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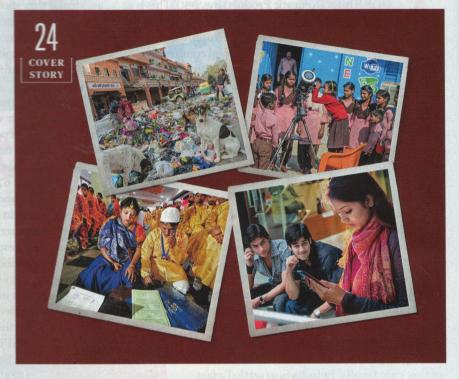
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TEJASWI'S NEW **POLL PLAYBOOK**

By Amitabh Srivastava

hen the odds don't favour you, change the playbook. Bihar's leader of the Opposition in the assembly, Tejaswi Yadav, is doing just that. On March 9, as Chief Minister Nitish Kumar presided over a carefully choreographed display of governance, distributing appointment letters to 51,000 newly recruited teachers at Patna's Gandhi Maidan, just three kilometres

away, Tejaswi offered a starkly different narrative. Seated in protest, he accused Nitish of political trickery, claiming the much-touted jobs had come at the expense of "stolen reservations". While Nitish cast himself as a champion of employment, Tejaswi reminded Bihar's voters of the unfulfilled promise of 65 per cent reservation-struck down by the Patna High Court last year-blaming both the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governments in Delhi and Patna for their inaction.

This marks a subtle but clear refocusing of Tejaswi's electoral strategyfrom a universalist line to one hewing close to caste. The weapon is the allegation that the government is systematically depriving the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) of their rightful 15 per cent reservations in government