

NEET & Unclean

In spite of the government cancelling the NEET exam, repairing the broken medical education system is a long haul

By KAVITA BAJELI-DATT

Kota, the coaching capital of India is like a dystopian world of death, deception and desire to win. Last year, the authorities of hostels installed ceiling fans with springs inside them so that disappointed students, who have enrolled for Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) for engineering and the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to medical colleges, do not end up hanging themselves. In January, 18-year-old Bagisha Tiwari, a Kolkata girl who failed NEET, jumped from the ninth floor of a building. The authorities and owners of private hostels have installed anti-suicide nets in balconies and lobbies to prevent more Bagisha Tiwaris from happening. The NEET-UG exam is the world's biggest medical entrance test, and Kota is where students believe the springboard to success is.

The city's coaching business, which has an annual turnover of ₹5,000 crore, is run from six large institutes—many smaller ones go uncounted—each of which teaches more than 5,000 full-time students and charges ₹40,000 to ₹1.3 lakh a year.

The reason why students keep coming to Kota is hope. Like 20-year-old Vidushi Sharma, who spent two years living alone in Kota away from her home in Delhi. She is determined to become a doctor despite failing twice to get into a good government medical college; private colleges charge double or treble the amount. Vidushi says, "I hope the third time will be my lucky charm." There is every chance she will be disappointed

again despite scoring 643 out of 720, which would have ensured a smooth shoe in. "I can't believe that my dream, as well as the dreams of other honest and hardworking students, has become impossible because of an examination system that is broken, unfair and lacks transparency," she exclaims.

At the centre of the current NEET heat wave is the issue of inflated marks. According to experts, 640-650 is considered a good score. "Last year, students with these marks would have achieved a rank around 10,000, but now they are getting ranks between 30,000-40,000," says Dheeraj Kumar Singh, an advocate who has filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court on

behalf of 20 NEET-UG candidates. Akhil Seelam, a Bengaluru resident, scored an impressive 640 out of 720. His rank, however, is 38,000. "Such a low rank will push me to move out of the city to find a government medical college. I will now have to look at a Tier-2 or -3 city in Karnataka," he says. He is now considering applying to Kasturba Medical College, Mangaluru, Karnataka Institute of Medical Sciences in Hubballi and Mandya Medical College.

Last year, 20,38,596 students appeared for the exam, and 13,991 (0.6 per cent) secured 620-720 marks. Last year's cut-off for government seats was 610.

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Students protest during the ongoing NEET crisis

What's the NEET Controversy?

The NEET-UG, conducted by the NTA, is the gateway to admission to a medical college. This year, the results were declared on June 4

- A total of 2.4 million students competed for just 1,10,000 available seats
- Around 60,000 seats belong to government-run colleges
- This year, an unprecedented 67 students achieved the perfect score of 720 marks
- There was also a significant increase in the number of candidates scoring in the high range of 650-680 marks
- 1,563 candidates were given 'grace marks' for delays at exam centres and because a physics question turned out to have two correct answers



Dr Rohan Krishnan, national chairman, Federation of All India Medical Association

"Instead of giving grace marks to those who lost time, the NTA should have given them more time to finish their paper. They decided on their own to give grace marks. All this smacks of corruption and malpractice."

Brajesh Maheshwari, ALLEN coaching institute, Kota

"Ever since NTA took over, systematic failures have occurred. For a student, even one mark makes a difference in ranking. There should be a thorough investigation into NTA's examination process."

Maheshwar Peri, chairman and founder, Careers 360

"NTA has lost its credibility, and next time they hold any examination, it will be open to challenge. They need to take up forensic and technical audits to ensure scoring is done properly."



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Continued from page 1

However, this year, the number of students in this bracket increased to 58,263 (2.5 per cent) of 23,33,297 who took the exams.

Also, this year, there was a decrease in students in the rank bracket of 520-620. In 2023, 91,001 (or 4.46 per cent) secured ranks between 520 and 620, which decreased to 4.39 per cent this year. "This proves that all bungling was done only in brackets of 620-720, as there are approximately 55,000 to 58,000 government seats in NEET-UG," says Singh. Altogether, there are 1,08,940 MBBS seats in more than 700 medical colleges across the country. Getting into private colleges is almost out of bounds for most, given the huge fee disparity, not to mention, donations. Academics is big business, especially medical and engineering courses. Colleges, a dime a dozen, spring up like mushrooms across the country ready to give every student a chance, almost irrespective of his or her meritocracy. The only criteria seems to be big money.

Many youngsters, including Vidushi, call for a complete retest or a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or judicial probe into the controversial results announced by the National Testing Agency (NTA). It was incidentally announced on June 4, a day when the Lok Sabha election results were also being watched nationwide. Rajasthan's Behror-based Ridhima Rao, who scored 648 out of 720, was shocked when the NEET results were announced 10 days earlier than the scheduled date. "We are compelled to seek justice on the streets, and if we don't get it, we will lose faith in the country's judicial system," she says.

There is no doubt that the exam results are dodgy. A few students and middlemen have been arrested for leaking exam papers in Bihar and Gujarat. A Bihar minister is in the spotlight for his role in fiddling with the NEET system to benefit chosen students. The disputed outcome has instigated a heated and impassioned debate regarding the credibility and reliability of the Indian public examination

Testing Times



Vidushi Sharma, aspirant

"I can't believe that my dream, as well as the dreams of other students, has become impossible because of an examination system that is broken, unfair, and lacks transparency."



V Lalitha, aspirant

"There were several problems in the centre where I wrote the examination. The questions were not printed clearly on the question paper I received. It took 30 minutes for the staff at the centre to give me another print. However, they didn't give me additional time."

Tanmaya Sharma, aspirant

"Last year, if I had scored 657, my ranking would have been 4,000-5,000. But with such inflated marks this year, my ranking has gone up to over 23,000. I don't think I will get a good government college."

Akhil Seelam, aspirant

"Due to NTA's move, my rank had an inflation of 340 per cent. Such a low rank will push me to move out of the city to find a government medical college. I will now have to look at a Tier-2 or 3 city in Karnataka."



system, prompting widespread scrutiny and concern. In response to the growing trend of paper leaks in several states, the central government enacted the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024. It aims to prevent paper leaks and malpractices in government recruitment exams by imposing imprisonment for up to 10 years and a fine of up to ₹1 crore.

Mareshwar Peri, entrepreneur, educationist and the chairman and founder of Careers 360, is skeptical about the bill's efficacy. He believes its execution and implementation remain uncertain. Peri points out that some of the 4,750 different centres in 571 cities across India, which conducted NEET-UG exams are bound to be compromised, considering that it is a pen-and-paper exam, as the question paper comes in at night. His explanation for rampant leaks and examination papers: intense competition. "The competition is more, and the fee disparity is huge. All this leads to corruption and a ready nexus that feeds on demand and supply," says Dr Rohan Krishnan, National Chairman of the Federation of All India Medical Association.

Three examples of hopeful students are disheartening

examples of NEET flawed marking system. Bengaluru-based Devika N, who scored 550 marks, securing a rank of 1.3 lakh dismisses the possibility of a government college seat. "My parents cannot afford a private college. I spent two years preparing for this," she says. Her only option is to drop a year and attempt again next year.

Sonal Chaudhary from Bhagalpur, Bihar, who scored 601 is hopeful of a retest. "I have already started preparations for a drop year and I am studying for next year's exam, but we sincerely hope that on July 8, there will be a positive judgement and a re-exam will be conducted," she says.

Bibhudutta Panigrahi, who scored 482 marks, came within the 1-lakh rank bracket. Although he is not hopeful of a medical seat, Bibhudutta says he might have got a better rank had there been no massive rank inflation this time. "This year even those with 600 marks will face difficulty in getting a seat in government medical colleges," says the Cuttack student.

The ongoing NEET-UG results have exposed some dubious firsts and shady shenanigans.

- 67 students achieved a perfect score of 720 out of 720 and received a percentile of 99.997129
- Grace marks were

allotted to candidates

- Some students had secured 718 or 719 marks, an impossible feat as per the marking system
- Six of the 67 toppers were from the same centre in Haryana, with the same sequence numbers

The student community and parents erupted in nationwide protests. The beleaguered testing body announced on June 8 that the Ministry of Education has established a four-member, high-powered committee to review the grace marks. NTA Director General Subodh Kumar Singh vehemently denied irregularities. Bowing to intense public pressure, on June 14, the NTA informed the Supreme Court that the decision to grant grace marks to 1,563 NEET-UG 2024 candidates has been rescinded. These candidates can opt for a retest on June 23. The retest results will be declared on June 30. However, the Court declined to halt the admissions counselling process, which will begin on July 6. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has given the NTA a clean chit, igniting a second wave of protests. Congress questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "silence" on the scandal. Taking to X, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra wrote: "Why is the

NEET and the Right 'Neeti'

BY INVITATION

Dinesh Singh

Former Vice-Chancellor,
Delhi University; Adjunct
Professor of Mathematics,
University of Houston, US



I do not know what it is with entrance examinations for medical colleges that over the years have led to all sorts of issues of credibility. My assertion here has been prompted as much by the latest noise around the NEET exams as by the ill-begotten practices engendered by various medical entrance examinations prior to the introduction of NEET. These pre-NEET exams had sprouted in various parts of our nation over the past several decades and had begun to lose their credibility. In fact, NEET was prompted to restore credibility and fairness. Unfortunately, the remedy has not worked as well as it should have or could have. We must remember that each time something goes wrong the real loser is the aspirant who has borne high levels of stress and incurred expenses often way beyond his or her means.

The antecedents of such practices date back to well before NEET was introduced. In fact, during my time as the Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, I had uncovered—after strenuous investigations—that our medical entrance examination had been compromised. To stem the rot, I had decided to tag the University of Delhi medical entrance examination with that being conducted by one of our foremost medical institutions. Unfortunately, I discovered that they too had been plagued by an identical problem. My search then led me far and wide only to learn that the same story prevailed almost everywhere. I recount all this only to highlight the fact that the National Testing Agency is up against heavy odds in its bid to maintain the credibility and integrity of the NEET examination.

However, the problem of restoring and maintaining credibility is not an insurmountable one. With some effort, the NTA can easily ensure that the NEET, as also other similar examinations, are conducted in a fair, transparent and equitable manner. Of course, the real effort shall lie in putting in place a significant one-time effort to create the right question bank. This shall require the constitution of genuine experts who understand the game of enlightened testing and are also knowledge experts. Let me also hasten to add that there is a shortage of such folk. Mediocrity, ineptitude and even corruption are the bane of our world of academe. It shall also require some ingenious use of technology that shall ensure efficiency and confidentiality. I have thought over such a scheme many times, but this column is not the right place to delineate the algorithm. I say this with much solemnity that the idea does not involve rocket science and shall hopefully work just as well for NEET as for any such major examination.

However, the moot point remains unaddressed: are we examining our youth out of their minds by heaping one examination after another on them? This obsession with imposing numerous entrance examinations is stemming creativity in our youth. And my fear is that very soon our nation may appear from outer space as one gigantic examination centre.

government ignoring the voices of lakhs of students? Students want answers to legitimate questions related to the rigging of the NEET exam results. Is it not the government's responsibility to investigate and resolve these legitimate complaints?" Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin also posted on X, saying NEET and other centrally conducted examinations are "anti-poor; undermine federal polity, and are against social justice". A fervent opponent of the system, he reiterated his earlier demand that the state regain control over the MBBS admission process.

year, it has gone up to over 23,000. I now have to wait for counselling. I don't think I will get admission in a good government college," says Tanmaya, one of the 20 petitioners seeking redressal. Advocate Singh says, "The sanctity of the examination process has come into question. We are praying for a court-monitored investigation and a comprehensive post-examination analysis."

V Lalitha, who took the examination at a centre in Salem in Tamil Nadu, secured 446 marks in her first attempt at NEET in 2023. Firm on pursuing medicine, she opted for coaching for a year and scored 624 marks this year. "However, there were several problems in the centre where I wrote the examination. The questions were not printed clearly on the question paper I received. It took 30 minutes for the staff to give me another print. However, they didn't give me additional time," says the youngster who believes that she could have scored around 680 if she had enough time.

A section of students, who appeared for NEET at the exam centres in Alagar Public School and Kamalavathi Higher Secondary School in Sahupuram in Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu, were detected over a different and tougher question paper provided to them. A Vignesh Subramanian, who attended the exam in Alagar Public School, says, "Biology questions involved long statements, and hence were time-consuming. More than 60 questions were lengthy, which left us with less time to attend questions from physics and chemistry." Many who attended the exam from these centres say they were able to attend only 150 questions and thus ended up scoring between 300 and 500 only.

Students who worked through the year, putting in so much effort for many years, stand to lose. Recalling her days at Kota, Vidushi says, "Living alone for two years was not easy." A day after NEET results were announced, an 18-year-old aspirant hailing from Madhya Pradesh's Rewa killed herself in Kota—the 11th suspected student suicide in Kota this year. "It was a tough time for me and my family when I lived alone. I hope we can overcome these challenging times, and I can fulfill my, and my parent's, dreams of becoming a doctor," Vidushi says. Corruption is not just killing students, it is also killing the Indian education system and meritocracy. A NEET solution isn't easy in the current convoluted circumstances, but a beginning can be made when the system itself has failed its exam to give Indian youth the creditable future they deserve.

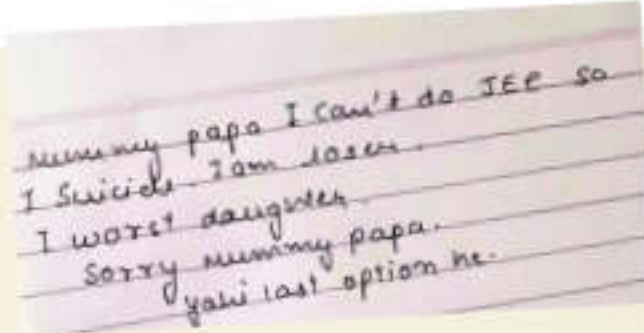
(With Puran Choudhary, Mrittika Banerjee, Saunyangi Yadav, S Godson Wisely Dass, Subashini Vijayakumar)

The Starting Point: Vyapam Scam

The Vyapam scam, also known as the Madhya Pradesh Professional Examination Board scam, was a massive admission and recruitment scandal that took place in Madhya Pradesh. It was responsible for conducting entrance exams for medical, engineering, management, and other professional courses and recruitment exams for various government posts in Madhya Pradesh. The scam that was going on for a decade, came to light in 2013 when irregularities were discovered in the Pre-Medical Test. It involved a vast network of middlemen, candidates, and officials who colluded to manipulate exam results, facilitate impersonation. Once investigations began led by the CBI and a Special Task Force appointed by the Madhya Pradesh government, there were mysterious deaths of several accused, witnesses and whistleblowers. The CBI had said that the accused candidates had adopted a unique 'engine-bogie' system or method of cheating in the exam by engaging intelligent students (engines) as solver candidates to allow copying of their answers by the beneficiaries (bogies), who would sit behind them.

The Killing Fields of Kota

The coaching industry in Kota is estimated to be worth around \$500 million. Students from across the country come to prepare for exams like NEET and JEE. Each year, 2,50,000 students from across the country flock to Kota for training in its 300 or more coaching institutes. There are roughly 4,000 hostels and 40,000 paying guest facilities. Of the 1 million students, who appear for the JEE exam, only 10,000 qualify for the 23 IITs. Of the 2 million, who sit for the NEET exam, only 1,40,000 bag a seat at a medical college. The coaching centres have punishing and gruelling schedules with students studying for 18 hours a day, seven days a week.





Shaping Future-Ready Learners With INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS

Education is evolving beyond mere facts, embracing personalised learning, microlearning, and immersive experiences. Technology drives this transformation, shaping a future where lifelong learning is paramount. With adaptive approaches and experiential learning, education becomes dynamic, empowering individuals for a rapidly changing world.

In the near future, the world is going to be tougher, rife with pessimists and pejoirists. Lentitude will have no room, especially when it comes to learning. So, equipping oneself for the even tougher world of competition is vital lest one risks being branded a dandiprat.

As is said, the goal of education is disciplined understanding. It is not about mere accumulation of facts; it aims to cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and lifelong learning for holistic personal and societal advancement.

In a landscape where optimism must be earned, education requires undergoing a profound transformation, driven by a wave of innovative trends that are redefining how we learn and grow. A positive trend now evolving is with technology. As it continues to advance and the demands of the modern workforce evolve, educators are embracing new concepts that go beyond traditional classroom models.

Personalised and Adaptive Learning

One of the key innovations in education is the rise of personalised and adaptive learning. Powered by artificial intelligence and data analytics, these approaches tailor the learning experience to the unique needs and pace of each student. By continuously assessing progress and adjusting content accordingly, personalised learning ensures that every individual can thrive, regardless of their starting point or learning style.

The one-size-fits-all approach of the past is giving way to highly customised learning journeys.



Students are no longer passive recipients of information but active participants in shaping their educational paths. This shift empowers learners to take ownership of their growth, fostering deeper engagement and mastery of the material.

Microlearning and Spaced Repetition

Alongside personalisation, the education sector is embracing the power of microlearning and spaced repetition. Rather than overwhelming students with lengthy lectures or dense textbooks, microlearning breaks down content into bite-sized, easily digestible chunks.

Research shows that our brains are better equipped to retain information when it is presented in short, focused bursts. Microlearning taps into this natural learning process, making it an increasingly popular approach.

Spaced repetition further enhances the effectiveness of microlearning by systematically revisiting key concepts over time. This

technique, grounded in cognitive science, helps cement knowledge and skills through repeated exposure, leading to long-term retention. It is a powerful combination that is transforming the way professional development, corporate training, and even traditional academic curricula are approached.

Immersive and Experiential Learning

The rise of virtual and augmented reality technologies is also revolutionising the learning experience. Immersive environments allow students to step into simulated scenarios, where they can actively engage with course material in a dynamic, hands-on manner.

Whether it is medical students practicing surgical procedures or engineering students designing and testing prototypes, these immersive experiences bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Experiential learning, which emphasises learning by doing, further amplifies the impact of these innovative approaches. By providing opportunities for real-world

application and problem-solving, educators are cultivating essential skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability – qualities that are increasingly sought after in the modern workforce.

Lifelong Learning and Continuous Upskilling

Perhaps the most profound shift in education is the recognition that learning is a lifelong journey, not confined to the traditional schooling years. As the pace of technological and societal change accelerates, the need for continuous upskilling and reskilling has become paramount. The half-life of skills is rapidly diminishing, and professionals must be prepared to adapt and evolve throughout their careers.

Innovative education trends are responding to this reality by fostering a culture of lifelong learning. Institutions are offering flexible, on-demand learning opportunities, from online courses and microcredentials to personalised coaching and mentorship programs.

The goal is to empower individuals to take charge of their professional development, equipping them with the tools and mindset to thrive in an ever-changing landscape.

As we embrace these innovative learning experiences, the future of education becomes increasingly dynamic, personalised, and empowering. By utilising the power of technology, cognitive science, and a learner-centric approach, educators are paving the way for a more engaged, adaptable, and future-ready generation.

The journey of learning has only just begun.

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The Multiple-choice Question Format Should be Scrapped for Fair Assessment

ACUTE ANGLE

Anand Neelakantan

Author of *Asura*, *Ajaya* series, *Vanara* and *Bahubali* trilogy



India is not new to examination scams. Corruption starts young in a country starved of ethics and morality. But the NEET examination scandal that has broken out now would be perhaps the most stupidly organised corruption scandal.

For years, the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for admissions to India's resource-crunched medical colleges has been mired in controversy. In a nation facing a severe shortage of doctors, over 2.5 million hopefuls sit for a three-hour and 20-minute multiple-choice exam, vying for admission to about 10,900 seats across 706 medical colleges throughout India.

As with any highly competitive exam in India, NEET is no exception to cut-throat competition. As a result, there is a thriving industry of coaching centres where teenagers are given shortcuts and simplified methods to conquer the multiple-choice examination.

Instead of comprehending the material, the pressure is on to quickly answer multiple-choice questions. The demand for enrollment in these coaching centres is so high that there are now ones specifically for gaining admission to top-tier coaching centres. This competitive frenzy has a dark side, even without leaked exam papers and unfair grading practices. The constant emphasis on competitiveness hinders students from impoverished backgrounds from pursuing higher education. The secondary education

system becomes obsolete as success is measured solely on the ability to solve multiple-choice questions within a set time frame. The exorbitant fee for coaching centres makes higher education unattainable for those who are poor.

India's rural areas face a critical shortage of doctors. Nevertheless, the NEET exam is structured in a way that advantages students from affluent families in urban centres. These students secure spots in government medical colleges where their education costs are significantly subsidised by taxpayer money. The NEET exemplifies a system designed to be highly discriminatory against the underprivi-

leged and those from rural India. It is held under extremely strict conditions that resembles a police state. Invigilators watch closely like hawks, CCTV cameras track every movement, and candidates undergo thorough checks for concealed notes or devices. Fingerprint scanners verify the identity of each test-taker to ensure they match the registered candidate. Even India's nuclear facilities don't experience this level of scrutiny and security.



It's absurd to think that a corrupt system of bureaucrats attempt one question, the maximum they can score is 716. Even if one question is answered incorrectly, the maximum possible mark becomes 715. Despite this, NEET evaluators have given marks like 719 and 718; their reasoning remains a mystery.

Their latest justification is that they gave grace marks to some candidates who were delayed in starting the exam. This turns the entire examination from being objective to subjective. There is no transparency in how, why and to whom

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Their latest justification is that they gave grace marks to some candidates who were delayed in starting the exam. This turns the entire examination from being objective to subjective. There is no transparency in how, why and to whom

these grace marks were given.

Some examination centres, especially in Gujarat, are so blessed that they have produced many toppers in a row. The National Testing Agency expects us to believe that the perfect scores of seven candidates from this exceptional examination centre are a coincidence. It is just incidental that the seven have consecutive enrolment numbers. Meanwhile, news is coming from Bihar that question papers were sold for amounts ranging from ₹30-50 lakh. The clandestine advancement of the NEET exam results by 10 days to align with the general election results suggests an attempt to obscure the scandal amid the commotion following the elections. It is disappointing how the courts have taken this farce so lightly and postponed the hearing of the case filed against it to July 8. It has refused to stay in the admission process, thus again denying justice to those who can't beat the system using money, corruption or influence.

If the elected government has any commitment to the youth of the country, they should cancel the NEET results without any delay and order a retest.

This is merely a temporary solution, and in the long run, we need to shift away from the multiple-choice question format for competitive exams. Doing so would dismantle the power of coaching centres and create a fairer environment for everyone. This nation doesn't belong solely to the wealthy and powerful manipulating the system through corrupt and unjust methods. Even if the above statement is not true, shouldn't we at least pretend that there is some justice and fairness left in this country? Or have we lost even that fig leaf of shame in our blatant selfish and competitive pursuit?

mail@asura.co.in

It is Gossip Time in Delhi About NDA's Future

PROVOCATEUR

Ravi Shankar

ravi@newindianexpress.com



Washington DC or London, New Delhi or Paris, the oxygen of power is gossip in any capital city. Delhi is not just the capital of India; it's also its gossip capital. The current chinwag during the rounds is that the Modi government will fall soon although there is little evidence to prove that.

Conniving Cassandras predict that the BJP is losing many of its 12 MPs in West Bengal. Goss says three BJP MPs are in touch with TMC and a fourth is on the way. How they will evade the anti-defection law is a mystery known only to *Didi*. Similarly in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP was utterly humiliated, Delhi's political blatherers have heard from a fly on the wall of 7 Race Course Road that Yogi sabotaged Modi because the PM wants Bulldozer Baba to shift to Delhi and lose his local base. Another shambolic shu-shu: Modi is looking for a fall guy for his poor Varanasi performance: Yogi. All this speculation looks like eggs in a cuckoo's nest because BJP needs to win the state again in three-and-a-half years; replacing Yogi with a lukewarm caste-based candidate will be plain stupid, as the new seat-selection experiment showed.

Wait, there's more. That the ageing Nitish Kumar is unwell and loses time is no secret. A hilarious hearsay about the NDA meet a couple of weeks ago was Nitish reminded a bemused prime minister about sharing *samosas*, which perplexed the sedate Chandrababu Naidu who could have suspected *samosa* is code for Cabinet berth. Pessimists indulging in NDA clishmaclaver say Nitish's debilitation has the 12 JDU MPs worrying about their future and some of them could even switch loyalties to Tejashwi. Should the JDU disintegrate, its voter alliance could switch to the RJD more than the BJP because a part of its Muslim-Yadav vote bank has more affinity with the Lalu clan. Impressive logic perhaps, because Nitish has just two ministers in the Modi Cabinet; the same as Chandrababu Naidu's TDP.

Both Narendra Modi and Naidu are no walkovers. The Telugu titleholder of 2024 is unlikely to compromise on important issues, which the imperious Modi will neither appreciate nor accept. Modi's strong personality brooks no insubordination, which is exactly how he sees TDP ministers in his Cabinet: subordinates. Having governed the country for 10 years without consultation, compromise, confabulation or conciliation, Modi believes it is his absolute right to take independent decisions: the Cabinet portfolios allotted to allies shows who is top dog. Labrish about Naidu's uneasy relationship with Modi says the Andhra CM has made it clear that they are his ministers, not Modi's. Talk to TDP politicians, and they'll tell you Naidu is bitter about the days he spent in jail since his *bête noire* Jagan fought the last elections as a BJP ally. Delhi tattlers say Naidu and the Congress have been in touch even before he threw in his lot with Modi. The Congress is watching for its Aha moment, according to back-fence talk.

The most fantastic tattle of all is that Modi and Amit Shah have conveyed to their allies that they are ready to sit in the Opposition. No prime minister or home minister has wielded such Olympian power in India ever. No Indian prime minister has straddled the world stage as visibly as Modi. Modi is facing the greatest test of his political life. To be Modi or not to be Modi is the question. No gossip-monger has the answer to that except Modi.

It's Okay to Not Know What to Do

MILLENNIALS AT WORK

Utkarsh Amitabh

CEO, Network Capital; Chevening Fellow, University of Oxford



Mary Oliver's poem *The Summer Day* concludes by asking, "What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" As someone who has always nurtured varied interests, figuring out this question hasn't been straightforward. There have been times when I excelled at things I didn't care much about and struggled with things I loved.

The most popular career advice is to follow your passion, but what if you aren't sure what your passion is? For most people, passion isn't found sitting under a tree and waiting for the metaphorical apple to fall. Rather it is discovered and nurtured through various micro-experiments designed to figure out what to work on, with whom, and why.

Some people like NYU Professor Scott Galloway reject the passion hypothesis altogether. They suggest that young professionals should follow their talent, i.e., do something they are good at, gain some financial security, and then explore other interests. That's a reasonable suggestion but risks nudging young people toward stable careers, but less meaningful lives. It can be challenging to work on stuff one isn't interested in with the hope that things will naturally fall into place.

To be clear, Galloway's suggestion is practical, but I think following one's curiosity is a better bet than following one's passion of talent. Curiosity creates engagement, which in turn sparks passion. Following that spark over an extended period creates expertise/talent which is often rewarded handsomely in the job market.

Therefore, patience is the unsung virtue and the missing piece of the puzzle when it comes to figuring out what you want to do with your life. David Epstein defines the "sampling period" as a crucial phase where we try a variety of activities and experiences before narrowing our focus. "Sampling periods are crucial, he argues, because they allow us to discover organically what we love doing and most want to succeed in.

It is not incidental to the development of great performers—something to be excised in the interest of a head start—it is crucial."

There are many illustrious examples of people who benefited from having a sampling period to put their curiosities and interests in the proper perspective. Roger Federer dabbled in basketball, handball, skiing, wrestling, swimming, table tennis and skateboarding before taking up tennis. Richard Feynman tried locksmithing, art and percussion instruments like bongo drums before focusing his energies on quantum mechanics. Toni Morrison explored dancing, acting and teaching before she became a celebrated author.



As a society, we may continue championing prodigies, but we should also normalise and celebrate those in their sampling periods. Having this implicit pressure of becoming the quintessential suitable boy or girl who has everything figured out almost always backfires. Designing one's life and knowing what to do with it doesn't come with a prescription manual. It should be an open-ended exploration with sufficient checks and balances.

I started the "I don't know what I want to do with my life" Fellowship in Network Capital largely to evangelise the idea that most people don't know what they want most of the time and that is okay. Guided experiments conducted with trusted peers and mentors can turn the spectre of career confusion into a shared discovery of conviction, talent and purpose.

So if you don't know where you are going in life, there is no need to

wallow in despair. Find people you trust, share the epicentre of your confusion, and try out stuff that piques your curiosity. You may not find what you are looking for in one go, but if you keep at it, you will get there.

I have had an extended sampling period. My first degree was in mechanical engineering, after which I read liberal arts, earned an MBA, worked in corporate for several years, started a company, sold part of it to a unicorn, turned to moral philosophy, and then enrolled in a PhD. I am happy with where I am in my life, but that's not because of professional milestones. I am glad the experimentation that I started in my teens continued till my 30s, and will probably go on for

the rest of my life.

The one thing I did reasonably well was to not approach my micro-experiments like a tourist: Come, explore, take pictures and move on. I treated my experiments with the same seriousness as my most important goals. Even if some of them didn't work out as I had expected, I got precious insights along the way. That's how I inched my way towards my desired state of being.

Other people can help you along the way and they can be fellow passengers on your journey, but the bulk of the work needs to be done by you. If you don't know where you are headed, that's fine. Your eureka moment could be an experiment away. You owe it to yourself and the wider world to keep trying. While you are at it, remember to treat it like an adventure, not a chore. It won't be easy, but will be worth your while.

Posts on X: @utkarsh_amitabh

Deepfake and the Truth About It

BY INVITATION

Anu Aggarwal

Actor, speaker, yogi and author



Have you ever considered how you who are affecting and thereby creating a bigger reality we live in? It seeps inside, worming into us, explodes outside and hits us right back. "When in today's world people are fake, then why complain about deepfake? We are so fake. Look at each one of us." While this I said in zest, in a short video on social media, the reel went viral. I was humouring a deeply worrisome phenomenon.

After all, hardly anyone seems to know what our Vedas purported, that pure intelligence is right inside our brains. Recently when I mentioned this to a Harvard-educated CEO who looked to use hi company's CSR funds for education, and mental health that my foundation caters to, he was aghast. Deepfakes have existed since 2017, it is easy to use. It needs no level of skill, it is child's play thanks to Generative

Artificial Intelligence, or Gen AI.

Late last year, a deepfake video of actor Rashmika Mandanna went viral. She is not the only celeb targeted. Alia Bhatt, Ranveer Singh, Katrina Kaif and many more have all had their faces pulled in deepfake videos.

Is everybody, whose deepfake is out, a victim? No. A lot of deepfakes are with the consent of the individual. Social media campaigns have been made using deepfake.

What exactly is deepfake? It is customised with the help of AI tools that can create hyper-realistic video and converse like real companions. Recent announcements from OpenAI and Google

I/O also prove that AI will soon be able to both see and hear you using an omni-channel approach.

One of the first deepfake videos to get national prominence was of Barack Obama saying "President Trump is a total dip...." It was made by comedian Jordan Peele. So how do you spot a deepfake? When you see some inconsistency in the audio and video, the lip movement, or if

the face appears a little wooden, then you know it is fake. How do we tackle this? "Deepfakes are increasingly blurring the lines between reality and fiction... As such, regulations to address this threat are now an urgent necessity," says Prabhu Ram, Head, Industry Intelligence Group at CyberMedia Research.

According to a BBC report, the creation of sexually explicit images of an adult is a criminal offense in England and Wales. While several states in the US have reportedly updated their laws to add deepfakes to existing prohibitions. In India, there are no specific regulations. More updated legislation around the use of AI should be the first step India, while campaigns raising awareness will help.

When managing a Buddhist meditation centre, one of the practices I worked on was 'Acceptance'. Accept what comes. However hard that be. I tried to follow it to the T. I accepted my smattered body and miracle healing happened. While enjoying the easy technical assistance of AI, mindfulness is a key to wellness.

Instagram: @amusulalnu

What exactly is deepfake? It is customised with the help of AI tools that can create hyper-realistic video and converse like real companions

You are Just Enough

BY INVITATION

Debashis Chatterjee

Author, Professor & Director, IIM Kozhikode



This century's most underrated disease is called, 'Never Enough'. You feel never enough about your imperfect dental arrangement or a perfect mental derangement. Glitzy mass media keeps airbrushing physical imperfections. Schools make a feverish pitch for near perfect scores measured in Fahrenheit (98.6 degrees onwards) rather than Celsius. The sense of insufficiency runs deep in our society. It practically gallops through our social media.

Beaming from a huge billboard on the way to the Kempegowda airport in Bengaluru, I see the picture of a bestselling author. He is advertising his book that reads something like, 'How to Think like a Monk and Live Like a Millionaire'. One need not read this book to envy the author's perfect display of teeth and perked up hair painted on the board. You wonder how can one successfully drive a train with the double engines of a missionary and a mercenary pulling the compartments in opposite directions.

The roadside hair transplant clinic shapes your identity in subversive ways. It makes you feel that you do not have enough hair where it matters. Your identity is measured by your nonexistent hair. Here are coaching centres that promise to give you waterproof, fireproof and bulletproof confidence for aching job interviews. A burning anxiety surfaces in your internal dialogue and leaves you with a profound sense of insufficiency.

The social contagion of 'Never Enough' hypnotises you into utter helplessness. It tells you that you must live into a perpetual state of insecurity unless you are elected to the assembly of the fortunate few. A man hugging an electric pole shouts, 'the pole is not leaving me.' The reality is that he is not able to leave the pole. The neurotic builds a castle in the air. The psychotic lives in it. Psychiatrists collect the rentals. The wanting man is always in want.

Anxious generations have resorted to mass meditation. There is nothing wrong with shutting your eyes, bellowing breath through alternate nostrils and rubbing your withering nails to grow a stream of jet black hair. Just that these activities are

diversions. Meditation is a way of seeing yourself as you are and recognising the world as it is. It has little to do with whether you live inside a cave or a castle.

"I want financial independence. I want a job", cries the unemployed man. There is no real independence here. You start depending on your job instead of your father's pension. The poor feel inadequate because of lack of money. The rich feel inadequate because of lack of meaning. In the course of one life we take on many roles: of a manager, a spouse, a business partner or a social activist. We hope that these roles will fulfil us. Well, the roles do not fulfil us, we fulfil the roles.

Know that the perfect human exists only in farewell speeches and obituaries. Embrace your imperfections. Do not get bound in this misleading cause effect mental model. If I can get more marks, remarks or likes, then I will be happy. Happiness, like a fleeting butterfly will always elude you when pursued but will come to you when you learn to be still. Don't try to keep up with the Khans and the Kardashians. Restore yourself to your level of self-sufficiency. You are just enough!

LinkedIn: debashischatterjee1

Getting a Sunny Outlook

With the depletion of the ozone layer, using sunscreen has become more necessary than ever. Here's why you should not ignore this golden rule for skincare

By IRAM ARA IBRAHIM

Too much of a good thing, anything, hurts. So will sunlight: too much of it and you get sunburn, especially from UV rays. One of the easiest ways to guard the skin's appearance and health is to apply sunscreen. Even on cloudy days, our skin is susceptible to sunlight which could lead to discolouration, wrinkles and in extreme cases even skin cancer: Dr. Anil KV Minz, Senior Consultant-Dermatology, Marengo Asia Hospitals, Faridabad says, "Using sunscreen is a simple yet crucial step in any skincare routine. It will protect your skin from immediate and long-term skin damage due to exposure to the sun. Sun prolonged exposure over time also increases the risk of non-cancerous skin growth, scaly patches and pre-cancerous skin lesions. Apart from wrinkles, skin spots, moles and tags, also encourages pigmentation. Sunscreen can help people sensitive to sunlight or those who are on medication which increases photosensitivity."

HOW TO USE SUNSCREEN CORRECTLY?

1. Choose a sunscreen that has an SPF of 30 or higher, is water resistant, and provides broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB rays) coverage. When this sunscreen is also a tinted sunscreen with iron oxide, you better protect your skin from developing dark spots. Iron oxide protects your skin from the sun's visible light.
2. Apply sunscreen before going outdoors. It takes approximately 15 minutes for your skin to absorb the sunscreen and protect you. If you wait until you are in the sun to apply sunscreen, your skin is unprotected and can lead to sunburn.
3. Use enough sunscreen. Most adults need about 1 ounce — or enough to fill a shot glass — to fully cover their body. Rub the sunscreen thoroughly into your skin.
4. Apart from your face, remember to cover your neck, ears, eyelids, feet, and legs. For hard to reach areas like your back, ask someone to help you or use a spray sunscreen. If you have thinning hair, either apply sunscreen to your scalp or wear a wide brimmed hat. To protect your lips, apply a lip balm with an SPF of at least 30.
5. To remain protected when outdoors, reapply sunscreen every two hours, and immediately after swimming or sweating. People who get sunburned usually don't reapply, used too little sunscreen, or used an expired sunscreen.

SUNSCREEN FOR DIFFERENT SKIN TYPES

DRY SKIN

If you have dry skin, sunscreens that provide hydration are ideal for you. Look for cream-based or lotion-based sunscreens that have a thicker consistency as this formulation assists dry skin to retain moisture and provides a barrier of protection. Choose products with moisturising components like hyaluronic acid or glycerin and at least 30 SPF (sun protection factor).

SENSITIVE SKIN

If you have sensitive skin, avoid sunscreen options that include alcohol, fragrances, oxybenzone, para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA), salicylates, and cinnamates. Sensitive skin types commonly tolerate physical sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. Mineral-based sunscreens containing ceramides or calming plant extracts, like chamomile or aloe vera, can also help nourish and calm the skin and are the ideal choice for sensitive skin.

OILY OR ACNE-PRONE SKIN

This type of skin needs additional thought when choosing a sunscreen. Look for non-comedogenic, broad-spectrum, water or gel-based formulations to prevent pore clogging and worsening of outbreaks. Sunscreens with a matte finish control excessive sebum production and create a shine-free appearance. Look for sunscreens with niacinamide, salicylic acid, green tea, and tea tree as these compounds reduce irritation and help control oil production.

NORMAL SKIN

If you neither have dry skin nor oily, the first thing we would like to ask is how does it feel to be God's favourite? Since you have a normal skin type, your journey to find near-perfect sunscreen options is pretty straightforward. Go for a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB radiation. Ingredients like zinc oxide and titanium dioxide provide better protection against UV exposure. Look for lightweight, non-greasy solutions that soak quickly and leave no white cast.

HOW TO GET INTO THE HABIT OF WEARING SUNSCREEN CONSISTENTLY

- A good way to incorporate sunscreen in your routine is by associating it with a morning activity you do daily—such as placing a sunscreen tube in your bathroom for ease of application.
- If you have the tendency to forget, it helps to stash miniature tubes in different locations like your purse, car and work desk for a visual reminder.
- You can also choose to set a reminder on your phone every 2 hours to reapply sunscreen.

SOUGHT AFTER SUNSCREEN BRANDS IN INDIA



MAKEUP PRODUCTS WITH SPF

While SPF-enriched cosmetics certainly help double down on sun protection, it's probably not enough to limit the harmful effects of ultraviolet rays. However, here are a few products that contain SPF.



AYURWISDOM Dr Ramya Alakkal

The Ayurvedic Way to Fight Fever

The monsoon is here, and will soon establish itself over most of the country. Unfortunately, so will the usual health issues. Preparation is needed, and ayurveda has your back. *Jwaram* as elaborated in the Ayurveda *Samhitas* is one of the most common clinical entities that affects the human population in its different forms. Literally translating *jwaram* to fever may not do justice to the term as envisaged in Ayurveda texts.

Jwaram represents a wide spectrum of clinical diagnosis where body has high fever and pain along with symptoms like cough, throat pain, breathing difficulty, skin issues, loss of appetite, etc. The ayurvedist would diagnose it to be *vatika jwara*, *paithika jwara*, *kapha jwara*, *vatapitha*, *pitha kapha*, etc.

How to Identify

Identifying the probable onset of fever is the most important aspect. A fever can start from an infection, a viral attack, metabolic changes, from dengue to malaria to typhoid which definitely would need medical attention. However, if the temperature is not initially very high and you don't experience too much fatigue, in ayurveda it is called *poorvaroopa*. It's further progression can be controlled.

What to Avoid

Avoiding direct exposure to the wind and rains is important. The rain that is with *sheetha guna* (cold property) would aggravate the similar *guna* in *kapha*.

It's one important location is the head and if you are already a *kapha prakrithi* or with *kapha* prone nature, you will immediately experience cough, cold and throat pain which will then lead to fever. Always have an umbrella or a raincoat when you are out.

Prevention

Try bathing with hot water. Maintaining a routine to use warm water adding little *tila tala* (ginger oil) for gargling is also very beneficial. People who are prone to

respiratory issues like cold, cough should start taking *tulsi* leaves. For people who have issues with digestion, use of ginger can be fruitful. Adding ginger to tea, diet recipes, etc. Also, the practice of "*gudaardrakam*" (intake of equal amount of ginger and jaggery in a pounded way) early in the morning on an empty stomach can help improve *agni* (the digestive fire) and prevent inflammation.

What to Eat

The diet must be light, easy to digest, freshly prepared, hot, not too spicy during rainy season to avoid health issues in general. The fluid intake must be taken care of. Too much of drinking water can be avoided by people with *kapha* but those with *vata* and *pitha* are allowed. Always use water that is boiled with contents like, *jeera*, *ajwain*, *tulsi*.

The medication spectrum

Ayurveda has a large spectrum of internal medications ranging from *gutikas*, *churna*, *kashaya aasavarishtha* etc are prescribed by the practitioner after examining the patient. *Sudarshanam gutika*, *taxmivilasa rasam*, *vettumaran gutika*, *vilwadi*, *gorochanadi*, *pravala pishti*, *amritarishtam* *vasarishtam* etc to name a few.

Environmental preparedness

As we all are aware, the importance of environmental cleanliness to avoid mosquitoes, flies etc from breeding, *dhoopana* is a process of fumigating the house, spaces etc which acts as prevention for bacteria, fungal and insect growth. *Aparajitha dhoopa*, a very important formulation mentioned in *ashtanga hrdaya* is practiced widely.

The author is a Professor at the Department of Panchakarma, Ashtamgam Ayurveda Medical College, Kerala

FIT BIT



MOUTHWASH WOES

A new study reveals that commonly used alcohol-based mouthwashes could negatively impact the oral microbiome, the community of bacteria in the mouth, potentially increasing the risk of periodontal diseases and certain cancers. The oral microbiome is essential for digestion and maintaining oral health. Experts suggest that good and bad microorganisms are present in the oral cavity and our oral hygiene plays a crucial role in balancing them. The study found that three months of daily use of alcohol-based mouthwash led to an increase in two species of opportunistic bacteria: *Fusobacterium nucleatum* and *Streptococcus anginosus*. These bacteria are associated with a higher risk of gum disease, as well as esophageal and colorectal (colon) cancers. The researchers observed a decrease in *Actinobacteria*, a group of bacteria crucial for regulating blood pressure.

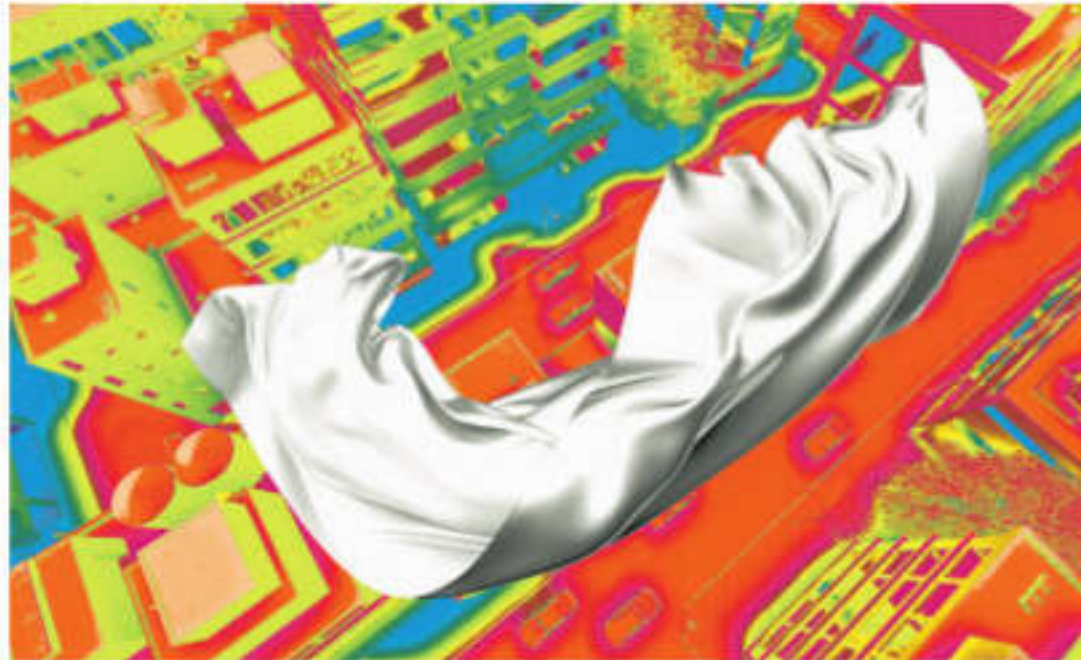


ICE-CREAM DAYS

Low-fat ice creams are changing the dessert scene in India and there's no denying that. Some brands have taken the onus of treating Indians to healthy, low-fat ice cream this summer. These innovative products cater to health-conscious consumers seeking indulgence without guilt, offering delicious alternatives that align with their dietary goals and preferences. The founders of some of these brands claim that they used skimmed milk instead of full cream and plant-based sweeteners to make their products low in calories. Fresh fruit pulp is used instead of fruit concentrates in their ice creams to keep the calorie count in mind. Not just low-calorie ice creams, you know the market is brimming with other products too that promise to be healthy.

Truly Cool Clothes

An all-new fabric that radiates heat away



HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM OTHER RADIATIVE TEXTILES?

by surrounding structures. Some cooling fabrics and building materials already rely on this radiative cooling principle, but most of those designs do not account for radiation from the sun or infrared radiation from structures like buildings and pavement.

What else can it be used for?

Researchers suggest this cooling textile could be used on buildings, in cars, or even for food storage and shipping in order to lessen the need for refrigeration, which has a significant climate impact of its own. The textile could have health benefits

for those in extreme heat conditions.

High temperatures can lead to a lot of health related issues. According to the World Health Organisation, heat stress is actually the leading cause of weather-related deaths. As climate change makes heat waves more common and more severe, it's increasing the number of people exposed to this heat, and the potential health risks they face.

There's some way to go yet. Researchers have established that this new fabric can cool skin temperatures but public acceptance and mass production remains to be worked on.

1. The top layer is made of polymethylpentene or PMP, a type of plastic commonly used for packaging; the researchers had to figure out how to spin it into a fiber.
2. The second is a sheet of silver nanowires, which acts like a mirror to reflect infrared radiation.
3. The top two layers block both the solar radiation and the ambient radiation reflected off of surfaces.
4. The third layer can be any conventional fabric, like wool or cotton.
5. The main thickness comes from the conventional fabric, the top layer is about 1/100th of a human hair.

PRODUCT REVIEW

Soft 'n' Smooth

I generally avoid applying foundation. But there are days when you need that extra sheen and smoothness. I found my answer in Rivona's Bright Pink Cream. It ticked all the right boxes for me with its foundation-like finish and moisturising ability. The lightweight cream has a pleasant aroma, and I quite like the shade. It helps reduce pores and provides instant spot coverage, which due to its hue seamlessly blends into the skin. The best part is that it doesn't make the skin greasy and offers sun protection, making it a comfortable all-day wear. The application bit is an easy-breezy one, with the product not caking the skin. It also heals acne scars and reduces sebum production if used regularly over a period of two weeks. While the product promises a reduction of fine lines and wrinkles, I didn't notice any change, so not sure about the claims. But I would still bat for the cream as it suited my combination skin type to the T—neither too drying, nor oily, and a nice glow too!

—Medha Dutta Yadav

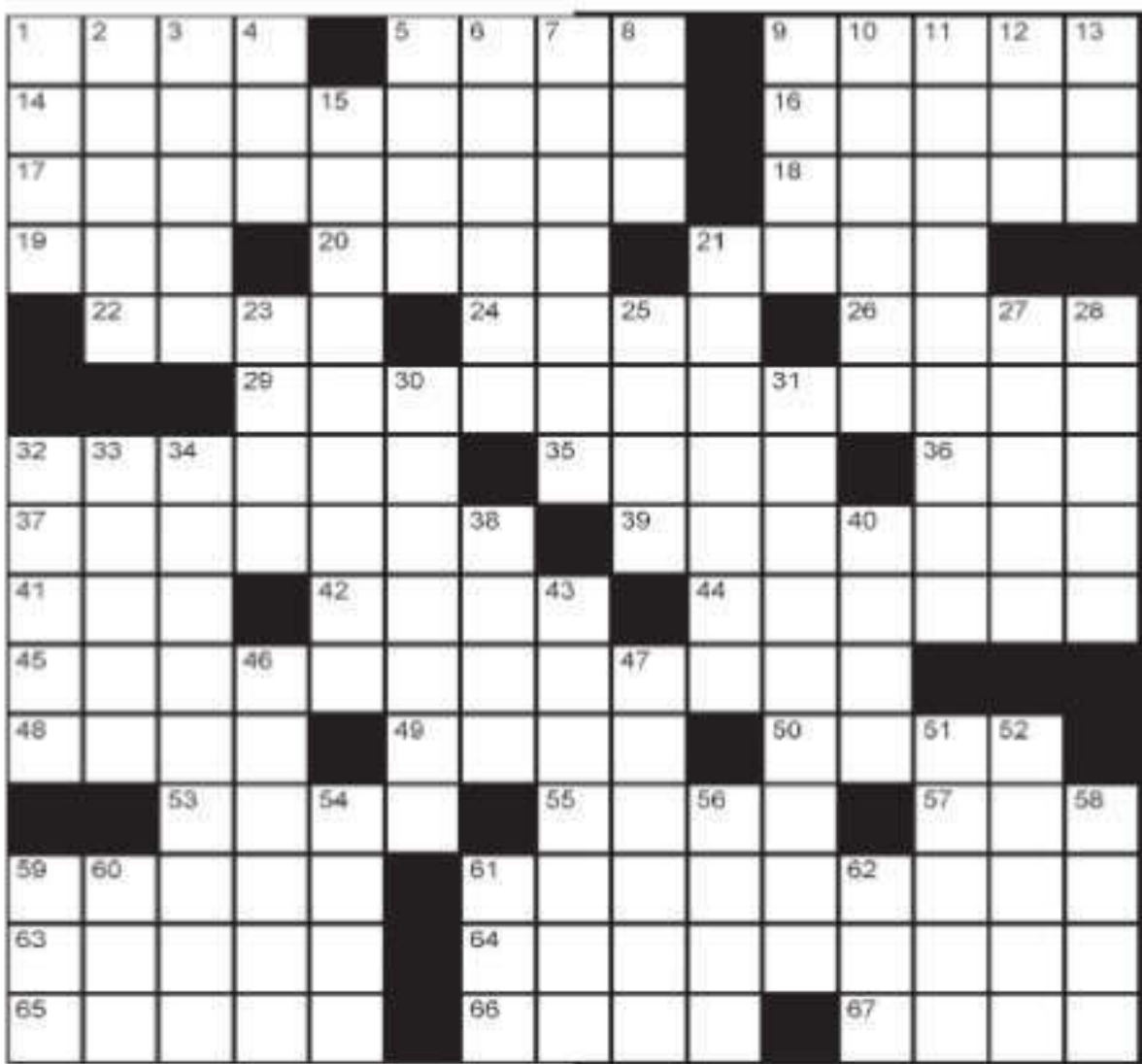


Rivona's Bright Pink Cream
Price: ₹799

★★★★★

Available: online

CROSSWORD | FAST WALKER — 401



Across

- 1 Little devils
5 Jan. 15, for Martin Luther King Jr.
9 Moistened, as a turkey
14 Ironic tattoo words in a Milky Way commercial
16 Crooked
17 Smart aleck
18 Back track?
19 Capitol one?: Abbr.
20 Berenstein bear in a blue bonnet
21 Enlist again
22 Abound (with)
24 Sailing the ocean
26 Actress Sorvino
29 Pie charts?
32 Soda in some Shirley Temples
35 Father, as a horse
36 "Truthfully," in a text
37 "Is there a third option?!"
39 Structure for a feline
41 End of the Mayo Clinic's URL
42 Freshly
44 Sings like Frank Sinatra
45 "This just isn't worth it!"
48 Grand _____ (baseball feat)

- 49 Banks of "Coyote Ugly"
50 "Say it ____ so!"
53 Wrap at a spa
55 Sign of an old injury
57 Carry debt
59 Skip the wedding ceremony
61 What some psychics read
63 Raptor's grabber
64 "Volunteers?"
65 Like an expert
66 Rae who portrayed President Barbie in "Barbie"
67 lams competitor

Down

- 1 Liquids for quills
2 Claude who painted poppies
3 Likely (to)
4 Do some quilting
5 In _____ (still being tested)
6 Serious TV shows
7 Legendary books?
8 Paris fashion monogram
9 Iconic pig of film
10 "I would ____ so!"
11 Button at the beginning of a streaming TV show
12 Danson of "The Good Place"

- 13 Female sheep
15 "I gotta have it!"
21 Corporate grind
23 Make grammatically correct, say
25 Ncuti's "Sex Education" character
27 Name that sounds like a corned beef sandwich
28 Hibachi remnants
30 (More info below)
31 City and its suburbs
32 Little devils
33 Grave danger
34 Long and tedious process
38 ____ Martin cognac
40 Colette of "The Staircase"
43 Deteriorates
46 Angry and mainstream music genre
47 Quick getaways?
51 Unprecedented
52 Silly sort
54 Stooped (over)
56 High, in Guadalupe
58 Canadian gas brand
59 Touchdown stat?
60 Chap
61 ____ chi
62 Letters before a pseudonym

Solution to last week's puzzle in the bottom right corner of the page

ARE YOU DATING THE WRONG GUY? (ADULT FEMALE)

- 1: If you and your guy had an argument and weren't speaking, would you consider apologising, even if it wasn't your fault?
a) Yes, if it saved your relationship
b) You wouldn't go as far as apologising; instead you'd try to find a middle ground
c) No, you would expect him to say sorry if he was in the wrong
2: Planning on an evening at home with a pizza and DVDs, your guy goes out to rent a movie. What film would he return with?
a) A action movie that he liked, even though he's seen it a dozen times before
b) A chick flick that he knew you'd love, even if it bored him
c) He'd consult with you about movies you'd both enjoy before going out
3: Have you ever suspected that your guy is hiding a secret from you?
a) Yes, he keeps a lot about himself secret
b) No, he is always open and honest
c) Yes, but only good secrets such as birthday surprises
4: If your boyfriend were to accidentally make you cry how do you think he would react?
a) By telling you not to be so silly
b) By apologising and acting awkwardly
c) By hugging you and offering you a

- handkerchief
5: Does your guy ever complain that you are spending too much time with your friends and not enough with him?
a) No, he knows that your friends are an important part of your life
b) No, because he spends more time with his friends than he does with you
c) Yes, he sulks if you go out with the girls instead of him
6: If you asked your partner to go clothes shopping with you what response do you think you are likely to get from him?
a) I'd rather go out with my mates
b) I'll come with you, but only if you come to the big sports game with me
c) I'd love too; I can carry your bags
7: Have you any fears that your guy will cheat on you?
a) Yes, and you suspect he may have already done so
b) You worry that he could succumb to temptation
c) No, you trust him completely
8: What sort of relationship do you have with your partner's family?
a) None, because you've never met them
b) Wonderful, they are like a second family to you

- c) Distant, you've only meet them briefly
9: You are dining out at a restaurant with your partner, the waiter comes to take the order while you are away from the table. Would your guy order for you?
a) No, he would ask the waiter to come back
b) Only if you had told him what you wanted
c) Yes, he would make the assumption that he knew what you liked
10: Does your guy make an effort to be courteous if you meet up with your friends when you are out together?
a) He is always respectful to your friends
b) Not all of them, only the good looking ones
c) No, he normally complains if you stop and chat with them

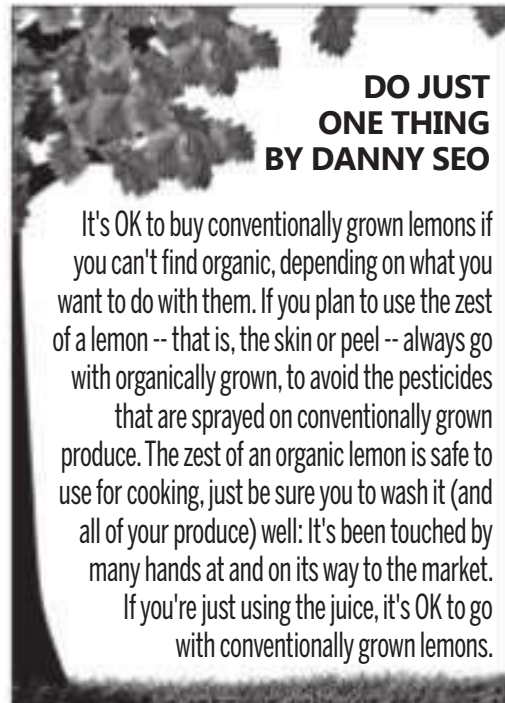
HOW TO SCORE:

1.	a	b	c
2.	1	2	3
3.	1	3	2
4.	1	2	3
5.	3	2	1
6.	0	1	3
7.	1	2	3
8.	1	3	2
9.	3	2	1
10.	3	2	1

What your score means:
Between 0-10: There would seem to be a very strong possibility that you are dating the wrong man. There doesn't seem to be a lot of evidence to suggest that you are made for each other. If you are not sure in yourself how well you fit together, then seek the opinion of a third party and ask how they see you as an item. If their view is negative then maybe you should consider its time to split with your guy. Between 11-20: You are not dating the wrong guy, but he is not the right guy either. Don't despair and start thinking of the kindest way to dump him, because your relationship can be salvaged. You need to tell your guy what is troubling you and ask him to help make it right. With a bit of effort it is possible for the pair of you to turn what is a failing relationship into a strong one. Between 21-30: As everyone knows finding a guy who fits the profile of the perfect boyfriend is very difficult if not completely impossible. You are lucky in that your man, while not totally perfect, is probably as close as it gets to fitting the bill of being the ideal partner. He is truly the ideal man for you. You are so well suited that you are in serious risk of becoming one of those couples who finish off each others sentences.

Asia Features

GARFIELD by Jim Davis



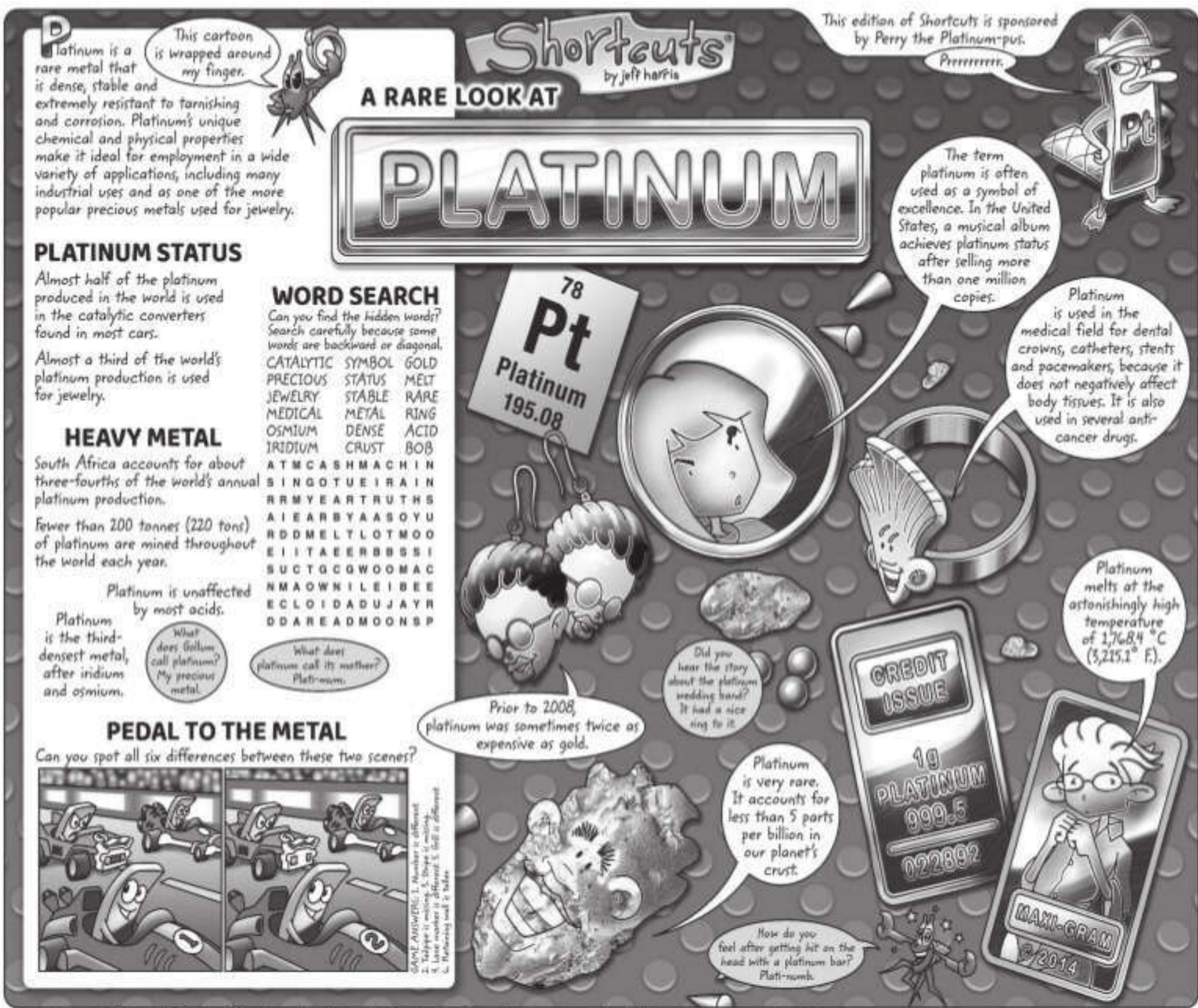
DRAWING CONCLUSIONS by Arun Ramkumar



PEANUTS by Charles M Schulz



SMALL TALK by Gokul Gopalakrishnan



For more information: "Platinum" by Greg Roca (Gareth Stevens) or "Platinum" by Paula Johnson (Rosen Central).

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QUESTION TIME
by Lalitha Balakrishnan

1. Which breed of dog inspired the cartoon character 'Scooby Doo'?
(a) Great Dane
(b) Golden Retriever
(c) Poodle
2. Which United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) died in a plane crash in 1961?
(a) U Thant
(b) Dag Hammarskjöld
(c) Kofi Annan
3. This region is marked by tall grasses and scattered trees and is also called Elephant Grasslands. What are the grasslands found in Africa known as?
(a) Jungle
(b) Steppes
(c) Savannah
4. Which is the only Indian national park and wildlife refuge where the critically endangered Asiatic Lions still live?
(a) Gir Forest National Park
(b) Jim Corbett National Park
(c) Kaziranga National Park
5. What is the common name given to the coastal plain of western India, lying between the Arabian Sea in the west and the Western Ghats in the east?
(a) Konkan
(b) Sahyadri
(c) Deccan
6. A foal is a young?
(a) Skunk
(b) Mouse
(c) Horse
7. Nationality of French Open Women Singles Winner Iga Swiatek is?
(a) French
(b) Polish
(c) German
8. What was Royal Emblem of the Chera Kingdom?
(a) Bow and Arrow
(b) Tiger
(c) Monkey
9. Who wrote Atomic Habits?
(a) Shiv Khera
(b) James Clear
(c) Robin Cook
10. Perumal Peak is located in?
(a) Kodakanal
(b) Pity
(c) Tirumala

Answers to last week's questions

- 1.b, 2a, 3.b, 4.b, 5.c, 6.b, 7.b, 8.c, 9.b, 10.a

Winner
Raghav Nitin Gopinathan, Mohan T-Kerala
Pavithra SR-Uttar Pradesh
KS Muthupandian-Tamil Nadu
Sanjay Kishor Patro-Odisha

Answers to this week's questions will appear next week. Only entries with all correct answers sent before Wednesday noon will be considered for prizes.

Email your answers along with your name, phone number and complete address to: sundayquiz@newindianexpress.com. For example, if the answer for Question No. 1 is A, it should be written as: 1. A. Please mention QT and the issue date in MM/DD/YY format (for example, QT, April 25, 2021) in the subject line of the email. Only entries with these details will be considered for prizes.

FIVE ALL-CORRECT ENTRIES WILL WIN THE BOOK, 'THE GOENKA LETTERS: AGONY AND ECSTASY IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS'

SUDOKU 1 TODAY'S SOLUTION

4	3	6	1	2	7	9	5	8
2	5	1	8	9	3	4	7	6
8	9	7	6	4	5	3	1	2
7	2	9	4	3	6	5	8	1
1	4	5	7	8	9	6	2	3
3	6	8	2	5	1	7	4	9
9	8	2	5	6	4	1	3	7
6	7	4	3	1	8	2	9	5
5	1	3	9	7	2	8	6	4

4	3	6	1	2	7	9	5	8
2	5	1	8	9	3	4	7	6
8	9	7	6	4	5	3	1	2
7	2	9	4	3	6	5	8	1
1	4	5	7	8	9	6	2	3
3	6	8	2	5	1	7	4	9
9	8	2	5	6	4	1	3	7
6	7	4	3	1	8	2	9	5
5	1	3	9	7	2	8	6	4

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

W	E	L	D	A	T	H	O	S	R	E	F	I
E	D	I	E	S	M	O	P	H	O	L	L	I
I	D	E	A	C	O	E	M	O	R	Y		
R	I	D	D	L	E	A	D	E	L	E	S	
D	E	E	P	E	N	D						
T	I	N	D	E	R	B	I	O				
A	L	E	X	A		F	E	T	E			
R	I	C	E	A		A	I	D	E	S		
I	N	T	L			T	N	I	A			
A	D	O				S	E	E	D			
T	A	L	I	O	N	S						
B	R	A	I	N	C	A	N	D				
F	E	L	S	E	A	L	A	R	M			
F	E	L				L	A	P	S	E		

ALMANAC
TODAY 23.06.2024
Year: Krodhi.
Aani: TheiPirai / Jyeshtha:
Krishna Paksha.
Tithi: K.Dwitiya
till 27.27 hrs.
Nakshatra (Star):
P. Shadha
till 17.05 hrs.
Moon in Dhanu.
Rahukaalam:
04.30 pm to 06.00 pm
Yamagantam:
12 noon to 01.30 pm
Gulikakalam:
03.00 pm to 04.30 pm



BIRTHSTONES
CANCER


(June 22 - July 23)
Ruby is the birthstone which has a great impact on the relationships, financial matters in the life of a person. Ruby, the cancer birthstone is considered to be the gateway in the life of a wearer. Cancerians always want independence while doing anything. They are self-sufficient and do not want to depend on others, but for emotional support and encouragement they need motivation. This cancer birthstone possesses the energies of the ruling planet Mercury which brings major changes in the life of a wearer. Cancerians are emotional , they do need motivational support for encouragement. Ruby is considered to be the very good source of energy that provides emotion of love and helps the wearer to feel compassionate for all life. It fills the heart with sparkles. Ruby, the cancer birthstone includes the power of courage and self-esteem. It also hepls the wearer in attaining spiritual and mental satisfaction.

THE WEEK AHEAD Peter Vidal

Mar 21-Apr 20:
Your principle planetary patterns still focus on money. There are no indications of long-term changes so, if you're coping with major personal or professional complications, these are almost certainly a hang-over from the past.

July 24-Aug 23:
You may press on with professional and other worldly ambitions and don't listen to people who seem determined to undermine you. And if you can get away from your usual environment for a few days, you'll do yourself the power of good.

Nov 23-Dec 22:
Those two tough planets, Jupiter and Saturn, are pulling you in two directions. So, you can't really be blamed if you feel stuck between irreconcilable options. Good, solid family relationships are a priority in the meantime.



AUGURIES

Meenakshi Chawla


Twitter: @Astrology_us

Two important celestial events marked 21st June last week. It was the Summer Solstice occurring on a full moon day and Sun moving to *Ardra Nakshatra*. All this resulted in an increase in restlessness and indecisiveness. But at the same time this rare heavenly event also created a spectacular view for sky gazers. The rising of the full Moon and setting of the Sun, both could be seen at the same time.

Now to shed some light on the *mahurat* of the oath taking ceremony of Prime Minister Modi 3.0 government. The *mahurat* time was important and selected with minimum malefic influence. It was chosen to ensure good stability and permanency of the government in order to complete its full term. The day was Sunday, 9th June and the oath taking time was 7:23 in the evening. As per the horoscope of that day and time, it had Scorpio as ascendent and ascendent lord Mars sitting in its own sign Aries

in the sixth house of litigation, competition, adventure, debt and health issues. The prime minister will have to take many risks and fight against all odds. There are five planets sitting in the seventh house facing ascendent. All this shows that sworn enemies will continue to create problems for the ruling government and tiding over in-house conflicts on a regular basis will also be an arduous task for the PM. There will be lots of ups and downs and a challenging period ahead. The Prime Minister will have to strike a balanced approach and channel the Mars energy with patience and intelligence. *Rahu* is sitting in the fifth house which is the house of the prime minister that shows external disturbances. Negative forces will always try to dethrone him. Venus as India's *lagana* lord and Mercury, both were heavily combusted that day.

The lunar *tithi* chosen was fourth, a *rikta tithi* and *nakshatra* as *Punarvasu* which are generally



HOW THE CARDS FALL

Meenakshi Rani

meenakshirani33@gmail.com

ARIES

An epicurean experience brings the focus to food allergies. Skin sensitivity to random products has you adjust your diet rather than give in to the palate. Skin breakouts, eczema, zits and acne are treated. Water borne ailments are prevented from doing much damage and you are more judicious about the intake of water. Motion sickness brings the focus back to vertigo, inner ear imbalances and gastric ailments. Stomach flu bothers some while experimenting with local cuisine whilst travelling. Wear soft pink and lemon with peridot and tourmaline; include yogurt, citrus fruit and rice preparations for Mercury and Moon.

TAURUS

A cyclical pattern is interrupted and you find a medical breakthrough. Heart conditions improve with tweaks in lifestyle and learning to co-exist with a problem that's genetic or an autoimmune response. Seniors learn to rebuild a shield of defence against shingles and nerve inflammations. Youngsters successfully come out of bouts of mumps, chicken pox or measles. You notice a decrease in natural resistance to seasonal bugs or triggers and learn to lower your threshold limit for tolerance. Someone recovers from a bout of fever by taking the slow road to recovery rather than rushing things. Wear yellow and blue; sapphires in both yellow and blue. Include turmeric, garlic and unsalted walnuts for Jupiter and Saturn.

VIRGO

A shifting of gears; you are cautious about new medication and skeptical about unverified treatments. Hormonal treatments are undertaken regarding adrenals, thyroid glands and other replacement therapies. Wellness of the eyes is supported with lens correction, cataract treatments and recovery from cornea tears or conjunctivitis. Health of a spouse is in focus with kidney treatments, dialysis or removal of stones. Hydrotherapy clears up a host of infections from blood toxicity, water retention to blocks and inflammations. Diabetics 'walk the talk' and find a world of improvement. Pollen allergies soon clear up. Wear shell pink and peach with pink coral and pink pearl for Moon, Venus and Mars. Include celery, watery vegetables and tomato broth.

CAPRICORN

A flare up of a chronic condition forces you to relook a certain bout of treatment. Some recover from boils, tumours, cysts or growths. Cancer treatments conclude for some with a successful procedure. High blood pressure bothers those in high stress jobs and you shed unease building around career insecurity. Bone density tests reveal the need for more nutrition and calcium. Bone marrow transplants go well. Additions catch up with youngsters on a break from alcohol or nicotine and you enlist the help of support groups for best results. Wear dark brown and purple; hesonite and amethyst for Rahu and Saturn. Include mild coffee, lentil dishes, sprouts and chickpeas.

GEMINI

Mental and emotional well being remains in focus. You overcome sensory overload by delegating and having optimism about pending tasks. Water retention is lowered and kidney function improves. Some overcome dehydration with a fruit based diet and electrolytes. Breathing improves and lung capacity in youngsters enables the return to a more active lifestyle. Seniors recover sleep deficit, insomnia and apnea. Skin ailments clear up sans any trace of marks restoring confidence. Stones in the kidney dissolve. An eye ailment is corrected in time and a youngster gets corrective or preventive eyewear. Wear sky blue and white with aquamarine and pearl. Include dairy sweets, cheese, lychees and melons for Neptune and Moon.

CANCER

You realise the limitations of certain actions on your health and learn to self correct. A conscious move away from stress has you exercise choices that stem from your core. Cholesterol levels are lowered; stents and implants are put in place that add years to longevity. The neck is vulnerable for all sorts of reasons; from a diabetic 'sugar necklace' to cervical pains, sprains to whiplash. Sports enthusiasts wear protective gear against a freak act of nature. Some are vulnerable to electric shock and steer clear of damp hands on appliances. Seniors recover from paralysis or stroke and get back an active lifestyle. Wear grey, orange, coral and smoky topaz for Uranus and Mars. Include red beans, beets, rusks and fried onion kachori.

LIBRA

A state of inertia or static gradually finds a release. Energy levels are restored after a long period of convalescence. Recuperation from surgeries and trauma or injury has you recalibrate your moves. An inept diagnosis has you substitute medical practitioners. Stability returns post muscular aches and pains. Sportsmen recover from sprains, a fracture or tendonitis. Seniors are in particular vulnerable to a torn ligament. Cochlear surgeries are a delicate process and successful. Knee replacement surgeries are marked by slow and steady progress. Wear red and yellow with ruby, amber and yellow sapphire. Include bell peppers, allspice cookies, bran porridge and jaggery for Sun, Mars and Jupiter.

AQUARIUS

A conventional ailment warrants thinking that's out of the box. Liver upsets take you through a multiverse of symptoms. Some find a fatty liver condition while others deal with abnormal levels of bile. Still others grapple with jaundice while a few consider liver transplants. Youngsters find dietary detox on point to strengthen their digestion. A chronic cough stems from pollutants and a virus and you address both. Some explore the possibilities of alternate healing in addition to modern medicine and find lifestyle pivots bring marked results. A heat rash goes away gradually. Wear white, yellow, pearl and clear quartz. Include apples, custard and gelatinous based dessert for Sun and Moon.

SCORPIO

The head remains in focus. Migraines, dizzy spells and nerve pains are overcome as you return to a regular lifestyle. Some focus on concentration, memory, nervous responses and neuralgia. Patients of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's have some symptoms abate. Degenerative ailments make an appearance in the elderly and you ensure they experience a change of scene and more interaction. Clots and haemorrhages are addressed with the balancing act of surgery and post operative recovery. Photo-sensitivity proves to be a symptom of something other than an eye ailment. Wear vivid blue and accents of black with turquoise. Include jamun, wild berries, mustard oil, pecans or walnuts and millets for Saturn.

PISCES

Easily bothered by changes in your situation, you learn to wind down and relax the mind. Anxiety, high blood pressure and irregular breathing are corrected. Some handle claustrophobic responses with focus and calm. Provocative behaviour of others is channelled away and you stay detached. Youngsters find ways to tap into their inner Zen while improving concentration in studies or competitive events. Migraines, nerve pains and reduced blood supply to the brain and following dizzy spells are examined for triggers and cures. Wear orange, Rudraksha and garnet for Mars and Uranus; moderate intake of caffeine; herb teas, dark chocolate and quinoa benefit.

YOUR FORTUNE THIS WEEK Amarakosha

What the planets say about your prospects for wealth, romance and professional success this week

ARIES (Mar 21–Apr 19)
Work: Retaliation or passive-aggressive behaviour from someone could make things complicated.
Money: If you plan to travel, be cautious about valuable items being stolen.
Couples: You might develop a close bond with a friend or acquaintance, leading to special conversations or even a secret romance.
Singles: You might unintentionally play games with someone who is interested in you.

TAURUS (Apr 20–May 20)
Work: Facing technical glitches and sudden changes can increase workload.
Money: Unexpected hefty repair costs for essential items might arise. Be vigilant of scams.
Couples: Expect ups and downs akin to a roller coaster ride, with both romance and arguments.
Singles: You might engage with someone you're interested in, but they might not be entirely honest with you.

GEMINI (May 21–June 20)
Work: You'll stay updated with technological and knowledge advancements relevant to your job.
Money: Expect increased social expenses due to a broader professional or social network. This might unexpectedly bring financial opportunities.
Couples: You will have healthy communication, better mutual understanding with your partner.
Singles: You may focus on work and self-empowerment more than dating.

CANCER (June 21–July 22)
Work: You'll find opportunities to take on additional responsibilities, which could significantly increase your workload.
Money: You may earn significantly, however, be mindful of increased expenses.
Couples: Stay mindful, be patient and calm when communicating with your partner.
Singles: If you decide to express your feelings, there's a likelihood of facing heartbreak.

LEO (July 23–Aug 22)
Work: You may perform better and gain recognition. Job interview or business negotiations tends to go well.
Money: You can earn a lot but also have a lot of expenses and enjoy a lavish lifestyle.
Couples: You might be prone to stubbornness, but your partner will find your quirks endearing.
Singles: Your charm may attract admirers, but you're selective and not easily falling for anybody.

VIRGO (Aug 23–Sept 22)
Work: Higher authority may trust you with more decision-making power and support your ideas.
Money: Expected money should arrive on time, if you have debts, you might be able to repay some of them. Investors should be cautious.
Couples: Disagreements over household chores and finances may lead to serious arguments.
Singles: Someone who previously ghosted you might reappear in your life.



avoided for a mahurat. The only good point was that Moon was well placed in the ninth house. This will bring an increase in religious activities. Government will be carrying out huge reforms in the areas of business and finance. The political scene will continue to remain dynamic and super energetic.

Jupiter has moved to *Rohini Nakshatra* until 20th August. It will go retrograde from 9th October for 119 days and then again come back to *Rohini* on 28th November where it will stay until April 2025, a rather long stay! *Rohini* means growth, de-

velopment and clearing obstacles if there are any. It relates to agriculture, farming, vehicles, construction, wealth, comfort and growth in products. Jupiter will expand many of *Rohini*'s significances only when Venus comes out of combustion. Business will improve and so will the purchase of luxury items and vehicles. Home loans and buying of properties will also increase.

This is the last week when Gemini sign will hold the Sun, Mercury and Venus. Media and news will stay lively and super active and so will trade and commerce.



LIBRA (Sept 23–Oct 22)
Work: You may encounter people who don't keep their word. Entrepreneurs involved in international business may face unexpected challenges.
Money: Extra income may come your way. You will get requests for financial assistance from family.
Couples: Stay calm and mindful when communicating with your partner.
Singles: If you are dating someone, you may be contacted by their spouse.

SCORPIO (Oct 23–Nov 21)
Work: You may find yourself busy juggling main tasks and side projects, but it'll be a fulfilling and productive kind of busy.
Money: You'll have the freedom to treat yourself and engage in activities that bring you joy.
Couples: You have communication and understanding, with opportunities for open discussions.
Singles: Your charm might attract the attention of a younger admirer.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22–Dec 21)
Work: You find unexpected opportunities to expand your network and build valuable connections.
Money: You may receive a good opportunity or financial support from an older friend.
Couples: You can be a source of support and safe space for each other.
Singles: If you're casually dating someone, they haven't developed feelings for anyone yet.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20–Feb 18)
Work: You may exceed performance benchmarks and earn recognition from higher-ups.
Money: You'll have the freedom to reward yourself with shopping and activities that bring you joy. Unexpected rewards may come your way.
Couples: You could swiftly find common ground when disagreements arise. There's mutual support.
Singles: You may meet potential partners through social or work-related activities.

PISCES (Feb 19–Mar 20)
Work: You'll have increased workload. You'll receive excellent support from your boss.
Money: You'll have opportunities for side gigs or extra income through your network of friends.
Couples: To maintain peace, there may be instances of white lies or hidden truths between you and your partner. Private time with each other may decrease.
Singles: You may meet someone you like but to develop a relationship might prove challenging.

The Other Side of Nepal

A striking pagoda with cantilevered wooden roofs, towers above Bhaktapur, a royal city in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Close by is an Indian-style temple whose statues of deities are carved in stone. Nepal is a staple on the Indian tourist map and had a 33 per cent rise in Indian travellers flying into the country in 2023. The mountain country's religious diversity evidenced in its wealth of temples, monasteries and stupas is no secret. Historically it stands at the cultural crossroads of India, Tibet and China since myriad ethnic groups and communities have influenced its architecture.

Nepal is witnessing an indigenous architectural rediscovery as can be observed in Bhaktapur's new boutique hotel, The Nancee (Nepalese for small courtyard), tucked into a narrow lane which takes inspiration from the Newari

Nepali architecture is experiencing a slow revival, visible in its new and old buildings that speak of cultural diversity

By KALPANA SUNDER

(Right) Durbar Square in Patan; (Below) Nyatapola Temple in Bhaktapur; Sanctuary Resort's Bawa-esque architecture



houses built around a courtyard. "The homes here are typically multi-storeyed, with large courtyards that serve as gathering places for families and friends," explains host Aditya Piya. Aware of seismic dangers, traditional Newari houses incorporated earthquake-resistant techniques such as interlocking bricks, flexible joints and stone foundations. The five-tiered Nyatapola Pagoda temple is an example since it has

never been destroyed ever by any earthquake.

A striking element of Nepali architecture is its intricate woodwork. The Bhaktapur palace of 55 windows at the Durbar Square has dozens of carved timber windows, each with different designs. Some have mythological and religious themes with geometric and floral motifs. Bhaktapur local Rita Suwal explains that Nepal has three distinct architectural styles—the

Pagoda, Shikhara and the Stupa. The first features multiple tiers of roofs, each diminishing in size, creating an elegant and tapering structure. The struts that support each level are elaborately carved and decorated. Inspired by ancient Indian architectural principles, Hindu temples in Nepal showcase the Shikhara style through towering spires and stone carvings reminiscent of pyramids. A prime example is the Pashupatinath Temple. Its dome-shaped Stupa style is thought to have been introduced to Nepal by Emperor Asoka. With a broad base and tapering towards the top, Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu exemplifies his taste. The soft chants and smell of incense imparts a Zen vibe here.

Like all indigenous architecture, Nepal's too is influenced by topography. On the western edge of

Chitwan National Park in southern Nepal, along the banks of the Narayani River stands the Sanctuary Resort. Designed by Sri Lankan architect Palinda Kannangara, who is influenced by the legendary Geoffrey Bawa, it has stone cottages with rustic interiors that mirrors the dwellings of the local Tharu people. "We designed the property to merge seamlessly with the landscape using local bamboo and stone. The bamboo screens were made by women from the village," explains Palinda.

For an architecture aficionado, Nepal is Shangrila. Owner Dwarika Das Shrestha of Dwarika's Hotel in Kathmandu is a time traveller through his country's design age. In 1952, he saw a man cutting an old carved pillar of a building to use as firewood. The thought of his country's artistic ancestry being burned, set him on a



(From top) A 13th-century wooden door at Dwarika's; The Nancee in Bhaktapur; Tiger Sanctuary Lodge in Pokhara

mission. He started collecting old window frames, pillars and doors for his hotel, which feels more like a heritage museum than a tourist refuge. Red brick and exposed wooden beams, intricately carved windows and doors including a 13th-century door, are reminders that Nepal has woken up to its past treasures.



Pet Obsessions

The unprecedented surge in gourmet pet food products manufactured with human-grade ingredients shows how pet owners are splurging on their furballs

By NOOR ANAND CHAWLA

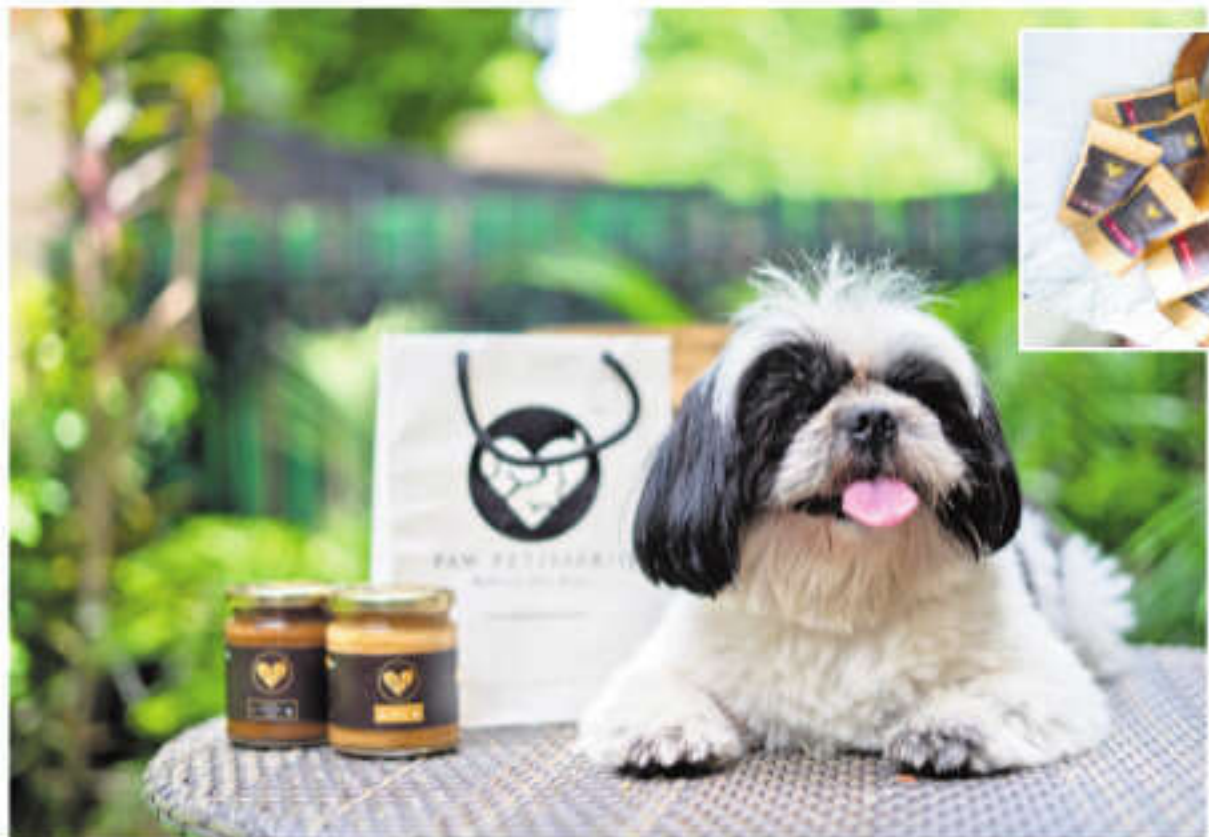
Google, Zigly, Emoji, and Zoom, two of whom are adorable Cavalier King Charles' and two are Shih Tzus, are the apple of their owner Yamini Jaipuria's eyes. While Google and Zoom love curated pizzas and peanut butter; Emoji and Zigly have a yen for anything with sweet potatoes and also exotic stews. "All four of my babies love different kinds of gourmet food. I prepare separate meals for each one, but only after consulting the vet to ensure these gourmet foods don't upset their tummy," she declares.

Jaipuria, the managing trustee of pet-care related Zigly Foundation and Cosmo Foundation, believes pets often see themselves as humans and start imitating their owner's traits. When they are pampered with delectable treats, they recognise their irresistible charm to their humans and ask for more. Jaipuria isn't the only besotted pet parent. As per data released on Statista, the pet food market in India is expected to grow by 12.63 per cent in 2024 and garner revenues upward of \$389.9 million. Further,



"When pets are pampered, they recognise their worth and ask for more options to satisfy their taste buds."

YAMINI JAIPURIA



Pets with edibles from Paw Petisserie

had polished off every last tasty cookie, Singh gushed, "This was the 'bestest' Raksha Bandhan ever." Yashika Arora, the founder-CEO of

Statista shows an uptick in the population of pet dogs which is expected to exceed 43 million by 2026. All these dogs, cats and other pets are running up monthly food bills of thousands of rupees for their owners. Pet food brands have been quick to cash in and have begun to sell exclusive human-grade food to pet parents that includes but isn't limited to Atlantic salmon, boneless duck, quail eggs, dog wine and an array of bakery products.

"There has been a significant increase in demand for gourmet pet food. Pet owners are treating their furry friends like family, since they have more disposable income to spend on their beloved wards. People are becoming savvier about pet nutrition, and look for high-quality ingredients," explains Dr Shashank Sinha, CEO, Drools Pet food, a company that prides itself on making real, clean pet food which includes vegetarian, non-vegetarian and vegan options. This shift can be accredited to the rise of smaller nuclear families where pets are viewed as valued members, leading to a shift in mindset in pet parenting. "Millennials, are at the forefront of this trend, and are spoiling their furry



"People turn to these packaged and expensive treats to overcompensate for their own absence as a parent."

NUPUR ARYA

companions with premium pet products and services," he reveals.

On Raksha Bandhan day last year, Rani Singh was seized with the desire to pamper her golden lab bro Scotch. She ordered special treats from Paw Petisserie, an exclusive pet bakery. The order included customised edible Rakhi cookies made with peanut butter, which Scotch absolutely adores. They came with special Rakhi-themed decorations, making the memory extra special for Singh. Once Scotch



Pets with edibles from Paw Petisserie

had polished off every last tasty cookie, Singh gushed, "This was the 'bestest' Raksha Bandhan ever." Yashika Arora, the founder-CEO of

Paw Petisserie, believes the outlet's popularity is because everything is made with pet-safe ingredients. Patrons choose from exotic delights like chicken or mutton ice-cream, different flavours of jams, doughnuts, brownies, breads and salami. However, their most sought-after items are their chicken jerky and mutton chips. "Universally popular ingredients are chicken, peanut butter, yogurt and mutton. Pet parents love our products because everything is human-grade. Even the colours used as decorations for cakes and cupcakes are made from fruits and vegetables," she shares.

Interestingly, no matter how pretty the packaging or promising the treat, not all pet parents are taken in by these indulgences. Nupur Arya, who owns golden retriever Wally has indulged him with some treats in the past but isn't sure how "gourmet" they actually are. "I'm not sure why more people are turning to these packaged and expensive treats. This could be for two reasons: to show off to other pet parents or to overcompensate for their own absence as a parent."

Irrespective of sceptics or addicts, India's gourmet pet food market is the new feast, because every dog has its day with an array of gourmet treats.

QUICK TAKE



KERALA KALEIDOSCOPE

The upcoming Malabar River Festival, scheduled for July 25-28, aims to position Kerala Tourism as a prime destination for adventure tourism. The four-day event aims to enhance white-water kayaking across peninsular India. By showcasing the state's natural assets, the Malabar River Festival is set to attract both domestic and international visitors, boosting the region's tourism appeal. The festival, which is to be held in upstate Thusharagiri, Chalipuzha and Iruvarinjipuzha, will also conduct competitions that seek to encourage locals alongside professionals to excel in kayaking. The festival anticipates the participation of kayakers from over 20 countries. Pre-event activities include mountain bike water rally, water polo, state and national level swimming competitions, fishing-bait contests, rugby matches, and off-road rallies.



BETTER BATTERY

OnePlus has announced a new smartphone battery technology called the "Glacier Battery," which was developed in partnership with the world's largest battery maker, CATL. The company claims this new battery tech will significantly improve battery life and performance, potentially ushering in a new era of "super endurance" for mobile devices. OnePlus claims it will alleviate common user frustrations such as frequent charging, low battery anxiety, and the need for power banks. The company also hinted at a battery capacity that exceeds current standards, offering a "breakthrough" in battery life experience. The phone will reportedly feature a mammoth 6,100mAh battery capable of reaching a full charge in under 30 minutes with 100W charging.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Rabbits and Truffles

Break all culinary rules with Chef Hussain Shahzad over a tasting menu at Papa's in Mumbai



By SHILPI MADAN

Papa's is a veritable food museum, merging travel diaries and childhood food memories of Chef Hussain Shahzad, and his erstwhile mentor Chef Floyd Cardoz. Robust preparations and quirky flavours compose an offbeat, lip-smacking culinary experience inside the tiny 12-seater in Mumbai's suburban Bandra.

Food: The 13-course tasting menu at Papa's invites you to discover why Chef Shahzad is one of the emerging culinary talents in India. Tuck into the beautiful *bebinka* cosseted with black truffles and dates in a floral swirl; or the caviar-crowned *chenna poda*. Pair it with—what is best described as—a pizza in a glass, which teams marinara with vodka, in a Bloody Mary-esque spin. Hussain's menu reads simple, and the dishes delight. Ribbons of shiny, cured trout and juicy watermelon



curl up in a *rasam* broth, with glistening trout roe perched on top. *Thayir sadam* is elevated with the crackling *shiso* tempura. Tender rabbit from Nashik appears with a marinade tipped with soy sauce. Go for it as a wrap in a *jowar* pita bread roll with tangy *kosho*. What The Duck! is Hussain's ode to the Hyderabad biriyani marrying seven-day

dry-aged duck with Indrayani rice. Potato Chips—a play on fried, truffle honey-tipped noodles—with champagne *sabayon* sheathing a tangy lemon sorbet is an inspiring desert. ★★★★★

Décor: Cupped in toasted woody tones, and warm amber, the intimate restaurant brings in 12 teal hip seaters at the sole table, with an informal bar. The counter has been upcycled from a wooden bar top from The Bombay Canteen. ★★★★★

Service: You can expect warm, genuine, effortless service. The playlist sets the vibe easily, with numbers pulled in by Hussain from his personal stack. ★★★★★

Price: At ₹5,000 plus taxes per head, this is not really easy on the pocket. ★★★★★

Papa's at Veronica's, Bandra West, Mumbai
Timings: Wednesday to Saturday, 8 pm onwards. Below 18 years not allowed

Unlocking Life's Mysteries

Metaphysical spirituality facilitates a holistic integration of mind, body, and spirit, leading to a more enlightened and fulfilling life

By AKINA ALHOM

Metaphysical spirituality is a fascinating journey into the realms of reality, existence, and the spiritual domain, transcending the confines of the material world. Its roots stretch deep into ancient philosophies and practices, encompassing a rich tapestry of beliefs and methodologies aimed at unravelling the profound mysteries of the universe.

The origins of metaphysical spirituality can be traced back to the ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions that sought to understand what lies beyond the physical realm. The term 'metaphysical' itself finds its origins in the works of Aristotle, where 'metaphysics' referred to the study of existence, being, and the nature of reality. Eastern philosophies, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, with their emphasis on transcendence and inner consciousness, have significantly influenced metaphysical thought. These traditions delve into higher states of consciousness and the interconnectedness of all things, offering valuable insights into the deeper aspects of existence.

Similarly, Western traditions like Neoplatonism and Hermeticism contribute to the rich tapestry of metaphysical spirituality, promoting the idea of an underlying reality beyond what is observable in the physical world. In the modern era, the New Thought movement emerged as a catalyst, playing a pivotal role in popularising metaphysical ideas. Key figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Helena Blavatsky, and Deepak Chopra have all contributed significantly to the development



HOW TO PRACTICE METAPHYSICAL SPIRITUALITY

Meditation and Mindfulness: Regular meditation helps you connect with your inner self, explore consciousness, and cultivate awareness.

Energy Work: Explore various energy healing modalities such as Reiki, Qi Gong, or chakra balancing. These practices focus on working with the body's energy systems to promote healing and balance.

Nature Connection: Spend time in nature to connect with the natural energies around you. Practice grounding techniques like walking barefoot on the earth or sitting quietly in natural settings.

Creative Expression: Engage in creative activities like writing, art, music, or dance to channel your inner insights and emotions.

Connect with Like-minded Individuals: Join metaphysical communities, discussion groups, or workshops where you can share experiences and learn from others.

Intuitive Development: Work on developing your intuition through practices like tarot/oracle card readings, journaling, or guided visualisation.

Practice Gratitude and Positivity: Cultivate a positive mindset and practice gratitude daily. Gratitude enhances your spiritual awareness and attracts positivity.

and dissemination of metaphysical concepts and practices.

Metaphysical spirituality offers a framework for understanding the universe's deeper aspects and one's place within it. It posits that reality extends beyond the material world, encompassing higher states of consciousness and spiritual dimensions. This perspective encourages individuals to explore their inner selves and the interconnectedness of all existence. One of its core tenets is the belief in a universal consciousness or divine presence that permeates everything. This idea aligns with the concept of the 'Divine Matrix', popularised by Gregg Braden, which suggests that everything in the universe is interconnected through an underlying field of energy and consciousness.

Practices within metaphysical spirituality are diverse and

expansive, designed to enhance spiritual awareness and foster personal growth. Meditation and mindfulness, for instance, are powerful tools that help individuals achieve higher states of consciousness and inner peace. Energy healing practices like *Reiki*, *chakra* balancing, and crystal healing are believed to restore harmony and balance within the body's energy systems. Methods like astral projection and lucid dreaming involve consciously exploring other dimensions or planes of existence beyond the physical body. Affirmations and visualisation techniques harness the power of the mind and universal laws, aiming to manifest desired outcomes and facilitate personal transformation.

The advantages of engaging with metaphysical spirituality are numerous and profound. By exploring inner consciousness,

individuals gain a deeper understanding of their true selves, leading to personal growth and self-empowerment. Practices like meditation and mindfulness have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, promoting overall mental well-being. Energy healing practices offer a complementary approach to traditional medicine, addressing physical, emotional, and spiritual imbalances. Understanding one's connection to the universe can provide a profound sense of purpose and meaning in life. Techniques like affirmations and visualisation foster a more positive mindset, aiding in the manifestation of goals and desires.

In the words of Chopra, a prominent figure in metaphysical spirituality, "the physical world, including our bodies, is a response of the observer. We

create our bodies as we create the experience of our world." Similarly, Braden emphasises the interconnectedness of all things, stating, "We are part of a much greater existence, an interconnected web of life, energy, and consciousness." These perspectives underscore the profound implications of metaphysical spirituality, suggesting that our thoughts, beliefs and consciousness play a crucial role in shaping our reality.

Metaphysical spirituality invites individuals to embark on a journey of self-discovery. It offers a path toward comprehending the universe and our place within it, fostering self-awareness, holistic healing, and a sense of interconnectedness. In embracing this path, one can experience a holistic integration of mind, body, and spirit, paving the way for a more enlightened and fulfilling life.

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MODERN PANCHATANTRA AT WORK

Once a prince roamed a jungle all day without finding a single animal to hunt. Tired, he sat under a tree to rest, but saw a tiger inching toward him. Quickly, he climbed the tree, only to find a bear already sitting on a branch. Terrified, he had nowhere to go. The bear said, "Don't worry. I'll not harm you; you're my guest." The prince trusted him. As the sun set, the prince fell asleep, and the bear supported him. The tiger, waiting below, told the bear, "This is a human, our enemy. Throw him down for my meal." The bear refused. In the morning, the prince saw the bear sleeping beside him. The tiger said, "Don't trust this wicked bear. Push him down; I'll eat him and let you go." The prince believed the tiger and pushed the bear off the branch. The alert bear caught a branch and saved himself, then cursed the prince, saying, "We animals are better than you humans."



MORAL: Trust and integrity are essential in modern workplaces. Betraying colleagues for personal gain not only harms relationships but also undermines team cohesion and the overall work environment. Always choose honesty and collaboration.

EPICS FOR CHILDREN | GAURAV YADAV

Is the Universe a Manifestation of God?

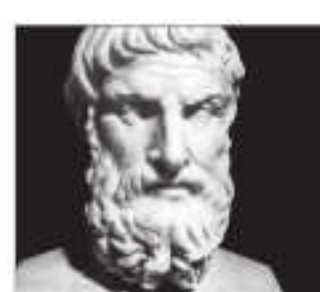
Swami Vivekananda once remarked, 'The Universe is God's manifestation of Himself.' Such a belief that the universe, with everything that it contains and the laws governing it, is God and there is no separate God, is called Pantheism. The term is made from the Greek roots pan (all), and theos (God). In simple words, it can be summarised as-God is in everything, everything is God. Nothing is outside God, and God himself is not outside or distinct from the universe. Whatever we see around us-people, animals, objects-is part of God. It stresses a strong identification with and deep respect for the world around us. It states that God can be encountered directly in what we experience around us. It rejects the view held by most major religions that God is a person who sits far away and judges our actions as right or wrong.

Pantheism is not a religion by itself, but the idea has been present in most parts of the world. The early gods of the Vedas were mostly forces of nature such as *Surya* (Sun), *Varuna* (Ocean), *Agni* (Fire), *Ushas* (Dawn), *Nisha* (Night) etc. As the Vedic society moved from a simple agrarian one to a more complex one, the gods too were codified in more complex ways. A similar pattern can be seen in other ancient civilisations too. African traditional religions and Native American religions are mostly Pantheistic. Sikhism, Kabbalistic Judaism, Celtic spirituality, and Sufi mysticism also contain elements of Pantheism. The basic teaching of *Advaita* Vedanta, a school to which Swami Vivekananda and Adi Shankaracharya belonged, is that God and the world are not two entities but one. Brahman is the supreme



reality, and nothing lies outside it. Christianity regards Pantheism as heresy and has burnt pantheists like Giordano Bruno at the stake. But there have been a number of Western philosophers and thinkers like Baruch Spinoza, Albert Einstein, Carl Jung, Nikola Tesla, Nietzsche and Thoreau who have championed Pantheism.

Besides philosophy and religion, the ideas are quite popular in culture too. In the movie, *Avatar*, the fictional planet of Pandora is inhabited by the Na'vi who worship a goddess, Eywa. Everything that is a part of their land is part of Eywa. At death, every soul is joined to Eywa. The famous *Star Wars* movies had the concept of 'The Force' which is also a pantheistic entity. Disney movies like *Pocahontas* and *The Lion King* also contain pantheistic beliefs. When *Avatar* was released, one critic remarked that Pantheism 'has been Hollywood's preferred religion for years.' Pantheism believes that the universe is not a random collection of objects but an interconnected coherent whole, of which we are a small but important part.



MASTER MIND

"Make the best use of what's in your power and take the rest as it happens." ~ EPICTETUS

DID YOU KNOW?

Paganism

Paganism is a term that broadly refers to a variety of polytheistic, nature-based religions and spiritual practices. Originating from the Latin word "paganus," which means "country dweller," paganism historically encompassed the diverse religious traditions of ancient Europe, the Near East, and North Africa before the rise of monotheistic religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

Central to pagan beliefs is the veneration of multiple deities often associated with natural elements and phenomena. Pagans typically honour gods and goddesses linked to the earth,



sky, water, and other aspects of the natural world. Rituals and ceremonies often mark seasonal cycles, such as solstices and equinoxes, and aim to harmonise human life with the rhythms of nature. Modern paganism, or contemporary paganism, includes movements like Wicca, Druidry, and Heathenry, which have revived or reimagined ancient practices. These paths emphasise personal spirituality, ecological awareness, and a deep connection to the earth. Pagans may practice individually or in groups, and their rituals often involve offerings, meditations and celebrations of life's milestones.

Despite historical marginalisation and misunderstanding, paganism today enjoys a resurgence, reflecting a growing interest in spirituality that honours both ancient traditions and the natural world.

SOOTHE SAYINGS Swami Sukhabodhananda



Why Do We Create Problems?

Two Pakistani prisoners in India who were released were talking at the marketplace in Lahore. "Have you forgotten the Indians?" asked one Pakistani of the other, who was a soldier in their army.

"No, I have neither forgotten nor forgiven them," replied the soldier.

"In that case, you are still in prison," replied his friend.

To forgive is a deep letting go of dislike. Any form of dislike or hatred is a subtle prison without walls. We suffer in these prisons. One feels suffocated and one does not know why one feels so.

The spaces of our psychological prison have no walls but they do exist. Look deeply into the eyes of the people with jealousy, anger, dislike and greed. You find in them a world of misery despite material excesses.

One feels lost, if one has not found oneself. We are busy finding things outside and fail to see who the seeker is. Who am I? We are seeking, but who is the seeker? When you say I am not spiritual, do you know what is meant by being spiritual? Spiritual is the one who is seeking the spirit. You are not just the body; there is a spirit which makes the body alive. Unless you discover that you will be lost. It is good that you feel lost. The lost feeling is telling you to find yourself.

What do you mean when you say I am sensuous? We have to use our senses, even a spiritual person has to use the senses.... while eating, walking, hearing music. But living your life only with the senses and not seeing the sense organs alive is not wise. So, your feeling of being lost is telling you something good. Go deep into that feeling and you find that some intelligence is giving you messages.

You go on creating problems as the mind is not happy with what is. Your greed creates an illusion of fulfilment and tells you that the future is better than the present. Your mind creates an illusion your past should have been like this or that, and that makes you incomplete. So, with such a mind you cannot expect the fragrance of a rose flower around.

Your mind is not trained to see the joy of acceptance. With a non-accepting mind, every grey hair in your beard, every wrinkle on your cheeks is an expression of sorrow. This mind has to be changed.

A wise man has the secret key for converting everything into heaven. He has the alchemy to transform worry into wisdom and frustration into fascination. He takes every opportunity as a ladder of growth. But an unwise person has the key to convert heaven into hell.

Be alert to whether your energies are creating hell or heaven. Then you decide if you are wise or unwise, not in what you say but in what you are creating.

You can discover the splendour of what is. You are improving only in the sense of discovering the hidden splendour. In a way, you are perfect if you look deep within. You have to improve the way you look at yourself or existence. Since your looking has been polluted by greed, it is making you unhappy. The trees are happy, the parrots and squirrels are happy.

A man walked into a psychiatrist's room with a carrot on his ear, wearing a garland of radish, a piece of bread on his head and asked, "What is wrong with me Doctor?" "You are not eating properly," replied the doctor.

Join Swami Sukhabodhananda ji's upcoming online workshop, *Spiritual Warrior Bootcamp*, beginning June 24, 2024. Email: support@prasannatrust.com

In the Footsteps of an Adventurer

The story of an English Marco Polo whose pursuit of knowledge about 16th-century India leaves reader both amazed and entertained



The Long Strider in Jehangir's Hindustan
By: Dom Moraes, Sarayu Srivatsa
Publisher: Speaking Tiger
Pages: 384
Price: ₹499

By SHEILA KUMAR

The late poet and novelist Dom Moraes was apparently much taken with the account of the adventures of a man named Thomas Coryate of Odcombe village in Somerset, an enthusiastic trekker known in those parts as the ‘long strider’. Coryate took a long walk from England to Jehangir’s court in India, in the early 1600s. Some 385 years later, Moraes was motivated enough to track Coryate’s 5,000-mile journey and write about it with his co-author and companion, architect and writer Sarayu Srivatsa.

Together, Moraes and Srivatsa have breathed life into the bare bones story of an English Marco Polo, seeking information from Coryate’s own writing, anecdotal references and the memoirs of Sir Thomas Roe and Edward Terry; it was a project that took them three years.

Coryate was no aristo, military hero or a white nabob, though interestingly enough, he is credited with introducing the use of the fork and the parasol in England. He was a physically challenged poor Englishman, son of a rector, with an ambition that matched his long strides. He wanted to come to India, then go on to Tartary and Cathay, and write about his travels. This was a work that he envisaged would bring him renown at the English court of James I, as well as attendant fame and fortune.

Coryate was no aristo, military hero or a white nabob, though he is credited with introducing the use of the fork and the parasol in England.



A scene from Jehangir’s court

By the end of this book, however, Coryate faces up to reality, and during this time, the reader has become so sympathetic to his endeavour as to feel a distant pang of disappointment for this adventurer.

The Long Strider contains chapters that frequently switch back from 1615 to the 2000s, both periods that hold the reader’s interest, though for different reasons. The times of the Great Mogul, as seen and observed with elegant literary flourishes,

and the irascible, moody, brilliant and very ill Moraes—he had been diagnosed with cancer midway through this particular project—in languid pursuit of whatever he can glean of Coryate’s early life and nature.

Coryate died an obscure death in miserable ill-health somewhere in Surat, and his tomb remains something of a mystery. As it turned out, his benefactor Prince Henry regarded him as a court jester and Emperor Jehangir paid him no attention

The book frequently switches back from 1615 to the 2000s, both periods that hold the reader’s interest, but for different reasons

despite Coryate having learned Persian to converse with the Great Mogul. Most tragically of all, all his early writings, which he gave over to Richard Steele to take back to England and give to Ben Jonson, who Coryate was sure would see it into print, was a wasted effort as the uncaring Steele burned the sheaves of paper. “I have come for knowledge not for coin,” the Oxford-

educated Coryate states firmly at one point, and the reader respects him for that. Eventually, some of Coryate’s accounts of his India sojourn were posthumously published in a 1625 anthology.

The Long Strider closes with a final adventure for the two writers, who are travelling in that first tourist and backpacker’s footsteps, as well as a small reveal, as all good stories must. If there lingers the impression that some of the authors’ condemnation of the past and present conditions of several parts of India carry the uppity tones of a VS Naipaul, it is hard to argue that the vignettes of squalor that Moraes and Srivatsa reveal to the reader don’t exist. In fact, the former says in the Preface: “We would speculate that the people were better off then than now. Today, communalism and consumerism affect too much of the population.”

All the details about Moraes in his last days serve as effective counterpoint to this reconstruction and reinvention of Coryate’s adventures, his trips to Agra, Ajmer, Delhi, Varanasi, Mandu; his meeting a host of interesting people in these places. The passages where Coryate is witness to a woman from the palace being buried alive, another describing a reluctant Sati, are chilling in its clarity.

Despite an overlong title and a cluttered front jacket



I Want to Die but I Still Want to Eat Tteokbokki
By: Baek Sehee
Translated by: Anton Hur
Publisher: Bloomsbury
Pages: 204
Price: ₹699
A collection of the author’s sessions with her psychiatrist that gives a peek into her reflections on her struggle with dysthymia



Let's Talk Legacy
By: Monika Halan
Publisher: HarperCollins
Pages: 136
Price: ₹499
A go-to resource that lists the key aspects of financial life, from banking and stocks to taxes and more in a workbook format that will look after your loved ones even after you are gone



Camino Ghosts
By: John Grisham
Publisher: Hachette
Pages: 304
Price: ₹699
Following two international bestsellers, *Camino Island* and *Camino Winds*, this is the story of an island off the Florida coast with a haunted, violent history and an uncertain future.



1990, Aramganj
By: Rakeysh Kayasth
Translated by: Varsha Tiwary
Publisher: Westland
Pages: 264
Price: ₹499
Set in a watershed moment in Indian history, one that led to a rapid seeding of Hindu consciousness, this is a blistering novel by one of Hindi’s most inventive writers

ATTENTION PUBLISHERS:
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WRITE VIEW

‘Karma is a Useful Concept for Single Life’

British writer David Mitchell speaks to Kanika Sharma about why he thinks *Cloud Atlas* is his ‘hit album’, his idea of a utopian world and his next novel



Cloud Atlas
By: David Mitchell
Publisher: Sceptre
Pages: 544
Price: ₹999

Cloud Atlas has completed 20 years, and yet its appeal to readers is unceasing. When you look back at the novel, what realisations dawn upon you?

I feel the need to resist the temptation to read it in editing mode, and change everything. I want to say, ‘well done’ to the kid I was when I wrote it. It’s the best thing I could have written at the time. *Cloud Atlas* is my hit album. It has sold more than anything else I’ve ever written. It bought me some financial and literary independence.

Pico Iyer called your approach ‘novel globalism’ in the *Time*. Globalisation is premised on inter-connectedness. What draws you to such narratives?

I think interconnection as an archetypal theme got into me when I was a kid. Or maybe, it was this

obsession with causality. An early memory of mine is of my grandfather, who was a tailor. He got a job during WWII in a factory in North India to make military uniforms. My grandfather and his family spent the duration of the war in India. SS Cairo, a white liner went with my father from Southampton and docked in Mumbai. I still have a postcard of it. The next trip out, it was hit by a German torpedo, and it sunk. Some people survived, others didn’t. But that just hit me hard. All of these causalities; this sort of infinite domino tip-tip-tip...is what reality is. And, that is delicious to me.

Reincarnation or karma is a prominent archetype in your works. Your interpretation of the concept is quite close to the Hindu beliefs. Tell us more.

I am agnostic, but this



‘I would love a world where it is a civic responsibility to try to think like other people in your society. That’s, that’s a little glimpse of utopia’

doesn’t mean that religious concepts aren’t useful. When Christian, and some non-Christian, cultures talk about heaven and hell, I find the words to be useful instruments. Karma is like an intellectual equipment to use. Even in the course of a life, I think most of us die, and are reborn metaphorically, figuratively, several times.

Karma is a principle enshrined in a multi-life paradigm. Alternatively, it’s a useful concept for a single

life. I guess it’s also just about the nature of the narrative itself.

Cloud Atlas contains narratives occurring in New Zealand, Belgium, California, Britain, Korea and Hawaii. Has it ever proven to be daunting to write about different cultures or geographies?

It was easier when I started off in the ‘90s. The old Creative Writing Workshop advice—write what you know—has, in

more recent years, become a kind of a commandment. I don’t want to just write novels about middle-class, middle-aged English guys with university degrees. I’m too hungry to try to see the world through other people’s eyes, maybe with slightly differently coloured skins. That’s where the excitement is for me. I think it’s just really important that we do try. Republicans should try to think like Democrats, Democrats should try to think like how Trump voters think. And, maybe in a multi-cultural society like India, it’s that or it’s civic distress. In the UK, in Ireland, and everywhere else, it’s the same story. I would love a world where it is a civic responsibility to try to think like other people in your society. That is a little glimpse of utopia.

Tell us about your next book. When is it slated to be out?

It’s about now, about life, about love, about little cracks and fissures and get-out clauses in the finality of death. It’s a bit mad and a bit risky. Maybe like *Cloud Atlas*, it isn’t exactly a novel. I should finish it this summer. It should be out next year.

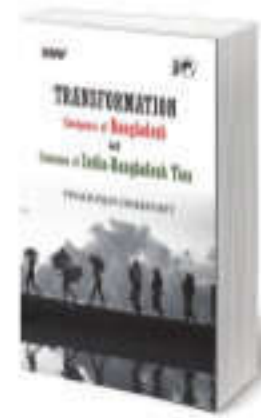
Looking East

By YOGENDRA KUMAR

This book, by a veteran diplomat with widely acknowledged expertise on Bangladesh, etches a wide arc of regional history right upto 2022. A concise, pithy and racy book, it begins with the history of formation of Bengali identity in its different facets, especially Muslim. It then traces its evolution, conditioned by not infrequent changes in political circumstances whose precipitate, violent dimension barely recede from the community’s consciousness. The author reflects throughout on the precise identity of a Bengali Muslim, which animates the regional politics till today while dissecting Bangladeshi politics to explain the functioning of the state and its regional ramifications for India’s foreign and domestic policies. The constant identity-related tension in Bangladeshi politics, whether a Bengali Muslim is ‘Muslim’ enough to constitute the core of its nationhood manifests itself as its daily grist.

The inner contradictions of Bengali Nationalism before Partition, and thereafter, burst forth with ferocity during the liberation war for Bangladesh. Despite Sheikh Mujib’s mass popularity before and after liberation, an abortive democratic transition under him complicated its growth as a nation, prising further apart its existing societal and governmental fractures. The post-1971 euphoric bilateral relationship was quickly followed by periods of dramatic swings between friendship and hostility. The hard-core statecraft practised by successive Bangladesh leaders necessitated suitable Indian responses to cope with these shifts.

As the author elaborates on these phases, baring innumerable critical



Emergence of Bangladesh and Evolution of India-Bangladesh Ties
By: PR Chakravarty
Publisher: KW Publishers
Pages: 270
Price: ₹1,500

inter-dependencies between the two countries, he provides insights into the steadying of this relationship in recent decades due to the friendly attitude of PM Sheikh Hasina. She has leveraged the relationship for a spectacular growth of Bangladesh’s economy and India’s keenness to foster it through various measures, especially wide spectrum connectivity projects.

A candid explanation has been given of the achievements as well as of the enduring and emerging challenges placing them in South Asia’s volatile geopolitical setting. Bangladesh’s authoritarian leadership is now in transition, its economy is increasingly vulnerable to internal and external geopolitical shocks, including the multiple localised impacts of accelerating global warming, and the overarching tension in India-China relations with its pluses and minuses for its leaders.

This empathetic, perceptive book, interspersed with his personal experiences as a highly placed participant in the shaping of this relationship, is a must read for everyone interested in understanding the profound complexity of managing India’s foreign relations in its immediate neighbourhood in our uncertain times.

The Shape of Simplicity

You read about older people having interesting second careers post-retirement or middle-aged people suddenly feeling the need for something eadically. But what do you say about a farming consultant-turned-furniture maker, who is all of 29? We'd say he's enterprising, creative and doing rather well in his second innings.

After getting a Master's degree in Agriculture in 2018, Jaipur-based Bhalendra Gupta was working with local farmers, helping them improve their practices and output. But then, a volleyball injury prevented him from going into the field: an impediment for anyone associated with farming.

Looking around for an alternate career, Gupta got interested in furniture. "Though Rajasthan is full of manufacturers making solid wood furniture, the products invariably go out of the state. In Jaipur, all I could find was furniture made of plywood and fibreboard or bulky, old-fashioned wooden pieces. I didn't want either, and I knew there were others like me. So, I decided to get into the business myself. I tried trading first,

Jaipur-based furniture designer Bhalendra Gupta launches a new collection for children

By SHAMPA DHAR-KAMATH



Jungle Book
knox kids bed
by Takshaka



Starship shelf
by Takshaka

but it didn't work. Then, I changed track and set up my own manufacturing unit. I had a little money saved from my farming days; my father, who is a government servant, also chipped in, and I started my business with ₹5 lakh."

Gupta's initial clients were all exporters. That worked well for him, as it gave him an appreciation and understanding of quality and put him in touch with vendors selling raw material. But less than two years later, the pandemic struck. The exporters disappeared, leaving him with a huge inventory. "Online selling was the only option. I managed to offload most of my stock on Amazon and Flipkart."

Though it was scary, the experience made Gupta confident that there was a market for his products. Once the second wave of Covid was over, he established his own brand Woodworm, and started

retailing from his website. All the furniture was made in-house.

All the pieces have straight legs and clean lines and are made of rosewood, acacia or mango wood. The simple, functional designs give the furniture an almost Scandinavian aesthetic. But the only foreign component is the Malaysian cane that Gupta loves for its "small

weave and neat look".

The quality and workmanship aside, Woodworm's big selling point is its competitive pricing. "We set out to provide clients with quality products at honest prices. And we've succeeded. We don't cut corners, use shoddy material or tolerate poor workmanship. Instead, we look for

innovative ways to offer more value," says Gupta.

The entrepreneur's newest offering is the Jungle Book range of children's furniture, under the Takshaka brandname, which Gupta uses to sell eco-friendly home and kitchen products. This is a personal venture for the entrepreneur: his designers created a baby chair and

rocker when his son was born. He loved both and decided to create a full line for kids. "We decided to create all the pieces in mango wood. It's a soft wood, which is light in colour and doesn't need polishing. That makes it perfect for children," explains Gupta. It took more than a year for the company to design, test and create the full range, and the first sale happened in December 2023.

So far, the line has only 20 products. There are cute chairs (with bunny ears and bear faces), bookshelves shaped like a rocket, beds with Mickey Mouse headboards, toy chests and table chair sets. But Gupta has big plans for the line.

He could be right. January 2024 saw a lightning order from Jamnagar for 40 tables and 80 chairs. He made the delivery in 10 days. The orders haven't stopped coming since.



Bhalendra Gupta in his Jaipur factory



(L-R) Solid wood cane chair by Woodworm; Norse solid wood cane bed by Woodworm



Embrace the Dot

As the polka-dot pattern makes a comeback in a sexy avatar, here are some style options to stock up on

If you've been following fashion trends long enough, you already know there's nothing new in this world. The same colours, fabrics and styles come through every few years. Skirt lengths rise one season to dip the next, and then rise again. Consider the flared jeans of the Seventies or the padded shoulders of the Eighties. They're back—on the ramp and off it. Of course, not every trend is popular with everyone. Fashionistas typically pick and choose from trending styles and colours to match their personality and body type.

Only the polka dot seems to buck that trend. The playful pattern is currently as popular with Hollywood A-listers as it is with the girl shopping at the fast fashion store next door. Remember Margot 'Barbie' Robbie? She showed up at the Palm Springs Film Festival earlier this year in a pale pink polka-dotted mini dress and shoes. Actor Phoebe Waller-Bridge attended the London premiere of her film *If* wearing a pin-striped suit and an asymmetrical, sheer polka-dotted crop top. In India, high street shoppers are choosing between a Zara white polka mini skirt with gathered details, an H&M pleated polka chiffon skirt and a white dotted Nicobar racerback dress in blue.



H&M strappy top; (below right) semi-sheer polka shirt and trousers from Zara



The playful polka-dot pattern is currently as popular with Hollywood A-listers as it is with the girl shopping at the fast fashion store next door

If there's one big difference between today's polka-dotted offerings and the earlier outfits (yes, even the chocolate-coloured dress Julia Roberts wore in *Pretty Woman*), it lies in the former's fashion-forward, sexy details.

It started from the SS 24 ramps, where Dolce sent out seductively-sheer *choli*-like tops and flowing frocks, and Stella McCartney showed off-shoulder black top and leave-nothing-to-the-imagi-

semi-sheer polka shirt and trousers (slip optional). The high-necked black dress at H&M, demure at first glance, is a mesh bodycon dress. If it separates you want, the brand gives you an itty-bitsy flouncy strappy top.

It's too early to say how long the trend will last. But if you want a pattern with personality in your wardrobe, it may be time to go shopping. ASAP. —SDK

HOW TO

No Room for Dents



Are you someone who never shifts her furniture around because of the dents they've made in your carpet? Well, that can change now. With the small tricks listed below, you can make the dents disappear faster than you can say 'new-look room'.

Place one ice cube each on every dent, and give it time to melt. When the ice cube has melted completely, blot up the extra water with a tissue or a sponge. Then, brush the damp carpet fibres back and forth with your hand or a comb till they regain their original height.

If you're dealing with a deep dent, you will need to use more than one ice cube. If it's a shallow dent, just spritz it with water.

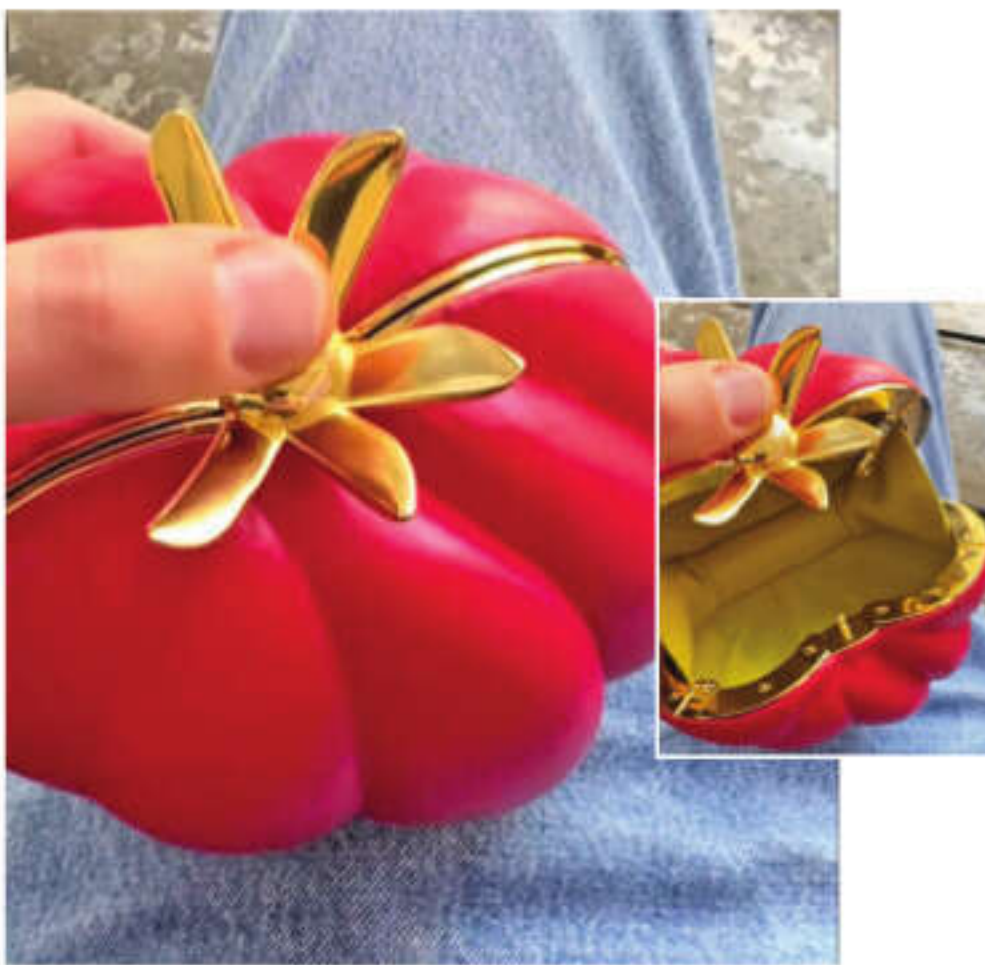
Then, use a hair dryer to dry the affected area, while simultaneously brushing up the fibres with your other hand.

If a large area of your carpet has been hollowed by, say, a leg-less sofa or a large, heavy sideboard, wet a tea towel and place it on the affected area. Then plug in an iron, put it on a medium setting and lightly iron the damp cloth. Leave the towel in place for at least ten minutes after you've finished ironing. Remove it when it's bone dry to reveal a dent-free carpet.



Loewe in the Time of Tomatoes

Here's how a viral meme may have led to the Spanish brand crafting a tomato-inspired clutch



A fortnight ago, Sicilian designer Gianna Rosina posted the picture of a distinctive heirloom tomato on X (formerly Twitter). "Look at this tomato I got," she wrote. The picture of the funky-looking fruit/vegetable caught the attention of a content publisher who said, "The tomato is so Loewe," referring to the Spanish luxury fashion brand that's become synonymous with reinvention and the ability to twist the average into the audacious, under its creative director Jonathan Anderson.

The post and the picture went viral, and caught the attention of Anderson, who reposted it with two tomato emojis. It didn't end there. Two days later, Anderson put out a video of a 'Loewe clutch'. Made of red leather, it was shaped exactly like the tomato with similar distinctive grooves and a golden sepal masquerading as the lock.

While the posts and pictures are in the virtual world, rumour has it that the clutch may not be. Anderson, they say, had designed the tomato bag well before the viral meme. That's possible. One of Loewe's best-selling fragrances is called Tomato Leaves. The range includes a hand wash, body lotion, liquid and solid soap, incense, candles, diffuser and room spray. Plus, Anderson has previously released bags in the form of a pigeon, a frog and a cushion for his own brand JW Anderson.

‘It is a Film for the Big Screen’

Kevin Costner talks about making and starring in the latest epic trilogy, *Horizon: An American Saga*, and his love for the Western genre

By ADAM STONE

Horizon: An American Saga is the latest in a long line of epics you have worked on over the years. Where do you find the inspiration?

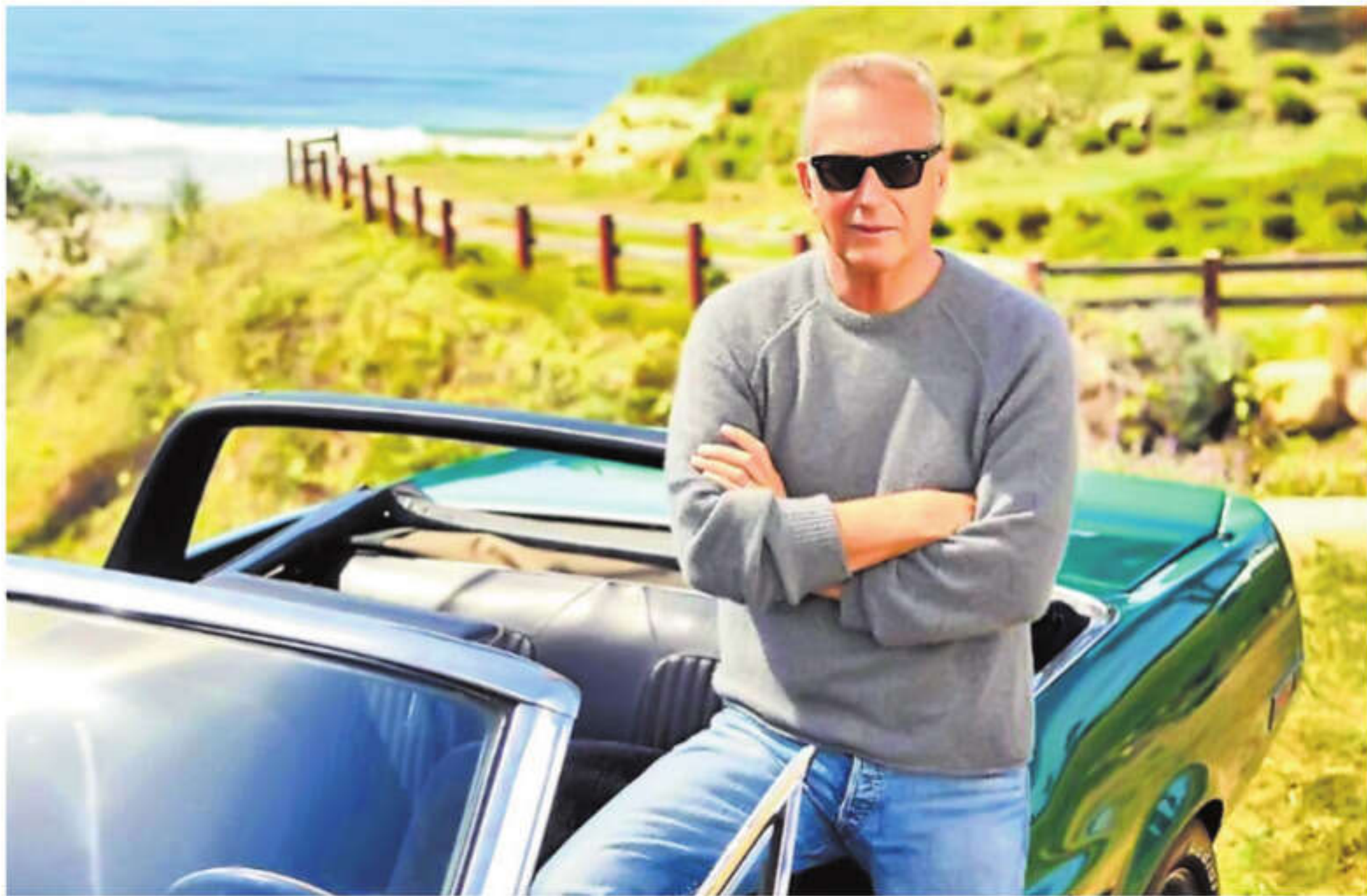
I get inspired by art and by books. And of course, the camera was a thing back in the 1800s, so photographs really inspire me. This is an era that has fascinated me from when I was growing up and it still does. *Horizon* definitely draws on a lifetime of everything I have read and learned.

How important is it to you to have audiences experience *Horizon* on the big screen?

It's important. The theatre experience is something I truly believe in, and *Horizon* is the kind of movie you want to see on a big screen.

You invested a lot of your own money in making this film. Why is that?

Because it was so hard to get people to believe in the movie that I wanted to make. I made this movie as much for myself as for the audiences. It was the same with *Dances With Wolves*, *Field Of Dreams*, *Bull Durham*



A still from *Horizon: An American Saga*



and *Open Range*. I never think my movie is better than anybody else's, but I also don't think anybody else's movie is better than mine. It's just so happens that my movies are harder to make. My problem is that if I think something good, I have to do it anyway.

***Horizon* is set to be the first of a trilogy. When do you plan to release the next?**

Well, we have filmed the second one, so that will follow soon. Right now, we are busy making the third. It's a matter of money, but I am lucky to have acquired some things that are valuable. I am at a point where I don't need four homes, so I am willing to take a risk to make my movies. Ideally, I want to leave those homes to my children, but they live their own lives. Hopefully, this will go well, and I won't

lose any homes, but it is a risk.

Speaking of your children, what was it like to have your 15-year-old son, Hayes, as one of your *Horizon* co-stars?

He had never acted before, but he did a good job. It's a small part, but I was glad that he was able to follow the level of direction I was giving him. Hayes actually gets his name from my character in the trilogy. That's how long I have been working on this project. It's beautiful that he is here to help me tell it.

What is it about the Western genre that appeals to you?

It's the challenge of not just making a Western, but making a good one. They are really hard to make and there's not a lot of great ones. A lot of films set the genre back because they're just too simple. They have somebody

killing a family, and then someone seeking revenge for the rest of the movie. That's fine if it's done well, but it makes people think of the American West as something simple. It was terribly complicated.

You have been in the business for more than 40 years now. Would you say you are as passionate about filmmaking as you ever were?

I'm passionate about the work. I want to make films as an actor and director that are going to stand the test of time. That continues to be my goal.

How much do you take notice of the critical response?

It's all part of the business. But, one has to make sure why they have done the movie. I will continue to try to do my best. That is all we can do.

—Asia Features

BUZZ CUT



PACKED SCHEDULE

Akshay Kumar's next film is *Sarfira*, the trailer for which was launched recently. The story revolves around ordinary but ambitious people, who have managed to achieve their goals despite several obstacles. Kumar has has *Jolly LLB 3* and *Welcome to the Jungle* in the pipeline.

KING OF SCREENS

Director **SS Rajamouli's** next film, believed to be starring Mahesh Babu and set in the African jungles, is rumoured to be an adaptation of a novel series. The director reportedly recently bought the rights to African-British novelist Wilbur Smith's adventure novels *Triumph of the Sun* and *King of Kings*.



CAMILA CABELLO ON THE PRICE OF HER MET GALA ICEBLOCK PURSE



‘You can make it at home!’

Lover Boy, Actually

Rohit Saraf on his new film *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, being called the national crush and choosing quality over quantity

By SHAMA BHAGAT

He has shared screen space with Alia Bhatt, Priyanka Chopra and Farhan Akhtar. He has an impressive following of 3.4 million on Instagram. He has been named the national crush. Yet, 28-year-old Rohit Saraf refuses to call himself a celebrity. Perhaps because his filmography has been noteworthy in terms of content, but not numbers. Since he debuted in 2012 with the TV show, *Best Friends Forever*, Saraf has done close to 13 projects, including films and web series, mostly in supporting roles. The latest addition to his repertoire is his newly released film *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, where Saraf plays one of the leads, alongside debutants Jibraan Khan, Pashmina Roshan and Naila Grewal.

“I have always believed in quality over quantity. Every film I have chosen has been a stepping stone, and has led to a film like *Ishq Vishk Rebound*,” he says, adding, “I am not choosy. I simply believe that every character that I play must take the story forward. And I want to play such roles even if that

A poster of *Ishq Vishk Rebound*



‘I was once rejected because I was apparently too good looking to play a heartland character’

means giving up on a lot of films. If I constantly do projects for the sake of being visible, I would reach a saturation point and I don't want that.”

In many ways, *Ishq Vishk Rebound* was familiar grounds for Saraf. First, it is a romance, a genre that the actor has mastered with two seasons of his incredibly popular Netflix series, *Mismatched*. The film is sort-of a remake of the 2003 *Ishq Vishk*, starring Shahid Kapoor and Amrita Rao. But, Saraf insists that the only similarity between the two is that they are both

love-stories, something that “feels like home” to the actor. “We are not trying to ape Shahid sir. He's an incredible actor who has already set benchmarks in romance. There's also Ranbir Kapoor and Ranveer Singh. But, I believe that there is still a huge appetite for romance in this country,” he says.

Secondly, the film has been directed by the *Mismatched* director Nipun Dharmadikari. “We have known each other for over five years. I love working with him. He comes from a theatre background and often we would rehearse together before shooting,” he says, adding, “I was too young and inexperienced when I first met him, so his vision was important. And, now I know it's safe to follow that.”

Saraf's popularity and picky approach while choosing projects, however, belie his initial challenges. The actor admits that his boyish

charm often worked against him during auditions. “I was once rejected because I was apparently too good looking to play a heartland character, and that was just beyond my understanding. I think every producer and director is entitled to their vision, but they shouldn't be rejecting me on these grounds. But, I also believe rejections only make you stronger,” says the actor, who has starred in several hit films, including *Dear Zindagi*, where he played Alia Bhatt's younger brother; *The Sky is Pink*, where he is Priyanka Chopra and Farhan Akhtar's son. There's also Anurag Basu's *Ludo*, Shonali Bose's *Hichki*, Hrithik Roshan-starrer *Vikram Vedha* and the Norwegian film, *What Will People Say?*

Saraf may have taken his time to get started, but he is evidently making strides. Following *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, he will return for the third season of *Mismatched*, followed by *Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumar* directed by Shashank Khaitan.

BINGE BOX



ENGLISH WOES

Penelope Featherington awaits the public disclosure of her identity as Lady Whistledown, even as she is confused by the reaction of her friend-turned-husband Collin Bridgerton on learning her secret. Watch the second part of the season three of *Bridgerton*, starring Nicola Coughlan and Luke Newton, on Netflix.

TRENDING

Kota Factory S3 Netflix

CAST Jitendra Kumar, Mayur More, Ranjan Raj
PLOT Students face an uphill challenge amid ambition, loss and grueling pressure

Yakshini Hotstar

CAST Sofiya Shaikh, Priyanka Chaurasia, Kamana Newar
PLOT During a quest to undo a curse, a supernatural being comes across a hopeless romantic and falls in love

Kleeks Academy Netflix

CAST Antonia Litwiniak, Danuta Stenka
PLOT To find her missing father, an ordinary girl accepts an invitation to a magical academy run by an eccentric teacher

Bad Cop Hotstar

CAST Gulshan Devaiah, Anurag Kashyap
PLOT Twin brothers on the opposite side of the law get caught in a complex web of deceit and betrayal

Trigger Warning Netflix

CAST Jessica Alba, Mark Webber, Anthony Michael Hall
PLOT A Special Forces commando uncovers a dangerous conspiracy when she returns to her hometown looking for answers into her father's death

REVIEW

Yes, He Ken



ULTRAMAN: RISING

Director: Shannon Tindle

Genre: Animation

Platform: Netflix

Language: English

Rating: ★★★★★

Netflix's animated film *Ultraman: Rising* starts with a scene that serves as a moment of truth for its protagonist, Ken Sato (Christopher Sean). Ken's father, an Uncle Ben-like figure named Professor Sato (Gedde Watanabe), asks him whether he wants to be a baseball player or take on the mantle of Ultraman, Earth's last line of defence against colossal, city-stomping Kaiju. A confused Ken cannot decide for himself, and the moment instantly reminds you of Uncle Ben telling Peter Parker, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Director Shannon Tindle's *Ultraman: Rising* offers a vibrant blend of classic Kaiju (strange beast) action and a story with relatable themes like family values, parenthood, identity versus responsibility, and so forth. Torn between his passion for baseball and the weighty mantle of Ultraman, he wrestles with responsibility and self-doubt. This internal struggle is reminiscent of many superhero origin stories, from *Superman* to *Spider-Man*. However, the film does not simply retread old ground. It uses the trope to explore themes of identity and legacy, particularly the question of whether heroism is a choice or a birthright.

The film shines in its world-building. It paints a world where Kaiju attacks are a constant threat, forcing humanity to develop defence technology, which extends to Ultraman himself, whose sleek armour suit and instant transformation capabilities resemble Iron Man. Adding to the Iron Man parallels is Mina (Tamlyn Tomita), Ultraman's witty AI companion. Their banter provides a steady stream of humour throughout the film, reminiscent of Tony Stark's interactions with J.A.R.V.I.S. *Ultraman: Rising* carves its own niche by introducing a unique twist: a colossal, adorable baby kaiju that Ken must raise and protect. This addition injects a surprising dose of heart and humour into the film.

The film's early acts are a joy to watch. It establishes the universe with clear world-building, introduces the characters with relatable personalities, and sets the stage for the irresistible comedic dynamic between Ken and Mina. The plot thickens with the emergence of the Kaiju Defense Force (KDF), a seemingly noble organisation tasked with protecting Tokyo from Kaiju threats. However, a hidden agenda and a sinister leader, Dr Onda (Keone Young), cast a shadow of doubt on the KDF's intentions. This twist adds a layer of intrigue to the plot and raises the stakes.

While the final showdown between Ultraman and Dr Onda feels slightly rushed, it does not overshadow the overall entertainment value. The animation shines throughout the film, particularly during the action sequences. The Kaiju designs are both awe-inspiring and destructive, and the battles showcase Ultraman's impressive array of powers with dazzling special effects.

Ultimately, *Ultraman: Rising* is a triumph. The film's humour, central conflict and baby Kaiju make it a superhero adventure with a fresh twist.

—Sreejith Mullappilly

