US. Sharifullah had plotted the deadly Abbey Gate bombing that killed 13 US service members while they were being evacuated from Afghanistan. Trump thanked Pakistan for helping the US out. Just a week before the arrest was made public, the US had released \$397 million to Pakistan for the maintenance of

its F-16s. After Pahalgam, Trump condemned the terror attack, but did not blame Pakistan. He maintained that the conflict with India was “on for thousands of years” and the two countries should sort it out together. China and Turkey were anyway toeing the Pakistani line for an independent investigation into the terror attack. Over the past two years, Pakistan has been purchasing state-of-the-art military equipment from both these countries, in addition to sophisticated electronic warfare items from China. Despite his country’s financial crunch, Munir embarked on a modernisation programme of the army that now seems to have given him the confidence to take on India.

But Munir may just have overreached with his most recent provocation. Targeting tourists in Pahalgam has damaged Pakistan’s prospects in Kashmir because, for the first time, the Valley has risen unitedly in protest and condemned the attacks. These directly impacted tourism, which had been booming for the past two years, affecting their livelihood. Experts in Pakistan are despairing over Munir’s actions, saying a military conflict with India is the last thing the country can afford, especially as it has far from recovered from the economic crisis. They believe Munir’s ISI past has made him reckless, pointing out that rarely does someone who heads the spy agency become the chief. As one expert put it, “When it comes to lighting fires, Munir may have been very good. But the Pakistan army has historically understood that if you let somebody with the matchbox be in charge, then you need to keep an eye on them to avoid a conflagration.”

With no one capable of restraining Munir in Pakistan, it falls on the Modi government to punish the errant general. As Bisaria says, “Pakistan knows it will have a heavy cost to pay and must be prepared for war with India. That is the only deterrent to prevent such misadventures in future.” ■

MARCHING TO ITS OWN DRUMBEAT

Beyond the social media humour, Pakistanis are open to better relations with India.

But jingoism and bullying from across the border don't elicit ideas of friendship

By HASAN ZAIDI in Karachi



AFP

IF

anyone needed contemporary evidence for the two-nation theory, they could have pointed to the social media of Pakistan and India in the aftermath of the horrendous Pahalgam attack. In fact, Indians and Pakistanis seemed to exist in different worlds in cyberspace. Whereas Indian social media seemed to be breathing fire after the initial shock—in line with the immediate blame levelled by India against Pakistan—Pakistani social media responded to the threat of doom in the way it knows best: with memes and humour.

When an Indian tweeted that missiles should be launched on Lahore, Muridke and Rawalpindi—cities in Pakistani Punjab—one wag commented that even when it came to missiles, Punjab was gobbling up the rights of other provinces. When

another Indian claimed the problem was not Pakistan but Pakistanis living in India, a Pakistani responded with mock incredulity, “No way you’re trying to pin this on Adnan Sami???”

Wit: The Best Defence

When India announced it was suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, a slew of memes poured forth, such as one with a man taking a shower calling on India to turn the water on again because soap was getting into his eyes. Others were self-deprecating, such as one Pakistani telling India to start the war before 9 pm because gas ‘loadshedding’ begins at 9.15 pm, and some warning Indian soldiers to leave their mobile phones

at home because they’d get snatched on Karachi’s streets. One commented that if India captured Lahore, it would want to give it back within two hours! Others used stills and videos from Bollywood films to mock the heated rhetoric from Indian TV channels.

One of the funniest posts referenced the national cricket teams playing each other only at neutral venues. “Guys war bhi hybrid model pe Dubai mein hogi ya India iss baar Pakistan aa raha hai (Guys, will the war also be fought on a hybrid model in Dubai or will India come to Pakistan this time?)” asked @aymx_infinity on X.

Observers were stumped, trying to understand why Pakistani social media was taking the threat of war so

THE THREAT OF A POTENTIAL INDIAN INGRESS INTO PAKISTAN HAS MADE THE SQUABBLING POLITICAL OPPOSITION CLOSE RANKS BEHIND THE ESTABLISHMENT



THE NATION'S
PROTECTOR Gen. Asim
Munir with Pakistan
PM Shehbaz Sharif in
Abbotabad, Apr. 26

**PAKISTAN
IS AWARE
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ECONOMIC
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unseriously. Some put it down to gallows humour, others to wit being the best defence against overblown rhetoric, yet others to annoyance at Indian analysts' lack of understanding of Pakistani realities. Someone suggested Pakistan needed to establish a "Tamgha-e-Memetiaz" for "outstanding bravery in the comment section and exceptional service to meme culture", a pun on the civilian Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (Medal of Distinction) award.

Of course, such frivolity is different from how Pakistan's government and establishment view matters. An indication of how seriously they took it came on April 29 when Pakistan information minister Atta Tarrar announced that Pakistan had "credible intelligence" that India was planning to "carry out military action against Pakistan in the next 24-36 hours". A day earlier, defence minister Khawaja Asif had indicated something similar, though he had backtracked after it started creating some panic.

There have been reminders sent out to the international media and governments that, with both Pakistan and India being nuclear powers, the costs of

miscalculation and military escalation could be unimaginably high.

Pakistan has also stuck to its line that India has yet to provide any credible information connecting it to the Pahalgam attack. It has offered to participate in a "neutral" internationally-led investigation. Some ministers have dubbed the attack a "false flag" operation, implying that it was carried out by the Indian armed forces to provoke a crisis. Other analysts have connected it to the upcoming polls in Bihar, hinting that heightened tensions will be used by the ruling BJP to rally support.

Most Pakistanis have bought this, citing unanswered questions about how the attack took place in a heavily fortified area far away from the LoC and how the attackers managed to escape, the lack of familiarity with the group alleged to be behind the attack, and India's knee jerk blaming of Pakistan "within five minutes of the attack".

Among hardliners, or those willing to concede that it could be an attack by a local Kashmiri militant outfit, there is great scepticism around the Indian

claims that this attack comes out of the blue. They point out that terrorism has been spiking for the past year in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, which Pakistan has tied to alleged backing from Indian covert operations.

In fact, in a press conference on April 29, the director-general of the armed forces Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), LtGen. Arshad Sharif Chaudhry, presented what he claimed was "incontrovertible proof" of Indian armed forces personnel—including a major—serving as handlers for terrorists arrested inside Pakistan. The Pakistan interior minister also pointed to alleged Indian involvement in the March 11 hijacking of the Jaffar Express train by Baloch militants, which resulted in 64 casualties.

Munir Emerges Stronger

Much of the Indian media seems to have focused on the allegedly fragile position of the army chief, Gen. Asim Munir. This is as far from the truth as it could get, and a poor reading of the structure of the Pakistan army. If anything, the drums of war beating across the border have strengthened his position. The threat of a potential Indian ingress into Pakistan has made the squabbling political opposition close ranks behind the establishment. While Imran Khan languishes in prison, his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf has stated that it stands behind the armed forces in case of Indian aggression.

Any act of terrorism at this stage will likely be viewed as being backed by India, which will allow the establishment to go after them with a stronger hand. Pakistanis are aware that macroeconomic stability has returned to the country after a couple of years of great volatility. Nobody wants to trade that in.

Most Pakistanis are amenable to building better relations with India, as long as India is willing to engage sincerely and substantively. But when they see cricket teams being stopped from touring, threats of waters being diverted and calls for Pakistan's dismemberment on Indian media, they do not evoke ideas of friendship or sincerity. Hubris and bullying tactics will not be the way forward. ■

POLITICS OF GOVERNORS

THE COUNTRY'S TOP COURT SETS A TIMELINE FOR THE PROCESSING OF STATE GOVERNMENT BILLS TO PREVENT GOVERNORS FROM STALLING LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS INDEFINITELY

By KAUSHIK DEKA / Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

On April 8, when the Supreme Court delivered a landmark verdict in *Tamil Nadu vs Governor of Tamil Nadu*, it once again laid bare fundamental questions about India's federal structure, the limits of gubernatorial discretion and who ultimately decides when a constitutional office has overstepped its bounds. The apex court invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution, which equip it to pass a decree or order to "do complete justice". Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, whose stint as governor in West Bengal regularly pitted him against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, promptly denounced Article 142 as a "nuclear missile against democratic forces".

The case in Tamil Nadu related to the 10 bills that had been pending with Governor R.N. Ravi since 2022. In a sweeping 415-page judgment, the court declared these "deemed to have been assented to". Passed by the Tamil Nadu assembly, the governor had withheld them—neither granting assent, returning them for reconsideration, nor forwarding them to the President—amounting, in effect, to a "pocket veto". An earlier intervention by the apex court had seen Ravi sending the bills back for reconsideration. When the assembly

resubmitted the bills, the governor referred them to the President. At the time of the judgment, the President had given assent to one of the 10 bills, withheld assent to seven, and had yet to decide on the remaining two.

The Supreme Court judgment made it clear that governors cannot wield a veto or a pocket veto on bills passed by the state legislature. Nor can they first return a bill to the assembly and then refer it to the President. It must be one or the other, and referral is allowed only under clearly defined circumstances. The President, too, cannot withhold assent to state bills arbitrarily but must give a constitutionally valid reason, like a conflict with existing central laws. Crucially, the court imposed specific timelines for the governor and the President to act on state bills, depending on whether they were assenting, returning or referring them, as the Constitution is silent on any such deadline.

It prescribed that governors should ordinarily act on bills "forthwith" and within one month if following ministerial advice. If withholding assent, the governor must return the bill with recommendations within three months. For bills presented after reconsideration, the governor must give assent within a month. The judgment also clarified that governors cannot reserve bills for the President after the legislature has reconsidered and passed them again. Justice J.B. Pardiwala, writing for the bench, observed that the phrase "shall not withhold assent therefrom" in Article



WHY THE SUPREME COURT FIXED A TIMELINE

THE LAW

► All bills—except a money bill—require the assent of the governor to become law

► Under Article 200 of the Constitution, a governor can exercise any of the four alternatives—to give assent, withhold it, return the bill to the assembly for reconsideration, or reserve it for the consideration of the President

THE PROBLEM

► Since no timeline is prescribed for governors to decide on a bill, Raj Bhavans exploit this ambiguity to sit on bills indefinitely

THE REMEDY

► SC has now ruled that governors cannot wield a veto or a pocket veto over the passed bills

► They cannot first return a bill to the assembly and then refer it to the President, it must be one or the other; referral is allowed only under clearly defined circumstances

► The President, too, cannot withhold assent arbitrarily; a constitutionally valid reason is a must. Bills can also not be withheld for more than three months

200 constitutes a “clear embargo” on further gubernatorial resistance once the legislature reaffirms a bill.

Role of the Governor

In the Constituent Assembly debates of 1949, B.R. Ambedkar had stated: “The Governor under the Constitution has no functions which he can discharge by himself; no functions at all.” That intent came under stress almost immediately after, from independent India’s first election in 1952. In Madras, Governor Sri Prakasa invited Congress’s C. Rajagopalachari to form the government despite the United Democratic Front winning more seats, setting a precedent of favouring the Centre’s ruling party. President’s Rule became another weapon in the hands of gover-



“When a governor deliberately sits on bills passed by an elected assembly, it’s democratic sabotage”

ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI, Jurist

nors—the Centre imposed it more than 100 times before 1994 till the Supreme Court reined in this misuse through the landmark *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India* verdict in 1994. It ruled that assembly floors—not governors—must test a government’s majority, and that Article 356 is subject to judicial review. The impact was stark: average annual impositions of President’s Rule dropped from six to 1.5 after the judgment.

The BJP’s ascendance to power at the Centre in 2014 marked a turning point in the governor-state relationship,

GOVERNORS VS CHIEF MINISTERS

Across India, governors are at odds with state governments, fuelling constitutional showdowns, ideological clashes and political manoeuvring. Raj Bhavans are now flashpoints where questions of federalism, executive overreach and institutional integrity are being contested



TAMIL NADU

The confrontation between Tamil Nadu governor **R.N. Ravi** and Chief Minister **M.K. Stalin** has been one of the most intense Centre-state face-offs. From withholding assent to key bills—including legislation curbing his powers as university chancellor—to staging walkouts from the

assembly, Ravi has repeatedly defied constitutional convention. In April 2025, the Supreme Court ruled his inaction on pending bills “erroneous and illegal”, emphasising that governors cannot indefinitely stall legislation. The conflict has also assumed other dimensions. Ravi’s suggestion to rename

the state as “Tamilizham” was seen as an affront to Tamil identity. His omission of social justice themes and key leaders in official speeches bred mistrust. What began as procedural friction has evolved into a symbolic struggle between federal authority and state assertion.

particularly in Opposition-ruled states. From Kerala to Punjab and Tamil Nadu to West Bengal, governors appointed by the BJP-led central government have been engaged in increasingly bitter confrontations with elected state governments. “The Governor’s office has been weaponised into a *supari* agency for the Centre—an instrument not of guidance, but of harassment and disruption,” says jurist and four-time parliamentarian Abhishek Manu Singhvi.

Though, constitutionally, the governors are envisaged as constitutional

heads who would act on ministerial advice except in rare circumstances outlined in the founding document, some governors have explicitly articulated a more assertive stance. West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose, for instance, has declared: “The governor should be active. The concept of passive governor has gone.” Adopting a literal interpretation of constitutional provisions, governors in many states are asserting powers not conventionally exercised. Former Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, for



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HINDUSTAN TIMES



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WEST BENGAL

West Bengal has witnessed prolonged tensions between Raj Bhavan and the state government. During Jagdeep Dhankhar's tenure as governor, frequent clashes occurred over administrative decisions and university appointments.

BOTH C.V. ANANDA BOSE AND HIS PREDECESSOR JAGDEEP DHANKHAR HAVE CLASHED WITH MAMATA BANERJEE

His successor, C.V. Ananda Bose, continued this trend, notably announcing a "social boycott" of CM Mamata Banerjee amid protests over the RG Kar incident. The discord extended to the appointment of vice-chancellors in universities. In January 2025, the SC granted Bose more time to finalise appointments, emphasising transparency and fairness in the process.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

In October 2024, after the first Assembly election since the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019, Omar Abdullah's National Conference-led alliance came to power. But significant powers, including control over police and bureaucratic appointments, remain with Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, a central appointee. The turf war came to a head on April 1, when LG Sinha ordered the transfer of 48 officials without consulting the chief minister. The LG further rejected Abdullah's bid to restore a holiday honouring Sheikh Abdullah and extended varsity vice-chancellors' terms. Security decisions, too, are made without the CM's input. The disconnect proved deadly in January 2025, when 17 died in Rajouri from a sudden illness due to delayed emergency response—caught between divided authority and bureaucratic inertia.

KARNATAKA

In Karnataka, ties between CM Siddaramaiah and governor Thaawarchand Gehlot soured in August 2024 after Gehlot sanctioned a probe into corruption allegations against Siddaramaiah over the allotment of land to his wife. The Karnataka HC cleared the way for a Lokayukta investigation. In response,

GOVERNOR GEHLOT SANCTIONED A CORRUPTION PROBE AGAINST CM SIDDARAMAIAH, TRIGGERING GOVERNOR-STATE STRIFE

the state government tried to curb the governor's powers, passing a bill that made the CM chancellor of the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj University, replacing Gehlot. The standoff deepened when Gehlot referred to the President an amendment to the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act, which reserved 4 per cent of public works contracts for Muslims.

instance, claimed the authority to dismiss a minister. In Tamil Nadu, Governor Ravi unilaterally sacked a minister arrested on corruption charges—though he later reversed the decision—and refused to reinstate another minister despite the Supreme Court having suspended his conviction in a corruption case. This when as constitutional expert PDT Achary points out, "Article 164 says that the CM is appointed by the governor and other ministers are appointed on the advice



"Across the world, politics has become divisive. The governor-state government conflict are reflective of this"

MAHESH JETHMALANI
Senior lawyer and former
Rajya Sabha MP

of the CM. So, the governor cannot remove a minister without the advice of the CM."

And it is not just appointment of CMs, dismissal of government, dissolution of assembly and imposition of President's Rule that are causing governor-state frictions; the current battles revolve around determining when assemblies are convened, interference in day-to-day administration, delaying assent to bills and even making adverse comments in public. The

THE BIG STORY
THE CONSTITUTION

conflict between West Bengal Governor Dhankhar and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee became so bitter that the state government wrote to the Centre multiple times requesting Dhankhar's recall. But even after Dhankhar's elevation to the vice-presidency, tensions persisted under his successor Bose. According to Speaker Biman Banerjee, the Raj Bhavan has yet to give assent to 23 bills since 2015. However, Raj Bhavan sources claim that the governor has assented to eight of these bills, while



"Governors blocking legislative business are engaging in political theatre that damages governance and the Constitution"

FAIZAN MUSTAFA

VC, Chanakya National Law University

11 have been sent for the President's consideration. Telangana faced a similar situation when Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan delayed approval for several bills passed by the state legislature. The state government moved the Supreme Court in March 2023, accusing the governor of creating a "constitutional impasse". "When a governor deliberately sits on bills passed by an elected assembly, it is no longer a constitutional disagreement—it becomes an act of democratic sabotage, a betrayal of the people's mandate," says Singhi.

What was designed as an apolitical bridge between the Union and states has become a choke point where legislative will often stalls. "Governors refusing to read cabinet-approved speeches, interfering in university appointments or blocking legislative business without reason are not engaging in

THE OTHER BATTLES



PUNJAB

The relationship between former Punjab governor **Banwarilal Purohit** and Chief Minister **Bhagwant Mann** was marked by confrontation. Disputes arose over Purohit's visits to border districts and role in legislative processes. In September 2022, the governor withdrew consent for a special assembly session called by the AAP government, leading to charges of constitutional overreach. More tension emerged over a bill seeking to remove Purohit as chancellor of state universities, which was declined by the President.



TELANGANA

The tenure of **Tamilisai Soundararajan** as Telangana governor (2019–2024) was marked by conflict with former CM **K. Chandrashekhar Rao**. Clashes erupted over legislative delays, most notably when she withheld assent to the TSRTC merger bill in 2023, sparking protests by transport workers. The governor also claimed she was excluded from official events, including the state's budget session. Soundararajan, a former BJP leader, was often accused by the BRS of politicising her constitutional role.



MAHARASHTRA

In June 2022, a rebellion within the Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde triggered a political crisis in Maharashtra. Governor **Bhagat Singh Koshyari**'s directive for a floor test prompted the then chief minister **Uddhav Thackeray** to resign. Shinde then formed a government with BJP support. In May 2023, the Supreme Court criticised the governor's actions, stating that he did not act as per the law, but did not reinstate Thackeray's government, as he had resigned voluntarily.



JHARKHAND

In February 2023, Jharkhand CM **Hemant Soren** accused Governor **C.P. Radhakrishnan** of conspiring with the Centre to orchestrate his arrest. His nominee Champai Soren waited nearly 48 hours before being invited to form a government, a delay the JMM claimed was a BJP ploy to engineer defections. But Radhakrishnan denied the allegations. In August 2022, former governor Ramesh Bais refused to disclose an EC report on Soren in an office-of-profit case, sparking a political storm. Both governors have also withheld assent to key state legislation.

constitutional oversight, they are staggering political theatre that damages both governance and the Constitution,” says Faizan Mustafa, Vice-Chancellor, Chanakya National Law University, Patna.

Assent as Weapon

The Governor’s or President’s assent is necessary for a bill—except a money bill—passed by the legislature to become law. While Article 163 of the Constitution deals with the powers of the governor, Article 200 specifically deals with the granting of assent to bills. However, there is no timeline prescribed for governors to decide on a bill. The current conflict is over this ambiguity—Raj Bhavans have exploited it to sit on bills indefinitely. Several state governments claim that they are using this procedure to keep bills in “cold storage”. “Governors—and the President of India, for that matter—are vital not because they can obstruct or delay governance (they shouldn’t and, constitutionally, they can’t), but because they are meant to serve as moral compasses. Their role is to uphold and reflect the ethical standards that reinforce the legitimacy and democratic integrity of elected governments,” says former West Bengal Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi.

Interestingly, most of the bills pending in Raj Bhavans relate to the education sector, particularly the appointment of vice-chancellors (VCs). Eight of the bills Ravi has an issue with pertain to a proposal to amend the statutes of certain state universities to enable the CM to take over the role of the chancellor from the governor. Kerala witnessed a similar tussle between the Pinarayi Vijayan government and then Governor Arif Mohammad Khan over the appointment of VCs in the 13 state-run universities. The Bengal government has been engaged in a legal battle with Governor Bose over the appointment of VCs in 31 state universities. Likewise, Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit clashed with CM Bhagwant Mann over VC appointments in 2020.

Such conflicts are rooted in the intent of the political class to exercise

an ideological grip over the higher education sector. Though education falls in the concurrent list, where both the Centre and states can legislate, entry 66 of the Union list—determination of standards in institutions for higher education—gives the Centre substantial authority over higher education. Such conflicts get intensified when the Centre and the states have governments with almost diametrically opposite ideologies. “Politics all over the world has become extremely divisive. The conflicts between governors and state governments are reflective of this clash of ideologies,” says Mahesh Jethmalani, senior lawyer and former Rajya Sabha MP.

But nowhere is the imbalance



“The structural flaw in the governor’s office is that the occupant’s survival is bound to political will of the Centre”

KEVIN JAMES

Public policy expert

starker than in Jammu and Kashmir, where the LG wields sweeping authority under the 2019 Reorganisation Act. Every bill requires his assent, even money bills. CM Omar Abdullah has been repeatedly overruled—on transfers, appointments and holidays. His proposed Transaction of Business Rules still await LG approval. Even emergency response suffers: 17 died in Rajouri in January 2025 due to bureaucratic delays and split authority.

According to analysts, governors act the way they do because they are political appointees, often chosen for ideological loyalty or as reward for past services. “The structural flaw in the governor’s office is that it binds the occupant’s survival to the political will of the Centre. Regardless of personal integrity,

a governor’s institutional incentive is to align with the central government’s interests. Until we democratise the appointment and removal processes, every solution, whether through judicial intervention or political convention, will only be temporary firefighting, not structural reform,” says public policy expert Kevin James.

The Case for Reform

Multiple commissions have been formed to review and reform Centre-State relations and encourage cooperative federalism. Their reports speak of appointing non-political governors through independent broad-based mechanisms, securing the consent of the concerned CMs to the appointment, and giving governors fixed, non-renewable tenures. There are also recommendations about the manner of exercising discretion in the appointment and dismissal of CMs and in recommending President’s Rule. None of these reports or recommendations have been taken up for implementation by any government at the Centre.

Interestingly, to end the monopoly of the Centre selecting its ‘own man’, the BJP, along with the Left Front government in Bengal, had in the 1980s, suggested that the appointment be made from a panel prepared by the state legislature with the Inter-state Council as the appointing authority, not the central government. “Governors citing ‘discretion’ to justify unilateral action misunderstand the very nature of discretion under the Constitution, which is bound by the principles of reasonableness, good faith and constitutional morality, not the whims of political convenience or personal ideology. Even if rare cases arise where a governor may legitimately question a state’s decision, the role must be confined to advice, counsel and cooperation, not confrontation,” says Mustafa. Until then, this new battleground in Indian federalism will see continued skirmishes. ■

*-with Amarnath K. Menon.
Arkamoy Datta Majumdar, Jeemon Jacob, Dhaval S. Kulkarni, Amitabh Srivastava, Ajay Sukumaran and
Kaleem Geelani*

A DIRE DONOR SHORTAGE

India is a world leader in organ transplant technology, numbers of transplants and success rates. Yet, as demand grows exponentially, donation rates remain low and thousands await an organ for a second chance at life

BY SONALI ACHARJEE

In

death, Janmesh Lenka saved two lives. On March 1, when the 15-year-old was declared brain-dead at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bhubaneswar, his parents made the courageous—and compassionate—decision to allow his organs to be used for transplants. Lenka's liver was retrieved and transported to the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) in Delhi, where it was given to a child with end-stage liver failure, while his kidneys were transplanted into an adolescent at AIIMS Bhubaneswar itself. "These procedures were impossible to do a decade ago...there is no denying the advancements made in transplant technology," says Dr Sanjeev Lalwani, professor of forensic medicine at the JPN Apex Trauma Centre

in AIIMS Delhi. An equally complex procedure was performed on a 10-month-old boy from Karur in Tamil Nadu, at the G Kuppuswamy Naidu Memorial Hospital in Coimbatore, where bone marrow from a brain-dead donor was transplanted to treat his deficiency of MALT1, a protein crucial to the immune system. A few years back, the medical diagnosis would have meant a death sentence.

The Organ Retrieval Banking Organisation at AIIMS Delhi, which maintains a register of brain-dead donors and promotes awareness on organ donations, has witnessed a remarkable rise in donor requests in recent years. "India performed the third highest number of organ transplants in 2023, next only to the US and China," says Dr (Col.) Avnish Seth VSM, head of Manipal Organ Sharing & Transplant (MOST). Not just numbers, success rates are impressive too. One-year survival rates—the usual benchmark—are around 85-90 per cent for liver and kidney transplants, 85-90 per cent for lung transplants, 85-90 per cent for heart, and over 95 per cent for pancreas transplants.

As the country sees a rise in non-communicable diseases—diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, chronic kidney disease etc—the damage to vital organs remains high. According to a 2023 assessment by the

A FRESH LEASE OF LIFE

THESE ARE THE FIVE ORGANS MOST IN DEMAND FOR TRANSPLANTS

CORNEA

A corneal transplant, also known as keratoplasty or corneal grafting, replaces a damaged or diseased cornea with a healthy one from a deceased donor. It's used to treat vision loss, relieve pain and for severe infections or damage to the cornea

200,000 (approx, national list awaited)

27,394

₹Rs 40,000 to ₹1.5 lakh

Survival rates: One-year survival rate is 90 per cent or higher

KIDNEY

A healthy kidney from a living or deceased donor is placed into a person with kidney failure. It is the treatment for end-stage renal disease. One kidney from a living donor can be used; both can be used from a deceased donor

57,806

13,426

₹5 lakh to ₹15 lakh

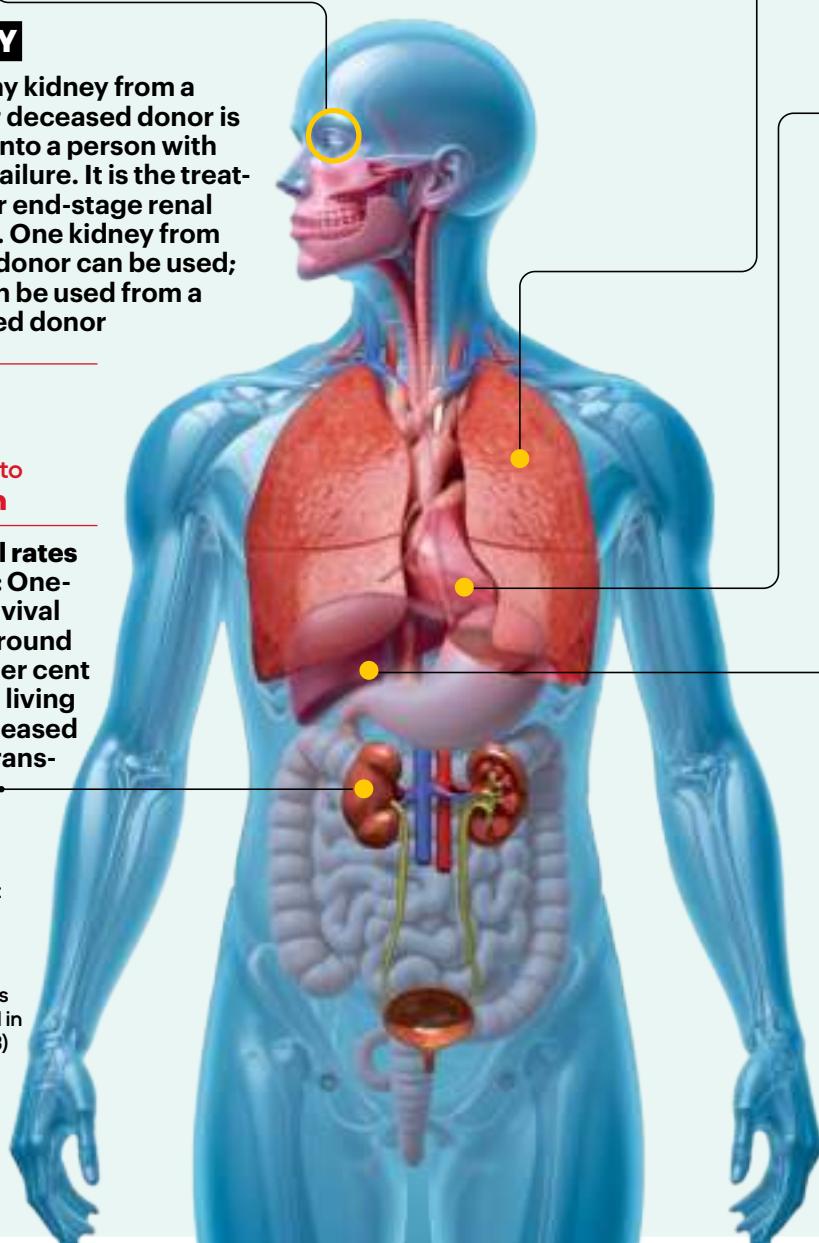
Survival rates in India: One-year survival rate is around 95-99 per cent for both living and deceased donor transplants

● National waiting list (till Sept. 2024)

● No. of transplants performed in India (2023)

● Cost

Source:
NOTTO



LUNG

It's a life-saving option for individuals with end-stage lung diseases like COPD, cystic fibrosis, pulmonary fibrosis and pulmonary hypertension. Lungs are taken from deceased donors

1,771 / 197

₹Rs 30 lakh to ₹45 lakh

Survival rates: One-year survival rate is 85-90 per cent

HEART

A heart transplant is used for those with a diseased or failing heart. It's a last resort treatment for end-stage heart failure, and the organ is taken from deceased donors

2,671 / 221

₹Rs 15 lakh to ₹25 lakh

Survival rates: One-year survival rate is around 80-90 per cent

LIVER

A liver transplant is a life-saving treatment for end-stage liver disease and acute liver failure. A portion of a living donor's liver can be used, while an entire liver of a deceased donor can be used

19,847 / 4,491

₹Rs 20 lakh to ₹30 lakh

Survival rates: One-year survival rate is around 95 per cent

Union health ministry, India faces an annual demand for 175,000 kidney, 50,000 liver, heart and lung and 2,500 pancreas transplants. However, despite advancements in medical science, the supply of donated organs is heartbreakingly low. The Organ Receiving & Giving Awareness Network of India, a Delhi-based NGO, estimates the number of patients waiting for a transplant to be as high as 500,000.

In the countrywide wait list with the National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO), updated till September 2024, 57,806 patients have been listed for kidney transplants, while only 13,426 such transplants were performed in 2023. Similarly, 19,847 are listed for liver, as against 4,491 liver transplants; 2,671 for heart transplants, as against 221 surgeries. The wait list is 1,771 for lungs, while the number of lung transplants was 197; 277 people had enlisted for pancreas transplants while only 27 got them. And while small intestine transplantation had a wait list of 92, only 16 small intestine transplants were performed in 2023. In all, 18,336 persons received 18,378 donated organs.

Sadly, India's organ donation rate is less than one per million population (PMP), according to a 2024 report from the National Academy of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. To achieve self-sufficiency, the required rate is around 124 PMP. "Many patients rely on dialysis for years, either waiting for a donor or financial support for a transplant. Many die due to lack of medical services that are affordable or accessible," says Dr Neeraj Saraf, senior director, liver transplant, Medanta, in Gurugram. The main reasons for the abysmally low number of organ donations in India are lack of awareness, fear of disfigurement (in case of live organ donation), religious reasons and lack of faith in the healthcare system.

THE CRY FOR ORGANS

The three organs most in demand remain the kidney, liver and heart. "Kidney transplants top the list due to the high prevalence of chronic kidney disease and diabetes," explains Dr Swapnil Sharma, consultant, HPB and liver transplant, at Wockhardt Hospitals in Mumbai. "Similarly, liver transplants are sought-after due to alcohol-related liver diseases, hepatitis infections and fatty liver conditions. Heart and lung transplants are also needed for patients suffering from end-stage heart failure and chronic respiratory diseases caused by air pollution—a growing concern," he adds.

Yet families of patients are often left to despair for want of a donated organ. Samira Bhatt's father was one such patient. "It was the worst phase of my life," says the 39-year-old homemaker from Delhi. She checked the NOTTO website every morning to see if an organ was available for her father who had been diagnosed with end-stage liver disease. "Despite the urgency, which I was told means you are prioritised for an organ, we never got one and he passed away," she adds. While the urgency of transplants influence wait time, so do blood type compatibility, organ size and proximity to the hospital where the organ was donated.

Aakash Kumar, 41, an investment banker from Mumbai who lost his mother after a car accident severely injured her kidneys and heart, says, "At the hospital, a man approached us and said he could procure the organs at a high price. We agreed. But before the deal could be made, she passed away," he says. However, for recipients, a new organ is a fresh lease of life. "I had chronic type 2 diabetes...till age 65, I had such poor vision that they predicted blindness in a few years. Last year, at age 66...a kind friend who lost her father agreed for the cornea donation and I received it. It is difficult to describe the feeling...that my eyes are not my own. But I am tremendously grateful," says Kamla Mangawa, 67, a retired banking executive from Pune.

LIVE VS DECEASED DONORS

Significantly, most organ donations in India happen through live donors. For example, out of the 13,426 kidney transplants in India in 2023, 10,896 were from living donors. This trend, say experts, applies to all organs, and is a reason behind such a huge gap between demand and supply.

According to a process regulated by the Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994 (THOA), to qualify as a living donor, a person must be 18–55 years old, with a blood group matching that of the patient, be a close relative, have a healthy organ, and not suffer from serious illnesses. But a living donor can only donate one kidney, 40 per cent of the liver (the organ can regenerate) and bone marrow. For other organs, one has to depend on deceased donors. For live donations, the donor pool is also restricted to close relatives. Post-mortem donations depend on the donor being declared brain-dead—the usual condition for deceased organ donation, where there is cessation of brain and brain stem activity, but the heart beats still, and there is circulation of blood to organs, making them viable for retrieval.



DR NEERAJ SARAF

*Senior Director,
Liver Transplant,
Medanta, Gurugram*

“ Many patients rely on dialysis for their entire lives, either waiting for a donor or financial support. Many default on treatment...or die due to lack of affordable/accessible medical services”

NEW DIRECTIONS IN TRANSPLANTS

These new medical breakthroughs are making organ transplants easier, with more successful outcomes

IMMUNOSUPPRESSIVE DRUGS

Immunosuppression medication like tacrolimus and cyclosporine suppress the immune system's response to a transplanted organ, helping its acceptance by the body



IMAGING FOR PRE- AND POST-SURGERY MONITORING

Before surgery, ultrasound, MRI and various CT scans help surgeons monitor patients.



Post-surgery techniques like Ultrasound-Doppler show the state of the transplanted organ

MACHINE PERfusion SYSTEMS

These devices circulate fluids through organs to mimic the body's blood flow, support organ viability during preservation and assessment



NEW PRESERVATIVES

New preservation solutions and techniques are being developed to minimise damage to organs during storage/ transportation



ROBOTIC SURGERY

Enhanced precision and minimally invasive techniques for transplant procedures help in faster recovery and better outcomes



AI DRIVEN ORGAN ALLOCATIONS

AI algorithms can analyse complex patient data to optimise donor-recipient matching, identifying the best possible organ for each individual



While most deceased donor organ transplants in India are carried out through Donation after Brain Death (DBD), organ Donation after Circulatory Death (DCD)—after circulatory and cardio-respiratory failure—is being increasingly used in the rest of the world. “In DCD, we declare death once the heart has stopped for five minutes and then have protocols in place for rapid retrieval to prevent damage to organs. The retrieved organs may be placed in machine perfusion systems (which ensure the artificial passage of blood, or ‘perfusion’, through the organs) where their function is assessed before implantation,” explains Dr (Col.) Seth.

THE TECH EDGE

To meet the demand for organs, scientists are working on increasing availability from genetically modified animals, particularly pigs, trying to create bioengineered organs using 3D printing technology, and banking on stem cell research with an aim to regenerate damaged tissues/ organs.

“Innovations such as laparoscopic donor nephrectomy have made kidney donation less invasive, reducing post-operative recovery time. Immunosuppressive drugs have evolved, lowering the risk of organ rejection,” says Dr Arun Kumar Balakrishnan, MD, Asian Institute of Nephrology and Urology (AINU) in Chennai. Advancements in robotic-assisted transplants are ensuring greater precision and minimal error. Using these techniques, Medanta can perform multi-organ transplants in a single surgery and can undertake liver transplants for advanced liver cancer, a procedure that a decade ago was found in medical fiction.

In another leap forward, there is the possibility for re-transplants—the process of replacing a previously transplanted organ with a new one—in case a transplanted organ creates problems. In 2023, a heart re-transplant was done in Karnataka. Hospitals like Apollo are also doing their bit to raise awareness, and have been setting up special teams to counsel patient families. Likewise, Manipal has the only cornea donation programme in India. The government, too, has taken the initiative to increase the availability of donor organs. As of 2025, this includes more public awareness campaigns, setting up a national eye bank registry for cornea transplants and an organ transport policy. Organs are being transported faster than ever before, with state-run and hospital-run green corridors.

More than anything else, awareness remains key in improving organ supply. Though Indians have their hearts in the right place—a 2018 survey by market research firm IPSOS found 74 per cent wanting to donate organs after death—lack of awareness of the process and age-old custom hold most back. “While medical advancements continue to enhance transplant success rates, increasing donor availability remains a collective responsibility,” says Dr Navinath M., nephrologist at AINU. Only then can thousands get a second chance at life. ■

INDIA MAKES A BIG BID

AS THE COUNTRY BIDS TO HOST THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPORTS

By JUMANA SHAH

MOTERA MAGIC REIMAGINED

At the heart of India's pitch for the 2036 Games is the Rs 4,000-crore, 650-acre Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave on the banks of the Sabarmati. An artist's impression of what we can expect

MULTIPURPOSE INDOOR ARENA

A 15,000-seat indoor arena for basketball, badminton, wrestling, table tennis, boxing etc...

CYCLING VELODROME

For track cycling

VOLLEYBALL ARENA

A 10,000-seat facility for indoor volleyball

AQUATICS CENTRES

A 12,000-seat facility for swimming, diving, synchronised swimming and water polo

Narendra Modi Stadium

Sabarmati River

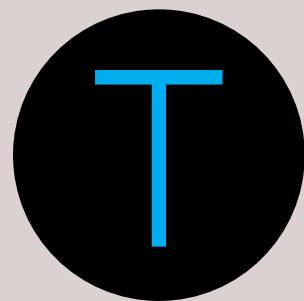
₹4,000
CRORE
Cost of the project

650
Acreage for the sports enclave



G PITCH FOR 2036

HOSTING EVENT IN GUJARAT, HERE IS WHAT THE STATE MUST DO



THE OLYMPICS ARE VERY MUCH ON GUJARAT'S MIND. YOU CAN SEE IT IN THE FRENETHIC ACTIVITY at the 650-acre Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave coming up on the banks of the Sabarmati, in Ahmedabad's Motera area. Olympic rings made of colour-appropriate flowers were the main attraction at the annual flower show in Ahmedabad this January. A more permanent steel and cement symbol has come up outside the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Airport in the city.

Never mind that it will take another year for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to decide who will host the 2036 event. India submitted a letter of intent (LoI) in October 2024. Though it did not specify any location, sources in Gandhinagar say a majority of the events will be hosted in Gujarat, and a few in Goa, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. There is no ambivalence about where the opening and closing ceremonies will be held: at the Narendra Modi Cricket Stadium.

Though the Games are 11 years away, India's enormous population, rapid economic growth and lack of previous hosting experience make it a strong contender. "Hosting the Olympics is the dream of 140 crore Indians, it is their aspiration," Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declared in his August 2024 Independence Day speech. The buzz in bureaucratic circles in the PM's home state had begun as early as 2021, the intent also made an appearance in the BJP manifesto for the 2022 assembly election.

WHAT IT WILL TAKE

For a country to host the Olympics, the IOC mandates conducive geopolitical, socio-economic, human development and environmental factors; political will, a masterplan of the vision and its alignment with long-term devel-

athletes across 21 sports.

Though the IOC does not specify the number of stadiums a country must have to host Olympics, France had 35 sporting venues and Tokyo 41. However, Gujarat, or perhaps any city in India for that matter, lacks infrastructure of the required quality and scale. Also, the IOC has in the past few years been asking countries to cut down costs, and make use of existing venues or temporary ones and consider the 'sustainability and legacy' impact of the Olympics. India will therefore have to demonstrate that it has the resources to develop high-end sports infrastructure without compromising on its social sector spend. Government sources estimate it will cost Rs 35,000-64,000 crore to host the Olympics. But this seems conservative given that the Paris Olympics,

WHAT MAY WORK IN INDIA'S FAVOUR IS ITS ENORMOUS POPULATION, RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE FACT THAT IT HAS NOT HOSTED THE OLYMPICS BEFORE

opment; sports, accommodation and transport facilities; sports events experience, and safety and security, among other things.

India has in the past five decades hosted four multi-country non-cricket international sporting events—the Asian Games in 1982 and the Commonwealth Games in 2010, both in Delhi, the 2017 U-17 FIFA World Cup in six cities, and the 2022 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup across three cities.

Summer Olympics typically feature 28-35 sports with 184 countries participating and nearly 203 National Olympic Committees. Paris 2024 had 10,714 athletes across 32 disciplines, while the Los Angeles 2026 edition will have 35 core sports, with some 10,500 athletes and their support staff. The biggest games India has hosted so far, the CWG in 2010, saw 71 Commonwealth teams and 4,352

which had one of the lowest budgets, cost \$8.9 billion (Rs 76,626 crore). Many events were staged in venues built for the French Open and the 2016 European Football Championship. "At the outset," says Manisha Malhotra, president of the Inspire Institute of Sport, "India's budget would be thrice that of, say, a Los Angeles Olympics (2026)."

The battery of bureaucrats putting India's case before the IOC intends to argue that the additional infrastructure will boost the economy which, in turn, will benefit society for years to come. "Hospitality, tourism, transportation, retail et al will benefit from the influx of visitors for the multiple small and big sporting events that will be hosted in the countdown to the Olympics and afterwards," says a senior office-bearer and member of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

X @CMOGuj



IS INDIA READY FOR THE OLYMPICS?

To host the Games, a country must demonstrate political will, funding and sports, accommodation and transport infrastructure. How we fare...

No. of athletes

Paris 2024: 10,714 athletes across 32 sports

Tokyo 2020: 11,000 athletes across 33 sports

India: CWG 2010, the biggest games India has hosted so far, saw 4,352 athletes across 21 sports

GUJARAT GETS SET

Whether or not India gets the nod, Gujarat started work on its Olympian ambition three years ago. The state's sports and culture ministry along with the urban development department have been reimagining Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar as modern international sporting hubs and priming them to host multiple sporting events in the run-up to 2036. In March, India submitted an interest in hosting Commonwealth Games 2030 in Ahmedabad. The state will also be hosting the Commonwealth Weightlifting Championship this year and the Asian Weightlifting Championship in 2026.



Venues

Paris 2024: 35 venues, 329 events

Tokyo 2020: 41 venues, 339 events

India: The Rs 4,000 crore, 650-acre Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel sports enclave will be India's Olympic city, with more than 10 stadiums, and 14 other venues besides the Narendra Modi Cricket Stadium

Cost

Paris 2024: \$8.9 billion (Rs 75,650 crore)

Tokyo 2020: \$13 billion (Rs 1.1 lakh crore)

India: Rs 35,000-Rs 64,000 crore (\$4.1-7.5 billion)

At the heart of all the development is the Rs 4,000 crore Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (SVP) Sports Enclave. It will house more than 10 stadiums, including those for football, a multi-purpose indoor arena, an aquatics centre and a tennis court. Fourteen other sporting venues are being readied within a 20 km radius. Sports infrastructure is also being developed at the Karai Police Training Academy, GIFT City and the Sanskardham Sports Academy (SSA) in Manipur-Godhavi village.

A site has also been identified for the athletes' village in the Sughad-Bhat area between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. Spread over 500 acres, it will have 3,000 housing units that

can potentially accommodate up to 10,000 athletes and staff. Another land parcel of a similar size has been identified near SSA. At least two international consultants have been helping the Gujarat Olympic Planning and Infrastructure Corporation Ltd (GOLYMPIC) to prepare a masterplan for the Olympic village, while a third consultant is overseeing the development of the SVP sports enclave. The 11.5 km Sabarmati riverfront development, which currently ends just ahead of the Motera stadium, will be extended to 26.7 km up to GIFT City, Gandhinagar. The government is also acquiring land in Motera, including huge portions of convicted godman Asaram Bapu's ashram. Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar will have to fulfil the IOC prerequisite for the host city to have at least 40,000 hotel rooms to house tourists and staff, in addition to the Olympic village. Currently, the two cities have only 4,000 rooms between them.

The SVP sports enclave is also within walking distance of the Sabarmati multimodal transport hub, which will have the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train station (expected to start by 2028); a metro and rail station each; and the Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS). Another international airport at Dholera, 103 km from Ahmedabad, is expected to start operations by 2028.

The Gujarat government allocated Rs 250 crore for sports development in its budget this year. The MoS for home, sports and youth affairs Harsh Sanghavi informed the assembly that 13 new district sports complexes and 19 taluka sports complexes are being constructed. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corpora-

THE WEATHER MAY PLAY SPOILSPORT AS GUJARAT IS EITHER BATTLED BY SUMMER OR THE MONSOONS IN JULY-AUGUST WHEN OLYMPICS ARE HELD

tion is spending another Rs 250 crore to build seven large sports complexes in the city. "These complexes will promote active lifestyles among the city's residents, particularly youth," says M. Thennarasan, GOLYMPIC CEO and former commissioner, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

WORRYING HEADWINDS

The weather will be a key challenge in Gujarat's bid for the Summer Olympics. Held in the months of July-August, Gujarat is either reeling under an extended summer at the time, or weathering a heavy monsoon. As a result, some events may be relocated—the canoeing slalom may move to Bhopal, mountain cycling to the Shivalik Hills in Uttarakhand, and sailing and surfing to Goa.

Equally difficult may be generating public support for the event in Gujarat, known more for its entrepreneurial prowess than a sporting spirit. What does work in the state's favour is the BJP's influence and control in every aspect of the state administration. Prohibition may prove another dampener but the government is said to be testing the waters by relaxing it in GIFT City and perhaps the Surat diamond bourse soon. There are also dynamics within the IOC to contend with. India has only one member in the 110-seat Olympic body—Reliance Foundation chairperson Nita Ambani. Former shooter and Olympic Council of Asia president Randhir Singh is among the 39 honorary members. Then there is the competition—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Indonesia and Qatar. Like India, none of them have hosted the Olympics before. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have a strong chance, as no West Asian country has held an Olympic so far. Ditto for South Africa and other African nations.

Yet, where there is a will, there is a way. And there is plenty of political will behind India's bid. Popular support is likely to build up too. As Malhotra says, "When people see the Olympics happening, it will open their eyes to the opportunities, and they will galvanise behind it." Wanting something badly enough, after all, is perhaps the first step toward achieving any goal. ■



When Ananth Mahadevan set out to make a straightforward biopic on the 19th century social reformers Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule, the first time it would be told in Hindi, little did he know he'd find himself in hot waters with the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The board's examining committee came up with a series of amendments, which included changing mentions of Mang, Mahar, Shudra and Kunbi to lower caste and tweaking a line from "teen hazaar saal puraani" (3,000 years old) to "kai saal puraani" (going back several years). Mahadevan was taken aback. "Just today I saw a headline in the *Times of India* which mentions Kunbis in big bold letters," he said. "If you can allow that in other forms of communication, why not cinema?"

Phule's certification woes began after a member of the Parshuram community landed at the CBFC office in Mumbai, worried that the film would project the Brahmins in a poor light. Mahadevan says he reassured the man that he shouldn't judge the film on the basis of the trailer and that his two-hour-plus drama, in fact, showed how the liberal Brahmins supported the couple's cause for education and donated funds to help them set up a school. "The CBFC's logic [behind the changes] was that they endorsed the film and wanted every child to see it," says Mahadevan. For that, the film needed a 'U' certificate which would be granted only if the makers acceded to the changes. Mahadevan reluctantly agreed, to avoid a 'U/A' certification, which would restrict the film's audience.

Among the few filmmakers who were not afraid to speak up about the contro-

Death by a Thousand Cuts

CENSORSHIP IS ALIVE AND KICKING, JUDGING BY THE CHANGES THAT FILMS DEPICTING INCONVENIENT TRUTHS ARE BEING FORCED TO MAKE

By Suhani Singh



PHULE

Brahmin groups alleged the film was anti-Brahmin, which is why the CBFC suggested caste names in the film be changed to just lower caste



"We have changed the name of the board, giving the impression that it's a certifying board, but we have not dropped the censorship"

ANANT MAHADEVAN
Filmmaker



DHADAK 2

Like *Phule* now, *Dhadak 2* too is reportedly facing heat from the CBFC for its depiction of caste prejudice

L2: EMPURAAN

Even after CBFC clearance, scenes depicting atrocities on Muslims in the 2002 Gujarat riots were cut and a character's name changed after irate Hindutva groups accused the film of being anti-Hindu

versy around *Phule* was Anurag Kashyap, who took to Instagram to vent his rage in a series of stories. After the film failed to release on the initial date of April 11 to coincide with Phule's birth anniversary, he wrote: "Bhai India mein caste to exist hi nahin kerti. Dhadak 2 mein bhi yahi bola tha. Hamare leaders ne India mein caste system khatam kar diya hai. Baaki jinko nahin dikhta, woh chu**** hain [There's no caste system in India. They said the

same in *Dhadak 2*. Our leaders have eliminated the caste system. Those who don't see it are fools.]

Kashyap was referring to Shazia Iqbal's caste-centric romantic drama *Dhadak 2*, a Dharma produced adaptation of the critically acclaimed Tamil drama *Pariyerum Perumal*. The primary reason for its repeated delays—from November 2024 to March 2025 to an as yet undisclosed date—is reportedly that it too has come under the CBFC scanner for the caste discrimination it showcases. A teaser of the film, released nearly 11 months ago, shows slogans like 'Dalit Lives Matter' and 'Revolution' and states that the love story centres on a couple (starring Triptii Dimri and Siddhant Chaturvedi) of opposing castes. With no clarity on whether it has received a certification from the examining committee, its wait to release on the big screen is further prolonged. *Dhadak 2* for Dharma is a franchise that continues the theme of forbidden love that began with *Dhadak* (2018), a remake of the Marathi blockbuster *Sairat*, which was an ill-fated romance between a lower-caste boy and an upper-caste girl.

While *Dhadak 2* still holds out hope

of a release, there is one filmmaker who has refused to capitulate to the CBFC's demands, which resulted in her film not having a theatrical release in India. Sandhya Suri, whose India-set film *Santosh* was the UK's submission for best international film at the Oscars last year, felt the cuts demanded would hurt the film's narrative. "It was very important to me that the film release in India, so I did try to figure out if there was a way to make it work," she told *The Guardian*. "But, in the end, it was just too difficult to make those cuts and have a film that still made sense, let alone stayed true to its vision." *Santosh*'s leading lady Shahana Goswami told India Today Digital that the "list of changes" expected were ones that the makers were "not in agreement with".

SELECTIVE OUTRAGE

For some, the CBFC's actions reek of double standards. "India's censor board did not object to a single scene from propaganda movies like *The Kashmir Files* or *The Kerala Story*. But it was quick to object to films like *Phule*. It shows the mentality of the board," Jayant Patil, Maharashtra chief of NCP (SP), had said in response to the controversy. Mahadevan, too, feels it's not a level playing field and there are different rules for different filmmakers. While excessively violent films are handed 'A' certification without any cuts, films like *Phule* and *Santosh*, which showcase an inconvenient truth around caste, face a tough battle. "They should differentiate between the intent of the filmmakers—whether they are honest and truly representing, or trying to exaggerate and have an agenda," says Mahadevan. "Do we have people who have a mature outlook to make the decision?

Mahadevan's film finally released on April 25 but only after he fought the good fight and endured two screenings for the examining committee. Mahadevan says the board suggested he remove the scene where a Brahmin boy throws *gobar* (cowdung)



SANTOSH

Objecting to police brutality, caste discrimination and misogyny in the film, the CBFC asked for so many cuts that its filmmaker refused to release it in India

at Savitribai, a scene that has been depicted in a 1950 Marathi film as well as in an episode of Shyam Benegal's classic series *Bharat Ek Khoj*. "They had okayed it in the beginning. Why are you getting cold feet because of a few Brahmins?" Worse, Mahadevan felt forced to clarify his intent by invoking his own Brahmin caste identity, something that went against the very grain of his intent behind *Phule*. "I had to make a stupid statement that I am a Brahmin and would not run down Brahmins," he says. "I was provoked to say I am one of you."

In a more worrying trend, filmmakers themselves are opting for self-censorship even after a clean chit from the CBFC. This is what the makers of *L2: Empuraan* did two days after the film's release—deleted scenes indirectly signalling the atrocities committed on Muslims during the 2002 Gujarat riots—to mollify irate Hindutva outfits who accused the film of attempting to "malign



"I wanted the film to release in India, so I did try to see if there was a way to make it work. But, in the end, it was just too difficult to make those cuts and have a film that still made sense"

SANDHYA SURI, *Santosh* director, in an interview to *The Guardian*

Hinduism" and "appease anti-national elements". The name of the villain who incites a mob to riot in the film was also changed, because it was too similar to that of a real-life perpetrator.

"As an artist, it is my duty to ensure none of my films promote hatred toward any political movement, ideology or religious community," the film's leading man Mohanlal said in a post on Facebook.

Censorship is alive and kicking, in a board that's meant to certify. Mahadevan cites the example of the ratings handed out by the Motion Picture Association of America. These range from 'G', which is the most audience-friendly, and 'NC-17', which restricts audience below 17. Issuing cuts is not part of its job. "We have changed the name [of the board], giving everyone the impression that it's a certifying board, but we have not dropped the censorship," says Mahadevan. "It has defeated the purpose totally." INDIA TODAY reached out to the CBFC for a comment, but didn't get a response. Looking back on *Phule*'s journey, Mahadevan feels he may have done something right eventually. "They have taken *Phule* so seriously, they know where the danger lies, that it's meant to be a serious document and statement." ■

INDIA TODAY



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MADHYA PRADESH FIRST

DRAWING A GROWTH BLUEPRINT

The Madhya Pradesh First Conclave showcased a diverse range of ideas, aiming to explore how the state can unlock its full potential and achieve inclusive, sustained growth

By Rahul Noronha



WAS A CONFLUENCE OF POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND PERSPECTIVE to chart Madhya Pradesh's path to its next phase of growth. Held on April 25 in Bhopal, INDIA TODAY's State of the States Madhya Pradesh First Conclave brought together politicians from across the spectrum, civil servants, academicians, industrialists, professionals, actors, hoteliers, a humorist, wildlife experts and subject experts. Over a series of sessions, speaker after speaker addressed the central theme—how to realise the state's full potential and drive its next leap forward.

Marking his 500th day in office, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav outlined his government's priorities and the policy changes being introduced across key sectors to achieve the desired goals. First up, he highlighted efforts to shore up investments, including a shift toward local engagement through regional industry summits. Dwelling on the need to simplify processes for businesses, he said, "Earlier, if anyone wanted to set up an industrial unit, they would have to get clearances from multiple sources. But now we have made collectors responsible for all permissions by creating an industries cell so that all permissions can be secured at one point." Later in the day, Raghwendra Singh, Principal Secretary, Industrial Policy and Investment, reinforced this point. "Ease of doing business is not a slogan in Madhya Pradesh, but a reality," he said.

In a session focused on the dairy sector, Gujarat assembly Speaker Shankar Chaudhary—who also heads Banas Dairy—shared his experience of turning around the sector in Gujarat and how similar efforts could be replicated in neighbouring MP. He was joined by Dr Sanjay Govani, MD, MP State Cooperative Milk Federation, who outlined the steps he plans to take to make dairy more remunerative.

Even though promoting manufacturing was a key part of the agenda, the criticality of agriculture to MP can never be lost. In a session on elevating agriculture to the enterprise level, M. Selvendran, Secretary, Department of Farmer Welfare, listed the initiatives launched towards this end, while Siraj Hussain, former Union Agriculture Secretary, mentioned, among other things, the challenges ahead for the sector.



**MISSION MADHYA
PRADESH** CM Dr Mohan
Yadav (middle) with
India Today Group's Raj
Chengappa (right) and
Sayeed Ansari (left)



Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

"WE HAVE MADE COLLECTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL PERMISSIONS BY CREATING AN INDUSTRIES CELL SO THAT ALL PERMISSIONS CAN BE SECURED AT ONE POINT"

MOHAN YADAV, Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh

In a state known for its numerous women-centric initiatives, minister Pratima Bagri shared her journey in politics, while Sufiyah Faruqui, Commissioner, Women and Child Development, highlighted the latest welfare interventions. In a session on manufacturing, Nidhi Agrawal, representing the MSME sector, spoke about the kind of policy support she expected from the government—particularly in securing talent. Aditya Shrivastava of Volvo Eicher discussed the company's massive investments in

Madhya Pradesh, especially in next-generation technologies, including electric vehicles.

Start-ups based in MP, represented by Gaurav Rana, Anurag Asati and Prashant Mishra, also shared their journeys and outlined what is needed to make startups more successful. Tourism, another key sector identified for growth, was the subject of a session wherein the policy initiatives were listed by the department's Principal Secretary Sheo Shekhar Shukla, with Bagheli culinary expert and former

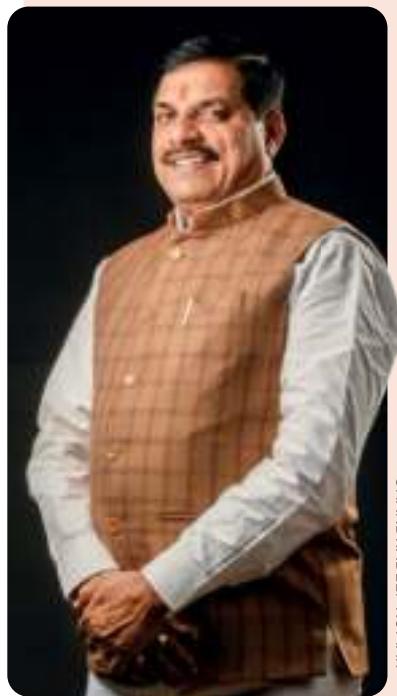
minister Pushpraj Singh, MLA Nitendra Singh Rathore and wildlifer Ali Rashid mentioning what they expected from the state's policy. As the discussions on sectoral growth wrapped up, attention shifted to the political landscape. A feisty MP Congress chief Jitendra (Jitu) Patwari spoke of his plans to revive the party ahead of the assembly election slated for 2028.

As classical vocalist Gautam Kale set the tone for the day with his insights into the intricacies of music with a couple of short performances, popular telly heartthrob Vivian D'Sena entertained the audience with a little jig while also narrating his journey from small town Ujjain to the world of television in Mumbai. Standup comic Aditya Kulshreshth, known for his acute observations on life in Bhopal, had the audience in splits. ■

▼ Q&A
MOHAN'S MADHYA PRADESH

“Impact of the decisions can be seen after 5 years”

Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

Q ON HIS 500 DAYS IN OFFICE

While 500 days seem a long time for seeing the impact of some decisions, I feel a proper assessment of long-term decisions can be done after five years.

Q ON THE EXTENSIVE TOUR TO GET INVESTMENT IN MANUFACTURING INTO THE STATE

The purpose of my foreign trips was to study their models for investment and the opportunities people of MP can have in those countries.

Q ON THE NEWLY UNVEILED INDUSTRIAL POLICY

There are incentives for industries

that are labour-intensive, and such units can be given land too.

Q ON THE STEPS TAKEN TO MAKE INVESTING EASIER

We've made collectors responsible for all permissions, by creating an industries cell so that all permissions can be secured at one point.

Q ON ORGANISING REGIONAL INVESTMENT SUMMITS

MP is a large state and if we want development to be evenly spread in the state, we need to attract investment in all parts.

Q ON EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

We have decided to give an added subsidy to industries that want to set up their skill centres. We are adding more ITIs and polytechnics, and even a skill university.

Q ON REPLACING THE WORD 'UNEMPLOYED YOUTH' WITH 'ASPIRATIONAL YOUTH' IN GOVERNMENT JARGON

You see someone or the other in every household has a job or a source of livelihood. The others in the family have ambitions to raise the income and take it forward. We want to give wings to those aspirations.

Q ON THE NEW INITIATIVES IN TOURISM

We are promoting home stays, and giving subsidies for setting up hotels, helicopter services. We are also promoting health tourism, especially in Ayurveda.

▼ MOOS, MILK AND



▼ FIELDS OF FORTUNE:



“The government has launched Mission Annadata to sustain [agricultural] growth rates. The focus now is to make farmers to shift to crops that yield higher returns per unit area”

M. SELVENDRAN, Secretary, Dept of Farmer Welfare and Agriculture Development, Madhya Pradesh

MADHYA PRADESH: PASTURES OF PROGRESS

"The tie-up between the MP Milk Cooperative and NDDB will bring the dairy sector on track in MP.... While breed improvement, direct benefit transfer to farmers will help, improving the quality of feed will also scale up production"

SHANKAR CHAUDHARY

Gujarat Legislative Assembly,
and Chairman, Banas Dairy



"The bulk of the milk is going to the private sector, which is motivated by profit. The plan is to get more and more milk collected through the organised sector"

DR SANJAY GOVANI, MD, MP State Cooperative Milk Federation

AGRICULTURE AS ENTERPRISE IN MADHYA PRADESH



"A large portion of India's pulses and oilseeds is imported. Madhya Pradesh needs to prioritise the cultivation of these crops so that the farmers get a remunerative price"

SIRAJ HUSSAIN

Former Union Agriculture
Secretary

"When I began selling my produce in mandis, there were a lot of price fluctuations, mostly controlled by middlemen. I then decided to create my own brand, and sell directly to retail chains and loyal customers"

HARSH AGARWAL

The Green Rack

STARTUP DREAM THE MP WAY



GAURAV RANA
Founder, Yatrikart

"The MP startup ecosystem is evolving.... In 2015, it took us three years to get a government organisation on board; with my current startup, it took only three months"



ANURAG ASATI
Founder, Kabadiwala

"There are apps for everything today, to order food, deliver packages etc., but there isn't anything to help manage waste at the household level"



PRASHANT MISHRA
CEO, TechXR Innovations

"Through the AR/VR device that we have built out of Bhopal, we have brought down the cost of experiential learning to 5% of its overall cost"

▼ MAKE IT IN MADHYA PRADESH: VISION, INVESTMENT AND THE NEW GROWTH STORY



“We have recently launched 18 sector-specific policies to drive investment. We have reduced compliances and decriminalised 64 provisions related to industries”

RAGHWENDRA KUMAR SINGH, Principal Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Investment, MP

“There should be an incentive for small and medium enterprises to become big enterprises. Now, there seems to be an incentive to remain small or medium. China did precisely that and moved ahead”

C.P. SHARMA, MD, Daulat Ram Engineering

“The MSME sector is struggling to acquire and retain talent, as it has to compete with big businesses on that front. I would want a policy wherein a share of ITI graduates is assigned to MSMEs”

NIDHI AGRAWAL, Director, Steel Innovation Pvt. Ltd

“Our expansion would now focus on making more EVs. The ecosystem in MP is good for making electric buses and would soon churn out tarmac buses and even last-mile trucks”

ADITYA SRIVASTAVA, Executive VP, Manufacturing Strategy and Sustainability, Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicles Ltd

▼ RESETTING THE HAND: WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE CONGRESS IN MADHYA PRADESH?

“If we compare the organisations of the BJP and Congress, the BJP may be better, which is why they won. We will change our strategy, make ours better and win; we are continuously working in that direction”

“If the government claims there is good governance and prosperity in Madhya Pradesh, the Opposition has the responsibility to ascertain the impact of these claims on the common people”

JITENDRA (JITU) PATWARI

President, Madhya Pradesh Congress, and former Cabinet Minister, Madhya Pradesh



▼ EMPOWERING WOMEN: THE ROAD AHEAD

"Education plays an important role in providing equal opportunities. The fact that senior leadership and middle leadership roles are available to women as much as men is something that we have set forth at VIT Vellore"

KADHAMBARI S. VISWANATHAN
Assistant Vice-President, Vellore Institute of Technology



"The government is aiming to build gender-intentional infrastructure.... The idea is to create infrastructure that not only provides facilities but also drives economic empowerment for women"

SUFIYAH FARUQUI, Commissioner, Department of Women and Child Development, Madhya Pradesh



"The Madhya Pradesh government is working not only to ensure women's safety but also to bring them to the forefront in every field and aspect of society"

PRATIMA BAGRI, Minister of State for Urban Administration and Housing, Madhya Pradesh



"The body becomes a very primary instrument in instilling confidence in someone. From a very young age, if you're training your body—not for vanity but for a higher purpose—you learn values that are eternal through dance. I feel that gives a lot of body positivity to the young girls"

KALYANI PHAGRE
Odissi Dancer



"Empowerment is not something that can be done to someone; until you yourself realise and choose to undergo the process of transformation, you cannot be empowered"

SARIKA SINHA Head, Women's Leadership Wing, Coady Institute, St Francis Xavier University, Canada

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

▼ TEMPLES, TIGERS, AND TIMELESS TRAILS:
MAKING MP TOURISM EXPERIENTIAL AND IMMERSIVE



"We believe in low-volume, high-value travel, and want discerning travellers to visit MP—those who understand and appreciate its culture, heritage and history"

SHEO SHEKHAR SHUKLA, Principal Secretary, Tourism, and Managing Director, MP Tourism Board

"We need to bring about policies... to promote unexplored forts, palaces, and temples"

NITENDRA SINGH RATHORE
MLA, Prithvipur, Madhya Pradesh



"The strategic geographical location of MP served as an important gateway to Prayagraj during the Kumbh, creating significant economic opportunities"

PUSHPRAJ SINGH, Former Minister, Madhya Pradesh



"We can leverage the solid positioning of MP wildlife tourism to promote its culture and heritage"

ALI RASHID, Director, Jehan Numa Hotels, Madhya Pradesh



"The earlier you fail, the quicker you will taste success...The moment you feel like giving up, don't; that is the most beautiful beginning"

VIVIAN D'SENA, Actor



"Bhopal has a tradition of mehfilaaz...I was performing at open mics and then took up a job as a radio jockey before moving to Indore and eventually to Mumbai"

AADITYA KULSHRESHTH
Standup Comedian & Writer



"I was blessed to have Pandit Jasraj as my guru...It was with his blessings that we started the sangeet gurukul in Indore"

GAUTAM KALE
Classical Vocalist



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BOOKS ▶

MURDER, THEY WROTE

INDIAN CRIME FICTION IS
HAVING A MOMENT, WITH
A NOTABLE UPTICK IN BOTH
QUALITY AND QUANTITY

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS



B

sions centred around crime writing. In addition to writers of crime fiction, there were also Bollywood mainstays like the filmmaker Prakash Jha, journalist Sunetra Chowdhury (whose book on Tihar Jail was adapted into the Netflix series *Black Warrant*), folks involved in the Amazon Prime crime series *Mirzapur*, etc. The festival was a reminder of how crime fiction is dominating bookshelves across the country. In recent years, Indian crime fiction has seen a notable uptick in both quality and quantity. Even a cursory glance at the ‘new releases’ section at bookstores will tell you about the genre’s rude health in India.

Penguin Random House India, for example, has recently released Faiqa Mansab’s *The Sufi Storyteller*, a work of crime fiction wherein an estranged mother-daughter duo must navigate a series of clues pertaining to Sufi poetry/music in order to solve the grisly murder of a young woman at a library. Picador/Pan Macmillan’s recent offerings include *Scarlet Sands* by Udayan Mukherjee, the second novel featuring Neville Wadia, a private eye character who was once a Mumbai Police hero. Over at Harper-Collins, another ex-cop private eye has started his innings—bestselling author Ashwin Sanghi’s *Razor Sharp* is the first among an announced series featuring Prakash ‘Kutta’ Kadam, ex-cop turned private investigator.

“One of the reasons I find crime fiction to be so compelling is that it is such

between November 3–5 last year, Dehradun played host to the 2nd Crime Literature Festival of India, three days of literary events and panel discussions

centred around crime writing. In addition to writers of crime fiction, there were also Bollywood mainstays like the filmmaker Prakash Jha, journalist Sunetra Chowdhury (whose book on Tihar Jail was adapted into the Netflix series *Black Warrant*), folks involved in the Amazon Prime crime series *Mirzapur*, etc. The festival was a reminder of how crime fiction is dominating bookshelves across the country. In recent years, Indian crime fiction has seen a notable uptick in both quality and quantity. Even a cursory glance at the ‘new releases’ section at bookstores will tell you about the genre’s rude health in India.

NEW INDIAN CRIME FICTION comes with a variety of settings and backdrops

a versatile genre,” says novelist Ankush Saikia. “It can take you to so many interesting places as a writer. A story that begins with an individual’s guilt can expand and incorporate societal institutions, public attitudes, historical events.” Saikia is one of the most successful and acclaimed practitioners of crime fiction in India. His recurring character, Detective Arjun Arora, has been featured in four books so far, most recently *Tears of the Dragon* (Speaking Tiger). One of these books, *More Bodies Will Fall*, drew from Saikia’s life in the Northeast (Tezpur, Assam and Shillong, Meghalaya) and in Delhi—the murder

changed the main character to a private detective and set it in the Northeast, everything flowed perfectly.”

Because of the way crime fiction has expanded laterally in Indian English publishing, aficionados can find a wide variety of settings. For example, Salil Desai’s *The Sane Psychopath* and *The Murder of Sonia Raikonen* (both Westland) are contemporary, noir-adjacent crime stories set in Pune. Rohan Monteiro’s *Shadows Rising* introduces a supernatural element into the who-dunit, with gods, demons and demigods all featuring in this Mumbai-set kidnapping thriller. The protagonist

BOOKISH BODY COUNT



victim here is a young woman from the Northeast, allegedly killed by her ‘mainlander’ boyfriend in the national capital.

“For me, the setting of the novel comes first, and then the individual characters and their psychologies,” says Saikia. “I left Delhi in 2011 and returned to the Northeast. Before that phase, I was trying to write a cop novel set in Delhi, but progress was slow. Once I

is a *yaksha* (a demi-god like entity in Hinduism) banished from the heavens, living out his days in contemporary Mumbai. Shesh’s *Sixty is the New Assassin* sees a retired corporate employee deciding to take murderous revenge in between living the retired life at book clubs and tennis gatherings. There’s even crime fiction aimed at children, like Sutapa Basu’s *Murder in the Jun-*

gle, where a Famous Five-like group investigates a spate of tiger deaths at the Nagarhole Wildlife Reserve.

Another indicator of the genre's cultural dominance is the number of new writers. These include debut writers as well as practitioners better known for, say, literary fiction, producing novels that are written and marketed as crime fiction. Anita Nair's *Hot Stage* and Tanuj Solanki's Manjhi's *Mayhem* are stellar examples of the latter, as is Deepti Kapur's *Age of Vice*.

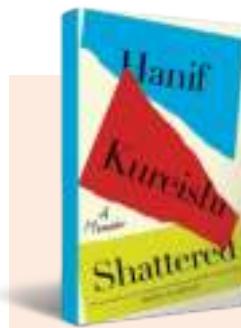
"I think anybody who has even the slightest interest in the psychology of a person will be drawn to crime fiction," says Girish Dutt Shukla. "Gangster stories are different, where there's organised crime and economic motives but I feel that most lay readers are drawn to the question of 'why would a

AN INDICATOR OF THE GENRE'S DOMINANCE IS NEW WRITERS—DEBUT WRITERS AND ESTABLISHED ONES—PRODUCING CRIME FICTION

perfectly ordinary person be driven to murder?" Shukla's crime novel *Cold-Blooded Love* was published by Rupa a couple of years ago. A computer scientist by education, Shukla hopes to build a career writing crime fiction.

It's undeniable that crime fiction is in the middle of a cultural moment in India. What remains to be seen is whether publishers can build upon this momentum and string together an array of writers and books—look at how efficiently Nordic crime fiction (Jo Nesbo, Asa Larsson et al) has been marketed globally. Hopefully, we can pull off something similar and bring Indian crime writers to the attention of readers around the world. ■

—Aditya Mani Jha



SHATTERED
A Memoir
By Hanif Kureishi
PENGUIN
₹999; 322 pages

BOOKS ▼

Down But Not Out

HANIF KUREISHI'S MEMOIR OF A SUDDEN FALL THAT LEFT HIM PARALYSED IS A TALE OF RESILIENCE AGAINST ALL ODDS

On Boxing Day in 2022, the British-Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi had a sudden fall while holidaying in Rome with his partner Isabella d'Amico. Kureishi had suffered a severe spinal injury that left him paralysed, unable to walk, feed himself or hold a pen. From an active 68-year-old father of three sons with a vigorous intellectual life, he became wholly dependent, undergoing slow, agonising rehab. Although his speech and brain remained unaffected, he was moved eventually to two hospitals in England. Over the course of a year, Kureishi began to dictate regular blog posts to Isabella, and his sons Carlo, Sachin and Kier, and post them online as *The Kureishi Chronicles*.

Shattered is an edited version of those diaries, of his often degrading hospital routine—a life of catheters, daily bowel excavation, and repetitive interaction—interspersed with memories of his past life. These are the unsentimental and witty observations of an accomplished storyteller.

He is now determined not to let "the constant realisation that I am disabled" wear him down. Exhuming his past life leads to musings on literature and friendships ("My friend Salman Rushdie...writes to

me every day, encouraging patience"), his long engagement with psychoanalysis ("My analyst knows me better than anyone else") and his changed relationships.

Finally, Kureishi returns home to a house suitably

EXHUMING HIS PAST LIFE, KUREISHI MUSES ON LITERATURE, FRIENDSHIPS AND HIS CHANGED RELATIONSHIPS



amended for his disabled needs. "Paki, writer, cripple: who am I now?" he asks. But the year of writing in hospital has helped him establish a new routine. With Carlo as amanuensis to fashion his blogs into a book is like collaborating on plays and movies with directors.

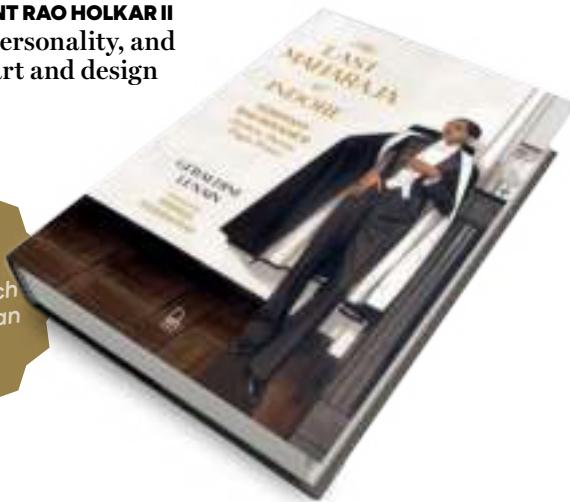
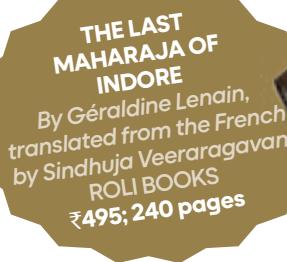
It is also a brave act to sustain a memoir that seamlessly shifts between a fully lived past and a dependent present. "My world has taken a zig where previously it zagged; it has been smashed, remade and altered.... But I will not go under; I will make something of this." ■

—Sunil Sethi

BOOKS ▼

The Way of Kings

MAHARAJA YESHWANT RAO HOLKAR II
was a fascinating personality, and
a global patron of art and design



History is so much more fascinating than fabricated fiction. Especially when it is told about people, almost at touching distance, and by someone who knows the proximate geopolitics, the foul games of colonialism and the cruel rules of adoration in high society when the wallet is full against when the inflow dries out. Kudos to Géraldine Lenain.

If the Indian god Vishwakarma was given a foot ruler, set squares and a compass to interpret the French design movement of *les Arts Décoratif* into a human being, he couldn't better his hand from his own creation of 1908: Indore's Yeshwant Rao Holkar II, with an almost perfect half-round skull, mildly bow-arched eyebrows, a protruding, triangular aquiline nose, with ears which stood out like the handles of an Art Deco teapot! Cast in this mould, the adolescent Yeshwant became the world's most conspicuous art and design patron.

Young Holkar, who was only 22 when crowned as a Maharaja, lost no time to beat the British in style by relying on German and French avant-garde design

movements. But he had been brought up strictly with British public school etiquettes and austerities. When the floodgates of his own wealth opened for him, he outdid the nouveau riche, but with rare good taste, which even European connoisseurs envied. But without a good spiritual, non-materialistic Indian grounding, the Maharaja played Life's game on the terms of the western glitterati. He had custom-made gold and diamond-encrusted skis; his hunting motorhome of 1936 had a bathroom with a tub and an eight-seater dining. He also went on to make a palace on his train valued at €1,200,000 in 2021 and a virtual palace within his plane. His yacht-water palace project was abandoned when he lost his first wife Sanyogita. His second and third wives—a nurse and a socialite, only pulled him in the wrong direction. They made a visionary become a victim of his own excesses. Material lust took precedence, leading to fatal consequences. Compact, racy, fact-filled but evocative, Lenain has produced a near-perfect book. ■

—Aman Nath

EXHIBITION ▼

ROYAL DESIGNS

A travelling photo exhibition spotlights one of India's earliest icons of modernity

Maharaja Yeshwant Rao Holkar II of Indore met German architect Eckart Muthesius at a garden party in Oxford in the late 1920s. Soon after, the maharaja commissioned Muthesius to design a palace for him and his wife in Indore. Completed in 1933, Manik Bagh set a precedent for introducing western modern aesthetics in India.

At Mumbai's Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, *Eckart Muthesius and Manik Bagh—Pioneering*



IN MANIK BAGH The Maharaja's living room (watercolour on paper) by Eckart Muthesius

Modernism in India tells the story of this Indo-German collaboration. The exhibition shows rare photographs as well as little-known watercolours, drawings and design studies by Muthesius, which highlight the puristic yet innovative interiors of the palace. "Some of these sketches and photographs were exhibited at Mumbai's Town Hall (now the Asiatic Society) in 1934. This was a period of cultural shift in (then) Bombay and was reflected in its evolving art, architecture and design," says Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, managing trustee and director of the museum. The exhibition is on till August 17. ■

—Prachi Joshi



**FROM
PORTUGAL**
Sempre Fado—a highlight of the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa

ARTS ▼

CELEBRATING CULTURE

To celebrate a decade of **SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL**, a Mini Edition in Birmingham is the first in a series of global engagements

In a first, Serendipity Arts Festival—one of South Asia's most recognised multidisciplinary arts festivals—makes its way to Birmingham for a Mini Edition. Scheduled from May 23-26, the event—organised in collaboration with Birmingham City University (BCU)—is a concentrated yet immersive experience of the flagship festival held in Goa every year. "The Mini Edition is an opportunity to engage with the Festival's spirit in new geographies and forge new cultural connections leading up to the milestone celebration in December," says Smriti Rajgarhia, Director, Serendipity Arts Foundation.

A pivotal reason behind choosing Birmingham, says Rajgarhia, is the city's openness to cultural experimentation. Besides, Serendipity has a longstanding relationship with BCU. "The University has been a deeply collaborative partner, and their spaces—from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire to the symphony hall—offered the ideal infrastructure to host this cross-cultural initiative," adds Rajgarhia.

One of the highlights of the Mini Edition is 'Thumri in the Chamber', which reimagines the Hindustani form of thumri through an interdisciplinary lens—merging it with contemporary arrangements and presenting it in a chamber concert format. There's



THE MINI EDITION IN BIRMINGHAM WILL HAVE A TRIBUTE AND CELEBRATION OF USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN'S LEGACY

also a two-part tribute and a celebration of Ustad Zakir Hussain's legacy: a special screening of *The Speaking Hand*, a documentary by Sumantra Ghosal, will be followed by a conversation featuring Ghosal, Dayanita Singh and other collaborators of Hussain.

The Birmingham edition will include a repertoire of performances, exhibitions, workshops and cross-cultural dialogues. For Rajgarhia, the idea is not just to replicate the Goa festival, but to co-create contextually relevant experiences that draw from both local and South Asian cultural vocabularies. ■

—Geetika Sachdev

TAKING THE HELM

Harman Baweja has pivoted into the role of producer with elan and is off to a fine start in 2025

Nine years back, with his acting career in doldrums and his father Harry Baweja having suffered a stroke, Harman Baweja found himself facing a choice which was both a challenge and an opportunity—step up and take the reins of the family-run film studio. In 2025, he is finally reaping the fruits of it as the marital drama *Mrs.*, featuring Sanya Malhotra, produced and co-written by Baweja, became a streaming sensation, amassing 500 million views since its release in February, as per ZEE5. Validation has come his way, as has the expectation to deliver another sleeper hit.

Baweja has the pandemic to thank for his career-defining moment. “I’d be writing 12 hours a day, and at one point my sister would be like ‘who are you writing all this for?’ A lot of what we are producing now comes from stories and ideas written in that spell,” he says. It’s also when he realised the studio needed to veer into a different, new direction, one adapted to the fast-evolving industry. Says Baweja, “We constantly talk about big and small films when, in fact, it’s the film’s budget that’s big or small. What we should be focusing on is, ‘Is my story big enough?’ We need to do everything to support that and push the envelope.”

Baweja has just wrapped up a discussion with four writers, which, in industry parlance, is now referred



The marital drama *Mrs.* has become a streaming sensation, amassing 500 million views since its release in February

to as a writers’ room. “It was called a writing session back in the day. What has now become methodology was instinctive for the earlier generation,” he says. Baweja is familiar with it because he began his cinematic journey shadowing his father after having studied and subsequently dropping out of both UCLA and the Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute in the US. Six months shy of 21, he had already produced his first film, *Yeh Kya Ho Raha Hai*, which marked the directorial debut of Hansal Mehta. Incidentally, it was Mehta who’d bring Baweja back in the public imagination by casting him as a top cop in *Scoop* (Netflix).

Acting, with which he has had a less-hit-more-miss affair, isn’t his priority for the moment. “It has to be something that’s just wow, fun and unique and doesn’t take too much of my time,” he says. Instead,

he’s more content playing a behind-the-scenes role, writing, developing a gamut of films from his two offices in Andheri, and being a family man by spending time with his two kids. The aim, he adds, as a producer is to hit “the sweet spot”, marrying commercial sensibilities with creative freedom.

On the 2025 slate is a rom-com, *Dil Ka Darwaza Khol Na Darling*, featuring Jaya Bachchan, Siddhant Chaturvedi and Wamiqa Gabbi; and *Nouva Noor*, a prequel to the animated Punjabi film *Chaar Sahibzaade*. Also going into production soon is an Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari-directed feature with Sonakshi Sinha and Jyotika. Now, the question is not if but when he steps into the director’s chair. “Not too far,” he quickly says. “I have my two stories ready. Whenever I am up for it, I will jump into it.” ■

—Suhani Singh

OTT ▼

THE FEAR IS REAL

Smita Singh taps into our inner demons for her Amazon Prime horror series *Khauf*



When **Smita Singh** moved to Delhi in 1998, little did she know that her experience

would drive her to create *Khauf*. "I lived in a working women's hostel, and the danger and isolation that women coming from small towns faced every single day, the fear of being followed, being watched, the feeling that your space is never truly yours, was our constant companion," says Singh. In fact, it is the exact alley that Singh would have to survive to reach her hostel in the Qutub Institutional Area, that makes a spooky appearance in *Khauf*.

The series follows Madhu (Monika Panwar), leaving behind her traumatic past to seek a new life in Delhi, where she moves into a haunted hostel. Elsewhere, a creepy healer (Rajat Kapoor) is trying to prolong his life by consuming the souls of young women. More than the computer-generated ghouls, the daily experiences of working urban women with hostile men are close to the bone.

Singh, an FTII screenwriting graduate, broke into the industry as a staff writer on Netflix's *Sacred Games*. An acclaimed thriller (*Raat Akeli Hai*) later, she is now the creator and showrunner of her own series. ■

—Devarshi Ghosh



A still from *Khauf*

CINEMA ▼

A Suitable Boy

SPARSH SHRIVASTAVA's dance moves got him to the city of dreams, but it's his thespian skills which have ensured he stays on and shines

Accidental actor. That's the phrase Sparsh Srivastava uses to describe his 16-year run as an entertainer. The Agra boy was 11 when he won the dance reality show, *Chak Dhoon Dhoon*. Acting wasn't on the horizon, he says, but his connection with the camera was undeniable and,

do something in life, you don't have to rely on excuses," he says. "Work hard and you will get there."

It has taken him a while to find his way in the industry. By his own account, he has given some 400 auditions and had his share of rejections. "I never saw it as a struggle," he says. "I enjoy giving



The 27-year-old scored a hit as a young wannabe with Bollywood on his mind in *Dupahiya*

PARAG JALGAONKAR

by 2017, he knew that Mumbai was to be his new home. Last year, the 27-year-old actor's breakthrough moment came with *Laapataa Ladies*, where his convincing turn as a naive groom stuck with somebody else's wife tickled as well as won hearts. In March, he scored another hit as a young wannabe with Bollywood on his mind in the Amazon Prime sitcom *Dupahiya*. And last month, Sparsh made a case for being a multi-hyphenate artist after releasing his first single, *Ji Huzoor*. "I want to set an example for the audience and say that if you want to

auditions. It's a way to practise my craft." It's how he'd bag his first prominent role in *Jamtara*. Aamir Khan would see the Netflix show and call to congratulate him. And that video call would land him another audition, a life-changing one for the Khan-produced *Laapataa Ladies*.

A self-taught dancer, actor and now singer, Sparsh says if TV was his school and OTT his graduation, then currently he is in his post-grad phase. Not a flash in the pan but a "lambi race ka ghoda" [one for the long haul] is what he seeks to be. ■

—Suhani Singh

THE LISTICLE

Art and photography exhibitions on this month

GANGTOK ▼

A REGAL BOND TO REMEMBER

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, is organising a specially curated exhibition, *An Extraordinary Friendship*, in May of nearly 300 photographs, documents, films and artefacts celebrating the friendship between Sikkim's last Chogyal, Palden Thondup Namgyal, and the Dewan of Sikkim, Nari K. Rustomji, who first met at the ICS probationary training camp in Mussoorie in 1942. The exhibits, primarily from the Rustomji Archives, detail important milestones in Sikkim's history, like the construction of iconic government buildings, the 2,500th Buddha Jayanti celebrations in 1956, Nehru's visit en route to Bhutan in 1958, the 1965 coronation of the Chogyal, etc. The exhibition is a testament to an extraordinary friendship which set Sikkim up for development and modernity in the 1950s.

The exhibition will open at the **NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY**, Gangtok, on **May 22** and run for about a week



On view at **KNMA SAKET**, New Delhi, till **May 18**

NEW DELHI ▲

Caravaggio Comes to India

KNMA has pulled off an artistic coup by bringing a painting by the Italian baroque master Caravaggio to Indian shores for the very first time. In association with the Italian Cultural Centre, the museum is showcasing '**Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy**', which the artist painted around 1606 while in exile after being charged with murder. A poignant depiction of spiritual transcendence, the artwork is a superlative example of Caravaggio's signature chiaroscuro (literally 'light-dark' in Italian) technique. Alongside the masterpiece, visitors will be treated to an immersive VR experience of the artist's world.

KOLKATA ▶

A DOUBLE SHOWCASE

At **EMAMI ART**, Kolkata Centre for Creativity, 777, Anandapur EM Bypass, Kolkata, till **Jun. 21**



Emami Art, Kolkata, is currently hosting two exhibitions. *Re-Figuring*, a group show featuring 10 contemporary artists, examines the figure not as a mimetic representation but as an evolving form shaped by lived realities and larger

systems of power. Featuring works by Avishek Das, Janhavi Khemka, Kushan Bhattacharya, Sayanee Sarkar and others, the exhibition showcases hyperreal and semi-abstract bodies rendered across painting, sculpture and mixed

LONDON ▼

ARPITA'S OEUVRE

The Serpentine Galleries, London, is hosting veteran artist Arpita Singh's first institutional solo exhibition outside India, spotlighting her six-decade-long career. *Remembering* explores the full breadth of her oeuvre, ranging from large-scale oil paintings to more intimate watercolours and ink drawings. The works have been selected in consultation with the artist who "brings together Surrealism and figuration with Indian Court painting narratives".

At **SERPENTINE NORTH**, Kensington Gardens, London, till **Jul. 27**

KYOTO ▼

Pushpamala N. in Japan



At **MUSEUM OF KYOTO ANNEX** till **MAY 11**

Multidisciplinary artist Pushpamala N., known for her photo-performances, is exhibiting three major work series, including 'The Arrival of Vasco da Gama'—based on the 1898 Orientalist painting by José Veloso Salgado—and 'Bharat Mata', at KYOTOGRAPHIE 2025, an annual photography festival in Kyoto.

'There Will Be Signs' by Janhavi Khemka

media. The other—*The Geometry of Ordinary Lives*—is a solo show by Prasanta Sahu, which encapsulates a decade-long inquiry into the relationship between traditional knowledge, artisanal practice and contemporary life. Sahu's interdisciplinary practice—shaped by engineering and cartography—fuses poetic visual vocabulary with critical documentation of India's pre-industrial wisdom.

—compiled by Amit Dixit

EXHIBITION ▼

Diasporic Dreams

From resistance to speculative futures, Indian voices bring depth and dynamism to the **16TH SHARJAH BIENNIAL**

Every two years, Sharjah opens its doors to a compelling range of art, fostering dialogue from the heart of the UAE to the world beyond. Under the theme 'Thinking historically in the present', the 16th Sharjah Biennial, on till June 15, sprawls across five cities and towns in the emirate, transforming spaces into sites of creative reckoning. Over 300 works are on display, spanning everything from sonic experiments to film, performance and visual storytelling. The common denominator? Exploring memory, identity and belonging.

Among the artists presenting at SB16, there are several Indian and

today's context. Bringing 15 years of her time at the Chandralekha Dance Company, Tishani Doshi explores a lyrical resistance that highlights the interlinked gender, violence and power dynamics.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson aims to fill the silences in colonial archives, offering a long overdue voice



GLOBAL TAPESTRY

An installation by Womanifesto, a transnational feminist platform; (left) an archival presentation of the choreographer Chandralekha



Indian-origin voices. The Anga Art Collective, known for their intersectional and indigenous-led practice across Assam, brings their focus on community resistance into conversation with regional histories. A rare archival presentation of the legendary choreographer Chandralekha reflects on the body, feminism and Indian classical forms as political tools, still resonant in

to the indentured labourers of South Africa and focusing on migration, grief and beyond. And in Womanifesto, a transnational feminist platform, Varsha Nair's contributions speak to decades of collaborative and cross-border art-making. In many ways, these artists, alongside their work, stand as breathing testimonies to the boundless fluidity of art. And perhaps that's the Sharjah Biennial's most radical offering: a reminder that history isn't just behind us, it's still unfolding. ■

—Caroline D'Almeida

The SB16 is on till June 15. For more information, visit www.sharjahart.org

Q+A

Role Play

RANDEEP HOODA, the 48-year-old *Jaat* actor, talks about his pivot towards writing stories and new-found love for direction



Q. You've played the antagonist a few times, including in your latest film *Jaat*. What does it really take to be an effective villain?

There is no difference with playing the hero or the villain. While I am used to doing a lot of prep for my roles, with this one, almost 90 per cent of the job is looking the part. Usually, the audience cheers for the hero but with *Jaat*, I have got so much love for Ranatunga (his character) that I am amazed.

Q. You recently said that you want to direct more...

I was an accidental director (on *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar*) but I then found that I have a flair for it. All my life, I've been co-conspiring with my directors for my part at least. What has also helped is that I've been a wildlife photographer for about eight years now, which has honed my sense of framing. I have a couple of stories that I've developed, both action films.

Q. Boman Irani, who just directed his first film, took time off to study screenplay writing and skill up. Is that something you feel you would need to do as well?

Not at all. In fact, for *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar*, I also co-wrote the screenplay with Utkarsh Naithani and it just flew out of me. I didn't feel the need to get any other skill set at all. Maybe I was just born to do it (laughs).

Q. Do you enjoy writing?

I really do. Since the screenplay, I've been writing short stories in Hindi. They basically document our times. I write about Versova (a suburb in Mumbai) and the characters I have known. When you read a lot, you also want to write because your thoughts need an outlet. I did most of my writing after I broke my knee while horse riding. I have about 10-15 short stories written. A few more and I'll probably put them out there as a book.

—with Karishma Upadhyay



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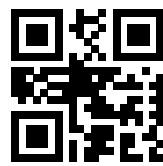
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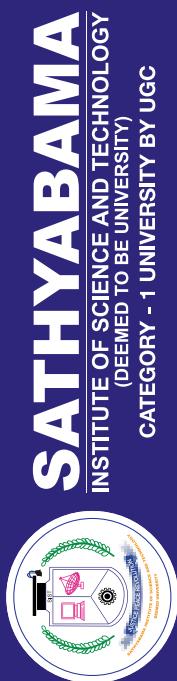
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