Pilgrimage of memory, cradle of civilisation



SMARAJIT KANUNGOE

Bihar may often find itself in the news for reasons not always pleasant, yet it remains one of the cradles of ancient Indian civilisation. This land was home to Magadha's imperial power, the Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, Mahavira's preaching in Vaishali, and world renowned universities like Nalanda and Vikramashila. Reading Lama Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India, I learned that Vikramashila was a great Buddhist monastery devoted to Tantric practices, particularly Guhya Tantra, under the patronage of King Dharmapala of the Pala dynasty. At its peak in the 12th century, during Ramapala's reign, it rivalled Nalanda in prestige. Tradition says two scholars were stationed at its main gate, admitting only those students who could prove their worth. Education was free, and the long rule of pro Buddhist Pala kings gave fresh life to Buddhism, though increasingly in its tantric form. Yet in 1193, foreign invaders reduced Vikramashila to rubble, and by 1236 it lay deserted—its fate shared by Nalanda.

I visited Vikramshila with my wife while staying in Bhagalpur a few years back, and it was a lovely experience; one could go back to the eighth century and feel those days of our past. After its destruction sometime in 1193 AD by foreign invaders, the place was fully forgotten and remained hidden, surprisingly, for centuries under deep earth. It was discovered by one Lakshmikanta Mishra when he found a mound at Antichak village. He collected bricks from the ruins and sent them to Patna University. Thereafter, excavations were done in two phases in 1962 and 1972.

It was a Buddhist institution: students from various parts of eastern Asia came here to learn Buddhist theology, besides logic and philosophy. However, Tibetan students were more numerous. The most popular and important subject taught here was Vajrayana Buddhism. It had a worldwide reputation and was practised through Tantric preceptors. During that time, necromancy and black magic were very popular and the order of the day. We have seen the ruins of many well-built brick structures at a separate place, consisting of smaller rooms down below the upper surface, within the complex, with



small entry points of about 2 x 2 feet to go deeper inside for a long time of meditation. It had a big library too.

It had a central stupa, an imposing structure in the middle of a whole constructed area . The main stupa had terraces with a circumambulatory path. One could walk around the path feeling a sense of having made a round of something big, something sacred and mighty. Similarly, we saw the same types of ruined structures in Nalanda also .

Nalanda, once the jewel of ancient India, stood as the world's first great residential university, flourishing between the 5th and 12th centuries, founded under the Gupta dynasty. Though destroyed in the 12th century, Nalanda's legacy endures as a symbol of India's scholarly heritage, a beacon of knowledge where wisdom was nurtured and shared across cultures.

Bihar shaped Buddhism's rise, but also witnessed its decline, as shifting patronage, political upheavals, and resurgent Hindu traditions gradually overshadowed monastic institutions. Present day Bihar was once the core of Magadha, among the most powerful mahajanapadas of the 6th century BCE. Its fertile plains, nourished by the Ganga, Son, and Gandak rivers, made it a hub of settlement and empire. Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka the Great expanded Magadha into one of the largest empires in Indian history, with Pataliputra—today's Patna—serving as the nerve centre of administration and diplomacy. Thinkers like Chanakya and Aryabhata emerged from this soil, reinforcing Bihar's reputation as a centre of political theory and scientific inquiry. Chanakya, also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta, studied and later taught at Takshashila (Taxila), where he trained in statecraft before becoming chief advisor to Chandragupta Maurya. Aryabhata, centuries later, revolutionised mathematics and astronomy, leaving a legacy that still resonates.

Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree, remains the spiritual heart of Buddhism. Pilgrims from across the world visit this sacred site, and countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka have built temples nearby to welcome their devotees.

My wife and I were blessed to visit Bodh Gaya, and Vaishali, spending days immersed in its history. At Kolhua, we stood before the famous 18.3 metre Ashokan Pillar with its lion capital, commemorating Buddha's last sermon. Nearby stupas mark the places where tradition says monkeys offered honey to the Buddha. The Coronation Tank, now under renovation, recalls the Licchavi kings who bathed there before their coronation.

The Licchavi republic was governed by a Gana Sangha—an assembly of clans—where power rested with a council rather than a single monarch. The head of the republic, chosen by consensus, acted more as presiding officer than absolute ruler. Matters of war, alliances, and justice were debated collectively, making Vaishali one of the earliest examples of republican governance in India. As we reflected on these ancient scenarios, we watched schoolchildren exploring the site with youthful curiosity, examining each brick of Ashoka's time. Their energy reminded us that history is not merely a record of the past but a living inheritance, shaping the imagination of each new generation.

Later, we visited the new library, meditation centre, museum, and guest house—all nearing completion. In the meditation hall, we joined a brief session, while groups of students arrived in buses, part of government sponsored educational trips designed to instil pride in India's historic past. In the museum, we admired a rare black basalt sculpture of the Buddha from the Pala period, adorned with a trefoil crown and ornaments—an unusual depiction compared to familiar images. The artistry spoke of a time when Buddhist iconography was evolving, absorbing local influences while retaining its spiritual essence.

On earlier journeys, we had visited the ruins of Nalanda and Vikramashila. Their remains still whisper of the grandeur of institutions that once drew students from distant lands to study philosophy, medicine, and logic. Taxila, now in Pakistan, was another great seat of learning that later became a Buddhist monastic centre, though socio political upheavals eventually destroyed it. Legendary teachers like Chanakya, Panini, Charaka, and Jivaka shaped empires, languages, and intellectual traditions across South Asia. Panini's grammar system codified Sanskrit , and Charaka's medical treatises laid foundations of Ayurveda, and Jivaka, the Buddha's physician, exemplified the union of compassion and science.

At the guest house in Vaishali, we met a young Revenue Officer, newly in service. Over tea, we spoke of her work and aspirations, touching on women's rights in parental property and the obstacles they face. I realised that women today are no longer willing to accept compromises—they seek respect and rightful standing both in their parental homes and in their in laws' households. In Bihar, the impact of women's reservation is visible everywhere, with women joining the workforce in increasing numbers, proving their merit in every sector.

Their presence in administration, education, and public service signals a profound social transformation, one that echoes the ancient republican spirit of Vaishali but in a modern, democratic form.

As we left Vaishali for home in Muzaffarpur, we carried with us not only pleasant memories but also a renewed appreciation for the resilience of Bihar's people and the richness of its past. The ruins of Nalanda and Vikramashila, the sacred Bodhi Tree, the Ashokan Pillar, and the bustling energy of students—all reminded us that history is not static. It is a dialogue between past and present, between memory and aspiration. Bihar, once the cradle of civilization, continues to shape India's story, offering lessons of endurance, renewal, and hope.

NEC WOOD Land
Entertainment Unlimited ...

Why Eastern India Could Become India's Next Major Steel Growth Corridor

MANISH KHEMMKA

India's steel story is no longer only about how much capacity gets added. It is about where that capacity is built, and how well it is connected. Increasingly, the answer points east. Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, with their mineral wealth, established industrial ecosystems and improving connectivity, are emerging as the core of the country's next steel growth corridor. As India pursues its long-term infrastructure and manufacturing goals, the question is no longer whether more capacity is needed, but where it should be built, and how efficiently raw materials and finished steel can move.

From Mineral Advantage to Manufacturing Advantage

Steelmaking depends on iron ore, coal and limestone, which gives Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh a natural foundation. But minerals alone do not build competitiveness. What matters is clustering. When plants, mines, power generation, engineering suppliers and logistics networks sit together, they share infrastructure, talent and supply chains, creating a lasting manufacturing advantage.

Odisha: From Steel Producer to Steel Ecosystem

Odisha shows this at scale. Its 2025-26 Economic Survey targets 100 million tonnes of annual steel production by 2030, with major integrated projects and expansions approved or underway across Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Angul, Keonjhar, Sambalpur and Jajpur. The government is also in active discussions with industry on strengthening downstream and value-added metal manufacturing. A tonne of steel is not the end of the story. It can become engineering products, construction materials, automotive components and fabricated goods, and the more downstream industry sits near steelmaking centres, the more value the region captures.

Jharkhand: Industrial Depth With Room to Grow

Jharkhand's advantage is decades of accumulated industrial capability. Jamshedpur, Bokaro and Adityapur host established steel, engineering, automobile and ancillary manufacturing clusters, and this ecosystem of engineering firms, maintenance providers, logistics operators and equipment suppliers increasingly determines how competitive a modern steel plant is. Recent investments are adding capacity and jobs, alongside a state-level push toward advanced and green steel, downstream manufacturing and industrial clusters. The real opportunity is to extract more economic value from the industrial base the state already has.

Chhattisgarh: Minerals, Power and Industrial Scale

Chhattisgarh's edge comes down to power. Steel production is energy-hungry, so reliable, affordable electricity is a genuine advantage, and the state has it in abundance, with over 26,000 MW of installed capacity. Alongside its mineral reserves, established steel players and skilled workforce, this gives the region the know-how, supply chains and manpower for further growth, extending the manufacturing belt from central India's mineral-rich core toward the eastern industrial and port corridor. West Bengal: The Consumption and Connectivity Bridge

West Bengal's value lies less in resources and more in location, industrial heritage and market access. The Durgapur–Asansol belt, one of Eastern India's oldest industrial centres, is connected by rail and road to Kolkata and the wider national market. Access to the Kolkata and Haldia ports, with extensive waterways as an additional logistics channel, gives the state a bridging role between the mineral-rich interior and Eastern India's major urban and commercial markets.

Logistics: The Second Pillar

Minerals may be the first advantage, but logistics is just as critical. Steel is a bulk commodity, and how efficiently ore, coal, limestone and finished products move directly shapes production costs. Paradip Port already handles this flow across all four states, and the proposed National Waterway-5 could tie mineral hubs like Talcher and Angul, and industrial centres like Kalinganagar, even more closely to ports and markets.

The Road Ahead

The next stage of growth won't be about tonnage alone. India needs more higher-value steel for autos, infrastructure and advanced manufacturing, and eastern India is well placed to build that layer on its existing base, shifting from extraction toward processing, fabrication and engineering, with knock-on gains for jobs in logistics and services. This will likely unfold in three stages: capacity expansion, deeper integration of rail, ports, power and industrial clusters, and finally a real push into value addition.

Companies like OCL Iron & Steels and SM Group, expanding in Rourkela, Odisha and Nimdih, Jharkhand, are already positioning themselves at the heart of this shift. Both sites sit at the intersection of mineral access, power availability and logistics connectivity that will define the next competitive edge. Their distribution network across Eastern India extends this advantage downstream, connecting manufacturing to the infrastructure and construction sectors through dependable logistics and supply-chain execution.

(Writer: Chairman and Managing Director, SM Group)

STATE/REGION

125 to join INDIA rally in Delhi

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 Committee president Asish Saha and senior Congress leader Sudip Roy Barman also reached Delhi to join other party leaders at the rally. Tripura Pradesh Youth Congress president Nilkamal Saha said that around 125 Congress leaders and members from the state had travelled to Delhi to participate in the rally organised by the INDIA bloc at Ramlila Maidan.

BJP-Motha meeting today on seat

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 IPFT. The TIPURA Motha has not yet clarified their stand over the issue but the situation suggests that they may agree so far reserve seats are concern but may claim few unreserved seats as they also have a non-tribal front. Inclusion of Ranjan Sinha, convenor of Motha's non-tribal wing in the party delegation is significant in this regard. One of the major development in the negotiation process is that Motha side has agreed to keep the Land right issue in abeyance for the time being. However, they are determined that the issues of reshuffle in state cabinet and in the Executive Committee of the TTAADC won't be discussed unless this land issue is solved.

BJP overshadows rivals in city rally

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 trying to intimidate police and government officials through public protests. Former Chief Minister and BJP National General Secretary Biplab Kumar Deb expanded the policy defense to the national level. He specifically targeted Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his demands for a caste census and opposition to the National Population Register. "If a caste-based census is held, how will Rahul Gandhi explain his own caste and community identity?" Deb asked the gathering, referring to the Congress leader as a duplicate Gandhi. Deb stated that changing a surname does not change one's social identity. The leaders urged party workers to stay connected with the public. "We are all soldiers of the Bharatiya Janata Party. We are workers, not leaders. We must work among the people and earn their support through service," Debroy concluded.

Mystery over firing by Congress

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 Meanwhile, Tripura Pradesh Youth Congress president Nilkamal Saha held a press conference on Saturday. He said that the Congress had taken permission to observe the death anniversary of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Saturday. Congress workers across the state marked the occasion through various programmes and activities. He alleged that a similar programme was organised in Khayerpur, where BJP supporters attempted to throw away the portrait of Indira Gandhi and damaged a nearby hotel. He further alleged that the BJP supporters attacked Baptu Chakraborty and attempted to kill him, following which the incident involving the toy pistol took place.

CM led unity run on Patel Birth Day

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 National Unity Day is observed across the country every year on October 31 to commemorate the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and reaffirm the commitment to preserving India's unity and integrity.

VC oath taking notice Monday

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 The BJP-TIPRA Motha alliance won most of the seats. It is learnt that in 22 villages none got majority and the NDA constitutes are yet to finalized the matter.

Kishor took up issue with union

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 He went on to say, "I firmly believe that if a planned renovation is carried out while preserving Rudrasagar's natural beauty, heritage and environmental importance, it will not only become a new tourist attraction for Tripura but also open new doors of possibility for the economic development and employment of local people."

Barman emphasized that the Union minister considered the matters with great importance and assured him that the necessary steps would be taken up soon.

"Our goal is not just to conserve Rudrasagar, but to establish it for future generations with a new identity, new possibilities, and as a heritage of pride at the national level," Barman said.

TET teachers want HM higher age

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 for promotion-linked recruitment under the current age criteria. Alongside the age limit demand, the association has also asked the government to reduce the minimum teaching experience required for headmaster and assistant headmaster posts, currently set at ten and seven years respectively. The association expressed hope that the state government would weigh the overall situation and arrive at an appropriate decision. It said that if the demands are accepted, around 700 teachers across Tripura would become eligible to appear for the recruitment examination.

Nomination rally attacked

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 Urban Body areas till the end of election with clear direction to act upon against unruly elements. All approach reads to the office of ROs must be guarded by the CPMF personnel to ensure unhindered accessibility of all intending candidates.

The election is scheduled to be held on November 27 and counting of votes will take place on December 2. A total of 345 seats across the 21 civic bodies will go to the polls, including 51 seats in the Agartala Municipal Corporation. Of these, 162 seats have been reserved for women, 80 for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates, and nine for Scheduled Tribe (ST) candidates.

SVM NCC Observes Ekta Diwas

NEC Report

Mohanpur, Oct 31: The NCC Sub-Unit of Swami Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya (SVM), Mohanpur, commemorated the 151st birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Iron Man of India, by observing Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day) with great enthusiasm. On this occasion, ANO Lt. (Dr.) Prasanta Deb delivered a brief speech highlighting the significance of the day and Sardar Patel's remarkable contribution towards national integration and the unification of India. He emphasised the importance of unity, integrity and collective responsibility in building a strong nation.

Orange cultivation in Barmura hilly terrains

NEC Report

Udaipur, Oct 31: On the terrain of a mountain, Ham Bahadur is dreaming of cultivating oranges earning an annual income of about Rs. three lakh.He is a farmer from Darjeelingbari area of North Baramura under Bagma assembly constituency of Udaipur subdivision, has found a way to self-reliance by cultivating oranges in the hilly soil for the last six years. By establishing an orange garden on his seven acres of land, he has also set a positive example in the agricultural sector of the area as to how to become a self-reliant in orange cultivation with the government assistance every year. Currently, he is having fully orange-producing 250 orange trees. In addition, about 350 more trees are gradually approaching maturity. This means that there is a lot of potential for the production of his orange garden to increase further in the coming days. He is producing three types of oranges - small, medium and large and selling each orange @ Rs.30, 40 and 50 at Killa market depending on the size.

Goa Police held Cyber fraud at

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ▸ 01 A police team of Goa Police arrived at Gandachara yesterday in search of him and were searching to arrest him under the covers. On Saturday morning, Parag Debbama was arrested by the Goa police while taking lunch at a hotel in Gandachhara Bazar. He was later taken to Gandachara Police Station for interrogating the accused youth in the incident and to maintain legal formalities. The police believe that more people may be arrested based on his interrogation. It is learnt that the youth will be produced in SDJM court soon to issue transit remand warrant and thereafter he will be taken to Goa state to produce him to Goa court.

Nagaland literature festival highlights preservation of indigenous oral traditions, myths, folklore

Kohima, Oct 31 (PTI): The sixth edition of the Nagaland Literature Festival, which began here on Friday, highlighted the importance of preserving indigenous oral traditions, myths and folklore, with speakers calling for greater recognition and support for homegrown literary talent. Delivering the keynote address at the two-day festival, organised by Writers Collective Kohima under the theme 'From Hearth to Page' here, MLA & Advisor for School Education Dr Kekhrielhoulie Yhome said Naga society, with its predominantly oral history, had a rich repository of ancestral knowledge and storytelling traditions that needed to be preserved through literature.

He said myths and folklore were deeply connected with the past and served as important vehicles for transmitting moral values, cultural identity and collective experiences across generations.

Drawing parallels with Greek and Roman mythology and referencing literary and philosophical thinkers, Yhome said stories were constantly created, retold and reinterpreted, while writers have an important role in challenging stereotypes and presenting the diverse identities and experiences of the Northeast.

He also highlighted the significance of indigenous beliefs, rituals and traditional knowledge systems as valuable sources of literary creativity. Earlier, Writers Collective Kohima president Vishü Rita Krocha said the collective was formed in 2019 by four literature enthusiasts with the primary objective of promoting Naga literature and storytelling through the Nagaland Literature Festival. The collective, which now has 11 members, organised its first festival in 2021 and has continued the initiative despite financial constraints, she said.

Krocha said the theme 'From Hearth to Page' sought to explore the transition of Naga heritage from oral storytelling around traditional kitchen hearths to contemporary written, published and digital forms. Emphasising the need for institutional support, she called upon the state government to invest in the literary and artistic development of young people, saying initiatives promoting literature should receive greater support. The festival also marked the introduction of the inaugural NLF Prizes for Poetry, Short Story and Essay, which received over 80 entries.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Sri Prakash Sinha, S/o Late Parikshit Sinha, residing at House No. 485, Dakshin Paschim Halhali, near Shiv Mandir, Halahali, District Dhalai, Tripura 799286, do hereby declare for general information that my mother's name has been inadvertently recorded as "Manju Sinha" in my Indian Passport bearing No. N4215901, whereas her actual and correct name is "Rupamanjuri Sinha"
In this regard, I have executed a Notarial Affidavit dated 29.10.2026 before the Notary, Kamalpur, District Dhalai, Tripura, declaring the aforesaid facts to be true and correct.
This public notice is published to bring the aforesaid discrepancy to the notice of the general public for updating of the relevant official records. NEC-543