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FEELS THE HEAT**

**AVIATION MAKING  
DELHI A GLOBAL HUB**

**AUTO REPORT HOT  
NEW LAUNCHES**

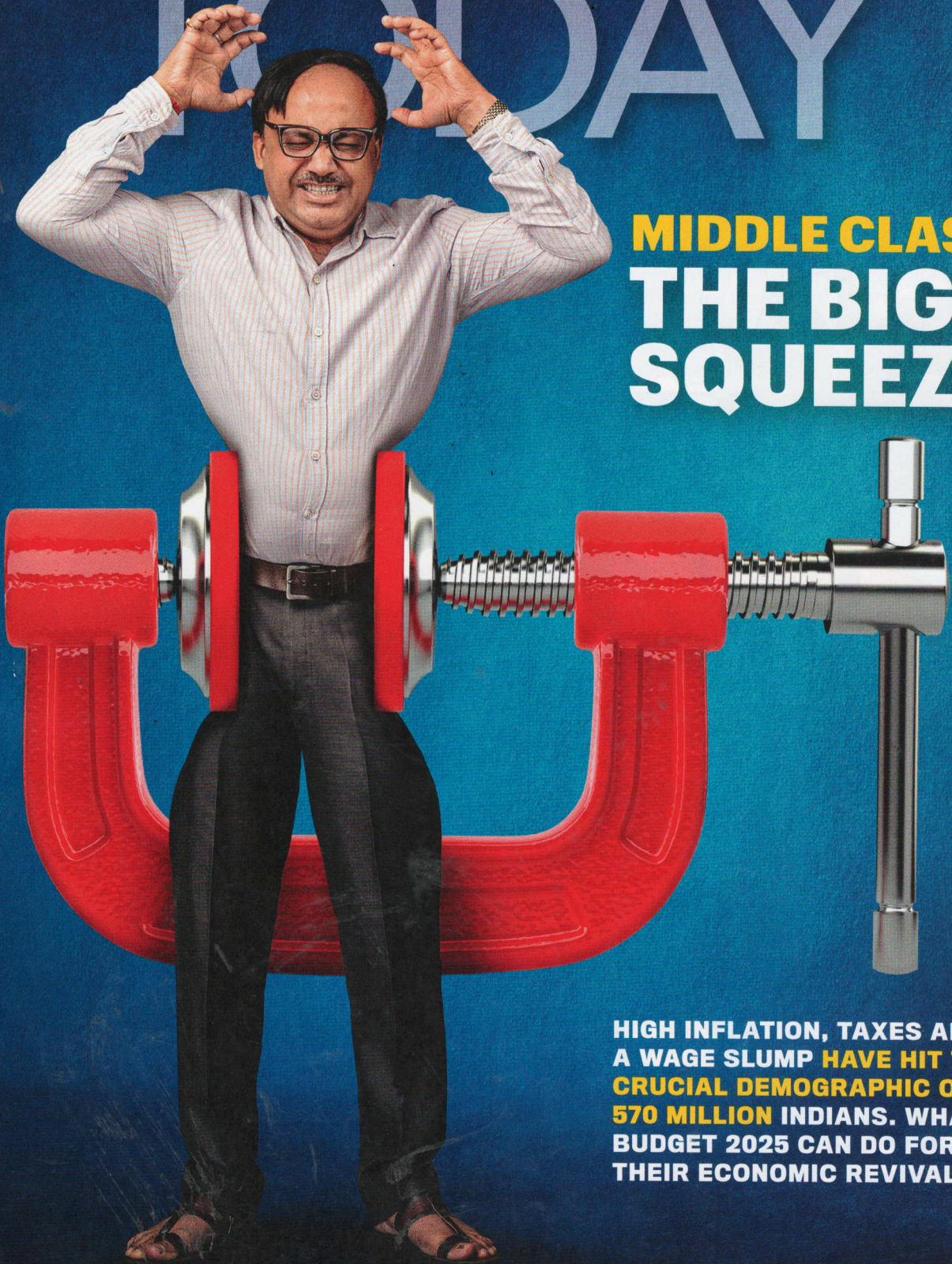
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# INDIA TODAY

## MIDDLE CLASS THE BIG SQUEEZE



**HIGH INFLATION, TAXES AND  
A WAGE SLUMP HAVE HIT THIS  
CRUCIAL DEMOGRAPHIC OF  
570 MILLION INDIANS. WHAT  
BUDGET 2025 CAN DO FOR  
THEIR ECONOMIC REVIVAL**



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COVER STORY

## MIDDLE CLASS THE BIG SQUEEZE



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

High inflation, taxes and  
a wage slump have hit this  
crucial demographic of  
570 million Indians. What  
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their economic revival

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A MURDER ROILS  
THE MAHAYUTI  
PG 7

COPYING SCAMS  
GO HI-TECH  
PG 12

# UPFRONT

UP: FIGHT BOILS  
IN MILKIPUR  
PG 10

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THE END OF  
TUNNEL PG 14



**RIISING TENSIONS**  
Devotees at  
the Shahi Jama  
Masjid in Sambhal

ANI

UTTAR PRADESH

## THE PANDORA'S BOX UNDER THE SHRINE

By Avaneesh Mishra

**T**he Mahakumbh has presently taken centre stage in the media narrative, so the right buttons are being pressed when it comes to keeping alive a saturation Hindu presence in the social space. But the more conflictual elements of religious politics may be in only for a short hibernation. The controversy surrounding the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal—the western Uttar Pradesh town wracked by violence in late November, with four people killed in clashes with the

police—is far from a closed chapter. As the new year dawned, the courts applied the brakes on the controversy, which till then seemed to have taken on a momentum of its own. But with a constitutional law up for question, and a bristling sheaf of legal disputes on the anvil, all signs are that the game of wits between judicial principles and political ideas will resume in the near future.

One sign came from UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath. His rhetorical pitch recalled a formula for rapprochement that had once been suggested

for Ayodhya, laced with his trademark punch. On January 10, he said the Muslim community should—“in the most respectful manner”—voluntarily hand over the Sambhal site to Hindus if evidence establishes that it was built on the remains of a 16th century Kalki temple. Speaking at an India Today Group event in Prayagraj on the sidelines of the Kumbh, he also said no “disputed structure” should be referred to as a mosque. “The day we stop calling such places mosques, people will also stop going there. Islam does not sanction the