

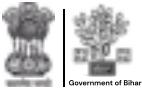
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OCTOBER 13, 2025 ₹100

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Ashwini Vaishnaw**SEMICONDUCTOR MISSION****THE GREAT CHIP GAMBIT**

**THE MODI GOVERNMENT INVESTS A MASSIVE ₹76,000 CRORE IN PRIVATE PLAYERS FOR SELF-RELIANCE IN CHIP MANUFACTURING. CAN INDIA PULL OFF THIS HIGH-RISK STRATEGIC INITIATIVE?**



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## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

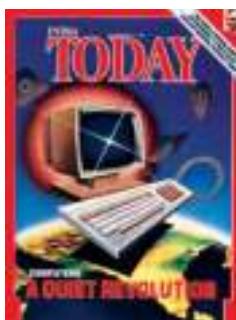
**F**or a country on the vanguard of the software revolution, India has curiously stayed a few light years behind the hardware architecture that supports it: semiconductor chips. India imports 95 per cent of its annual requirement of 19 billion chips, paying a hefty import bill of Rs 1.71 lakh crore. Why do chips matter? Because this tiny silicon wafer, with billions of nano-sized transistors embossed on a base of just a few millimetres, is the beating heart of the Information Age. Almost everything runs on this complex little marvel: from your slim mobile phone to data centres spread across millions of square feet, from automated factories to the robots that do the grunt work, from automatic cars to every other navigable object like ships, aircraft, rockets and spacecraft, from your smart TV to your WiFi router, from MRI scanners to cloud services. More recently, Operation Sindoor demonstrated how central a role electronic gadgetry plays in modern warfare. Whether through autonomous intelligent drones, precision-guided missiles or radar tracking and surveillance systems, it's information transmitted across chips that play a decisive role in the outcome. No wonder the silicon chip is seen as the steel of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: it forms the core of just about everything.

Trouble is, India does not make it. The folly of that approach came out starkly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply chain disruptions created a massive semiconductor crisis globally and impacted several key industries in India, including the auto and consumer electronic goods sectors. Even a country like the US suffered. Though it leads in chip design and innovation, it presently accounts for only 12 per cent of the world's chip manufacturing. The fabrication industry is dominated by East Asia: Taiwan, South Korea and, to some extent, China. That's what goaded America, under President Joe Biden in 2022, to pass the Chips and Science Act: it set aside \$52.7 billion to boost domestic semiconductor manufacturing. India had already decided that it too could not afford such upheavals and needed to be self-reliant in chips. Under the India Semiconductor Mission launched in December 2021, the Modi government made one of its biggest gambits. It pledged to invest Rs 76,000 crore to attract private chip manufacturers, both foreign and Indian, to set up foundries here.

Unlike the Performance Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, it offered to underwrite up to half the project cost but with no repayment or equivalent equity, simply to seed a fully homegrown ecosystem of chip manufacturing. This would span across designing and fabricating chips to having them assembled, tested and packaged indigenously. States were also encouraged to provide grants ranging from 20 to 30 per cent of the project costs.

Chips are not easy to make and only a handful of

nations do it. That's because it needs ultra-precision, up to 99.5 per cent accuracy, to create a tiny silicon wafer treated with photosensitive agents, transfer the chip circuit design on to it using lithography, and fire billions of transistors and the rest of the circuitry on to it. It's capital-intensive and creates few jobs. And besides high order engineering skills, it needs enormous supplies of uninterrupted power, water and rare chemicals. Such massive investments by the Modi government drew criticism from Raghuram Rajan, the former Reserve Bank of India governor, who described India's mission as a "ruinous race to get into now", pointing to its high capital costs, heavy upfront subsidies and low labour potential. Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, brushes aside the criticism. "It is a foundational industry that is of strategic importance to India, especially in a world full of turbulence and geopolitical changes. We need to be self-reliant," he tells **INDIA TODAY** in an interview. "It is a very complex industry compared to any other manufacturing industry and must be supported by government. That is the practice the world over."



▲ Dec. 31, 1987

**P**owered by cumulative investments of around Rs 1.6 lakh crore, it's a bold, risky and expensive plan, with a gestation period of about a decade. But the bet seems to be already paying off. By now, 10 projects have been greenlit and fast-tracked into construction mode. From big players like Tata Electronics, partnering with the Taiwanese giant PSMC for India's first semiconductor fabrication unit, to US major Micron Technology and an HCL-Foxconn venture, the Indian landscape is now bristling with activity. Four smaller units were set rolling just in August, and startups are foraying into advanced chip design. Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa, who has tracked the frontiers of science and technology for a long time, brings all his expertise into this week's cover story.

Chengappa visited Sanand in Gujarat, one of the new semiconductor hubs, for a close-up look at Murugappa Group's CG Semi facility as it became the first to launch its pilot line. He was impressed with the cutting-edge technology employed, apart from the high-quality standards. A space and atomic energy buff, Chengappa says, "The technology to make chips is confined to an exclusive club of nations and it has become imperative for India to become a full-fledged member."

It's a blue-chip dream that needs to become a reality. So that when the chips are down, our chips are up. Fingers firmly crossed.

(Aroon Purie)

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Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

**SEMICONDUCTOR MISSION**

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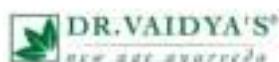
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# UPFRONT

HEALTH WATCH: MONSOON FLU PG 22

GRAPHIC: REDRAWING DIASPORA PG 24

**ON EDGE** A police vehicle torched by the demonstrators in Leh, Sept. 24



AFP

► LADAKH

## HIMALAYAN STORM FOR STATEHOOD

**Leh's demands for constitutional safeguards lead to violence and a high-profile arrest, exposing the fragility of New Delhi's Ladakh experiment**

**By KALEEM GEELANI**

**L**ADAKH, THE ICE-COLD DESERT WITH A MOONSCAPE, was one of the most placid places on the Indian map—till September 24, that is. That's when arson and violence shattered its long calm, leaving four dead and dozens injured in its wake. If any other sign was needed to show how abnormal things were, Sonam Wangchuk—iconic innovator, Magsaysay awardee, climate activist—was in jail.

Evidently, beneath Ladakh's serene topsoil, there had been stirrings of a volcanic unrest. Its sudden eruption, if anything, exposes the fragility of New Delhi's political experiment in this northern outpost. Since Ladakh's separation from Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019, and rebirth as a Union Territory, its demands have been getting louder: not only jobs, but full statehood, a legislature, inclusion under the Sixth Schedule (which provides for self-administration of tribal areas), land rights and full control over its ecology. During



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his 14-day hunger strike, Wangchuk had warned that, without meaningful concessions, Ladakh could see “Gen-Z protests of the likes of Nepal and Bangladesh...the real cause is the frustration of six years of unemployment and unmet promises at every level”. Soon, the peaceful demonstrations he had led till then took a violent turn. Wangchuk was arrested on September 26 under the stringent National Security Act—on charges of “inciting mob violence” through “provocative statements”—and shifted out to Jodhpur jail in Rajasthan.

Retrospectively, a sense of planned intent is being ascribed to the sequence of events. On September 27, Ladakh DGP S.D. Singh Jamwal said Wangchuk was being probed for alleged “Pakistan links”. Questioning its very basis, Wangchuk’s wife Gitanjali Angmo—instrumental in running their non-profit, the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh (HIAL)—says the “witch hunt” began four years ago, when Wangchuk started advocating for statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule.

HIAL was stripped of its land over allegations of “deep-rooted corruption”. Their other non-profit, Students’ Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL)—which earned renown as the inspiration for the hit film *3 Idiots*—had its FCRA licence revoked. Wangchuk has insisted that SECMOL never took foreign contributions, only payments from UN and European agencies for services rendered, which he said were taxed in India.

### **GENESIS OF UNREST**

When Ladakh was carved out of J&K, many residents, Wangchuk included, had welcomed the freedom it would bring from the fraught politics of Srinagar and Jammu. But within two years, that enthusiasm soured into anxiety, fuelled by the absence of democratic agency and avenues to voice dissent or articulate aspirations. Earlier, Ladakh sent four MLAs to the J&K assembly. Now, as a UT without a legislature, it has none. The role of its apex elected body, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill De-



Wangchuk speaks to the media in Leh, Sept. 25

### **KEY DEMANDS**

- **Statehood: Ladakh as a separate state**
- **Inclusion in Sixth Schedule: Constitutional safeguards through autonomous governance**
- **Jobs: Genuine reservation and employment opportunities for locals**
- **Land rights: Protection and allotment of land**
- **Central representation: Allotting two Lok Sabha seats instead of one**

velopment Council (LAHDC), has been reduced to basic matters like roads, water and electricity. It faces elections in October, with the BJP hoping to retain the majority it won in Leh in 2020.

Unlike Kashmir’s 16,000 sq. km land area, Ladakh spans nearly 60,000 sq. km but is home to just 275,000 people, as per the 2011 Census. Locals fear demographic change, and with a Centre-appointed lieutenant governor controlling key appointments, administration and land use, many sense growing marginalisation, disempowerment and even cultural erosion. The torching of the LAHDC secretariat and BJP office on September 24 reflected popular anger over unmet promises from the 2020 election—a legislature and Sixth Schedule inclusion among them.

Today, the demands unite Ladakh’s two divergent districts: Muslim-majority Kargil and Buddhist-dominated Leh. Together, civil society groups and political parties, barring the BJP, have rallied under the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA). Seizing the moment on September 28,

Rahul Gandhi, Opposition leader in the Lok Sabha, mounted a sharp attack on the Modi government. Accusing the BJP-RSS of undermining Ladakh, he backed statehood and Sixth Schedule. The Centre, on its part, had all along sought to ease the agitation through dialogue, but with little success—unless dilatoriness was an objective in itself.

### **DEEPENING STALEMATE**

It was in May that a panel led by Union minister of state for home Nityanand Rai last met Ladakhi leaders to discuss their grievances. That yielded a few placatory steps: a continuous stay of 15 years was mandated for non-Ladakhis to get domicile status; reservations for Scheduled Tribes, who make up the majority, were raised from 45 to 84 per cent; 1,800 posts were advertised. But a few key demands stayed unmet—a Public Service Commission to speed up recruitment; two Lok Sabha seats instead of one; and genuine safeguards for locals in jobs, land rights, culture.

Statehood, Sixth Schedule, a say over projects that could harm the ecosystem—these found no mention. Wangchuk accused New Delhi of not seeking peace, preferring tactics that could “aggravate” the air. His warning that “Sonam Wangchuk in jail will be equally, if not more, problematic” threw the dialogue process into doubt—both the LAB and KDA have pulled out of a scheduled October 6 meeting with the home ministry, demanding a judicial inquiry into the deaths and withdrawal of cases against locals. On October 2, a magisterial probe was finally ordered.

The Centre’s wariness stems from Ladakh’s geopolitically delicate location, a border zone with China that saw a flashpoint in the 2020 Galwan clashes. National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah warns against an incriminatory approach to local leadership, saying “the void might be exploited”. L-G Ravinder Gupta seemed to pay little heed, alleging a “foreign hand”, a claim swiftly dismissed by the LAB. For the Centre, the collapse of talks signals a crisis. It may need a warmer touch. ■

विक्रमगंज, बिहार



Govt. of Bihar

# BIHAR RISING GLOBALLY





# MUKHYAMANTRI MAHILA ROJGAR YOJANA

## BIHAR'S MODEL FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's leadership, Bihar is witnessing a new chapter of development and social change, where women's empowerment has been given a top priority. The government is not only making promises through policies but also bringing results at the grassroots level. The Bihar government has launched several schemes to benefit marginalized women of all sections and the regions in order to ensure them with education, jobs, safety and social recognition. Among these, the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana stands out as a historic step towards self-employment and job creation for women.

### RESOLVE FOR SELF-RELIANCE

On September 26, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi transferred the first installment of Rs 10,000 each to the bank accounts of 75 lakh women beneficiaries in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. A total of Rs 7,500 crore was transferred through DBT on the occasion under the scheme

which is aimed at promoting women's empowerment through self-employment. This money is given to one woman from each family so that she can start her own small business. Additionally, women who will show progress in their business can get up to ₹2 lakh as extra support, making the total possible support up to ₹2.1 lakh per beneficiary in each family. This isn't just financial help, it's about making women self-reliant so that they can start ventures like tailoring, weaving, farming, livestock, handicrafts, and cottage industries. The scheme has brought a new wave of happiness and hope among millions of families.

### ENROLLMENT PROCESS TO JOIN THE SCHEME, UNIVERSAL COVERAGE & INCLUSIVITY

The process to join the scheme is simple and its focus is on its inclusivity. Both rural and urban women can apply under the scheme. Women from rural areas associated with Self-Help Groups

are applying through their village-level organizations, while women from urban areas are submitting applications through their area-level organizations. Additionally, a large number of applications have also been submitted by women who were not previously associated with any Self-Help Group. Urban women not linked to self-help groups can apply on the Jeevika website ([www.brtps.in](http://www.brtps.in)). Over 1.1 million women have already applied to avail the benefit of the scheme, making it the largest women's employment scheme in India.



**PHOOLAN KUMARI**

Begusarai

Expressing her joy, Phoolan Kumari shares that the support received through this scheme will help her set up a clothing shop. She hopes the income will enable her to provide good education and a better life for her three children. Her husband, equally happy about her selection, says, "I feel proud of my wife and will stand by her in growing her business." Together, they extend their heartfelt gratitude to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for introducing this empowering initiative.





This scheme is not confined to any particular group or community, rather it has been framed to provide financial support to every woman. The government has made the selection of beneficiaries transparent, simple, and fast.

#### **NOT AN ELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT, BUT A CHANGING SOCIAL FABRIC**

This evident that the Mahila Rozgar Yojana is neither an election announcement nor a freebie. Its objective is not only to give women jobs but to make them job creators. Women will start their own work and give jobs to others too. Training and skill development will also be provided to women entrepreneurs for better management of their businesses.

This initiative has brought big changes to Bihar's social structure. Women have gained confidence, self-respect, and decision-making power. Now, they are not only supporting their family finances but also playing a key role in community and social rebuilding.

#### **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE & SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

The main feature of the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana is that financial support to beneficiary women has not been confined only to initial grant but they will be given additional grant of Rs 2 lakh after evaluation of their business. They can use the money to expand their

business, to adopt new technique and to further boost their production.

#### **COMMUNITY BASED MONITORING & TRANSPARENCY**

The scheme is implemented by Jeevika (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society) with the Rural Development Department. The participation of Self-Help Groups and village organizations makes the monitoring of the scheme easier and more effective. This scheme is subject to social audit.

#### **SELF-EMPLOYMENT, PRODUCTIVITY & MARKET DEVELOPMENT**

The components of the scheme include self-employment for women, development of new products and services, market development, and improved market access. The government has made it clear that the products made by women entrepreneurs will be branded for better sales. Additionally, haat bazaars will be developed from villages to cities for the sale of women's products, which will give a new boost to the rural economy.

By benefiting from the scheme, the local products of an increasing number of women entrepreneurs will be able to reach national and international markets, which will directly benefit the economy of Bihar.

#### **SOCIAL IMPACT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

The schemes run by the government for the development of women have strengthened the economic status, confidence, respect within the family, social prestige, and increased participation in decision-making processes at both family and social levels for women in Bihar.

Mukhya Mantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana will bring prosperity to society through self-employment, thereby continuously



**ANITA KUMARI**

(resident of Anantpur village, Chandi Block, Nalanda District)

Extends her heartfelt gratitude to the Hon'ble Chief Minister for advancing Bihar's progress. Under the Women's Self-Employment Scheme initiated by the Chief Minister, all women have been provided with an amount of ₹10,000.

This support will further empower women, make them self-reliant, and pave the way for a brighter future.

elevating the status of women in the community. They have become agents of change by generating employment, they are bringing change in to their families, villages, neighborhoods, and the entire state.

#### **A REVOLUTION TOWARDS PROSPEROUS BIHAR**

Mukhya Mantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana is developing as a model for women's empowerment, self-employment, entrepreneurship, social change, and economic prosperity. This has given half the population of Bihar a bigger share in decision-making and leadership. Bihar's model is now an example for the whole country, changing the direction of the state's social, economic, and cultural development through women's leadership.





# BIHAR ACCELERATES WITH ENHANCED Connectivity

Over the past two decades, Bihar has witnessed a transformation in infrastructure and road connectivity that is truly unprecedented in the state's history. Once counted among the states lagging behind in road and bridge expansion, Bihar has now set new benchmarks of progress and development. In 2005, the state had a total road network of 14,468 kilometers; by 2025, this figure had surged to 26,081 kilometers. This remarkable growth is credited to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. His visionary leadership aimed at connecting every corner of the state to the capital, Patna, and other key cities.

#### STRENGTHENING THE ROAD NETWORK

In 2005, Bihar had a total of 3,629 km of National Highways (NH). By 2025, this has expanded to 6,147 km. The length of State Highways (SH) increased from 2,382 km to 3,638 km, and Major District Roads expanded from 8,457 km to 16,296 km. This growth underscores Bihar's robust connectivity. Notably, four-lane national highways have increased from 769 km in 2005 to 1,704 km, while two-lane highways have expanded from 1,208 km to 3,278 km. Additionally, 665 km of Greenfield and missing link roads are under development to further boost industrial, commercial, and rural growth[1].

#### EXPRESSWAYS AND HIGH-SPEED CORRIDORS

Two decades ago, Bihar did not have any expressways. Today, five major expressways are

**BIHAR HAS RECEIVED CENTRAL AND STATE APPROVAL FOR ₹1,85 LAKH CRORE TOWARDS NATIONAL HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT.**

#### FIVE KEY EXPRESSWAYS ARE UNDERWAY:

Raxaul–Haldia	(407 km)	Cost: ₹26,704 crore
Gorakhpur–Siliguri	(417 km)	Cost: ₹29,724 crore
Patna–Purnia	(245 km)	Cost: ₹28,415 crore
Varanasi–Kolkata	(177.37 km)	Cost: ₹11,207 crore
Buxar–Bhagalpur (Proposed)	(380 km)	Cost: ₹22,800 crore

#### MAJOR HIGH-SPEED CORRIDORS:

Patna–Bettiah	(170.60 km)	Cost: ₹10,022 crore
Mokama–Munger–Mirzachauki	(202.91 km)	Cost: ₹9,282 crore
Amas–Darbhanga–Jaynagar	(266.71 km)	Cost: ₹10,484 crore
Naugachia–Bhagalpur–Hansdiha	(83.09 km),	Cost: ₹3,335 crore
Mehrunga–Siwan–Mashrakh–Chakia–Shivhar–Sitamarhi–Bheeta Mod	(236.36 km)	Cost: ₹10,330 crore
Purnia–Narayanpur–Sahibganj	(70.69 km)	Cost: ₹4,221 crore

#### OTHER SIGNIFICANT HIGHWAY PROJECTS INCLUDE

Patna–Gaya–Dobhi	(130 km)	Cost: ₹6,001 crore
Bakhtiarpur–Mokama	(44.60 km)	Cost: ₹1,183 crore
Auta–Simaria 6 lane Bridge	(8.15 km)	Cost: ₹1,871 crore
Arwal–Jehanabad–Bihar Sharif	(90 km)	Cost: ₹2,280 crore
Chapwa–Bettiah Bagaha 4 lane Bridge (Proposed)	(94 km)	Cost: ₹5,850 crore

After the completion of these projects, Patna can be easily reached within 3.5 hours from the remotest area of the state

either Under process or under construction. Currently, High-speed corridors are directly linking commercial, industrial, agricultural, and ecological centers across the state with the capital and major ports. Upon completion, it will take just three-and-a-half hours to reach Patna from any corner of Bihar.

#### **BRIDGES, FLYOVERS, AND URBAN CONNECTIVITY**

Until 2005, there were only 11 major bridges built over the major rivers of Bihar—Ganga, Kosi, Gandak, and Sone. However, between 2005 and 2025, 16 more major bridges were constructed across these rivers. In addition, 19 more grand bridges are currently under construction over these rivers. Urban infrastructure in Patna—like the JP Ganga Path, Mithapur-Mahuli Road, double-decker elevated roads, R Block-Digha, AIIMS-Digha (Patlipatna), and Lohia Path Chakra,

among others—has transformed city traffic, eased railway crossings, and improved public mobility.

The country's most advanced 19-kilometer-long cable bridge at Raghpur now enables people to cross the Ganga in just five minutes, reducing the distance between North and South Bihar by 60 km and ensuring year-round seamless travel for tens of thousands of farmers, families, and workers.

#### **MODERN MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

Since the implementation of the OPRMC system in 2013, 10,379 km of Bihar's roads have been maintained by private companies. GPS-based tracking, control, and command centers, along with regular patrols and emergency services, ensure quality and safety. Under the Bridge Management Policy 2025, systems like health cards for major bridges, a maintenance priority index, drone and

non-destructive testing, and third-party audits are being implemented.

#### **INDUSTRY, BUSINESS, AND EMPLOYMENT**

The rapidly expanding road and bridge network has attracted significant investments and new companies to Bihar in sectors like trade, transport, logistics, tourism, food processing, and aviation. Large corporations such as Adani and Britannia have established units in the state. This boom has translated into millions of new job opportunities and a surge in local entrepreneurship. The government aims to create 10 million jobs over the next five years. Today's Bihar, with its modern network of roads, bridges, expressways, high-speed corridors, and integrated bridge management, stands among the nation's leading states.

## **FLOURISHING INDUSTRIES AND PROSPEROUS FAMILIES ARE THE IDENTITY OF TODAY'S BIHAR**

### **Bihar Steps Forward Towards Achieving Energy-Related SDG Goals**



Bihar is on the path of development, where electricity is no longer a dream or a promise, but a reality, reaching every house, every village, and every farmer. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the state has achieved significant progress in the energy sector, turning the dream of "Illuminated Bihar, Prosperous Bihar" into reality. As of today, access to 24x7 electricity in millions of households at affordable rates is a significant example of Bihar's changing scenario.

The government has also greatly promoted solar energy. Solar panels are being installed on government and private buildings and fields. A record 8752 MW of Peak demand has been achieved in 2025, where as it was only 700 in 2005 MW. This has almost ended concerns about electricity shortages. The Bihar government is also moving towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals. In the coming days, significant preparations are underway to make the state self-reliant in the energy sector through solar power.

#### **NEARLY 20 MILLION FAMILIES ARE SAVING HUNDREDS OF RUPEES EVERY MONTH**

The state government is providing significant relief and has announced that, from August onwards, all domestic electricity consumers will receive 125 units of free electricity every month. More than 18.9 million consumers are directly benefiting, resulting in a considerable reduction in their monthly expenditure. Now, the monthly needs of domestic consumers are being met without any

financial burden. Beneficiaries report that the money they are saving is being used to educate their children and improve their standard of living.

#### **DIRECT SUBSIDY FOR FARMERS AND AMPLE POWER FOR AGRICULTURE**

Under the Chief Minister Power Consumer Assistance Scheme, a subsidy of ₹19,792 crore has been earmarked for 2025–26. Both domestic consumers and farmers in the state are receiving extensive benefits. Farmers using electricity for irrigation and running cold storage are getting power at just 55 paise per unit, significantly reducing costs associated with farming, storage, and production. This is providing a foundation for Bihar to advance in the agricultural sector as well.

#### **SOLAR POWER REVOLUTION: CLEAN FUEL FOR THE FUTURE**

Under the visionary leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, the state government—which has accorded top priority to the promotion of solar energy under the Jal-Jeevan-Hariyali Abhiyan for environmental protection—has been carrying out on a war footing basis the installation of solar plants on the rooftops of all government as well as private buildings.

On the lines of Darbhanga, Supaul, and Phulwaria (Nawada), plans have also been made to set up solar projects on other ponds across the state, and similar to Vikram (Patna), projects are being planned along the banks of other canals.

So far, more than 300 megawatts of solar energy

projects have already been commissioned in the state. Additionally, a 301 MW solar project is being developed, along with the establishment of the country's largest battery energy storage project with a capacity of 495 megawatt hours at Kajra (Lakhisarai).

To further promote renewable energy in the state, the state government implemented the country's most investor-friendly New and Renewable Energy Promotion Policy in 2025 itself, which will create significant investment opportunities in this sector.

#### **SPECIAL ELECTRICITY SCHEMES FOR COTTAGE AND SMALL INDUSTRIES**

The state government is also providing full financial assistance to small, cottage, and domestic consumers for setting up solar power plants. Issues related to electricity bills have decreased, and electricity has reached every village and hamlet. As a result, small units, women's groups, and local entrepreneurs have found new opportunities.

Thanks to the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and the foresight of the state government, Bihar today stands as a model of self-sufficiency in the energy sector. Free electricity, affordable rates for farmers and domestic consumers, 24x7 lighting in every district and village, and the increasing use of solar energy have taken Bihar to new heights.

"Illuminated Bihar, Empowered Bihar"—this is not just a slogan anymore but the new reality for the people of Bihar."



# BIHAR: A NEW EXAMPLE OF INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Important Steps like Bihar Industrial Investment Promotion Package 2025 and BIADA Amnesty Policy 2025 have been playing crucial role in the expansion of industries and creation of employment opportunities.

Bihar, in recent years, has registered remarkable progress in the fields of industrial and economic development. According to the state government, the share of industrial sector in GSDP has been rising steadily in the state. Besides, the procedure to start businesses has been made easier and transparent.

Due to initiatives like single-window approval for investors, digital process and real time monitoring, the state is setting an example across the country in creating an "ease of doing business" environment in the state. Employment opportunities have doubled in the state and the per capita income is constantly rising.

The recent decisions of Bihar government especially industries department have contributed immensely in the state's development. These steps- like Bihar Industrial Investment Promotion Package 2025, BIADA Amnesty Policy 2025- have been playing an important role in the industrial expansion of the state.

In order to accelerate industrial development of the state, Bihar government under the

leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has made approval procedure easy for the convenience of investors. Approval from different departments and land allotment related documents have been linked with 'Single Window Clearance' system which has made starting new businesses easier or carrying out its expansion or bringing technical innovation.

The government has accorded priority to facilities like IT-based monitoring, real time approval and online application to avoid any sort of complexities or delays in industrial sector. These initiatives have instilled confidence among local entrepreneurs along with outside investors.

## BIHAR INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT PROMOTION PACKAGE 2025

Bihar Industrial Investment Promotion Package (BIIPP) 2025 is a major initiative towards making the procedure easier, convenient and attractive for setting up industries in the state. The package provides all the facilities to investors on a single platform like making land available to them, financial incentives and all other necessary requirements.

Its main objective is to ensure that new small and large industries can be easily established and youth of the state get maximum employment opportunities at the local level. The package boosts investors' confidence, creates a competitive industrial environment, and helps make Bihar a leading state for industries.

## BIADA AMNESTY POLICY 2025

Under BIADA Amnesty Policy 2025, Bihar government is giving an opportunity to revive

### BIHAR INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT PROMOTION PACKAGE 2025

- Land allotment to investors at token amount of Rs 1
- 10 acres of land for investments of Rs 100 crore and 1,000 jobs
- 25 acres of land for investments exceeding Rs 1,000 crore
- 10 acres of land on investments of Rs 200 crore by Fortune 500 companies
- For other projects, land will be provided at a 50% discount on BIADA rates
- Investors to get three options- Interest subsidy of up to 40 crore, Or Capital subsidy up to 30% of the total investment, Or Reimbursement of SGST up to 300% of the approved project cost for 14 years
- Textile Industry Incentive: Rs 5000/month/worker, 300% ESI-EPF;
- Other industry: Rs 2000/month/worker, 100% ESI-EPF
- Export Incentive (Maximum Rs 40 lakh/year for 14 years)
- Skill Development Incentive (Rs 20,000/worker)
- Environment protection 25% (up to Rs 1 crore),
- Renewable energy 20% (up to Rs 6 lakh)
- Apply till 31<sup>st</sup> march, 2026

closed or disputed industrial units. The policy not only ensures better utilization of industrial land but also giving an opportunity to investors and entrepreneurs a simple and transparent way to make a fresh start.

It enables the revival of old resources, reduces industrial disputes besides creating new opportunities for employment and production in the state. This policy demonstrates that the state government aims to accelerate the pace of industrial development by making closed units operational again through a simplified process.





Build New Enterprises  
Generate Employment  
Create Wealth



## BIHAR INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT PROMOTION PACKAGE 2025

### For the first time in Bihar

#### Free land

@token amount of ₹1

**10 Acre**  
on  
Investment of  
₹100 Cr. &  
1000 direct  
employment

or

**25 Acre**  
on  
Investment of  
₹1000 Cr.

or

**10 Acre**  
on  
Investment of  
₹200 Cr.  
by Fortune 500  
companies

For others - 50% off on BIADA Land rate

#### Financial Incentives

##### Option 1

Interest Subvention  
(maximum upto ₹40 cr.) +  
SGST Reimbursement  
(upto 100%)

##### Option 2

NET SGST  
Reimbursement of upto  
**300%** of approved  
project cost in 14 Years

##### Option 3

Capital Subsidy  
(upto **30%** of  
Approved Project Cost)

Apply till 31st March, 2026

#### KEY INCENTIVES



##### Employment Generation Incentive

For textile units upto ₹5000 per month per employee, **300%** of ESI and EPF.  
For others upto ₹2000 per month per employee, **100%** of ESI and EPF.

- Export Incentive:** For 14 Years (Maximum **40** lakhs per year).
- Skill Development Incentive:** Upto ₹20,000 per worker.
- Environmental Protection Incentive:** 25% reimbursement upto ₹1 cr.
- Renewable Energy Usage Incentive:** @20%, maximum amount of ₹6 lakh.
- CFC Development Incentives:** Case to case basis.
- Other Incentives:** Reimbursement of Stamp Duty & Land Conversion,  
Patent Registration, Quality Certification Support.

Dovetailing is allowed for Incentives offered through other  
State Government Policies and GoI policies.



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## MAHISHASUR GOES BLOND AND BEYOND

**D**urga Puja pandals in Bengal have had their share of jaw-droppers over the years, but this orange-maned foe could be the talking point this year. In Murshidabad's Khagra Shamshan Ghat, amid the feasting and frantic pandal-hopping, visitors have been stumped by an unlikely tableau: Goddess Durga taking aim, not at Mahishasura, but a Trump doppelgänger. The Puja committee claims inspiration from the "great betrayal"—tariffs, visas, trade tantrums—and artist Asim Pal dutifully birthed 'Trumpasura'. The satire and gore don't stop there. A quick stroll to Sadhak Narendra Smriti Sangha unveils Durga unleashing unimaginable vengeance on the heads of our neighbouring countries—Pakistan's Shehzad Sharif and Bangladesh's Muhammad Yunus.

The theme 'Dahan (immolation)', organisers say gravely, is about "burning the enemies of the nation". It seems this year's pandals are all about slaying our 'international demons'.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ BLURRED LINES

## SMUT REBUT

Last month, Barmer and Jaisalmer woke up to a bizarre sight: hoardings across kilometres splashed with a blurred screenshot of a man engaged in a sexual act. The target: ex-MLA Mewa Ram Jain, 73, back in the Congress fold after being expelled in 2023. Scandal has long shadowed Jain—threats over a sex CD in 2012, a viral clip that led to his expulsion, a POCSO case (since acquitted)



and an ED raid over alleged crores paid as hush money. What raised eyebrows was Rajasthan Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra, who had expelled Jain, presiding over his return (reportedly at ex-CM Ashok Gehlot's insistence). Unsurprisingly, local party leaders in Barmer are up in arms, perhaps the reason for the smutty posters now dotting the desert highways.



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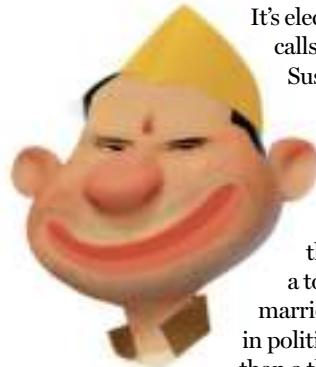


## SPLITTING HEIRS

The divorce drama of Kunda strongman **Raghuraj Pratap Singh** aka 'Raja Bhaiya' has spilled from courtrooms to social media. Estranged wife Bhanvi, who's long accused the MLA of abuse and affairs, recently posted videos of his 'arms cache'. Son Shivraj, defending the father, then called out his mother as a "jhootebaaz (liar)", even accusing her of assaulting his grandmother. Soon after, daughter Raghvi joined the action, but siding with her mother. With the kids also now picking sides, it's the TV channels that are having a field day.



## SNUB SIGNALS



It's election time, and even ghosted calls count as political bombshells. Suspended RJD leader and Lalu's son **Tej Pratap Yadav** claims that repeated calls to Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav during the Voter Adhikar Yatra went unanswered, so he blocked the latter's number. The spat has a touch of farce: Tej Pratap's sister is married into Akhilesh's family. But then, in politics, a dropped call speaks louder than a thousand words.

## NEW ICON IN TOWN

From Garba nights in Surat and Visavadar to his debut assembly session in September, AAP's Visavadar MLA **Gopal Italia** is fast becoming a crowd-puller in Gujarat. Fresh from his bypoll win, he's being asked for more selfies and creating more ripples than the BJP and Congress would like. As a strident Patidar voice, he's caught the eye of political observers, much like Hardik Patel, whose 2017 agitation nearly unseated the BJP that year.



**Kaushik Deka with Arkamoy Datta Majumdar, Rohit Parihar, Avaneesh Mishra, Amitabh Srivastava and Jumana Shah**

## HEALTH WATCH

By **Sonali Acharjee**

## FLU SEASON PRECISION TESTING IS KEY

**N**ot to cause alarm, but the sniffles have made a comeback—the H3N2 influenza virus is spreading rapidly across parts of India. The uptick is sharpest in Delhi-NCR, where reports say over 60 per cent households have reported flu-like symptoms. The picture can be tricky: fever, fatigue, bodyaches, cough and

pathways and infection-control steps. Rapid diagnostics, though, can cut through the fog. "Symptoms and signs alone may not be enough to delineate the cause. Genomic testing can provide precise, pathogen-level identification within a short timeframe," says Mahua Kapoor Dasgupta, director-medical affairs (Infectious Diseases) at

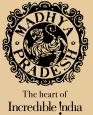


congestion look identical across influenza subtypes and other respiratory viruses, which risks delayed treatment and unnecessary antibiotics.

That uncertainty matters clinically. Breathlessness or chest pain could mean influenza, RSV (Respiratory syncytial virus, which causes infections in the respiratory tract), parainfluenza, or a bacterial infection—or a co-infection—each demanding different care

HaystackAnalytics. Next-Generation Sequencing, he adds, can detect multiple pathogens from a single sample to guide targeted therapy and appropriate isolation.

Early testing supports timely antivirals, curbs inappropriate antibiotic use, and helps health systems allocate resources better. As Dasgupta puts it, "With rising H3N2 cases, early and accurate diagnosis is indispensable to control the outbreak."



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► MIGRATION

# Redrawing Diaspora

Text by JUMANA SHAH

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

The term diaspora is usually reserved for those who cross national borders. A new study, however, broadens the frame. 'The Internal and International Diasporas of India', published in the *Sociological Bulletin*, is the first attempt to sketch a conceptual framework for both kinds of movement. Its author, Chinmay Tumbe, an associate professor at IIM Ahmedabad, charts migration by language and estimates that, in 2011, over 60 million Indians lived in 'internal' diasporas, nearly three times as many as abroad. For every major linguistic group, except Malayalam and Tamil, the domestic diaspora outweighs the overseas one. ■

## GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

Countries with the highest Indian overseas population

**35.4 mn**

Total worldwide



**USA**  
**5.6**



**UAE**  
**3.9**



**Canada**  
**3.6**



**Malaysia**  
**2.9**



**Saudi Arabia**  
**2.7**



**Sri Lanka**  
**1.6**

Figures (in million) include NRIs and PIOs; MEA data as of Jan. 2025 (Rajya Sabha reply, Aug. 21, 2025)

## CITIES OF MANY TONGUES

A third of India's internal diaspora is dispersed across 10 largest cities



### JAIPUR

Hindi*	<b>4,900</b>
Urdu	<b>130</b>
Sindhi	<b>90</b>
Punjabi	<b>30</b>
Bengali	<b>20</b>
Gujarati	<b>10</b>

\*Includes Marwari



SHUTTERSTOCK

### AHMEDABAD

**Gujarati 4,500**

Hindi	<b>700</b>
Urdu	<b>300</b>
Sindhi	<b>120</b>
Marathi	<b>100</b>
Malayalam	<b>20</b>
+ Tamil	

There are far more non-resident Gujaratis within India than abroad, and this holds true even if you exclude Mumbai

### SURAT

**Gujarati 2,800**

Hindi	<b>700</b>
Marathi	<b>400</b>
Odia	<b>100</b>
Urdu	<b>100</b>
Telugu	<b>30</b>

Sindhis numbered around 3 million in 2011, rooted in post-Partition migration from Sindh, with strong bases in Mumbai and Ahmedabad



### MUMBAI

**Marathi 8,900**

Hindi	<b>3,900</b>
Gujarati	<b>1,800</b>
Sindhi	<b>440</b>
Telugu	<b>400</b>
Tamil	<b>400</b>

Mumbai is India's migration capital, hosting the largest communities of Tamils, Malayalis, Kannadigas, Gujaratis and Hindi speakers

### PUNE

**Marathi 5,700**

Hindi	<b>700</b>
Urdu	<b>170</b>
Telugu	<b>150</b>
Kannada	<b>100</b>
Gujarati	<b>100</b>

### BENGALURU

**Kannada 4,100**

Telugu	<b>1,200</b>
Urdu	<b>1,000</b>
Hindi	<b>240</b>
Malayalam	<b>200</b>
Tamil	<b>125</b>



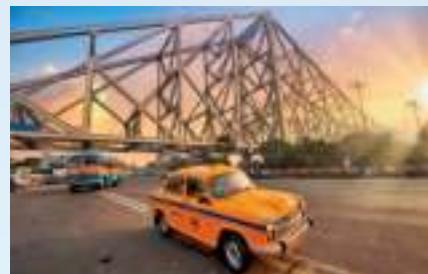
SHUTTERSTOCK

● 'Native speakers'  
Source: Census 2001 & 2011, language data files

**DELHI**

Hindi*	18,700
Urdu	1,400
Punjabi	1,100
Telugu	300
Bengali	250

\*Includes Marwari and Bhojpuri



SHUTTERSTOCK

**KOLKATA**

Bengali	6,400
Hindi	1,450
Odia	60
Punjabi	30
Gujarati	30
Telugu	30

The Indian Bengali diaspora was the least dispersed in 2011, relative to the population of speakers in its core region, West Bengal



Odia outmigration, largely from coastal districts like Ganjam, is concentrated in Surat, where workers in the synthetic textile power loom industry trace their migration roots to the 1970s

workers in the synthetic textile power loom industry trace their migration roots to the 1970s

**CHENNAI**

Tamil	3,400
Telugu	400
Urdu	180
Hindi	100
Malayalam	100
Gujarati	30

The Telugu internal diaspora is prominent in Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Pune

**HYDERABAD**

Telugu	4,600
Urdu	2,000
Hindi	440
Tamil	100
Marathi	100
Kannada	60

**INDIA BEYOND BORDERS**

Indian international diaspora by linguistic groups

**UP FRONT****UK**

Punjabi	700
Gujarati	300
Marathi	150
Bengali	150
Telugu	150

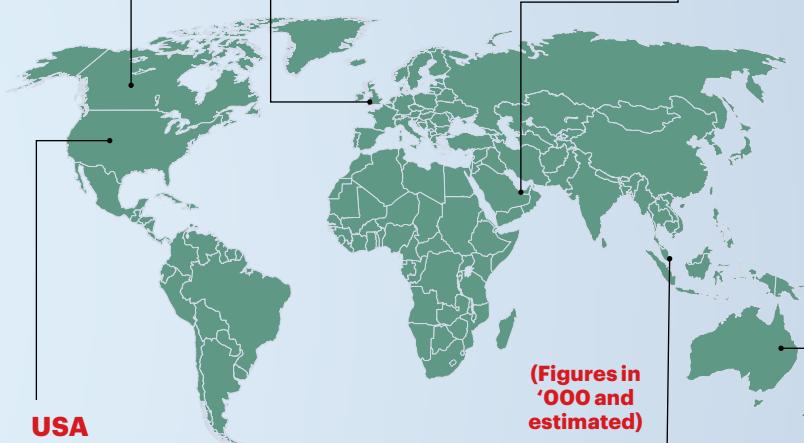
West Asia (GCC countries), North America, Australia & New Zealand, the UK and Italy have driven much of the growth in the international diaspora over the past two decades

**CANADA**

Punjabi	700
Gujarati	200
Hindi	100
Tamil	100

**WEST ASIA**

Malayalam	2,600
Hindi	2,500
Gujarati	100
Punjabi	100
Tamil	50
Telugu	50
Kannada	50
Marathi	10



(Figures in '000 and estimated)

**USA**

Hindi	710
Telugu	370
Gujarati	340
Kannada	300
Tamil	250
Punjabi	230
Bengali	200
Malayalam	200
Marathi	200

**MALAYSIA**

Tamil	1,900
Malayalam	100

**NEW ZEALAND**

Gujarati	90
Hindi	30
Punjabi	20

**AUSTRALIA**

Hindi	100
Tamil	50
Malayalam	50
Telugu	50
Kannada	50
Gujarati	50
Punjabi	50

About 12.4% of the Punjabi-speaking population live outside their core region (Punjab, India)—the most linguistically dispersed

Only Tamil and Malayalam-speaking diaspora are present more outside India than within

Of the 4.6 million Malayalis in the diaspora, about 3 million lived abroad, while the Tamil diaspora numbered over 8.4 million, with around 4.5 million overseas

Sources: Gol; numerous independent studies; census data on languages

# STATE SCAN

UTTAR PRADESH: LAST MILE PUSH BY AKHILESH PG 28

GOA: THE HARDEST NUT TO CRACK PG 30



► ASSAM

## BOLT FROM BODOLAND FOR SARMA

The BJP faces its first big rebuff in a decade in Assam, as Bodoland falls back on old favourite BPF. Will there be a larger impact on the 2026 election?

By Kaushik Deka

**S**INCE INITIATING THE BJP'S NORTHEASTERN EXPANSION NEARLY A DECADE AGO, Himanta Biswa Sarma has been the lord of all political tides in his precincts. That spell of dominance stands interrupted. On September 22, the Assam chief minister faced his first significant electoral rebuke at home. Or call it near-home, for the arena was the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), not his primary turf.

The Bodoland People's Front (BPF) swept 28 out of 40 seats, many with huge margins. The BJP, which went solo, was down to a humiliating five. The ally it had built up and now abandoned, the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), managed only seven seats, nearly half of its 2020 tally.

The outright majority for the BPF, under its 56-year-old chief Hagrama Mohilary, restores an 'old normal'. Defections had marred the BPF story post-2020—after the BJP-UPPL duet denied it power, despite its 17 seats making it the single largest party. But its grassroots footprint had never faded. These results confirm that: they are a verdict on the BJP's attempt to seed an alternate network into the Bodo subsoil via a local proxy.

Under the 1975-born Pramod Boro, the UPPL seemed to signify an evolution beyond the BPF's personality-driven

politics. But despite initial impetus with the Bodo Peace Accord and sundry projects, its reformist lure hasn't gone beyond a slim urban base. Its failure exposes the limits of saffron penetration in tribal lands—also, a touch of hubris in imagining a state-backed force could trump organic legitimacy in a region where identity runs deeper than growth narratives.

It's a sobering scenario ahead of the 2026 assembly poll for Sarma. Post delimitation, the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) has 15 assembly seats, representing over 10 per cent of Assam's 126-member house.



#### Takeaways

► The BPF, under Hagrami Mohilary (above), sweeps 28 out of 40 seats in the Bodoland Council election

► The BJP, which went solo, gets only five seats, down from nine in '20. Ex-ally UPPL reduced to seven

► Sarma's first big electoral setback, its effects could spread to other tribal areas, impacting '26 poll

In 2021, the BJP-UPPL combine had secured seven—later upped to eight—of BTR's then-11 seats. Though a slender numerical bundle, it lent a special lustre to the NDA's 75-seat majority in the state.

#### A MATH PROBLEM

It's not only the idea of cross-ethnic embrace that's threatened. If voting patterns hold, the BJP risks losing six to eight Bodo seats, potentially the difference between comfortable governance and coalition haggling. Sarma's prompt pivot to embrace Mohilary—declaring within hours that "BPF is part of NDA" and "all 40 BTC seats are with NDA"—beats the depth of his worry. The BJP faces an unenviable choice: grovel before the very leader it spurned in 2020, potentially alienating the UPPL or, worse, risk

facing a united Bodo opposition.

Mohilary holds all the cards in the transactional negotiation that may ensue. His campaign framed the poll as a defence of Bodo autonomy against outside interference, with slogans like "Bodoland isn't for sale", a barely veiled swipe at the BJP's centralising tendencies. Yet, having governed the BTC for 17 years, the former insurgent commander is pragmatic enough to know tribal councils need state and central largesse. BPF has long sided with the ruling party in Dispur, but in 2020 the BJP dumped it for UPPL. Now, he has the leverage to extract the maximum

#### ► RAJASTHAN

## THE 'PILOT EPISODE' FLIES AGAIN

**Charges fly back and forth as Gehlot camp counters clean chit to 2020 rebellion**

By Rohit Parihar

**I**T SHOULD HAVE BEEN A MINOR EPILOGUE, an act of formal closure. But a court order has drawn the curtains back on one of the most controversial chapters in Rajasthan politics in recent times: Sachin Pilot's revolt of 2020, which had almost split the then Ashok Gehlot government.

Tough conversations have resumed around the 'Pilot episode'. Innuendo and recrimination fill the air again; allegations and rebuttals are flying back and forth between various camps of the Congress, as well as between the ex-CM and top BJP leaders, the surround sound made more lurid by leaked audio clips and phone-tapping charges.

#### 'CASUAL CHATTER'

Months ago, the state Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) had filed a closure report before the trial court, saying it had found no evidence of bribery, horse-trading or conspiracy to topple the Gehlot regime. The intercepted phone calls said to clinch the claim contained only "casual political chatter", it held. The file had been lying with the ACB court, with only skirmishes elsewhere disturbing the peace. But the Rajasthan High Court, on September 16, took note of the closure report and disposed of the petition by the two accused seeking quashing of FIR as infructuous. Now, the trial court will decide whether to accept or reject the closure report.

Yet, for many, the ACB's closure



**OLD FOES** Former Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot; right, Congress leader Sachin Pilot

report is proof that the alleged BJP-Pilot conspiracy was more fiction than fact, a plot conjured up by Gehlot to sully an internal revolt by the then deputy CM.

Gehlot's counter? That of the many FIRs filed then, the gravest one still pending with the ACB. This involves another of the audio clips circulated by Gehlot's then OSD (and now bitter critic) Lokesh Sharma. Here, it's directly alleged that Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat is speaking with Congressmen—then minister Vishvendra Singh, MLA Bhanwarlal Sharma (since deceased)—besides businessman Sanjay Jain.

#### PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT

Gehlot first alleged a plot in June 2020, fearing a repeat of MP where the BJP had toppled Kamal Nath's regime with Jyotiraditya Scindia's help. His loyalist and then water resources minister Mahesh Joshi—now jailed by the ED on an alleged scam in the Jal Jeevan Mission—lodged complaints with the ACB and the Special Operations Group (SOG), citing the phone conversations and listing suspect numbers. That July, the SOG made two arrests; the HC order in this case has reopened the controversy, slapping charges of conspiracy and sedition, while seeking Gehlot and Pilot's statements.

Pilot revolted soon after,

moving his MLAs to a Gurgaon resort; Gehlot shifted his flock to Jaipur. Joshi got another FIR filed, submitting new recordings that named one 'Gajendra Singh'. Amidst more arrests, the Centre hinted at handing the sedition-linked probe to the NIA. That got Gehlot's police to apply brakes; in August, sedition charges were dropped and all FIRs were transferred to the ACB.

Gehlot traces the report exoneration to "pressure", and says the surviving ACB case is stalled because Shekhawat refuses to give a voice sample. Critics point to how the ACB, under Gehlot, couldn't nail even the first case for three years. Accused by Gehlot of masterminding the coup, Shekhawat, too, has seized upon the closure as



#### Takeaways

► **HC finds the petitions to quash FIR infructuous, given the closure report pending before the trial court**

► **That reignites hostilities, with Gehlot camp alleging BJP plot to weaken him**

vindication. "The case against me was a lie," he declares. He has had an FIR filed in Delhi alleging illegal phone-tapping under Gehlot.

Gehlot already faces a defamation case from Shekhawat over the alleged Sanjeevani Cooperative scam, where the ex-CM had accused the Union minister of duping investors. The SOG had given Shekhawat a clean chit.

To Gehlot's camp, the selective closure of cases reflects a BJP strategy to weaken him, perhaps even with the objective of subtly keeping Pilot in play as a challenger to him within the Congress. True or not, the Congress's inner dynamic will be worth watching. ■

#### ► KARNATAKA

## THE CASTE

Siddaramaiah's second caste sur



By Ajay Sukumaran

**A** TUMULTUOUS START. That's what Karnataka's latest attempt to map the socio-economic conditions of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) got off to on September 22. Depending on how the weather conditions develop, the question is whether it will elude the fate of its predecessor—the 2015 caste survey conducted during Siddaramaiah's first term as CM, whose findings took ten years to see the light of day. Or will Karnataka be able and willing to produce some-

# CLIFFHANGER

vey rolls on—under a court greenlight, and a boycott shadow



**DISPUTED SURVEY**  
Officials during the  
caste census in Hubballi,  
Karnataka, Sept. 23; below,  
CM Siddaramaiah and  
Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar

a report afresh. While its recommendations were to increase OBC reservations from 32 per cent to 51 per cent and revise the backward lists, the accompanying caste-wise break-up placed Veerashaiva-Lingayats at only 11.1 per cent of the state's population and Vokkaligas at 10.3 per cent. Both communities dismissed it as an undercount. After much deliberation, the Congress in July this year decided to shelve this report, opting instead for a fresh survey since the data was anyway a decade old.

## RASH OF DISPUTANTS

But pressure mounted closer to its launch, with unease spreading among some of Siddaramaiah's own cabinet members. On September 18, the judicial challenge began. The Rajya Vokkaligara Sangha, the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha and the Akhila Karnataka Brahmana Mahasabha approached the Karnataka High Court, asking that the government be restrained from conducting the survey. Arguing that its socio-economic terms of reference were a 'subterfuge' and the idea was only to elicit a headcount, the petitioners contended that the power to conduct a census vests exclusively with the Union government. Among other objections, the survey was also accused of violating the right to privacy and of collecting demographic statistics for electoral gains.

The government had a defence ready. A survey was necessary, it argued, because apex court orders in the 1992 Indra Sawhney case had laid down mandatory guidelines for identification of backward classes, which entailed a periodic review of the population. Besides, neither of the previous surveys—Bihar (2023) and Telangana (2024)—were interdicted. The high court, accordingly, declined to grant a stay in its interim order on September 25. However, it added a vital caveat: the KSBCC was to not only ensure data confidentiality, it would have to issue a public notice clarifying that participation in the survey was purely voluntary.

For the BJP's Bengaluru South MP, Tejasvi Surya, that was reason enough



thing more enlightening than a long bureaucratic coma?

The logistics of the door-to-door survey presently under way are already daunting: it aims to cover about 14.37 million households and 70 million citizens within a 16-day window, ending October 7. The report is slated to be out by December—if all goes well. More formidable than its demographic

footprint is the demonology it has to surmount. Not that it was unexpected. In August, when the Siddaramaiah-led government ordered the survey, it was precisely because of the opposition its 2015 forerunner faced. Dubbed a 'caste census', that one had scythed through a forbidding path—only to fall to a veto from Veerashaiva-Lingayats and Vokkaligas, who feared a drop in their population estimates and consequently decried it as 'unscientific'.

The 2015 data thus stayed under wraps till 2023 when Siddaramaiah, back as CM, ordered that it be utilised by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission (KSBCC), which had conducted the exercise, to prepare

to call for a boycott of the survey. "I won't participate because I do not trust this government with my data," he said. The CM riposted that this exposed the BJP's "true colours", pointing out that its own ruling alliance in Bihar had carried out a caste-based survey. Even in Telangana, "BJP leaders did not utter a word of opposition", said Siddaramaiah, adding that the Centre too had now "initiated a caste census".

#### THE SPECTRE OF RELIGION

The BJP hasn't backed Surya's stand, but it has other discomfiting issues on its plate. For one, the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha, notwithstanding its distrust of the survey, has appealed to community members to specify their religion under the 'Others' column and not as 'Hindu'. Backwardness, and not religion, is the crux of

#### Takeaways

- ➲ **Karnataka's socio-economic caste survey 2025 is under way. Has to cover 14 million households by October 7**
- ➲ **Unease among stakeholder groups. Three caste groups go to court, but HC refuses stay. Says participation is voluntary**

the survey, but the Lingayat reassertion of an old demand for minority religion status puts the Karnataka BJP, which relies heavily on the community's support, in a fix.

Meanwhile, the survey itself was stymied by technical glitches and resistance from teachers drafted in for enumeration work during festival season, prompting the CM to step in with a stern admonitory message. "Every single family in the state must be surveyed," he told district authorities in a video conference on September 26. Karnataka has set aside a whopping Rs 420 crore for the exercise, about two and a half-times the amount spent in 2015. Well spent? Time will tell. ■



#### ► UTTAR PRADESH

## LAST MILE PUSH BY AKHILESH

**The party goes hyperlocal—promising manifestos tailored to each district's needs and grievances**

By Avaneesh Mishra

**U**TTAR PRADESH is larger than countries like Britain and Uganda, and its vast sprawl is often scantly clad in the arteries that bring an even flow of things from elsewhere, material or otherwise. Add to that the centralised ways of our administration, and you have

a distance between Lucknow and the local universe that's far more than geographical. The Samajwadi Party has now come up with an innovation that may alter that with radical decentralisation—well, at least at the level of election campaigning.

Shedding the broad strokes of statewide promises, the SP



SUMIT KUMAR

has promised what it calls “local manifestos”—hyper-specific documents tailored to the needs of each district. Mathura-Vrindavan, Hathras and Agra will be the first to get theirs, as party chief Akhilesh Yadav promised local partymen at a meeting in Lucknow. Soon, the idea was extended to Noida, Ghaziabad and Baghpat.

## WHY THE WEST?

While this promises to reshape how the SP talks to voters ahead of the 2027 assembly election, it cites a twin rationale for starting with these districts, encompassing macro and micro themes. At one level, it speaks of a pincer-grip: continuing social discrimination and overall decline

in local economic activity. Flaying the BJP for “deliberate neglect”, it linked that to a stifling scenario of endemic corruption, unchecked land mafias, joblessness, poor social infrastructure, and farm and artisanal distress. At another, it vows to zoom in on the nitty-gritty—roads, flyovers, electricity, water supply, drainage, traffic congestion, and the like.

Yet, all this is not without strategic intent. Many believe the decision is rooted in necessity. For the SP, western UP is a crucial battleground. It has sizeable Jat, Muslim and Dalit populations, but also sharp divides that the BJP has often capitalised on.

Analysts say the idea is to find the right rhetoric

to match the BJP’s ground machinery. The ruling party has long relied on its booth-level network to dominate local conversations, while tying them back to broader ideological appeals. By issuing “local manifestos”, the SP is trying to equip its workers with something

revive faith in the socialist party’s ability to deliver “a harmonious, development-oriented government” if returned to power.

SP MLC Udayveer

Singh says the idea is not entirely new, but the focus and commitment to follow through are sharper. “In the past, too, we noted down demands from specific areas and tried to accommodate those in the manifesto. But this time, we will release both a state-level vision document and separate local-level manifestos. This binds not just the local candidate to the promises, but the party as a whole,” he tells INDIA TODAY.

## Takeaways

► **SP unveils plan for district-level manifestos for 2027 election**

► **Exercise to begin with Agra, Mathura, Hathras, Baghpat, Noida, Ghaziabad**

► **The idea is to marry policy with political aim of challenging BJP**

similar, i.e. a set of talking points and promises that feel relevant in the mohalla or the village square.

UP’s voters often judge parties not by abstract pledges from Lucknow but by lived realities at the local level: material concerns such as power supply and waterlogging as much as caste discrimination and land disputes. The SP calculates that if it can position itself as attentive to such concerns, it can cut into the BJP’s claim of being the only party that gets things done on the ground.

Akhilesh, though, frames it as a genuine developmental initiative going beyond electoral rhetoric—a model that could be replicated across UP. The aim, he argues, is to

## AKHILESH’S RESUME

Part of this pitch for 2027 harks back to the past: the SP’s track record in governance during Akhilesh’s 2012-17 tenure as CM. Recalling projects from his time in Agra, Mathura and Hathras, Akhilesh says the BJP had undone much of that work in the area.

At the same time, the “local manifestos” are also tied to the SP’s present and future focus on fortifying its larger PDA plank of social justice—an effort to build a consolidated base of backwards, Dalits and minorities. Under this rubric, a caste census is key to ensuring even and balanced growth, by guaranteeing rights and representation “in proportion to numbers”.

All these districts fall within that western arc of the state where chaotic urban sprawls cohabit with straitened kasba and countryside. Human cohorts, too, occupy either side of a yawning gap. That presents an opportunity to bridge electoral tactics and genuine policy. ■

► WEST BENGAL

## JUTE TURNS GOLD AGAIN

**A happy coincidence of good weather and astute central policy scripts a revival for struggling crop**

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

**G**OLDEN AGES ARE USUALLY THINGS OF THE PAST. So it had long seemed for Bengal's jute story. Once vivisected down the middle by Partition, the Indian side had of late been stalked by dwindling returns, farm distress, locked mills and layoffs. But after years, with nature and official nurture working in unusual concert, the state's jute farmers are tasting a season of genuine profit.

The decisive factor: in two steps through June-August, New Delhi imposed restrictions on imports from Bangladesh. The extra demand created thus has fortuitously coincided with a season that is seeing an uptick in local supply. Excess rainfall, which damaged crops elsewhere, worked as a blessing for jute—the crop thrives on abundant water. The result: not only better yields but finer quality fibre, fetching prices unseen in recent years.

Jute cultivation and allied trades

provide direct or indirect livelihood to around four million in Bengal. So, the year's bounty has generated more work in the labour-intensive processes of retting—submerging the stalks in water so as to disentangle the fibre from the wooden core—and then drying and bundling. That is boosting wages for farmhands all around Bengal. In hamlets, there is, for once, a sense of relief as orders flow in and payments arrive on time.

The price curve tells its own story. On September 8, jute was being sold at Rs 8,800 per quintal—that's a straight rise of Rs 3,000 from January 8. "Farmers are getting almost double of what they used to get until the corresponding period last year," says Sanjay Kajaria, former president, Indian Jute Mills Association.

### THE OTHER BENGAL

Of India's annual requirement of around 7.5 million bales of jute, West Bengal contributes some 5.8 million bales, and Assam 700,000-800,000. The shortfall was met by imports from Bangladesh, whose production overtook India's last year. That sourcing had steadily undermined confidence among local farmers; many of them switched to other crops.

The import ban has changed that. As Jai Bagra of the Jute Baler's Association points out, "If this trend continues, it's possible that many farmers will return to jute farming." That guarded optimism runs like a glint of gold across Bengal's riverine tracts, where bundles of freshly dried fibre are once again drawing middlemen and traders. ■

GETTY IMAGES



► **RESURGENT CROP**  
A labourer ties jute stalks in North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal



► GOA

## THE HARD

**The coastal state does not have**

By Dhaval S. Kulkarni

**I**N THE GOA OF THE MIND, there exists a surplus of all good things—and every frame of leisure is fringed by a coconut palm or two. From a cool glass of sol kadi to fish curry to beach shack pina coladas, the sweet tinge of coconut milk tempers everything. In reality, though, Goa's state tree is struggling to cope with the rigours of playing everybody's favourite seaside Eden. Coconuts, of all things, are in crisis.

Goa needs an average of 100,000 coconuts every day but only around 40,000 are available locally. The rest—as much as 60



PRAYING FOR FRUIT  
Coconut trees along a road in Old Goa

INDIA PICTURE

# EST NUT TO CRACK

enough coconuts to feed its tourist boom—and itself

per cent—has to be imported from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu et al. During the Ganesh festival in late August, when demand rose, the Goa State Horticulture Corporation imported 75,000 coconuts from Karnataka and sold them to consumers at a subsidised Rs 40-45 per piece. Otherwise, retail prices range from Rs 80 to Rs 100 per coconut, depending on its size (and the market's location). Wholesale rates vary from Rs 29 to Rs 50 per coconut.

## COCONUT PER CAPITA

If coconut prices are pinching the pockets of local consumers, put it down to a double whammy: production falling amidst a rising demand graph due to tourism. “Goa is a tourist destination,

and tourists relish fish curry and rice. So, consumption is growing, and we need more coconuts, but we have limited geographical area,” says Sandeep Foldessai, director at the state government’s directorate of agriculture.

Goa’s total land area is 370,200 hectares. In 2025, about 38.77 per cent of this was under farming—down from 39.58 per cent in 2019-20. Coconut plantations, even with a slightly rising footprint, cover only a modest 26,807 hectares. In 2022-23, Goa’s production was 163.1 million coconuts. This fell to 160.9 million in 2023-24, and further to 150.8 million in 2024-25, with a per hectare decline in productivity from 6,113 coconuts to 6,006 and 5,625.

Narendra Sawaikar, former BJP

MP from South Goa and chairman of Goa’s largest cooperative society, attributes the decline chiefly to mite infestation—apparently the result of climatic changes—and crop destruction by monkeys. “The area under coconut cultivation has actually risen, but the production has declined,” he observes.

## SENILE PLANTATIONS

Many coconut plantations have also aged, having neared their natural productive cycle of 80-90 years, says Foldessai. The earlier advent of monsoon rains has also affected harvesting cycles. Goa needs to urgently rejuvenate its senile plantations, he adds.

The issue has elicited cross-party concern. Replying to the Goa Forward Party’s Vijai Sardesai in the assembly,

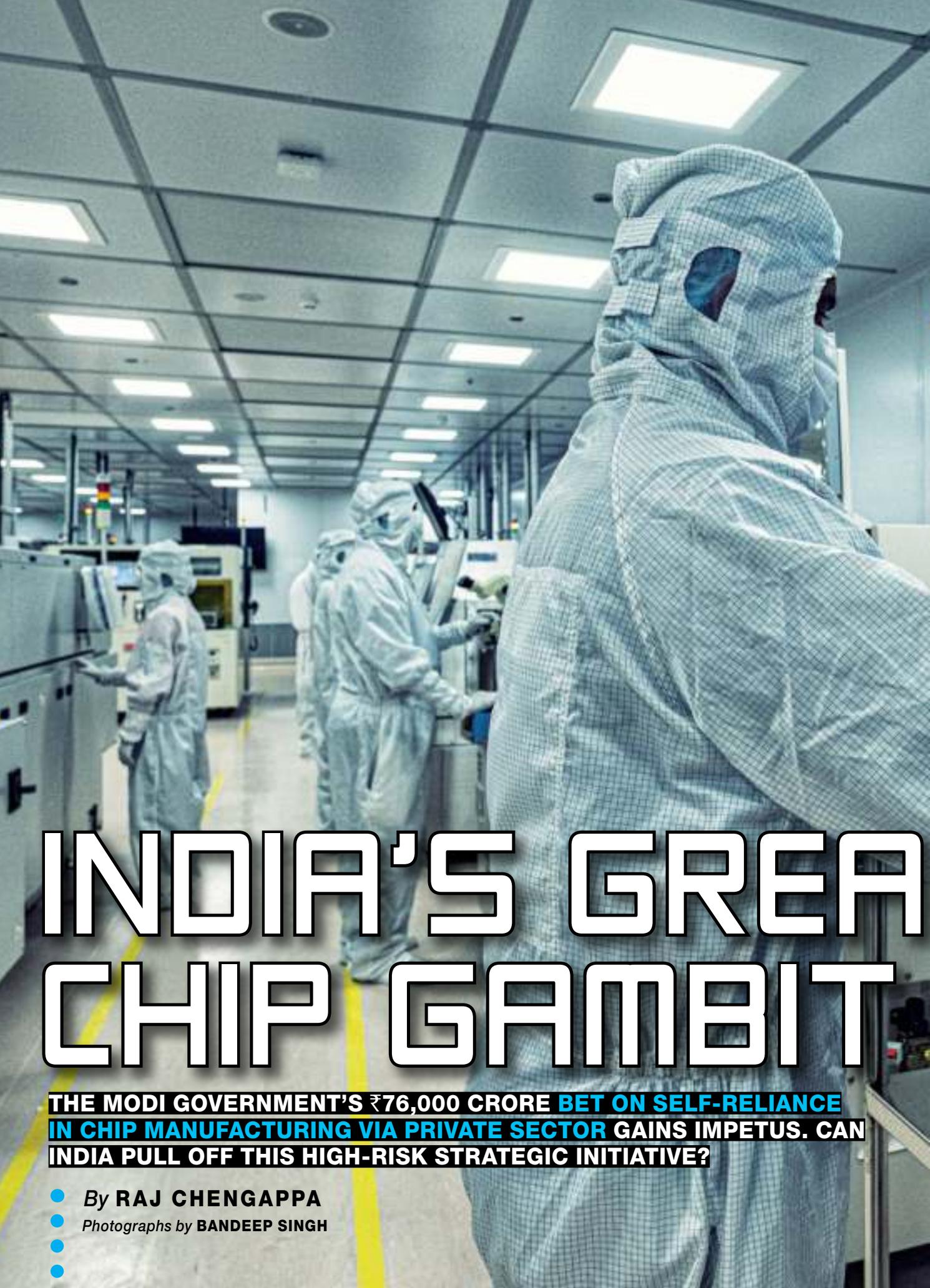
## Takeaways

With local output falling to 150.8 million, Goa has to import 60% of its coconuts from Karnataka, TN et al

Goa has limited area. Its local plantations also suffer from pest infestation, simian attacks and senility

agriculture minister Ravi Naik said Goa has to import both mature and tender coconuts due to the high influx of tourists and the concomitant rise in demand from hotels and restaurants. Independent MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco, who raised the issue in the House, calls for subsidies. “Coconuts are a lifeline. Their oil, water and shavings are good for health. Coconut oil is healthier than processed oils,” says Lourenco.

In January-June 2025, Goa saw a record 5.45 million tourist arrivals, an 8.4 per cent surge, so the year’s figures may surpass the 10.4 million of 2024. Add 1.6 million locals. Even on a lazy Goan holiday, you can do the rough math on how many millions will be looking for some coconut nirvana. ■



# INDIA'S GREAT CHIP GAMBIT

THE MODI GOVERNMENT'S ₹76,000 CRORE BET ON SELF-RELIANCE IN CHIP MANUFACTURING VIA PRIVATE SECTOR GAINS IMPETUS. CAN INDIA PULL OFF THIS HIGH-RISK STRATEGIC INITIATIVE?

- By RAJ CHENGAPPA
- Photographs by BANDEEP SINGH
-



**BUILDING  
SILICON DREAMS**

Engineers oversee  
chip assembly  
and testing at CG  
Semi facility in  
Sanand, Gujarat

T

# B

Bullock carts and bytes jostle together in the Sanand industrial belt on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. But don't be misled by the rustic settings. Ever since Tata shifted its massive Nano factory almost overnight from Singur in West Bengal in 2008, the township has flourished as a manufacturing hub. Now with three of the world's most sophisticated semiconductor chip factories being set up, Sanand is poised to become India's newest Silicon lodestone.

The shining example is the Murugappa Group's semiconductor chip venture CG Semi whose compact factory complex seems to have sprouted up from the ground as rapidly as the verdant rice fields that surround it. Just eight months ago, CG Semi set up its Rs 7,600 crore Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly & Test (OSAT) facility here in collaboration with Japan's Renesas Electronics Corporation and Thailand's Stars Microelectronics. On August 28, Ashwini Vaishnaw, the Union minister of electronics and information technology, flew down to inaugurate the brand new assembly pilot line that rolled out CG Semi's first made-in-India semiconductor chips.

A huge step forward, these chips are now being tested by clients to see if they match global industry standards. S. Vellayan, chairman, CG Power and Industrial Solutions Limited, of which CG Semi is a subsidiary, likened the challenge to being "just as steep as climbing Mount Everest". As he puts it, "Every chip we make here is a step towards India's technological sovereignty. It shows how government and industry can come together with conviction, capital and scale, and deliver rapidly."



**“We took a leap of faith because chip making is a strategic and foundational industry, with a whole range of sectors depending on reliable supply apart from quality products”**

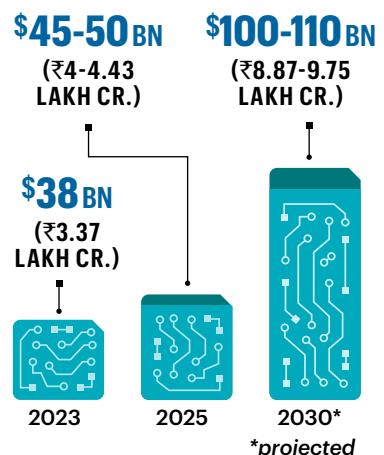
**AMITESH SINHA | CEO,  
India Semiconductor Mission**

Vellayan is not exaggerating. India needs 19 billion semiconductor chips annually. They are the heartbeat of a range of devices, be it smartphones, washing machines, refrigerators, cars or missiles and spaceships. But because the country lacks major semiconductor facilities, we are forced to import 95 per cent of our requirements from a handful of semiconductor chip companies that dominate the world. The price tag? A hefty Rs 1.71 lakh crore a year. That is two and a half

## INDIA'S CHIP CRUNCH

**The size of the Indian semiconductor market is projected to double in the next five years**

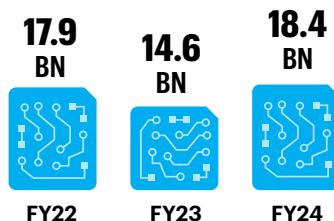
### MARKET SIZE



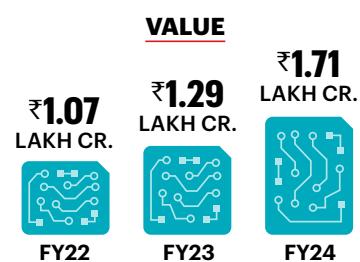
### HEFTY IMPORT BILL

India imports about 95% of its chip needs, mainly from China, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and other Asian hubs

### CHIPS IMPORTED



### VALUE



Source: MeitY

# MODI GOVT BETS BIG ON SEMICON

With chip demand surging and import costs mounting, the Modi govt launched the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) to position the country as a global manufacturing hub

## MISSION AIMS

- Build the entire semiconductor ecosystem from scratch—fabs to assembly, testing and packaging—in India
- Cut import dependence and make India a trusted global design and manufacturing hub
- Boost security by localising chip production, securing supply chains
- Power the digital economy as chips underpin everything from smartphones, EVs to AI, defence and industrial systems

### LAUNCHED ON

Dec. 21, 2021

### CENTRAL OUTLAY

₹76,000 CR.

## GOVT INCENTIVES

- The Centre is offering to cover 50% of project costs on a pari-passu basis—matching private investment proportionately—to companies setting up semiconductor facilities
- This is given as grants to private players, excluding state govt contributions
- States like Gujarat and Odisha are offering additional incentives of 20-25%
- The Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme with an outlay of Rs 1,000 cr. supports start-ups financially along with access to design tools for them and for academic institutions

**CRAFTING THE FUTURE** ▶  
Technicians at work inside CDIL's Mohali facility

## THE KEY PRIVATE PLAYERS

With four more plants approved by the Union cabinet in August 2025, the total number of projects under the ISM has risen to 10 across six states. Cumulative investments stand at Rs 1.6 lakh cr.

### Continental Device India Limited (CDIL)

₹117 CR.

Brownfield expansion for high-power Silicon & SiC devices  
Mohali, Punjab

### HCL with Foxconn, Taiwan

₹3,700 CR.

Display driver chips production unit  
Jewar, Uttar Pradesh

### Micron, US

₹22,516 CR.

ATMP facility  
Sanand, Gujarat

### Murugappa Group's CG Semi with Renesas Electronics, Japan & Stars Microelectronics, Thailand

₹7,600 CR.

OSAT facility  
Sanand, Gujarat

### Kaynes Semicon with UST Global, US

₹3,300 CR.

OSAT facility  
Sanand, Gujarat

### Tata Semiconductor Assembly & Test

₹27,000 CR.

Assembly & test facility  
Morigaon, Assam

### 3D Glass Solutions, US

₹1,943 CR.

Advanced packaging & embedded glass substrate components facility  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha

### SicSem with Clas-SiC Wafer Fab, UK

₹2,066 CR.

Silicon Carbide (SiC) wafer fab & ATMP facility  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha

### ASIP Technologies with APACT, South Korea

₹468 CR.

Packaging & assembly unit  
Andhra Pradesh

Source: MeitY

ATMP: Assembly, Testing, Marking & Packaging

OSAT: Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly & Test



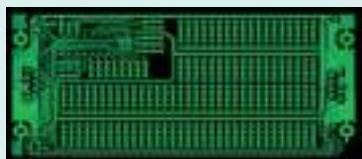
# WHY MAKING SEMICON CHIPS IS HARD

**From crystal growth to final testing, semiconductor manufacturing involves thousands of precision steps, advanced machinery and a deep global supply chain—making it one of the most difficult engineering challenges**

## 1. DESIGN

**Process:** Engineers create the chip's circuit design using specialised Electronic Design Automation (EDA) software. Designs specify transistor layouts, logic gates and interconnects

**Difficulty:** Requires extreme precision, advanced architecture planning and flawless nanoscale simulation—mistakes here ripple through the entire process



## 2. WAFER PREPARATION

**Process:** Ultra-pure silicon is grown into cylindrical ingots, sliced into wafers and polished

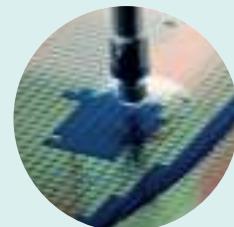
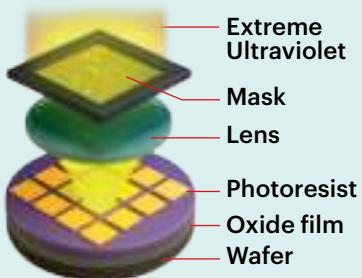


**Difficulty:** Demands flawless crystal purity and atomic-level smoothness to ensure defect-free chips

## 3. FABRICATION (Front-end Processing)

**Photolithography:** Circuit patterns are etched onto wafers using laser light, masks and photoresist

**Difficulty:** Uses billion-dollar Extreme Ultraviolet (EUV) lithography machines to create features smaller than a virus



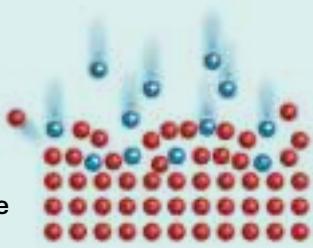
**Etching:** Unwanted material is chemically or physically removed to form the designed circuit patterns

**Difficulty:** Requires selective removal with nanometre precision without damaging adjacent structures

## Deposition & Ion Implantation:

**Implantation:** Thin films are deposited and impurities implanted to change electrical properties

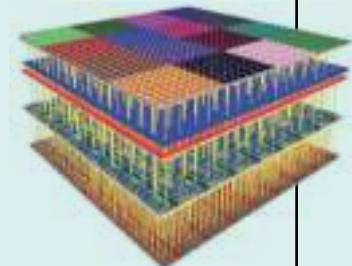
**Difficulty:** Atomic-level control is essential to ensure yield and performance



## 4. INTERCONNECT

### (Back-end Processing)

**Process:** Dozens of microscopic metal layers and insulating layers are stacked to connect thousands of transistors



**Difficulty:** Aligning and insulating up to 60 layers with nanometre accuracy is a formidable engineering challenge

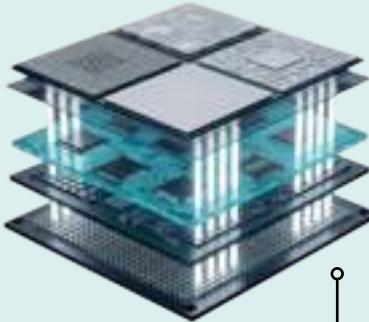
## 5. TESTING & DICING

**Process:** Electrical testing ensures each chip meets design specifications before the wafer is cut (diced) into individual dies

**Difficulty:** Requires high-speed precision testing; dicing must avoid micro-cracks that could ruin chips



## 6. PACKAGING



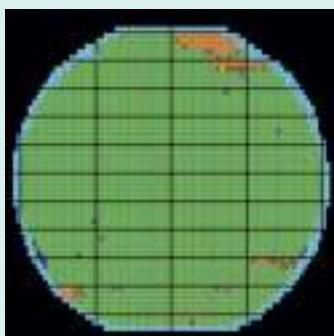
**Process:** Individual dies are mounted onto substrates, connected via wire bonding or advanced packaging techniques, and sealed

**Difficulty:** Advanced packaging—including 3D stacking—demands innovative solutions for heat, connectivity and miniaturisation

## 7. FINAL TEST & BINNING

**Process:** Packaged chips undergo rigorous electrical, thermal and reliability tests, then are sorted (binned) by performance before shipment

**Difficulty:** Demands precise stress-testing under varied conditions; performance grading directly affects chip value



times the annual budget for the Jal Jeevan Mission, which provides drinking water via taps to India's 190 million rural households. With the semiconductor market size likely to double from \$45-50 billion (Rs 4-4.3 lakh crore) currently to \$100-110 billion (Rs 8.87-9.75 lakh crore) by 2030, experts say India may end up spending as much money on importing chips as it does on importing crude oil if it does not start building semiconductor chips indigenously soon.

Nothing brought home the perils of import dependency more forcefully than the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the worldwide shortage of chips severely impacted India's auto, electronics and other critical sectors, resulting in costly delays. Given the wildly fluctuating geopolitical landscape amidst US president Donald Trump's policy of 'fall in line or fall behind', the worry is that

ence Act, sanctioning \$52.7 billion (Rs 4.67 lakh crore at current exchange rates) in incentives to domestic manufacturers.

## INDIA'S BIG BET

**J**ust a few months earlier, in December 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had unveiled his own high-stakes gambit, when he announced a massive Rs 76,000 crore India Semiconductor Mission (ISM). With the ambitious aim of making India a global hub for semiconductor design and manufacturing, it envisaged building a robust ecosystem and attaining self-reliance in chip manufacturing. As Vaishnav tells INDIA TODAY in an accompanying interview, "Prime Minister Modi laid down a clear vision that not only should India become self-reliant in chip-making, but we should now become drivers of this bus."

**“The semiconductor mission has made boardrooms across the global chip industry sit up and ask: ‘Do I need an India strategy? Am I missing out on a big opportunity in India?’”**

**ANKUSH WADHERA | MD & Partner, BCG (India)**



silicon chip scarcity may turn chronic. And India can scarcely ignore that, since chips are coming to dominate every aspect of our lives, including warfare. This was only too evident during Operation Sindoora, India's response to the Pahalgam terror attack in April, in which autonomous missiles and drones guided by advanced semiconductor processors played a dominant role.

Chips are to the Fourth Industrial Revolution what steel was to its earlier iterations. Even the US, once the undisputed leader in this domain, finds itself being overtaken by East Asian giants such as Taiwan, South Korea and, to some extent, China. To reclaim the American edge, US president Joe Biden in early 2022 launched the Chips and Sci-

It was, by all accounts, an audacious bet. India may be a global software giant, but we were pygmies when it came to making chips that can power industry. Fabricating semiconductor chips is not just another industry, it requires extensive infusions of capital, complex high-precision equipment and tools, advanced technology and skills to etch billions of tiny transistors onto a wafer quarter the size of your fingernail (see graphic *Why Making Semicon Chips is Hard*).

CG Semi's state-of-the-art assembly line, for instance, is an engineering marvel. Cleanliness here borders on obsession, as even a microscopic particle of dust can play havoc with a chip's delicate circuitry. You enter the complex like a surgeon suiting up for an operation

theatre—in sanitised gowns, gloves, headwear and shoes. On the assembly line, robotic arms guide the gleaming iridescent silicon wafers reminiscent of compact discs of yore.

These discs are the building blocks of chip manufacturing. Each wafer holds thousands of chips etched in meticulous rows, fabricated in foundries abroad, using over 500 chemical, gaseous and electrical processes. A single chip is a beehive of transistors stacked in microscopic layers, with over 40 metres of micro-thin wiring threading the circuits. A whirring machine using diamond cutters slices the wafer into individual chips. They are then subjected to rigorous temperature, vibration and pressure checks, and scanned for material flaws before being packaged and dispatched to their destinations. To start with, CG Semi will process half a million chips daily and will scale it up to 15 million once its second complex is ready in 2027.

## LEARNING FROM FAILURES

**W**hat makes Modi's semiconductor mission even more challenging is India's six-decade track record of failure. In the 1960s, Robert Noyce, co-inventor of the integrated circuit and co-founder first of Fairchild Semiconductor and then of Intel, wanted to set up a unit in India but, confronted with red tape, settled for Hong Kong. Then, in 1983, Indira Gandhi announced the setting up of the Semi-Conductor Laboratory (SCL) in Chandigarh, complete with a chip foundry. But a devastating fire gutted the facility in 1989, and it could never recover or regain its expertise since.

In the 2000s, when Manmohan Singh was prime minister, he made several attempts to bring chip expertise to India, but failed. Bureaucratic roadblocks played spoilsport again when Intel in 2005 announced plans to invest \$1 billion in a chip facility in Tamil Nadu, but shifted shop to China following restrictions on importing equipment. Two years later, Manmohan

**“Every chip we make is a step towards India’s technological sovereignty. It shows how government and industry can come together with conviction, capital and scale, and deliver rapidly”**

**S. VELLAYAN** | Chairman, CG Power and Industrial Solutions



han Singh made another attempt, announcing a Special Incentive Package Scheme (SIPS) to encourage electronics manufacturing, including semiconductors, in India, with an attractive 25 per cent capital subsidy. The 2008 global financial meltdown put paid to that ambition. The scheme was revived in 2012, with the government setting aside Rs 39,000 crore as a subsidy to construct two chip fabrication plants. Both IBM and the Chinese semicon giant HSMC participated in the bidding process, but eventually withdrew, citing an unfavourable market environment.

Learning from this string of failures, officials in the Modi government worked on how to sidestep these pitfalls.

As Amitesh Sinha, the affable CEO of ISM, points out, earlier efforts failed because India went straight for the high end of the business—a semiconductor fabrication (fab) unit—a risky proposition in the absence of an ecosystem. This time, therefore, the Modi government is inviting projects across the entire spectrum of chip-making, from design, fabrication, assembly to testing and packaging. The financial incentive is also better. Instead of loans or equity stakes, the government is offering direct grants. The Centre is also adopting a *pari-passu* approach—for every rupee an investor spends, the government gives a matching grant. States have said they will bear another 20-30 per



**“Failure is not an option for any of us. We must show the world that India can do it. But it’s important that the government continue to support us for the next four years”**

**PANKAJ GULATI** | President, CDIL



**PRECISION IN ACTION**  
A cutting-edge lab at CG Semi's Sanand facility

cent of the cost. Companies will also remain free to export their products without restriction. "We took a leap of faith," says Sinha, "because chip-making is a strategic and foundational industry, with a whole range of sectors depending on reliable supply apart from quality products."

## THE DOUBTING THOMASES

**N**ot everyone, though, is convinced about the government's chip mission. Former Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan called it a "ruinous race" for India to get into at this point, because besides being capital-intensive and heavy on subsidies, it is lean on labour employment. Instead of high-end chip manufacturing, Rajan thinks grants would be better spent on training the workforce in chip design, thereby strengthening India's R&D and talent pool. Persons of Indian origin already make up 20 per cent of the global workforce designing chips for multinational giants.

Kathir Thandavarayan, partner, Deloitte South Asia, begs to differ. "The government is making the right move," he says. "It is imperative that India, which is growing very fast and is likely to be a \$10 trillion economy by 2035, has a semiconductor ecosystem. Any external dependency will always be disadvantageous. We need to build resilience and self-reliance by setting up semiconductor manufac-

## KNOW YOUR CHIPS

These unseen workhorses power our digital lives, from the smartphone in your hand to the complex systems behind the Internet of Everything

### MICROPROCESSORS



Integrated circuits (ICs) that contain one or more central processing units (CPUs) to execute instructions, serving as the core 'brains' of computing devices

### GPUS



Specialised processors for massive parallel computation, Graphics Processing Units are critical not just for rendering graphics but now for powering advanced AI models

### MEMORY CHIPS



DRAM, NAND Flash, ROM and other memory types that store data temporarily or permanently, shaping the speed, capacity and performance of devices from smartphones to AI systems

### ASICs



Application-Specific ICs are custom-built chips for specialised functions such as cryptocurrency mining, network processing or industrial automation

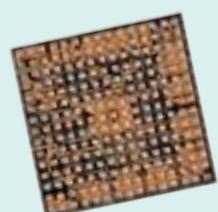
### SIGNAL CONVERSION CHIP



Analog and mixed-signal ICs that transform physical inputs like light, sound and radio waves into digital data, vital for telecom, medical devices and autonomous vehicles

### POWER MANAGEMENT CHIPS

Circuits that regulate and distribute power efficiently, ensuring safe, reliable operation across devices ranging from smartphones to EVs and cloud servers



### SENSOR CHIPS



Components that detect physical phenomena—motion, temperature, pressure, light—powering automation, robotics, driver-assistance systems and wearable technology



turing if the economy is to thrive."

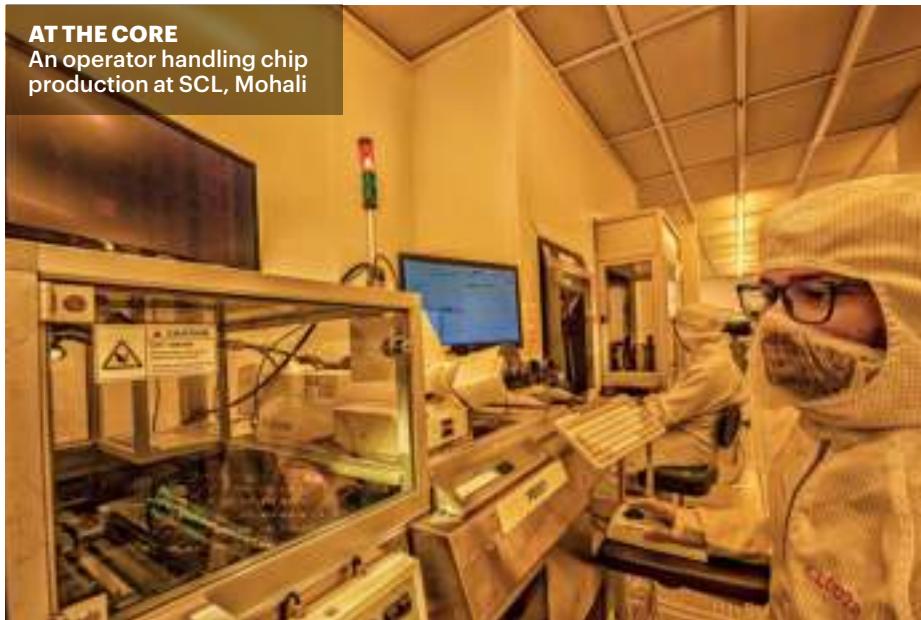
What Thandavarayan does want the government to do is exploit the significant advantage India has in a large phalanx of chip designers by encouraging global semiconductor companies to set up their R&D operations in India. "Policymakers need to work out how much India can leverage this existing advantage into the very strong ecosystem that we are building," he says. As part of the mission, ISM's Sinha points out, the government has set up a Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme with an outlay of Rs 1,000 crore to support start-ups and academic institutions. The initiative provides access to costly Electronic Design Automation (EDA) tools, which an impressive 278 academic institutions and 72 start-ups have availed of.

## THE BIG PLAYERS

**C**hip experts give full marks to the Modi government for its judicious curation of private players to build India's semiconductor ecosystem. In its initial approvals, the government targeted the 'low-hanging fruit'—assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP) facilities—which demand far less capital investment than full-fledged fab plants. As a result, of the 10 semiconductor proposals that have been sanctioned so far, only two are for fab units; the remaining eight focus on ATMPs. Each bid was subjected to stringent scrutiny, with the government ensuring that applicants had both financial capacity and credible technology partners.

The biggest approval yet has gone to the Tata Group, which secured a fabrication plant in Dholera, Gujarat, in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC), the third-largest chipmaker in that country. The total project cost is estimated to be Rs 91,000 crore, of which 50 per cent will come from central subsidy and 20 per cent from

**AT THE CORE**  
An operator handling chip production at SCL, Mohali



Gujarat; Tata's contribution will be Rs 27,000 crore. Tata has also been sanctioned an assembly and testing facility in Morigaon, Assam, in collaboration with Bosch as technology partner. This project entails an investment of Rs 27,000 crore, with the Centre and the Assam govern-

ment bearing 70 per cent of the cost.

Meanwhile, US semiconductor major Micron is building a colossal Rs 22,516 crore ATMP plant on a 75-acre campus in Sanand. Once fully operational, it will process up to 1.35 billion memory chips annually. Micron will also receive 70 per cent of its project cost as government grants. Mysuru-based Kayne Semicon tied up with UST Global, US, for a Rs 3,300 crore state-of-the-art OSAT facility in Sanand with near similar incentive terms as Micron.

The largesse is being extended beyond Gujarat. In Uttar Pradesh's Jewar area, where an international airport becomes operational this month, HCL is building a Rs 3,700 crore display driver chip unit in partnership with Foxconn, the world's largest electronics contract manufacturer. In Odisha, US-based 3D Glass Solutions is setting up a Rs 1,943 crore facility for advanced packaging and glass substrate components and Chennai-based SicSem, in partnership with UK's Clas-SIC Wafer Fab, is establishing a semiconductor fab with Rs 2,066 crore investment. Both these facilities are dedicated mainly to the defence and automotive

**“To address the shortage of skilled manpower, the government needs to establish centres of excellence in collaboration with academic and global semiconductor companies”**

**KATHIR THANDAVARAYAN**  
Partner, Deloitte South Asia

sectors. In Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad-based ASIP Technologies has joined forces with South Korea's APACT to launch a packaging and assembly facility for the electronics sector. And in Mohali, Punjab, CDIL has received approval for brownfield expansion of its high-power silicon and SiC device manufacturing for electric vehicles.

## THE NEXT STEP

**A**nkush Wadhera, BCG's Managing Director and India Practice Leader for Semiconductors, gives the government a double tick for the mission's execution so far. Unlike in the past, it has drawn more credible applications than the money it has set aside. "This has made boardrooms across the world in the chip business sit up and ask: Do I need an India strategy? Am I missing out on a big opportunity in India?", says Wadhera. Pankaj Gulati, an industry veteran and president, CDIL, stops only slightly short of embracing his enthusiasm wholeheartedly. "Failure is not an option for any of us," he says. "We must show the world that India can and will do it. But it's important that the government continue to support us for the next four years."

Wadhera, meanwhile, says that while ISM 1.0 may take a decade to bear fruit, India should not lose momentum and must prepare for ISM 2.0. It should focus on three broad areas—a self-reliant input ecosystem of chemicals, gases and substrates; expanding compound semiconductor fabs for use in diverse Indian

**“The government should also help semicon start-ups get the sales side right, including market strategies”**

**RAJA MANICKAM**  
Founder & CEO, iVP Semi



industries; and establishing advanced fabs to bolster domestic R&D and keep pace with giants like TSMC.

Raja Manickam, founder and CEO of iVP semi and former CEO of Tata Electronics OSAT, says the government also needs to help semiconductor start-ups get the sales side right, including market strategies. "Many of these chip companies are being set up not so much to meet Indian demand but for global needs," he says. "We can tell these and other companies selling us chips to start using the ecosystem being set up and make chips in India itself." CDIL's Gulati echoes the need for focus, urging India to concentrate on end-product markets like automotive and power and pick up world leadership in these rather than spread its resources across a wide spectrum.

## THE TALENT GAP

**W**hile exponential expansion of chip-making facilities has got the wheels moving, they could come to a grinding halt without a steady pipeline of trained manpower, especially mid-level managers. BCG's Wadhera doubts if a generalised 'spray and play' approach to skill development will work. What's needed are talent corridors between India and Taiwan or India and Japan for seamless workforce exchange. Deloitte's Thandavarayan believes that while advanced semiconductor manufacturing can be included in the curricula of universities and technical institutes, the government should also establish centres of excellence in collaboration with global academic institutions and chip companies. In a promising move, the government is encouraging young talent by using the integrated semiconductor facilities in the public sector SCL. After start-ups and university students design them, SCL fabricates these chips as proofs of concept to validate them.

SCL itself is stepping up to become the backbone of India's strategic sectors, especially space, defence and atomic energy. "What the strategic sector needs is reliability," says SCL director-general Dr Kamaljeet Singh, "as there is a chip war going on, and we could be vulnerable. The chips we make for ISRO are fully indigenous, from fabrication to packaging. What India should also develop is a clear roadmap of what we require and become a leader in these segments rather than trying to develop expertise in a vast area. We should not try to be *shaane* (oversmart), but proceed step by step."

That's good advice. If the Modi government's big bet on chips pays off, India could meet 35 per cent of its needs domestically within a decade. That's huge. The pace of indigenisation is expected to accelerate as the ecosystem stabilises. At the launch of the mission, Modi had said, "Our dream is that every device in the world will have an Indian-made chip." It's an ambition worth pursuing. ■

**“What the strategic sector needs is reliability as there is a chip war going on and we could be vulnerable. We are filling that gap in space and defence”**

**DR KAMALJEET SINGH** | Director General, SCL





## INTERVIEW

# “We now want to be drivers of the bus”

**Ashwini Vaishnaw**, Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, spoke to Group Editorial Director **Raj Chengappa** about the Modi government's vision for and execution of the massive Rs 76,000 crore India Semiconductor Mission (ISM). Excerpts

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



**In 1984, India seemed ahead in the semiconductor race, having set up the Semiconductor Laboratory in Mohali. But 40 years later, we seem to have missed the bus—we are importing 95 per cent of our chips. What went wrong?**

There is history behind that. It has been a period of missed opportunities, but I do not want to get into a political discussion on why. What is important, as our prime minister said, is that we should not be looking at the bus we missed, but must now become the drivers of this bus. And he has a very clear vision and laser-sharp focus on executing it.

**Q. How different is the Indian Semiconductor Mission launched by the Modi government from previous such initiatives?**

It is important to understand the nature of the industry. It works well when the entire ecosystem gets developed. More than 500 chemicals and over 50 gases are used in manufacturing chips. These are chemicals and gases where you measure purity not in parts per million, but per billion and trillion, as these are ultra, ultra pure materials. To get them, it is essential to ensure the stability of the entire grid and develop the complete ecosystem, so that the foundation of the industry is laid properly and it can run for the next 40 years. For that, we have to look at the entire value chain, from design, fabrication and assembly testing

to marking and packaging supported by a series of EDA or electronic design automation tools.

**Q. Will ISM help develop this ecosystem?**

We have worked diligently with every ecosystem player, whether it is those who make chemical gases, equipment manufacturers and suppliers along with the state governments, the local level panchayat and municipal governments. This industry requires a minimum of 10 years to get established. China took, I think, about 20-plus years. Today, we are at a stage where 10 units are under construction or under planning. In the value chain design, we all know we have very good indigenous strength. So, it is really satisfying to know that we shall soon have entire end-to-end chip-making.

**“This industry works well only when the entire ecosystem is developed, from design, fabrication, assembly testing to packaging. That takes a minimum of 10 years”**





**“When you start a totally new industry, the world looks at you with a question mark. Now, those question marks are behind us.... We are moving to take the lead”**



**Q. What incentives have you given big semiconductor companies and why?**

See, if you look at the global benchmark, what countries our size have done is pour in billions and billions of dollars in this entire industry, because this is a strategic industry. It requires support through the inevitable vicious cycles. So, being a foundational industry, it has to be supported by government; across the world, that is the practice, and we follow the best practices of the world. We have offered incentives that are in line with the Semiconductor Mission Policy, which is supporting capital expenditure as well as the eligible investment. Some state governments have done so too. The total investment now is around \$18 billion

(Rs 1.6 lakh crore). So, we are going to manufacture chips, the material and the machines which make chips. That's the whole ecosystem we are working on.

**Q. So far, some of the big chip-makers like TSMC, NVIDIA or Chinese manufacturers have not come to India? Why do you think this is so?**

One of the big ones, [the Taiwanese company] PSMC, has collaborated with Tatas, and Micron [which is establishing a project in Sanand, Gujarat] is among the top five in the world. Others will come. When you start a totally new industry, the world looks at you with a question mark. Now, those question marks are behind us. [The Dutch com-

pany] ASML, for instance, came with a full contingent, their entire top leadership was here and they very categorically said that India is absolutely on the right track to become a semiconductor nation.

**Q. When do you think we will start making them indigenously and reduce our imports?**

If you look at how we have selected our 10 projects, we have covered practically every sector. As these facilities start coming online, we will meet a significant part of our domestic demand. But we must also understand that semiconductor is a global industry. It doesn't know national boundaries; each material, each component crosses multiple boundaries before it becomes a finished product. Our role is to be a trusted partner in the growth story unfolding in our country, making sure that we contribute. The way we have consolidated our forces and used our strengths, both in the public sector and the private sector, it's going to be a good journey ahead.

**Q. What about skill development and job creation?**

We started a talent development programme and gave the latest design tools to 278 universities. As a result, in a very short time-frame of two and a half years, students have designed chips based on the design tools they have access to, and we have used the SCL to fabricate these chips. Very few countries in the world today can claim that their university and college students can design and produce chips. It will be a huge driver of jobs.

**Q. What do you reckon India's semiconductor industry will look like 5-10 years from now?**

It will be a very comprehensive industry. Five years down the line, we will be manufacturing chips, we will have a lot of R&D, we will have a great equipment-manufacturing ecosystem. We will be manufacturing some of the most complex and critical new materials like silicon carbide. It is a journey which will become a very significant one in the coming years and we are moving to take the lead. ■

# VIJAY TAKES A HIT

**The Karur rally stampede that took 41 lives has shaken up the Tamil superstar's fledgling political career. How he navigates this crisis will determine his future in TN politics**

By KAVITHA MURALIDHARAN

I

**IN HIS 2020 NOVELLA VAAZHGA VAAZHGA**, Sahitya Akademi-winning writer Imayam ends with a haunting image: the weary cadre, including women and children, stand for hours in the scorching sun, hungry and drained, waiting for the Great Leader. When she arrives, chaos erupts. People collapse under the crush of the crowd. In the end, all that remains is the exhausted chant “Vaazhga, vaazhga... (Long live, long live)” rising from the emptiness.

Last week in Karur, that piece of fiction played out in real life: 41 fans

of Tamil superhero-turned-neta Vijay, who had been waiting all day for a glimpse of the leader, were killed in a stampede. Over a hundred others were injured in the September 27 rally organised by his party, the Thamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK).

The cause of the tragedy itself was no mystery—the organisers had taken permission for a gathering of 10,000, but post-tragedy estimates suggest the crowd could have been three times the number. More than 5,000 supporters had followed Vijay from Namakkal—from where his cavalcade had started that day, the 14th day of his statewide tour. Thousands more streamed into the venue at Karur’s Veluchampipuram, where he was supposed to reach by afternoon. Eager fans had staked out places since morning itself. But with

INDIA PICTURE

multiple breaks en route, the star caravan arrived six hours late, at around 7 pm, by which time people had braved the scorching sun for several hours. News of him arrived first, and people climbed on top of trees and makeshift structures. As the long-awaited motorcade rolled in, the surge peaked. Structures gave way. Then chaos. Not long into the stampede, the actor was whisked away and remained incommunicado for three days.

## Reel to Reality Check

**B**efore the Karur tragedy, Vijay had been meticulously crafting his political persona. The strategy was clear: position himself as an alternative to the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and stake claim as a decisive, combative leader.



 **CRUSHED** Vijay at the Karur rally just before tragedy struck, Sept. 27; (below) mourning relatives with the body of a victim



In the past year, notes political analyst Priyan Srinivasan, Vijay had held six key rallies, mapping out his target electorate and building a narrative that was decidedly confrontational. With the opposition All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) alliance still in disarray, he had been trying to frame the 2026 assembly election as a battle between his fledgling TVK and the DMK. At least a few political observers felt the message had begun to resonate.

The Karur mishap has upended this careful positioning. Vijay's rallies before the tragedy took hard swipes at the DMK and BJP, and projected himself as a credible alternative for voters weary of entrenched party politics. But, as anthropologist Rajan Kurai Krishnan puts it, Tamil Nadu has seen this script before. The state's political history is replete with examples of superstars who failed to translate their screen magic into votes. From Sivaji Ganesan to Kamal Haasan to Rajinikanth, they all realised they could not replicate the legacy of M.G.

AFP

Ramachandran (MGR) or Jayalalithaa overnight. "In Tamil Nadu, the concept of social justice also permeated cinema," says Krishnan. "The semiotic manoeuvres MGR negotiated to become a party leader in the DMK, break from it, found the AIADMK and become chief minister were not something others could easily copy."

Vijay's attempt to create a political space for himself, Krishnan suggests, rests on spectacle rather than substance. "There is this misbegotten belief that, without doing any fieldwork, without engaging people at the grassroots and building a party structure bottom up, one can seize power directly by riding on the shine of one's star image," he says. The tragedy in Karur, he adds, reflects the risks inherent in such ambition. "In such ungrounded, power-mongering politics, it is Vijay's fans who get caught in the middle and are degraded."

## Milking a Tragedy

**M**eanwhile, with the assembly election less than a year away, politicians of every hue are making a beeline for Karur. A delegation of NDA MPs from outside the state, led by BJP's Hema Malini, met local officials and victims' families. Later, while calling for an impartial judicial probe, the former actress remarked that there was "something fishy" about the incident. This immediately sparked criticism about the 'targeting' of non-BJP states by the Centre. Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi leader Thol Thirumavalavan, who is part of the ruling DMK alliance, accused the BJP of trying to milk the tragedy to score political brownie points.

The DMK itself has been exercising extreme caution, wary that they would get some of the blowback about the security arrangements. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin went down to Karur to meet the survivors. The state also announced

Rs 10 lakh compensation each for the deceased and appointed a one-member judicial commission headed by retired high court justice Aruna Jagadeesan to investigate the incident. According to sources, the commission will examine crowd control measures, safety protocols and possible lapses in event management.

In all this, what lies exposed is the disarray in Vijay's camp. "It's not just about how he was missing in action after the Karur tragedy, the party



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

**Given Vijay's enormous popularity, Tamil Nadu CM Stalin has been wary of implicating him. But his defiant, accusatory statement may force the DMK government to take action**

itself was in chaos," says political analyst Srinivasan. "He has not owned up or taken responsibility as a leader." When Vijay finally emerged and spoke through a video message on September 30, it was to strike a defiant note and hint at conspiracy theories. "Why did this happen in Karur alone?" he asked. "People are watching. Truth will come out soon." He even issued a direct challenge to Stalin. "If you want revenge, take it out on me. Don't touch my comrades.... Do anything to me." According to some observers, the DMK's overcautious approach—in not taking immediate action against the star, fearing a sympathy wave—may

have actually backfired. While criminal cases have been filed against lower-ranking members of the TVK and some arrests made, the actor himself has not been named in the FIR.

## Hardening Stand

**T**he TVK cadre has been floating conspiracy theories linking former minister and DMK Karur strongman Senthil Balaji to the stampede, but the ruling party has rejected these claims. In Srinivasan's view, this confirms the trajectory that Vijay and the TVK will pursue: "He'll continue to oppose the DMK...if anything, Karur may harden his combative stand."

However, after Vijay's video message and insinuations of foul play, the government has gone on the offensive. At a press conference in Chennai, additional chief secretary P. Amudha and other officers gave a minute-by-minute account of how the tragedy unfolded, with videos and images to refute the allegations going around in social media. The officials also explained why the police had allocated Veluchampuram for the rally after rejecting seven other sites for safety reasons. On Vijay's charge of why in "Karur alone", the government claimed TVK rallies had resulted in one death at the Villupuram event and two in Madurai. There had been many injuries too, the officials said, blaming the organisers for the disasters.

The TVK's troubles may not find sympathy among other parties in Tamil Nadu. For AIADMK, Vijay's rise had been a double-edged sword: he could hurt the DMK but also mop up anti-DMK votes. "They are perhaps secretly happy that Vijay has suffered this setback," says Srinivasan.

For all his belligerence, the Karur tragedy will be a moment of reckoning for Vijay: can he weather this storm? The *Ilayathalapathy*, young general to his fans, might flex muscle in video messages, but this is no three-hour potboiler where the hero endures, rallies and wins. To regain lost ground, Vijay will need less bravado, more introspection. ■



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# ALL OR NOTHING FOR PK

**THE POLL STRATEGIST-TURNED-NETA'S CHARGES AGAINST THE RULING NDA LEADERS MAY UPSET THE CALCULUS OF BIHAR'S ENTRENCHED FORCES, EVEN IF HE DOES NOT WIN BIG HIMSELF**

By AMITABH SRIVASTAVA

O

On the afternoon of September 29, as families flocked to Patna's teeming Durga puja pandals, poll strategist-turned-neta Prashant Kishor offered a different sort of spectacle. Having called a press conference, he waved a dossier in front of reporters while rattling off a fresh set of allegations against some of the senior leaders in the ruling Janata Dal (United)-BJP government in Bihar. Kishor's target was five senior figures: veteran JD(U) minister Ashok Choudhary, and deputy CM Samrat Choudhary, health minister Mangal Pandey, state unit

chief Dilip Jaiswal and West Champaran MP Sanjay Jaiswal from the BJP. Each allegation, new and old, was accompanied by its own set of legal notices, threats of lawsuits and vows to publish more documents so that the disputes immediately became both legal contests and a media spectacle.

At the centre of the storm is Ashok Choudhary, who Kishor had earlier alleged has made benami purchases worth Rs 200 crore through a trust connected to the in-laws of his daughter Shambhavi, the Lok Sabha MP from Samastipur. Choudhary responded with a civil defamation notice for Rs 100 crore demanding an unconditional apology. On September 29, Kishor upped the ante, warning that unless the notice was withdrawn within seven days, he would put in the

public domain documents alleging properties to the value of Rs 500 crore. His charges against others are no less damning. He has demanded the arrest of Samrat Choudhary, alleging that the deputy CM used a forged birth certificate to avoid trial in a 1995 murder case in Tarapur. Health minister Mangal Pandey purportedly acquired a Delhi flat with unaccounted funds, Dilip Jaiswal is accused of seizing control of a medical college allotted to the Sikh minority, and Sanjay Jaiswal of manipulating the alignment of an overbridge to favour a petrol pump. (Sanjay has threatened a Rs 132.2 crore defamation suit if PK doesn't apologise publicly.)

The political reaction to Kishor's most recent charges has been predictably fractured. JD(U) spokesman Neeraj Kumar publicly urged Ashok



PTI



**A NEW APPEAL**  
Kishor at a rally in Kaimur district during his Bihar Badlav Yatra in August

## THE PK GAMEPLAN

► **Rock the Casbah:** PK's charges against senior BJP-JD(U) leaders on the eve of polls keep him in the headlines, puncture NDA image

► **Rising giant:** PK's national profile, narrative-setting skill, expanding grassroots network are now real threats

► **Fracture binary:** Contesting all 243 assembly seats to disrupt RJD-JD(U) duopoly

► **Spoiler effect:** 7-10% vote swing towards Jan Suraaj can tilt result in many seats

Choudhary to "come clean", as has former Union minister Raj Kumar Singh, who has asked his BJP colleagues in the dock to respond with counter-proof. Yet, CM Nitish Kumar has been conspicuous by his silence, a restraint that is striking, given the *sushaasan* image he has cultivated all these years.

For now, these are allegations, unproven in a court of law, but impossible to ignore in the court of public opinion. They have also cast a shadow on the narrative the NDA has carefully cultivated—of its government being comparatively clean unlike the 'jungle raj' of Lalu Yadav and his party Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). PK is out to puncture this very balloon, while presenting himself as an exemplar of financial transparency. At the same press conference, he

revealed that he had earned Rs 241 crore over the past three years from consultancy work and that "every rupee is accounted for". PK also let it be known that he channels his own funds into his Jan Suraaj Party.

### PARTY AMBITIONS

**K**ishor has been explicit about the fledgling Jan Suraaj's ambitions. In a state where many contests are decided by wafer-thin margins, the projected swing of 7-10 per cent towards him can be decisive. In the 2020 assembly election, 35 of the 243 seats were decided by margins of less than 3,000 votes, and 52 others by margins of under 5,000.

In such a finely balanced contest, Kishor's claim that Jan Suraaj will contest all 243 seats carries import.

If his party can slice away even 7-10 per cent of the vote, it could alter the outcome in dozens of constituencies, sending the electoral calculations of established parties into a tizzy, even if it does not necessarily win big itself. In this lies Kishor's strength—his potential to damage others.

The 7-10 per cent estimate is no conjecture. The first hint of Jan Suraaj's electoral strength came in October 2024, when the party contested four bypolls barely a month after its formal launch on October 2 last year. The results were instructive: no victories, but its candidate in Imamganj secured over 37,000 votes, enough to ensure the RJD's defeat. Across these constituencies, the party averaged 10.1 per cent of the vote share. Yes, not too grand for one party. But spread evenly across seats, a real likely spoiler.

### WHAT ARE HIS CHANCES?

**B**y PK's own admission, it's either "arsh pe ya farsh pe", either top or bottom, fewer than 10 seats or more than 150. That said, he does see an opening in Bihar's bipolar political world, where Nitish aligns with the BJP and the RJD with the Congress. For too long, he says, voters have been trapped in a cycle of choosing between Lalu Yadav's RJD (in a bid to keep out the BJP), or backing Nitish's BJP alliance, out of an aversion to the former.

PK also has a strategy for Jan Suraaj's pan-Bihar solo sorties. All 243 tickets will be distributed in such a way as to mirror the proportional strength of Bihar's castes and communities. Every social group, he says, will see itself reflected in the party's candidate list. "Har samaj ko population basis par representation diya jayega," he declares.

However, while his promise of tickets by proportional population sounds radical, the reality is a bit more complicated. Representation on paper does not guarantee mobilisation on the ground. A ticket to a caste candidate does not automatically translate into loyalty votes, especially when older networks of patronage, intimidation and social respect are already in place.

A section of the commentariat believes Jan Suraaj's rise will hurt Nitish and the NDA more than Tejashwi, since PK's political persona aligns more with the CM's 'good governance' plank that sits well with a savarna base. Even a section of BJP voters may back him over the JD(U), which will contest no less than 100 seats, for there is fatigue with Nitish and his 20-year tenure.

And while the RJD's Muslim-Yadav base looks near-unshakeable, PK has also begun to probe one of its flanks for weaknesses. The promise of proportional ticket distribution may play a role here. PK has also been at his most provocative while addressing this

support base, Chirag ensured Nitish was reduced to his lowest tally in two decades. The spoiler effect was undeniable: small shifts in vote share had outsized consequences.

### DOUBLE OR NOTHING

**K**ishor's wager is that Jan Suraaj can replicate this, and on a far bigger scale. If Chirag could destabilise the status quo, then Jan Suraaj's targeted mobilisation across castes and communities might possibly redraw the state's electoral map. Political commentator Dr N.K. Choudhary, though, points to an obvious flaw in this idea. "Kishor does not have a com-

## A S.W.O.T. FOR JAN SURAAJ

**Strengths:** PK's agenda-setting ability, voter weariness with binary politics. Call to contest all 243 seats and caste-proportional ticketing bring additional twists in the poll drama

**Weaknesses:** Limited organisational depth,

inexperienced leadership, no entrenched caste base and the modest vote conversion in the 2024 bypoll debut

**Opportunities:** In a state effectively alternating between Nitish and Lalu since 1990, PK offers a fresh alternative

for voters. Could attract fence-sitters from both the NDA and Mahagathbandhan alliances

**Threats:** Being perceived as a spoiler that fragments established vote banks to the benefit of rivals; could marginalise Jan Suraaj

constituency. "You should fear no one other than Allah," he tells them. "Do not become the kerosene oil for RJD's lantern, merely to brighten Lalu's home." The line is both metaphor and indictment. He accuses the RJD of exploiting Muslim anxieties about the BJP, weaponising their fear to secure votes, while offering little in return.

PK is also inspired by Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) chief Chirag Paswan's 2020 score. He contested 135 seats, got only about 2.3 million votes and a solitary seat, yet could tilt dozens of contests. By cutting into the JD(U)

mitted voter base yet, so the impact will at best be marginal at this stage." Jan Suraaj's early outings attest to the potential, though, like the byelections late last year.

Meanwhile, Kishor, with his allegations against the JD(U)-BJP regime, has opened another front in the battle for Bihar. Reputations are fragile, and poll narratives are weapons. PK the disruptor has put both in play. The coming weeks will show whether his newly choreographed sequence can make more than headlines and win an election or two. ■

# SWAPAN K. CHATTERJEE

## An Inspiring Journey in Hi-Tech Engineering

### From Humble Beginnings to a Life of Purpose

Born into a humble family, Swapan K. Chatterjee's journey began at a local government school and later continued at the Rama Krishna Mission, Narendrapur—a temple of learning that provided free education, including hostel, food, clothing, and books. The Mission not only focused on academics but also emphasized psychological, intellectual, and spiritual development.

His dream of pursuing engineering became possible only after he secured the Jagdish Bose National Talent Search (JBNSTS) Scholarship, which provided complete financial support for his studies.

### Choosing Nation over Foreign Shores

As a mechanical engineering student, Swapan developed a deep interest in research. His work at IIT Madras was so impactful that a German university invited him to continue his research abroad. But guided by his mother's words and a deep sense of responsibility to his country, he chose to stay in India. Financial pressures led him to join the Tata Group as a design engineer, where he began shaping India's industrial journey.

### Pioneering Cleanroom Technology in India

In the early 1990s, Swapan became one of the pioneering engineers to introduce Cleanroom Technology in India. Along with his team, he helped establish the country's first Automatic PLC-controlled pharmaceutical plant as per US FDA regulations. Over the next decade, he contributed to building numerous pharmaceutical plants across India, helping position the country as a global leader in pharmaceutical exports.

His contributions also include the design and development of facilities for the Oral Polio Vaccine, Swine Flu vaccine, and cleanrooms for the Ministry of Defence, Indian Space Research, and the solar PV cell industry. For these achievements, he was awarded Honorary Doctorate in Cleanroom Engineering by the National American University.

### A Visionary Entrepreneur

After decades of working with multinational corporations, Swapan realized a critical gap—India lacked trained cleanroom experts, as no engineering institution, not even the IITs, offered it in their curriculum.

To address this, he founded CGMP Projects Pvt. Ltd., where he recruits and trains young engineers in both classrooms and on-site projects. Under his leadership, CGMP has grown into one of India's most renowned cleanroom organizations, recognized among the Top 100 SMEs in India.



### Awards and Recognition

**Swapan and CGMP have received numerous accolades, including:**

- Excellence in Hi-Tech Engineering & Construction Award (Economic Times & Times of India, 2025)
- Most Renowned Organisation in India for Cleanroom Design & Construction (2025)
- Tech SME of the Year (ASSOCHAM, 2025)
- Global Platinum Business Excellence Award (Vigyan Bhavan, 2024)
- Iconic Brand (Vikshit Bharat Abhiyan, 2025)
- MSME Best CEO of the Year (MSMSE-CII, 2025)
- Leading Brand of the Year (Eminent Research, 2025)
- India 500 SME Award (SME India, 2024)
- Most Promising Brand of the Year (ASSOCHAM, 2024 & 2025)
- ...and many more.

### A Leader Who Inspires

Swapan has always faced struggles with immense patience and confidence. His leadership inspires CGMP employees to become competent, responsible, and ethical. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he and his young team worked tirelessly to establish multiple testing labs across the country, answering the nation's urgent need.

To his employees, CGMP is not just a company—it is a family, with Swapan as a fatherly figure, guiding and supporting them through every challenge. This unique bond sets CGMP apart from other organizations.

### Empowering Society & Strengthening the Nation

At 63, Swapan believes this is just the beginning. His vision is to develop a new generation of engineers, who will build the future of our nation with Hi-tech engineering using knowledge, ethics and dedication. Beyond business, he is committed to social initiatives, supporting education and healthcare for underprivileged children. His team remains his greatest strength, giving him the energy to overcome challenges and continue his inspiring journey.

Swapan K. Chatterjee's life is a powerful example of vision, sacrifice, and determination. From humble beginnings to national recognition, his story reflects the spirit of a true nation-builder. His mantra of life is simple "Whatever you do in life, think about the nation first and help to build Viksit Bharat of 2047".

*This philosophy aligns deeply with the vision of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, whom Swapan K. Chatterjee regards as a guiding light. Swapan says- dream big but keep your feet on the ground. To him, success should not be measured by wealth or position, but by how many lives you uplift along the way. Never compromise on honesty, discipline and hard work.*

# NEW RAGE FOR O



# FFLINE

Pushing back an epidemic of digitised loneliness, Gen Z is connecting with real people through mystery walks, blindfolded conversations, fake weddings and dinner with strangers

By SONALI ACHARJEE



**As the twenty-first century blues spread their malaise,** Gen Z (persons born between 1996 and 2010) is mounting a fightback. The descending steps into the abyss are well-delimited—a strenuous professional life leaving little time for other people, a compensatory immersion in social media to connect, yet the gradual drifting apart of friends, resulting in a creeping loneliness. Preeti Mehra, a 28-year-old management consultant, opted for a remedy. On a humid Thursday in Gurugram, she walked into a small Sector 29 café. The invite promised ‘dinner with strangers’, a curated supper seating you next to people you’ve never met—the antidote to late nights, early flights and Zoom fatigue. Friends had scattered—to jobs, marriages, child-care—and chats felt hollow. What Preeti wanted was laughter across a table and the warmth of a shared meal.

Her impulse reflects a wider shift. A NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) study published in August finds that the biggest emotional anxiety for 18- to 25-year-olds is about losing close friendships. Now, Gen Z, that most connected cohort, is logging out to log back into real life. The craving for in-person contact is reshaping friendships, and urbane events that throw strangers together are the toast of Indian towns. “There’s a desperate need for connection that likes and filters can’t meet. Young people are creating intentional offline spaces because presence itself is reassurance,” says Delhi-based psychologist Dr Upasana Chaddha.

Across India, twenty-somethings are meeting in parks, around sketchbooks and dinner tables, at board-game cafés and at improv jams, where a mix of improvisers play or perform practically anything together on a stage. They aren’t networking; they are rebuilding friendships as a habit. “Dating apps have failed their purpose and become a mess of mismatched outlooks; meeting offline lets singles know one another through real-life shared experiences,” says Ravinder Singh, founder of Let’s Socialise, an app that curates offline events for singles.

The practice is catching on—BookMyShow counted 30,687 live events across 319 cities in 2024—an 18 per cent year-on-year jump. Nearly 890,000 people turned up solo, signalling that ar-

▲ **LONELY NO MORE**  
A singles meet-up by  
Let's Socialise at a  
Delhi restaurant



Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

# GOTTA BE TALKIN', WALKIN', LIVIN'...

**A few clubs and groups helping youngsters meet and socialise across activities**

## ↳ DINNER WITH STRANGERS

**Activity:** Curated suppers where strangers share meals and conversations

**Footfall:** 40–60 per event

**Cities:** Delhi NCR, Kolkata, Trivandrum, Bhubaneswar

**Cost:** Rs 1,000–Rs 2,000 per head

## ↳ GIRLS WHO WALK

**Activity:** Women gather for weekly city walks for safe, casual socialising

**Footfall:** 80–150 per walk

**Cities:** Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru

**Cost:** Free

## ↳ BLINDFOLDED CONVERSATIONS

**Activity:** Participants talk without visual cues, focusing on voice and words

**Footfall:** 25–40 per session

**Cities:** Delhi, Bengaluru

**Cost:** Rs 500–Rs 1,000

## ↳ MYSTERY WALKS

**Activity:** Secret-location walks with strangers, ending in cafés or bars

**Footfall:** 50–70 per walk

**Cities:** Delhi NCR, Pune, Mumbai

**Cost:** Rs 800–Rs 1,200

## ↳ GAME NIGHTS WITH STRANGERS

**Activity:** Board/ card games

**Footfall:** 40–80 per night

**Cities:** Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Chennai

**Cost:** Rs 500–Rs 1,000

## ↳ FAKE WEDDINGS

**Activity:** Staged wedding

▼ ONLY CONNECT  
A session of Blindfolded Conversation in Delhi organised by Justbaat



parties where attendees play roles, bond over revelry

**Footfall:** 100–250 per event

**Cities:** Bengaluru, Pune, Delhi NCR

**Cost:** Rs 2,000–Rs 3,500

## ↳ SILENT READING CLUB

**Activity:** Reading together in silence, then optional chats or book swaps

**Footfall:** 30–80 per session

**Cities:** Mumbai,

Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai

**Cost:** Free–Rs 300

## ↳ HUMAN LIBRARY

**Activity:** Attendees 'borrow' people with lived experiences for conversations

**Footfall:** 60–150 per event

**Cities:** Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Kochi, Chandigarh

**Cost:** Rs 200–Rs 600

iving alone is no longer a social risk—it is the point. On a wider bandwidth, the money trail is impressive—the FICCI-EY media and entertainment analysis pegs organised live events at over Rs 12,000 crore in 2024, with growth on the back of ticketed gigs, cultural festivals and curated social experiences.

Deloitte's 2025 Gen Z & Millennial Survey shows Indian Gen Zers value emotional well-being as much as money and success. International research backs this. A 2023 study in *Scientific Re-*

*ports* found in-person communication the strongest predictor of mental health during lockdowns. Similarly, a 2024 report in *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences* showed young adults rate offline, face-to-face interactions as more enjoyable than digital exchanges. The takeaway is not anti-tech but pro-human: use the phone to discover people, then put it face-down to meet them.

Dr Samir Parikh, director of mental health at Fortis Healthcare, says what sustains friendship is the micro-signals

screens can't deliver. "Tone, timing, eye contact—the signals our brains use to judge safety and trust." Dr Sameer Malhotra, senior director, department of mental health and behavioural sciences at Max Healthcare, adds that even short in-person encounters make people more willing to return. That is why weekly reading circles, monthly dinners and fortnightly improv jams matter. They are not dramatic; they are dependable. And dependability, Dr Malhotra notes, is the soil in which friendships grow.

## WHERE FRIENDSHIPS BEGIN

**S**tart with the dinner table that rescued Mehra's weekend. The concept of dinner with strangers is not a novelty. The social collective Thrifty X runs 'Dine-in with Strangers' at restaurants in Gurugram, Delhi, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Thiruvananthapuram; seats are capped at 8–12 to keep tables intimate—and routinely sell out. In September, their listings showed Gurugram dinners and city hops—events in cities across India at the same time—alongside formats like 'Game Nights with Strangers'. Rent-a-friend is now a reality too. Apps like DosthAdda, FRND and PalMatch—as well as Facebook and Telegram communities—list profiles of people who rent out their time for a fee starting at Rs 50 an hour. One can scroll through bios, apply filters for age, language or interests, and book someone. These companions are meant to be strictly non-romantic and governed by clear rules: no intrusive personal questions and no private locations. A companion arrives at the agreed venue and spends the booked duration.

On Sunday mornings, Bengaluru's Cubbon Park is dotted with silent reading circles. Cubbon Reads, which began in 2023, grew into a weekly gathering: at its peak, over 500 readers gathered under Tree No. 3256. The template travelled briskly to over 60 offshoots, from Bessy Reads on Chennai's beachfront to Juhu and Bandra Reads in Mumbai. It is simple: read together, then talk—about books or nothing in particular. It is how Pranav Sinha, 23, an advertising intern, found his first friend circle in Mumbai: a lent pen, a shared snack and, by the third Sunday, a plan with pals.

City Girls Who Walk Delhi began in March 2023 with seven women. Since then, the community says it has walked with over 4,000 across Sunder Nursery, Lodhi Garden, Purana Qila and Amrit Udyam. Weekend routes, posted on Instagram, draw 90–100 walkers—ensuring safety in numbers. Neha Kapoor, 23, an architecture student, arrived for an internship. "I just had to show up in comfy shoes," she says. "By the end, I

had a brunch invite and a buddy."

Prefer improv to ambling? In Delhi, Kaivalya Plays runs open jams where first-timers play and perform—storytelling, stand-up comedy, theatre, music—alongside regulars. Warm-ups reduce self-consciousness and the post-jam chai often leads to deeper bonds. In the board-game scene, newcomers learn Catan or Ticket to Ride in community meets in Mumbai's Andheri and Bandra; in Bengaluru, cafés seat solos with groups at open tables.



**"THERE'S A DESPERATE NEED FOR CONNECTION THAT LIKES AND FILTERS CAN'T MEET. YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CREATING INTENTIONAL OFFLINE**

**SPACES BECAUSE PRESENCE ITSELF IS REASSURANCE"**

**DR UPASANA CHADDHA**  
*Delhi-based psychologist*

If wielding a pencil is one's forte, there are sketch-crawls organised by Bengaluru-based Penciljam that fills lawns and boulevards. Throughout August, over 100 sketchers gathered under trees at the National Gallery of Modern Art. Tara Iyer, 26, a sustainability consultant, stumbled into a session after a tough week. "Someone passed me a kneaded eraser like a secret handshake. I drew leaves badly for two hours and got invited back."

Some formats cut out the performance bit. In the Human Library—a concept where a reader 'borrows' a person for 15 minutes and listens to her life experiences—you enter as strang-

ers, leave as acquaintances, sometimes as allies. Blindfolded Conversations, rotated by Thrifty X through Delhi and Bengaluru and by Justbaat across India, go further: People talk with eyes covered, so looks and labels don't get in the way and talk moves to the honest bits. The set-up lowers social anxiety, helping strangers build judgement-free rapport.

Cycling groups have their days too. In Kochi, the women-led Freedom Night Ride has become a city ritual, drawing enthusiasts from late-teens to people in their 60s, who roll through the old city's lanes.

And because this is India, even the fake wedding—a ticketed, tongue-in-cheek *shaadi* where nobody marries—has arrived. You dress up, there is a *baraat* and cake, and the aim is to dance and befriend. It is all delightfully absurd but, like in real weddings, you meet people you will recognise next time.

## BELONGING IS KEY

**W**hy do these formats work? Low-stakes curation helps—a facilitator at dinner, or a host who seats a shy newcomer beside a steady one. Shared environs and tasks lead to bonding—pedalling the same night route, reading under the same tree. Inclusivity is built in too: women-only walks, 'come-as-you-are' art meets. As Dr Parikh puts it, "Belonging isn't a grand gesture. It's the small, repeated invitation: see you next week."

Affordability helps too. Many formats are free (walking clubs, sketch crawls) or low-ticket (Rs 300–Rs 1,200 for board-game nights and open improv). On a weekend, a quick scroll reveals open mics for people to perform, mystery walks and sell-out suppers. The appeal? You show up, the structure does the heavy lifting, you leave with friends.

In a world saturated by screens, Gen Zers have embraced offline friendships to anchor identity, soothe anxiety and build family outside bloodlines. Make eye contact. Share a bench. Split a sandwich. It is striking how quickly conversation becomes connection when a city gives you a place to sit and express yourself. ■



# POWER MEETS PURPOSE

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**THE INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE – MUMBAI BROUGHT TOGETHER VOICES**  
**DEFINING INDIA'S ANXIETIES, ASPIRATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES TODAY**



## MAHARASHTRA'S MASTER STRATEGIST: WHAT DRIVES FADNAVIS 3.0?

“Devendra was never alone to begin with. It's just an illusion that people create. And it's to my advantage that they think Devendra is alone, so they underestimate Devendra”

“Despite launching many schemes, Maharashtra maintains top fiscal health, with debt-GDP ratio contained at 18-19%. It shows our strong economic management”

**DEVENDRA FADNAVIS**  
Chief Minister, Maharashtra



## LIFE IN ZERO GRAVITY: ONE SMALL STEP, INDIA'S GIANT LEAP



**F**rom a chief minister defending coalition politics to an astronaut recalling India's leap into space, the India Today Conclave – Mumbai (September 25-26) offered a vivid tableau of ideas for a changing world. The two-day conclave opened with the session 'Maharashtra's Master Strategist: What Drives Fadnavis 3.0?', where Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "The BJP acts as that strong pole with 187 seats, ensuring no major issues," defending the coalition government's stability while outlining a positive fiscal outlook despite welfare spending.

Later, in a session, Yuva Sena president Aaditya Thackeray criticised the government for its language policy. Turning to the BMC, where elections are due this year, he said the civic body's finances remained robust during the undivided Shiv Sena's rule, but the metro's problems are many. State IT and cultural affairs minister Ashish Shelar stressed the urgency of preparing Mumbai for frequent flooding due to climate change.

Political activist Yogendra Yadav, lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay and former chief election commissioner Om Prakash Rawat debated the fraught special intensive revision of electoral rolls and its implications for assembly polls. On the RSS's centenary, author Tushar Gandhi warned that "Godse's voice finds more resonance and empathy than Gandhi's," while *Organiser* editor Pravfulla Ketkar reminded the audience that M.S. Golwalkar, the second RSS chief, was the first to denounce Gandhi's assassin.

The defence and diplomacy sessions shifted the focus outward. Lt Gen. Dhiraj Seth, Air Marshal Surat Singh and Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan detailed the precision and synergy behind Operation Sindoora, while former diplomats Meera Shankar, Jawed Ashraf and Ajay Bisaria cautioned against relying too heavily on a single trade partner.

Astronaut Group Captain Shubhanshu

**“Today, in 2025, the Indian flag reached the ISS for the first time and there was a person who conversed in Hindi with the Indian leader currently running the country. I think that was a strong message to the world that we are here and, this time, we are here to stay”**

**GROUP CAPTAIN SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA, Astronaut, ISRO**

Photographs by BANDEEP SINGH

Shukla described India's space exploration as a "golden period", while AI experts Srikant Velamakanni, R. Chandrasekhar and Deep Mukherjee stressed the need to close India's technology gaps. Former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud called for speedier case disposal and greater transparency in judicial appointments.

The business session featured entrepreneur Ananya Birla on microfinance and legacy, NSE CEO Ashish Chauhan on India's global positioning and economists Sajjid Chinoy, Samiran Chakraborty and Tanvee Gupta Jain on the risks of US tariffs. Healthcare and culture sessions rounded off the spectrum—from Dr P. Murali Doraiswamy on neurological threats to candid reflections on recognition and purpose by actor Rani Mukerji, producer Ekta Kapoor and actor Bhumi Pednekar. ■

**-by M.G. Arun**

## VOTER ROLL REVISION:



**“Of 7.24 crore people of Bihar, 987 applications have been filed on the ground of someone being a foreigner... just 215 are Muslims”**

**YOGENDRA YADAV**  
Political Activist;  
Founder, Swaraj India

## NEXTGEN WEST: THE NEW LEADERSHIP CURVE

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



**“The 2030 Commonwealth Games is our ambition. Khel Mahakumbh saw 7.3 mn participants, many reaching national and international levels”**

**HARSH SANGHAVI, BJP  
MoS - Home, Gujarat**



**“In our party, No. 1 position is open, No. 2 is open too. It's not a family party. There is no owner, also no servant. Whoever works hard will reach that position”**

**SHRIKANT SHINDE, Shiv Sena  
LS MP, Kalyan, Maharashtra**



**“You just have to fight. So, I keep on fighting without expecting anything, putting forward real issues of Maharashtra”**

**ROHIT PAWAR, NCP-SCP  
MLA, Karjat-Jamkhed,  
Maharashtra**

## MASTER RESET OR MANIPULATION?



MANDAR DEODHAR

**“The MoS, Home, stated in Parliament, referring to 2016, that there are currently 20 mn infiltrators living in India”**

**ASHWINI  
UPADHYAY, Lawyer**

**“Electoral rolls are the bedrock of free and fair elections. Now, voters are in trouble, as they are being asked to provide proof and documents”**

**O.P. RAWAT, Ex-CEC**

## ALLIES, ADVERSARIES, AND THE ARITHMETIC OF SURVIVAL



**“In 1997, when we first came to run the BMC, it was in a Rs 600 crore deficit. When we left the BMC due for elections in 2022, it had a Rs 92,000 crore surplus—without adding a single hidden tax or overcharging the people of Mumbai”**

**AADITYA THACKERAY  
President, Yuva Sena,  
Shiv Sena (UBT)**

## JOINTNESS IN OPERATIONS: ENHANCING TRI-SERVICES SYNERGY FOR FUTURE WARS

“Operation Sindoors outcome was essentially decided in the first 25 minutes due to synchronised decision-making... involving all three services and the Chief of Defence Staff”

**AIR MARSHAL SURAT SINGH**  
Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Air Command



“Operation Sindoors gave us a new normal. It showcased India’s readiness for full-spectrum deterrence and revealed the importance of integrating cyber, space and Artificial Intelligence capabilities”

**LT GEN. DHIRAJ SETH**  
General Officer  
Commanding-in-Chief,  
Southern Command

“The navy’s capacity to challenge enemy militaries and exert economic pressure during Operation Sindoors required clear political directives... [We were] ready to strike hard”

**VICE ADMIRAL KRISHNA SWAMINATHAN**  
Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command



“We cannot rely on the US as a partner for offensive defence systems because they have a history of imposing ex post facto sanctions”

**MEERA SHANKAR**  
Former Ambassador of India to the US

## 100 YEARS OF RSS: NATION-BUILDING OR NATIONALISM?

“I have a big problem with this term ‘nation-building’. As far as the RSS is concerned, our work is not nation-making, it is nation-reconstructing”

**J. NANDAKUMAR**  
All India Executive Member,  
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh



CHANDRAADEEP KUMAR

## US AND THE GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS



MANDAR DEODHAR

“The US is retreating from a global order it itself created... there will be a diminution of its influence in the Indo-Pacific region”

JAWED ASHRAF

Former Ambassador of India to France and Monaco

“Trump 2.0 is governed more by MAGA ideologues... and Pakistan's transactionalism is part of it”

AJAY BISARIA, Former High Commissioner of India to Pakistan, Canada, Poland and Lithuania

## CONVENTIONAL WARS UNDER THE NUCLEAR UMBRELLA: THE INDIA-PAKISTAN CONUNDRUM

“India's 'no first use' doctrine is backed by the promise of 'massive retaliation' in a nuclear strike”

LT GEN. RAJESH PANT

Former National Cyber Security Coordinator, PMO

“Nuclear weapons, paradoxically, prevent large wars but encourage instability and small conflicts”

WALTER C. LADWIG III, Associate Prof. in International Relations, King's College London

## BATTLE FOR BIHAR: WHO'S WINNING?

“The unhappy youth is divided between Tejashwi Yadav and Prashant Kishor, who has also targeted the former's educational qualifications, denting his image among the youth”

AMITABH TIWARI  
Managing Partner, Ascendia Strategies;  
Founder Partner, VoteVibe



“One cannot win Bihar only with the Muslim-Yadav votes. That is Lalaji's traditional vote bank, but when did he last win Bihar? The only person who has been winning the state is Nitish Kumar”

YASHWANT DESHMUKH  
Founder, CVoter Foundation

“If the direct benefit transfer to women works and they shift in bulk, our life [as psephologists] becomes easier. But today, even the voters of Bihar don't know whom to vote for”

PRADEEP GUPTA, Chairman & Managing Director, Axis My India



## MIDDLE CLASS: THE NEW BULLS IN THE MARKET

“People with money come, lose money, and gain experience. Risk and return go hand in hand. If you take higher risk in small or mid-cap stocks, volatility will be high but returns may also be higher”

**NILESH SHAH**  
Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd



“You have to be able to identify the right companies, sit through the volatility, take a medium to long-term view and just enjoy the party”

**MADHUSUDAN KELA**  
Promoter, MK Ventures

“For retail investors, mutual funds remain a safer choice because professionals dedicate their time to research and have learnt from their mistakes”

**PRAMOD GUBBI**  
Co-founder, Marcellus

THE



“India should not retaliate against higher US tariffs... The government has been very mature about not escalating this”

**DR SAJJID Z. CHINOY**  
MD and Chief India Economist, J.P. Morgan

## THE RSS IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY,



“The word ‘Hindu’ defines Bharat’s USP. An atheist, monotheist, polytheist, omnitheist can all be Hindu. That freedom is only given in this land”

**PRAFULLA KETKAR**  
Editor, Organiser, and author of *100 Years: Resolve for Selfless Service (RSS)*

## 50 PER CENT PENALTY: WHAT NOW?



MANDAR DEODHAR

**“We can act on what we have delayed, like the GST cut to boost consumption, which could've come sooner”**

**DR SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY**, Chief Economist, India, Citibank

**“Around \$35 billion of our goods are exposed to higher tariffs—8% of the GDP; 10 to 15 million Indian employees can be affected”**

**TANVEE GUPTA JAIN**, Chief India Economist, UBS

## CONSTITUTION'S MORAL COMPASS: DISABILITY, DIGNITY & COURTROOM BATTLES



## CENTURY: AND INDIA'S DESTINY



MANDAR DEODHAR

**“Gandhi never opposed cow slaughter because people in India treat cows as a source of food. When there was an agitation to ban it, he said we can't emulate the rules of Pakistan”**

**TUSHAR GANDHI**  
Author, Senior Editor,  
*History Cell*

## MARKETS IN MOTION: THE NSE PERSPECTIVE

**“Day trading is clearly not productive. You could lose money. It is not for everyone. Ditto with derivatives. If you do not understand them, you should stay away from the activity”**

**ASHISH CHAUHAN**  
CEO, National Stock Exchange of India



**“I make no bones about the fact that I'm a devout Hindu. But the justice which we do is even-handed among communities. Every single day, you will have communities across the board seeking justice, to whom even-handed justice is delivered”**

**“To bring a sense of peace, equanimity and equilibrium in the work which you do as a judge, you pray or meditate every morning. What is wrong about that? I did the same with the Ayodhya verdict”**

**DR JUSTICE D.Y. CHANDRACHUD**  
Former Chief Justice of India



## HUMAN MIND VS MACHINE MIND: THE RACE FOR SUPERINTELLIGENCE

**“One of my goals is to democratise brain health. We don't want to just study white brains. We want to make brain research universal”**

**DR P. MURALI DORAI SWAMY**  
Professor, Duke Institute for Brain Sciences, Duke University



## THE AI REVOLUTION: PIVOT OR PERISH

**“India has a 1.4 bn population...why OpenAI or Google and Perplexity, everyone wants to target the Indian market”**

**SRIKANTH VELAMAKANNI**  
Co-founder, Fractal

**“The AI journey is just starting. The technology is itself evolving at a very rapid pace. The game is still wide open”**

**DEEP MUKHERJEE**  
Partner & Director, Risk Management & Data Science, BCG



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

**“Being three years behind in AI is a very long distance. So we not only have to cover those three years, but we have to do it twice as fast so that we catch up”**

**R. CHANDRASEKHAR**, Former President, NASSCOM; Former Secretary, Department of Information Technology

## PAANI BAI: THE WATER WIVES OF MAHARASHTRA



MANDAR DEODHAR

**“Historically, people of India managed their own water. But after Independence, governments didn't care about community knowledge”**

**RAJENDRA SINGH**, Water conservationist



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

**“If we empower people, give them knowledge about water conservation and soil conservation, they can become agents of change”**

**KIRAN RAO**  
Filmmaker; Co-founder, Paani Foundation



MANDAR DEODHAR

**“The water crisis today is almost a gendered crisis. Yes, it is an environmental crisis. It is also a health crisis; primarily for women”**

**POONAM MUTTREJA**  
Executive Director, Population Foundation of India



**“The key to fitness lies in mindset, consistency and peace... All women should take time out for themselves and engage in physical activity. Body size is not a barrier to exercise”**

**RITA MEHTA**  
Powerlifter

## LIVING WITH GLP-1: REDEFINING LIVES BEYOND THE SHOT



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

**“These are prescription medications for obesity or diabetes. We’ve launched education programmes to take away the stigma and encourage patients to talk to health-care professionals”**

**WINSELOW TUCKER**  
President and GM,  
Eli Lilly India

**“For the first time, you’ve got surgery in a pill. Anybody looking for a shortcut with GLP-1 is mistaken. Long-term lifestyle change must go hand in hand with these drugs”**

**DR MUFFAZAL LAKDAWALA**  
Director,  
Department of  
Minimal Access  
Surgical Sciences,  
Sir H.N. Reliance  
Foundation Hospital

**“We are growing as a country, as an economy. But the price we are paying is health. People living with obesity can actually bankrupt their health with more than 200-300 disease complications”**

**DR SHASHANK JOSHI**  
Senior  
Endocrinologist

## IMMORTALITY ENGINEERED: WE ALL DIE. WHAT IF WE DIDN’T HAVE TO?

**“Scientists today are not thinking about immortality but negligible senescence, or think of it as amortality”**

**DR AVI ROY**  
Co-founder, Founders Health, and London Longevity Club



Photographs by BANDEEP SINGH

## STRENGTH NOT SIZE



**“Fitness is the ability to do what you want to do, when you want to do, without second-guessing yourself”**

**SOHRAB KHUSHRUSHAMI**  
Founder,  
SOHFIT;  
Co-founder, The Func. Lab



### **POWER OF PRESENCE IN CHANGING INDUSTRY**

**“When I started in the Hindi film industry, I was seeking recognition, opportunities and acceptance. Today, I seek purpose and impact. I have evolved as an actor and individual”**

**BHUMI SATISH PEDNEKKAR, Actor**



### **QUEEN OF CONTENT: WOMAN WHO SHAPED INDIAN SCREENS**

**“Without a *Naagin*, no *Udta Punjab* or *Kathal* would happen. When you have economic buoyancy, you can produce films you believe in”**

**EKTA KAPOOR**  
Founder, Balaji Telefilms

MANDAR DEODHAR



**IT TAKES TWO TO**



## NEXT-GEN BUSINESS: BUILDING MORE THAN WEALTH

**“Social media can be messy, but there is so much potential to build a strong base with customers or teams”**

**ANANYA BIRLA**  
Businessperson & Artist



## TROLLED, TAGGED AND TAKEN ON: AMRUTA FADNAVIS UNFILTERED

**“Trolls will happen to every independent woman...they are like background music—you can either be disturbed or dance to that tune”**

**AMRUTA FADNAVIS**  
Banker, Singer, Social Worker

## TANGO: LOVE IS IN THE AIR AGAIN



## LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM INDIA'S SPORTING ICON

**“A hockey player's journey is understated... We leave home when we are 11, play for 8-9 years, get into the junior team, play junior nationals... There's no guarantee”**

**HARDIK SINGH, Vice Captain, Indian Hockey Team**



(Left to right) Actors Varun Dhawan, Janhvi Kapoor, Rohit Saraf and Sanya Malhotra discussed the need for collaboration on the film set (“I alone cannot create a wonderful scene. I need my co-stars to make it work,” said Dhawan) and gender parity in the Hindi film industry (“... It is [so rare] to have a leading man who... gets a high seeing his co-stars get lauded,” said Kapoor)



## TINY TABLES, BIG IDEAS: MINIATURE RESTAURANTS AS INNOVATION LABS

“People haven’t stopped eating sourdough toast or drinking Matcha teas. But now, there is room for Benne Dosa”

AKHIL IYER

Founder, Benne and The Artist Collective

“The challenge with fine dining in India is that restaurants are designed only to be seen... With Papa’s, we want you to walk out refreshed”

YASH BHANAGE, Founder & COO, Papa’s Bombay

“In Japan, a typical Ramen restaurant has one dish on the menu. With 25 dishes on ours, we have already adapted; there’s something in it for everybody”

KAVAN KUTTAPPA

Founder, Naru Noodle Bar

## AMCHI MUMBAI: HOW TO MAKE THE CITY FUTURE-READY



MANDAR DEODHAR

“Mumbai can never sink... We must focus on infrastructure, sustainability and jobs”

KAUSTUBH DHAVSE

Chief Advisor (Investments & Strategy) to Maharashtra CM

“Redevelopment is for workers. It is not a favour but duty... Mumbai is for everyone”

ASHISH SHELAR  
Minister of IT & Cultural Affairs, Maharashtra

“We need a single planning agency in Mumbai, [so it is not easy to shift blame]”

VARUN SARDESAI  
MLA, Bandra East, Maharashtra

## THE LANGUAGE WAR: THE ART OF IDENTITY ASSERTION

“Those who are agitating want no imposition of Hindi from grade one”

AJAY GUDAVARTHY  
Associate Professor, Centre for Political Studies, JNU

“In the globalised world, without English, there is no future...”

NARENDRA JADHAV  
Economist and former Rajya Sabha member



MANDAR DEODHAR

# BEYOND THE STAGE

WARMTH, WIT AND CAMARADERIE AT THE CONCLAVE



India Today Group Chairman and Editor-in-Chief Aroon Purie with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis



Aroon Purie with former Chief Justice of India Dr Justice D.Y. Chandrachud



Yuva Sena President Aaditya Thackeray with astronaut, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla

MANDAR DEODHAR



Shailesh Dalmia, Vice President of N.D. Dalmia Educational Society, with Devendra Fadnavis

BANDEEP SINGH

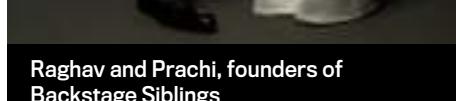


Retired IPS officer Dr Meeran Chadha Borwankar with actor Rani Mukerji

BANDEEP SINGH



Rohit Pawar, MLA from Karjat-Jamkhed, Maharashtra, and Shrikant Shinde, MP from Kalyan, Maharashtra



Raghav and Prachi, founders of Backstage Siblings

MANDAR DEODHAR



Dr Santosh Shetty, CEO of Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, with Hardik Singh, Vice Captain of the Indian hockey team



Actors Rohit Saraf, Sanya Malhotra, Janhvi Kapoor and Varun Dhawan with former CJI Dr Justice D.Y. Chandrachud

MANDAR DEODHAR



Actor Bhumi Satish Pednekar with Dr Pradipta Basu, Vice President of Business Development, Radico Khaitan

BANDEEP SINGH



Piano prodigy Lydian Nadhaswaram

BANDEEP SINGH



MILIND SHELTE

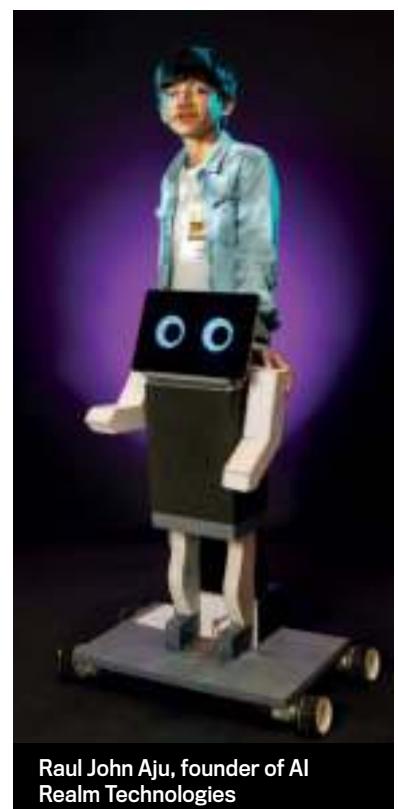


Actor Sanya Malhotra with founder of Balaji Telefilms Ekta Kapoor

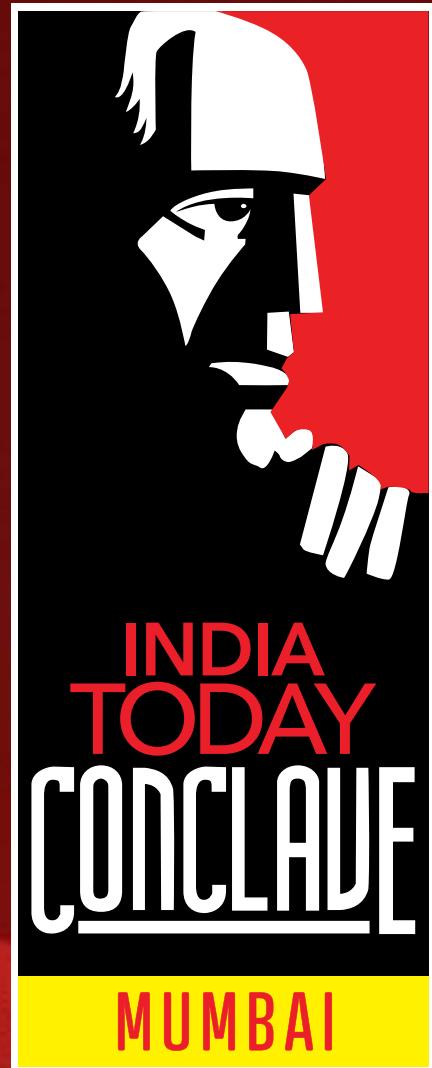
CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



Dancers Anuj, Prashant, Kunal and Rudra



Raul John Aju, founder of AI Realm Technologies



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# No Full Stops

**RANI MUKERJI** on winning a National Award late, living private and dreaming ahead

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



**Q. Thirty years in cinema and you finally won your first National Award for *Mrs. Chatterjee Vs Norway*. Many thought you should have won for *Black*.**

My blinkers came on when I didn't win for *Black*. I was like, 'Okay, even when you do your best work, it might not be in your favour.' I was like, don't be disappointed, keep working hard and maybe you need to do better, and I kept doing that. I have always believed in *shraddha* [faith] and *sabori* [patience], and to work hard and do my best in my craft and not disappoint my fans.

**Q. Do you see the award as a culmination of the body of work you have put together?**

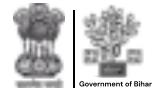
I would like to see it as an eternity. I wouldn't like to see it as a full stop because I have lots more things to do and more National Awards to win. Maybe this is just the start.

**Q. Images of you and Shah Rukh Khan at the National Awards went viral on social media. But you aren't on Instagram?**

It feels special that he and I won in the same year; it made it all the more special. I am not on social media by clear choice. My husband [filmmaker Aditya Chopra] doesn't want to be seen [in public]. And I don't want to be in trouble with my fans if they ask me, 'Where is your husband's picture?' I don't want to say he is Mr India. I have also not put my daughter out there. I'd also like to protect her till I can.

**Q. Interestingly, Aditya has never directed you. When will that happen?**

If he ever has to direct me, he will have the upper hand, and I will never want that. As a Bengali woman, never, *kabhi nahin*. I would like to believe I am the captain of the ship in my and Adi's life.



Road Construction Department, Bihar  
Road to Progress



**Through the collaborative efforts of the  
Central and State Government**

**1.85 Lakh Crore have been allocated for the development of  
National Highways in Bihar**

### 5 MAJOR EXPRESSWAYS ARE UNDER PROGRESS IN THE STATE

Cost: ₹26,704 crore

**407 km**  
Raxaul - Haldia

Cost: ₹29,724 crore

**417 km**  
Gorakhpur - Siliguri

Cost: ₹28,415 crore

**245 km**  
Patna - Purnea

Cost: ₹11,207 crore

**177.37 km**  
Varanasi - Kolkata

Cost: ₹22,800 crore

**380 km**  
Buxar - Bhagalpur  
(Proposed)



### CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH - SPEED CORRIDORS

Cost: ₹10,022 crore

**170.60 km**  
Patna - Bettiah

Cost: ₹9,822 crore

**202.91 km**  
Mokama - Munger - Mirzachowki

Cost: ₹10,484 crore

**266.71 km**  
Amas - Darbhanga - Jaynagar

Cost: ₹3,335 crore

**83.09 km**  
Naugachia - Bhagalpur - Hansdiha

Cost: ₹10,330 crore

**236.36 km**

Mehrauna - Siwan - Masrakh - Chakiya -  
Sheohar - Sitamarhi - Bhittamod

Cost: ₹4,221 crore

**70.69 km**

Purnea - Narayanpur - Sahebganj

### OTHER IMPORTANT NH PROJECTS IN THE STATE

Cost: ₹6,001 crore

**130 km**  
Patna - Gaya - Dobhi  
(Work almost completed)

Cost: ₹1,183 crore

**44.60 km**  
Bakhtiyarpur - Mokama  
(Work completed)

Cost: ₹1,871 crore

**8.15 km**  
Aunta - Simaria  
(Work completed)

Cost: ₹2,280 crore

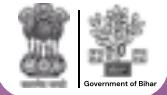
**90 km**  
Arwal - Jehanabad - Biharsharif  
(4 - lane highway proposed)

Cost: ₹5,850 crore (Approx)

**94 km**  
Chhapwa - Bettiah - Bagaha  
(4 - lane highway proposed)

With the completion of these projects, Patna can be easily reached within **3.5 hours** from the remotest areas of the state.

Expressways and high - speed corridors are paving the path of Bihar's development.



A TRANSFORMATIVE STEP IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

## MUKHYAMANTRI MAHILA ROJGAR YOJANA

FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Financial assistance of up to

**₹2.10 lakh**



One woman from every family will receive **₹10,000** directly in her bank account to start a business of her choice.

No last date—applications open until all eligible beneficiaries are covered in rural and urban areas.



Based on assessment, women entrepreneurs to receive further assistance of up to **₹2 lakh**

### Process to join the scheme in Rural Areas (Accepting applications from September 7, 2025)

Applications from SHG members will be taken collectively during special Village Organization meetings.

Women not part of an SHG must first submit their application in the prescribed format to their Village Organization (VO).

### Process to join the scheme in Urban Areas (Accepting applications from September 10, 2025)

Women associated with SHGs can apply for the scheme during designated meetings organised by the Area-Level Organization (ALO) or municipal body.

Women not associated with a SHG can apply online through the website [www.brlps.in](http://www.brlps.in)

#### Eligibility (Rural and Urban)

- Mandatory for women to be associated with a Self-Help Group (SHG).
- Eligible women must be between 18 and 60 years of age.
- Neither the applicant nor her husband should be an income taxpayer or employed in a government job (regular or contractual).



#### Any demand for registration fees must be reported

- Rural Areas: JEEViKA Block or District Office, Block Office, Deputy Development Commissioner, or District Officer's Office.
- Urban Areas: Respective Municipal body office.