

**TAMIL NADU**

**STALIN VS GOVERNOR FIGHT ESCALATES**

**EXCLUSIVE FROM SYRIA**

**ASSAD'S CHEMICAL WEAPON VICTIMS**



JOURNALISM WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

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# THE WEEK

APRIL 27, 2025

**BRUCE LEE**

**RETURNS**

AFGHAN LOOKALIKE'S  
INDIAN CONNECTION

**WRITER PICO IYER**

WHAT SILENCE  
DID TO ME

## SEMICONDUCTORS THE INDIAN SURGE

Geopolitics, national security and technological ambition are driving our strategy



**INTERVIEW**

**V.K. SARASWAT**

INDIA SEMICONDUCTOR MISSION

The one in 'China plus one'  
should be India



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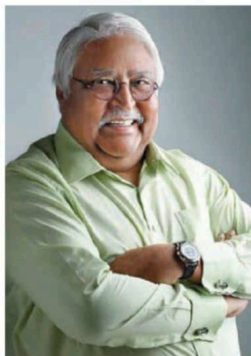
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## THE WORD XENNIAL HAS COMPLETED

one decade of existence. The credit for birthing the word goes to journalist Susan Stankorb. The word is defined as “a micro-generation that serves as a bridge between the disaffection of Gen X and the blithe optimism of millennials”.

One of the places where this generation and the generational shift are seen is in newsrooms. I remember a period of transition when THE WEEK’s desk did not have a computer per subeditor. In DTP centres, you approached a computer respectfully, without footwear. Air conditioning was deemed to be a must for this new animal. The words Pentium III and Celeron were pronounced in hushed tones.

From those times, we have come so far. Computers now live in pockets, order food for us, help us flirt, bring our families closer and a lot more. Hey, they even accompany us to the loo. Correspondent Niladry Sarkar’s cover story tells you what India is doing to stay relevant in the digital century by securing its semiconductor future. He travelled to Dholera in Gujarat, where a 920sqkm-megacity is rising fast to build semiconductors—a city larger than Mumbai or Bengaluru.

The cover story has voices that lend it gravitas, like the interview with V.K. Saraswat, member of NITI Aayog and the advisory committee of India Semiconductor Mission. We have three guest columns, too, from

V. Veerappan, chairman, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association; Pranay Kotasthane, deputy director and chairperson of the high-tech geopolitics programme at the Takshashila Institution; and Anantha Kinnal, cofounder and managing director of Bengaluru-based Calligo Technologies.

As always, the cover story is just one dish in THE WEEK’s weekly buffet. We have Mark Linscott and Anushka Shah looking at the Trump tariff strategy vis-à-vis India. Linscott is a former assistant US trade representative and senior adviser (trade) at the US India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) and Shah is manager, trade policy and emerging and critical technologies, USISPF.

In @leisure, Senior Subeditor Bechu S. writes about the ‘Afghan Bruce Lee’. Abbas Alizada was a social media star in Afghanistan before the Taliban stormed back into Kabul. Soon, artistes were in their crosshairs and to make things worse, he is a Hazara, an ethnic group that has been systemically targeted in Afghanistan. He fled with his family to the UK in 2021, from where he spoke to THE WEEK. His latest movie was shot in India and released in March.

Another poignant article in this issue is Anagha Subhash Nair’s interaction with those who survived chemical weapon attacks in Syria. The Baathist regime later destroyed its cache of chemical weapons, but the damage lives to this day.

When one thinks of chemical weapons, the first name that comes to mind to those of us who lived through the Gulf War is that of Ali Hassan al-Majid, Saddam Hussein’s defence minister. He was so much in the news in those days that an artist at THE WEEK named a kitten after him. The artist fed many strays and this one was different. He had a coat that looked like camouflage; he was a furtive little thing. He never ate with the others and never grew close to the hand that fed him. An anti-social kitten, if there could be one.

Chemical Ali was the kitten’s name, Al-Majid’s alias.

*Philip Mathew,*



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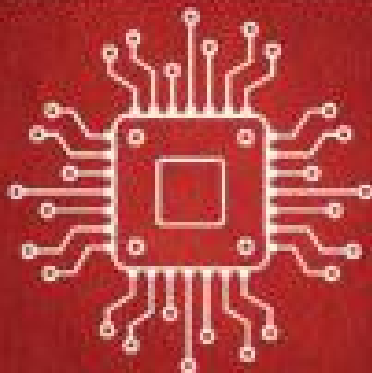
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### INDIA'S SILICON SUNRISE

Driven by geopolitical realities and national security concerns, India is implementing an ambitious plan to build a semiconductor ecosystem. Will it succeed in its highest-stakes mission?

#### INTERVIEW

It's a come-uppance with no two endings: India's semiconductor saga of past the weekend, we can complement the efforts of the US in a big way by providing them low-cost chips instead of taxing VLSI. Sure not, neither PPTI lay up and the administrative committee of India's Semiconductor Mission.



#### PLUS

India is making its foray into the world of artificial intelligence. It's a big challenge, deputy director said. However, the Indian government is planning to take a big step in this direction.

India is making strides in the world of artificial intelligence. It's a big challenge, deputy director said. However, the Indian government is planning to take a big step in this direction.



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## SYRIA

A decade later, the scars borne by survivors of Syria's chemical attacks remain far from healed



ANAGHA SUBHASH NAIR

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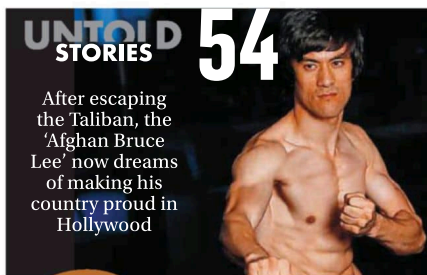
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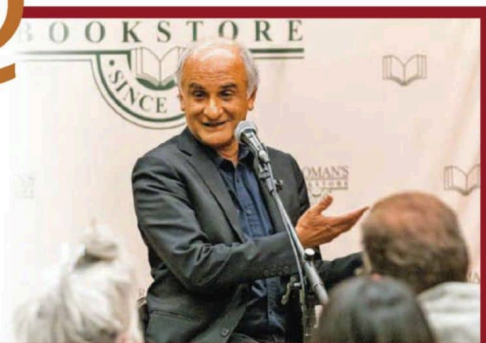
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Baijayant Panda



India's dealings with the US, from the outset of this second Trump innings, have been cool, calm and collected.

**Without any fanfare, or any retaliatory statements, or counter tariffs, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team have worked with the US behind the scenes, in an understated manner aimed at seeking solutions**

COVER DESIGN DENI LAL

Printed at Manorama Building, K.K. Road, Kottayam - 686 001, Kerala, and M P Printers, Noida, and published from Manorama Building, K.K. Road, Kottayam - 686 001, Kerala, by **Jacob Mathew**, on behalf of the

Malayala Manorama Company Private Ltd., Manorama Building, K.K. Road, Kottayam - 686 001, Kerala. Editor **Philip Mathew**, Manorama Buildings, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi - 682 036, Kerala. Place of Publication: Manorama Buildings, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi - 682036, Kerala.

• **Focus/Infocus** features are paid marketing/PR initiatives



### Care for nature

It made me sad to read about the contamination and pollution of the Yamuna ('When the divine turns dark,' April 13). Once a symbol of purity and life, the Yamuna now suffers daily at the hands of human negligence.

The degradation reflects not just an environmental crisis, but a deeper malaise within our society. As the Yamuna darkens, so does the moral fabric of our nation—tainted by war, violence, injustice, hatred, fundamentalism and corruption. The river's plight serves as a mirror, urging us to cleanse our social conscience as much as our natural surroundings.

I commend the efforts of the officials and THE WEEK for highlighting the issue. It is time we turned our attention towards healing not only our environment but also values that guide us. Let us begin by caring for our society and nurturing the one home we all share—nature.

Anish N.S.J,  
On email.

The Yamuna, being a sacred river, must be kept clean and free from pollution. Thankfully, there are no major factories along its banks that could contribute to heavy industrial pollution. However, it is up to the visitors to ensure cleanliness by refraining from throwing used towels and waste into the river while bathing or boating. Although cleaning the

river is a challenging task, I appreciate the government's continued efforts in this regard.

Equally commendable is the ambitious task of laying a railway line to Leh, which lies on a high-altitude plateau ('Train to Ladakh,' April 13). Kudos to Indian Railways for the vision and planning.

Indian engineers are rising to the challenge with

determination and innovation. Hats off to them, and best wishes to everyone involved in this monumental project.

Raghavan Rajagopal,  
On email.

### Moment of pride

The headline 'Train to Ladakh' (April 13) instantly fired up my imagination. Indian Railways is clearly on a remarkable journey, with transformative projects like the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link, and now, the ambitious plan to connect Ladakh by rail, which comes with formidable engineering challenges.

Given the regions's rugged terrain, it was fascinating to learn that nearly half the route will be underground. The proposal to eventually extend the line to Siachen is even more audacious. Once completed and operational, this project will be a moment of immense pride—not just for Indian Railways, but for the nation as a whole.

Asha Krishnakumar,  
On email.

### True lovers of cinema

Those opposing certain scenes in the film *Empuraan* are propagating a brand of nationalism that is ironically anti-national ('Much ado about nothing,' April 13). One is left wondering whether they truly fail to grasp the difference between a documentary and a commercial film.

Kudos to all true lovers of cinema who have refused

to be swayed by such baseless controversies. Their unwavering support for team *Empuraan* has ensured the film's success.

Biju C. Mathew,  
On email.

### Ego fuels conflicts

It is difficult to assign blame to either Russia or Ukraine ('We are actively working to end the war this year,' April 6). The fact is this war should never have dragged on for so long. The international community should have acted decisively to end the war. Whether Vladimir Putin will relent under mounting pressure—especially from Donald Trump—remains to be seen. In the end, it is ego that fuels such conflicts. Humanity, sadly, is the last concern.

Aparajita Basu,  
On email.

### Swift and fair investigations

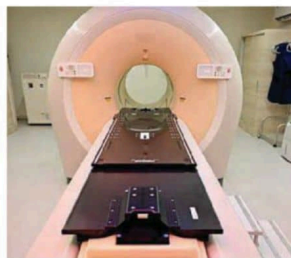
The case involving Justice Yashwant Varma—regardless of whether the allegations are ultimately proven—highlights the urgent need for a framework that enables swift and fair investigations ('When the gavel falls,' April 6). It is essential to ensure that any judge facing allegations is treated justly and in accordance with due process, while also safeguarding public trust in the judiciary.

Sanjay Chopra,  
On email.

To me, the entire episode appears to be a state-

# From Pain to Purpose: Prof. Achyuta Samanta's Mission to Make Healthcare a Right, Not a Privilege

**Health is not just about survival. It is the foundation of a life lived with dignity. It determines a person's ability to work, study, and contribute to society. Yet, for millions, healthcare remains out of reach either due to financial constraints or the absence of medical facilities. The disparity between urban and rural healthcare access, between those who can afford private hospitals and those who must travel miles for basic treatment, continues to be one of the greatest challenges in India's development story.**



Prof. Achyuta Samanta, having grown up in extreme poverty, understands this struggle firsthand. Prof. Samanta's dedication to healthcare comes from a deeply personal place. When he was a child, an accident nearly cost him his eyesight. In a moment of frustration, his mother accidentally hit his left eye with a stick while scolding him. At that time, medical treatment was hard to come by, and for a poor family like his, even reaching a doctor was a challenge. He was fortunate that his vision was saved, but the incident left a lasting impression on him. It reinforced the idea that healthcare should not be a matter of luck—it should be available when and where it is needed the most. He has often recalled how, in his childhood, even a minor illness could become life-threatening due to the lack of nearby hospitals and doctors. It was this early experience that shaped his belief that healthcare should not be a privilege for the few but a right for all. His conviction led to the establishment of the Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), a comprehensive healthcare institution committed to making quality healthcare accessible, affordable, and compassionate.

KIMS started in 2007 as a small medical college with an attached hospital. Today, it has expanded into a 2600-bed multi-specialty hospital, housing a 300-bed Super Speciality Hospital, a 300-bed Cancer Care Centre, and a 1600-bed General Hospital that caters especially to economically disadvantaged sections. Over the years, it has drawn some of the country's most respected doctors and specialists, gained recognition for its research and pioneering surgeries, and built a reputation for being a hospital that serves with heart. KIMS, along with its Dental College and Nursing

**Prof. Achyuta Samanta's personal experiences with poverty and lack of medical access in childhood deeply influenced his commitment to making healthcare a right, not a privilege.**

**He founded KIMS in 2007, which has grown into a 2600-bed multi-specialty hospital with super speciality, cancer care, and general hospitals.**

**KIMS launched the Health Empowerment of Rural Odisha initiative to take healthcare to remote regions through satellite centers and free health camps.**

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, KIMS played a crucial role in Odisha's healthcare response, including testing, vaccination, and critical care support.**

**Prof. Samanta views healthcare as a matter of justice and has actively supported national campaigns like TB Mukh Bharat and personally sponsors treatments for those in need.**

College forms a comprehensive healthcare education hub.

Prof. Samanta's vision for healthcare is deeply rooted in accessibility and outreach. He believes that a hospital should work to bridge the gap between healthcare and those who need it most. This belief led to the launch of HERO – Health Empowerment of Rural Odisha, an initiative aimed at taking healthcare beyond city limits and ensuring

that even the most remote communities receive medical attention. Under HERO, KIMS is establishing 10 satellite centers across Odisha that shall function as mini-hospitals, providing consultations, diagnostics, and treatment for people who would otherwise have to travel long distances for basic care. Under HERO free health camps are conducted across Odisha, particularly in tribal and rural districts where medical services are scarce. These camps provide routine check-ups, screenings for chronic illnesses, and free medicines, ensuring that health conditions are detected and treated before they become critical. During the COVID-19 crisis, KIMS played a pivotal role in Odisha's healthcare response, providing critical care, large-scale testing, vaccination drives, and frontline medical support. He has personally sponsored surgeries and medical treatments for those who cannot afford them if they reach out to him or he reads about it in the newspapers. As a parliamentarian, he participated in and helped advance the TB Mukh Bharat campaign, advocating for better policies and resources to eliminate tuberculosis from the country.

Prof. Samanta has always maintained that "Healthcare is not about charity; it is about justice." A well-functioning healthcare system fosters trust, empowers communities, and strengthens the very foundation of a just society. As the world moves forward, the focus must shift beyond infrastructure to accessible, affordable, and patient-centered care, where innovation, outreach, and preventive health measures take priority. If education gives wings to dreams, healthcare ensures these dreams are lived with strength and hope.



gic move to corner the judiciary. The passage of the National Judicial Appointments Commission is imminent, and all of this seems to be paving the way for it.

Who knows, we can expect similar cases against many more judges in the days ahead.

**Vimal Sukumar,**  
On email.

## Missing point

Anuja Chauhan seems to have deliberately omitted Kunal Kamra's version about a celebrated personality like Sudha Murty, who has inspired millions through her stories ('Schizo-nation', April 6). Has Kamra ever taken the time to understand how Murty rose from a modest, middle-class background to where she is today.

Is it wrong to earn wealth and be successful through hard work and integrity? Yes, Kamra certainly has the rights to express his opinions as he seems fit. But for a more affable and respectful atmosphere, it would be better to do so in a manner that doesn't hurt others' sentiments or come across as if he alone holds the moral high ground.

**Jitendranath Guru,**  
On email.

## We stood out

The courageous and humanitarian leadership demonstrated by the government of India highlighted the country's stellar role in global health diplomacy ('Last word', April 6).

India's response rightly

deserves to be remembered, both in honour of those who tragically lost their lives to the pandemic and as a testament to our resolve in extending a helping hand to the global community during one of the most challenging periods marked by isolation and strict social distancing measures.

**Sachidananda Satpathy,**  
On email.

## Too many

These days, it feels like there are far too many literary festivals ('Reading between the lit fests', March 30). Unfortunately, the focus seems to have shifted—from celebrating literature and ideas to promoting individuals and their institutions. The guest list is hyped, while the content and true purpose of these festivals often take a back seat.

We need to be more real and sincere. Let us bring the spotlight back to literature and the arts, rather than individual egos and status symbols.

**R.D. Singh,**  
On email.

## Error

Birendra [former king of Nepal] and family were assassinated in 2001, and not in 2002, as mentioned in Powerdrive (April 13).

**M.A. Kalam,**  
visiting professor,  
International Institute  
of Migration and  
Development (IIMAD),  
Thiruvananthapuram.

We regret the error.  
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## POINT BLANK



In some ways, it is like raising children. When they are young, your conversations with them are different. But as they mature, those interactions evolve.

**Rahul Dravid,**  
former cricketer,  
on his journey as a coach

People who listen to poetry of romance do not know that poetry is not only the language of love, but it is also the language of justice. The value system of poetry is culturally correct all over the world. And this is the reason why... the rightwing has never been able to create a big poet.

**Javed Akhtar,**  
lyricist

You don't become any more or less of an Indian because you know Hindi. I don't think I am less of an Indian compared to anybody else and I don't know Hindi.

**Kanimozhi,**  
DMK leader

If you stay in Delhi for three days, you get some infection. Every time, while going to Delhi, I think whether I should go or not because the pollution levels are so high.

**Nitin Gadkari,**  
Union minister

When in Bengaluru it feels like home. This is where I grew up... all the formative years and experience have been here. The energy in Mumbai is very, very different. But I feel both Mumbai and Bengaluru have influenced my 39 years.

**Deepika Padukone,**  
actor

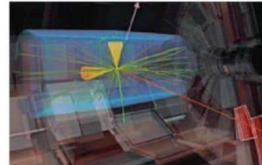


AFP

## WORD PLAY

The capabilities of AI are limitless, and they include understanding and analysing your online activity and predicting what you are likely to buy in future. Here is the term for this act of spying on a potential customer and shaping his buying habit: **intention economy.**

## MILESTONES



### TINY WONDER

Researchers at CERN have discovered evidence of the smallest of Higgs bosons—fundamental force-carrying particles that give subatomic particles their mass. Called toponium, the ultra-tiny boson particle had long been theorised but never observed because it decays immediately after formation.



### GUESSING GAME

A team of researchers from IIT (BHU) Varanasi won top honours at the Forensic Hackathon 2025 for developing a glycan-based forensic technology for accurate age estimation through biological fluids. The hackathon was held by the National Forensic Sciences University under the Union home ministry.



REUTERS

### HISTORY UNEARTHED

The fossilised mandible of a male Denisovan, an extinct archaic human species, was discovered at the Penghu Channel off the coast of Taiwan. Based on current evidence, Denisovans lived in Asia from 2,85,000 to 25,000 years ago.



## Your bills, dead or alive?

**B**revity is the soul of wit, said Shakespeare. We, Indians, won't agree. We created the world's most verbose epic, and also the most verbose Constitution—395 Articles and eight Schedules in about 1,45,000 words. Yet, pundits say, the latter is silent on several things.

Governance becomes impossible when rulers confront silence in the statute. That's where the courts come in. Where the statute is silent, judges speak. They spoke last week, ending the silence of the statute on an issue that has been plaguing governments for three quarters of a century.

The issue was this. The Constitution says that a bill passed by the legislature shall become law only after the president, or the governor in the case of a state, gives his assent. If he returns the bill, and if the legislature passes it again and sends it to him, he is bound to give assent.

What if he sits on it doing nothing? The Constitution is silent; it doesn't give a deadline to the president or the governor to sign a bill on the dotted line, or to tear it up along any perforated line.

President Zail Singh used this silence of the statute to the hilt; he sat on Rajiv Gandhi's postal bill, which would have empowered your postmaster to open your love letters, an ungentlemanly act in those pre-hacking days when epistolary privacy was an article of faith in decent democracies. Soon constitutional pundits came out with a new phrase—'pocket veto'. Since then governors who have quarrels with their governments have been taking pages out of Zail's pocket, keeping bills in their pockets or sending them to the president, leaving their CMs fretting and fuming.

Is such a bill dead or alive? Horror writers would have called it an 'undead' bill, after Bram Stoker used the term to describe Dracula. Horror or horrors—the Constitution is not a Gothic tome.

Two years ago, Governor R.N. Ravi of Tamil Nadu (or Tamizhagam, as he was pleased) tried to give a finality to the situation. Addressing a few civil service aspirants who came calling at his Raj Bhavan, he said a bill is dead if the governor has not given assent.

The death verdict from the Raj Bhavan brought back to life all the dead and buried federal spirits in Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. The Tamil thalaivar approached the apex court and asked the judges whether his 10 bills, that Ravi was keeping in his pocket or had sent to the president after long delay, were dead or alive.

Last week the judges spoke—a bill is neither dead nor undead; it is alive, if the governor holds it back for a month or sends it for the president to consider after a month. In effect, they took out the bills out of the governor's pocket and declared them alive.

Moral of the story? Where there's a will, there's a way; where there is a bill blocked, there is a way out.

How did the judges do it? They took recourse to a rarely invoked provision in the Constitution—Article 142—that gives them the power to innovate the law so that

"complete justice" gets done. They declared 10 bills, inordinately delayed by the governor, as deemed to have received his assent.

Very good, m'lords. But as Kerala Governor Rajendra Arlekar wondered, haven't you legislated? You were asked to decide on the fate of a few undead bills, but you have written down deadlines and procedures to follow.

You were asked to read into the Constitution, but haven't you written into the Constitution, a job that only Parliament can do with two-thirds majority?

They may have. But if Parliament doesn't act, who will exorcise the bad spirits?







# KMCH Center of Excellence for Atrial Fibrillation and AF clinic

**A**trial fibrillation (AF), an irregular heart rhythm originating in the upper chambers of the heart, is a significant global public health concern. Its prevalence increases with age, affecting up to 10% of individuals in their 80s. If left untreated, AF can have severe and potentially fatal consequences, including an increased risk of stroke and heart failure.

During AF, the atria contract chaotically due to erratic, disordered electrical signals that override the heart's natural rhythm. This ineffective pumping causes blood to pool in the heart's grooves, increasing the risk of clot formation. If these clots travel to the brain, they can lead to ischemic strokes—AF patients are three to five times more likely to experience this type of stroke. Additionally, the irregular and rapid heartbeat associated with AF can weaken the heart over time, potentially leading to heart failure, a condition where the heart struggles to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs.

Recognizing the serious impact of AF, KMCH is proud to introduce the KMCH Center of Excellence for Atrial Fibrillation and AF Clinic—the first of its kind in India. This initiative aims to raise awareness among the general public and primary care physicians, promoting early detection and treatment to prevent the life-threatening complications of AF.

## 1. Personalized Treatment Plans and Comprehensive Risk Factor Management

The clinic emphasizes managing modifiable risk factors like high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, and sleep apnea, which are common in AF patients.

## 2. Catheter Ablation and Surgical Options

KMCH is known for its expertise in catheter ablation, a minimally invasive procedure used to isolate and eliminate

the areas of the heart causing AF. KMCH uses state-of-the-art mapping technology like Cryoablation for precise ablation.

## Steps of Cryo Ablation – Overview

### CRYO ABLATION PROCEDURE

**Access:** With a small incision in the groin area to insert the catheter (small tube). To access the left atrium (upper chamber) of the heart, create a puncture in the wall that separates the left and right sides of the heart. The cryoballoon is then advanced to the left atrium.

**Inflate:** The balloon is inflated and moved it to the opening of the pulmonary vein. The goal is to temporarily plug the opening of the pulmonary vein stopping blood flow between the atrium and the vein (this is called occlusion) so the balloon is able to reach a cold enough temperature.

**Freeze (Ablate):** When the cryoballoon is in position cold energy is introduced (nitrous oxide) into the balloon. The cold energy freezes the tissue where the balloon touches the opening of the pulmonary vein. This scars the tissue, stopping the transmission of electrical signals that cause atrial fibrillation.

### Is cryoballoon ablation safe?

Cryoballoon ablation is generally considered to be a safe and effective treatment for AF when medication isn't sufficient. It is a minimally invasive procedure.



## 3. Interdisciplinary Team Approach

Patients are cared for by an interdisciplinary team, including Electrophysiologist, cardiologists, nurse practitioners, and specialists in nutrition, exercise, and sleep medicine.



**Dr. Lawrence Jesuraj**

Kovai Medical center and Hospital  
Coimbatore

## 4. Remote Patient Monitoring

KMCH uses remote monitoring tools, such as mobile apps and wearable devices, to track heart rhythm, allowing for early detection of irregular heartbeats or other issues.

Patients can report symptoms in real-time, enabling the care team to intervene promptly and make adjustments to treatment if needed.

## 5. Telemedicine and Virtual Consultations

Telemedicine appointments provide patients with easy access to their care team, reducing the need for in-person visits. This is particularly helpful for patients outside Coimbatore.

Virtual consultations allow for follow-up discussions, medication

adjustments, and continued patient education, ensuring consistent care and reducing travel burdens.

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**+ 91 9043355553** Whatsapp/Voice call  
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## OLD GUARD UNITED

After stepping out of the extended Congress working committee meeting for a photo shoot at Gujarat's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Museum on April 8, two veteran ex-chief ministers, Ashok Gehlot of Rajasthan and Bhupendra Hooda of Haryana, were spotted sharing a rare moment of bonhomie. As the cameras zoomed in, Gehlot casually raised his elbow, rested it on Hooda's shoulder, and gleefully whispered something. Hooda modestly acquiesced with silence. At a time when there is speculation on whether the Congress is easing out the old guard to infuse young blood, tongues are wagging on whether this was the soft launch of the post-retirement reunion tour.

## A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Having already put Madhya Pradesh on the wheat map, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is now branching out—literally. The man once known for bumper grain yields in his state is now betting on fruits that don't quite scream rural India: avocado and dragon fruit. Of course these exotic, and Instagram-able, imports come at a price. In a move that's equal parts agricultural policy and lifestyle statement, Chouhan has planted both fruits at his farmhouse. The message? If you can't beat imports, grow them. And coming from a leader who's actively engaging with protesting farmers, his fruity pitch might just find fertile ground. But he's not stopping at farming. Chouhan is now headed east to Bihar, ready to help the NDA sow the seeds of electoral victory. From crop cycles to campaign trails, he seems to have a green thumb for everything.

## THE BJP'S DYNASTY ALLY

While elsewhere there might be a raging debate on the demerits of nepotism, Sanjay Nishad proudly declared that his son is most suited for taking forward his political mission; reasoning that if not a politician, should his son instead be a rickshaw puller or a farmer. He further said that he would ensure that other members of his family became MPs, MLAs and ministers as that was the only way they could help people. It should be noted that all his party has are six members in the Uttar Pradesh assembly. He has also placed himself above the nepotism followed by the Samajwadi Party explaining that their brand is only about enjoying the fruits of power. Nishad's stance is at variance with his ally, the BJP, which has prided itself on being a party which is above family politics.

ILLUSTRATIONS JAIRAJ T.G.

## CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

The Ezhava Hindu community in Kerala has traditionally supported the CPI(M). However, over the past decade, there have been growing signs that the party is gradually losing its foothold within the community and the BJP has been making a concerted effort to convert the left's losses into its own gains. In a notable move, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan recently adopted a tactical tone of appeasement by lavishing praise on Vellappally Natesan, the long-time general secretary of the powerful Ezhava community organisation SNDP. Natesan had recently made a controversial remark about Malappuram, a Muslim-majority district. However, Vijayan downplayed the controversy, asserting that Natesan's statement was not targeted at any religion but rather at a political party—read, the Indian Union Muslim League—while also congratulating him on completing 30 years at the helm of the SNDP. Interestingly, critics of Vijayan on Facebook dug up his posts from 2015, in which he had strongly criticised Natesan, even calling him a mouthpiece of the RSS.



## WHAT ABOUT A RESPONSE?

Recently, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was asked about his government allegedly diverting funds meant for welfare measures for SCs and STs to guarantee schemes. In response, he demanded to know if there was a single BJP-ruled state that had implemented the act in question—the SCP/TSP Act. Similarly, when the lorries and transport vehicle owners' association sought a roll back on the diesel prices and warned of an indefinite strike, Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy asked why they had not gone on strike when the Modi government hiked diesel prices.

## WHO'LL WHIP THE CHIEF WHIP?

Kalyan may mean "good," but for Trinamool Congress's Kalyan Banerjee, things are turning ugly fast. Instead of targeting the opposition, he seems to have taken up the noble mission of waging war on his party colleagues. Recently, screenshots of leaked WhatsApp group chats showed Banerjee allegedly calling Trinamool's Krishnanagar MP Mahua Moitra a "versatile international lady", though he did not name her. In the group, he was also seen attacking Bardhaman-Durgapur MP Kirti Azad, who hinted that the veteran politician may have had one too many. Banerjee, the Serampore MP and the party's Lok Sabha chief whip, also attacked his colleague from Dum Dum, Saugata Roy, with "Narada scam chief". Roy diagnosed Banerjee with "mental complex".





## The fourth nerve

“Doc, I think my eyes are playing tricks on me,” said Vikram, a lanky 17-year-old who looked like he’d rather be skateboarding than sitting in my clinic. He sported a colourful cast on his left arm, a souvenir from a recent attempt to defy gravity, and his eyes darted around nervously, as if expecting the furniture to jump out and attack him. “Playing tricks how?” I asked. “Well,” he began, his voice cracking slightly, “everything seems tilted. Like, the world’s decided to lean over for a nap.”

Now, tilted worlds are usually not part of a teenager’s everyday experience, unless they’ve been experimenting with substances best left to horticultural enthusiasts. Vikram, however, assured me that his only indulgence was an overabundance of video games. A quick examination revealed the culprit: his left eye was doing a subtle ‘up and in’ impression, as if trying to get a better view of his brain. Clearly, the fourth cranial nerve, the delicate little trochlear nerve responsible for guiding the eye’s downward and inward gaze, had decided to take a vacation.

“So, what’s the damage, doc?” Vikram asked, his voice a mix of bravado and genuine concern. “Is this going to be like a permanent tilt-a-whirl situation?”

“Not necessarily,” I reassured him, launching into an explanation of how the fourth cranial nerve, the slenderest of all the cranial nerves, could be affected by head trauma. I may have gotten a little carried away with the anatomical details, because Vikram’s eyes started to glaze over, as if he were contemplating the nutritional value of the ceiling tiles.

“So, basically,” I summarised, “your fourth nerve is a bit bruised, but it should recover with time.” I prescribed him some eye exercises and a healthy dose of patience, which, for a teenager, is like asking a hummingbird to stand still.

Over the next few weeks, Vikram became a regular fixture at my clinic. He’d come in complaining that his eye was still doing the ‘tilt-a-whirl’ thing, but his complaints

were peppered with increasingly outlandish descriptions. One week, his vision was ‘like looking through a kaleidoscope that’s been attacked by a squirrel’. Another week, it was ‘like the world’s doing the Macarena’. I began to suspect he was secretly enjoying his newfound ability to describe his visual experience in terms that would make a poet blush.

But, beneath the humorous exaggerations, I could see that Vikram was frustrated. He was struggling to read, to play his beloved video games, even to walk down the street without feeling like the ground was sloping away beneath him. I reassured him that his recovery was progressing, albeit slowly, and that his brain was remarkably adept at adapting to such challenges.

And indeed, it was. Slowly but surely, the tilt in

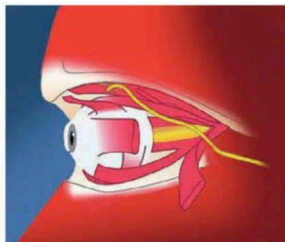
Vikram’s world began to subside. His eye exercises, though performed with the enthusiasm of a sloth on a treadmill, were helping to strengthen the weakened nerve. His brain, meanwhile, was busy rewiring itself, finding new ways to process the visual information it was receiving.

Three months after his initial visit, Vikram walked into my clinic with a swagger. His cast was gone, replaced by a faded scar that

looked like a lightning bolt, and his eyes were bright and focused. “Doc,” he announced, “I think my world’s finally back to normal.”

I examined him carefully, and sure enough, his fourth nerve had made a full recovery. His eyes were aligned, his vision was clear, and his descriptions of his visual experience had returned to their usual teenage simplicity. “Well, Vikram,” I said, “it seems your fourth nerve has finally decided to come down from its vacation.”

Vikram grinned, a mischievous glint in his eye. “Yeah,” he said, “and I think it brought me back a souvenir.” He tilted his head slightly, and for a fleeting moment, I thought I saw a hint of the old tilt in his vision. But then he winked, and I realised he was just messing with me. After all, what’s life without a little bit of tilt?



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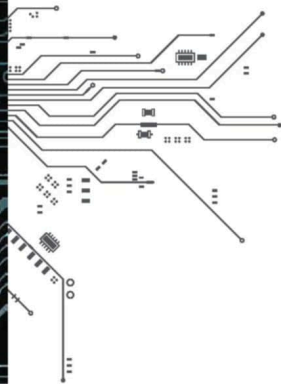
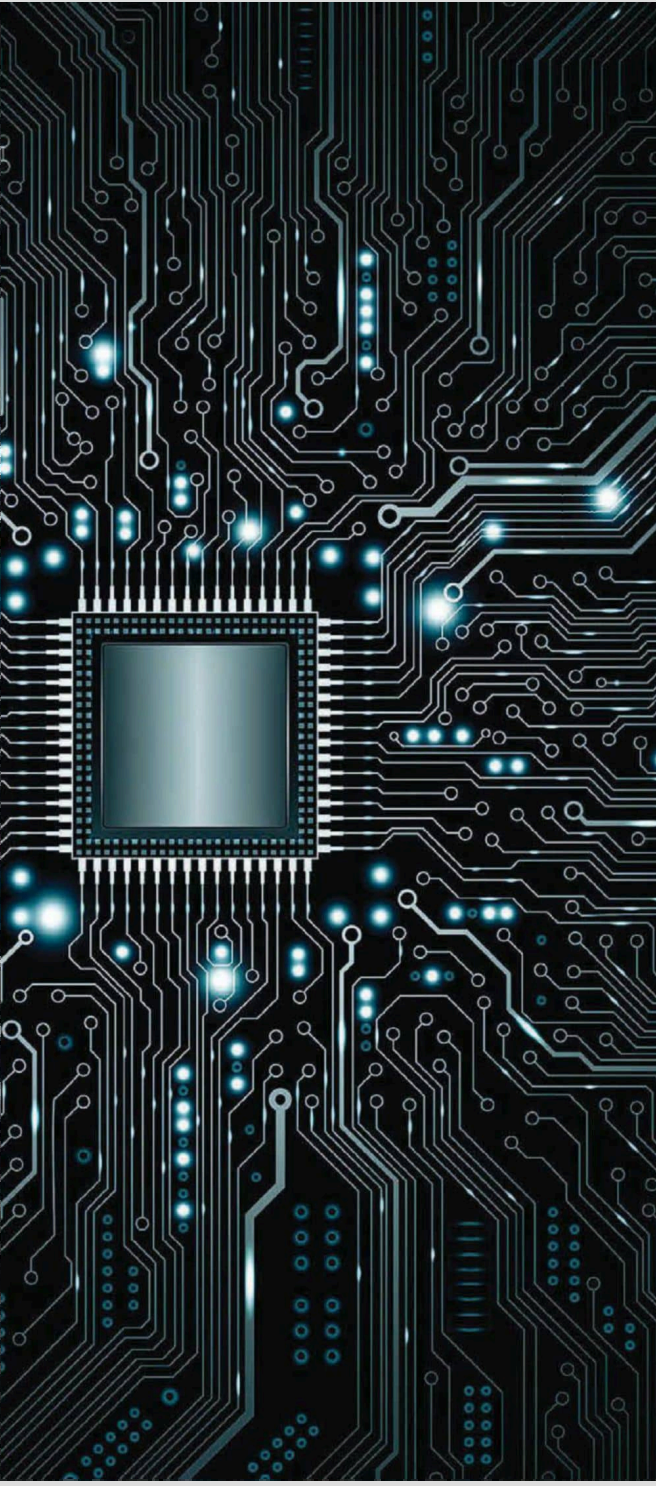


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# THE CHIPS ARE IN!





**SEMICONDUCTOR  
MANUFACTURING  
IS A SYMPHONY OF  
GLOBAL INPUTS:  
LITHOGRAPHY  
MACHINES FROM  
THE NETHERLANDS,  
SPECIALTY GASES  
FROM JAPAN, AND  
FABRICATION HUBS  
IN TAIWAN AND  
SOUTH KOREA. WILL  
INDIA'S AMBITIOUS  
MISSION TO  
DEVELOP A  
SEMICONDUCTOR  
ECOSYSTEM HELP IT  
JOIN THE HIGH-TECH  
CHORUS?**

**BY NILADRY SARKAR/  
Dholera, Gujarat**

**L**ocated 115 kilometres southwest of Ahmedabad, Dholera is a dusty village of broken roads and rugged terrain—non-descript at first glance. The landscape is dry and barren, save for an area where construction is in full swing. Sleek office buildings are beginning to rise, and newly laid blacktop roads carve paths into the future—an empty canvas coming to life.

So far, 22 square kilometres have been developed—the first brush-stroke in an audacious plan to transform Dholera into a next-generation city. Over the next three decades, under the Dholera Special Investment Region (DSIR) project, 22 villages in the taluka will be woven into a sprawling, 920sqkm megacity—larger than Mumbai or Bengaluru.

This transformation is being charted through six town-planning schemes (TPS), rolled out in three phases. Phase one includes TPS-1 and TPS-2, covering 158 square kilometres. This phase involves building essential infrastructure: roads, utility grids, water pipelines, wastewater systems, solid waste facilities, and power and information technology networks. Also under development is a river-bunding project, the Ahmedabad-Dholera expressway, freight and rapid transit rail links, and an international airport. Since Dholera falls within a coastal regulation zone, 150 square kilometres of agricultural land will remain preserved.

As a greenfield city-in-the-making, Dholera is envisioned as a manufacturing and industrial hub. Its economic base is set to shift from agriculture and aquaculture to high-value, cutting-edge sectors such

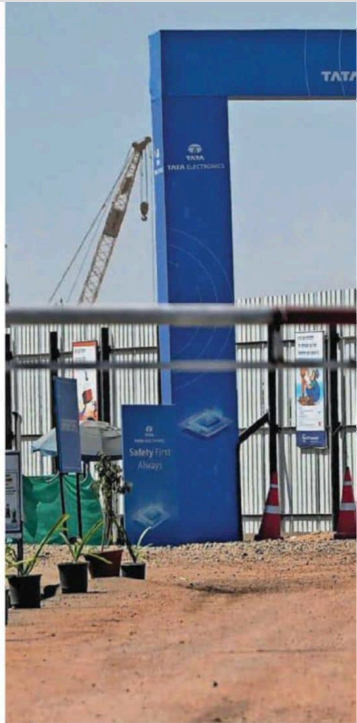
as electronics, aviation, defence, metallurgy, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, automotive components, and agro-food processing.

Among all the developments, perhaps the most ambitious is the ₹91,000-crore plan to build India's first commercial semiconductor fabrication plant—a cornerstone of technological self-reliance. Spanning 290 acres and encircled by a protective canal that would prevent floods, the facility is being developed by Tata Electronics in collaboration with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation.

Creating a semiconductor chip is arguably as complex and demanding as building an entire city from scratch. Often cited as the most intricate human-made products, chips are the invisible engines of the digital age. They power everything from smartphones and automobiles to advanced medical systems and military technology. With the rise of artificial intelligence, chips have become the most strategically valuable asset a nation can possess.

Yet, India remains a marginal player in the global semiconductor

**INDIA LACKS A COMMERCIAL FABRICATION FACILITY, FORCING IT TO CONTINUE IMPORTING 95 PER CENT OF ITS CHIPS FROM CHINA, TAIWAN, SOUTH KOREA AND SINGAPORE.**



PHOTOS: SALLI BERA



arena. The country lacks a commercial fabrication facility, forcing it to continue importing 95 per cent of its chips from China, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore. In 2023-24, India imported 18.43 billion chips and 'system on chips' (SoCs, which combine essential parts such as processor and memory onto a single chip) worth \$20.7 billion.

India realised the urgent need to change course because of two pivotal events: the Covid-19 pandemic and a border standoff with China. "Back



#### FORGING AHEAD

Construction work in progress at the PSMC-Tata Electronics facility in Dholera; (inset) a 3D representation of the Dholera smart city project

in April 2020, the government moved to restrict opportunistic takeovers of Indian companies by entities from countries it shares land border with. It was widely understood that the policy was aimed at Chinese firms,” said Konark Bhandari, a Carnegie India fellow who authored the paper *Geopolitics of the Semiconductor Industry and India’s Place in It*.

Following the border tensions, India ramped up its pushback—banning hundreds of Chinese apps in June 2020 and, a year later, barring

Chinese telecom giant Huawei from participating in 5G trials. “By June 2021, India had also barred Huawei from supplying equipment to mobile carriers,” Bhandari said. A former official of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), he specialises in space tech regulation and digital antitrust policy.

While the pandemic exposed the fragility of global chip supply chains, the border standoff underscored the strategic perils of dependency on China. With India’s semiconductor market booming—it is expected to surpass \$80 billion by 2026 and \$110 billion by 2030, according to the US department of commerce—there is a greater urgency to build a robust domestic manufacturing ecosystem.

The global chip shortage revealed

how deeply interconnected, and vulnerable, the semiconductor supply chain is. With no single entity in full control, semiconductor manufacturing is a symphony of global inputs: lithography machines from the Netherlands, specialty gases from Japan, and fabrication hubs in Taiwan and South Korea. A single tremor—an earthquake in Japan or a drought in Taiwan—can send shockwaves through the global economy.

As artificial intelligence and machine learning redefine the bound-



## SKY IS NO LIMIT

Micron is setting up an ATMP (assembly, testing, marking and packaging) facility in Sanand

aries of computing, cutting-edge chips have become essentials. Driven by the demand for AI integration, internet of things, and ever-smaller consumer electronics, India can no longer afford to rely solely on imports. The message is clear: if India wants to stay relevant in the digital century, it must secure its semiconductor future.

With the fab being built in Dholera, India's semiconductor dream is waiting for its breakthrough moment.

India's semiconductor foray began in 1962, when Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) started producing germanium transistors. By 1967, the company had progressed to silicon-based devices, marking a significant shift. But, even as India refined transistor technology, the world swiftly transitioned to integrated circuits (ICs)—compact chips that combined transistors, resistors and capacitors into a single unit.

BEL eventually ventured into IC manufacturing, but the progress was sluggish. It was not until the 1980s that the sector gained traction, fuelled by a \$40 million investment from the government to establish Semiconductor Complex Limited (SCL) in Mohali, Punjab—India's first semiconductor fabrication facility. Streamlining licensing regulations and reducing import duties, the government set the stage for accelerated growth. Remarkably, this happened before Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC)—now a global leader—even entered the industry.

By the late 1980s, SCL had advanced to 800-nanometre technology—the number referring to the width of the chip circuit line. The gap



SALIL BERA

with global standards was down to just two years.

"But they were not producing large-volume commercial chips, which were the trendsetters in the advancement of semiconductor manufacturing at that time. The Indian market was very small and they did not have any export market," said Pranay Kotashane, deputy director at the Takshashila Institution and author of *When The Chips are Down: A Deep Dive into a Global Crisis*.

According to Kotashane, the state-controlled, non-competitive environment hindered government companies. India's semiconduc-

tor industry soon ran into a major challenge: Rock's law, which says the cost of semiconductor fabrication plants doubles every four years. As it became increasingly expensive to remain competitive, and without a sustained growth in investment from the government, there was a gradual decline in India's semiconductor ambitions.

"Government-run companies struggled to keep pace with the rapidly evolving semiconductor industry, largely because they operated in a non-competitive environment that didn't demand continuous technological upgrades. The companies





**THE GUJARAT  
SEMICONNECT IN  
MARCH BROUGHT  
TOGETHER  
1,500 GLOBAL  
DELEGATES, 250  
EXHIBITORS, AND  
A NUMBER OF  
INDUSTRY  
LEADERS.**

were also restricted from competing with each other,” said Kotasthane.

While SCL was tasked with chip manufacturing, BEL was restricted to assembly, creating a fragmented approach that stifled innovation. As a result, both failed to keep up with Moore’s law—the principle that transistor density in integrated circuits doubles roughly every two years, fuelling exponential advancements in computing power and efficiency.

A devastating fire at SCL’s Mohali facility in 1989 further pushed India behind, as the US, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea marched ahead. While the SCL and BEL continued to

serve government agencies such as the Defence Research Development Organisation, the Indian government in 2007 unsuccessfully tried to attract private players in semiconductor manufacturing by offering a host of incentives, including capital subsidy of up to 25 per cent.

Over the years, several semiconductor projects to address India’s commercial needs were proposed only to fizzle out later. The Andhra Pradesh government’s ‘Fab City’ project, announced in 2006, failed after major investors SemIndia and Nano Tech Silicon India backed out following the global financial crisis. Infrastructure firm JP Associates, in association with IBM and Israel’s Tower Semiconductor, wanted to build a wafer fab in Noida. But they abandoned the plan in 2016, saying it would not be commercially viable.

With high-profile proposals not progressing beyond the drawing board, India continues to rely on imports. In 2021, realising the need to secure India’s technological future, the government launched the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) as an independent division within Digital India Corporation, a not-for-profit company established in 2013 for capacity building in technology. With administrative and financial autonomy, ISM serves as the nodal agency responsible for shaping and executing the country’s long-term vision for semiconductor manufacturing, as well as fostering a chip design ecosystem.

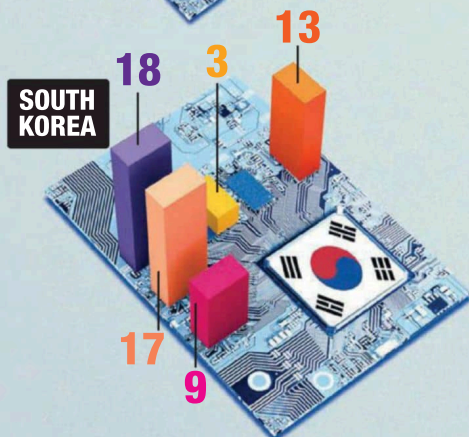
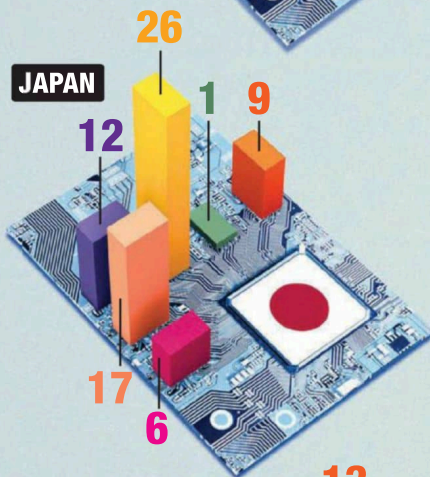
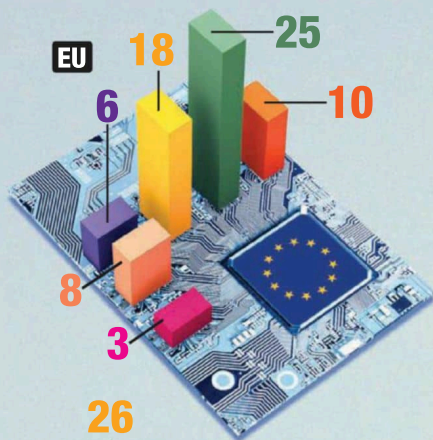
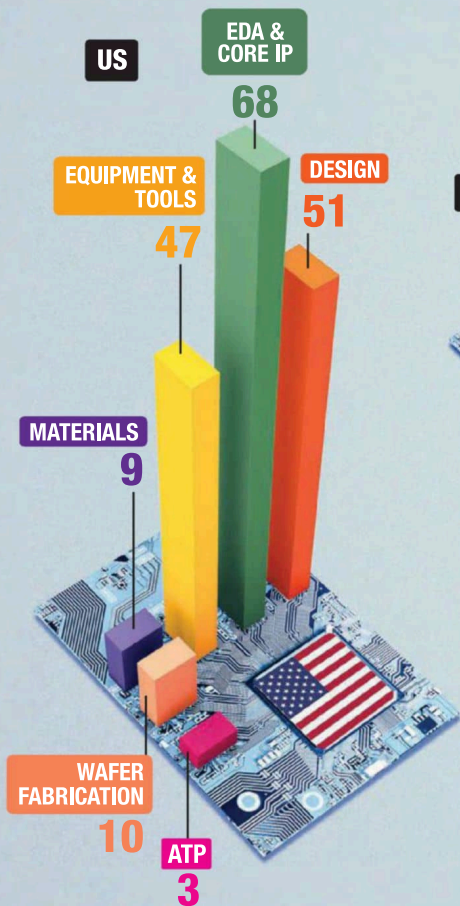
The following year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Semicon India Programme, committing more than \$10 billion as incentives to companies establishing fabrication units, display fabs, and facilities for assembling, testing and packaging chips.

“SCL was upgraded to 180nm technology, which we got in collaboration with Tower Semiconductor of Israel. It did not produce any latest

# THE CHIP NETWORK

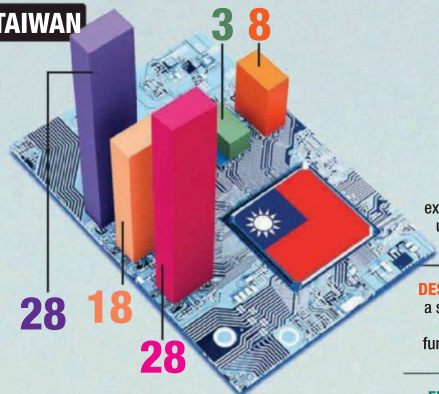
A LOOK AT THE GLOBAL SEMICONDUCTOR SUPPLY CHAIN

SUPPLY CHAIN  
SPREAD (%), 2022



SOURCE: 'EMERGING RESILIENCE IN THE SEMICONDUCTOR SUPPLY CHAIN' (MAY 2024) BY THE BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP AND THE SEMICONDUCTOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

## TAIWAN



Note: Total could exceed, or may not add up to 100, because of rounding

**DESIGN:** The defining of a semiconductor chip's architecture, functionality and layout

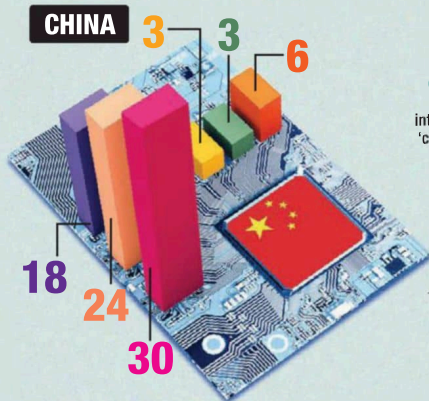
**EDA:** Electronic design automation; software for chip design

**CORE IP:** Pre-designed and verified blocks that can be integrated into a chip design; 'core' indicates a processing element, like a CPU core

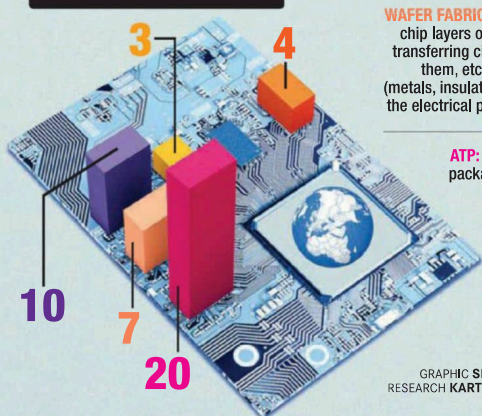
**EQUIPMENT & TOOLS:** Special machinery used in semiconductor manufacturing

**MATERIALS:** Substances like silicon wafers, light-sensitive polymers, metals and dopants (impurities introduced to modify silicon's electrical properties)

## CHINA



## REST OF THE WORLD



**WAFER FABRICATION:** Creation of chip layers on silicon wafers by transferring circuit patterns onto them, etching, adding layers (metals, insulators) and modifying the electrical properties of silicon

**ATP:** Assembly, test and packaging; stage where wafers are cut into chips, tested and enclosed in casing

GRAPHIC SREEMANIKANDAN S.  
RESEARCH KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH

technology but served its purpose in a big way by catering to our strategic sectors," V.K. Saraswat, NITI Aayog member and member of ISM's advisory committee, told THE WEEK.

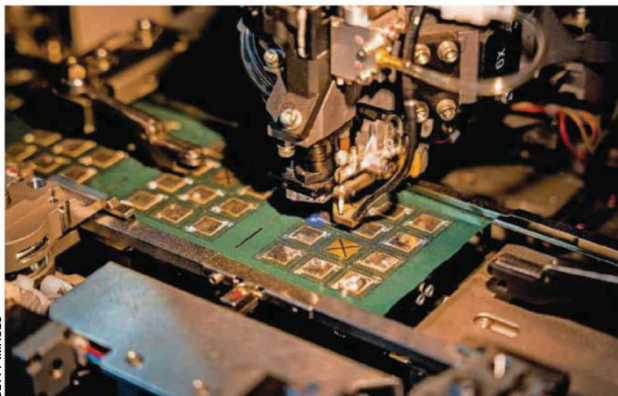
According to Saraswat, the government realised that things had to be done in a different manner. "The journey from 180nm technology to ISM began sometime in 2012," he said. "We decided to modify policies for ISM to give a greater push for the creation of a semiconductor ecosystem in India."

As part of ISM, five groundbreaking semiconductor projects are now underway—four in Gujarat and one in Assam. Leading the mission is the PSMC-Tata Electronics facility in Dholera, which is expected to have a monthly output capacity of 50,000 wafers—a slice of semiconductor material, typically silicon, for fabricating chips. PSMC will transfer advanced technology to manufacture a range of chips—28nm, 40nm, 55nm, 90nm and 110nm—that will cater to the surging demand across sectors such as automotive, computing, data storage, wireless communication and artificial intelligence.

"The Gujarat government also plans to develop a Semicon City, which will serve as a vibrant hub for the semiconductor ecosystem in India," said Manish Gurwani, who served as director, Gujarat State Electronics Mission.

In 2022, Gujarat became one of the first states to introduce a dedicated semiconductor policy that charted an ambitious five-year plan to attract global players. The policy offers a range of incentives, including up to 40 per cent capital expenditure assistance for fab projects, full reimbursement of stamp duty and registration fees, and subsidy on land required for a fab up to certain area. Companies are provided access to high-quality water at ₹12 per cubic metre for five years, along with a power tariff subsidy of ₹2 per unit for





GETTY IMAGES

a decade.

According to Gurwani, Gujarat's semiconductor policy is well-aligned with ISM. "No separate scrutiny is required for projects approved by ISM, reducing the timeline for state approval and additional burden for the investor," said Gurwani. The Dholera fab, he said, was approved by the state government within 24 hours of the ISM clearing it.

The incentives are already yielding results. Apart from the Dholera fab, CG Power and Industrial Solutions—partnering with Renesas Electronics Corp of Japan and Stars Microelectronics of Thailand—is developing an OSAT (outsourced semiconductor assembly and test) facility in Sanand with an investment of ₹7,000 crore. Micron is setting up an ATMP (assembly, testing, marking and packaging) facility in Sanand with a ₹22,516 crore capital investment, supported by a pilot project site already in operation. Kaynes Semicon Pvt Ltd is investing ₹3,300 crore to establish another ATMP unit there.

These plants are being established under the second phase of the Sanand Industrial Estate, developed by the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation. The first phase, spanning 2,056 hectares, hosts more than 500 global companies, including top

#### RIISING PROWESS

A chip manufacturing demo at the Advantage Assam summit in Guwahati in February; (right) delegates at a semiconductor exhibition in Gandhinagar in March

auto manufacturers. A key centre for auto ancillary, pharmaceuticals and electronics industries, Sanand is evolving into a major research and development hub.

"They (the state government) have given us a dedicated, 24x7 power and water supply, which is what a semiconductor project needs. What we also need is an ecosystem, and that's why the government has ensured multiple projects in this region," said Wasi Uddin of Kaynes. Once fully operational, the Kaynes facility, spread across 1.84 lakh square metres, is expected to produce 2.3 billion chips annually.

To help establish a semiconductor and packaging ecosystem, the state government organised the Gujarat SemiConnect in March, bringing together 1,500 global delegates, 250 exhibitors, and a number of industry leaders. Six country-specific roundtables and seven panel discussions were held during the event, reinforcing Gujarat's growing presence on the global semiconductor map.



Assam is another state that has benefited from India's renewed semiconductor push. Tata Electronics is building a state-of-the-art assembly and test facility in Jagiroad in Morigaon district with an investment outlay of ₹27,000 crore. The facility will focus on three platform technologies—wire bond, flip chip and integrated systems packaging—that have crucial applications in sectors such as automobiles, communications and network infrastructure.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Jagiroad project would transform the state's economy. Unlike Sanand, an established industrial hub where the Gujarat government is enhancing existing infrastructure, Jagiroad starts from scratch. As part of the state's most underdeveloped regions, Jagiroad lacks the essential framework for large and medium-scale industries. The Tata facility is expected to be a beacon of economic transformation.

"This facility will initially create





SALIL BERA

**A UNIQUE  
ADVANTAGE THAT  
INDIA HAS IN THE  
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27,000 jobs, with numbers set to grow over time,” Industries and Commerce Minister Bimal Borah said at the Assam Semiconductor Conclave in Guwahati last December. He projected Assam’s proximity to southeast Asia as a strategic advantage, saying the government was in talks to host representatives from ASEAN countries. “The Jagiroad project belongs to the entire northeast, and it will be a gateway for the region’s industrial development,” said Borah.

Tata wants to help build an entire semiconductor ecosystem around its Jagiroad facility. “We will engage with the ecosystem and the entire chain. Suppliers of equipment, raw materials and gases will have to work as a team,” said Srinivas Satya, president (components business and supply chain), Tata Electronics.

Confident that the projects in Gujarat and Assam are progressing well, the Union government is gearing up for phase two of ISM. With

a proposed \$15 billion outlay, said Union Minister of Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw, phase two of ISM aims to expand beyond chip manufacturing, offering strategic support for raw materials, equipment, gases and specialty chemicals—key components essential to semiconductor production.

India’s chip ambitions extend beyond commercial manufacturing. A significant milestone has been the Union government’s initiative to revamp SCL’s Mohali facility. As part of a major upgrade, India’s first fab is set to double its manufacturing capacity, with modern tools being introduced to enhance production efficiency. The government is also spearheading a ₹2,000-crore effort to augment SCL’s chip production capabilities to 65nm, 40nm and 28nm nodes.

Also, India has signed an agreement with the US to establish a semiconductor fab dedicated to national security—a first of its kind that will

focus on advanced sensing, communication and power electronics for national security.

A unique advantage that India has in the semiconductor space is that 20 per cent of the global chip designing workforce is based in the country. In recent decades, major players such as Intel, NXP and Qualcomm have set up expansive global capability centres in cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Noida, Pune and Chennai.

“Initially, India’s appeal to global semiconductor companies was largely driven by cost advantages. However, over the past decade or more, that narrative has significantly evolved,” said Ashish Lachhwani, a former Qualcomm engineer who is preparing to launch a startup. “It’s not just about affordability anymore. It’s about the knowledge base and expertise built over the years—they have positioned Indian engineers to design and define next-generation semiconductor products.”

## INTERVIEW

V.K. SARASWAT

Member, NITI Aayog and the advisory committee of India Semiconductor Mission



# EVERYONE SAYS 'CHINA PLUS ONE'; THE 'ONE' SHOULD BE INDIA

BY NILADRY SARKAR

**A FORMER SECRETARY** of the Defence Research and Development Organisation, Vijay Kumar Saraswat has played a pivotal role in developing indigenous missile systems such as Prithvi, Dhanush, Prahaar and Agni-5, as well as India's ballistic missile defence system, the fighter jet Tejas, and the nuclear submarine INS Arihant.

He also launched the Photonics Valley Corporation in Telangana to advance silicon photonics, crucial for 5G and supercomputing, and has led India's microprocessor development for smart cities and internet of things. In an exclusive interview with THE WEEK, Saraswat, 75, speaks about the past, present and future of the Indian semiconductor sector. Excerpts:

**Q/ For long, unclear trade policies, high import tariffs, an unfavour-**

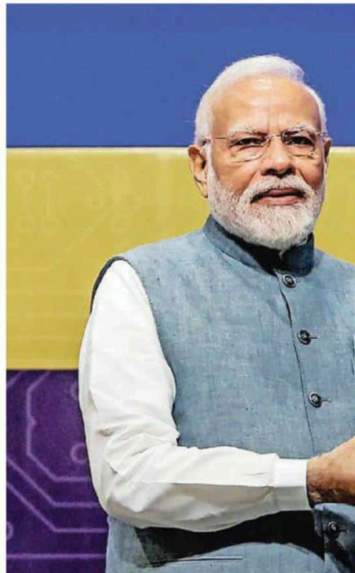
**able tax regime, limited domestic demand and overall governmental inaction ensured that we do not have any commercial semiconductor fabs. How does the Narendra Modi government plan to change this?**

**A/** The entire commercial electronics sector in India is assembly-based. We import television kits, assemble them here, and sell them. The same applies to most electronic products. So, semiconductor imports—chips, integrated circuits, devices—were largely limited to critical sectors and did not penetrate the commercial sector. The government found it difficult to invest when demand was so low. But it was a catch-22 situation. We believed that the availability of semiconductors in the country would spur demand. That is why, in 2014, the government of India decid-

ed to make upfront investments and involve the private sector in manufacturing to compete with global technologies.

**Q/ Despite being greenlit, several semiconductor fab projects—including those by the JP Group and Tower Semiconductor—did not materialise during Modi's first term. Will projects based by the India Semiconductor Mission meet the same fate?**

**A/** The licences for these companies were issued during the previous (UPA) government's time, and around 2015, I also got involved. We discovered that the policy had major drawbacks. For example, while the government promised support, it required private companies to first invest and successfully demonstrate semiconductor production before reimbursement. That meant private players had to take the initial risk in an ecosystem where demand and market size were uncertain.





## CHARKHA TO CHIPS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw during the inauguration of Semicon India in Gandhinagar in July 2023

I worked with them for three years, tried to persuade them, and assured them that we would help create a market. But the requirement of up-front investment made the proposition too risky, so they withdrew their licences.

Some of these companies also lacked financial muscle. They hoped for support from international financial institutions. But with unclear demand and limited capital, banks and institutions hesitated. Although they signed contracts with companies from France and Taiwan for technology transfer, they failed to secure the financial inputs needed.

In 2017, we decided that the government must absorb the initial investment risk. Today's policy ecosystem is far more supportive—and that is why so many companies have now come forward.

**Q/ Current estimates suggest that Indian semiconductor facilities will not be producing chips smaller**

**than 20 nanometre anytime soon, while global players are already making sub-10nm chips. How long could it take for India to catch up?**

**A/** We should not follow the same trajectory as others. Our market research shows that 70–80 per cent of the products we manufacture—both strategic and commercial—can be supported by 28nm technology. Our focus is currently on 28nm and above. We are also looking at 65nm and 90nm, as analog and memory devices can be made with these mature technologies.

**Q/ From a national security standpoint, how essential is India's push to become a semiconductor powerhouse, especially with the government's 'Make in India' push in defence manufacturing? How soon might we see indigenous chips powering India's defence sector?**

**A/** This is a very important point. Everything is digital today. Not only in strategic sectors like defence,

but even in commercial sectors, vulnerabilities are high if we rely on imported chips and technologies. Cyber warfare is the next frontier, and we expose ourselves if our digital infrastructure is based on foreign products.

That is why the government has prioritised domestic chip manufacturing. The 28nm node will cater significantly to the defence sector. The upgraded Semiconductor Laboratory in Mohali, which will soon support 90nm and 65nm, will start churning out many devices that meet national security needs. Facilities in Gujarat and Assam will focus on 28nm chip packaging. Domestic packaging gives us access to design verification and quality checks—ensuring no bugs are embedded in imported products. Even with just ATMP (assembly, testing, marking and packaging), we improve our sense of security.

**Q/ India has signed an agreement with the US to establish a semiconductor fabrication plant for national security purposes. Can we expect similar government-to-government partnerships with other nations?**

**A/** These are strategic decisions based on our partnerships. With China dominating the semiconductor market, the US has realised it must strengthen its own capabilities. Many US foundries, including IBM, moved operations to China. That is why the US made a major investment of \$22 billion to set up new foundries there.

Given our current relationship with the US, the joint fab is one of the most potent collaborations. They are investing, and we also need special foundries for strategic sectors. Similar partnerships are possible, but

only with countries willing to invest and contribute—not those relying on others for their needs.

**Q/ What will be India's role in the chip war between the US and China?**

**A/** India has hardly any major role to play in the chip war. But if we come up with our own technology, facilities and production capacity at the earliest, we can compliment the efforts of the US in a big way by providing them low-cost chip manufacturing—reducing their dependence on China. So, to that extent, India can play a role. Everyone says 'China plus one'; that 'one' should be India, making headway to the US market.

**Q/ So far, five semiconductor plants have been sanctioned under ISM. Four are in Gujarat and one in Assam—both the states are governed by the BJP. Is there a political agenda behind the location choices? How is the government ensuring equitable distribution?**

**A/** Plant locations are selected based on the ecosystem available in each state. Private investors assess factors like financial incentives, infrastructure, logistics, and, to some extent, availability of skilled manpower. Water, power and a good chemical industry are essential. Gujarat and Assam offered those advantages.

Other states also submitted proposals, and the private sector chose where to invest. I don't think politics played a role. For instance, there was a strong push for Karnataka, but water scarcity and industrial congestion may have deterred investors.

As for Assam, the goal is to promote the northeast. The state has no water or power problems. The only challenge was manpower, and the Assam government is training 3,000 young people through NASSCOM and other agencies. It is a major initiative that the state has taken. Costs are also lower. ●



# GRASPING THE GAME

## No country can be 'atmanirbhar' in semiconductor sector

BY PRANAY KOTASTHANE

**FROM ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** to electric vehicles, nearly every breakthrough technology relies on semiconductor advancements. As AI and machine learning push computational limits, they require cutting-edge chips. Also, the future of autonomous vehicles, quantum computing and advanced communication networks will be shaped by semiconductor innovations.

Semiconductors have become critical as three major streams—geopolitical, geo-economic and technological—have converged, making them a top priority for nations. They have begun treating semiconductor development as a strategic imperative.

The pandemic highlighted the fragility of the global supply chain. During the pandemic, demand for automotive chips plummeted, and manufacturers reallocated production capacity to consumer electronics like laptops and data centres, whose demands skyrocketed because of the growing remote working culture during the pandemic. When the auto industry rebounded, it found itself in a severe chip shortage, disrupting global production.

China-Taiwan tensions have heightened the geopolitical importance of semiconductors. Taiwan, producing over 60 per cent of advanced chips, is vital to global supply chains. A Chinese invasion could disrupt industries worldwide, forcing the US and allies to react. Meanwhile, worsening US-China ties drive nations like India to build independent semiconductor ecosystems.

But India cannot aim for complete self-sufficiency in semiconductors—no country can. India's goal should be to secure a strong presence across multiple stages of the supply chain to ensure strategic leverage.

India's strength lies in semiconductor design. Approximately 20 per cent of the global semiconductor design workforce is based in India. But most Indian engineers work for foreign multinational companies, and very few semiconductor products are designed by Indian firms.

To address this, the Indian government has introduced an incentive scheme to encourage domestic semiconductor design. These incentives cover prototyping, software licensing, and chip design support. However, the programme is currently managed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), a government-run entity with limited capacity to drive innovation at the required scale.





## INDUSTRY TITAN

The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) plant in Tainan Science Park, Taiwan

SHUTTERSTOCK

India currently lacks a commercial semiconductor fabrication industry, but the Tata-PSMC partnership aims to change that with a 28nm chip manufacturing plant capable of producing 50,000 wafers per month. This facility is expected to pave the way for more advanced fabrication, eventually reaching 14nm and 12nm chip production.

However, setting up a semiconductor fabrication plant is a massive challenge. It will take at least four years before production begins. Initially, the defect rate for manufactured chips will be high, increasing costs. The success of the Tata-PSMC fab will depend on how quickly it can achieve high yield rates and compete in the global market.

Unlike fabrication, chip assembly and packaging are more labour-intensive, making India well-suited for this segment due to inexpensive workforce. Encouragingly, India has announced four new ATMP (assembly, testing, marking and packaging) plants, with Micron leading the way. If Micron's project succeeds, India could attract significant investments

in chip packaging.

India must cultivate homegrown semiconductor startups. This requires a supportive regulatory environment, improved access to capital, and policies that encourage innovation. A thriving startup ecosystem will ensure that India not only manufactures chips, but also designs and innovates new semi-

conductor technologies.

To stay competitive, India must avoid restrictive policies like limiting domestically made chips to the local market, which would stifle innovation and global expansion. ATMP plants depend on imported chip wafers and materials, but high tariffs and exclusion from the World Trade Organisation's Information Technology Agreement 3 (ITA-3) could make Indian assembly facilities uncompetitive. Unless import duties are lowered, Indian chip assemblers will struggle against global competitors who can source raw materials more cheaply. Even today, Taiwan relies on photolithography machines from the Netherlands and customers from the US and Europe.

A successful semiconductor strategy must be built over decades. It has taken Taiwan over three decades of consistent investment to reach its current dominance. India must take a similar long-term approach.

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**Kotasthane** is deputy director and chairperson, high-tech geopolitics programme, Takshashila Institution.

# LONG POSITION



India is making strides, but our reliance on imports will not diminish overnight

BY V. VEERAPPAN

## INDIA'S ELECTRONICS

**APPETITE**, driven by mobiles, is growing at an unprecedented pace. A decade ago, smartphones were a luxury—the penetration rate was just 19 per cent. Today, over 70 per cent of Indians own smartphones. This digital transformation is not just about mobile phones—it extends across multiple sectors, each contributing to the soaring demand for semiconductors.

The e-commerce boom is one such driver. The rapid expansion of India's telecom and cloud ecosystem has also reshaped how businesses and individuals connect. The post-pandemic shift to remote work has further accelerated this trend, making Wi-Fi routers common in Indian households.

Beyond connectivity, emerging industries are amplifying the semiconductor surge. Electronic vehicles require advanced chips for battery management and smart driving systems. Artificial intelligence and automation are transforming industries, with factories deploying AI-powered robotics to enhance efficiency and precision. These factors converge to create such an insatiable demand for chips that the Indian semiconductor market could cross \$100 billion in revenues by 2030.

The future of Indian-made chips

in the country's semiconductor landscape remains an open question. India has yet to establish a foothold in the manufacturing, assembly and packaging of integrated circuits. Unlike other global players, we are not yet exporting chips, nor do we have the facilities for producing semiconductors at scale.

Change is on the horizon, though. India Semiconductor Mission has given subsidies worth \$10 billion for developing semiconductor and display manufacturing facilities in the country. This production-linked incentive scheme has lowered capital costs for companies setting up chip-making plants, ensuring they can compete on a global scale. The 'Digital India' and 'Make in India' initiatives are also playing important roles. As a result, in the next three to five years, we will have India-manufactured ICs.

But our imports will not diminish overnight. It could come down by 10-20 per cent in the coming years, and we will have to still largely depend on other countries.

One notable shift that may take place is the declining dependence on Chinese semiconductors. At present, China is India's largest source of chip imports, but this is expected to change due to the 'China plus one' policy. Countries like Germany, Israel, Taiwan, the US, Japan, Vietnam

and Malaysia will fill the gap in the near future, reducing India's exposure to Chinese suppliers.

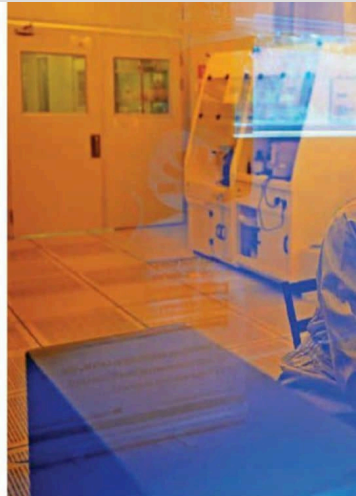
But, the semiconductor market is deeply intertwined with both superpowers—the US dominates intellectual property rights, while China leads in high-volume manufacturing. Unlike many nations that have chosen sides, India has pragmatically kept its doors open to both.

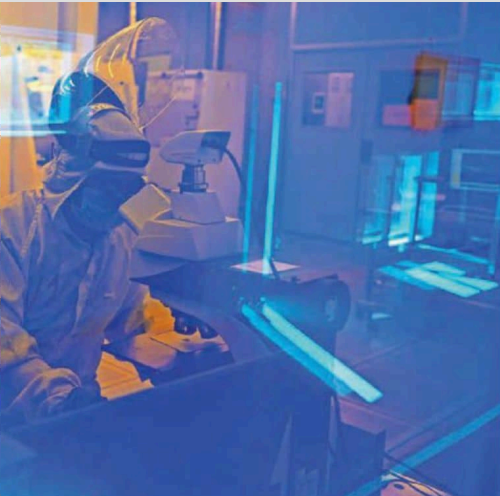
While a complete halt in chip imports from China is unlikely, India's engagement with the US in semiconductor technology is growing. One of the biggest factors shaping India's role is its deep-rooted connection to American semiconductor firms. Many of them have their largest design teams based in India. The US also views India as an essential ally in its semiconductor ambitions, and a recent bilateral agreement to establish a semiconductor fab has strengthened ties.

India must also strengthen its position as an exporter. Today, global companies leverage India for chip design. If Indian manufacturers can produce and export chips in addition to offering design expertise, the country's status in the global semiconductor value chain will rise significantly.

**Veerappan** is chairman, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association.

BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA





## PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Agnit Semiconductors in Bengaluru is developing a chip technology based on gallium nitride, a semiconductor compound used to make specialised chips

# INCUBATING IDEALS

India's chip revolution calls for a deeper conversation about ethics, national responsibility, and the global perception of Indian enterprise

BY ANANTHA KINNAL



## INDIA HAS SEEN

a quiet revolution in semiconductors in the past five to 10 years. The country is now emerging as a hub for design, development and deep-tech innovation—a shift that is not accidental, but the result of visionary policies and the support of the Union and state governments.

Karnataka became a pioneer by launching the ₹92.5 crore Karnataka Semiconductor Venture Capital Fund (KARSEMVEN Fund) in 1999. It laid the foundation for initiatives like SUFFL—the Semiconductor Fabless Accelerator Lab—further strength-

ening India's fabless chip design ecosystem.

My company, Calligo Technologies, began its product development journey in 2018, when one could only dream of attracting investment for a chip startup. Venture capitalists were wary, and support systems were nascent. Survival meant ingenuity. Calligo generated revenue through services, and we funnelled it back into product development. We saw a flicker of investor interest when we finally reached a point where we could present a rudimentary prototype—a form of 'virtual silicon'.

It was enough to start conversations, but far from sufficient to bring a chip to life. That is when we turned to the Karnataka government. We became the first startup to be incubated by SUFFL, which helped us address two of the biggest hurdles for a semiconductor startup—the high cost of chip fabrication and access to EDA (electronic design automation) tools. Thanks to SUFFL, we were able to receive 100 samples of our first chip, without bearing full cost. SUFFL's support served as a critical launchpad for our market entry.

Today, other states are drawing

inspiration from Karnataka. We are seeing a decentralised, yet coordinated push—state governments are providing the runway, and the Union government is offering fuel for liftoff. States contribute at the seed level, while Central schemes provide next-level funding for market entry. With the semiconductor startup scene receiving this dual-engine thrust, the venture capital community has begun to respond—what was once a trickle is becoming a steady flow of interest.

Projects by Micron and Tata Electronics are laying the groundwork for India's end-to-end semiconductor ecosystem. Many of India's top talent, who for decades had contributed to leading global semiconductor firms, are now drawn by opportunities at home. Having gained deep knowledge and global insights, they bring not just expertise, but also international networks and entrepreneurial energy to strengthen India's ecosystem.

As India tries to position itself as a global semiconductor hub, a parallel conversation must unfold—about ethics, national responsibility, and creating a global perception of Indian enterprise. The recent discovery of a component made by an Indian semiconductor company in a Russian weapon system shows the importance of having that conversation.

It raises concerns around sanctions loopholes, weak export controls and unintended supply chain links, resulting in Indian companies inadvertently becoming transit hubs. Startups, especially in the strategically sensitive semiconductor sector, must recognise that they operate not only in a business environment, but also within a geopolitical ecosystem. Weak export controls or lax due diligence are not minor oversights—they risk India's global credibility, particularly with key partners like the US.

**Kinnal** is cofounder and managing director of the Bengaluru-based Calligo Technologies.



# Still catching their breath

More than a decade on, the scars of Syria's chemical attack survivors are far from faded

BY ANAGHA SUBHASH NAIR/DAMASCUS

**A**bdul Rahman Idris was woken up by the sounds of screaming and ambulance sirens. A resident of Ein Tarma, an area in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta, the 10-year-old was accustomed to the chaos that the Syrian civil war brought. That night, however, was different. Amid the screams of panic were whispers of an unprecedented horror in the area—a chemical attack.

His eyes widened as he realised that the strike had been near his sister's house. He rushed there with

some family members, but was met with haunting nothingness.

Nearly 12 years later, Idris narrates this story as we drive through the streets of Ein Tarma. As with many hotspots of the war, the road we are on is a stretch of ghostly reminders of the life it once held. The air is dusty, and the brown we are enveloped by is sometimes splashed with the colour of a lone shop or a restaurant among the ruins.

Idris points to the skeleton of a building, indistinguishable to me from the ones on either side of it.

"That used to be my house," he says.

In late August 2013, Bashar al-Assad's Baathist regime attacked multiple towns in Ghouta with the nerve agent sarin, killing over 1,100 people. The attack was part of the civil war that killed more than 2,30,000 people between 2011 and 2024, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. The war was brought to an abrupt end after a blitz takeover of the government in December 2024 by rebel forces led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Assad and his family fled to Moscow, one of the regime's staunchest allies during the war.

After the attack, photos of the effects of the nerve agent on women and children emerged online, horrifying the local and international community. The regime vehemently denied responsibility but multiple investigations by human rights organisations said otherwise.

Idris explains how the situation was uncharted territory for everyone. At the time of bombing, residents of the area usually took refuge in bunkers, even associating the sound of aircraft with a rapid descent into underground chambers. However, gas is heavier than air and sinks into





basements, many of which were used as hospitals.

"At the time, the regime was conducting airstrikes along with the chemical attack," says Idris. "If people went up to their roofs to breathe clean air, they would face the airstrikes."

I ask him if he could really understand what was going on, considering how young he was. "Living in that atmosphere makes children grow up," he replies.

"We had responsibilities. We didn't live our childhood very well, we didn't play in the neighbourhood because of the constant bombing."

Idris is 22 now and works in mass media. In Hamouriye, we walk through a cemetery, home to multiple mass graves. Idris says many of the people buried there were killed in the chemical attacks. I notice that many of the headstones said '21 August 2013'; the date of the attacks.

He stops near one of the headstones and points to it. "That's my sister," he says.

Idris's losses included his nieces Jana, four, and Hala, three. He explains how they found the children before their

mother, and thus buried them in a different spot.

"Hala had a needle sticking out of her neck [when we found her]," he says. "Maybe she was on the verge of death and doctors were trying to save her, but they couldn't."

Later that year, under American and Russian pressure, Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention and declared its chemical weapon stockpile, which was later destroyed under a joint mission by the UN and Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). But in 2017 and 2018, more rebel-held areas were gassed, sparking strong suspicion that Syria still possessed significant undeclared chemical weapons and capabilities. These claims, however, were difficult to investigate because of the ongoing

fighting and the lack of access during Assad's rule.

The chemical attacks in the suburbs of Damascus are seared into the memories of those there. Marwan Othman Abuqr, 55, and his wife, Ruwaida Mohaity, 49, are among them. I meet the couple in a workshop they own. They are eager to share their story, and Mohaity pulls out her phone to show me photos of her children, Israa, 11, and Hasan, five, whom they lost to the attacks in Ghouta.

Abuqr was one of 17 people working at a relief centre when the attack happened. He covered his nose and tried to flee, but lost consciousness. When he opened his eyes, he was in a clinic, surrounded by ailing women and children, many of them foaming at the mouth.

"My wife's aunt told me that she saw me at 3am, foaming at the mouth and bleeding from the nose. Death seemed certain," he says. Mohaity explains how she had no clue about what was going on,

#### POISONED PAST

Idris looks over the destroyed town of Ein Tarma



**HORROR STORIES**

Mohaity shows a photo of her daughter following the gas attack as her niece watches on



ANAGHA SUBHASH NAIR

and all that she felt was a sense of strangulation. Her last memory was of her daughter asking to go to the wash room. “I couldn’t even get up to take her to the toilet,” she says.

“I was paralysed in a wheelchair for about 40 days after regaining consciousness.”

A *Lancet* study from 2015 shows the higher probability of adverse birth outcomes in pregnant women and their children following exposure to such gases. Mohaity tells me she was pregnant at the time of the attack, and that she miscarried six months into her term, possibly an effect of the poisonous nerve agent.

Abuqr says that he, too, experienced the effects of the gas for some time following the attack. “Our minds were affected, we couldn’t concentrate,” he explains.

“It was like that for a while, and then God gave us back our health.”

Not far from the workshop, I meet a man building a wall. He appears to be in his 70s. People around him explain that he was a survivor of the gas attack, and that the building he is helping reconstruct was destroyed during the war. He rolls up his sleeve,

showing me an injury on his forearm from explosives.

Syria’s new administration has promised to destroy any remaining traces of chemical weapons and capabilities. In early March, Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani addressed an OPCW meeting at The Hague, promising full compliance and transparency pertaining to ongoing investigations. In late March, President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced a caretaker government, with limited inclusion of those from

the country’s minorities.

For survivors like Idris, justice means holding those who authorised these war crimes to account. “Especially the higher-ups,” he says. “Maybe the supporters [of the regime] were servants of their employers, but the higher-ups were responsible for the massacres.”

Another survivor I met, Khaled Mohammed Hazoume, tells me about the collective fatigue among the survivors from talking to the media. He says that reliving the trauma feels pointless when the one thing they want—for Assad to be held accountable—still appears to be distant.

Those who lived the years of war are trying to pick up their lives once more. Time heals, but some scars take longer than others to heal. “I had only one sister, and she was so kind to me, especially because I was the youngest in my family,” says Idris.

He chokes up, unable to complete his thought. “We really felt her loss. I was the only sibling for quite a while...”

His mind wanders, eyes moist with sorrow and fond remembrance. ●



**In early March, Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani addressed a meeting at The Hague, promising full compliance and transparency pertaining to ongoing investigations.**

# MY EXPERIENCE OF USING EXCIMER LASER IN TREATMENT OF CORONARY ARTERY BLOCKAGES

This is to give you a brief about one such therapeutic option, the Excimer Laser System and its applications in the field of Vascular Sciences. The Excimer Laser System is manufactured by Spectranetics Corporation in the US and is being introduced in India by Veiva Scientific India Private Limited.

## Mechanism of Action

The PLS LASER SYSTEM emits a cool beam of ultraviolet light with a specific wavelength of 308 nanometers to precisely break down, vaporize and remove matter by means of Pulsed Photoablation. The Laser energy reaches the molecular level and through its three distinct mechanisms of Photochemical, Photothermal and Photomechanical action contributes to Photoablation. The depth of penetration of the laser is only 50 microns making it very safe to use within the vasculature.

## Applications

Excimer Laser therapy will be a solution for various problems currently faced by the patients and healthcare professionals, who are constantly dissatisfied with the sub-optimal outcomes due to certain challenging scenarios they encounter. The indicated treatments using the PLS and ELCA catheters include removing lesions comprising atheroma, fibrosis, calcium, thrombus and neointimal hyperplasia in the Coronary and Peripheral vasculature. It can also be used for transvenous removal of problematic Pacing and Defibrillator leads.

Given below are the list of indications for use of the Excimer Laser System in a healthcare setting.

## Coronary Atherectomy

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) currently approved indications for excimer laser coronary angioplasty (ELCA) are

1. Balloon uncrossable and un-dilatable lesions
2. Multi-focal, thrombotic saphenous vein graft lesions
3. Chronic total occlusion (CTO)
4. Moderately calcified lesions
5. Ostial lesions
6. Eccentric lesions
7. Long lesions (> 20 mm)
8. In-stent restenosis

Besides, there have been reports of ELCA being utilized successfully for other indications, which are listed below:

1. Adjunctive to conventional percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) for under-expanded/under-deployed stents, or in cases of large thrombus burden.
2. Modification of proximal cap of heavily calcified lesions, when initial attempts to cross with rotablation wire are unsuccessful.

## Peripheral Thrombectomy

- Infrainguinal stenoses and occlusions
- Critical limb ischemia (CLI)
- Total occlusions crossable by guidewires.

## Lead Extraction

- Pocket infection
- Device upgrades
- Malfunctioning Leads
- Advisory leads
- Various other scenarios demanding lead removal

## Clinical Significance

Excimer laser coronary angioplasty (ELCA) is a safe and effective technique as an adjunct to conventional PCI and can improve clinical outcomes when used in the appropriate context. As noted previously, its primary application currently is for lesions that are uncrossable or undilatable with conventional balloons. In cases where even the laser catheter cannot cross the lesion, such as CTOs or heavily calcified lesions, the laser energy has been successfully utilized to modify the lesion's proximal cap. This allows the passage of a standard PCI microcatheter or dedicated guidewire such as RotaWire later on, and the procedure can then be completed in a usual fashion.

Another important application of ELCA is to debulk thrombotic occlusions in saphenous vein grafts (SVGs). These lesions are prone to distal embolization and can cause no-reflow with standard SVG-PCI. Hence, it is recommended that distal protection devices (DPDs) be utilized to prevent this complication. However, these devices are often bulky and unable to be delivered distally. ELCA has been shown to



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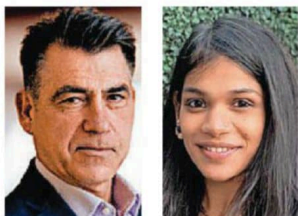
have a low rate of distal embolization and can be used as a safer alternative without DPDs for the majority of cases.

The incidence of in-stent restenosis (ISR) has reduced considerably with the advent of drug-eluting stents (DES), compared to bare-metal stents (BMS). In those cases with ISR, ELCA is a safe technique that does not cause collateral damage to the stainless-steel stent. Simultaneously, it achieves greater intravascular ultrasound (IVUS) cross-sectional area, luminal gain, and intimal hyperplasia ablation compared to balloon angioplasty alone.

Additionally, since ELCA has been shown to ablate both the luminal and the abluminal plaque tissue, in those cases where an under-deployed stent was the cause of ISR, these stents can be better approximated to the vessel wall. This can potentially prevent the need for future revascularization.



# The tariff tactic



## The strategic gamble behind Trump's trade play with India

BY MARK LINSCOTT AND  
ANUSHKA SHAH

**ON APRIL 9**, the US administration reacted to the meltdown of financial markets, in the wake of President Donald Trump's April 2 executive order imposing sweeping tariffs, by pausing reciprocal country-specific hikes for 90 days, excluding China. Indian exports, which long benefited from near-zero tariffs on many products, now fall under the 10 per cent universal duty—substantially higher than before, though far less than the paused 26 per cent.

However, it is important to unpack the scope and nuances. The original plan called for a two-stage implementation—an initial 10 per cent tariff on all imports, followed by an additional 16 per cent on Indian goods. While the second stage has now been put on hold, its inclusion in the executive order highlights the pressure India faces to accelerate trade negotiations. The phased design—and now the pause—suggests that this is not just about protectionism, but also about creating negotiating leverage on India's tariffs and the size of the US trade deficit with India.

The proposed reciprocal rate for India was explicitly framed as a response to India's trade practices—including high tariffs on American

automobiles, electronics and agricultural goods, and a range of restrictive non-tariff barriers—although the methodology is determined on the basis of the trade deficit. However, Trump's order includes an off-ramp: If a targeted country addresses the concerns that prompted reciprocal tariffs, the US may reconsider and reduce that country's rate. With US-India trade talks already underway, the pause has been portrayed by the Trump administration as less a retreat and more a calculated gesture, designed to keep negotiations moving while keeping pressure intact.

There is no question that the 26 per cent tariff would sharply impact India's trade and economy. The US is India's largest export market. In FY 2024, India recorded a goods trade surplus of approximately \$45 billion with the US. While the pause spares India from immediate disruption, the underlying risk remains. Should the higher duty be reinstated, it would threaten to erode price competitiveness, potentially reducing export volumes, company revenues and jobs in export-driven sectors. Indian firms will be forced to either absorb the cost—cutting margins to keep US



prices stable—or pass it on to American buyers, which may suppress demand.

Notably, the Trump administration carved out certain essential sectors for exemption or lighter treatment. For example, pharmaceuticals were excluded from reciprocal tariffs globally—a recognition, even if temporary, of their critical role in US health care. The US remains the top destination for Indian pharmaceutical companies, with exports valued at \$8.73 billion in FY 2024–25—a 15.66 per cent increase over the previous year. India supplies nearly 40 per cent of generics sold in the US, often priced 50–90 per cent lower than branded alternatives. Imposing steep tariffs here could have driven up US health care costs and disrupted drug supply chains. As a result, life-saving Indian generics will continue flowing without added duties for the moment—preserving a vital area of trade cooperation amid broader tensions.

The ongoing US-India negotiations aim for the first tranche of a bilat-



## FRIENDLY DUTY

Modi and Trump at the White House in February

eral trade agreement by fall 2025, a commitment made during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's February visit to Washington. This initial phase is expected to resolve smaller issues and lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive agreement. The tariffs scenario is also pressuring India to make concessions that may otherwise have been off the table. The administration has made it clear that if India responds with far-reaching, market-opening measures that equate with US average tariffs, it is willing to roll back the tariffs.

Washington's key asks include much lower Indian tariffs, fixes for non-tariff barriers such as quality control orders and movement on rules-based chapters—intellectual property, technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary (relating to health of plants) standards, trade facilitation, good regulatory practices and digital trade. While failure to compromise risks a return to higher duties, the opportunities are immense as well, potentially leading to a much higher level of economic

integration between the world's largest economy and the soon-to-be third largest economy.

Trump and Modi have set an ambitious goal of reaching \$500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030—an objective that requires removing barriers, not adding new ones. In this context, the tariffs appear designed to be as much bargaining chips as permanent policy.

How does India's treatment under Trump's tariff push compare with other US trading partners? It was not singled out. The White House's chart placed India roughly in the middle of the pack. With the pause in place, India has temporarily avoided the full brunt—but the message is clear. The US sees India as a significant trading partner whose high tariffs and non-tariff barriers cannot go unaddressed, but one whose strategic relevance demands negotiation. India's position as first in line for negotiations reflects Washington's acknowledgment of India's importance. Trump himself noted Modi as a "great friend" in the same breath as

he called out India's trade practices. The underlying sentiment is that India is a friend—but one that needs to change its longstanding protectionist instincts.

Trump's tariff strategy is a bold gambit—highly risky, but potentially effective. In India's case, it is a strategic provocation to bring India to the table and push for a modernised, rules-based trade framework that addresses long-standing asymmetries. Even as such, there appears to be a US understanding that this negotiation should offer win-wins and not be zero-sum.

So far, the approach seems to be working. India's response has been measured and negotiations are moving forward. That suggests both sides prefer diplomacy over escalation. One can support the goal of a more balanced, equitable US-India trade relationship while recognising the tactical costs involved. If a deal is reached, tariffs can be rolled back and bilateral trade can move to a stronger footing.

Of course, the outcome is not predetermined. In the coming months, India must decide how much reform and liberalisation it is willing to undertake in exchange for tariff relief. And the clock is ticking.

The world is watching—not just to see how two major economies manage their trade friction, but to gauge whether diplomacy can still prevail. At its core, this moment is a test: Can strategic partners navigate long-standing imbalances through negotiation, or are we entering a new age of transactional brinkmanship, where pressure replaces partnership as the currency of global trade?

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**Linscott** is a former assistant US trade representative and senior adviser, trade, at the US India Strategic Partnership Forum; **Shah** is manager, trade policy and emerging and critical technologies, USISPF.

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## WORLD LIVER DAY

# Addressing Liver Ailments and Nurturing Liver Health

**W**orld Liver Day serves as a global reminder to prioritise the health of one of our body's most vital organs—the liver. In 2025, the theme "Food is Medicine" underscores the critical role nutrition plays in preventing and managing liver ailments. In India, where liver diseases are a growing public health concern, this day holds special significance. With lifestyle changes, an increasing burden of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), and persistent challenges like viral hepatitis, India is grappling with a silent epidemic. However, through awareness, medical advancements, and proactive care, there's hope for

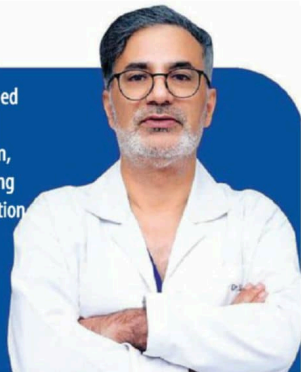
a healthier future. Let's explore how India is addressing liver ailments and practical ways to take care of this resilient organ.

The liver, often called the body's powerhouse, performs more than 500 functions, including detoxification, nutrient processing, and bile production for digestion. Yet, its resilience is being tested in India, where liver diseases rank as the tenth leading cause of death, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Approximately 1 million new cases of chronic liver disease are diagnosed annually, and liver cancer is the third most common cause of cancer-related deaths in the country.

One of the most alarming trends is the rise of NAFLD, recently renamed Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD). Studies suggest that 9 per cent to 32 per cent of Indians are affected by this condition, driven by obesity, diabetes, and sedentary lifestyles. Apollo Hospitals' 2025 health survey highlight that up to 65% of Indians may have fatty liver, often without noticeable symptoms until the disease progresses to advanced stages like cirrhosis or liver cancer. Viral hepatitis, particularly Hepatitis B and C, also remains a significant challenge, with India bearing the second-highest burden of Hepatitis B



# Prevention of Liver Disease is Key to Longevity



World Liver Day is observed on 19th April every year. This year the celebration is themed "Food is Medicine". Dr Sanjay Goja, Director & Clinical Lead - Liver Transplantation, Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) & Robotic Liver Surgery, Narayana Hospital, Gurugram, Haryana, from his 28 years of vast experience in the specialty, talks about the increasing burden of Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Diseases (NAFLD) in the population and its prevention for ensuring a healthy liver.

## Dr Sanjay Goja

Director & Clinical Lead - Liver Transplantation,  
Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) & Robotic Liver Surgery,  
Narayana Hospital, Gurugram

### What are the reasons for increasing incidence of liver problems, and are they reversible?

One of the biggest reasons for liver problems reaching pandemic proportions across the world has been identified as Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Diseases (NAFLD), the name has been re coined as MASLD, metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease. Skewed diet, binging on junk food high on sugar, poor lifestyle of people, who lead a sedentary life, sans exercise, which are detrimental for liver health.

There are different stages to MASLD. If corrective measures are taken in the early stages, the condition can be reversed or else the organ will get burdened with excess fat deposit eventually damaging the liver. Be warned that a diseased liver that fails to perform its functions is more susceptible to developing cancer. Early detection of MASLD is only possible if you go for regular check-up. Obesity, especially in the trunk region is an indirect marker for likely harbouring MASLD.

### What are the symptoms of liver disease and its prevention?

The advantage of the liver is that nature has endowed it with extra tissues, as a result the liver shows no symptoms of damage in the early stages as it functions on its excess reserves. But signs of potential liver disease are fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite, muscle loss, excessive weight loss, inflammation of the body, vomiting blood, cognitive issues etc., in which case consult a doctor immediately.

Liver disease can be prevented by keeping a check on calorie in-take and obesity, doing regular exercise and adding a lot of fresh seasonal greens on to your plate. There is no replacement for home cooked food which is ideal, so avoid eating out.

### When does procedures become unavoidable?

Liver is treated in two ways - medically and surgically.

When the liver disease is in its advanced stage at times the blood vessels are at high pressure on the abdomen, known as portal hypertension. At times the veins may burst, in which case, the patient vomits blood. This condition is called Upper Gastrointestinal Bleeding (UGIB) or it even causes Esophageal Variceal Bleed.

When liver decompensated disease occurs, an individual can develop jaundice, ascites, altered sensorium, kidney dysfunction damage to organ is severe enough needing liver transplant as only cure.

### Why is liver transplant a typical procedure?

There are two types of liver procedures - Living donor, where first and second degree relative donates a part of their liver to the patient. The other is when the organ is retrieved from a brain dead diseased person, mostly accident victims, which is donated by the family for transplant in a needy patient. In fact, Europe has the highest diseased donor transplant statistics in the world because of an effective system in place with the support of state intervention. On the contrary, disease donor is a voluntary act in India, rendering it very ineffective. Lack of public awareness and social taboos also add to dearth of diseased organs, a situation which is more acute in north India as compared to South India where there is an efficient system in place with the support of the respective state governments. The entire process is very challenging for each of us i.e., the surgeon, donor and recipient because the laws and procedures for acquiring a living donor are stringent, long-winding and tedious. On our part, we have to take utmost precaution to ensure that the transplantation is carried out ethically and meets all protocol standards to make the procedure happen and be successful.

### Which are the latest techniques practised in liver transplantation?

Immuno suppressants have revolutionised liver transplant. Fortunately, we are seeing tremendous

development and progress in the quality and efficacy of the new immune suppressants besides other medications with negligible side effects. Also, critical care has become highly advanced benefitting the patients with early recovery and negligible post-operative complications.

Surgical advancements, especially, are a boon for the donor where laparoscopic and robotic surgeries entail minimal incision. "But one size fits all" does not work here. Infact, there are different set of criteria to be met for minimally invasive surgeries. I must say a lot of innovations are coming up which augurs well for all stakeholders.

### Can a patient lead a normal life after liver transplant?

Liver can regenerate itself within 3 weeks to 3 months! After six months to one year of transplantation the liver is good for a lifetime, enabling the patient to lead a normal life. The patients, however, must take their medication regularly for life as prescribed by the doctor and stay safe from infections.

### How are you promoting liver care on World Liver Day, besides your awareness efforts round the year?

Living hygienically, eating balanced, healthy, contamination-free food and water, keeping your sugar and calorie in-take within limits, leading an active and positive healthy lifestyle are fundamental for liver health. Strictly avoid taking medications across the counter without consulting a doctor, a tendency fatal for the liver because we are seeing an alarming surge of such patients. Get vaccinated for viruses, hepatitis, and periodically check your blood pressure and sugar to keep the liver safe. At Narayana Hospital, awareness campaigns for liver care is on-going, yet there is room for improvement through a more coordinated and concerted drive in this direction.

globally. Alcohol-related liver disease further compounds the issue, fuelled by excessive consumption and binge drinking.

Despite these challenges, India's healthcare system is responding. The National Viral Hepatitis Control Programme, launched in 2018, aims to eliminate viral hepatitis by 2030 through free screening, vaccination, and treatment. Liver transplants, though limited by organ donation rates (only about 1,800 annually against a need for 25,000), are becoming more accessible in specialised centres. Public awareness campaigns on World Liver Day and beyond are also encouraging early detection and lifestyle changes to curb this growing crisis.

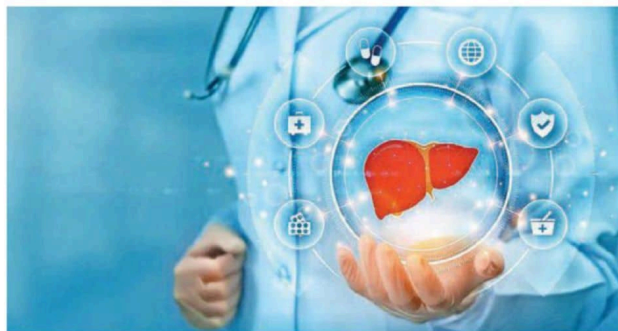
India's approach to liver ailments combines policy, medical innovation, and community efforts:

**Prevention and Screening:** The government promotes Hepatitis B vaccination and has expanded diagnostic facilities to detect liver diseases early. Regular health check-ups are increasingly emphasised, especially for high-risk groups like those with diabetes or a family history of liver disease.

**Medical Advancements:** Treatments for liver conditions have evolved significantly. Antiviral therapies for Hepatitis B and C are more effective, while innovations like targeted therapies and immunotherapy offer hope for liver cancer patients. Liver transplantation, though limited, is a lifeline for end-stage liver failure cases.

**Awareness Campaigns:** World Liver Day plays a pivotal role in educating the public. Hospitals, NGOs, and hepatology experts organise workshops, free screening camps, and social media drives to highlight symptoms like fatigue, jaundice, and abdominal pain, urging timely medical consultation.

**Lifestyle Interventions:** With NAFLD linked to metabolic syndrome, doctors



advocate for weight management and balanced diets. The Mediterranean diet—rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats like olive oil—is gaining traction as a science-backed option to manage liver fat.

However, challenges remain. Access to affordable healthcare, stigma around organ donation, and the high cost of advanced treatments limit progress. Socioeconomic barriers also make healthy eating and regular exercise difficult for many, amplifying the liver disease burden.

The liver's remarkable ability to regenerate offers a window of opportunity—if we act early. Here's how you can nurture your liver health, aligning with the 2025 theme, "Food is Medicine":

### Embrace a Liver-Friendly Diet:

**Focus on whole foods:** Include fruits (berries, apples), vegetables (broccoli, spinach), whole grains (quinoa, millets), and lean proteins (fish, legumes).

**Reduce sugar and saturated fats:** Cut back on processed foods, sugary drinks, and fried items that strain the liver.

**Boost antioxidants:** Green tea, walnuts, and turmeric can help reduce liver inflammation.

**Limit Alcohol:** Excessive alcohol is a leading cause of liver damage. Stick to moderate limits or opt for

abstinence to let your liver heal.

**Stay Active:** Regular exercise—30 minutes most days of the week—helps burn liver fat and improves metabolism. Walking, cycling, or yoga are great starting points.

**Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Obesity is a key driver of NAFLD. Even a 5-10 per cent reduction in body weight can significantly lower liver fat.

**Get Vaccinated and Tested:** Vaccines for Hepatitis A and B are widely available. Routine liver function tests can catch issues before they escalate.

**Avoid Toxins:** Limit over-the-counter painkillers (like paracetamol) unless prescribed, and avoid sharing personal items like razors to prevent hepatitis transmission.

**Hydrate:** Drinking 8-10 glasses of water daily supports the liver's detoxification process.

World Liver Day 2025 is a clarion call for India to confront its liver health crisis head-on. While the nation battles rising NAFLD, viral hepatitis, and alcohol-related damage, individual and collective action can turn the tide. By embracing the "Food is Medicine" philosophy, we can harness nutrition as a powerful tool to prevent and reverse liver damage. Small, consistent changes—swapping junk food for whole grains, cutting alcohol, or adding a daily walk—can make a big difference.

# KNOW YOUR LIVER, KEEP IT SAFE

Dr Sukrit Singh Sethi, Senior Consultant, Gastroenterology, Narayana Hospital, Gurugram, Haryana, is an expert in treating all complex GI and Liver conditions. On World Liver Day, Dr Sethi, gives a bird's eye view of his specialty and the importance of liver care to stay disease free and healthy.



## Dr Sukrit Singh Sethi

Senior Consultant Gastroenterology,  
Narayana Hospital, Gurugram

### Why is the liver known as the 'Power House' of the body?

Liver is considered the 'Power House' because it does many essential functions like help process nutrients from food, store and releases glucose, synthesis protein, cholesterol and bile, which is essential in digestion. The liver also detoxifies the body from drugs, alcohol and toxins, besides breaking down old red blood cells.

### Which are the common liver diseases and how lethal is hepatitis to the organ?

Common liver diseases includes viral hepatitis which could be Hepatitis A and Hepatitis E, which are usually self-limiting and Hepatitis B, C and D, which are usually chronic infections of the liver. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease is commonly seen in obese, diabetic as well as hypothyroid patients. Liver diseases also include liver cancer, known as Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC), genetic disorder like hemochromatosis, Wilson's disease and also auto immune liver diseases or auto immune hepatitis. Any inflammation in the liver is known as hepatitis and when the condition becomes chronic it may lead to liver cirrhosis.

### What leads to alcoholic and non-alcoholic liver diseases and the difference between the two?

Liver disease has three stages mainly fatty liver, hepatitis followed by cirrhosis or liver cancer. When a person consumes more than 40-60 gms (for men) and more than 20 gms daily (for women) alcohol daily, they are more susceptible to alcoholic liver disease.

40 gms equates to more than two drinks in a day and 20 gms measure is one drink. Liver diseases due to metabolic factors like diabetes, obesity is known as NAFLD, which follows the same sequence of stages. The possibility of liver cancer is also much higher in NAFLD than alcohol related liver disease.

### What makes Narayana Hospital a hub for liver transplantation?

Narayana Hospital in Gurugram is renowned as a transplant centre where we do liver transplant regularly. End stage liver disease warrants transplant. We also do other therapies like plasma exchange on patients to reduce toxins in the liver. Endoscopic ultrasound guided biopsies and other weight loss endoscopic procedures are also done regularly such as intra gastric balloon placement along with endoscopic sleep gastropasty, to reduce the volume of the stomach and weight. Besides, we offer comprehensive treatment for diabetes, thyroid and other liver related issues.

### Why is liver disease increasingly common in the youth?

Incidence of liver disease is increasing in younger adults and even adolescents often due to rising consumption of alcohol from an early age, besides obesity and sedentary lifestyles. NAFLD is one of the most common chronic liver disease prevalent in the youth and it is because of the junk food diets that develops insulin resistance in childhood and leads to obesity. In some regions, viral hepatitis is endemic because of mother to child transmission and lack of vaccination.

### How do you recognise symptoms of liver disease?

Early symptoms of liver disease include fatigue, upper abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, weight loss, dark urine, yellow discolouration of the eyes, swelling in the abdomen or feet, itching in the skin and sometimes the patients can also present with Gastrointestinal bleed where they vomit blood or there is blood in stools. One should ensure regular investigation with LFTs and ultrasound abdomen and those excessively obese should undergo weight management therapy including an endocrinological evaluation, and follow a strict exercise regimen. Those with family history of liver disease should be screened more often.

### What is your message for prevention and curbing of liver diseases?

Prevention of liver disease can be done by carrying out regular screening with Liver Function Tests (LFT), ultrasound of the abdomen and fibro scan, and obese patient should be counselled for weight loss. Those who consume moderate or increased alcohol should also undergo regular testing. De-addiction counselling and support groups may help.

The silver lining is that, fatty liver is reversible with intervention in the form of exercise, diet or calorie restriction and certain supplements and one sees marked reduction in liver fat content. If you are overweight or morbidly obese, one should undergo endoscopic or bariatric procedures for weight loss, which helps prevent liver disease in the long run.



# Cementing his spot

Six months into his term, Chief Minister Nayab Saini is busy building on the BJP's historic win in the assembly elections

BY PRATUL SHARMA

**LAST OCTOBER**, the BJP surprised everyone by beating anti-incumbency and winning a historic third term in Haryana. It was not only a lesson in political management, but also an endorsement for the party to push forward its governance model.

With Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini completing six months in office, on April 17, his stamp on governance is visible. This month, Saini announced a significant step. Haryana became the first state to announce 20 per cent reservation in the state police for Agniveers after their stint in the Army. The first batch of Agniveers will complete its tenure in 2026, and the recruits will have to look for jobs again. This has the potential to snowball into a social and political issue country-wide.

As Haryana sends a significant number of youth to the Army, it will have to provide incentives to the Agniveers. "There is also a provision of 10 per cent reservation for Agniveers in the jobs of forest guard, jail warden and mining guard in the forest department," Saini said.

The state is also offering attractive packages to the industries that could provide employment to Agniveers. The Haryana government plans to create a separate portal for their recruitment. More than 5,000

Haryana youth have been recruited as Agniveers since the inception of the scheme in 2022. If the model is successful, other state governments might feel pressure to replicate it.

Saini, who was then state party president, replaced chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar in March 2024, ahead of the assembly elections. Many were sceptical of the decision, but the BJP's stunning performance came as an endorsement for Saini. Ever since, he has strengthened his position. Keen to build an image of an accessible chief minister, Saini has met more than 1.5 lakh visitors at his office residence in Chandigarh in the past three months.

What has helped the BJP and Saini is the disarray in the opposition camp, where the Congress has yet not picked its leader of opposition. Also, the potential of the farmers' agitation in neighbouring Punjab spilling over has subsided as the Bhagwant Mann government cracked down on the farmers' groups last month.

Haryana is known for its *jawans*, *kisans* and *pehelwans* (soldiers, farmers and wrestlers), each of whom forms formidable pressure groups that can influence the government. The Congress had built its campaign on this slogan along with highlight-



RAHUL R. PATTON

ing the expected plight of Agniveers.

Since then, Saini has made sure the key communities were addressed. According to the government, Haryana is the first state to buy 24 crops on minimum support price. For wrestlers, the government decided to give Vinesh Phogat, now a Congress MLA, the same incentives as an Olympic silver medalist (she was disqualified from the Olympics final for being overweight by 100g). She had a choice to pick one from ₹4 crore, government job or a plot; she chose the cash.

However, by the government's own admission, only 19 of the 217 promises made in the party manifesto have



## RINGING IN A NEW ERA

Saini is building an image of an accessible chief minister

The cash schemes, often derided as freebies, are attractive during the election season, but cause a drain to the state budget. How Haryana manages its finances in this regard could set an example for smaller states.

Another first from the state government was the announcement that it would implement the Supreme Court's order on the sub-classification of scheduled castes. This means that, of the 20 per cent quota for scheduled castes in Haryana, 50 per cent would be reserved for deprived scheduled castes and the other half for other scheduled castes. The BJP claims this will uplift the weakest among the marginalised communities.

Also, to explore Haryana's needs and potential, the state budget proposed a "department of future". The fancy name apart, the new department will act as a think tank to propose changes and policies to help the state stay in touch with disruptive technological and social changes that challenge traditional policy making. The government has announced the setting up of AI hubs in Gurugram and Panchkula. These will train over 50,000 professionals from Haryana in new technologies.

"Saini is focusing on increasing the happiness index of the state," said Prof Vidhu Rawal, state BJP spokesperson. "Haryana could have been a model state had not the Congress governments looted it for long. Haryana has been scoring over several other states since the BJP was voted to power. [About] 80 per cent of our villages have 24-hour power supply. Our state has the best per capita income among the northern states. Our contribution to the GDP has also increased to 4.3 per cent. The government is defining how a welfare state is run." ●

been fulfilled. Saini hopes 90 more will be completed this year.

The key promise of giving ₹2,100 a month to eligible women under the Lado Lakshmi Yojana, a poll promise that proved to be a massive hit, is being rolled out, said officials. Saini, who also holds the finance portfolio, announced in his maiden budget that the government had earmarked ₹5,000 crore for the scheme. This is estimated to be 4 per cent of Haryana's revenue receipts. The scheme draws from the highly successful scheme of the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh, which helped the party beat anti-incumbency.

**UNDER SAINI,  
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BECAME THE  
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TO ANNOUNCE  
20 PER CENT  
RESERVATION in  
the state police  
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after their stint in  
the Army.**

**Bone** marrow is the soft, spongy tissue inside bones. Haematopoietic stem cells are immature cells in the bone marrow that give rise to all types of blood and immune system cells. Bone marrow transplants are sometimes called hematopoietic stem cell transplants.

At just 4 months, Diksharth was diagnosed with Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome (WAS), a rare genetic disorder that primarily affects boys. This X-linked condition disrupts immune function and blood clotting, leaving those affected vulnerable to recurrent infections and life-threatening bleeding episodes. The disorder is caused by mutations in the WAS gene, which leads to the absence of WASp, a protein essential for immune cell signalling and platelet formation. Without functional WASp, immune cells struggle to respond to infections, and platelets fail to form properly, causing bleeding complications. While rare, WAS is one of the more severe immunodeficiencies, and without treatment, it can lead to devastating consequences.

Diksharth's story, however, is one of hope. His journey began with a diagnosis at just four months old, when the first signs of WAS began to manifest. Frequent infections and prolonged bleeding prompted his medical team to look for a solution. By the time he was referred to Zydus Hospital, his condition had worsened, and the risk of further complications loomed large. He was counselled for a stem cell transplant

# A 2-YEAR-OLD'S JOURNEY WITH WISKOTT-ALDRICH SYNDROME

*Doctors gift a new life to a young child through stem cell transplant at Zydus Cancer Hospital, Ahmedabad*

by Dr. Nidhi Jain as it was the only curative therapy available for him. He was referred to Dr Akanksha Garg.

The road to potential cure for Diksharth was fraught with obstacles. His weight was dangerously low, below 10 kg, and his ongoing struggle with a Cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection made the prospect of a transplant even more complex. His father was not a suitable bone marrow donor, so the team turned to the global stem cell donor registry. After an exhaustive search, a match was found, but it was only

an 8/10 match—a factor that brought its own set of challenges. An unmatched donor increases the risks of graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), where the donor's immune cells attack the patient's tissues. To combat this, the medical team employed an advanced strategy involving post-transplant cyclophosphamide, administered on days +3 and +4 post-transplant. This approach significantly reduced the risk of GVHD but came with a trade-off:

it prolonged the period of neutropenia (lower-than-normal levels of neutrophils in the blood), leaving Diksharth without sufficient white blood cells for an extended time, which rendered him highly susceptible to infections.

Compounding the complexity of the situation, Diksharth developed a resistant *Klebsiella* infection (CRE) during the transplant process. Known for its resistance to multiple antibiotics, this infection threatened to derail the entire procedure. The medical team, led by Dr. Akanksha Garg, Bone Marrow Transplant Physician, took swift and aggressive action to manage the infection, carefully selecting the right antibiotics and maintaining a strict infection-control regimen to prevent further complications. His hospital stay was long but gradually his blood counts starting recovering, and it was clear that the collective expertise of his medical team was making a difference.

This transplant marked the first time that a pediatric patient under the age of 2 had undergone an HSCT



at Zydus. For the team at Zydus, this presented a unique challenge in managing everything from fluids and nutrition to immune modulation, specifically tailored to the needs of such a young child. Despite the high risks involved, Diksharth's transplant was successful. His immune system began to function more effectively, and platelet production returned to normal levels, improving his overall health and quality of life. The child is doing fine now and comes regularly to hospital for follow ups.

This exemplary success was the result of the unmatched coordination between the multidisciplinary team of Dr. Akanksha Garg, the primary consultant and bone marrow transplant physician, supported by Dr. Ankit Mehta and Dr. Harshil, pediatric critical care specialists. Each played a crucial role in managing the intricacies of Diksharth's case during the transplant. Additionally, Dr. Girish Amlani addressed the perianal lesions, a complication often seen in post-transplant patients. The team also benefited from the guidance of Prof. Dr. Michael Albert, an international expert from Dr. Von Hauner Children's Hospital in Germany, who offered invaluable insights during the critical moments of Diksharth's treatment.

With a team that includes some of the brightest minds in pediatric care, infection management, and transplant medicine, Zydus continues to push boundaries in treatment innovation, offering hope and life-changing care to children like Diksharth.

His parents expressed gratitude towards Dr. Akanksha, the Zydus BMT team and Dr. Ankit for giving their child the gift of a healthier, brighter future—one with endless possibilities.

“This breakthrough reflects the strides we are making in the field of stem cell transplantation. The success was made possible by a dedicated team and the family's trust. It was a privilege to bring hope to the child and his family. Moments like these inspire us to keep pushing boundaries in the fight against rare diseases.”



**Dr. Akanksha Garg**

Hemato Oncologist & Bone Marrow Transplant Specialist,  
Zydus Cancer Hospital

“Inborn errors of immunity require high index of suspicion to reach a conclusive diagnosis. With science making advancements by leaps and bounds, we were able to give this child a proper cure.”



**Dr. Ankit Mehta**

Pediatric Intensivist, Zydus Hospitals

# Who'll blink first?

With the apex court verdict in his favour, Stalin has upped the ante against the governor and Centre. But neither Ravi nor BJP is looking to back down

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

**ON APRIL 8**, minutes after the Supreme Court deemed Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi's refusal to clear 10 state bills for over three years as arbitrary and illegal, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin was over the moon on his government's "victory" against Ravi's (in) action. He asked his party colleagues in the state assembly to "thump the desks" in gratitude to the apex court. "The Supreme Court judgment is not just a victory for Tamil Nadu, but for all state governments in India," he said. "This is a historic verdict."

While the opposition AIADMK and the BJP staged a walkout, Stalin asked DMK allies to join in the celebration. In the next few hours, he greeted DMK's counsel and Rajya Sabha MP P. Wilson and his team at the party office. And within a couple of days, all 10 bills passed by the assembly were notified in the gazette. "The verdict enhances the administrative autonomy of the states and regulates the functioning of constitutional offices," Wilson told THE WEEK. The judgment, he added, gave strength to state governments at a time when the Union was snatching away all their powers.

The Supreme Court's judgment is expected to have a far-reaching impact on Centre-state relations,

which has led all opposition-ruled states to rally behind Stalin and fight for state autonomy and India's federal principles. The verdict, which also set timelines for the president and governors to clear bills, is seen not only as a legal milestone but also as a reinforcement of constitutional morality and cooperative federalism. The apex court had observed that a governor is expected to act as a "friend, philosopher, and guide" to the state cabinet, not as an agent of the Union government. The ruling, said Wilson, would change the way governors carry out their constitutional responsibilities. "The governor or the president cannot sit on the bills passed by the assembly for a long time," he said.

The verdict has come as a blessing in disguise for the state government, which has been finding it difficult to administer the state-run universities. The governor's authority to appoint and remove vice chancellors of the 13 state-run universities has now been stripped off and transferred to the state government. On April 16, Stalin made history by chairing the meeting of the vice chancellors and registrars of state-funded universities. "The role of governor as chancellor of universities has become politicised, and undermined the uni-



**GRIM TEAM**

Governor R.N. Ravi with Chief Minister M.K. Stalin during a walkthrough of the new terminal building at Tiruchirappalli International Airport in 2024

versity autonomy. The court verdict is a huge relief as the administration of higher education institutions will not be at stake," said educationist Prince Gajendrababu.

Bolstered by the verdict, Stalin is now going against the BJP-led Union government with guns blazing. A week after the verdict, he picked up the state autonomy weapon. Making an announcement under rule 110, he constituted a high-level panel to study the Centre-state relations and recommend measures to strengthen India's federal structure. The panel, chaired by former Supreme Court judge Justice Kurian Joseph, will submit its interim report in January 2026 and the final report in two years.

The verdict is also a political victory for Stalin. Stalin and Ravi have been at loggerheads ever since the beginning of his term in 2021. Ravi would chair meetings of vice chancellors and registrars without consulting the state government, which funds the universities. The meetings came under sharp criticism by educationists and the state government as Ravi used it as a platform to ask vice chancellors and registrars to implement the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is being opposed by the state.

"Our chief minister will not stop here. His fight for autonomy of the states and federal rights will continue," Rajiv Gandhi, DMK's student wing secretary and spokesperson, told THE WEEK. "Be it the language policy issue, NEP 2020, our resistance to NEET exams or our demand for fair delimitation, our fight will continue. Our chief minister will show the way for other opposition-ruled states."

The anti-NEET bill, which was brought in the state assembly in 2021 and readopted in 2023, has been sent to the president by the governor. "Our leader had already convened and met with the legislative party leaders of all parties to proceed

legally in our fight against NEET," said Gandhi. The panel constituted by Stalin to recommend state rights, he added, would show the way to bring education from the concurrent list to the state list. "After Stalin took over, politics in India has become state versus Union, more specifically it is Stalin versus Modi," said Gandhi. "The BJP calls it separatism. But it is a call for federal rights."

However, Ravi is not likely to back down. Two days after the verdict, he continued to point out the errors of the state government. Addressing an event at a private college in Madurai, he asked students to chant 'Jai Shri Ram' as a way to honour poet Kambar, who had penned the Ramayan in Tamil. Kambar is revered as an icon of Tamil literature, and not just as a poet who wrote the Tamil version of the epic. On April 14, while presiding over the celebrations of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, he commented on the educational skills of dalit students in government schools. He even criticised the government's scheme to provide a cash dole of ₹1,000 to college students. "This money will not help to improve the skills of the students," he said.

Sources in the Raj Bhavan said that both Ravi and the Union government would continue with their no-holds-barred attack on Stalin and the DMK. With regard to the universities, sources said that the governor would not give up his role as chancellor even when the bills have stripped off his powers. "Many of the vice chancellors have been appointed by him directly and they will only follow his instructions," a source close to the Raj Bhavan told THE WEEK. "This will only cripple the functioning of the universities. The governor was intervening in the affairs only to ensure better administration and quality higher education. He will not give up."

A battle, perhaps, has been won, but the Centre-state war is far from over. ●



# Justice disabled?

Delhi student  
**Kabir Paharia's**  
court fight reveals  
the cracks in medical  
admission norms  
for persons with  
disabilities

BY KANU SARDA

**KABIR PAHARIA**, 18, led an ordinary life until he sat for the NEET exam last year. During the test, an invigilator approached him for his documents. Although Kabir had them with him, he grew anxious when the invigilator walked away and began discussing his case with other teachers. Despite the distraction, Kabir remained focused and continued with the exam.

Ten minutes later, the invigilator returned and informed Kabir that he would receive 30 extra minutes. Though puzzled, Kabir relaxed and maintained his pace. Three hours later, as students streamed out into the sweltering Delhi heat to reunite with their families, Kabir's parents, Bhawna and Manish, grew increasingly worried. The exam centre had emptied out, but there was no sign of their son.

Bhawna, a mathematics teacher, was in tears, searching the premises with Manish, a businessman. Eventually, a security guard told them that one student was still inside. Thirty minutes later, Kabir emerged and hugged his mother, confused about the extra time but confident about his performance. He had already started calculating his expected score and was optimistic about cracking the exam.

That optimism, however, was short-lived.

When the results were announced—amid widespread controversy over paper leaks—Kabir had secured a PwD (persons with disabilities) category rank of 176. Confident of the rank fetching him a seat in a government medical college, Kabir went for a medical assessment at Vardhman Medical College. There he got a shock: the assessment declared a 68 per cent locomotor disability—well within the permissible 40–80 per cent range—but he was deemed ineligible for admission under National Medical Commission (NMC) guidelines. Kabir was born with five short fingers on both hands and deformities in two

toes of his left foot. Though he had never considered himself limited by these conditions, the medical board determined that his disability would hinder him from becoming a doctor.

Manish, devastated that his son's dream could end, decided to approach the courts. He connected with advocate Rahul Bajaj, a disability rights activist who led the nonprofit Mission Accessibility. Together, they filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court, arguing that the rejection violated Kabir's rights under Article 14 (equality before law) and Article 19(1)(g) (right to practise a profession) of the Constitution. They also cited the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, which guarantees reasonable accommodation and nondiscrimination.

Kabir's official disability certificate pegged his disability at 42 per cent, qualifying him for the PwD category. Yet, two more medical boards rejected his eligibility. Speaking to *The WEEK*, Kabir's parents said they never imagined he would face such hurdles. Bhawna said Kabir was raised like any other child and did everything on his own. She recalled how her pregnancy had been smooth and all scans had shown normal results. "Our medical technology couldn't detect this," she said.

Kabir's dream of becoming a doctor stemmed from his early experiences—multiple surgeries and constant interactions with doctors inspired him to pursue medicine. A stellar student, he consistently excelled in academics, scoring 91.5 per cent in Class X and 90 per cent in Class XII—all without a scribe. He had never considered getting a disability certificate until his coaching teacher suggested it for NEET application.

Kabir is frustrated by the slow pace of legal proceedings. "I have already lost one academic year, and I am still at the assessment stage," he said.

Now, the Supreme Court has ordered a fresh medical evaluation

at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. The medical board at AIIMS will have five doctors, including specialists in locomotor disabilities and neurology. "Denying relief to the petitioner... would be totally unjustified," said the court. "Merely because the NMC is revising its guidelines, the petitioner's fate cannot hang in limbo when he has performed exceedingly well."

Kabir has also questioned the current assessment methods. "No one asked me to perform daily tasks or practical exercises that a medical student might face. If they had, the outcome could have been different," he said.

The NMC's existing guidelines require both hands to be intact with sufficient strength, sensation, and range of motion to qualify for medical studies. But the Supreme Court has previously intervened in similar cases: in 2018, it directed Gujarat to admit Muskan Shaikh, who had a 75 per cent disability after losing her right hand in an accident.

In April 2022, the Delhi High Court asked the NMC to update its guidelines to reflect technological advances. A draft was submitted in December 2022, but it has not been implemented.

According to Dr Satendra Singh, disability rights activist and faculty member at GTB Hospital, the current NMC guidelines were outdated and opaque. He said many doctors with disabilities—including amputations—perform surgeries successfully. "How many more candidates must suffer before new norms are enforced?" he asked.

Though disappointed, Kabir has not given up. "I have started preparing for alternate career options now. I cannot waste another year," he said. He is hoping for good news from the Supreme Court. If the court allows him to pursue his dream, he has decided to specialise in pathology or radiology. "Work hard and be persistent," said Kabir. "That is my mantra." 🕯



# REBALANCING ACT

IT IS CRUCIAL TO ASSESS A PORTFOLIO AT LEAST ONCE IN SIX MONTHS

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

In the last financial year, 41 million new demat accounts were opened by domestic brokerages. Total mutual fund folios touched 23.45 crore and retail MF folios, 18.58 crore. Around ₹26,000 crore comes into mutual funds through systematic investment plans (SIPs) alone every month.

The past few months, however, have not been rosy, with markets entering a correction phase. Equity

mutual fund flows declined for three consecutive months, as investors, uncertain how the tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump will pan out and how it will impact economy and capital markets, turned cautious. Investors who had pumped money into the markets started pulling out with equal vigour to minimise their losses.

Amid the upheavals, one thing many people are not focusing on

enough is portfolio rebalancing. Essentially, it means reassessing a portfolio and adjusting it according to the goals and the prevailing risks. For instance, initially you might have decided to put half your money in equity and the other half in debt. But that composition might have changed over time. For instance, many people were aggressively investing in sectoral funds that were launched in the past few years. You





## ONE THING MANY PEOPLE ARE NOT FOCUSING ON ENOUGH IS PORTFOLIO REBALANCING—ADJUSTING A PORTFOLIO ACCORDING TO THE GOALS AND THE PREVAILING RISKS.



broad-based. There will be selective opportunities—certain sectors, certain asset classes—that will drive returns. And identifying and tilting toward those pockets requires thoughtful rebalancing,” he said.

It is crucial to assess a portfolio at least once in six months. “This way, when markets are high, you are able to sell some and replenish the liquidity and safety buckets. That gives you the confidence to stay put through a bear market or when there is a lot of turbulence in the market,” said Ram Meduri, founder and CEO of Maxiom Wealth, an investment adviser.

Given the volatility in the market, Meduri recommends 10-15 per cent allocation in gold. Long been considered a safe haven asset, the yellow metal glows even more brightly during uncertain times. Porwal also says gold will continue playing a crucial role in managing portfolio risk. He suggested that it might be good for long-term investors to consider increasing equity exposure selectively.

But again, the stress is on having a well-diversified portfolio. The RBI’s monetary policy committee cut repo rate by 25 basis points in February and again in April. With expectation of more interest rate cuts, parking money in medium-duration bonds in the 2-3 year range offers a compelling opportunity to lock in yields, while also keeping the duration risk in check, said Porwal. ●

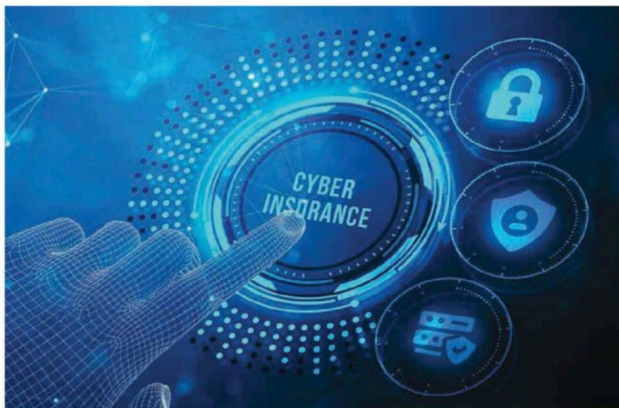
need to comprehensively assess if it still makes sense to stay invested in those.

Also, you may have locked in funds in bank fixed deposits a few years ago when interest rates were high. Now that the RBI has started reducing rates, FD rates will also fall, and reassessing the investment makes sense.

Vaibhav Porwal, cofounder of the wealth management platform Dezerv, says portfolio rebalancing

is a critical aspect of investing and it becomes a particularly necessary strategy in times like what we are in now. “Rebalancing allows investors to take advantage of current market conditions, where certain segments are available at discounted valuations. But more importantly, it helps reposition the portfolio to align with future potential, rather than past performance. In a market like this, capital appreciation will not be

SHUTTERSTOCK



SHUTTERSTOCK

# COVERING THE NET

## THE CYBER INSURANCE SPACE IS SEEING RAPID GROWTH AND INTERESTING INNOVATION

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

**C**yber attacks can spell financial disaster for victims. It should be no surprise then that cyber security insurance has emerged as one of the fastest growing segments in the insurance industry.

According to insurance platform PolicyBazaar, nearly 100 per cent of cyber insurance clients are renewing their policies. Cyber insurance is no longer an optional risk-transfer tool, but a core component of enterprise risk management.

“Companies are not only renewing their cyber insurance, they are increasing the sum assured,” said Evaai Saiwal, practice head of liability and speciality risk, Policybazaar for Business.

The banking and financial services sector is unsurprisingly the largest

consumer of cyber insurance, accounting for almost 35-40 per cent of the industry-wide adoption. Technology and software firms, too, have been big buyers of cyber insurance (close to 30 per cent) given that they manage vast amounts of customer and enterprise data. Hospitals, worried about sensitive patient data,

**CYBER INSURANCE IS NO LONGER AN OPTIONAL RISK-TRANSFER TOOL, BUT A CORE COMPONENT OF ENTERPRISE RISK MANAGEMENT.**



have also now started looking at cyber insurance seriously.

“Many companies must have seen some kind of cyber breach happening at their end,” said Saiwal. “Some are well protected by their systems and firewalls. But it is always a matter of time and if a loophole is found, there will be a breach.”

Even for individuals, cyber security has emerged as a major challenge. Despite every possible precaution, systems may still be vulnerable to cyber attacks and cyber insurance can help at least mitigate the financial impact.

“Cyber insurance plans were earlier available to only large entities,” said Mudassar Khalil, head, reinsurance, surety and liability, Digit Insurance. “But, with the rise in cyber risks, insurance companies are offering highly customisable cyber products to MSMEs and small entities as well. Personalised cyber covers are also being designed for individuals to protect them against various types of online financial frauds and other risks they are exposed to.”

Khalil adds that the individual cyber insurance space is seeing interesting innovation. “Today it not only covers individuals against unauthorised financial transactions—both online and offline—but also extends to cases relating to cyberbullying, cyber identity theft and impersonation in the virtual world.”

Examples of the options in cyber insurance products include Bajaj Allianz’s cover for digital theft and identity theft that includes claims for IT services to recover data or fix devices after a cyber attack. It also covers the cost of prosecution against a third party for committing cyber bullying or stalking. HDFC Ergo even covers the cost of restoring or decontaminating smart home devices affected by malware attacks. You can buy insurance plans for students, working professionals and even families. ●



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# The WAY OF THE DRAGON

After escaping the Taliban, the ‘Afghan Bruce Lee’ dreams of making his country proud in Hollywood

BY BECHU S.

**W**hen Abbas Alizada looks in the mirror, he sees *The Dragon*. For over a decade, he has been emulating a titan who knocked the socks off film lovers with his flying sidekicks and lightning-fast punches, but left the world too soon. Needless to say, Abbas—the ‘Afghan Bruce Lee’—is an expert in the nunchuck and spinning heel kicks.

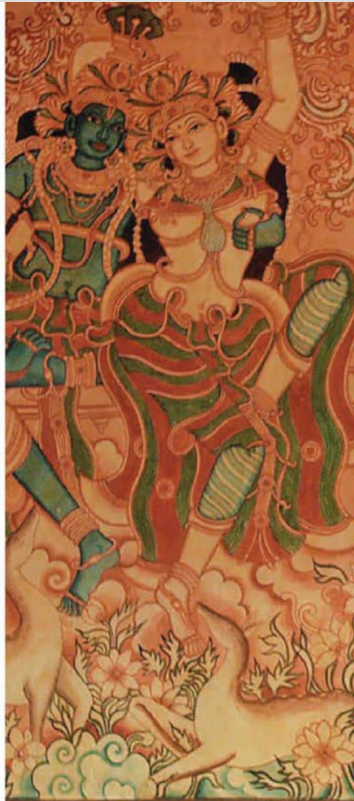
The drama in Abbas's life can match any Bruce Lee movie. Being the doppelganger of a legend with followers around the world inevitably led to him becoming a social media star. Sadly, fame would only make him an easier target. For, when the Taliban came storming back, art and artists once again became enemies of the state. To make things worse, Abbas is a Hazara, an ethnic group that has been systematically targeted in Afghanistan.

Hazaras, who speak an eastern variety of Farsi, are a mostly Shia community with Turkic and Mongolic lineage. Distinguishable by Asiatic features, they have endured massacres, enslavement and forced displacement under different regimes.

Under 19<sup>th</sup> century ruler Abdur Rahman Khan, around 60 per cent of Hazaras were massacred, enslaved or forced into exile. Hazara lands were confiscated and given to Pashtun settlers and nomads from other parts of the country by Khan, forcing them to take shelter in the central mountainous region, now known as Hazarajat (land of Hazaras). They currently inhabit Hazarajat and are also in Kabul and Balkh, among other places.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Kabul, the mujahideen's brief stint in power and the Taliban's subsequent rule led to further atrocities against Hazaras. The Taliban even imposed blockades on Hazarajat, blocking humanitarian relief and crippling the local economy in an effort to enforce a famine.

Therefore, when another Taliban takeover became imminent in 2021, Abbas fled Kabul with his wife Heena and children—the 31-year-old had seen enough in his lifetime to know there could be no negotiations with extremists. Good samaritans helped him to find asylum on British shores after a perilous journey. He has dodged every challenge that life threw at him and continues to



**IN FULL FLOW**  
Abbas Alizada in  
*Bloodline* (2024)

cherish his dream—become a Hollywood icon and make Afghanistan proud. Already a movie star, Abbas also has a regular job and is a student at the University of Manchester—he refused to share details about both.

## Practice makes perfect

Abbas did not have fame handed to him on a platter. For one, facial features alone makes nobody Bruce



Lee-like. Abbas has been hitting punching bags since childhood and once he realised the prospects of the gift he was given, he started to hit them harder. He did his part well, toiling for hours to remain in the best shape. "I train different martial arts, including karate, kung-fu and kick-boxing," he told THE WEEK. "Earlier, I used to train in the mornings and evenings for many hours. But, now, I dedicate two hours every

evening, six days a week, since I don't want to pressure myself."

He swears that he had become a fan of Bruce Lee and picked up martial arts way before the resemblance with the action legend started showing. "I was eight years old when I first watched *Enter the Dragon* (1973)," he said. "I started learning kung-fu at the age of 12. Some years later, my best friend told me at the gym that I look like Bruce Lee." He

likes to believe the heavens decided to reward his love and devotion for the great man.

Those were the years when the Taliban had been forced back to their caves on the fringes of the country. Local bazaars sold foreign movie disks and Abbas's family could afford a television. They even had the resources to let him train at a martial arts academy for a while. But when his father, Mohammad Reza, suffered

a stroke, Abbas had to drop out. Instead, he decided to watch Bruce Lee's movies and train at home. With the basics he picked up from the martial arts academy, he became a self-taught fighter who repeated the movie star's kicks and punches a thousand times to perfection. "I am a disciple of his in a sense," he said.

He was in his early 20s when the internet did its thing and made him a social media star. At Kabul's Darul Aman palace, he recorded his martial arts experience for the world to see. The world started "following" him in the winter of 2014 after his friend's Facebook post highlighting 'Bruce Hazara' went viral. But, Abbas was certain that was not how he wanted to be known. He wanted to be the 'Afghan Bruce Lee'. He wanted to replicate what his idol did for Hong Kong for his *watan* (country) and he did not want to be limited to his ethnicity.

In 2015, an Azerbaijani film crew approached him. They wanted someone to play a role that reminded the audience of Bruce Lee and who could fit the bill better than Abbas. He did not have to think twice before packing his bags. It was not Hollywood, but it was definitely a start. If *Brat Li* was released today, no one would believe it was Abbas and not an AI-generated clone of Bruce Lee. Donning the famous yellow track-suits and wielding the nunchuck, Abbas made the most of the opportunity. He also did five commercials in Baku before heading back.

Such was Abbas' popularity in the 2010s that the BBC reached out for a documentary. A Google search of his name will yield plenty of articles on the young man who took the internet by storm. But, there is not much on how his life changed dramatically following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

## Home turns hostile

There was panic in Kabul with the

news of another Taliban offensive. Government troops scattered and the wait for the inevitable arrived. A sudden pang of dread hit Hazaras as they were suddenly reminded of the Afshar incident. In February 1993, the Hazara-populated Afshar region witnessed the massacre of 1,000 civilians by militia groups who did not even spare women and children. Decapitated bodies were left unburied to send a message to the survivors.

Abbas knew the Taliban would not spare his family. If their Hazara identity was not enough, Heena was also a martial artist with a brown

“  
My kids are going  
to school, we are  
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But I feel helpless  
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country.”

belt in karate. He feared what lay in store for her under the Taliban's chauvinistic doctrine. And then, there was his career. Certainly, there were going to be no film stars or influencers under the Taliban. He was not ready to take any chances.

His fears were later proven right when a video of Nazar Mohammad (Khasha Zwan), one of Afghanistan's beloved comedians, being detained inside a car by armed Taliban fighters went viral. They slapped him across the face, abused and taunted him. Later, his bullet-riddled body was found.

A 2023 report by the *Michigan Journal of International Law* stated that Hazaras have been attacked in a widespread and systematic manner in recent years. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 49 Hazaras were killed between November 2023 and January 2024 alone. Apart from the Taliban, Hazaras also remain under perennial threat from the Islamic State Khorasan Province. Their *modus operandi* includes suicide attacks. Therefore, besides frequent summary executions, thousands of Hazaras have been killed and injured during assaults on hospitals, schools and places of worship. Even modes of public transport, work sites, weddings and cultural events are targeted to massacre them. Meanwhile, the Taliban's notorious ministry of propagation of virtue and prevention of vice has been carrying out targeted arrests of Hazara women and girls under the pretext of wearing improper hijabs.

Abbas and Heena's eldest son, Almas, was one and their second child, Elyas, was two weeks old when they made up their mind. They were ready to build a life from scratch somewhere else rather than being outcasts in their homeland. Elyas had no passport, so they crossed over to Pakistan and then to Iran. Abbas remembers how they slept in rough tents with no beds and he almost went bald because of the stress. His contact person in London, Mehtab Aziz, to whom he is eternally grateful, found them a charity sponsorship to reach British shores. But, uncertainties were galore.

## Dawn follows the darkness

Abbas recited Bruce Lee's famous "Be like water, my friend" quote when asked how he mustered hope in difficult times. "It is a very meaningful quote," he said. "It means you have to be flexible in every stage of life. You put water





**RED CARPET MOMENT**  
Abbas, his wife, Heena,  
and their elder son, Almas,  
attend the *Bloodline*  
London premiere

GETTY IMAGES

in a teapot, it [takes the shape of] a teapot, you pour it into a cup, it takes the shape of a cup. It can flow and also crush if needed. That's how you have to be no matter how much you struggle."

A true Bruce Lee disciple, he became water. And fate smiled at him again as he landed a part-time job. With life settling back down, he logged back on to the virtual space with his punches and kicks. Today, the 'Afghan Bruce Lee' is a celebrity among the UK's South Asian cabbies. He has acted in three Indian movies. His *Bloodline* (2024) was a British-Indian production and was shot in Kerala. It released in India in March this year.

His was a supporting role, but he says he loved the experience. "The crew found me via Instagram," he said. "They are a fantastic group. It was my first film in southern India. It was a good journey, but a difficult one." He added that he was a part of something big, but stopped short of spilling the beans because of its enormity. "When it comes out, you will be surprised," he said with a smile.

He says he has no regrets about the choices he made. But he is at a loss for words while trying to describe how much he misses meeting his dear ones back home. The man who can do two-fingered push-ups with ease struggles at the thought of his mother. "The best days for me were when my friends and family were able to be together and be there for each other. Now we are all far away from each other, only with those memories," he said. His former teacher still runs an academy in Kabul and some of his childhood friends are around. He is hopeful that things will become better and that he will get to visit his home again. "My kids are going to school, we are settled, life is good," he said. "But I feel helpless and sad when I hear about the bad things happening in my country." 🕊

# The No. 9 conundrum

Ballon d'Or winner **Michael Owen** dissects the great game's evolution

BY BECHU S./MUMBAI

A hippophile. An absolute movie hater. A clinical finisher who was part of the 'Galácticos' at Real Madrid. Michael Owen, whose solo goal against Argentina in the 1998 World Cup remains legendary, was an "all about runs, not tricks" striker before constant injuries took away his most potent weapon—pace. At the age of 18, he was the next big thing in English football as he became Liverpool's top scorer and the Premier League's joint top scorer in 1998. In 2001, following a cup treble season at Anfield, he became the first English player after Kevin Keegan to lift the Ballon d'Or. However, he had become a Madrista by the time of the award ceremony!

Owen, 45, sat down for a brief interaction in Mumbai ahead of the recent Legends El Clásico at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai. Football has evolved since he hung up his boots. For instance, inverted wingers (right-footers on the left, and vice versa) have become more popular and they often try to cut inside and shoot instead of focusing on feeding the strikers.

It is players of Owen's ilk who ultimately felt the impact of this change of style. "Nobody crosses the ball so much nowadays," Owen said. "Wider players are scoring more goals now,

they are cutting and coming inside, being on their wrong foot.... I guess I don't know where I would fit in today's game. The profile has changed, and with the way teams play now, there are just fewer natural No. 9s

who can score many goals. When we played there were loads and loads of them."

Owen, England's sixth all-time highest goalscorer who was called "speed merchant with a killer instinct", in his playing days, said modern football has become much more athletic. Tricksters are falling behind great runners and stamina guns, he said. "It is more important to be a good runner than it is to have skills, which was never ever the case [back in his day]; those mavericks, genius types of players are slowly disappearing now," said Owen. "It's about hard, fast, running football supported by stats. It is changing, but it's fascinating [in its own way]."

Coaches, Owen said, have become increasingly hesitant to deploy two strikers up front. Pairings, such

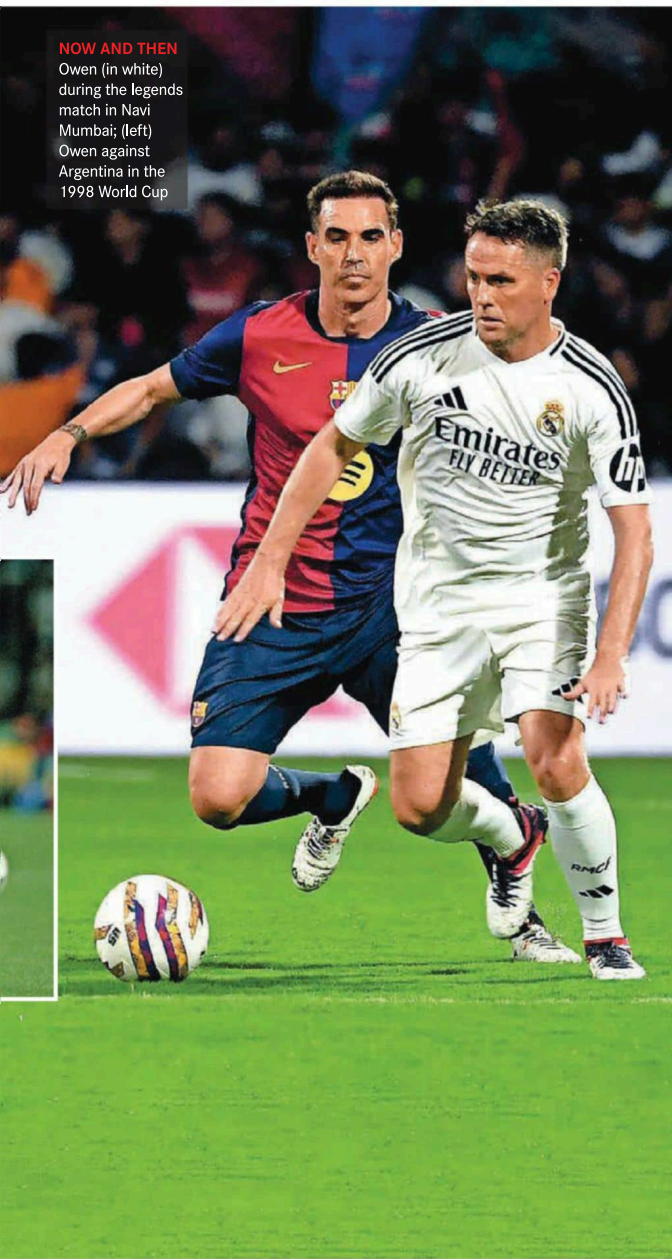


GETTY IMAGES

**I guess I don't know where I would fit in today's game. The profile has changed, and with the way teams play now, there are just fewer natural No. 9s who can score many goals. When we played there were loads and loads of them.**

”

**NOW AND THEN**  
 Owen (in white)  
 during the legends  
 match in Navi  
 Mumbai; (left)  
 Owen against  
 Argentina in the  
 1998 World Cup



AMEY MANSABDAR

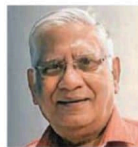
as Owen and Emile Heskey, Alan Shearer and Chris Sutton ("SAS"), Dwight Yorke and Andy Cole or Fernando Morientes and Raúl, are out of the picture as teams today prefer one No. 9 up front. This helps the teams make their midfield or defence watertight with an extra pair of legs.

At Chelsea, coach José Mourinho successfully popularised the single-striker tactic by deploying the talented and powerful African Didier Drogba up front. Then emerged many lone No. 9s like Diego Costa, Robert Lewandowski and Karim Benzema (at post-Cristiano Madrid).

The false-nine system (the striker drops back to create space and link up play), which has been used to devastating effect by Pep Guardiola, has also found many takers in Europe and England. Owen felt it is only natural for teams to adopt a proven style. "Robotic might be a harsh word to explain the way modern game works," he said. "Seeing a great manager succeed, others feel they have to copy that, although certain teams and players are not capable of doing that. But they still play that way and end up giving away many goals. We have one or two in the Premier League, teams at the bottom of the table, trying to play the Guardiola way and paying the price."

Four decades ago, there were no back passes. Today, teams love to have possession and back passes are vital to retain possession. Teams now look at data and stats to come up with varieties in team shapes, systems and even styles of play. "I think it is always nice to have two different styles; but again, this is not set in forever, people will find new ways of playing," Owen said. "So, maybe, in a few years, we will come back to having two centre-forwards. I don't know. But yeah, I made my name with different pairs and I'd certainly prefer the old way when everybody had pairs."●





## Customer is king! Perhaps

**T**he colder climes have their winters of discontent, but why must we have these summers of discomfort?" asked the little woman.

"You don't have to be so mordacious, just because the air-conditioner is being temperamental," I replied.

"Stop using big words and get the damn AC fixed," scowled the love of my life.

So off I trudged to the neighbourhood store, from where I had bought the air-conditioner. The heat was as good as predicted in the yellow alert of the met department.

"So, you mean to say that your AC is not working?" asked the helpful salesman, who just the other day had extolled the virtues of the lemon that he had sold to me.

"Yes," I said, because that seemed to be the most logical response.

"You mean to say it has stopped working?"

"Yes," I said again. Succinctly.

"You mean...."

"My good man," said I, interrupting him, "The air-conditioner has stopped working. It has gone kaput. It has conked out. It's defective, faulty, broken, inoperative, damaged, knackered out and ruined. Also busted. Gone kaput, or whichever term you fancy. Have I made myself clear?"

"Yes, sir. You have," he said. "Ummm.... Did you try switching the AC off and then on again?"

Instinctively, I knew I was dealing with a specimen of the laptop generation—the generation whose most advanced technological skills extend all the way to shutting down the Windows programme and restarting the computer.

With great patience I said, "I have. I have also checked the MCB and put fresh cells in the remote control."

"Ah! In that case, there is nothing we can do about it. You will have to contact customer care."

"So, call the blighter who cares for customers!" I said.

"Sir, we are only the dealers. You will have to

call customer care. The number is provided in the service booklet."

"But I bought the AC from you. You may be the dealer or the wheeler-dealer, I don't care. You sold it. You fix it. In our time, shopkeepers sold only good stuff and if something malfunctioned, they apologised and got it replaced."

But the salesman was not interested in increasing his store of knowledge about business ethics of prehistoric times. He ignored me completely and turned to another customer, a potential sucker like me, on whom he would undoubtedly unload another lemon.

I returned home and told the missus that it would take time to get the air-conditioner repaired. For the interim, I promised to rig up our old water-cooler by the afternoon.

"Isn't that just like you? You meet every step forward in technology by taking two steps back! I hope you remember the geyser you bought last winter which stopped functioning within a week? And then we used the old immersion rod heater the whole winter?"

"Look," I said irritably, "Don't nag! I have work to do. I need to register a complaint about the AC and here you are babbling away about geysers."

I prepared for the battle with customer care. I dug out the warranty document, the cash receipt, the delivery note and the operations manual. I kept two pencils, freshly sharpened, and a notepad by my side. Then I called the service number. A disembodied voice asked me to select 'one' for Hindi, 'two' for English—and then 'one', 'two', 'three' etc. for different types of appliances, their defects and probably even their TOEFL scores. I answered more multiple-choice questions than I have ever done in any examination. I was truly bewildered and needed a break to recover and recuperate.

My second attempt at besting the digital labyrinth was marginally better and I meticulously answered questions like when, where and why did I buy the appliance and if it was still under



ILLUSTRATION JOB P.K.

warranty. After a while I even started enjoying it, because it felt like being in the hot seat at Kaun Banega Crorepati! I furiously kept punching buttons, and I thought I was doing a pretty good job, till mysteriously, without my realising it, I was pushed out into a world of silence from that wonderland of disincarnate metallic voices. Nevertheless, I was certain that at some sublunary-astral level I had managed to register my complaint against the delinquent air-conditioner.

The next three days passed painfully, with the old-fashioned water cooler barely able to beat the heat, and the missus perpetually scowling at me.

On the fourth day, the security office at our condo gate called to inform that an engineer from Electronics World had arrived.

"See! The engineer is here to repair the AC!" I trilled.

The missus only scowled. Shortly, the doorbell rang. A weaselly specimen stood at our doorstep, mopping sweat from his brow. I welcomed him with a broad smile.

"Khush Aamdeed! Khush Aamdeed!" And I gleefully ushered him like royalty into the bedroom—the bedroom with the dead AC.

The engineer looked nonplussed. "I am here to fix the geyser," he said. "According to my work order, you bought it on the 5th and complained about it on the 10th of December last year. Right?"

In dismay, I collapsed on the bed. Standing near the door, the missus continued to scowl.

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# Vivienne never played it safe

**T**he secrecy! The suspense! The anticipation! When word got out that Britain's iconic brand—helmed by Dame Vivienne Westwood until her passing in 2022—was making its India debut with a show using the Gateway of India as a dramatic backdrop, major flutters ensued in the frothy, flirty, fabulous fashion world. A lot was anticipated from a global brand that's sought after by connoisseurs of Vivienne's trademark look (punk meets rock).

After Dior's spectacular show at the same venue in 2023, Westwood's Indian debut had a tough act to follow. Invitations were fiercely sought after, and desperate fashionistas were ready to kill for one.

Reportedly, the show was conceptualised and executed in just a month, following a visit to the Vivz Fashion School in Pune by the brand's CEO Carlo D'Amario. It was there that he brought Vivek Pawar, the school's founder-promoter, on board, along with 'Aaranya' patron Priyadarshini Scindia. The idea was to spotlight the gossamer-fine Chanderi weaves of Madhya Pradesh along with homespun khadi from the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. Great collab, for sure.

While commendable, the show didn't quite echo Westwood's original philosophy—rebellious, outrageous and out-of-the-box. Just like her own well-documented life which caused ripples each time she came up with a breakthrough collection.

Westwood's avant-garde thinking was evident from the word go. A lifelong vegetarian, pacifist and gardener, she first grabbed headlines with a boutique named 'Sex'—inspired by her then-husband's band, 'Sex Pistols'. She said she opted for punk as it provided her a way of seeing "if one could put a spoke in the system". Disruptive fashion and bold statements made her a fashion force throughout her long, colourful life, in which she flourished as extravagantly as her wild, untrimmed garden.

She married Andreas Kronthaler, her second husband—a bisexual man 25 years her junior, when she was his professor. Unfortunately, Kronthaler skipped the Mumbai show and it was Carlos who took to the stage to talk about the brand, with Kareena Kapoor, Priyadarshini Scindia and others, listening politely.

Bringing Westwood to India was an inspired choice, given its niche client base. Though most fashionistas today only associate Vivienne with the bridal gown chosen by Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, which had sparked off a huge buzz. Subsequently, Vivienne had graciously presented the gorgeous gown to Sarah

Jessica Parker with a charming note. Known for her flamboyance, Vivienne used her position in the fashion firmament to articulate her concerns—civil rights, climate change and nuclear disarmament.

Her brand today seems to be playing it safe by opting for fashion that isn't edgy enough to woo new fans. Tartan tweeds and flower hats have nostalgic value only for die-hard devotees of the look she pioneered. Perhaps, that is why the debut in India did not quite electrify the scene the way Dior did. Frankly, I was happy watching the show as a mixed bag of models walked around glumly

to a tepid response.

I recalled my brief encounter with the redhead years ago at the Place Vendôme in Paris. There she was, holding court on a muggy summer evening, as international paparazzi hung on to her every word. We got to speak briefly and she seemed enchanted by all things Indian. Well, for a woman who believed every fashion outing was a battlefield, perhaps the debut is two decades too late? Playing it safe was never an option for the vivacious Vivienne.

However, India is ready! We appreciate fashion risks. Let's take Chanderi, khadi and more to the world—and break a few fashion moulds with silhouettes that stun. Leave the predictable party frocks to the faint-hearted. Go for shock and awe, Viv. If any label can do it, it is you.



Vivienne Westwood







## A QUIET MIGHT

What silence has done  
for Pico Iyer

BY ANJULY MATHAI

AP

Someone once said that it is only in solitude that one can hear the mystic notes of the universe. Writer Pico Iyer would agree. After all, he has been courting silence for close to 34 years. Ironically, it is the chaos of a wildfire that first draws him to the calm of a monastery. It is while he is sleeping on the floor of someone's house, after a wildfire destroys his, that a friend suggests he visit a Catholic monastery in Big Sur, California. What has he to lose, he thinks. He gets into his dusty white Plymouth Horizon and follows the interstate freeway, into the inky darkness of the unknown.

Once there, a monk guides him to his room, with a single bed on one side, a rocking chair next to the blond-wood dresser. Through the windows, "the ocean a sheet of fire." And a wide expanse of silence, waiting to be tilled and tamed.

"Why am I exultant to find myself in the silence of this Catholic monastery?" he writes in his recent book, *Learning from Silence*. "Maybe because there is no 'I' to get in the way of the exultancy. Only the brightness of the blue above and below. That red-tailed hawk circling, the bees busy in the lavender. It's as if a lens cap has come off and once the self is gone, the world can come flooding in, in all its wild immediacy."



There are distant echoes of those who have gone before him in this lone, but never lonely, pilgrimage. Those like Admiral Richard Byrd who spent five months

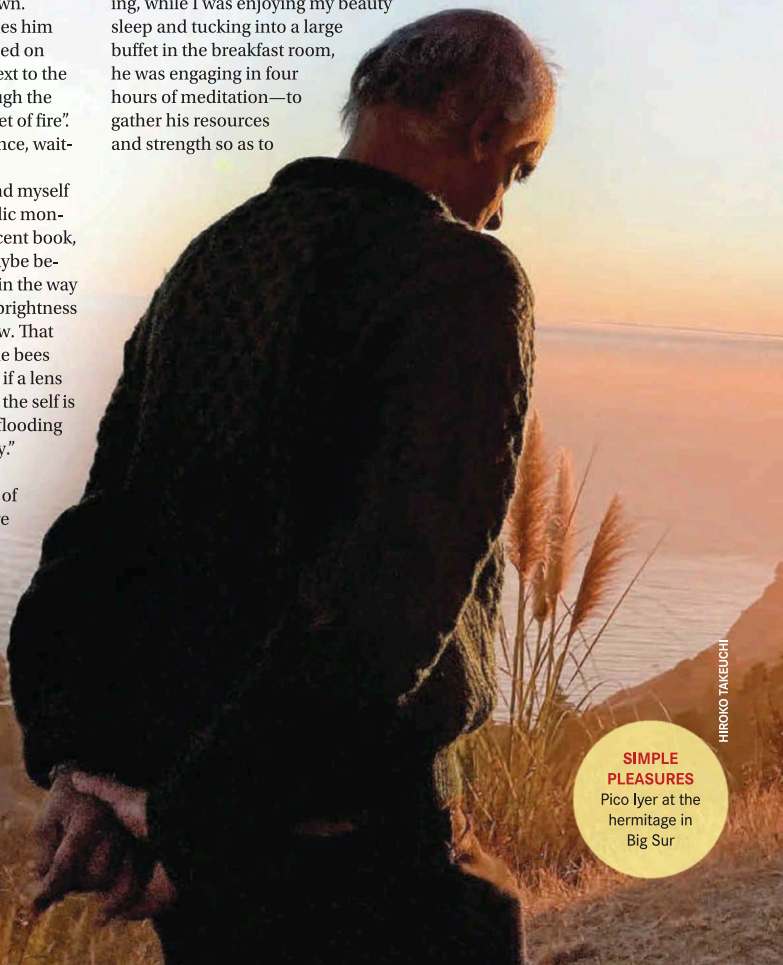
alone in a shack near the South Pole. "In his little cell," writes Iyer, "he came to see that success might be another word for peace and peace, at heart, for freedom from ceaseless striving. Though close at times to death, he 'felt more alive,' he confesses, in his solitude, 'than at any other time in my life.'"

Or the Dalai Lama, with whom Iyer travelled for 10 years across Japan. "I noticed that I grew exhausted just watching him go through his days, even though I am 22 years younger," Iyer told THE WEEK. "In time, I realised this was because, every morning, while I was enjoying my beauty sleep and tucking into a large buffet in the breakfast room, he was engaging in four hours of meditation—to gather his resources and strength so as to

have most to give to everyone he met during his eight-hour working day."

But the ones whose silence is most deafening are the monks of the monastery themselves, with a kind of unwavering, iron-clad joy. "I have been here eight months now and still I feel I'm on honeymoon," one of them tells Iyer. "Every morning I wake up and touch my forehead to the ground. Can this last?"

While silence is a full-stop for the monks, for Iyer, it is a comma—an expunging of the world before returning to it.



HIROKO TAKEUCHI

**SIMPLE PLEASURES**  
Pico Iyer at the hermitage in Big Sur

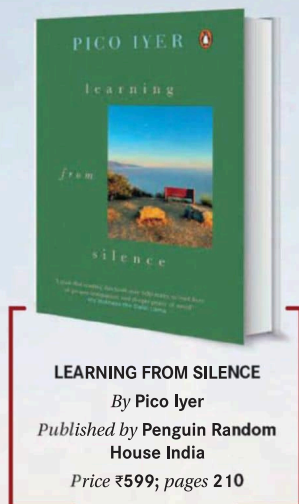
The book is written in the form of dream-like vignettes soaked in whimsy and wisdom. It is almost like Iyer is describing another world far removed from our pressure-cooker one—held together by a silent magnetic field in which more is said by what is left unsaid.

For a travel writer like Iyer—who has published 15 books translated into 23 languages, “on subjects ranging from the Dalai Lama to globalism, from the Cuban revolution to Islamic mysticism”—this is travel of a different kind, a sojourn to the inner from the outer, a kind of deep-sea excavation of the mind.

“The travel is interesting,” he writes. “It keeps me in touch with the lives of others. The relief comes in getting to be oneself.”



Iyer’s rendezvous with silence began years ago, even before he discovered the monastery. He is an only child and having studied at a boarding school since the age of nine, he grew up six thousand miles from the nearest relative. “From an early age I loved being by myself and never got bored or ran out of excitement so long as I



was left to my own devices,” he says.

An uncle remembers seeing him in Oxford at the age of three, surrounded by the toy cars he was arranging into patterns all around him, completely self-sufficient and delighted. “I’m not sure I have changed or

evolved much since then,” he says. He partly chose to be a writer because it involves sitting alone at one’s desk for hours every day. And he sometimes took to the road because that allowed him to spend all day by himself, “in intimate, unbroken conversation with the world”.

Through it all, the silence has been a bulwark against the blows. It has stood him through the loss of a home, a father’s death, a daughter’s cancer diagnosis, a mother’s illness.... It has ordered a discordant mind, teased music from the cacophony of grief.



And now, all these years later, Iyer hardly recognises the person who first came to the monastery, four days after his 34th birthday, so fresh and open. “Yet, the sentences I write, on every visit, are exactly the same cries of affirmation and joy that he once penned....,” he writes. “The views through the windows still put my passing hopes and ideas, my anxious thoughts in place.”

To find something you can’t doubt, realises Iyer, may be the closest that some of us need to get to faith. ●





# The taste of paradise

Goa has added a new must-do to its list

BY K. SUNIL THOMAS

Goa is no longer a vacation," says restaurateur Tarun Sibal. "It is a plan." That plan now features a new destination: Premium restaurants.

Chilled beer and shisha at a beach shack, partying at Tito's in Baga, parasailing at Calangute, flea market shopping at Anjuna, and a whole lot of people-watching and bike riding. This was what a vacay in India's favourite leisure destination meant to the one crore tourists who land up in Goa every year. Not any longer.

Going 'beachless' is the new trend, as a spate of new restaurants and activities that do not involve the beach pops up across the sunshine state. Rough estimates are that some 150 premium restaurants/cafe bars have opened up in just the past two years or so. Their combination of world class menus, signature cocktails and craft spirits, all in the stunning



backdrop, have spurred a veritable restaurant boom in Goa.

“Goa is the food capital of India now,” says Prashant Pallath, co-owner of Tanjore Tiffin Room, a popular Mumbai eatery that opened an outpost last year in Goa. “Even in Delhi (another claimant to the title), you do not get this combination of all kinds of foods and customers from around the world. Anybody who wants to make a name in the restaurant business has to open in Goa.”

And everybody is. Rohit Khattar, who runs Indian Accent as well as the culture and hospitality sections of the India Habitat Centre, chose Goa to open his first original restaurant outside of Delhi NCR. Hosa in Bardez serves a unique blend of traditional and modern south Indian food, and Fireback has a Thai menu. “We had been looking at Goa; it is slowly emerging as one of the major food destinations of the country,” says Nitin Mather, COO of Khattar’s holding firm EHV International.

Last year, celebrity chef and model Sarah Todd opened The Sanctuary, which has a menu that is an interplay between world cuisine and local flavours. Riyaz Amlaani, one of the biggest restaurateurs in India, has branches of Anti Social and Smoke House in north

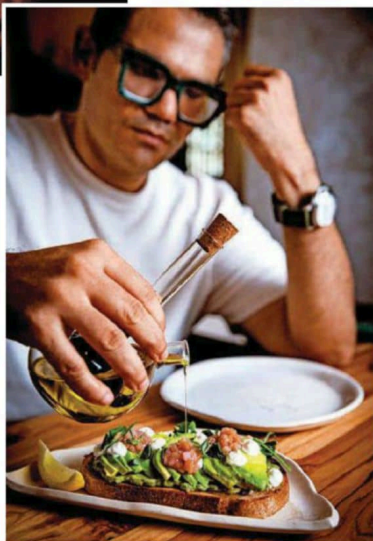


Goa. Olive (Delhi), Elephant & Co (Pune) and VietNom (Gurugram) have all set up outposts in the coastal state.

This transformation from a hippie haven to the culinary capital of the country has been a joyous accident of circumstances. For long, food options in Goa meant cheap street-side or beach-side joints offering lacklustre food and lousy service, or beach shacks catering primarily to the partying impulses of the visiting crowd or the long-staying charter tourists from Russia and Israel. The bigger resorts to the south of the state that catered to the well-heeled tried to remain self-contained à la propriétés in the Maldives, offering all options from food to sundowners to clubbing and spa on the premises.

The focus, and the overwhelming common logic, was that everything had to be on the seaside. Even while upmarket standalone restaurants opened in the past decade, like A.D. Singh’s Olive Beach, or Goa’s own legendary restaurateur Mariketty Grana’s place Thalassa, a beach view was de rigueur.

That seems to have changed. As the pandemic dried up the flow of foreign tourists and even the busloads of budget travellers, it brought in a new type of customer—city-dwelling work-from-home professionals from across the country who had always nursed the dream of



#### TASTE MAKERS

Tarun Sibal has two restaurants in Goa, Barfly (left) and Titli; (top right) celebrity chef Sarah Todd’s The Sanctuary has a menu that is an interplay between world cuisine and local flavours





ONLY GOOD  
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Rohit  
Khattar's  
Fireback  
(above) has a  
Thai menu

living in Goa but could not because of their jobs. "The chartered tourists have been replaced by the domestic corporate crowd," said Abraham David, a tour operator in Porvorim.

A property boom ensued to cater to the hordes of settlers from across the country, naturally followed by a spate of restaurants and bars. Still the prices were low compared to real estate in malls and leisure hubs of Mumbai and Delhi NCR. "If I do this in Mumbai, it would cost me three times more, minimum," said serial restaurateur Dishant Pritamani. "This' refers to The Second House in Saligao, a hip yet laid-back locality in north Goa. The only thing missing is that it is nowhere near the sea, but that is hardly an issue for a Goan destination anymore. "A few years ago, a Goa visit meant we would have gone only to the beach," said Pritamani. "But now people are actually going out and trying all the new places on offer."

The USP is a combination of cutting edge cui-

sine coupled with inventive alcohol menus and a killer backdrop. The last attribute is what pulls in the customer, before the food and drinks take over—most of the happening new places, from Hosla to Barfly to The Second House, are housed in Portuguese villas painstakingly renovated and spectacularly done up.

So while Tanjore Tiffin Room is nothing like a tiffin place you will find in Tamil Nadu, with its candle-lit al fresco dining and bistro interiors, The Second House used AI not just in reconstructing the dilapidated bungalow, but also in all the art present throughout the place, as well as projection mapping that lets the place acquire any desired character or theme. Bawri, in Assagao, has koi ponds separating seating areas.

The 'product forward' food and drinks also have a role to play, but perhaps the biggest impact could be Goa's unique mix of aspirational people. "North Goa has become a big, cosmopolitan kind





#### **SOUTH INDIAN CHARM**

Prashant Pallath (below) co-owns Tanjore Tiffin Room; (right) the sumptuous spread at the restaurant



of place where people across the country come in to eat and make merry," says Tarun Sibal, who also runs restaurants in Bengaluru, Delhi and Gurugram. "Goa is way ahead of what is happening in India's F&B space, with a lot more experimentation." Barfly, one of Sibal's two outposts in Goa (the other being the popular Titli), for instance, specialises in an exclusive and inventive agave bar section.

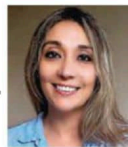
"Goa has character, with a floating populace of settlers and tourists coming and going. Which means there are different types of people who are ready to experiment a lot more," says Sibal.

While the boom has seen a drive from Assagao to Anjuna peppered with new restaurants all along the way, it has also brought with it issues such bounties bring in their wake. The post-pandemic boom attracted not

just restaurateurs and chefs, but also entrepreneurs, speculators and real estate sharks. The result? Too many places chasing the same floating crowd, with the experience not living up to Instagram 'hype' in many cases.

A solution, many feel, is wooing back the missing-in-action foreign tourists. "The number of foreign tourists coming to Goa has diminished considerably," says Mathur. "Domestic tourism has increased but the foreign tourist is good news not only for the newly opened restaurants but also for hotels and other adventure tourism companies as well."

Though some food experts like Vir Sanghvi have predicted that Goa's restaurant boom might be over, entrepreneurs say the best is yet to come. "There is more supply than demand," says Pritamani. "Many restaurants are empty. That always happens in a boom, but my plan is to be the most interesting place with the most interesting food. That will keep me ahead of the curve." 🍽️



## Stanley over Stella

**B** lame it on the heatwave or then just a clever marketing gimmick, but celebrities these days are carrying an unusual bottle out and about every day. Just about everybody—from Alia Bhatt and Ananya Panday to Rashmika Mandanna and Rasha Thadani—has been spotted carrying an oversize coffee cup (and they are not paid to promote it). The cup has replaced the day bag, the large leather tote like the ones seen by Saint Laurent, Marc Jacobs or Stella McCartney. All the girls, and only the girls, want to carry this giant cup.

The cup is in fact a water bottle that has been all the rage all over the world for the last couple of years. Called the Stanley Cup, or the Stanley Quencher, it is simply a water tumbler that can carry 1.8 litres of water. Unlike a bottle, this tumbler lets you take larger sips, hence the Quencher.

The American brand Stanley gets its name from the first all-insulated vacuum bottle invented by William Stanley Jr in 1913. It was especially made for men who worked in labour jobs or then went camping and hiking. However, it took a bunch of women for the forgotten company to increase its sales by 275 per cent in 2021. All thanks to influencer marketing.

The influencer Ashlee LeSueur discovered the Quencher at a local store. It looked unwieldy to carry, but it was actually genius, as its slimmer bottom could fit in a car's cup holder. When LeSueur realised it had increased her daily intake of water and was easy to carry around, she began to gift them to her friends and promote them on her website. In 2020, Terence Reilly, former CEO of Crocs, joined Stanley and engaged LeSueur to promote the Quencher via influencer marketing on TikTok. Soon, women began gifting each other

Quenchers, taking its sales from \$70 million in 2019 to \$750 million in 2023.

While the Stanley can cost as much as \$50 for a 1.8 litre cup, India has several local brands that have aped the Stanley design. I bought one for myself from House of Quirk on Amazon (which has half a dozen local brands copying the Stanley design) for as little as ₹1,500. It changed my hydration habits entirely. I could easily spend a full day outside home drinking enough water (a regular water bottle is 750ml). It was easy to carry

thanks to the cup-style handle. And it kept hot water hot and cold water cold for nearly 12 hours.

In the last year alone, I have gifted four to my girlfriends and they have all loved it.

It's also a fashion must-have. Almost every day I am asked, "Oh you got a Stanley?" Not only is the Quencher instantly recognisable, it has made Stanley a coveted and internationally renowned brand. "No, it's an Indian brand from Amazon," I reply. "And please get one, too."

Of course I love the Quencher. But the real lessons here are for businesses. To start with, women are a smarter and more influential demographic than men, even if the product is created for men. Women will truly appreciate the design and value of your product, instead of buying just for prestige.

Secondly, do not diss the power of social media. Many companies prefer to speak to their customers in traditional modes like celebrity endorsements. But the virality social media can give your product is irreplaceable.

Finally, good design is instantly recognisable. The slimmer bottom is a game changer. Form must match function to create a hero item. Or is it the heroine?



Alia Bhatt carries a Stanley Cup



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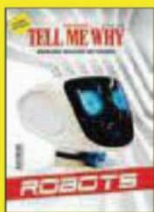


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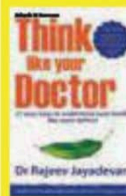
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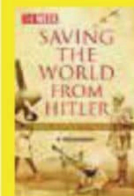
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## Snake shake

'Snake', the single by **Nora Fatehi** and American pop musician Jason Derulo, climbed to the top spot on the UK British Asian Music Charts, broadcast on BBC Asian Network. It beat '48 Rhymes' by Karan Aujla and Manna Music and 'Afsoos' by Anuv Jain and A.P. Dhillon. 'Snake'—a blend of pop with Latin and middle-eastern beats—had become the most viewed music video within 24 hours of its release in January. It quickly turned into a popular party anthem, especially with Fatehi's 'slithering' dance moves.



AP



PTI

## Dream team

Meghna Gulzar's next film, a crime thriller, features a dynamite combination—**Kareena Kapoor Khan** and **Prithviraj Sukumaran**. "As I celebrate 25 incredible years in Hindi cinema, I'm thrilled to announce my next film, *Daayra*, with the incredible Meghna Gulzar in the director's chair," said Kareena. "I've long admired her work, from *Talvar* to *Raazi*, and to be directed by her is a dream come true. The opportunity to collaborate with the talented Prithviraj is also a highlight..." Kareena and Prithviraj is not a pairing that is obvious, but sometimes those are the best kind. Like peanut butter and jelly. Or Jack Black and that bushy beard.

AP

## Drumming it up

Hip-hop star **Hanumankind** began with a bang at Coachella, with the thundering beats of the chenda. He sang his best hits like 'Big Dawgs' and 'Go To Sleep'. Last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had congratulated the rapper for putting Indian martial arts like Kalaripayattu on the world map in his latest song, 'Run It Up'. Although other Indian musicians like Diljit Dosanjh and A.P. Dhillon have performed at the renowned music festival in California, Hanumankind is the first Indian hip-hop artiste there.



GETTY IMAGES

## Just for laughs

After action and romance, **Priyanka Chopra** gets to flaunt her funny bone in her next Hollywood project—a comedy with *Baywatch* co-star Zac Efron. To be directed by Nicholas Stoller, the film also features Michael Pena and Will Ferrell. It is about a young convict (Efron) who takes revenge on a TV judge for delivering a wrong verdict. Meanwhile, PeeCee's plate is certainly stacked high, with projects like *Heads of State*, alongside Idris Elba and John Cena; *The Bluff*, in which she plays a Caribbean pirate; and *Citadel 2*.



AFP

COMPILED BY **ANJULY MATHAI**



# India navigates, China fulminates

**T**he global economy's roller-coaster ride since US President Donald Trump's tariff announcements this month rattled the world. The days since have seen back and forth retaliatory tariff increases between the US and China, negotiations between the US and more than 70 nations, and the financial markets fall precipitously and recover.

At the time of writing this column, Trump had announced his latest surprise, a 90-day pause on tariffs, along with a vastly reduced interim tariff of 10 per cent, except for China. He upped the tariff on Chinese imports, for the third time, to an eye-watering 145 per cent.

India's dealings with the US, from the outset of this second Trump innings, have been cool, calm and collected. Without any fanfare, or any retaliatory statements, or counter tariffs, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team have worked with the US behind the scenes, in an understated manner aimed at seeking solutions. So effective has this been that not only were the initially announced tariffs against India less than on competitors like Vietnam and Thailand, but Trump also publicly praised his "friend Modi" as an astute negotiator.

That is high praise indeed from the president who authored the 1987 bestseller *The Art of the Deal*, which he has been unsobly gifting to other global leaders. Modi's reputation ought to be no surprise, since he has made a career out of proving that every crisis also presents opportunities. That is something he deeply believes in, and often points out to colleagues in the BJP and the government. This was recently corroborated by the unexpected praise from longtime critic Shashi Tharoor, who lauded the prime minister for the way he handled Russia and Ukraine.

The trade wars and global economic upheaval unleashed by Trump are, in fact, a return to the way

the world worked a century ago. The era of globalisation that increasingly became a way of life started gaining ground after World War II, and especially sped up since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The latter half of this era saw the transition of the US—the world's largest economy and pre-eminent military power—from an industrial goliath to a post-industrial economy.

The America of today, still the world's leading innovator and creator of new technologies, is even more notable for being the world's biggest consumer. While China became the world's factory, many, if not most, of the world's economies have become dependent on exporting to the US, which in turn has a trade deficit with a large number of countries.

India's challenges in this uncertain new world could arise from any significant hiccups in the agricultural sector, potentially impacting the 245 million Indians employed in it. On the other hand, the opportunities lie in our relatively high domestic consumption and low export

dependence. Compared to China, for instance, India has far more headroom to negotiate and adapt to changing trade scenarios. India's domestic private consumption, at 60 per cent of GDP, makes us more resilient to trade disruptions than the Chinese, with domestic consumption at only 38 per cent of GDP. Similarly, India's exports at 21 per cent of GDP make us less vulnerable than China, where exports are 40 per cent of GDP.

This explains China's apoplectic reaction to the Trump tariffs, which will have a gut-wrenching effect on its economy. Long accused by others of gaming and misusing the liberal global trade regime that helped it to rise, China now has a tough reckoning. In contrast, India's lesser challenges are outweighed by many new export opportunities arising from the US rewiring its own and reshaping the world's economies.





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