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A JOURNAL OF POLITICS
AND CULTURE

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₹250

THE CARAVAN



CHOKING TO DEATH

*Silica dust from India's industries
is killing its workers*



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COVER STORY / HEALTH

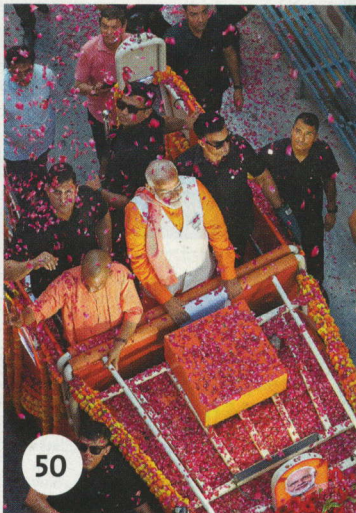
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Choking to Death

Silica dust from India's industries is killing its workers

AKHILESH PANDEY

Workers in industries such as mining, quarrying, construction, glass are exposed to high quantities of active silica dust, and often contract a fatal and incurable lung disease called silicosis. It causes the formation of fibrous nodules in the lungs, slowly choking patients to death. The scale of silicosis in India is staggering—research estimates suggest that 52 million workers will be at risk of the disease by 2025. But just as staggering is the absence of the disease from the public imagination, and the government's indifference to it. Silicosis is often misdiagnosed as doctors lack awareness of the disease. Only a handful of states have any policies for the disease, and there is no national policy, or national-level data. Over the course of one and a half year, Akhilesh Pandey visited silicosis victims in close to two hundred villages across 12 states in India. It became clear in his reporting that no one thing had damned the victims more than the accident of their birth—they were poor, forced to migrate for work, and undertook any job they could get. Most worked as undocumented daily-wagers, outside the basic protections of Indian labour laws and without access to any reliable healthcare. The public reckoning for silicosis remains pending because these people, its victims, are already invisible to the system.



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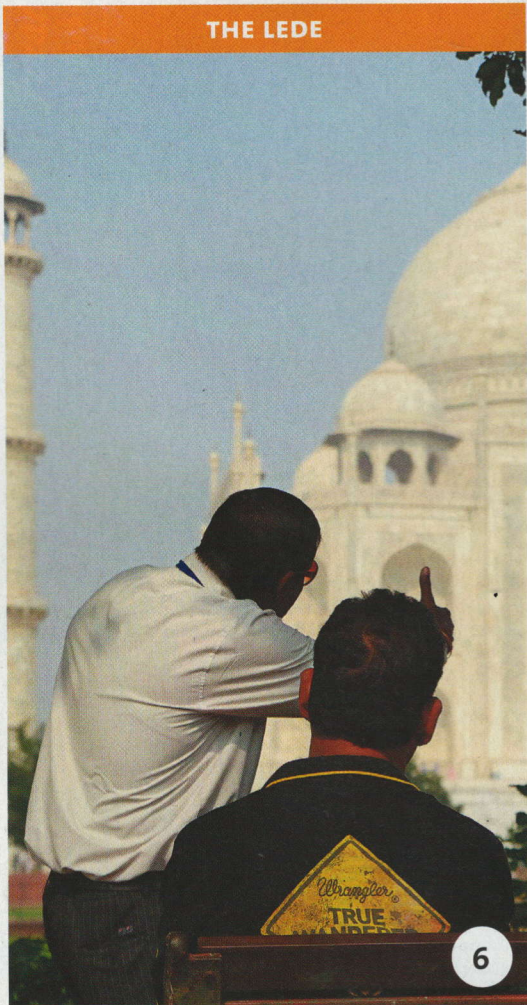


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ANKUSH PAL

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