

health
Summit
2025

IDEAS TO DEAL WITH INDIA'S CHALLENGES

JOURNALISM WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

www.theweek.in

TheWeekMag

TheWeekLive

₹ 80

BIHAR STUNNER
STORY BEHIND THE
ELECTION SWEEP

UNTOLD STORY
THE HOUSE OF
BENEGALS AND
THEIR BRILLIANCE

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

THE WEEK



SATHYA SAI BABA
CENTENARY SPECIAL

LOVING GOD

Celebrating the birth centenary
of Sathya Sai Baba, followers
remember their experiences and
his multi-faith legacy

PRIME MINISTER **NARENDRA MODI**

BLUES SINGER **DANA GILLESPIE**

ACTOR **VIVEK OBEROI**

CRICKETER **ALVIN KALLICHARRAN**

CRICKETER **V.V.S. LAXMAN**

BROADCASTER **TED HENRY**

BABA'S NEPHEW **R.J. RATHNAKAR**

Patriarch's powerplay

Nitish Kumar decimated the opposition, thanks to his women-centric policies, a vote base that cut across caste lines and the formidable organisational muscle of the BJP

BY PRATUL SHARMA



Nitish Kumar ended Lalu Prasad's 15-year rule in 2005, a defeat from which Lalu—despite his national profile during the United Progressive Alliance years—never recovered in Bihar. An opportunity appeared in 2020 when his son and political heir, Tejashwi Yadav, mounted a serious challenge with a promise to sanction 10 lakh jobs. The election, held during the pandemic and amid the return of migrant workers, saw Nitish losing support but not his position. Tejashwi, 30, emerged as leader of the single largest party but could not form the government.

Five years later, a more politically experienced Tejashwi raised the stakes with the promise of one government job per family. Yet, the RJD lost 50 seats, while Nitish's JD(U) gained 42 seats over its 2020 tally. Cohesive campaign, effective political management and Nitish's credibility helped the National Democratic Alliance retain power with an impressive margin. At 74, Nitish is one of the oldest and longest serving chief ministers, and he was the face of the NDA campaign. The strong appeal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP's election machinery, too, played a key role.

In terms of messaging, the NDA relied on two potent themes: repeated invocation of the Lalu era as 'jungle raj' and a focus on the

delivery of welfare schemes.

Nitish drew on a vote base he had built over two decades, one that extended beyond caste lines. Despite concerns about his health, he remained agile politically. Whenever Tejashwi made a promise, Nitish moved quickly and made a better offer. But the decisive factor was the Nitish government's effort to strengthen its most loyal vote base: women. A one-time transfer of ₹10,000 to more than 1.3 crore women for small enterprises, the network of Jeevika Didi self-help groups and the generation of girls who first received bicycles during his early years in office formed a dependable support base.

The welfare push included 125 units of free electricity for 1.67 crore households, 33 per cent reservation for women in government jobs, higher social security pensions and free bus travel for women. "Nitish Kumar built trust among women, who constitute 50 per cent of the population, and drew support from extremely backward classes, Pasmanda Muslims, and dalits," said JD(U) leader Neeraj Kumar.

The NDA campaign showcased a new political playbook of preemptive action. In April,

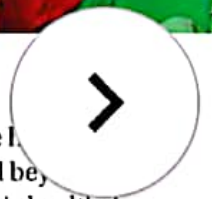




PHOTO X@NITISHKUMAR

of hesitation, the Centre agreed caste census along with the census, which neutralised a major opposition plank. The BJP accommodated a proposal that could have hurt it politically.

Now, with 85 seats to the BJP's 89, there is no uncertainty about Nitish's return to office, despite earlier hints from Union Home Minister Amit Shah that the decision would be taken after the polls. While the BJP and the RJD retained their vote share, the JD(U) recorded a 3.8 per cent rise. Nitish's survival against aggressive opponents and demanding allies conveys a broader message: regional parties endure when they have credible leadership and remain alert to alliance dynamics.

However, the NDA's victory relied heavily on the BJP's organisational strength. Modi has visited Bihar nearly 70 times since 2014, unveiling a series of infrastructure projects in the months preceding the election. The party moderated its hindutva messaging and focused on caste representations of religious and historical figures. BJP spokesperson Guru Prakash said the verdict was a rejection of entitlement politics and dynastic politics. "It

WINNING FORMULA

Nitish Kumar after inaugurating 22 development projects in Muzaffarpur district before the elections

was a collective win for the NDA under Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the support of Nitish Kumar," he said.

The BJP's consolidation of upper-caste voters, the JD(U)'s social outreach and Chirag Paswan's support among dalits created a cohesive bloc. Smaller partners such as Jitan Ram Manjhi and Upendra Kushwaha added further depth.

The opposition, on the other hand, failed to build momentum. Although Tejashwi attempted to reframe the RJD's appeal around economic justice rather than social justice, he lacked a clear plan. His projection of Mukesh Sahani for deputy chief minister, despite Sahani's limited social base, unsettled dalits and Muslims. Asaduddin Owaisi capitalised on the vacuum, drawing Muslim votes and weakening the RJD's Muslim-Yadav combination. The RJD's failure to expand the MY vote bank by including upper castes, dalits and EBCs restricted its growth.

The grand alliance struggled with internal coherence. The Congress's delay in affirming Tejashwi as chief ministerial candidate added to voter confusion. The party failed to convert anti-incumbency into support, repeating a pattern seen in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Maharashtra. Its "voting for change" narrative did not resonate.

Tejashwi has age on his side. However, the Yadav scion will need to recast his image to win over other castes. He may need to remind the electorate that he would have zero tolerance for crime and corruption. Experience shows that voters prefer credibility. A similar predicament awaits Prashant Kishor, whose shift from coach to player ended poorly. Whether he stays in Bihar or returns to election management elsewhere will determine his credibility among Biharis. For Chirag Paswan, the next five years provide an opportunity to build on his momentum and position himself as a contender for the top post he keenly seeks.

For the BJP, the victory offers a chance to consolidate its base and work towards having its own chief minister. After an emphatic win, the party will hope that its impact extends to West Bengal, where elections will be held within six months. Nitish, meanwhile, has to answer a crucial question: who succeeds him? Regional parties often lose momentum if there is no successor to take over. ●