

South Conclave: Leading the Future

MISSION EAST: PM'S NEW POLL PLANK / GUJARAT INFRA: CRACKS IN THE SYSTEM

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SEPTEMBER 29, 2025 ₹100

INDIA TODAY



The broken Old Manali Bridge, after heavy rains caused the Beas to surge

CLIMATE CHAOS

WHY IS IT HAPPENING?

THE RAPIDLY RISING FREQUENCY OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS IS DEVASTATING INDIA WITH FLOODS, DROUGHTS AND CYCLONES

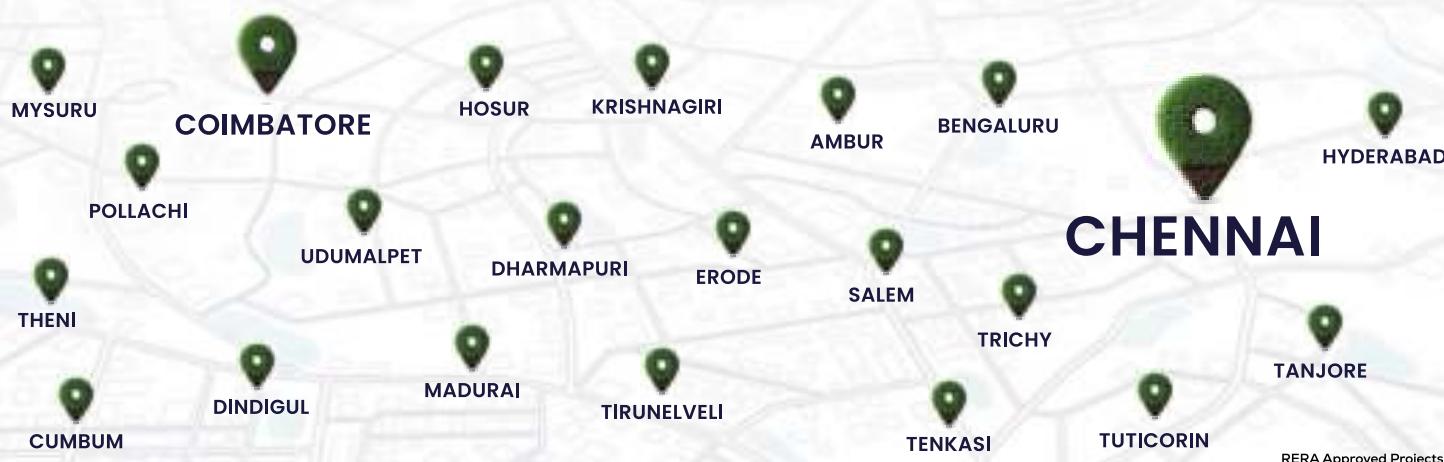
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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Climate chaos appears to be the new normal for India. We are inundated by visual evidence of the havoc it's causing. Much of Punjab resembles a sea: some 1,900 villages across 23 districts under water, after a record rainfall of 1,000 per cent above normal in the first week of September. The toll is stark: 56 dead, nearly half a million acres of farmland submerged, about Rs 12,000 crore lost. The images from neighbouring Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir are equally frightening: monster floods washing away villages, hillsides crumbling and turning bridges, lorries and riverside hotels into floating debris. Himachal has counted 45 cloudbursts, 91 flash floods and 105 major landslides just in this one season. It's a cautionary tale. For, India is now among the top ten nations most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

In fact, extreme weather events, be it floods, droughts, cyclones or heat waves, are devastating India with increasing intensity and frequency every year. In 2022, India saw such events on 314 days. That rose to 318 days in 2023 and to 322 days by 2024. That's an alarming 88 per cent of 366 days last year that Indians were in a weather emergency. This year, in the 90 days from January to March, India saw extreme weather events on 87 days. Together, they exacted a brutal toll: 3,080 climate-related deaths in 2024–25, the highest in a decade. A June report by development consultancy IPE Global and advanced mapping solutions provider Esri India found 85 per cent of India's 738 districts to be vulnerable to extreme events, and the costs are mounting. For 1998–2017, a UN report pegged India's total losses in climate disasters at \$79.5 billion (Rs 7 lakh crore). By 2030, the RBI estimates that up to 4.5 per cent of India's GDP (Rs 11.5 lakh crore of the projected Rs 255 lakh crore GDP at constant prices) may be at risk from labour hours lost to extreme heat and humidity.

For India, global warming is no more a myth. The 10 warmest years since 1900 have all occurred in the last 15 years. Average temperatures here rose 0.69°C in just the past two decades. That may look modest, but in climate science each minute degree has an exponential effect. In fact, the entire planet is heating up at breakneck speed. The red lines have been crossed. The World Meteorological Organization declared 2024, the warmest in 175 years of record-keeping, as the first year that average global temperatures breached the 1.5°C threshold above pre-industrial levels. The 2015 Paris Climate Accord accepts that exceeding 2°C will take global conditions to levels never experienced before by human civilisation. Put simply, global warming is a result of massive amounts of carbon emissions caused by burning coal, oil and gas besides rampant deforestation in the past century. This causes oceans and water bodies to evaporate faster, leading to major disturbances in global climate patterns. For

every one degree rise in global temperatures, moisture in the atmosphere is estimated to rise by 7 per cent. This then pours down in huge quantities on vulnerable zones.

India is now a prime victim. The current havoc in the hills and northern plains, which our cover story chronicles, is direct proof. What has become critical is the climate mitigation and adaptation strategies India needs to adopt. Unfortunately, states have lagged on these measures and are paying the price. Punjab was warned about flood risk as early as April but took no mitigating action. Desilting of rivers and dams was not done on priority in Himachal. Instead, it has blithely sanctioned buildings and infrastructure on vulnerable riverbanks and hillsides, as have Uttarakhand and Kashmir. Major cities, too, are victims of civic apathy and corruption, with Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai regularly going under due to poor drainage management. "The biggest problem is the lack of implementation of environmental bylaws by local bodies, with the connivance of contractors, government agencies and political patronage violating all safety norms," says Prof. Sanjay Srivastava, who chairs an inter-governmental body on climate resilience.

Correctives exist, but they demand urgency. Experts call for strict regulation of construction, roads, drainage and power supply. Cities must be redesigned as "urban sponges"—with permeable pavements, parks, rain gardens and effective drainage to soak up excess water. Dams must be regularly desilted to restore capacity. Encroachments on riverbanks and hillsides must be banned. Disaster management forces must be strengthened, evacuation routes mapped, shelters prepared and awareness spread. Odisha has shown how foresight and rigorous protocols can save lives during cyclones. The same culture of preparedness must spread nationwide.

Equally, we need hyperlocal forecasting so that vulnerability can be plotted down to the kilometre. Adaptation also requires climate-sensitive policies across sectors. Agriculture must rapidly shift to hardier, drought-resilient crops. Urban planning must integrate rainfall and drainage data. And the root cause must be addressed. The government's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2070 and 50 per cent energy through renewables by 2030 is the right direction. But ambition must translate into relentless execution.

Climate change is no longer tomorrow's threat; it is today's lived reality. India cannot afford apathy or short-cuts. Prevention, not *jugaad*, must be the national mindset. Only then can we hope to shield our people from a future of permanent emergencies.



▲ Aug. 11, 2002

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(Aroon Purie)

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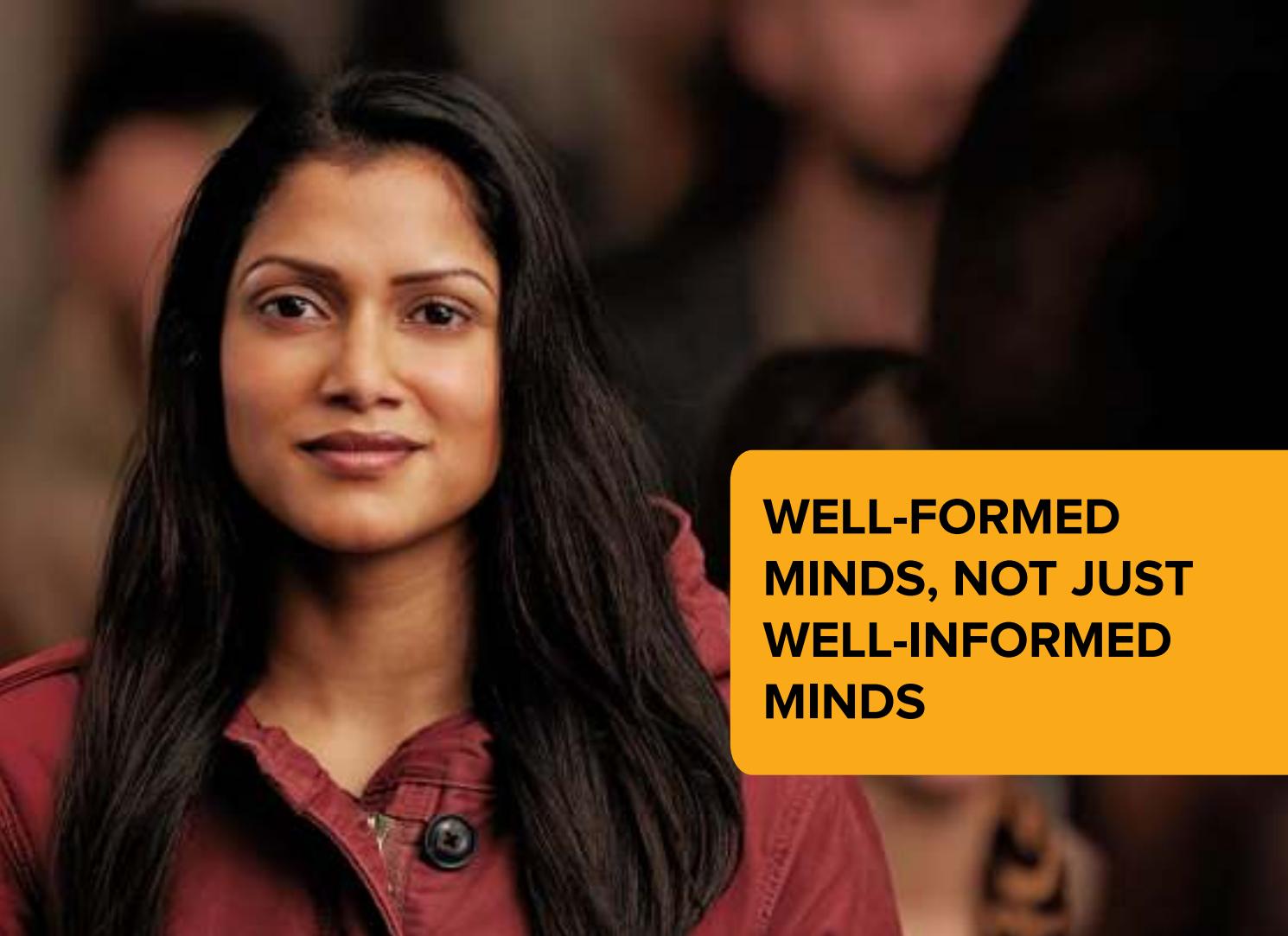
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UPFRONT

HEALTHWATCH: A NEW CANCER VACCINE? PG 12

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PLUMES FOR PEACE

PM Narendra
Modi at an event
in Churachandpur,
Manipur, Sept. 13

► MISSION EAST

PM'S NEW POLL PLANK

Not peace or development but addressing the widely perceived threat from illegal migration was the dominant theme running through PM Modi's tour of the east

By KAUSHIK DEKA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tour of eastern states from September 13 to 15, sweeping through Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, West Bengal and Bihar, ostensibly showcased the government's commitment to regional development. Yet beneath the project inaugurations lay a political stratagem. The PM's first visit to Manipur since ethnic clashes erupted in May 2023 might have been expected to herald serious reconciliation efforts between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. Instead, it turned out to be an exercise in crystallising the theme of illegal immigration as the BJP's defining electoral narrative for impending assembly elections—Bihar later this year, followed by West Bengal and Assam in 2026. Its overall tenor could be linked to Modi's Independence Day announcement of a national "demography mission" to address anxieties about demographic change, particularly in border states. Modi's itinerary, in turn, allowed him to weave that broader theme into a tapestry of local grievances.

MISSES IN MANIPUR?

Consider the PM's approach to Manipur, where he spent barely half a day, split between Kuki-dominated Churachandpur and Meitei stronghold Imphal. In Churachandpur, Modi talked about development projects and appealed for peace. However, in capital Imphal, he also spoke about cross-border infiltration. The Meitei community allege that an influx of Chin refugees from Myanmar—ethnically affiliated with Kuki-Zos—has altered the state's demographic equilibrium. The Kuki-Zos assert their indigenous status and view the anti-immigration drive as a thinly-veiled excuse for ethnic expansionism and land grab. One of the triggers behind the violence that has claimed over 200 lives and displaced 60,000 people was former chief minister Biren Singh's aggressive campaign against "illegal immigrants from Myanmar". By reprising that theme in Imphal, Modi validated the premise of Meitei grievances.

The reception to Modi's outreach efforts in Manipur is revealing. Meitei civil society leaders decried his silence on their core demands, notably the abrogation of the Suspension of Operations agreement with Kuki armed groups, which was instead extended. Kuki groups, for their part, have been consistent in demanding a separate administration—if not Union Territory status—for their areas, a proposal rejected by Delhi. Thokchom Sujata, convenor of the Meitei



Amul
CHOCOLATE

DARK.
A LITTLE MORE DELICIOUS.



MANY STATES, ONE THEME

The BJP is framing illegal infiltration as the core issue in states with demographic anxiety

women's collective Imagi Meira, dismisses the visit as superficial. "If Modi cares for Manipur, he should come with a proper plan instead of treating the visit as a stopover," she says. Arambam Noni, associate professor of political science at Dhanamanjiri University, is equally blunt. "Mega projects cannot substitute for trust-building, lasting peace and a serious reckoning with the state's deep-rooted divisions," she says. From the Kuki-Zo side, activist Hejang Misao read the separate stops in Imphal and Churachandpur as tacit acknowledgment of a divided polity, arguing that any real peace would require constitutional recognition of this divide. "We demand separate administration and Union Territory recognition—the only solution," says student leader Jacson Kuki.

BROADER ELECTORAL CANVAS

Speaking in Darrang district in Assam on September 14, Modi launched his most direct attack on illegal immigration and its alleged political patrons. Darrang had witnessed the most controversial eviction drives under CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's administration, with Bengali-speaking Muslims of immigrant origin removed from "encroached" land. Calling the Congress a "big protector of anti-nationals and infiltrators", Modi stated: "We will show the way we dedicate our lives to remove infiltrators." He thus cast the 2026 polls as a test of national allegiance. Modi's praise for the Sarma government's success in freeing "lakhs of bighas of land" from alleged encroachers explicitly linked evictions to national security imperatives. In his very first campaign speech in Assam in February 2014, Modi had vowed to oust illegal immigrants. That promise remains unfulfilled—the National Register of Citizens exercise, which excluded 1.9 million people, remains unimplemented. But the larger promise evidently remains useful.

West Bengal represents another battleground. After the Pahalgam terror attack, BJP-ruled states, including

► **In Manipur, Modi warns** about demographic conspiracies in border areas, says a "demography mission" will free India of infiltrators

► **In Assam, he lauds CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's** eviction drives as a model of reclaiming land from infiltrators, projecting

them as acts of national defence

► **In W. Bengal, as CM Mamata Banerjee** protests push-backs of Bangla-speaking Muslims, BJP hails the policy as proof of its tough stand on illegal immigration

► **Bihar's SIR is aimed** at weeding

out illegal immigrants from voter lists and will now be rolled out across the country

► **The new Immigration and Foreigners Act** arms the Centre with powers of detection, detention and deportation of suspected infiltrators

FORCIBLY PUSHING PEOPLE ACROSS THE BORDER IS A FAVOURED TOOL. NEARLY 3,000 ALLEGED BANGLADESHIS WERE PUSHED BACK IN 2025

Haryana, Delhi and Maharashtra, had rounded up Bengali Muslims—mostly West Bengal natives—and "pushed them back" as "illegal Bangladeshis". West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee has since accused the BJP of weaponising language and conflating Bengali identity with Bangladeshi nationality.

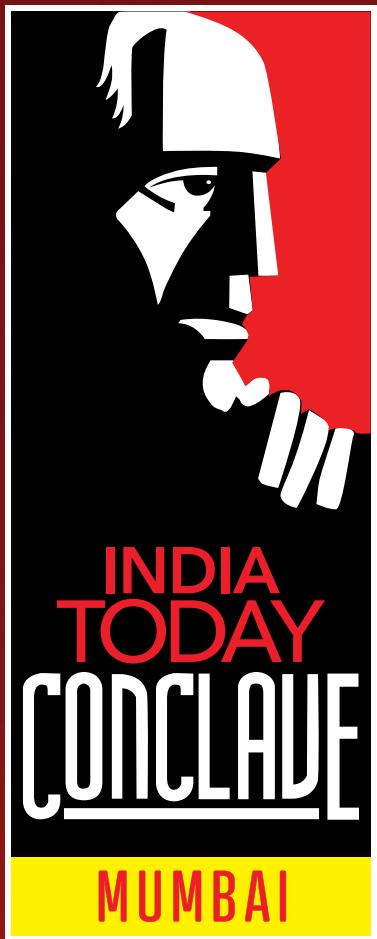
These 'pushbacks', or forcibly pushing people across the border without mutual verification, is a favoured tool. Nearly 3,000 alleged Bangladeshis were pushed back this year, compared to just 295 formal deportations in 2024. In Assam, Sarma revived the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, empowering officials to expel anyone deemed harmful to public interest or to the scheduled tribes. Nearly 500 alleged Bangladeshis have been removed under the law in 2025.

Bihar, where Modi concluded his tour and inaugurated the Purnea

airport in the Seemandhal region, presents yet another variation on the theme. The state is in the midst of a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, requiring voters added after 2003 to prove citizenship. Purnea offered a perfect setting for Modi as the BJP singles out the Seemandhal region, which borders Bengal and Nepal, as a symbol of demographic change driven by illegal immigration. In some districts here, Muslims make up over 60 per cent of the population. Modi's speech made the rhetoric official, declaring illegal infiltration as the source of a "demographic crisis" in Seemandhal. With the Election Commission of India confirming that SIR will be rolled out nationwide, including in election-bound West Bengal and Assam, "illegal infiltration" is set to gain a sharper edge.

The legislative architecture supporting this political offensive is also in place. The Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, enacted in April, grants sweeping powers to identify, detain and deport suspected illegal immigrants. The Centre's September directive, requiring states to establish detention centres, provides the administrative push.

Modi's eastern sojourn thus marks the launch of an electoral strategy that turns anxieties about demographic change into a binary political choice: those who support the BJP defend the nation, while those who oppose it protect infiltrators. ■



MAKING SENSE OF NEW REALITIES



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**AI FOR ARTIFICIAL INSULT**

On September 15, Union minister of culture and tourism **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat** took to social media to lecture the 'Congress IT Cell AI over-enthusiasts' on how artificial intelligence is meant for 'innovation, information and healthy entertainment' and not for 'insult, imitation or intended hurt'. The rebuke was perhaps triggered by a recent AI video, posted by the Bihar Congress, showing Prime Minister **Narendra Modi's** mother visiting him in his dream and admonishing him over playing politics in her name. The social media clip set off a furious row over the slight to the prime minister and his late mother. Fair point: the video was crass, and has rightly invited a legal notice. But Shekhawat's moral policing would carry more weight if he offered the same advice to his own party's IT cell. From **Rahul Gandhi** to Gaurav Gogoi and other leaders, the BJP's online machinery has for years been churning out a steady stream of smear videos packed with innuendo.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

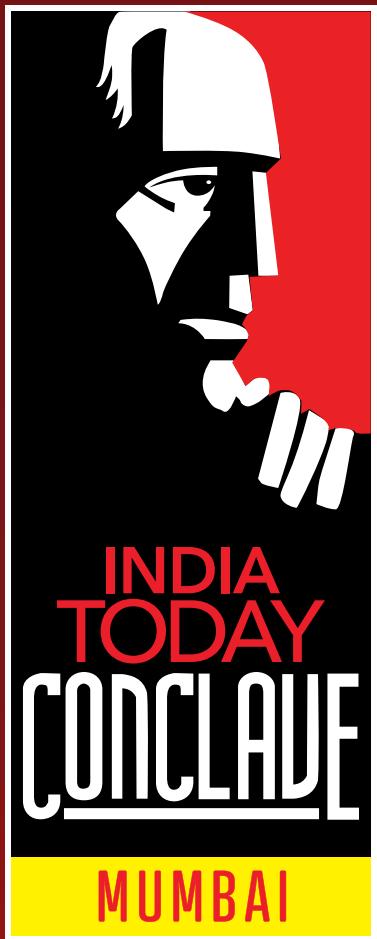
▼ SNOOP STORM

EYE SPY

The Rajasthan assembly monsoon session may have ended, but the uproar over two CCTV cameras near the Opposition benches rages on. Congress state chief Govind Singh Datasra, boycotting the session after his suspension, accused BJP leader and speaker **Vasudev Devnani** of installing "hidden



"cameras" accessible only from his anteroom to ogle at the women MLAs. Deputy CM Diya Kumari hit back, calling it proof of Congress's "rotten mentality", while dredging up veteran leader Shanti Dhariwal's defence of rape as "manhood". As the matter escalated, ex-CM Ashok Gehlot demanded a "criminal probe", but Devnani dismissed it, saying the 360-degree cameras were "only for security" and, anyway, audio was switched off.



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THE KICK-OFF

As any self-respecting Bengali will tell you, September 11 is no terror date but the day Swami Vivekananda made his famous speech at the 1893 Chicago World Congress of Religions. The West Bengal BJP has now decided to honour **Narendranath Dutta**

(Vivekananda's pre-monk phase name) by kicking off a 'Naren Cup' football tournament that ends on September 17, which just so happens to be PM Narendra Modi's birthday. Not to be out-dribbled, sports minister Aroop Biswas of the TMC has launched a rival 'Swami Vivekananda Cup', starting the very same day, with CM Mamata Banerjee's blessings. Guess it's all about netting pre-poll season goals now.



STARS & SWIPES



Tamil Nadu superstar-turned-neta **Vijay** is already facing jibes for indulging in 'weekend politics' given his policy of scheduling rallies for Saturdays. Yet his maiden rallies in Tiruchy and Ariyalur drew massive crowds, showcasing both his star power and voter curiosity.

In Ariyalur, he also turned up the heat on the ruling BJP (Centre) and the DMK (state). The big Perambalur event, however, was cancelled after long will-he-won't-he-make-it postponements, prompting the posters mocking his 'part-time' approach.



RUDE ACCENT

Maharashtra deputy CM and Nationalist Congress Party president **Ajit Pawar**, under fire for ticking off IPS officer Anjana Krishna in a Solapur illegal sand excavation case, has now received support from unexpected quarters.

Nephew and MLA from the rival NCP (Sharatchandra Pawar) **Rohit Pawar** has said that the controversy may have happened because of his uncle's wayward style of speaking Hindi. A case of blood being thicker than water or signs of a rapprochement?

By Sonali Acharjee

A NEW CANCER VACCINE? BE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

On September 6, Russia's Federal Medical-Biological Agency said a colorectal cancer vaccine had finished preclinical testing, was 'ready for use' and now awaits regulatory approval; in parallel, other Russian projects, such as the Enteromix platform—a customisable mRNA-based

deaths, with 3.3 million people dying within five years of a diagnosis. Cancer also drives profound financial toxicity: recent Indian studies show high out-of-pocket costs (Rs 3.3 lakh per patient annually in some cohorts) and widespread catastrophic health expenditure among cancer-affected households.

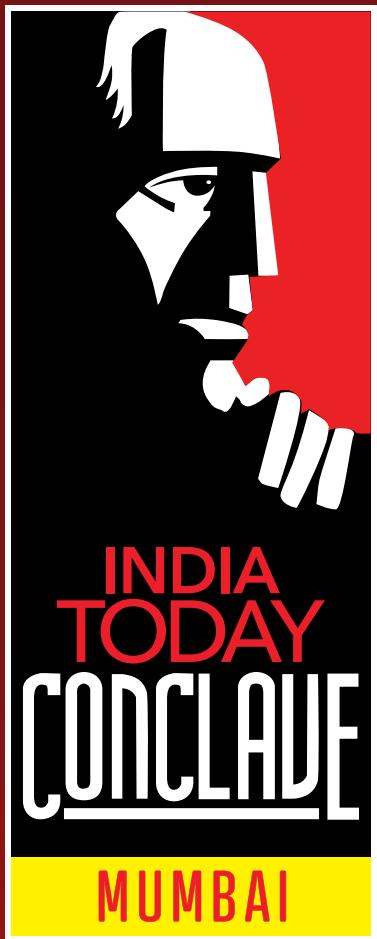


M ZHAZO

vaccine remain in early trials with viral claims of '100 per cent efficacy'. Dr Pooja Babbar, Head, Medical Oncology, Fortis Hospital Manesar, says, "The Russian mRNA cancer vaccine takes treatment a step further, teaching the body's immune system to recognise and destroy tumors...it may offer lasting protection and real hope for cancer patients."

For India, the public health need is stark. In 2022, the country saw some 1.41 million new cancer cases and 916,827

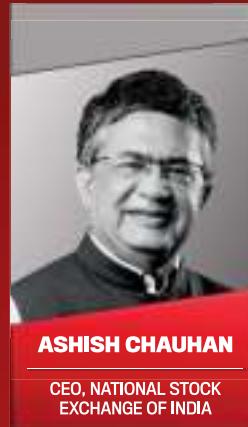
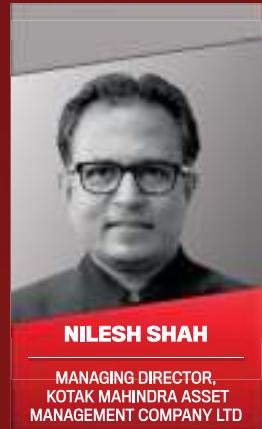
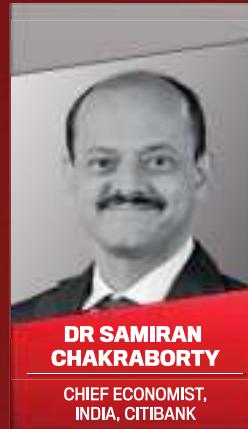
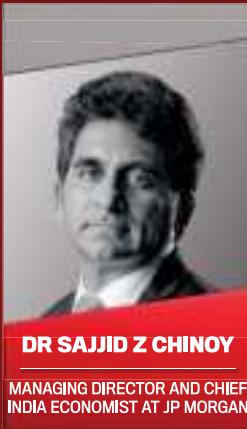
Will a Russian cancer vaccine be available in India soon? Not immediately. Any foreign biologic must pass India's regulatory pathway via CDSCO/DCGI (Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation/Drugs Controller General of India). India can waive local trials for drugs approved in some jurisdictions like the US, EU, UK, Japan, Canada, Australia; Russia isn't on that list. Bottom line: this is an encouraging frontier, but Indian patients must wait for peer-reviewed data and DCGI clearance.



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► MODI@75

Man of the MOMENT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned 75 on September 17, just over a year into his historic third consecutive term—an achievement unmatched since first PM Jawaharlal Nehru. INDIA TODAY takes a look at the making of 'Brand Modi', one of contemporary India's defining political stories



EARLY YEARS

1950: Born on September 17 in Vadnagar, Gujarat, to a family that ran a tea stall. From an early age, Modi displays an interest in debate and public life. As a teenager, he leaves home, spending years travelling across India, living an austere life



SANGH SCHOOLING

1972: Modi joins the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as a pracharak. It provides him a training ground in ideology and discipline that would later define his politics

BUILDING BASE IN THE BJP

1987: Joins the BJP, initially managing campaigns in Gujarat, where his organisational skills stand out. Plays pivotal roles in L.K. Advani's 1990 Somnath-Ayodhya Rath Yatra and the 1991-92 Ekta Yatra, hoisting the tricolour at Srinagar's Lal Chowk



THE GUJARAT MODEL

2003: Post-2002, Modi recasts himself as a pro-business reformer—streamlining approvals, promoting industrial corridors and accelerating infrastructure

GODHRA BLOT

2002: In Feb., the burning of a train in Godhra triggers riots across Gujarat, leaving over 1,000 dead. Modi's govt faces allegations of inaction. The Supreme Court clears his name

BECOMES GUJARAT CM

2001: Appointed chief minister in October after the devastating Kutch earthquake, replacing Keshubhai Patel

POLL WINNER

1990s: By the mid-1990s, as national secretary and later general secretary (organisation), Modi's meticulous planning helps the BJP increase its assembly seats in Gujarat in 1995

AS PRIME MINISTER

2014: Modi leads the BJP to famous win in general election with a clear majority on its own; in all, NDA gets 336 seats

► **Jan Dhan Yojana** over 11 years, brings 560 million into the banking system

► **Swachh Bharat Mission** built over 119 million toilets and made India open defecation free

► **Infrastructure drive:** National Highways network up by 60%, from 91,287 km in 2014 to 146,195 km in 2025



2016: **Digital push:** UPI, the world's largest real-time payment system, crossed 20 billion monthly transactions in August 2025

► **Surgical strikes:** India launches cross-border raids on terror launch-pads in PoK after the Uri terror attack that killed 19 Indian soldiers

► **Demonetisation:** The overnight ban on high-denomination banknotes aimed at curbing black money, sees mixed results



2017: **GST:** Unifies the fragmented indirect tax system, easing business, though challenges persist

2018: **Ayushman Bharat Yojana** Launched in September, provides health insurance to poor families



2019: **Balakot airstrikes:** The February attacks see IAF jets target a JeM camp in Pakistan after the Pulwama attack killed 40 CRPF jawans



2023: **New Parliament building:** Opened by Modi in May, part of Central Vista redevelopment project, symbolising his 'New India' vision

G20: India hosts summit in September, a triumph. New Delhi emerges as voice of the Global South



2021: **Covid management:** India launches the world's largest vaccination drive in January, delivering over 2 billion doses within 18 months

2020: **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana:** Launched after Covid, provides free foodgrains to 800 million

The China setback: The Galwan Valley clash in June between Indian and Chinese troops strains ties with Beijing, undermining claims of border normalcy

2019: **Second-term win:** Modi helps BJP win a clear majority again in the May general election and is re-elected as PM

► **Abrogation of Article 370:** Ends Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August, bringing the state under the direct control of the central government

► **Jal Jeevan Mission - Har Ghar Jal:** Over 124 million households have received tap water connections since the scheme's launch



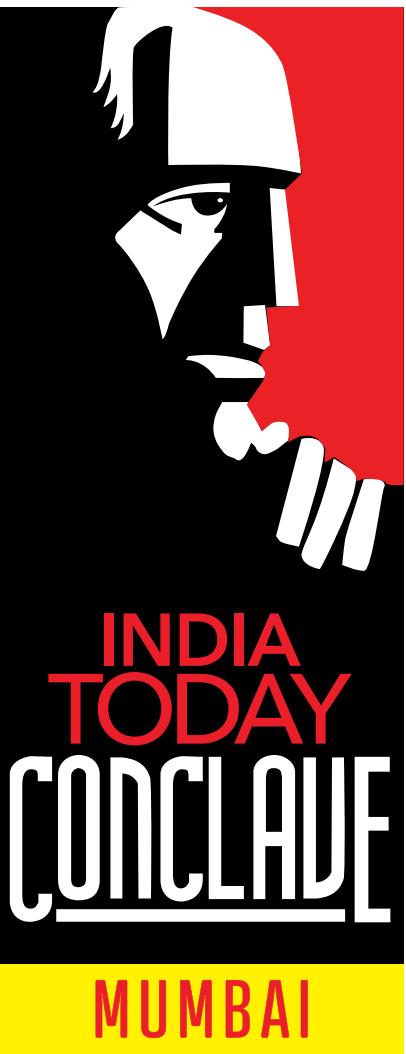
2024: **Modi presides over** the consecration of the newly built Ram temple in Ayodhya, marking the fulfilment of a 3-decade-old BJP promise

► **Historic third win:** First PM since Nehru to secure three consecutive terms, though with a reduced Lok Sabha majority in the April-June polls

2025: **Operation Sindoor:** After the Pa-halgam terror attack, which killed 26 civilians, India targets nine terrorist infrastructure sites in Pakistan and PoK between May 7-10



2025: **Indo-US ties:** Relations with Washington cool, tempering earlier bonhomie, but signs of a revival on the cards as Trump wishes Modi on his birthday



MAKING SENSE OF NEW REALITIES

RANI MUKERJI

ACTOR

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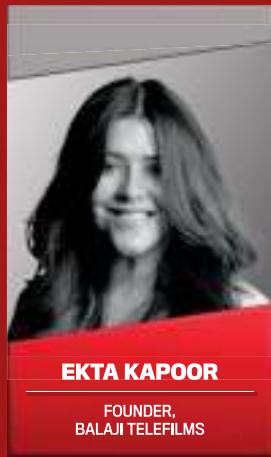
ROHIT SARAF

ACTOR



SANYA MALHOTRA

ACTOR



EKTA KAPOOR

FOUNDER,
BALAJI TELEFILMS



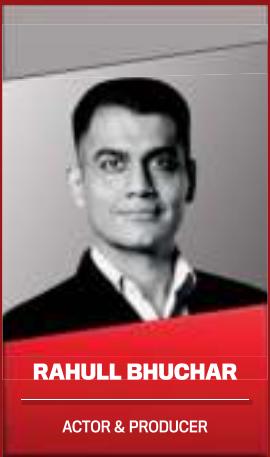
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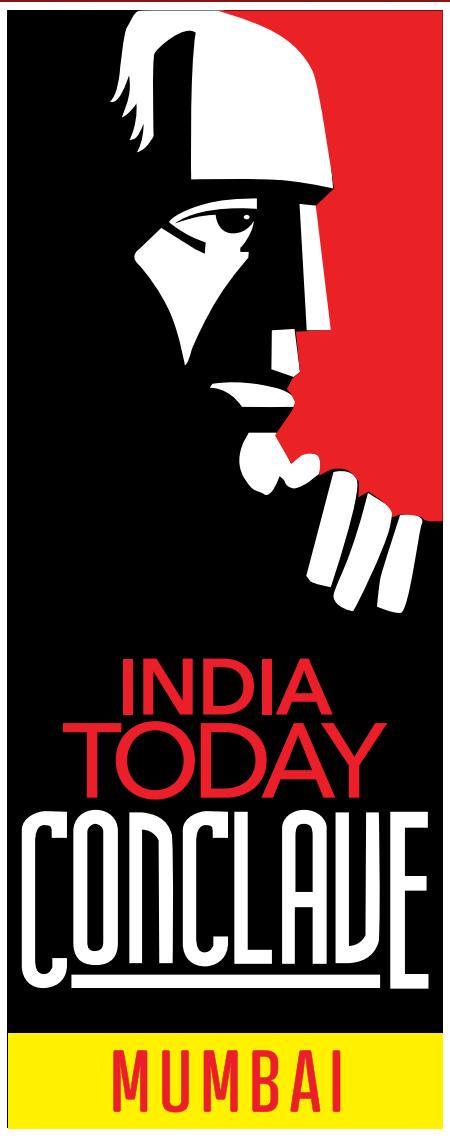
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STATE SCAN

BENGAL: IDENTITY CRISIS ON THE CARDS PG 24

MP: OLD SCHOOL SCRIMMAGE PG 26



► TAMIL NADU

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

EPS & HIS COALITION OF THE UNWILLING

The anti-DMK front threatens to fragment as friends flee and dissent stalks AIADMK

By Kavitha Muralidharan

A “GRAND ALLIANCE” AGAINST the ruling DMK is what AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami (EPS) has been promising. But as the assembly election approaches and the mustard starts popping on Tamil Nadu’s political skillet, his very ambition could be turning into a self-terminating seed. Result: what ought to have by now looked like an EPS-led battle phalanx, the NDA’s local translation, is beginning to look more like a mosaic of potsherd fragments from another time.

The AIADMK’s pre-nuptial pact with the BJP was itself a product of fraught renegotiation rather than rediscovered love. But EPS’s helmsmanship is producing contrary effects both within his party and outside. Mutiny is darkening the mood in the AIADMK. The party has ruled Tamil Nadu for over three decades since the Dravidian movement’s rise to power in 1967, but veterans don’t seem too amused at EPS’s self-image as the undisputed inheritor of that legacy—a ‘supremo’ à la MGR or Jayalalithaa. Others, too, are fleeing his big tent.

As September dawned, T.V. Dhinakaran’s Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) became the latest inmate to escape the umbrella space for anti-DMK forces. In July, EPS’s predecessor and ex-chief minister O. Panneerselvam (OPS) had walked out, being thwarted in his bid to meet PM Narendra Modi. In June, the first self-goal had come

with Vijayakanth's DMDK being denied a promised Rajya Sabha seat. The pique hasn't eased: the party is holding back from finalising a pact with the AIADMK.

Neither OPS nor Dhinakaran can boast of being able to command the entire anti-DMK space, but their relevance is clear. The ex-CM still carries influence in southern districts like Theni and parts of Madurai, Dhinakaran, too, retains pockets of support across the south. During the 2024 election, which the

Takeaways

► **Dhinakaran exits AIADMK alliance, OPS out too, DMDK in doubt**

► **Sengottaiyan says AIADMK must recall Sasikala, OPS et al**

► **Veterans unhappy at EPS's self-image as the undisputed inheritor of Jayalalithaa's legacy**

AIADMK had fought without the BJP, both OPS and Dhinakaran had undermined its prospects in several southern constituencies. Adding to the intrigue, speculation is that the BJP's **K. Annamalai** is quietly encouraging the duo, seeing them as a way to weaken EPS.

Inside the AIADMK, the churn is just as sharp, with veterans bristling at EPS's monopoly. On September 8, one of them, the 77-year-old K.A. Sengottaiyan, found himself stripped of all party posts. Why? A day earlier, he had demanded that all expelled

and sidelined leaders—like OPS and **V.K. Sasikala**—be brought back into the party fold within 10 days.

A BIT ERODED?

Sengottaiyan is no minor figure. A former minister and nine-time MLA, he has been a loyalist since the MGR period and holds sway in the AIADMK's western strongholds, especially Erode and the Kongu belt. On cue, mass resignations from the cadre streamed into local party offices. By not even opening talks with Sengottaiyan, EPS clearly wants to show dissent will not be tolerated, even from veterans, and is willing to risk alienating swathes of the grassroots for that objective.

Not everyone is convinced of the strategic wisdom of such a stance internally, though it's getting voiced outside. OPS, for one, repeats his call for unity. "Only if everyone comes together can we win and rule again... We face multiple trials because forces within the AIADMK are divided," he says. Sasikala, too, backs Sengottaiyan, terming his unity call "the voice of the people of Tamil Nadu".

As a commentator put it, "EPS believes he's as charismatic as MGR or Jayalalithaa. But the fact is, he hasn't been able to deliver a single victory for his party."

Meanwhile, all roads seem to lead to Amit Shah, who recently had separate closed-door meetings with Sengottaiyan and EPS. BJP state chief Nainar Nagendran calls the rift an "internal matter", but admits defeating the DMK requires a united front. Presently, things are racing in precisely the opposite direction. ■

► RAJASTHAN

CONVERTING FAITH TO A POINT OF LAW

The state's anti-conversion bill surpasses all others in the stringency of its provisions

By Rohit Parihar

IF HISTORY WERE TO PROCEED BACKWARDS, a lot of powerful Rajput ruling dynasties from Rajasthan's past would face the mortification of being dragged in front of modern courts. Interfaith weddings were the currency of their power. But today, state by state, India seems to be converting to a different article of faith. And Rajasthan has not only become the latest to pass an anti-conversion bill, it has surpassed all others in the stringency of its provisions.

The Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Bill, 2025, marks the state's third legislative venture of its ilk, its 2005 and 2008 editions having failed to get

► **SAFFRON VETO** Hindu groups protest forced conversion in Dausa, Jul. 6



ANI

gubernatorial or presidential approval. Unlike those, however, this bill is stirring nationwide debate due to its near-criminalisation of interfaith marriages. A marriage where either spouse has converted will be void in the eyes of the state. There's an exception, of course. For "ghar wapasi", largely understood to entail a "return" to Hinduism.

The bill—awaiting the Governor's nod—criminalises religious conversions by allurement, fraud, force, undue influence, misrepresentation, or marriage. These will constitute cognisable, non-bailable offences. Penalties range from 7-14 years in jail and Rs 5 lakh fine, scaling up to 10-20 years and Rs 10 lakh minimum for targeting minors, women, the differently abled,

Takeaways

► **Rajasthan passes new anti-conversion bill, hard provisions spawn debate**

► **Critics question the very need for law, also exclusion of ghar wapasi**

or members of Scheduled Castes/Tribes. The last is not irrelevant: there have been sporadic reports of tribal conversions to Christianity and the emergence of new churches in the southern districts.

Mass conversions and repeat offences draw even harsher sentences—20 years to life imprisonment, with fines going up to Rs 50 lakh. Properties and institutions found promoting unlawful conversion face confiscation, demolition, cancellable licence cancellation, and fines of up to Rs 1 crore. Foreign funding? Severe penalties.

Civil liberties groups, led by the PUCL, call special attention to a few red flags. One, "return to ancestral religion" is explic-

itly excluded. Two, the bill's broad definition of "allurement", with the natural potential it carries for harassment of minorities and interfaith couples. Three, the way the bill imposes even on what it calls 'voluntary' conversions a good dose of process as punishment: 90 days' advance declaration, including by the priest concerned, and an appearance before the authorities within 10 days of the act.

WHITHER CONGRESS?

If they condemn the bill as draconian and unconstitutional, the BJP strongly advocates for it, calling it essential to curb "forced" or "induced" conversions, particularly among poor, tribal and underprivileged groups. It claims such conversions are often a result of "greed, fear or deception". Meanwhile, the Congress evaded voting on the bill, citing an unrelated boycott, and is seen to have deliberately lost a chance to display its valour.

The critics question the very necessity for such bill, citing Rajasthan's relatively quieter record on community relations than many northern states. Save isolated cases, it has seen no systemic forced conversion or "love jihad". A conservative society means segregated living is the norm along all axes—that covers the minorities, about nine per cent of the population. So interfaith marriages, especially Hindu-Muslim, are rare anyway. Notable exceptions often serve to highlight the social pressures and stigma around such unions.

One such was the high-profile marriage of IAS officers Tina Dabi and Athar Aamir Khan—it ended in dissolution, both remarrying within their communities. The few known interfaith couples keep a low profile. In their time, they faced social resistance. Today, their counterparts would face modern secular law, whose high priests would annul their marriage. ■

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

THE BIJU JANATA DAL'S CONTROVERSIAL decision to abstain from the recent Vice-Presidential election has not entirely been without self-harm. The BJD, as with all such instances in the past, justified it as part of its "equal distance" policy from the BJP and the Congress. But distances are lengthening within the BJD itself, especially between Naveen Patnaik and a school of thought that sees his pragmatism as a sign of ideological and strategic timidity outside, a contrast to the iron hand he wields within the party.

On September 9, former Rajya Sabha MP and south Odisha strongman N. Bhaskar Rao brought the inner disaffection fully into the public eye by resigning from the BJD—quitting a formation he has been part of since 1974, having joined in those halcyon days of anti-Congressism, "inspired by the ideals of Biju Patnaik". District-level politics was the trigger, a reaction to the local leadership being overhauled, so the former CM's side belittled it as an inconsequential event. But signs on the ground don't quite match that reading. Rao's departure clearly carries weight far beyond the symbolic.

OLD COMRADE EXITS

A veteran of Odia politics and once a close Biju associate, Rao had built and nurtured the party's base in Rayagada, a stronghold district in southern Odisha. His grassroots connect, combined with his reputation as a "leader's leader", was visible as a mini-exodus followed in his wake: former SC/ST minister and ex-deputy speaker Lal Bihari Himirika, local body grandees as well as hundreds of supporters joined the departing cavalcade.

What's more, Rao and Himirika have now pledged to carry forward the old legacy under the banner of a new outfit, the Biju Swabhiman Manch, designed as a counter to what they describe as the BJD's declining internal democracy.

► ODISHA

NAVEEN'S ARK IN CHOPPY SEA

'Non-alignment' in Delhi is proving costly back home as BJD is rocked by a wave of resignations



▲ ALL ABOARD?
Former CM Naveen Patnaik visits
a church in Bhubaneswar on
Christmas last year

In fact, these exits are part of a larger wave of disenchantment among senior leaders who have grown increasingly vocal about the direction of the party since its shock defeat in the 2024 general election. Other high-profile resignations, including those of Rajya Sabha MPs Mamata Mohanta and Sujeept Kumar in 2024, had not created similar ripples largely because they lacked Rao's grassroots stature. This time, however, the tremors are unmistakable.

Former BJD MP and journalist Tathagat Satpathy, who has retired from politics, argues the party had "passed its best" and might eventually have to re-emerge under a new name, given the Congress's long eclipse in Odisha. Echoing him, ex-MLA Amar Satpathy, too, warns that the party's acceptance among the people is declining

Takeaways

► South Odisha veteran Bhaskar Rao, a loyalist since Biju days, quits; ex-minister, cadre follow

► Factionalism, wave of dissent since 2024 loss prompt critics to say BJD has "passed its best"

steadily. Abstaining from the V-P's election is seen to have dented the BJD's image as a strong, independent regional force.

That enfeeblement is breeding factionalism. Kendrapara satrap and ex-minister Prafulla Mallik threatened to resign in the wake of Rao-Himirika and was suspended. "Commitment is proved in difficult times," said BJD spokesperson Pratap Jena, scoffing at those who "fail the test of loyalty". No dearth of them these days, though. In Jajpur's Dharmasala, nearly 70 local BJD leaders jumped ship to the BJP.

The next test for the BJD comes only in 2027, with panchayat polls. But it seems to have entered a phase of precarity and self-doubt—portending what may be big changes to Odisha's political map. ■



DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

► WEST BENGAL

IDENTITY CRISIS ON THE CARDS

The shadows of an impending SIR sweep across Bengal, panicked voters rush to clean up eligibility documents

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

T'S LIKE A DOSE OF THE FEAR

HORMONE being shot through the veins of Bengal—a vague but sharp sense that something larger, and potentially disruptive, is about to unfold. Bivash Patra, a thirtysomething in Nazat, North 24 Parganas, epitomises it. Like a man possessed, he's shuttling between dowdy government office counters. His Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) spells his name as Bibhas instead of Bivash.

This is no longer a routine matter: such slips, dime a dozen in Indian documentation, could now determine whether he's 'in' or 'out'.

If cause and effect are the same across the polity, the Election Commission's Form 8 is both key and lock for the afflicted. Armed with this mandated document for corrections, Patra approached the local BDO, only to be told his year of birth was mismatched. His school-leaving cer-

tificate records it as 1989, his Aadhaar says 1986. "My father was a mason and didn't know how to get me a birth certificate," says a dejected Patra, as he leaves the office with his wife and toddler. "During my school admission, he simply guessed 1989. Why Aadhaar says 1986, I have no idea. Now the hassle is mine."

THE REVISION RUSH

The EC has not yet notified a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bengal, only called for a preliminary vetting of electoral rolls. But panic has already spread. Across rural Bengal—particularly in the border districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Malda, Murshidabad and North and South Dinajpur—residents are swarming block and panchayat offices in an anxious rush to correct anomalies in their voter and identity cards.

Officers handling election cells say the surge in Form 8 applications is unprecedented. "Earlier, we

CORRECT ACT

Voters with their documents at Nazat, North 24 Parganas, W. Bengal

handled 50-odd a month. Now, 100-150 people are trooping in daily to correct the smallest of spelling errors," says an officer in South 24 Parganas. The rush, he adds, is especially visible in Muslim-majority areas.

Rasida Bibi and Aaijoddi Khan, a middle-aged couple from Sarberia village in the district, exemplify this. They have been voting for decades without difficulty. Yet, they recently joined the crowds at their local office to correct spellings on their documents. "Don't you

porting document signed by, say, a pradhan must now be countersigned by the panchayat executive officer, a government employee. Those above 21 seeking their first voter ID must submit Annexure III, a self-declaration explaining why they did not apply upon turning 18. "Migrant labourers often leave home at an early age and miss the 18-year window. We are allowing up to 21, not beyond," says an officer.

Physical verification is another issue. "Faces can change drastically from old ID photos. Also, Muslim women used to be reluctant to lift their burqas. Now, they are more cooperative," says another.

Takeaways

- » EC yet to notify SIR in Bengal, but panic has spread on the ground
- » Border districts see a surge in applications to clean up ID documents
- » Officials say the rush is especially visible in Muslim-majority areas
- » Amidst rush for digital papers, BJP alleges local bodies enabling fakes
- » TMC says EC's acts are "politically motivated"

know?" Rasida asks earnestly. "From now, voter cards won't have names in Bengali. All names will be in English. Isn't it necessary that the spellings are right?" Rumour, rather than any official word, fuels the fear.

DIGITAL DUST-CLOUDS

But it's set off a huge demand for digitised certificates. Old birth papers, often fabricated post facto, were riddled with errors—digital cleaning at panchayat offices is seen to offer a new layer of authentication. For domicile, too, says a BDO in South Dinajpur, "Applications have shot up since July, with the Bihar SIR."

Officers, too, have begun tightening the rules. Any sup-

The politicking is getting fierce. The BJP claims offline birth certificates are being issued at will, alleging rampant fabrication. The TMC, in turn, calls the EC's September 20 deadline for cross-matching the 2002 electoral rolls with the present list "arbitrary and politically motivated".

On the ground, an ancillary industry has sprung up. Photocopy shops and cyber cafes are selling printed extracts of the 2002 rolls—available free on the state election office's website. Touts and middlemen lurk outside offices, promising faster service for up to Rs 2,000. Identity is both personal and political—but it's also business. ■

► GUJARAT

CUTTING REAMS OF RED TAPE

Government offices in the state see a spring breeze of new ideas as self-reform kicks in

By Jumana Shah

YOU CAN'T MOVE MOUNTAINS BY WHISPERING AT THEM," says a senior bureaucrat in Gujarat, glancing at four bulky volumes on his desk—all reports submitted by the Gujarat Administrative Reforms Commission (GARC) in the first six months of its two-year tenure. Headed by retired IAS officer Hasmukh Adhia, who serves as advisor to chief minister Bhupendra Patel, the commission has the unenviable mandate of taking a hard look at the functioning of the entire state government and its various arms. Judging by its first four reports, it isn't short of enthusiasm.

The panel has already recommended sweeping measures, of which 25 are under various stages of implementation. Mundane, yet monumental tasks. And potentially mind-shifting for a bureaucracy wedded to old, lethargic ways. These range from upgrading the SOPs for disposal of old furniture and cars, to having a QR code on government documents that would allow citizens to access their data online or in their digilocker.

"The broader vision is to bring a massive change in the style of governance," says the bureaucrat, cautiously. "This is a complex system where lakhs work. Change will take longer than in a private entity. We have started with small, effective reforms."

The first report, submitted in March, was inspired by the Kaizen philosophy of continuous improvement. Its focus was on changes to improve productivity and employee working conditions in Sachivalay, the state secretariat in Gandhinagar. To this end, it suggested

limiting meeting durations, while scheduling them in advance on the e-sarkar portal. "Abruptly convened but long-winded meetings affect productivity," says the babu.

Another interesting suggestion that's been accepted and successfully implemented was to seek employee feedback by installing a box outside all departments, or having anonymous digital submissions via a QR code scan. These have in turn yielded 4,000 suggestions online, almost half deemed worthy of consideration.

FROM KAIZEN TO CITIZEN

At least 10 recommendations from the second report have similarly been accepted. A silent leap in citizen services is the on-boarding of technology for the issuance and management of government documents, certificates or unique IDs—including Aadhaar and EPIC cards. Each document will have a distinct QR code, helping the user seek and access authenticated documents on government websites for instant

Takeaways

- ➲ A four-volume admin reform manual makes sweeping recos
- ➲ Gujarat's government offices reciprocate with a flood of ideas

sharing. "SSC and HSC marksheets issued in May-June had a unique QR code, which will allow students to access their document online for posterity. Similarly, we have started issuing QR codes on a few caste certificates. Some 40 of the estimated 200 documents and certificates issued by the government have started getting this QR code," says the official. With software updates under way, complete coverage is expected over the next few years.

Other ideas, too, are getting accepted, or getting a hearing. Automatic pension dispersal, sans human intervention, is on. So also the integration of UPI in public transport, currently dominated by cash transactions. Bolder ideas include introducing seniority and performance-based promotion of cadre on the lines of the IAS. ■

► MADHYA PRADESH

OLD SCHOOL SCRIMMAGE

Indore's Daly College sees its hallowed name dragged into unseemly battle for turf control



► SCREAMING SPIRES The 155-yr-old Daly College, Indore

By **Rahul Noronha**

THE DALY COLLEGE OF INDORE carries a certain elite cachet, owing to its colonial vintage and also by how it ramifies all the way into the modern hallways of power and wealth. The who's who of Madhya Pradesh politics and business can be said to have a direct or indirect stake in the 155-year-old public school. Imagine a canvas brimful with former and latter-day rajas. Add litigious busybodies to the mix. Any wonder, then, that Daly is yet again in the eye of a storm?

The prize catch: the Board of Governors, the school's apex body. In the latest ground assault, Sandeep Parekh, a board member and alumnus from 1979, has secured an order from the Assistant Registrar of Firms and Societies, Indore, directing school authorities to amend their bylaws. The effect will be to ensure the board is answerable to a bigger group: the electorate that elects five out of its nine members. Trifling matter? No, it's dominating conversations among the social elite in Indore and beyond.

Empowering Minds Enriching Futures



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A brief resume would explain all the interest. Set up in 1870 by Sir Henry Daly, the Political Agent of Malwa, the institution moved into its present 118-acre Indore campus in 1912. Among its alumni, count former chief minister Digvijaya Singh, economist Prabhat Patnaik, US-based orthopaedist Dr Chitraranjan Ranawat, the state's top mandarins (including Neeraj Mandloi, additional chief secretary to the CM), besides a gallery of former ministers and legislators like Surendra Singh 'Honey' Baghel, Sachin Yadav, Sudesh Rai and Brijendra Pratap Singh aka 'Dau Saheb'.

ELECTION HEAT

Given that spread, it would be tempting to read the conflict as reflecting a wider one between an old elite and its would-be gatecrashers—and any potential change being a blow to the *ancien régime*. But that could be simplistic in this case. The reason is more banal: the board is slated for elections in December and it's the usual scrimmage for turf. The good part: it would, at least theoretically, take Daly's administration towards greater accountability.

The board has two elected members from among the category of old donors, mostly former royals who had contributed financially in setting up the school. Two elected members come from among the alumni, one from among the 'new donors'. Two government and parent nominees each, the latter appointed by the board once constituted, complete the club of nine. The Principal comes in as an ex-officio secretary.

Presently, both government nominees are coloured royal blue: president of the board Vikram Sinh Puar and vice-chairperson Rajvardhan Singh, who are the titular maharaja of Dewas and the ex-raja of Narsinghgarh, respectively. Rounding off that part of the spectrum from the old donor category are Narendra Singh and ex-minister Priyavrat Singh, of the peerages of Jhabua and



“AMONG ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTRY, DALY COLLEGE HAS ELECTIONS, WHICH MAKES IT ONE OF THE MOST DEMOCRATIC. AT TIMES, IT GIVES AN OPENING TO VESTED INTERESTS”

VIKRAM SINH PUAR
Chairman, Daly board

Khilchipur, respectively. Harpal Bhatia represent the new donor category; Sanjay Pahwa and Sumeet Chandhok (since resigned) are the parent nominees. But much of the feuding begins with the two elected from the ranks of alumni: Parekh and Dheeraj Lulla, who are mostly at daggers drawn with each other. Sources say irrespective of who holds the chair, it's Lulla who calls the shots in board meetings. In effect, he faces only one dissenting voice—that of Parekh.

The assistant registrar's order endorses



Takeaways

➲ An assistant registrar orders school to amend its governing rules

➲ Provokes wide debate among Daly's illustrious alumni—a gallery of former royals, netas like **Digvijaya Singh**, and top mandarins

a few big demands, mandating a wider representation in Daly College Society, the registered body under which the school and other affiliated institutions run. The former students and new donors, too, must be given place on it, it says, while laying down norms for a clearer oversight.

Puar, though, had an interesting counter. "The order seems *prima facie unconstitutional*," he says, confirming that a legal challenge is in the works. "How can one society be ordered to become the member of another society?"

He also rubbishes talk of arbitrary administration. "Among all public schools in the country, Daly College has elections, which makes it one of the most democratic schools in the country in its functioning," Puar points out, adding an irony-laden barb: "At times, this provides for an opportunity to those with vested interest to sully the image of the school but democratic functioning has numerous advantages for which it should be cherished."

A FUND OF VALUES

What's at stake is not abstract values like old-world esteem. The school income from fees and deposits touches Rs 95 crore; add to that a comparable reserve fund. Allegations of opaque, whimsical running have been aired, including by Parekh in a letter to the board where he stated that meetings were not held properly, with minutes.

More recently, the head girl of the school resigned with a blaze of bitter complaints against the administration. That led to a counter-attack—by her own peers and classmates. It was amidst this letter war that parent nominee Chandhok quit the board. All stakeholders are hoping for the best, whichever way the case goes. There's some agreement on the fundamentals, though. "Transparency is the key to upholding Daly's reputation," said senior advocate Ajay Bagadia, an old student, at the Indore High Court. ■



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THE SOLAR FIELDS OF MAHARASHTRA: HOW INDIA'S MOST PROGRESSIVE STATE IS BETTING ITS FUTURE ON THE SUN

In the villages where farmers once prayed for rain, they now worship at the altar of solar panels—and it could change everything

Sunita Patil used to wake up at 4 AM to pump water for her sugarcane fields in Ahmednagar district. The electricity would come on in the dead of night—if it came at all—forcing millions of Maharashtra's farmers into a nocturnal existence that defied every natural rhythm of agriculture. But on a blazing afternoon last month, as solar panels gleamed across her neighbour's farm, Patil witnessed something that would have seemed impossible just two years ago: water flowing freely from an electric pump at high noon, powered entirely by the sun beating down on their fields.

"For the first time in my life, I can work when the sun is up and sleep when it's dark," Patil says, squinting against the light reflecting off what locals now call their "silver harvest." She's one of four million farmers about to be swept up in the world's largest agricultural solar revolution—a \$40 billion gamble by

Maharashtra that could either illuminate India's path to a carbon-neutral future or serve as an expensive cautionary tale about the perils of betting everything on renewable energy. Maharashtra's electricity appetite rivals entire nations—consuming as much power as the United Kingdom, Spain, or Australia. With 34 million consumers generating \$14.5 billion in annual revenue, the state faces a staggering challenge: energy demand growing at 6.3% annually while historic capacity addition has been just 1 gigawatt per year.

Key Drivers of the Energy Transition:

- 16 GW agricultural feeder solarization (world's largest program)
- Time-of-day tariffs incentivizing daytime solar consumption
- 3-5 GW rooftop solar installations
- 1-2 GW demand reduction through efficiency measures



Shri Devendra Fadnavis
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra

"Maharashtra is determined to lead India's clean energy revolution. Through initiatives like the Solar Agricultural Feeder Scheme 2.0, the PM SuryaGhar Free Electricity Scheme, and the creation of model solar villages, we are ensuring that affordable, reliable, and sustainable power reaches every household and every farm. By aligning with the Gati Shakti framework and focusing on execution with speed and precision, we are not just building infrastructure—we are building a greener, stronger future for generations to come."

The Arithmetic of Transformation

The numbers behind Maharashtra's solar revolution read like the specifications for terraforming a planet:

Current vs 2030 Targets	Present	2030 Goal	Change
Total Capacity	46.1 GW	85.8 GW	86%
Renewable Share	30% (11.1 GW)	60% (39.7 GW)	258%
Peak Demand	29 GW	45 GW	55%
Energy Consumption	185,000 MUs	280,000 MUs	51%
Carbon Intensity	0.88 kg CO2/kWh	0.55-0.60 kg CO2/kWh	-32%

The Villages That Became Power Plants

Drive through Maharashtra's countryside today, and you'll see the answer taking shape in thousands of villages. Under the Mukhyamantri Saur Krushi Vahini Yojana 2.0—a name locals have mercifully shortened to MSKVY—entire agricultural feeders are being converted into distributed solar power plants.

What are the biggest challenges facing Maharashtra's energy transition, particularly with MSEDCL's financial situation?

Abha Shukla: "The solar transition is as much about saving MSEDCL as saving the climate. Our distribution utility has been hemorrhaging money for years, which is why we've developed a comprehensive transformation plan. We're targeting 5% Profit Before Tax and potential public listing within 3-4 years. This includes deploying 5 million smart meters, expanding our franchise model to 6-8 geographical areas, and implementing loss reduction measures that will generate \$600 million in additional revenue."



Smt. Abha Shukla (IAS)
Additional Chief Secretary (Energy),
Government of Maharashtra

How are you addressing the operational challenges of implementing such a massive distributed solar program?

Abha Shukla: "The challenges are immense—acquiring thousands of small land parcels, coordinating approvals from dozens of agencies, ensuring grid connectivity for distributed installations, and maintaining payment security for developers. We're essentially rebuilding the entire energy system while keeping it running. It's like changing the engine of a plane while flying it. That's why we're creating a separate agricultural company to streamline operations."

How does Maharashtra's energy transition fit into India's broader climate commitments?

Abha Shukla: "India has promised net-zero emissions by 2070,

targeting 50% renewable penetration—500 GW—by 2030 nationally. Maharashtra's systematic approach combining generation, transmission, distribution, and demand-side management recognizes that successful energy transition requires more than just installing solar panels; it demands reimagining the entire power system."

What is Maharashtra's broader vision for energy leadership?

Abha Shukla: "We have a five-point vision: First, to be India's leader in energy transition planning and implementation. Second, achieve the fastest acceleration in renewable capacity between 2023-30. Third,

become an innovation leader in agricultural solarization, storage, and green hydrogen. Fourth, facilitate over \$36 billion in investment by 2030. And fifth, complete the turnaround and potential listing of our distribution company."

Can Maharashtra's model be replicated elsewhere?

Abha Shukla: "Absolutely. If Maharashtra succeeds, we won't just transform one state—we'll provide the template for decarbonizing the developing world. The distributed solar model we're pioneering in Maharashtra's villages could work in rural Indonesia, Nigeria, or Brazil. We're creating a replicable blueprint for large-scale energy transition in emerging economies."

MSKVY 2.0 Program Impact:

Metric	Target/Achievement
Capacity	16 GW
Investment	\$7.8 billion (\$65,000 Cr)
Rural Jobs	4,00,000
Farmers Served	4 million
Women Employment	Up to 2 million
Contract Duration	25 years

The economic mathematics are compelling. Despite explosive energy demand growth, Maharashtra projects that aggregate CO2 emissions will actually decrease from 160-165 million metric tons to 155-160 million tons by 2030. Even more remarkably, electricity tariffs will remain stable at 7.4-7.5 rupees per unit, as lower renewable costs offset higher transmission investments.

Capacity Status - Already Secured:

Energy Source	Capacity Tied Up
Total Capacity	43.6 GW
Renewable Energy	40.0 GW
Agricultural Solar	16.0 GW

Rajesh Kumbhar, a cotton farmer in Sangli district, describes watching his first solar-powered irrigation cycle with the wonder of someone witnessing magic: "The pump started exactly at sunrise, without any switch, without any bill. The crops seemed to understand—they were getting water exactly when they needed it most."

The Economics of Revolution

Maharashtra's transformation requires unprecedented coordination and investment:

Investment & Employment Projections (by 2030):

- Total investment required: \$40-42 billion
- Investment retained in-state: 75%
- Direct job creation: 500,000-600,000
- Rural employment (renewable sector): 520,000
- Transmission projects: 10 TBCB projects worth \$1.3 billion

The Darkness Before Dawn

At the helm of this unpreceded transformation stands Smt. Abha Shukla (IAS), Additional Chief Secretary (Energy), whose vision is reshaping not just Maharashtra's energy landscape but potentially India's entire approach to renewable transition. She answers a few questions for us:

As Sunita Patil watches the sun set over her neighbor's solar panels, she's seeing the future of India itself—powered by its greatest natural resource, distributed across its most fundamental industry, and controlled by the people who work closest to the earth.

The question isn't whether Maharashtra's solar revolution will succeed. The question is whether the rest of the world is ready to follow.



COVER STORY

CLIMATE CHAOS

WHY IS IT HAPPENING?

THE RAPIDLY RISING FREQUENCY OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS IS DEVASTATING INDIA WITH FLOODS, DROUGHTS AND CYCLONES. HOW WE CAN BUILD RESILIENCE

By SONAL KHETARPAL

Photographs by ANI

ONCE THERE WAS A

ROAD

Vehicles
become part of the debris
following flash floods in
Kullu, Himachal Pradesh



R

RAJINDER NEGI, AN APPLE GROWER IN KOTKHAI, HIMACHAL PRADESH, CAN ONLY SHAKE HIS HEAD IN DISBELIEF. His crop is rotting in warehouses or stranded on broken roads. Life itself seems broken in this Himalayan state: it has seen 45 cloudbursts, 91 flash floods and 105 major landslides so far this season, leaving over 660 road blockages in their wake. For Negi and countless orchard owners, the fallout is devastating, with up to 40 per cent of their apple harvest lost this year, a staggering blow to the Rs 5,500 crore industry. This, when they have only partially recovered from the 2023 floods. “We have rebuilt before,” says Negi, “but this time the damage is too deep.” His words capture the collective exhaustion of a community grappling with rapidly shifting climate patterns, which are upending their land and livelihoods.

THE ERA OF EXTREME WEATHER

Graphic by NILANJAN DAS

GLOBAL WARMING

- ➔ Hottest year on record globally: 2024
- ➔ India's annual mean temperature has risen by 0.69°C since 2001
- ➔ For a tropical country, India already has a high base average temperature of over 25°C
- ➔ Moreover, the Himalayan region has seen a 2.5°C rise over pre-industrial levels
- ➔ The country's 10 warmest years in 120 years have all been in the past 15 years

ANNUAL MEAN TEMPERATURE IN INDIA

25.05°C	25.74°C
[2001]	[2024]

1.5°C

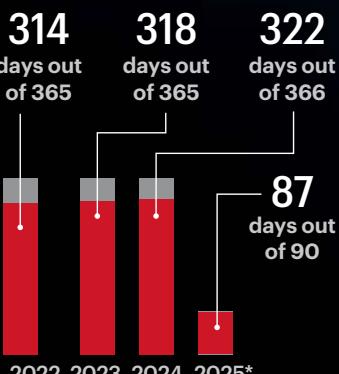
Global rise in annual average temperature since pre-industrial (1850–1900) levels

SHIFTING JET STREAM

- ➔ West Asia and Mediterranean are warming much faster than rest of the land, creating a strong pressure difference vis-à-vis the Arabian Sea
- ➔ This pushes the low-level jet stream northwards into the subcontinent, resulting in excess heat in pre-monsoon and extreme rainfall during monsoon

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

In 2024, India recorded extreme weather on 88% of the days, up from 86% in 2022



WEAKENING OCEAN CURRENTS

- ➔ Global warming weakens the Atlantic Ocean currents by adding fresh water from melting polar ice, which slows the northward flow of warm water
- ➔ This disruption can shift tropical rain belts and weaken the Indian monsoon, intensifying heat waves and droughts across South Asia

90%
of the excess heat is absorbed by the oceans

RISING EXTREME EVENTS IN INDIA

LIGHTNING AND STORMS

218 | **202**
[2024] | [2023]

HEAVY RAINS, FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES

227 | **208**
[2024] | [2023]

COLD WAVE

57 | **29**
[2024] | [2023]

HEAT WAVE

77 | **49**
[2024] | [2023]

Source: CSE-DTE data centre

THE IMPACT

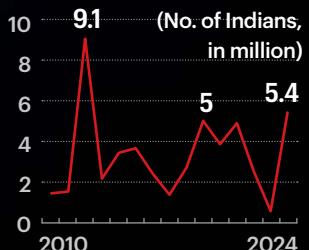
► India is the 7th most vulnerable country in terms of exposure to climate risk events

► The RBI estimates that extreme heat and humidity could cost India up to 4.5% of its GDP by 2030 due to lost labour hours

► The impact can be seen in lives lost—highest in the past decade—and damage to dwellings and crops

DISPLACEMENT

In 2024, India accounted for 12% of all disaster-related internal displacements globally



Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

HUMAN LIVES LOST



HOUSES DAMAGED



CROP AREA AFFECTED



2023-24 and 2024-25 figures are provisional; Source: EnviStats India 2025, MoSPI

Climate chaos, in fact, is turning into an ever-present nightmare in India. Extreme weather events such as excess rainfall, unseasonal cyclones, debilitating droughts and heat waves have increased in both regularity and intensity across the land. "Every season today is characterised by an extreme weather event," remarks K.J. Ramesh, former director general of the India Meteorological Department (IMD). This is evident in the numbers. From January to March this year, extreme weather battered India on 87 out of 90 days. The pattern was no accident: in 2024, the country suffered climate shocks on 322 out of 366 days, or 88 per cent of the year, according to the Centre for Science and Environment, which maintains a yearly tracker. This surpassed the 318 days in 2023 and 314 in 2022.

AN ENDLESS CALAMITY

Not just lives, but fields, crops, infrastructure and entire livelihoods are being lost to what has become a new normal of ceaseless disasters. A recent report by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reductions found that even in relatively calmer times—the 20 years from 1998 to 2017—climate-related disasters cost India \$79.5 billion (nearly Rs 7 lakh crore). The Reserve Bank of India's Report on Currency and Finance for 2023–24, estimates that, by 2030, extreme heat and humidity could cost India up to 4.5 per cent of its GDP due to lost labour hours. The human toll is as brutal: 3,080 climate-related deaths in 2024–25, the highest in a decade, compared to 2,616 the previous year.

India is now among the top 10 climate-vulnerable nations. The IMD confirms that the country's average temperature has already risen in the past two decades from 25.05°C in 2001 to 25.74°C in 2024. The 0.69°C rise may sound modest but, in climate science, even half a degree can mean the difference between survivable stress and catastrophe. A June 2025 report titled 'Weathering the Storm' by development consultancy IPE Global and advanced mapping solutions provider Esri India estimated that Indian cities will see a twofold rise in heat-wave days and a 43 per cent rise in rainfall intensity by 2030.

Abinash Mohanty, global sector head, climate & sustainability, IPE Global, outlines how climate change is causing several seasonal disruptions. The amount of rain for an entire monsoon is now falling over a day or two, the leading cause behind floods in Kerala, Chennai, Mumbai and Bengaluru in recent years. In fact, he adds, 85 per cent of India's 738 districts are hotspots for extreme events, with 45 per cent of these exhibiting what in climate parlance is called a 'swapping trend'. This means traditionally flood-prone areas face more frequent and intense droughts, and vice versa. So while Rajasthan experienced flash floods in August 2025, drought is threatening the lush green states of the Northeast. Meanwhile, along India's 11,098 km coastline, cyclones are intensifying, and rising seas pose a threat to cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.



A flooded locality
in Delhi, Sept. 3

Globally, too, red lines have been crossed. The World Meteorological Organization declared 2024 the first year when average global temperatures breached the 1.5°C threshold above pre-industrial levels, the ceiling set by the Paris Climate Accord. It was also the warmest year in 175 years of record-keeping, marked by the unprecedented failure of the Gulf of Panama upwelling—a reliable pulse of cool water into the Pacific Ocean—which did not occur this year for the first time since records began. Each of the past 10 years has been among the hottest on record. In India, the 10 warmest years in 120 years have all been in the past 15 years. The planet is heating at breakneck speed, and India is among those bearing the brunt. "There is a pressing need to consider the consequences of a 2°C target," warns Mohanty. "At our current pace, we will not be able to adapt fast enough."

But why are climate patterns veering so dramatically off their set paths? Earth's climate has always been prone to change, warming and cooling over thousands of years due to shifts in the planet's orbit and tilt. But human activity has accelerated this natural rhythm. Carbon emissions from burning coal, oil and gas, combined with deforestation and urban sprawl, have supercharged the greenhouse effect. This has compacted climate change cycles



“While climate change is a global driver leading to extreme weather events, human activities act as local amplifiers”

— **RAGHUNATH MURTUGUDDE**, Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland



“The mindset that nothing will happen is the biggest socio-behavioural problem in the country. The culture of safety must be built on a war footing among local bodies and citizens”

— **SANJAY SRIVASTAVA**, Chairman, CROPC



“We should have evacuation strategies for all extreme weather events. Currently, we have only one, for cyclones along the coasts. There is none for floods. All we do is put up tents in safe areas”

— **K.J. RAMESH**, Former Director General, India Meteorological Department



“There is a pressing need to consider the consequences of a 2°C [rise in temperature] because, at our current pace, India will not be able to adapt fast enough”

— **ABINASH MOHANTY**, Global Sector Head, Climate Change & Sustainability, IPE Global

that in the past took thousand of years to just a few decades now, says Roxy Mathew Koll, climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune. In fact, the science behind climate change is sobering. For every 1°C rise in global average temperature, the atmosphere can hold 7 per cent more moisture. The oceans, heating faster than ever, evaporate more water, fuelling cyclones and cloudbursts. These create storms that are wetter and more destructive. Hotter oceans see the Earth's frozen poles melt at an even faster rate, driving the rise in sea levels.

WHY THE CLIMATE CHAOS

Averages tell only part of the story. As important is where and when the warming happens. West Asia and the Mediterranean, for example, are heating at a faster pace as dry regions warm faster. This reduces the atmospheric pressure near the surface, creating a strong pressure difference between West Asia and the Arabian Sea, pushing northward the powerful wind systems called low-level jet stream. That shift creates scorching pre-monsoon heat in northwest India and the Himalayan foothills. In the monsoon months, it sprays those same regions with excess moisture. The result is a cruel double whammy of lethal heat waves and catastrophic floods hitting the same areas in back-to-back seasons. “Both seasons are now rendered more extreme due to these perfect conditions over the arid and semi-arid northwest

and vulnerable Himalayan foothills,” says climate expert Raghunath Murtugudde, currently emeritus professor at the University of Maryland and visiting professor at IIT Kanpur. At the same time, rising temperatures are weakening the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation—a major system of ocean currents—by adding fresh water from melting polar ice, which dilutes seawater and slows the northward flow of warm water. This disruption can shift tropical rain belts and weaken the Indian monsoon, intensifying heat waves and droughts across the subcontinent.

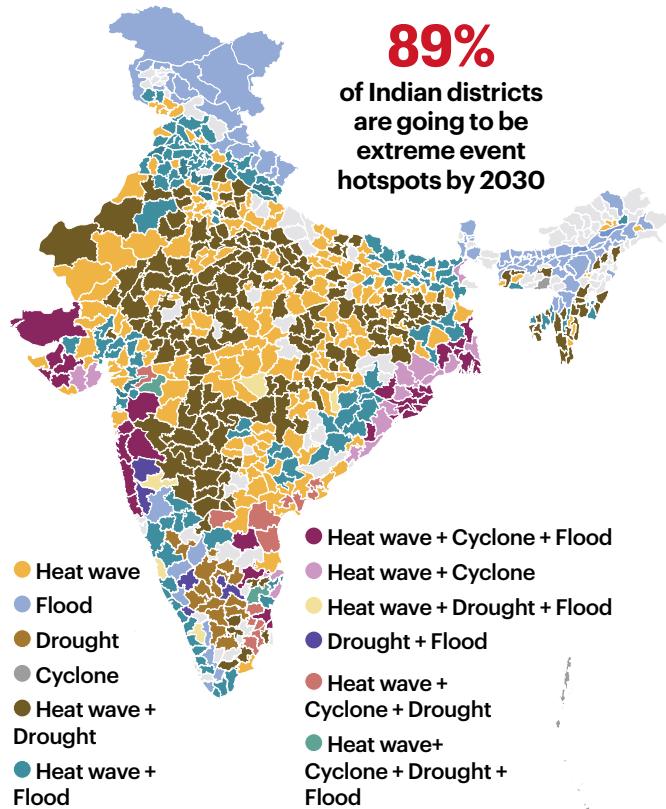
While climate change is a global driver leading to extreme weather events, a country’s development activities act as local amplifiers. Urbanisation, infrastructure development and human habitation on mountain slopes exacerbate the impact of rain with more land slips and flash floods. That fallout is visible across India’s geography today. In Himachal and Uttarakhand, fragile slopes have been weakened further by highways, tunnels and dams that are collapsing under extreme rainfall, burying entire villages (see accompanying story, *Flood of Apathy*). In Dharali, Uttarakhand, this August, a Himalayan stream turned into a raging torrent, wiping out shops and homes built right on the riverbed. “First, the riverbed was taken over by construction, and now the river has taken it back,” says Manshi Asher, an environmental justice activist and researcher and cofounder of Himdhara Collective. In Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, the paradox is starker—searing heat waves

THE THREAT AHEAD

By 2030, districts predominantly in coastal areas will be exposed to all four hazards—flood, drought, cyclone and extreme heat—while those in hills and plains will brace for floods, drought and heat wave

89%

of Indian districts
are going to be
extreme event
hotspots by 2030



Source: State of Extreme Events; Mohanty et al 2024 | IPE Global and Esri India Climate Risk Observatory

one month, floods the next. “Climate change is loading the dice by increasing the duration, frequency, scale and intensity of extreme weather events,” says Murtugudde.

WHAT INDIA NEEDS TO DO

To combat climate change and limit its damage, the Modi government has already set ambitious targets: achieving net zero emissions by 2070, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by a billion tonnes by 2030 and meeting half of India’s energy needs through renewables in the same period. Meanwhile, faced with the relentless rise in extreme weather events, experts and government agencies are increasingly turning to science and technology for better prediction, early warning and mapping of vulnerabilities. IMD has done commendable work in cyclone forecasting, saving countless lives. But even as its seasonal forecasts, which cover entire monsoon periods, are improving, experts want them to get hyperlocal and at scale so that citywide prevention measures can be planned in advance. Likewise, decadal predictions for the next 10–20 years, which estimate whether a monsoon will be in the up or down phase, should ideally come at the local, if not hyperlocal, level.

Granular risk maps are another key mitigation measure. The current ones outline the hazards each district is prone to, along with people and assets at risk, besides vulnerability maps to assess communities’ ability to cope with the hazards. But experts want them developed at much higher resolutions, on kilometre scale, for each potential threat, from drought, heat wave, fire and rain to floods. Equally important is a constant update of these profiles, as rapid climate change adds new risks to existing ones. Risks, therefore, need to be reassessed yearly to ensure they are factored into development planning, says Ramesh.

Several states have rolled out action plans to combat heat waves, floods, lightning and thunderstorms and build resilience. But resilience on paper is not translating into action on ground. Coordination between central, state and local bodies remains weak and implementation often falters. Sanjay Srivastava, chairman of the Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion Council (CROPC), points out how Punjab was warned about the risk of floods as early as April, yet it had no plan of action. “The mindset that nothing will happen is the biggest socio-behavioural problem in the country,” he says. “The culture of safety must be built on a war footing among local bodies and citizens. Even if early warnings are issued, the problem lies in implementation by local authorities and compliance by people.”

Mitigation measures such as urban planning regulations for construction, buildings, drainage and power supply must be designed to minimise the impact of disasters when they strike. It remains a huge challenge. Local governance bodies

often have knowledge of no-build zones and vulnerable areas, yet grant approvals for unsafe construction or turn a blind eye to violations of safety norms in connivance with local stakeholders. “The biggest problem is the lack of implementation of environmental bylaws by the local bodies and compliance by the common people. This is possible due to the connivance among local government bodies, the contractors, and political patronage. That needs to stop,” says Srivastava. Cities, too, must be redesigned. Experts talk of “urban sponges” that include parks, permeable pavements, rain gardens and drainage systems that soak up rainfall instead of letting it deluge streets. “The idea is to ensure falling water walks and walking water stops,” says Murtugudde.

Equally critical is strengthening the state disaster response forces (SDRFs). Their primary role is to carry out relief and rescue operations during disasters, but on non-disaster days, their mandate includes educating people, spreading awareness on disaster management and preparing communities with evacuation strategies, alternative shelters and rescue routes. States like UP, West Bengal and Bihar have improved their preparedness through their SDRFs and even conducted mock exercises with citizens in flood-prone areas. However, there should be



The Sangam banks
in Prayagraj, Aug. 27

evacuation strategies for all extreme weather events. “Currently, India has only one, for cyclones along the coasts,” says Ramesh. “There is none for floods. The only strategy used is to put up tents in safe areas, which is more of a reactive measure.”

ADAPTATION IS THE KEY

Experts warn that while mitigation softens the effect, adaptation is what will decide survival here and now. Fortunately, adaptation spending rose from 3.7 to 5.6 per cent of GDP between FY16 and FY22. India’s cyclone early warning systems have saved thousands of lives, especially in Odisha, but flood, landslide and lightning forecasts are still too broad to act upon. “They must be early enough, and at a hyperlocal level, so that decisions can be made,” insists Murtugudde. Lightning, for instance, is a huge emerging risk. Between 2019 and 2025, lightning strikes rose by 400 per cent across the country. In fact, among other climate disasters, lightning consistently caused the highest number of deaths, with figures ranging from 2,357 in 2018 to 2,887 in 2022. Rajasthan has shown the way: after lightning deaths at Amer Fort in 2021, it rolled out village warning systems, built lightning-safe shelters and installed protection devices in schools and hospitals. Fatalities in the state on account of lightning strikes have fallen considerably since.

It is also essential to ensure compliance with climate norms while planning and executing major infrastructure projects. “Any infrastructure development should decrease risk, only then can resilience be built, and future threats, worsened by climate change, be reduced. Infrastructure should not just address present risks but also prepare for emerging ones. That, unfortunately, is not happening,” says Ramesh. The consequences are already visible. Several mega infrastructure projects, supposedly



“Carbon emissions from coal, oil and gas, along with deforestation and urbanisation, have supercharged the greenhouse effect, compacting climate change cycles from millennia to a few decades”

— ROXY MATHEW KOLL, Climate Scientist,
Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune

“People must be included in the governance process, be it land-use planning or infrastructure development. There is also a need to decentralise climate data and share it with both citizens and planners”

— MANSHI ASHER, Co-founder, Himdhara Collective



resilient, have collapsed in the face of extreme weather. The so-called all-weather highway between Mandi and Manali has seen considerable damage due to floods this year. The Tapovan reservoir in Uttarakhand collapsed in 2021 and, in October 2023, the Teesta III dam in Sikkim was washed away. This must change. Mohanty of IPE Global suggests that climate risk assessment should become a mandatory compliance for all infrastructure projects in addition to environmental compliances.

Any solution must also involve communities. Asher stresses the need to include people in the governance process, be it land-use planning or infrastructure development. She also highlights the need to decentralise climate data and share it with both citizens and planners. Grassroots knowledge about which rivulets flood every year or which slopes slide regularly is invaluable. “Himachal has data at the district level on landslides, but it does not feed into policy for development or urban planning. It does not reach the department of infrastructure, local bodies, or panchayats,” says Asher.

The science is clear, the warnings unambiguous and the damage already here. India also has the institutions, the data, and the expertise. What it lacks is consistent enforcement and political will. Added to this are poor compliance with climate norms and communities left out of land-use planning. Regular assessments of emerging climate risks are also ignored. Together, these shortcomings stand in the way of building a truly disaster-resilient India and must be addressed on a war footing. Or else, the country will remain locked in a cycle of rebuilding after each disaster. The culture of *jugaad* cannot patch up a collapsing climate. Prevention, not improvisation, must become the national mindset. The time to act is now, for climate change will not wait for anyone. ■

**PUNJAB****56****DEATH TOLL****₹12,000 cr.****OFFICIAL LOSS
ESTIMATE****612 mm****AGGREGATE
RAINFALL*****50%****EXCESS RAIN**

* For the period
Jun. 1-Sept. 15, 2025;
Source: IMD

SUBMERGED
Aerial view of
Ghanaur village,
Patiala district,
Punjab, Sept. 4



COVER STORY

CLIMATE IMPACT

FLOOD OF APATHY

THE COUNTRY'S NORTHWEST HAS BEEN DEVASTATED BY EXTREME WEATHER PATTERNS THIS MONSOON. IT'S ALSO TESTED THE RESILIENCE OF PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENTS, AS WELL AS THE LIMITS OF RELIEF

By **ANILESH S. MAHAJAN** in the Ravi, Sutlej and Beas tract

T

HE WATERS HAVE STARTED TO RECEDE BACK INTO THE RAVI, but life in Gurchak village, in the Dera Baba Nanak area of Gurdaspur district, Punjab, will take months to return to normal. The village's 650 acres of farmland remain fully submerged, while another 1,100 acres are heavy with murky pools and silt from the monstrous surge on August 27. That afternoon, minutes

after the floodgates at the Madhopur barrage near Pathankot were breached, the rampaging Ravi tore through temporary embankments, transforming what were once lush green fields into scenes of devastation. By the end of the day, the river had swollen 3-4 km on both sides. Two weeks later, the air here is still dank with the stench of rotting crops and dead livestock. Gurchak is emblematic of Punjab's monsoon ordeal this year. Across the state, around 1,900 villages were inundated, 56 people died, and some 480,000 acres of farmland have gone under.

If Punjab's tragedy is about the drowned countryside, in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, it's about the mountains crumbling and river valleys inundated. Indeed, this monsoon season, northwest India has seen the worst of the whiplash fury of the rains. According to data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), 124 of the 208 districts in the region, or nearly 60 per cent, received excess/ large rainfall in the June 1-September 1 period. The stats are mind-boggling: while Punjab got in excess of 612 mm of aggregate rain (50 per cent above normal compared to an average monsoon), the figure was close to 1,000 mm for Himachal, climbing up to 1,342 mm for Uttarakhand. J&K had no better news to tell, with 37 per cent excess rain, and reel highlights featuring an August 26 cloudburst that saw 380 mm of rain fall in a 24-hour period that almost, literally, sunk Jammu. It was clear that climate change was playing havoc in the region, with devastating effect. What was also evident was how poorly these states were prepared for the deluge and its consequences, as this ground report indicates.

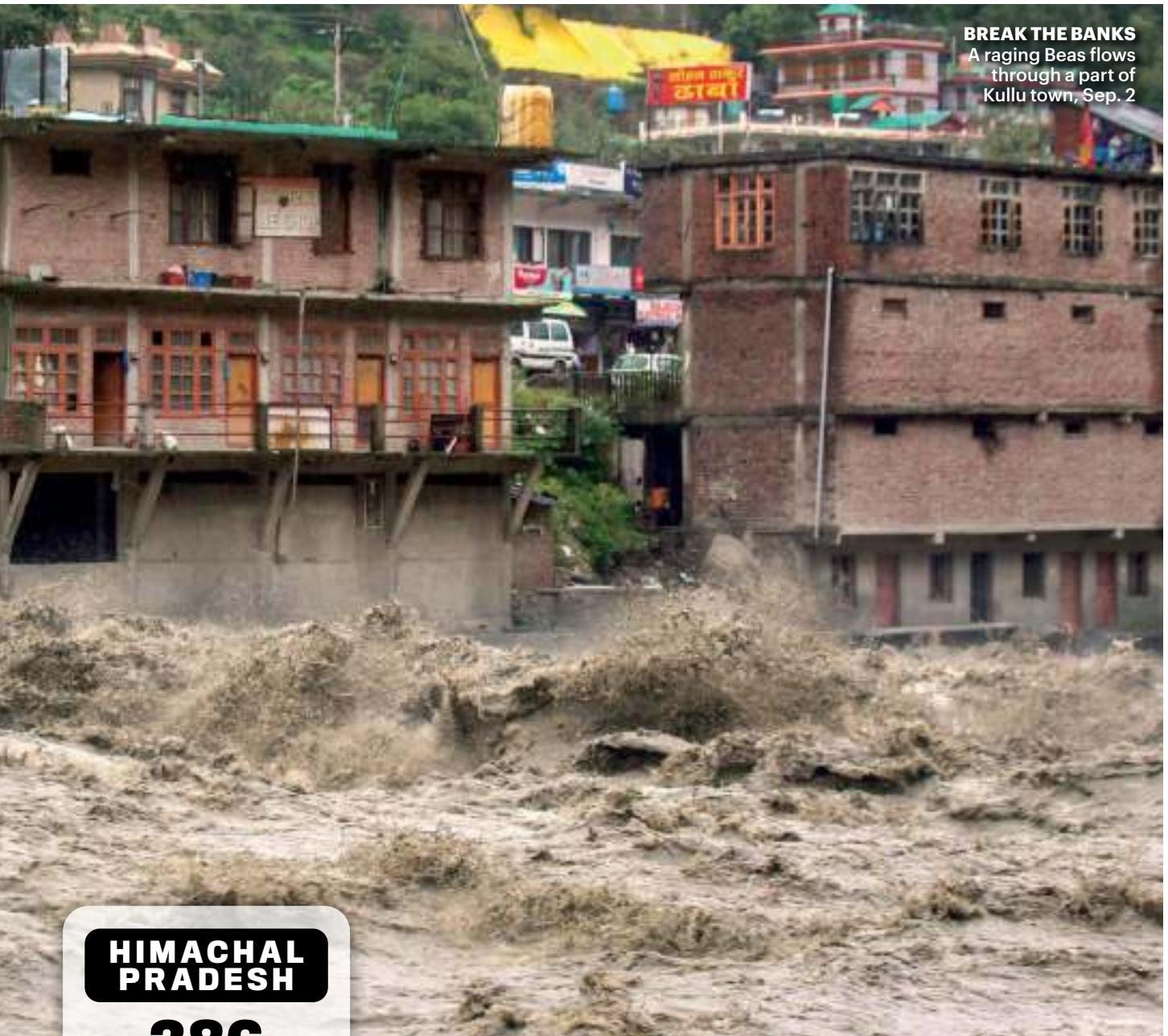
PUNJAB'S DAM MISERIES

In April, when the IMD predicted 105 per cent of normal rainfall during the monsoon, the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB)—which manages the Bhakra Nangal dam on the Sutlej and the others on the Beas—had recommended controlled releases from Bhakra to prevent reservoir overflow. But Punjab opposed it, citing state allocation norms and even deployed police at the dam to block



PTI

IMD DATA SAYS THAT OF THE 208 DISTRICTS IN NORTHWEST INDIA, NEARLY 60% RECEIVED EXCESS/ LARGE RAINFALL IN THE JUNE 1 TO SEPT. 1 PERIOD



HIMACHAL PRADESH

386

DEATH TOLL

₹4,100 cr.

OFFICIAL LOSS ESTIMATE

991 mm

AGGREGATE RAINFALL*

44%

EXCESS RAIN

* For the period
Jun. 1-Sept. 15, 2025;
Source: IMD

outflows to Haryana. Cut to August-end and with water levels at the dams reaching the danger mark, the BBMB was releasing 65,000 cusecs from Bhakra and 80,000 cusecs from Pong dam every day. Faulty weather forecasts left operators with little room to stagger discharges. “The release from Bhakra and Pong this year has been the highest in history,” confirmed BBMB chairman Manoj Tripathi. Between July 1 and September 5, the Beas alone received 11.7 billion cubic metres (BCM) of inflow, compared to, say, the 9.5 BCM for the same period in 2023 (when the last flood took place). The result: nearly three score dead and about half a million acres of farmland laid to waste. Wilted crops of cotton, paddy

and sugarcane are everywhere.

In Sultanpur Lodhi, farmer Baldev Singh points to his flattened stalks of paddy: “We have spent thousands on seeds and pesticides, and now everything is gone in one night. Even if the water recedes, the silt has choked the fields.” Across Gurdaspur, Tarn Taran, Amritsar, Jalandhar and Kapurthala, the stories repeat themselves, as families complain of their savings getting wiped out, and prospects looking grim for the kharif procurement season. Officials peg the losses at over Rs 12,000 crore, but farm unions argue the figure could be nearly double once input costs and damage to farm machinery are included.

On September 8, Punjab chief minister



SWEPT AWAY

A woman mourns her lost home after a cloudburst in Kishtwar district, Aug. 15

Bhagwant Mann—speaking from a hospital bed in Mohali, where he was admitted on September 5 with viral fever—announced his cabinet's long-awaited flood relief package. The irony wasn't lost on many: while the CM recuperated, the state had yet to begin its special *girdawari* (damage survey) to map the destruction. Still, the plan was unveiled: Rs 20,000 per acre for crop loss along with promises of various policy reliefs. On paper, Punjab's proposal may look substantial, but on the ground it feels woefully inadequate. "Rs 20,000 barely covers input costs. We expected at least Rs 40,000 per acre," says Satwant Singh of Gurchak. Tenant farmers, who form a large but invisible part of Punjab's agrarian economy, face a double blow: without formal contract norms, they are not eligible for compensation. "This relief doesn't recognise us," says Balkar Singh of Ajnala. The Centre has announced relief of Rs 1,600 crore for Punjab and similar amounts for the other states. But that's barely a speck, says the Mann government.

HIMACHAL'S VALLEYS OF WOES

The Himalayan state has seen the worst of it, with 76 days of extreme weather in the June 1-September 1 phase. Cloudbursts contributed to the deadly mix unleashed by torrential downpours from mid-August in the hills, putting the dams—Pong on the Beas and Bhakra Nangal on the Sutlej—to severe test. The spate of landslides in August-September has reopened old wounds over the follies of construction on the steep slopes, with villages in Kullu, Mandi, Chamba, Kinnaur and Shimla districts being buried under mud and debris. Tourist favourite Manali was cut off, the strategic Manali-Leh road was closed and thousands of tourists were stranded. In Chamba district, the Pathankot highway was blocked near Nalda bridge, while the suspension of the annual Manimahesh Yatra stranded over 5,000 pilgrims. Shimla had 828 road closures and three bridges washed away. For fruit

J & K**130+****DEATH TOLL****₹3,000 cr.****OFFICIAL LOSS
ESTIMATE****702 mm****AGGREGATE
RAINFALL*****37%****EXCESS RAIN**

* For the period
Jun. 1-Sept. 15, 2025;
Source: IMD

"THE RELEASE FROM BHAKRA AND PONG [DAMS] HAS BEEN THE HIGHEST IN HISTORY," ADMITS BBMB CHAIRMAN MANOJ TRIPATHI. IT COULDN'T BE HELPED; BETWEEN JULY 1 AND SEPT. 5, THE BEAS ALONE GOT 11.7 BILLION CU. M. OF INFLOW

growers, the losses are crushing. Shimla and Kullu reported Rs 126 crore in orchard damage, with 35,121 growers in Shimla and 10,908 in Kullu hit. Unlike Punjab's prolonged misery, destruction came in violent surges here, carrying away entire valleys in minutes. The Beas, Sutlej and Parvati rivers swelled beyond capacity, and along with lax early-warning systems turned climate shocks into cascading disasters. The Himachal State Disaster Management Authority calculates overall economic losses at over Rs 4,100 crore, spanning homes, shops, livestock sheds and public infrastructure. This comes even as recovery from the 2023 floods—then pegged at Rs 9,500 crore—remains incomplete despite central aid of Rs 2,006 crore and state allocations of Rs 4,500 crore.

CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, walking through relief camps caked in mud, announced immediate cash assistance of Rs 10,000 per affected family, while compensation slabs were set higher. With an annual budget of only Rs 57,000 crore, Sukhu quickly demanded a Rs 12,000 crore special package from the Centre. "We cannot fight climate calamities with 10-year-old relief norms," he declared in Shimla. Which is where talk turns to the structural bind. The Union government's NDRFs (National Disaster Response Funds) and SDRFs still operate on relief slabs last revised in 2015-16: Rs 95,100 for a fully damaged house, Rs 37,500 per cow, Rs 13,500 per hectare for crop loss (capped at 2 ha.). Families who lost members are entitled to Rs 60,000. It also insists on strict cost-sharing ratios; for example, 75:25 with Punjab, 90:10 for Himachal. But these numbers are divorced from today's realities. Even in rural Himachal, rebuilding a house costs Rs 8-10 lakh; apple orchards and livestock are worth several times the compensation announced. "Relief barely covers 30 per cent of the value lost," says Rajesh Chauhan of the Himachal Apple Growers Association. "It feels like a symbolic gesture."

NATURE'S WRATH IN J&K

After the mega floods of 2014, J&K saw its worst natural disaster this year, with over 130 people dead and 33 missing. The Jhelum raged in full spate, prompting evacuations in Anantnag, Pulwama and Srinagar. Bridges in Baramulla and Kupwara were washed away, isolating villages, while the strategic Srinagar-Jammu national highway had to be closed temporarily due to landslides in Ramban district, leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded. Even the cold desert of Ladakh, now a separate UT and normally a rainshadow region of the Himalayas, is fighting the sludge after some 434 per cent excess rainfall this year.

Official assessments show 13,000 ha. (32,000 acres) affected statewide, with paddy fields and fruit orchards devastated. The wider infrastructure collapse compounds the agrarian distress. About 12,000 km of roads are damaged. The collapse

of the Tawi Bridge alone will cost Rs 100 crore to rebuild. "Connectivity is our lifeline; without roads, fruit can't reach the mandis," says Bashir Ahmad, an apple grower from Anantnag, who has lost half his season's harvest. With traffic disrupted for over a fortnight and the repeated closures of the Srinagar-Jammu highway, Kashmir's fruit industry insiders say they are staring at losses of Rs 5,000 crore.

The ecologically fragile region is prone to natural calamities, but what made the recent floods worse is the unabated encroachment of river embankments and floodplains for commercial and residential purposes. Post-2019, the J&K government has made a major push on tourism and infrastructure development, with easy or no EIAs (Environmental Impact Assessments) helping in the smooth conversion of agricultural lands and forest lands for the purpose. Inevitably, this has only aggravated the problem.

UTTARAKHAND'S FRAGILE GEOGRAPHY

On August 5, the nation watched in horror as a viral video showed a giant wall of mud and water descend in fury and sweep away a big chunk of Dharali village in the Bhagirathi eco-sensitive zone in Uttarkashi district. IMD data says 400 mm of rain poured in a matter of hours, triggering the landslide. On its way down, the deluge also hit an army camp and Harsil village. Survivors described it as a "black wall" of debris that gave them no time to react. Some 60 people are still missing. More was to come as the month dragged on.

In September, even capital Dehradun and the holy town of Rishikesh were not spared. Late night on the 15th, a cloudburst in Sahastradhara area triggered flash floods that devastated parts of Dehradun and its surrounding areas. Homes and hotels were inundated, and even the local religious attraction, the Tapkeshwar Mahadev temple, went under, with only half of the giant Hanuman statue and the top domes of the temple visible. Tourist havens like Mussoorie were also hit, with the local hotel association stepping in to offer free accommodation to stranded visitors. Association member Sanjay Agarwal reveals, "Parts of all three main roads connecting Dehradun and Mussoorie were washed away; nearly 3,000 tourists were trapped here." Decades of deforestation, unplanned 'road cutting' on the slopes and construction along the riverbanks only magnified the damage.

The stories of apathy and untrammelled development, then, are common to these northern states. Alongside, the 2025 floods have also laid bare the fault lines of India's relief system. State governments compete for empathy; the Centre insists on uniformity. Experts have long argued for indexing



relief to inflation and linking payouts to market prices. A 2023 NITI Aayog paper even proposed dynamic relief tied to IMD-certified rainfall anomalies. Nothing has moved. For now, families wait for cheques that cover a sliver of their losses. Crops, homes and lives are swept away in hours. Relief takes weeks—sometimes months—to trickle in, if at all it does.

WHAT THE NORTH NEEDS

In the last week of August, videos of massive timber logs swirling through the Beas and Parvati rivers during the floods went viral. The images exposed what activists in Himachal have long alleged: unchecked illegal tree felling in the fragile Himalayan state. On September 4, the Supreme Court took note, remarking that such quantities of timber "cannot be explained by natural causes alone". Citing the visuals, the bench warned that large-scale deforestation had amplified the devastation. Notices went out to the Centre, ministries and departments concerned, but there has been no word of action taken. The SC's remarks tell its own story of how the floods have exposed chronic weaknesses in disaster preparedness and climate adaptation.

In Punjab, poor drainage infrastructure, unchecked sand mining, and ad hoc dam operations turned heavy rainfall into a full-blown agrarian crisis. Yet the state's Ranjit Sagar Dam and the Centre-controlled BBMB have not invested in



INUNDATED

The Tapkeshwar Mahadev temple in Dehradun, Sept. 16; (inset) the mandir in summer

UTTARAKHAND

85

DEATH TOLL

₹3,000 cr.

**OFFICIAL LOSS
ESTIMATE**

1,343 mm

**AGGREGATE
RAINFALL***

22%

EXCESS RAIN

* For the period
Jun. 1-Sept. 15, 2025;
Source: IMD

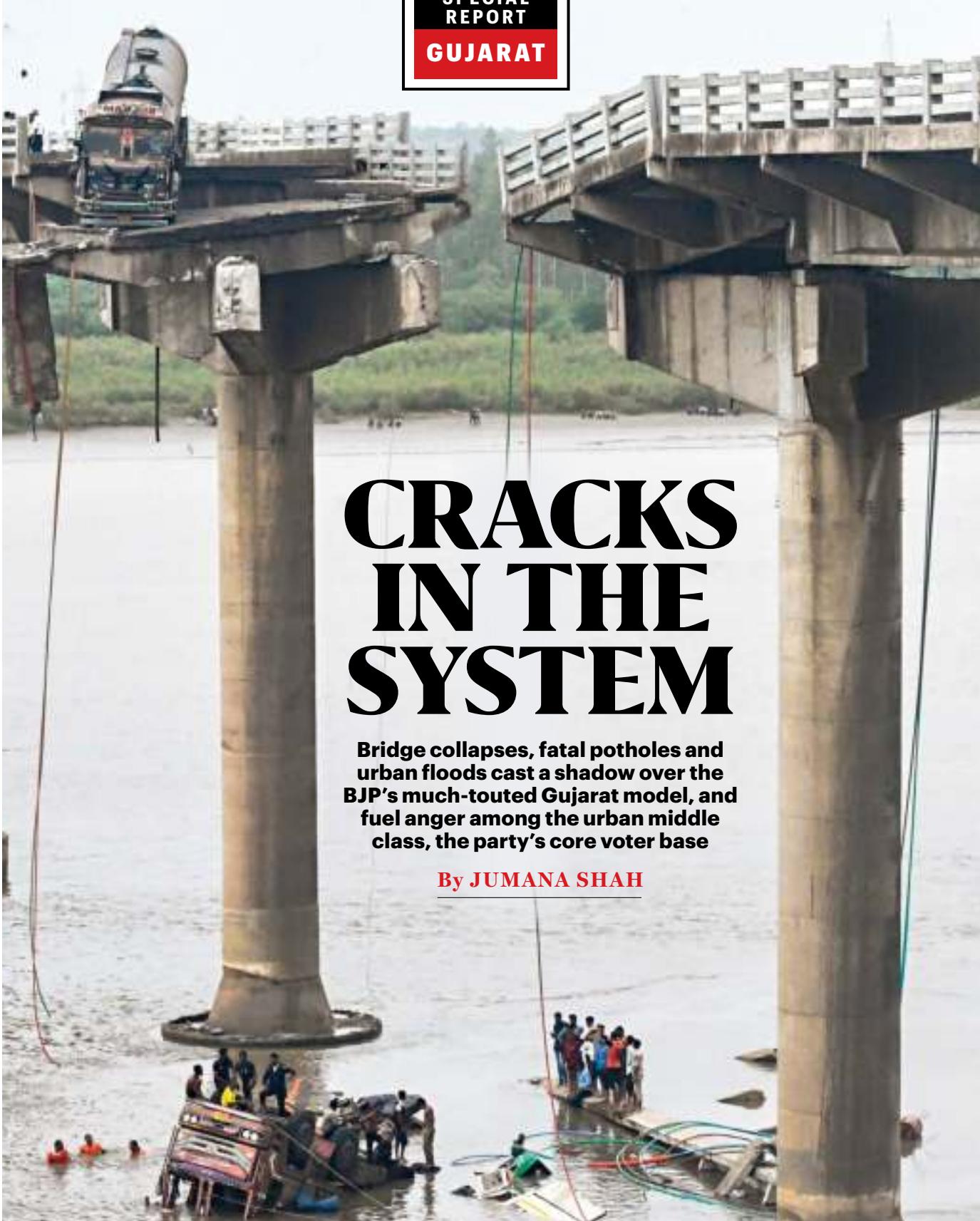
THE 2025 FLOODS HAVE EXPOSED MORE THAN CLIMATE FURY, THEY HAVE EXPOSED THE FAULT LINES OF INDIA'S RELIEF SYSTEM. STATE GOVTs COMPETE FOR EMPATHY; THE CENTRE INSISTS ON UNIFORMITY

automated telemetry-based river gauges for real-time monitoring, or dynamic reservoir operation protocols that allow pre-emptive releases based on weather forecasts. Himachal's vulnerability stems from decades of unregulated construction on fragile slopes, deforestation, and poorly safeguarded hydropower projects. The state has yet to implement slope-stabilisation through bioengineering, enforce strict no-construction zones along riverbanks, or instal automatic rainfall-landslide early-warning sensors in high-risk valleys. Amit Prothi, director general, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), says, "The challenge today is to make better risk assessments and build resilient infrastructure accordingly."

Uttarakhand would do well to take this advice. The ISRO Landslide Atlas places one of its hill districts, Rudraprayag, as the most landslide-prone in India, followed closely by Tehri Garhwal, while Chamoli, Uttarkashi and Pauri Garhwal districts also figure in the country's top 25 hotspots. The state lies in the Main Central Thrust, a particularly fragile tectonic zone of the Himalayas. The monsoon rains, often intensified by western disturbances, trigger slope failures and cloudbursts in narrow valleys. When these combine with the unplanned construction on riverbeds and floodplains, the damage multiplies. "The Himalayan region now has more structures, more people, more unchecked construction on riverbeds. This can only mean more destruction during freak weather events," says Charu C. Pant, retired professor of geology, Kumaon University.

Experts stress that mitigation cannot be reactive. Long-term resilience must include wetland restoration to absorb excess water, a strengthening of embankments and real-time river monitoring. Coordination between dams and state governments is crucial to manage water release during peak flows. The National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee, notes that integrated watershed management can reduce flood intensity by 30 per cent if implemented systematically across the northern states. The 2025 deluge will be remembered not just for the lives lost or crops destroyed, but for the uncomfortable truths it revealed: India's rivers, once the cradle of civilisations, are increasingly becoming unpredictable agents of ruin. Whether the lessons are heeded this time will decide if the next great flood comes later, or far sooner. ■

—with Avaneesh Mishra and Kaleem Geelani



CRACKS IN THE SYSTEM

Bridge collapses, fatal potholes and urban floods cast a shadow over the BJP's much-touted Gujarat model, and fuel anger among the urban middle class, the party's core voter base

By JUMANA SHAH

GAMBHIRA BRIDGE, Vadodara , July 9

The 40-year-old bridge connecting Vadodara and Anand districts collapsed when a 10-15-metre slab gave way, causing several vehicles to plunge into the Mahisagar river. The bridge was known to be in poor condition despite "some repairs"; prior warnings had been ignored

20 DEATHS
9 INJURED

THE REASONS

A preliminary investigation by the roads and buildings department pointed to structural failure due to 'pedestal and articulation crushing'. Heavy rains may have contributed



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On July 9, the image of a tanker hanging precariously on the edge of the broken Gambhira bridge at Padra in Gujarat's Vadodara district made for a haunting visual of trust betrayed, promises undone. A 10-15-metre concrete slab between two of the bridge's 23 piers collapsed suddenly, forcing several vehicles to plunge into the Mahisagar river, claiming 20 lives in a few minutes.

This was no isolated incident. Over the past three years, a spate of collapses involving the state's urban infrastructure has cast serious doubt on the BJP's much-vaunted 'Gujarat model'—a narrative built largely on the optics of wide roads, expansive flyovers and marquee projects like the Sabarmati Riverfront. At least six bridges and flyovers—some still under construction—have crumbled during this period, resulting in the deaths of over 160 people. In August 2024, most parts of Vadodara city were inundated for three days as the Vishwamitri river swelled; in June 2025, Surat encountered a similar fate. Not to mention the potholed roads that cause accidents almost every day, triggering public outrage.

On July 8, protests erupted following the death of a biker on NH 48 near Valsad after he skidded over potholes, and was run over by a truck. Locals held demonstrations at multiple places, terming the road 'highway to hell' and a 'death trap'. Fatalities on roads caused by potholes are classified 'accidents', with no investigation or accountability.

The rising anger among the urban middle class—the BJP's core voter base—has given the government much cause for worry, especially with urban local body elections scheduled early next year. Incidentally, Chief Minister Bhu-

FALLING APART
The collapsed Morbi suspension bridge



BRIDGES TO DISASTER

A string of recent collapses across Gujarat reveals a deadly mix of official apathy, decay and corruption

SUSPENSION BRIDGE, Morbi

OCT. 2022

The 19th-century pedestrian bridge over the Machchhu river collapsed just days after it was reopened following repairs. Overcrowding during

Diwali celebrations was cited as a reason. A forensic report highlighted **rusted cables, broken anchors and loose bolts** as causes. Ten people were charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder

141 killed, over 180 injured

pendra Patel holds the urban development, and roads and buildings portfolios. Following the Gambhira incident, the roads and buildings department suspended four officials. Several district collectors instructed the contractors to immediately repair the damaged roads at their cost. Municipal commissioners were asked to oversee work done on potholed roads, live photographs of which were posted by the BJP on social media. In the past six months, the roads and buildings department has closed 178 of the 1,800 inspected bridges to vehicles. The Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd has also surveyed hundreds of its bridges over canals, closing 53 to traffic.

THE ROT WITHIN

What explains this sudden collapse of infrastructure? The short answer, say experts, is systemic corruption. "It is not just about money anymore," says an industry insider. "Many government engineers are not only unwilling, but also unqualified and ill-equipped to carry out effective oversight. Almost all government tasks are outsourced to Project Management

Consultants (PMC) and oversight is done by Third Party Inspectors (TPI), reports merely signed by engineers to take the fall when a disaster happens. There is a nexus of contractors, PMC and TPI—all politically connected entities—that control much of the trade with their inflated costs."

After every incident, engineers are suspended, but by then they would have allegedly amassed enough illicit wealth to not miss the 25 per cent salary cut. Besides, suspension does not deprive them of retirement benefits. "The 'consultant culture' began in the '80s. Before that, engineers did inspections and took responsibility for every signature. We greased their palms then too, but now, with consultants preparing the reports, engineers are often unaware of what is actually happening," says a contractor.

The Gambhira incident bears ominous similarities with the November 2022 Morbi tragedy, in which 141 people died. The 19th-century bridge was reopened after incomplete repairs done by a local clock-making company without the requisite safety certification. Three years later, as the 40-year-old Gambhira

MINDHOLA RIVER

BRIDGE, Tapi

JUN. 2023

A portion of the two-year-old ready-to-inaugurate bridge crumbled, sending shockwaves as it was to open for vehicular traffic soon. Surat-based contractor Akshay Construction was blacklisted for using substandard materials and several senior engineers involved in the project were suspended

No loss of life

BHOGAVO RIVER BRIDGE, Surendranagar

SEPT. 2023

A portion of the 40-year-old bridge near Wadhwan city fell down when a 40-tonne dumper attempted to cross. No action was taken as signs banning heavy vehicles were put up

4 injured

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, AT LEAST SIX BRIDGES HAVE COLLAPSED, LEAVING MORE THAN 160 PEOPLE DEAD

bridge fell apart, local politicians and villagers produced multiple documents to show how its unsafe condition was brought to the notice of local authorities, but no action was taken. Officials confide that 'some repairs were done', but locals claim they only filled a few gaps superficially while the much-needed structural repairs were ignored.

Experts point out that there were many tell-tale signs of deterioration that appear to have been overlooked. "Asset management is extremely essential," says Yash Majeethia, treasurer, Gujarat Institute of Civil Engineers and Architects (GICEA). "About a decade ago, most trucks were two- or three-axle vehicles, often carrying loads even

UNDER-CONSTRUCTION

FLYOVER, Palanpur

OCT. 2023

Two girders of the overbridge near the RTO Circle collapsed due to **substandard material used**. Case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder filed against four engineers and directors of the contracting agency GPC Infrastructure

1 killed, 2 injured

HABIYASAR CHOTILA BRIDGE, Surendranagar

AUG. 2024

The 5-year-old small bridge in Habiyasar village collapsed after a sudden water discharge from a dam. Fortunately, the road had been closed to traffic. The sarpanch claimed he had raised **concerns about its construction quality**, but the contractor had dismissed them

No casualties

ing systemic flaws. The contractor's defect liability period was only one year. Within four years, severe damage to the structure was reported and, by May 2022, it was deemed unfit for use. Since then, its fate has been hanging in the balance. Built at a cost of Rs 34 crore, the flyover will be demolished for Rs 3.9 crore, to be recovered from the original contractor, and is expected to be rebuilt for around Rs 52 crore.

SHADOW OPERATORS

For contractors, blacklisting is a real threat, but there are several instances of them finding a way around the punishment. In the Hatkeshwar controversy, original contractors—Ajay Engineering Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd and PMC SGS India Pvt. Ltd—were blacklisted. But other public infrastructure projects awarded to the former were not withdrawn till media outcry forced the authorities' hand.

Besides, sources say, it is an open secret that a blacklisted firm starts operations in another name. "The solution is not to blacklist the firm, but blacklist the operator, so that his corrupt nexus breaks," an insider says. Add to this the cartel of a dozen odd civil contractors who dominate public construction projects by bidding 10-15 per cent below tender cost. "This is the first red flag," says Vatsal Patel, a technical consultant and past president of GICEA. "Hence, we want to recommend to the government to bring in a system to award contracts not to the lowest bidder, but the second lowest bidder."

Interestingly, a contractor dismisses the cost of corruption as only '5-6 per cent' of the total project cost. "We can work well within that," says a retired engineer. "But projects turn out to be of such poor quality because the entire government system is so lax that contractors get away with more theft out of sheer greed. It is a reflection on the society. Be it the engineers or contractors, their responsibility of ensuring even basic safety of commuters has gone missing." In Gujarat's crumbling infrastructure, the foundations most eroded are those of governance. ■

up to 1.5x their capacity, causing uneven stress on bridges. While overloading is better regulated today, it still occurs with two-, three- and multi-axle trucks. Many existing bridges were not originally designed for such loads and, without regular maintenance, the risks naturally increase."

An industry veteran says regular maintenance and alert engineers can prevent such disasters, but the 'culture' of late is to focus on new infrastructure rather than maintain existing assets. "Financial allocation, too, is insufficient. Ideally, 1 per cent of project cost should be reserved for maintenance, but only around 0.5 per cent is. The original contractor's defect liability period of the new asset is usually five years, so he does only the bare minimum for the asset to stay afloat till then. Thereafter, the new contractor cuts corners as maintenance contracts are not high-value. This is where effective government oversight can make a difference," he says.

But the case of Hatkeshwar flyover, inaugurated in Ahmedabad in 2017, the source of much embarrassment to the government, set new lows in expos-



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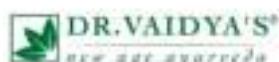
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SOUTHERN SURGE

India Today Group's Rajdeep Sardesai with Karnataka deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar; right, Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin speaks via videoconference



“Those who cannot tolerate Tamil Nadu’s growth slander the Dravidian model that is responsible for this growth. We ignore them and continue on our journey”

M.K. STALIN
Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu

“I’m coming out with a new 100 km Bengaluru Business Corridor around the city. The biggest decision I have taken is 44 km of double-decker tracks...there will be a flyover with a metro running on top—the largest in the country”

D.K. SHIVAKUMAR

Deputy Chief Minister, Karnataka

FROM POLITICS AND INDUSTRY TO CINEMA AND SPACE DREAMS, THE ‘INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE-SOUTH’ IN COIMBATORE SHOWCASED THE DYNAMISM OF THE SOUTHERN STATES AND THEIR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

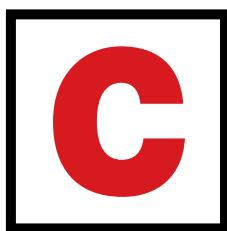
Photographs by ARUN KUMAR



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2



Can Bengaluru's new infrastructure roadmap transform the southern metropolis? Can Amaravati be the template to building new cities from the ground-up? How is the political battleground shaping up in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which go to assembly polls in 2026? What keeps southern cinema ticking? As the sixth edition of the 'India Today Conclave-South' kicked off in Coimbatore this month, a rich variety of discussions foregrounded the vibrant sweep of the peninsula, from its politics to industry to culture.

The keynote sessions and panel discussions, headlined by Karnataka deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar

and Nara Lokesh, HRD minister of Andhra Pradesh, featured as many as five ministers from the southern states. Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin spoke via videoconference. "Federalism should become stronger," he said. "State rights should be protected. We continue to fight for it." Outlining his vision for Bengaluru, Shivakumar said the Karnataka government has earmarked investments of over Rs 1 lakh crore for the tech capital over the next 3-4 years.

Day One of the conclave began with two former chief election commissioners and a former election commissioner weighing in on the hot topics of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and delimitation. "What truly matters," as former election commissioner Ashok Lavasa put it, "is the sanctity and integrity of the electoral rolls."

Next up was Nara Lokesh declaring that Andhra Pradesh CM and his father N. Chandrababu Naidu's agenda was firmly on making his state No. 1, and that his Telugu Desam

Party (TDP) stood steadfast behind the NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "TDP has joined the NDA unconditionally, it continues to support NDA unconditionally," he said.

While conversations on caste census, education policy and cooperative federalism drew insightful perspectives from an eclectic range of speakers, the conclave also featured absorbing discussions on healthcare, delivery of digital services and the dynamics of the southern real estate boom. Actors Rukmini Vasanth and Shwetha Menon were the highlight of the sessions on films and entertainment, while GenZ was represented by two promising youngsters: Andhra-born Jahnavi Dangeti who is training to be an astronaut, and Artificial Intelligence enthusiast Raul John Aju from Kerala. The show-stopper, fittingly for the high-octane event, was Coimbatore's own Narain Karthikeyan, the posterboy of Indian racing. ■

-by Ajay Sukumaran



3



4

1 FEDERALISM AND FUND TWIST

“Just because we belong to the Opposition, the government has suffered irreparable losses. We are not treated on par with BJP-ruled states. That is why we say that, when it comes to fiscal matters, there must be a cooperative federalism”

THANGAM THENNARASU

Minister of Finance and Environment & Climate Change, Tamil Nadu

2 ATTRACTING INVESTMENTS FOR A SUNRISE STATE

“Chandrababu Naiduji has both eyes on Andhra Pradesh. He wants to make the state No. 1... In the past, we have said we are ‘gully’ leaders, not Delhi leaders. So, we are here to develop our states”

NARA LOKESH

Minister of Human Resources Development, Andhra Pradesh

3 HYDERABAD: GROWING IT AS A GLOBAL HUB

“We are not competing with our neighbouring states. We would like to see our nation grow and ultimately we stand amid the healthy competition we have with Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh”

D. SRIDHAR BABU

Minister for IT, E&C, Industries & Commerce and Legislative Affairs, Telangana

4 FROM AUTOMATION TO ASPIRATION: BUILDING FUTURE-READY JOBS

“AI-based services with automated voice recognition, processed through the government’s own relatively pure databases, are to me the actual democratising kind of holy grail”

DR PALANIVEL THIAGARAJAN

Minister of Information Technology and Digital Services, Tamil Nadu

HOW DRAVIDIAN IDEOLOGY BECAME TAMIL IDENTITY

“ Dravidian identity is stolen from the original Tamil people. You cannot have the ‘Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam’ and have a Tamil identity. This is my complaint: Dravidian identity has no language. It is racial and regional ”

S. GURUMURTHY
Editor, *Thuglak*



ONE NATION, MANY CLASSROOMS: CAN NEP ALIGN WITH STATE REALITIES?

“ While the NEP mandates education in three languages, two are more than enough. Thinking and forming ideas can happen in one’s mother tongue, while English suffices for engaging globally ”

ANBIL MAHESH
Minister of School Education, TN



“ Education must remain with states. Every state has its own culture, language and vision of social justice. It’s like a family. A family will always look after its children’s future ”

MADHU BANGARAPPA
Minister of Primary & Secondary Education, Karnataka



THE HAT-TRICK HUNT: CAN THE LEFT HOLD KERALA IN 2026?

“ In 2021, the Left in Kerala created history by winning a second term due to its efficiency. We are confident that we will make a hat-trick win in 2026 ”

M.B. RAJESH
Minister of Local Self Government Department and Excise, Kerala

“ In 2021, we never expected that LDF would retain power. But due to Covid, they won. Now the situation has changed and I feel that they will lose in the next poll ”

RAMESH CHENNITHALA
Congress MLA, former Home Minister and Leader of Opposition, Kerala

FROM KHAKI TO KAMAL: BREAKING OLD ORDERS, BUILDING NEW NARRATIVES

“ We are a part of an alliance. If you had asked me six months back, I would push my case to say BJP should have contested alone. But the leadership listens to all sides of the story when they take a very deep pragmatic call ”

K. ANNAMALAI, Ex-President, TN BJP





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THE NEXT BIG TEST: S.I.R. AND DELIMITATION

“Rahul Gandhi is the Leader of the Opposition. He speaks for millions. If he makes such a complaint, EC should not respond in anger but take it seriously”

S.Y. QURAISHI (Centre)
Former Chief Election Commissioner

“The SIR is an important exercise to benchmark the electoral roll, and it is usually conducted periodically. However, the timing of Bihar’s SIR is questionable”

O.P. RAWAT (Right)
Former Chief Election Commissioner

“The phrase vote chori is essentially a political expression. Nobody has the means to know who has voted for whom. What truly matters is the sanctity and integrity of the electoral rolls”

ASHOK LAVASA (Left)
Former Election Commissioner



WHO WILL WIN TAMIL NADU 2026?

“It is not about new narrative, it is about what is being thrust on us. Rs 2,500 crore were not given to Tamil Nadu...Why was it not given to us? Because we did not want Hindi as the third language”

A. SARAVANAN
Spokesperson, DMK

“Is there any Opposition at all? Earlier, we heard about differences between BJP and AIADMK; today, within BJP, within AIADMK... They don’t present themselves as a viable option for the people”

**LAKSHMI
RAMACHANDRAN**, General Secretary, TN Congress

“There were 525 poll promises by the DMK. Three years ago, they were claiming that 90% of the promises were fulfilled. But when you ask them to list out the achievements, there will be no answers”

KOVAI SATHYAN
National Spokesperson,
AIADMK

“In 2024, there was a small error; the AIADMK and BJP ended up contesting alone. The result, 39-0, was given to the DMK’s alliance only because of the vote split between BJP and AIADMK”

VINOJ P. SELVAM
Secretary, TN BJP



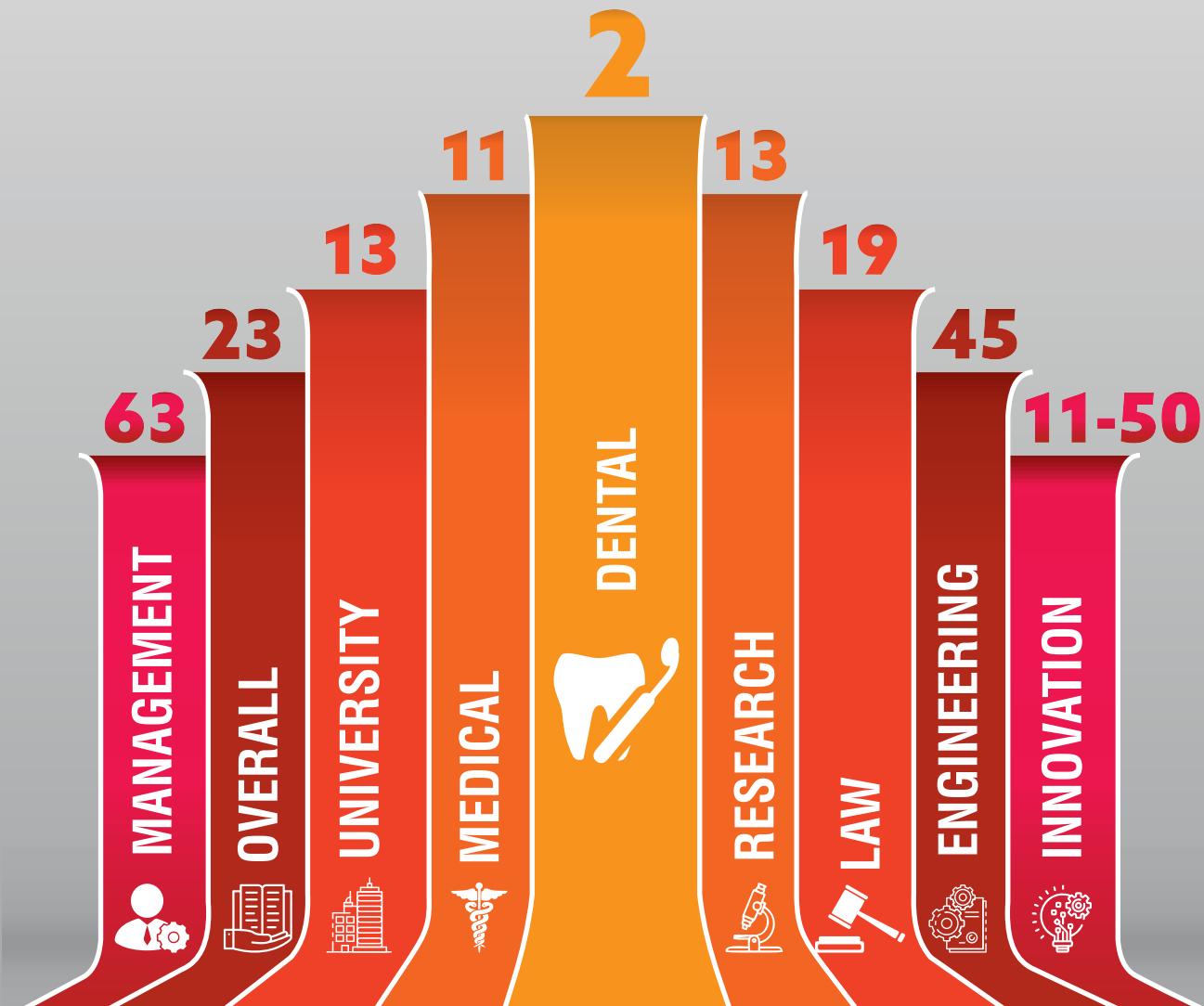
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REIMAGINING THE REAL ESTATE STORY: FROM DREAMS TO DESTINATIONS

With Mr. Bala Ramajayam at the helm, G Square turns land into living visions that inspire, endure, and redefine real estate.

In a market where skylines climb with glass towers, G Square Group is reshaping real estate by choosing to stay grounded, quite literally. Its bold mission is simple: make land ownership possible for every Indian family, across income levels. The impact speaks volumes: over 4,000 acres delivered, 125+ premium projects completed, and 18,000+ families who now call G Square home. Recognized as India's largest plotted real estate developer, G Square goes beyond numbers with a clear philosophy: Your Home. Your Dream. Your Choice.

COIMBATORE RISING: HOW G SQUARE IS SHAPING THE CITY'S FUTURE

India's growth story is no longer confined to its metros. As Tier-2 cities attract fresh waves of capital, talent, and infrastructure, Coimbatore has emerged as one of the brightest stars in the country's economic transformation. With its robust ecosystem of education, healthcare, and culture, alongside a climate that remains cooler and cleaner than many other urban centers, the city is becoming a preferred destination for both investors and families.

Large-scale infrastructure projects are catalyzing this boom: the Western Ring Road, now in its pivotal second phase, will ease congestion and open new investment corridors. The Coimbatore International Airport's expansion will boost both passenger and cargo capacity, strengthening global connectivity. Simultaneously, the Avinashi Road Expressway flyover is set to redefine mobility and commerce in the region.

With seamless connectivity to Chennai, Bengaluru, Mysuru, and Kerala, Coimbatore

blends Tier-1 talent with Tier-2 affordability through its 400+ colleges and skilled workforce. As India's second-largest IT hub, Coimbatore is powered by 700+ IT/ITeS firms. Safe, affordable, and offering a superior work-life balance, Coimbatore is fast becoming the next Bengaluru, Pune, and Gurugram.

At the forefront of this shift stands Mr. Bala Ramajayam, Founder and Managing Director of G Square Group, who entered Coimbatore with foresight that others lacked, positioning G Square to unlock the city's real estate potential long before the current investment surge.

KOVAIPUDUR: COIMBATORE'S NEXT LANDMARK DESTINATION

Kovaipudur, nestled at the foothills of the Western Ghats along the Palakkad Gap, is emerging as Coimbatore's next landmark destination. Known as "Little Ooty" for its cool climate and lush green surroundings, it offers a rare blend of tranquility and accessibility, just 15–20 minutes from the city with seamless highway and airport access. The upcoming Western Ring Road and Metro will further enhance connectivity, while IT and industrial growth corridors fuel demand. With real estate values rising 53% in a year and doubling over a decade, Kovaipudur is fast emerging as a preferred destination for GCCs, MNCs, and startups seeking growth with balance.

SEVEN HILLS CITY: THE CROWN JEWEL

At the heart of G Square's Coimbatore vision lies Seven Hills City, a monumental 700-acre township in Kovaipudur. With an investment of Rs. 1,000 crore, it ranks among the largest plotted developments in India. Phase 1, spanning 406 acres, offers 3,127 premium

plots, while the remaining 308 acres are reserved for landmark joint ventures. These include signature villas, luxury apartments, IT hubs, reputed schools, world-class hospitals, financial institutions, retail, and entertainment zones.

More than a township, Seven Hills City is a blueprint for future-ready living. It integrates every aspect of modern life, from senior citizens' homes to wellness tourism, while preserving the serene environment of the Western Ghats. Its location also carries cultural resonance: the presence of Isha Yoga Centre, the upcoming world's largest Marudhamalai statue, and proximity to sacred sites like Guruvayur and Sabarimala enrich its appeal.

What was once an uncut diamond has become the crown jewel of Coimbatore real estate. Investors are already witnessing remarkable appreciation, validating Mr. Bala Ramajayam's belief that land, when carefully developed, transforms from a simple purchase into a legacy.

A VISION ROOTED IN PEOPLE

Mr. Bala Ramajayam's philosophy stems from lived experience. He understood the emotional and financial weight of home ownership. "Our aim is that every customer should own a house," he says. "That house must remain secure and transfer to the next generation, carrying legal documents and value, without any concerns."

This people-first vision has shaped G Square's journey. Unlike many developers who pushed plots purely as investments, G Square emphasized livable layouts inside the city, ensuring residents enjoyed immediate

accessibility and strong appreciation. Their project reflected this philosophy: fair pricing, maximum space, and centrally located communities designed for everyday living.

Transparency has been another cornerstone. By bringing proper roads, legally approved layouts, and fully developed infrastructure, G Square has earned trust across Tier-2 cities such as Madurai, Trichy, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, and more, where organized developers were once absent. This approach has translated into impressive results: customer investments have appreciated by nearly 70 per cent within two years, and in just three years, G Square has sold many projects across South India.

**MR. BALA RAMAJAYAM: THE TRAILBLAZER
TRANSFORMING INDIAN REAL ESTATE**

Mr. Bala Ramajayam, Founder and Managing Director of G Square Group, is a leader shaped by ground realities rather than theory. Long before G Square became India's most trusted name in real estate, Mr. Bala was on the ground as a land expert, listening to the dreams, frustrations, and fears of buyers firsthand. He saw clearly what others overlooked: people longed not just for land, but for certainty, transparency, and the freedom to build without legal or bureaucratic worries.

To him, land is not just soil; it is the asset that withstands time, gains value steadily, and protects families across generations. Spotting what others could not, he identified India's uncut diamond of real estate: organized, plotted developments within city limits. His approach transformed a largely unstructured sector into one that was transparent, reliable, and value-driven. With ready-to-use plots, well-laid roads, and even complimentary maintenance for the first year, he made land ownership accessible across all income groups.

Anticipating overcrowded metros and the coming boom of Tier II cities, he provided families with a choice: larger spaces, private gardens, and independence over crowded high-rises. This vision gave rise to India's first fully customizable plot model, empowering buyers to choose every aspect, location, size, shape, and orientation, while G Square's in-house specialists turn visions into master-planned communities.

G Square is doing more than selling land; it is reshaping the very idea of home ownership and polishing Indian real estate into a diamond of enduring value.





THE CASTE COUNT: WHAT'S IN THE NUMBERS?



“True equality cannot be achieved without first understanding how assets, opportunities and power are distributed. That is why a caste census is essential”

K. RAJU, National Coordinator, SC, ST, OBC and Minority Departments, AICC

“A caste census has two goals: identifying beneficiaries of development and acting as a tool for social welfare and social justice. Unfortunately, in Telangana, it is being used for political gain”

N. RAMCHANDER RAO
President, BJP, Telangana

“We depend on the Indian state to eradicate untouchability, caste discrimination and backwardness. It is not possible. No society has progressed without effective, positive and progressive social movements”

RAKESH SINHA, Ex-BJP MP and RSS ideologue

“Today, education, mobility and employment are the true drivers of progress...Access to English-medium education has emerged as key to development for Adivasis, Dalits, OBCs, and even the upper castes”

KANCHI ILAIAH
Author

PRESCRIPTION FROM THE SOUTH: LESSONS IN HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP



“The spirit of competition is helping healthcare build a huge HR capital which is now translating into technological advancement and the general improvement of care and quality”

DR ARUN N. PALANISWAMI
Executive Director,
Kovai Medical Centre and Hospital



“The only way we can keep and retain talent is the ethos of the organisation. You are going to have to take young doctors, train them, build an environment in which they can grow and develop”

PROF. ASHWANI KUMAR
Vice-Chancellor, Saveetha
Institute of Medical and
Technical Sciences



“India's British-influenced education system historically overlooked skilling, unlike Germany or Switzerland. This led to a shortage of master trainers”

G.D. RAJKUMAR
Managing Director,
Gedee Weiler



“A caste count today is needed not only for backward and scheduled castes, but also for forward castes... The data is crucial for designing welfare schemes, identifying economic backwardness and addressing it effectively”

DR ANBUMANI RAMADOSS,
President, PMK, & Former
Union Minister of Health



“In India, skilling is often an add-on to academia, not central to education or industry. It is stigmatised as blue-collar work... Integrating skills into all job levels and enhancing career paths can bridge this gap”

KANISHKA ARUMUGAM
Co-CEO, Ekki Water
Technologies

REIMAGINING COIMBATORE AS INDIA’S NEW BUSINESS POWERHOUSE

“Coimbatore is well-positioned as a manufacturing hub with a low risk of natural calamities, surrounded by hills and well-connected to Tamil Nadu and Kerala, making it a prime candidate for industrial growth”

MITHUN RAMDAS

President, Southern India Engineering Manufacturers’ Association



“Tiruppur, a textile hub complementing Coimbatore, generates Rs 75,000 crore in business, with Rs 45,000 crore from exports. We are hit by the US tariffs, but we are resilient”

N. THIRUKKUMARAN
Gen. Secy, Tiruppur Exporters’ Association, and Chairman, Esstee Exports India Pvt. Ltd

“Coimbatore must urgently address labour shortages, improve roads and rail, and ensure affordable raw materials to become a future business hub. Tiruppur needs advancements in man-made fibre tech and automation in sewing operations”

JOSE CHARLES MARTIN
MD, Martin Group



HEALING 2.0: WHERE INNOVATION MEETS CARE

“Clean drinking water can save more children than all the hospital groups—Manipal, Apollo, Max—put together in the country; that is the beauty of preventive care... My mantra for a viable healthcare system is universal health insurance not necessarily coverage”

DR H. SUDARSHAN BALLAL
Chairman, Manipal Health Enterprises

POWER PLAY FROM THE SOUTH: FAST FISTS, FIERCE FEET

“Parents should support kids and encourage them to do what they love, be it sports or education... There should be work from grassroots level, encouraging kids from fifth standard to take up sports”

KALAIVANI SRINIVASAN

Boxer

“I feel, in India, sports should be on par with studies. They should make students comfortable with sports and try to make them understand one can have a future in it”

VISHAL T.K.

Athlete



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

WHAT MAKES COIMBATORE THE PRIDE OF TAMIL NADU



“Coimbatore has emotional warmth which is unique in its own way. It is nature's special child and has a blessed space in Tamil Nadu. Even the water here has a special quality”

VANITHA MOHAN
Entrepreneur,
Co-founder,
Siruthuli

“One more feather in Coimbatore's cap is Mr C.P. Radhakrishnan, a son of this soil, becoming the vice president of India. This is a place for ease of doing business, coupled with ease of living”

**VANATHI
SRINIVASAN**
BJP MLA,
Tamil Nadu

“People from multiple parts of the country have come here, making it a melting pot. There is local ownership, heritage and history, but we are also very future-focused. We look to tomorrow as much as we take pride in our past”

**SHANKAR
VANAVARAYAR**
President, Kumaraguru
Institutions

“Coimbatore is a very inclusive city. Its beauty is of course its diversity... There has been migration but people who came here from other communities, places and states also contributed to Coimbatore's growth in a tremendous way”

KALKI SUBRAMANIAM
Transgender Activist;
Founder, Sahodari
Foundation



SOUTH TO SPACE: MISSION 2029 AND BEYOND

“I did my own private training just to put me forward [so that] when India calls for more astronauts, I can raise my hand.

I didn't wait for someone to take me as an astronaut candidate, I started my own journey”

JAHNAVI DANGETI
Astronaut candidate
for 2029 Space
Mission by US space
company Titans
Space Industries



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



“People make Coimbatore lovely and a better place. I think Coimbatore is lovely to its senior citizens. It is a city with a lot of willpower and can bounce back immediately”

RJ DEEPAK
Radio Jockey



A CREATOR, A CODER, A CHANGEMAKER: CRAFTING TOMORROW'S INTELLIGENCE

“We are working on the JustEase Project 47X...with the Kerala and Dubai governments. There are a lot of people who don't know what to do during an emergency situation, so we are building a bot that tells you what to do during an emergency”

RAUL JOHN AJU, AI tech enthusiast,
Kerala's youngest AI prodigy

SOUTH INDIA'S REAL ESTATE BOOM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

“The infrastructure you are building in housing complexes today is not what it used to be. You want the experience of a resort or a hotel and for that you are willing to pay a premium”

SANJAY DUTT
MD & CEO, Tata Realty
& Infrastructure Ltd



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From
Coimbatore
to
the Nation



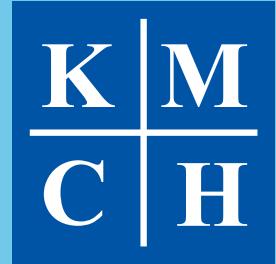
Dr. Nalla G. Palaniswami
Chairman & Managing Director, KMCH



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THE CHANGEMAKER: SAFE SPACES AND GENDER PARITY IN CINEMA

“The Hema Committee report opened up many closets. Kudos to all the women who came forward and spoke about the working conditions. Post Covid-19, a whole lot of changes have already happened. It’s an ongoing process”

— SHWETHA MENON

President, Association of Malayalam Movie Artists



KANTARA CHRONICLES: MYTHS IN MOTION

“After *KGF* and *Kantara*, I am very excited that there is spotlight on the Kannada film industry. It is an amazing time to be an actor there and be from there”

— RUKMINI VASANTH

Actor



RACING AHEAD: CAN INDIA CATCH THE FORMULA ONE DREAM?

“Aspiring to be an F1 driver from Coimbatore back in the ‘90s wasn’t easy... I finally made my debut back in 2005. Since then, we haven’t had an F1 driver. We have been close to getting another one”

— NARAIN KARTHIKEYAN

India’s First Formula One Driver



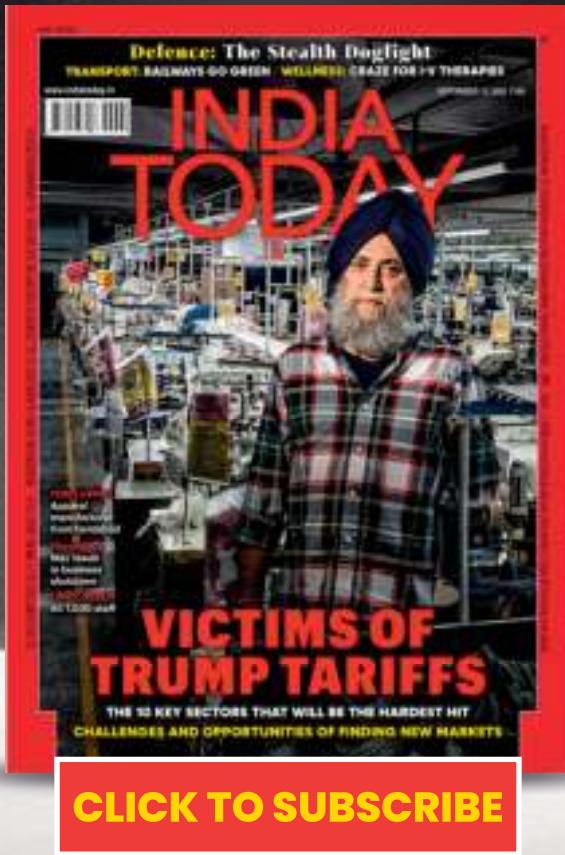
CRICKET: THE FINISHER’S BLUEPRINT— ALL GLOVES OFF

“M.S. Dhoni brought a sense of calm in chasing. Bowlers used to speak about the pressure they felt bowling to Dhoni compared to other players. He had done something which nobody had”

— DINESH KARTHIK

Former Indian cricketer & coach

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POLITICIANS, ACTORS,
BUREAUCRATS, ATHLETES,
DOCTORS EXCHANGE
GREETINGS AT THE CONCLAVE



Anbil Mahesh, Tamil Nadu minister of school education; Madhu Bangarappa, Karnataka minister of primary and secondary education and Dr Nava Subramaniam, dean of Amrita School of Business



Bala Ramajayam, founder and MD of G Square Housing, and Nara Lokesh, Andhra Pradesh HRD minister



Actor Rukmini Vasanth and Amar Sinha, COO of Radico Khaitan



Vijay Narayanan, GM of Campus Development and Administration at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, and Narain Karthikeyan, India's first F1 driver



D.K. Shivakumar, Karnataka deputy CM and Arvind Chauhan of NECC



Shwetha Menon, president of Association of Malayalam Movie Artists, and Prof. Dr Ashwani Kumar, vice chancellor of Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences



Former CECs S.Y. Quraishi and O.P. Rawat, former EC Ashok Lavasa and Amar Sinha of Radico Khaitan



Dr H. Sudarshan Ballal, chairman of Manipal Health Enterprises, and Dr Arun N. Palaniswami, executive director, Kovai Medical Center and Hospital



Dr Ezhil Kumar of NECC and D. Sridhar Babu, minister for IT, E&C, industries & commerce and legislative affairs, Telangana



Thangam Thennarasu, Tamil Nadu minister of finance and environment & climate change, and Dr J. Sivakumaran, COO of Kovai Medical Center and Hospital



Dinesh Karthik, former Indian cricketer and Arvind Chauhan of NECC



सबसे भरोसेमंद खोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

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

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

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

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहाँ स्कैन करें।

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



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◀ CINEMA

HIS NEW CHAPTER

WITH *NISHAANCHI*,
ANURAG KASHYAP
DELIVERS HIS MOST
'FILMI' DRAMA YET
WHILE STILL BETTING
ON FRESH FACES AND
UNCONVENTIONAL
CHOICES

A

Anurag Kashyap owned September and how. Toronto saw the world premiere of *Bandar*, his feature with Bobby Deol; Venice saw *Song of Forgotten Trees*—on which he served as executive producer—make waves and win best director prize for Anuparna Roy; and he was co-producer on the critically-acclaimed Tamil drama *Bad Girl*. But it's *Nishaanchi* that Kashyap is most excited about for now. "It's my most *filmi* film," he says with a boyish smile. "It's the one I'm most attached to and happy with the outcome of." Starring Aaishvary Thackeray, Vedika Pinto and Monika Panwar, the drama released in cinemas on September 19.

Even with a studio-backed film like *Nishaanchi*, Kashyap does what he is best known for—flaunting his independent spirit by centring his film on the shoulders of a newcomer, as he did with Kay Kay Menon (*Paanch*), Vineet Kumar Singh (*Mukkabaaz*) or on underutilised talent like Rahul Bhat (*Ugly*, *Kennedy*) and Nawazuddin Siddiqui (*Gangs of Wasseypur*). Here, Mumbai-based Aaishvary in his debut essays the double role of twins from Kanpur who are at odds with each other and Panwar plays mother to the boys. "It comes from the fact that I have seen it work," says Kashyap of his penchant to trust those ignored or looking for a break. "In *Satya*, everyone barring Urmila [Matondkar] was an outsider including the director [Ram Gopal Varma]. It gave me the confidence that when there is intention, it works."

Ramu gave Kashyap wings as a writer but these days it's the name that Kashyap's critics most resort to in a detrimental way as they compare Ramu's rapid downfall to Kashyap's

own career in the past decade. Kashyap's glory spell, which included *Black Friday*, *Dev D* and *Gangs of Wasseypur*, ended with the debacle that was *Bombay Velvet*. It's not that Kashyap has made bad films since then (*Ugly*, *Mukkabaaz*, *Manmarziyaan* are proof of his directorial panache and astute commentary on society); it's just that his works are no longer part of the zeitgeist as his earlier works were. In fact, *Kennedy*—his last feature—still

In *Nishaanchi*, Aaishvary essays the double role of twins from Kanpur who are at odds with each other

awaits a release. "I get written off—*yeh toh khatam ho gaya* [he's done and dusted]," he says. "When I talk, they are like he is going RGV 2.0 way. It does affect me when it comes from within the industry. But I know what I am doing." At a time when the Hindi film industry struggles to deliver hits consistently, Kashyap senses an "opportunity". "I know how to work with low budgets, the industry doesn't," he notes. "I'd warn the industry, but they'll see it as whining."

For *Nishaanchi*, producers Amazon MGM trusted Kashyap's vision and, more so, his credentials. "The way they are backing it feels good," he says. "In 32 years of being in this industry, this kind of faith has really been shown only twice before (*Dev D* and *Gangs of Wasseypur*)." The film is



all the more significant for Kashyap as it helped him get out of "the black hole" he had gone into. "It's a film where I have found myself, with my people holding me together," he adds.

Apart from filmmaking, the process of self-discovery has also seen Kashyap make a few key changes. He shifted from Mumbai to Bengaluru, and has started actively working as an actor in the southern film industry, with credits including *Maharaja* (Tamil) and *Rifle Club* (Malayalam). He's especially all praise for the Kerala film industry. "There is a beautiful world there where people are talking cinema and supporting each other," he says, citing the likes of actor-producers Tovino Thomas, Fahadh Faasil and Dulquer Salman. "They are all so collaborative, and not jealous of each other's success. Every-



one here [in Mumbai] only talks numbers."

In the Garden City, Kashyap finds himself recharging his batteries, empowered and enjoying "normal life" where he can walk on the streets and have conversations around cinema, books and daily life. In his own words, he is "busier than Shah Rukh Khan", and loving it. Says Kashyap, "My focus has shifted. I am done fighting for others." It's perhaps in this act of self-preservation that Kashyap hopes to appease his fanboys and, hopefully, win new audiences in the process. ■

—Suhani Singh

OTT ▼

Curtains Pulled Back

ARYAN KHAN steps behind the camera with *The Ba***ds of Bollywood*, his take on nepotism, outsiders and the Hindi film industry's quirks



It's not every day one hears of a Bollywood 'nepo baby' having an off-screen debut. And that's exactly what happens with *The Ba***ds of Bollywood* on Netflix, which marks the writing and directorial debut of Aryan Khan, the eldest son of Shah Rukh Khan. As the title and trailer hint, this one's a less serious and more humorous take on the film industry and its erratic ways. Daddy SRK called it a "sharp and self-aware" show at the teaser launch. Sahher Bambba, who plays a star kid at odds—and eventually in love—with Aasmaan Singh, an outsider and rising star played by Lakshya, calls it "an over-the-top, exaggerated look at what people expect Bollywood to be like". That's not to

say the show didn't resonate with the lead cast of mostly outsiders. Lakshya says there were moments in the script which had happened as he tried to break into the industry. Mostly, though, satire and sarcasm are essential to the drama, says actor Raghav Juyal, who plays Aasmaan's bestie. (The two were having a bloody battle in *Kill* when they were cast for the series.)

For Lakshya, working with Aryan in a show produced by SRK's banner Red Chillies was just one part of the appeal. "I was like, I am like this guy [Aasmaan] only,

I will be able to crack this," he says. What he didn't anticipate was its big scale—"OTT kahaan lag raha hai? [It doesn't look like a show for the small screen]," the length of the project (the shoot went on for over a year) and how passionate Aryan the filmmaker is. "As outsiders, we tend to see people [from the industry] differently, but when you interact, you realise they are like us only," says Lakshya. "There's a childlike innocence to him, and there's warmth for his crew. He is hard-working, hungry and will sacrifice everything to make a good show. He gave up his sleep and ours too and kept us on our toes." Key cast members laughed over how many takes he demanded of them.

It's hardly a surprise that there are cameos galore. The trailer shows the long list, including Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, S.S. Rajamouli, Ranveer Singh and Karan Johar. Raghav says at times he felt he was "in a dream world". While the cast mostly knew when a star would be shooting, Salman's appearance took them by surprise. "He was shooting in the same premises and decided to drop by," says Lakshya. "The set went all crazy." ■

META DRAMA

Lakshya leads a star-studded cast of Netflix's *The Ba***ds of Bollywood*



—Suhani Singh

SONGS IN THE FORT

Jodhpur RIFF 2025 blends local traditions and global sounds in a celebration of music and culture

Mehrangarh Fort will once again transform into the epicentre of global roots music as Jodhpur RIFF (Rajasthan International Folk Festival) returns for its 18th edition from October 2–6. Known for its dramatic setting and thoughtful curation, the festival gathers artists from Rajasthan, Bhutan, Uzbekistan, Portugal, Finland, Colombia and more—offering audiences music that

SOUL FOOD
(Second from right) Bhutanese artist Kheng Sonam Dorji and his co-performers



On September 12, New Delhi-based composer, producer and visual artist Sijya released her sophomore EP *Leather & Brass* via UK label One Little Independent Records, becoming the first Indian artist to join the iconic roster, best known for its long-time association with Björk. A bold and emotionally intricate work, the EP builds on the introspective groundwork laid in her 2022 debut *Young Hate*, while signalling a shift towards greater intention and sonic precision.

Described by Sijya as both painful and transformative, the process behind *Leather & Brass* involved

SONIC ALCHEMY

WITH *LEATHER & BRASS*, ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN SIJYA TRANSFORMS VULNERABILITY INTO TEXTURED SOUNDSCAPES, MARKING HER BOLDEST ARTISTIC EVOLUTION YET

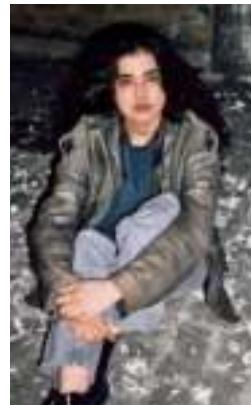
cycles of experimentation and failure. "As artists, we know what we want to improve, but sometimes we discover blind spots we didn't even know existed," she reflects. Having sought feedback from peers and mentors, including Jay Panelia, Amaan Khan and her former label Accidental Records, Sijya said, "I knew I had to 'level up'. It was humbling and exhausting, but that's why I'm proud of this project, I know how far it's come."

Dreamy synth layers collide with delicate vocal lines in the EP, prioritising emotional resonance over literal meaning. "It's really quite reductive to say what a song is about," she says.

"If something can be explained so easily, why make a four-minute work about it?" Her music resists the contemporary urge for clarity and invites listeners to excavate meaning for themselves.

Tracks like 'Rust' and 'I only want to crash' embody this ethos, while others, like 'Safe' and 'Why do you fight me', examine themes of anger, resistance and vulnerability. With engineers like Seth Manchester and Panelia helping shape its analogue warmth, *Leather & Brass* emerged as a textural and emotional evolution. Its artwork, a reworked childhood photo, mirrors this transformation. ■

A BOLD DELICACY
(Left) *Leather & Brass* and electronic musician Sijya



—Nikhil Sardana



bridges tradition and innovation in unexpected ways.

Festival director Divya Bhatia sums up RIFF's journey with a line from Marcel Proust—"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." "We're learning how best to positively impact the livelihood of traditional Rajasthani artists," he says. "And we have done this while keeping programming fresh."

A key highlight this year is En Route, a solo immersive walking experience that turns the fort and city into a living soundscape. "I wanted to develop an artistic experience to connect

the audience with the fort and the city in a completely novel way," says Bhatia.

The 2025 lineup features Padma Shri Lakha Khan on the 27-string Sindhi sarangi, Hindustani

A HIGHLIGHT THIS YEAR IS 'EN ROUTE', A SOLO IMMERSIVE WALK THAT TURNS THE FORT INTO A LIVING SOUNDSCAPE

vocalist Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, Manganiyar maestro Sawan Khan, Poland's Karolina Cicha, Finnish fiddler Emilia

Lajunen, Syrian saxophonist Basel Rajoub and Colombian DJ-producer Killabeatmaker. Together, they bring traditions as diverse as fado, shashmaqam, Carnatic fusion and Afro-Latin beats to the desert, creating a truly global musical dialogue.

The festival is equally celebrated for its late-night jam sessions and the climactic RIFF Rustle, where artists from across traditions come together in spontaneous performance under the Sharad Purnima full moon. "At 18, we have a strong foundation," says Bhatia. "We are just about finding our feet in this ever-evolving live music landscape." ■

—Geetika Sachdev



THE CITY SPEAKS Installations by (left) French sculptor Gaspard Combes and Rajasthani weaver Maina Devi

ART ▼

Artisan Dialogues

JODHPUR ARTS WEEK debuts with global creators and local artisans working on site-responsive works across the city

A Public Arts Trust of India (PATI) initiative, the Jodhpur Arts Week: Edition 1.0 will take place from October 1 to 7. Curated by Tapiwa Matsinde and Sakhshi Mahajan, it brings together more than 20 global artists and designers who have created site-responsive works in dialogue with Jodhpur's artisans, landscapes and communities.

"This year's theme, *Hath Ro Hunar*, honours the artisans whose expertise and labour have shaped Jodhpur's rich cultural fabric," says Sana Rezwan, founding chairwoman, PATI.

While Chila Kumari Singh Burman's site-specific neon installation reimagines Jodhpur's historic stepwells, Puneet Kaushik explores textile traditions as a means of cultural memory and gendered labour. Ayesha Singh's installation reflects on women's role in shaping public architecture and Theo Pinto merges his abstract visual language with Jodhpur's traditional stone- and wood-carving techniques. French artist Gaspard Combes's public sculpture, *Colours of Rajasthan*, will be unveiled in its new location at Mandore Gardens. Abishek Ganesh J. will present a site-specific work at the temple within the Raj Mahal Government Girls School, while Saruha Kilaru presents a new body of work that reimagines the lost legacy of Gulaab Rai. "By weaving together the narratives of contemporary creators, traditional artisans and local communities, we aim to challenge conventional boundaries between art, craft and social practice," says Rezwan. ■

—Neha Kirpal



Kangra
Fort near
Dharamshala,
Himachal
Pradesh

ART ▼

ECHOES OF POWER

Kangra Fort will set the stage for the next showcase of Panorama Editions

Curated by award-winning artist and filmmaker Sarah Singh, the fifth volume of Panorama Editions will be held at Kangra Fort near Dharamshala this October. Titled *Ten Nights By A Lost River*, the three-day art salon will explore the theme of power through theatrical installations, music and dance.

“The royal family here traces their lineage back 2,500 years, and one of their ancestors (that they claim) is King Porus, who was in the major battle with Alexander the Great. These are all battleground areas and there are these historical connections with the broader region. Himachal Pradesh is known as Veer Bhoomi or the land of the brave,” says Sarah.

The theatrical installations will

unfold like a gallery of about 15 scenes, with guests moving around and getting different perspectives or seeing scenes in varying contexts. “Power is so many things, and one of the things I’m exploring is the cycle of power and how it can be exchanged. I don’t mean it in the literal sense; I’m not staging a sword fight,” says Sarah. There will be an exploration of whether female power is fierceness or entrapment. Then there’s

the direct representation of male muscular power as well as the Wild West cowboy trope.

Another element of the salon will be a tented encampment dinner where guests will experience the traditional dham, prepared and served by Himachali pandits. Sarah has collaborated with renowned

**TITLED
*TEN NIGHTS BY A
LOST RIVER*, THE
3-DAY ART SALON
WILL SHOWCASE
THEATRICAL
INSTALLATIONS,
MUSIC AND
DANCE**

Delhi-based textile designer Peter D’Ascoli to design a special distressed brocade material for the tent. She has also roped in students from the NIFT Kangra to participate through performance, design interventions and backstage support.

The main event will be a free public concert at Police Ground, Dharamshala, by Spanish singer-songwriter Le Parody (Sole Parody), accompanied by Cuban trumpet player Frank Santuste. They will be joined by performers from Austria and Hungary as well as artists from Himachal Pradesh and other parts of India.

Sarah will later showcase elements from the art salon—like the staging and garments—at the Liszt Institute Delhi; the exhibition will run from October 12 for two weeks.

—Prachi Joshi
(Panorama Editions will be held from October 3 to 5)

THE LISTICLE

Interesting art exhibitions to look out for this month



► **The Oberoi**
New Delhi | Sept. 27

A Rare Treat

Auction house Saffronart is celebrating 25 years with a special anniversary live sale in Delhi on September 27. Highlights include works by V.S. Gaitonde, Akbar Padamsee, M.F. Husain and Jagdish Swaminathan. It also features F.N. Souza's 'Six Gentlemen of Our Times', a 1956 canvas by Tyeb Mehta, as well as works by Jehangir Sabavala, S.H. Raza, Nicholas Roerich and others.



► **Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi** | Till Oct. 11

Reclaiming the Body

Woman Song / Looking Back at Vadehra Art Gallery presents a selection of 35 paintings from artist Vasundhara Tewari Broota's oeuvre from the 1980s to the present. One of Broota's preoccupations throughout her career has been the nude female body, which she has reimagined as a site of agency, resistance, and liberation. Her practice is relevant today even as the female body remains a contested space. Crucially, the show also offers a window into the changing vocabulary of feminist art in India.

▼ **Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, Mumbai** | Till Oct. 27

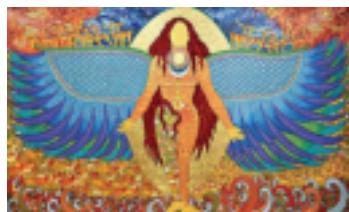
FINE PRINT

Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya and Vadehra Art Gallery present Gulammohammed Sheikh's two-part exhibition *Hand Prints | Mind Prints*, which puts the spotlight on the 88-year-old artist's lesser-known passion for printmaking. While *Hand Prints* explores his etchings, lithographs etc, *Mind Prints* features his experiments with new media, featuring digital prints from the 2000s.



▼ **National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru** | Till Sept. 26

WEB OF MYTHOS



Artist Seema Kohli's mythic universe comes to life in an exhibition at NGMA, Bengaluru. *Kaal Netra – Sacred Matrices* has over 150 works across painting, video, installation and performance, and spans 20 years of her 40-year practice. The richly layered works draw from Indian philosophical traditions, feminist thought, mythologies, and feature tapestries of gold leaf, yantras, goddess forms and textual inscriptions.

Q+A

Comedy Meets Crime

In Inspector Zende and beyond, actor MANOJ BAJPAEE stays true to the core of his characters



Q. You get to show off your funny bone in Netflix's *Inspector Zende*. Do you enjoy comedy? The narrative isn't serious even as it deals with the pursuit of a serial killer. The police are pygmies in front of him. They are dealing with too many odds, which lends itself to humour and irony. When you get into the skin of the character, you try to find moments of confusion, which for others may seem comic.

.....

Q. They say imitation is flattery. Tell us about your approach to playing a real-life figure.

It was simple: I am dealing with a middle-class character. He is struggling in his day-to-day life, but he has the tenacity to persevere. Once I cracked that, everything became easy. Zende loves to talk. He told me of his moments of insecurity, his fears.

.....

Q. Some of your finest work has been with Ram Gopal Varma—*Satya*, *Kaun*, *Shool*—and your next is a horror comedy with him.

I'll add here that if he gives me even a minuscule part, I'll do it. I was majorly surprised with the passion with which he was dealing with the film. The first schedule has completely shocked me. This man is back and I'm serious when I say that he will surprise everyone and make them eat their words.

.....

Q. Your collaborations with independent filmmakers continue with Raam Reddy's *Jugnuma - The Fable*, currently playing in cinemas. We do bad films, good films and fantastic films, but there are few great films. For me, *Jugnuma* is a great film. It redefines cinema and magical realism in a unique way. I have learned a lot from Raam and the character who is torn between attachment and detachment in life.

—with Suhani Singh

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



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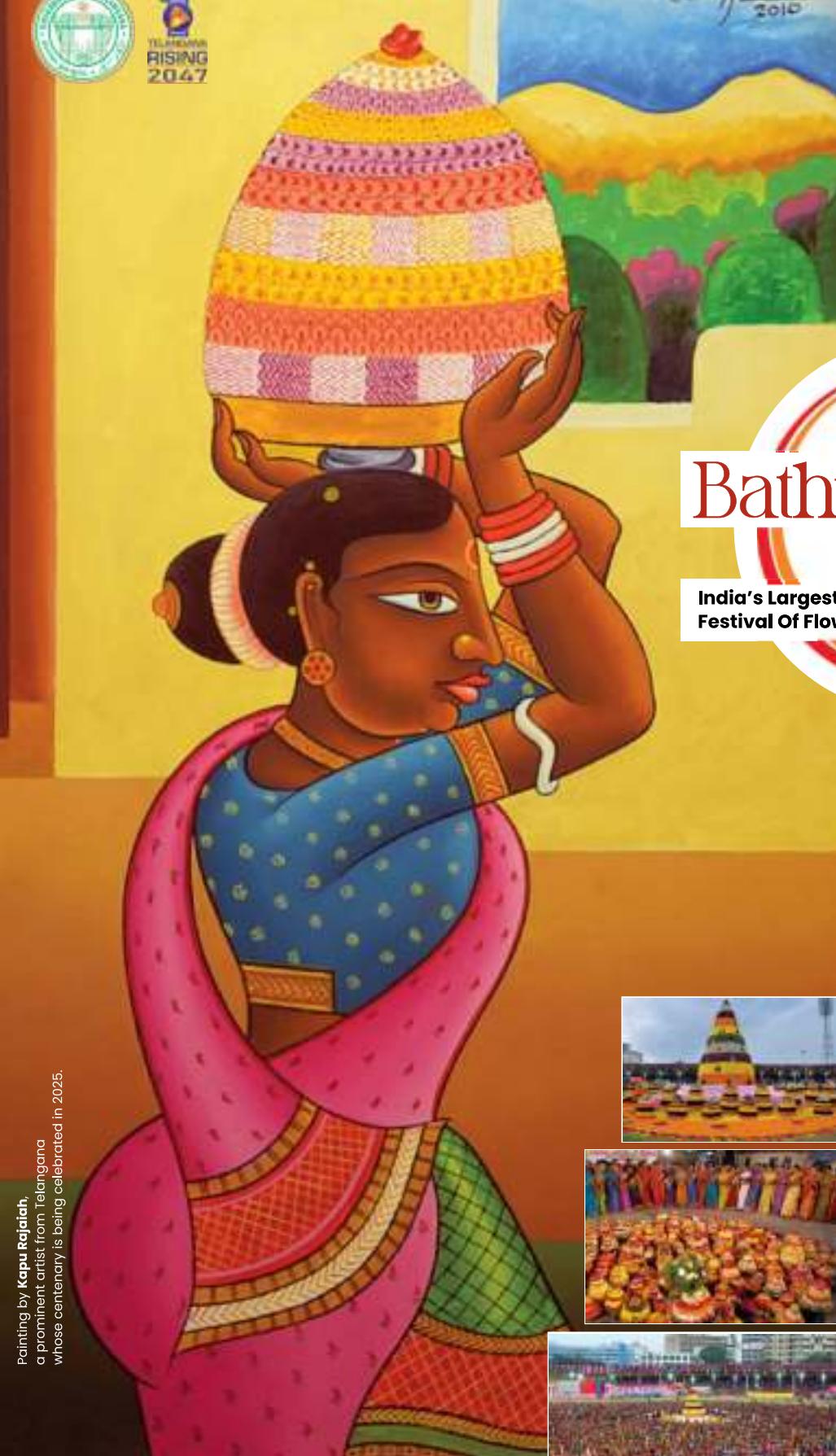
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Painting by **Kapu Rajaiah**,
a prominent artist from Telangana,
whose centenary is being celebrated in 2025.



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