

XXCE

The Telegraph

t2

BAKSHO BONDI

P9

Thursday
20 February 2025

REACHER
SEASON 3

SOUL & STRENGTH

PICTURE: PABITRA DAS

P8

HOWZAT!

SRIJIT MUKHERJI &
PARAMBRATA CHATTOPADHYAY

P7

RETURN OF THE LONE WOLF

● B'DAY, CAMPUS 2 ● BOOKS, FOOD FEST 4,5 ● STREAMING, WATCHIT 6
● YOUNG CHEFS, CLUB CALL 12,13,14 ● TECH TOOLS, PARTY 15,16

CINDY CRAWFORD, RIHANNA, PATRALEKHAA



This year, your hard work will be noticed and you will reap the rewards of success. Concentration, focus and perseverance will get you where you want to reach. A promotion or job offer could be coming your way. If you are single, someone from your past may reappear in a romantic way. Do not overthink and try to find harmony within yourself.

— Nita Chhotalal

ALSO: JAY HERNANDEZ

Instagram



SCENIC:

Al-vida Jannat-e-Kasheer! Shot for something lovely, coming soon
Uploaded by @ishaankhatler
(Ishaan Khatter)



SHIMMERY PALETTE:

Uploaded by @sanyamalhotra_ (Sanya Malhotra)

T O D A Y ' S T I P S by Nita Chhotalal



ARIES

DO balance your energy to avoid feeling overwhelmed
DON'T get anxious
EXPECT to prioritise your tasks and maintain harmony in relationships



TAURUS

DO make sure to allocate time for relaxation and mental health
DON'T neglect your fitness routine
EXPECT meditation or yoga to give you inner peace and reduce stress



GEMINI

DO focus on financial planning and organisation
DON'T buy impulsively
EXPECT to identify areas where you can cut back on unnecessary expenses



CANCER

DO keep a balance between your emotions and logical decisions
DON'T be impatient
EXPECT to come upon opportunities that can help you in your personal and professional lives



LEO

DO be honest with your feelings and listen actively to your partner
DON'T feel helpless
EXPECT to open your heart and communicate well



VIRGO

DO use your analytical skills to weigh the pros and cons
DON'T make hasty decisions
EXPECT to approach new opportunities with diligence and clear focus



LIBRA

DO be watchful of your expenses to be financially secure
DON'T neglect financial planning
EXPECT to look at your budget and spending habits to see where you can cut back



SCORPIO

DO make sure you're getting enough rest and nourishment
DON'T neglect meditation that can help you to remain calm
EXPECT to set up healthy routines that will serve you well in your overall vitality



SAGITTARIUS

DO incorporate new ways of thinking as they can increase productivity
DON'T be rigid with your views
EXPECT your enthusiasm to be an important asset



CAPRICORN

DO be proactive in your approach and show your skills well
DON'T find fault with others
EXPECT to be open to feedback which can help your career prospects



AQUARIUS

DO take time to relax in order to pay attention to your mental health
DON'T get stressed
EXPECT to stay fit and energised by incorporating physical activities



PISCES

DO trust your intuition when it comes to evaluating potential matches
DON'T be emotional
EXPECT to let go of past misunderstandings and build trust

Nita Chhotalal is on



@Divine Grace - Nita Chhotalal



@mysticalguidancebynita

WHATSUP

The Assembly of God Church School (AGCS), in association with **The Telegraph**, held Crescendo, their annual school reunion bringing together alumni for an unforgettable evening of camaraderie and celebration. It was a melting pot of emotions as old friends reconnected, reminisced about the days spent at their beloved alma mater, and sang the school anthem in union.

"Crescendo is an opportunity to reconnect with teachers, relive schooldays with besties and create memories. We wish that this custom continues and the bonds of unconditional love grows with time," said Hemant Kapoor, secretary of the AGCS alumni committee.

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THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH SCHOOL REUNION, CRESCENDO, WITH THE TELEGRAPH, WAS AN EVENING OF MEMORIES



Former teachers and students of the school came together to celebrate cherished memories by cutting a cake that symbolised their solidarity and the school's lasting impact on their lives



Past and present teachers gathered at the reunion to celebrate shared memories, reconnect with their former students, and reflect upon with pride and joy the enduring impact on the lives they had helped shape



A captivating fashion show celebrating creativity and shared memories united ex-students of various batches. The runway sparkled with stunning ensembles, beautifully highlighting their enduring bond



The core committee members of AGCS alumni committee posed for the t2 camera.

"School reunions celebrate more than just our shared past; they honour enduring friendships and memories. They are a joyful reminder of how far we have come together. I am immensely proud to organise Crescendo and to foster the connections that define us," said Sandip Bajaj (left), assistant secretary of the committee.

"It gives me immense pleasure, as a senior and a founding member, to have the opportunity to organise this reunion giving members and ex-students a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with old friends, reminisce about cherished memories, and catch up on everyone's latest achievements," said Arun Bose (centre), AGCS alumni committee vice-president.



"We eagerly anticipate this reunion each year," said Kahkashan Iqbal (right), who, along with her batchmate from 1999 Akanksha Modi, was having a good time

Urmimala Dev (t2 intern)
Pictures: Rashbehari Das

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SUNDAY OPEN



JULIE BANERJEE MEHTA REVISITS MARK TWAIN'S FOLLOWING THE EQUATOR AS THE BOOK IS SET TO BE STAGED AS A PLAY IN THE CITY



Keshav Sen in the play *Meet Mark Twain*, to be staged at The Tollygunge Club on Friday

In the late 1890s as part of his tour of the British Empire, Mark Twain, the prodigious American writer who wrote *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, stayed at the Great Eastern Hotel in Calcutta, which he called the "Jewel of the East". Twain wrote about his experiences in Calcutta in his travelogue *Following the Equator*, which is the book that inspired veteran scriptwriter and director, Renu Roy, and formidable thespian Keshav Roy to produce an innovative and spectacular stage adaptation of Twain's travels.

The celebrated American author Mark Twain in his 1897 travelogue on India, *Following the Equator*, wrote approvingly of imperialism, of the great deeds of British colonial leaders and administrators, who performed a selfless task of uplifting the Indian masses, but he also did so with humour, occasionally poking fun at the White bureaucracy.

It was a time of great transformation for Twain, who loved his cigars and his pipes, and was originally a supporter of American imperial power. He then became a staunch anti-imperialist who had seen how the United States had occupied the Philippines in 1898, not to emancipate their people but to subjugate them. He wrote: "We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem.... It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make those people free, and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way. And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land."

But when Twain arrived in Calcutta to write a chapter or two on the city in *Following the Equator*, he found Calcutta to be "a huge city" which is "rich in historical memories rich in British achievement — military, political, commercial; rich in the results of the miracles done by that brace of mighty magicians, Clive and Hastings".

And here comes the tongue-in-cheek Twain, who says in the next sentence that Calcutta also has "a cloud-kissing monument to one Ochterlony. It is a fluted candlestick 250 feet high. This lingam is the only large monument in Calcutta, I believe. It is a fine ornament, and will keep Ochterlony in mind. Wherever you are, in Calcutta, and for miles around, you can see it; and always when you see it you think of Ochterlony. And so there is not an hour in the day that you do not think of Ochterlony and wonder who he was. It is good that Clive cannot come back, for he would

think it was for Plassey; and then that great spirit would be wounded when the revelation came that it was not."

And so, "Clive would find out that it was for Ochterlony, and he would think Ochterlony was a battle. And he would think it was a great one, too." Twain adds, with a playful wink to his reader, "But he would be mistaken. Ochterlony was a man, not a battle. And he did good and honourable service, too, as good and honourable service as has been done in India by seventy-five or a hundred other Englishmen of courage, rectitude, and distinguished capacity."

Now that his readers in the West know that Ochterlony is a man, not a battle, Twain clarifies that these hundred other Englishmen "have no monuments, and were not expecting any. Ochterlony could not have been expecting one, and it is not at all likely that he desired one — certainly not until Clive and Hastings should be supplied."

In his characteristic way, Twain continues, "Every day Clive and Hastings lean on the battlements of heaven and look down and wonder which of the two the monument is for; and they fret and worry because they cannot find out, and so the peace of heaven is spoiled for them and lost. But not for Ochterlony. Ochterlony is not troubled. He doesn't suspect that it is his monument. Heaven is sweet and peaceful to him. There is a sort of unfairness about it all. Indeed, if monuments were always given in India for high achievements, duty straitly performed, and smirch less records, the landscape would be monotonous with them."

Mark Twain is great not merely because he was a master of humour, but because he wielded it as a scalpel to expose the absurdities of human nature, society and morality. His wit was not idle amusement, it was a weapon against hypocrisy. Few writers have so effortlessly blended satire, social critique and storytelling, creating works that remain as relevant today as they were, in his own time.

Julie Banerjee Mehta is the author of *Dance of Life*, and co-author of the bestselling biography *Strongman: The Extraordinary Life of Hun Sen*. She has a PhD in English and South Asian Studies from the University of Toronto, where she taught World Literature and Postcolonial Literature for many years. She currently lives in Calcutta and teaches Masters English at Loreto College

Renu Roy, a well-known personality in performing, visual and fine arts, is the founder-director of Spandan, a reputed cultural foundation in Calcutta. Keshav Roy is a leading stage actor and a dramatist who has to his credit more than 40 major productions. He has been a part of Spandan, and apart from being a writer, an elocutionist and a public speaker, Keshav Roy is also a professional illustrator and painter. The duo spoke to Julie Banerjee Mehta on their play exploring the travels of Mark Twain, titled *Meet Mark Twain*. Excerpts.

What were the parts of the book *Following the Equator* that you both found really felicitous and moving?

Mark Twain's observations on India in *Following the Equator* are some of the most powerful and thought-provoking in the book. His writing about the country strikes a balance between admiration for its cultural richness and a biting critique of British colonial rule. His keen eye for hypocrisy is evident when he notes that the British justified their rule as a "civilising mission" while their policies impoverished the very people they claimed to uplift.

Two aspects of the book stand out as particularly felicitous and moving: his observations on imperialism, and his reflections on human suffering.

One of the most moving passages in *Following the Equator* is Twain's account of the famine-stricken regions. Unlike many Western travellers of his time, who often romanticised the empire, Twain refused to look away from the suffering he saw. His descriptions of starving villagers and exploitative colonial policies were not written merely for shock value; they were a call to conscience, a way to make his Western readers confront the true cost of imperialism.

Ultimately, Twain's writings on India reflect his greatest strengths as a writer — his ability to mix wit with wisdom, humour with humanism, and skepticism with deep compassion. He did not simply document India. He sought to understand it, and in doing so, left behind one of the most insightful and enduring Western accounts of the country under colonial rule.

Who is the target audience?

Fans of classic American literature and satire who appreciate Twain's wit, storytelling, and social commentary. Then there would be those interested in 19th-century America, imperialism and Twain's sharp critiques of society. His views on race, politics, and human nature remain relevant, making the play appealing to those who enjoy thought-provoking historical narratives. Twain was a humourist above all, so a well-written play about him would attract audiences who enjoy clever



Renu Roy

dialogue, wit and satire. His style of humour — dry, observational, and often self-deprecating would resonate with fans of smart comedy. And finally general audiences seeking a unique and engaging experience. Even those unfamiliar with Twain's works might be drawn in by the humour, historical depth, and the charisma of a Twain-inspired performance. A well-executed play could make his character feel just as relevant and entertaining today as he was in his own time.

What were the challenges in staging this play?

One of the greatest challenges in crafting Twain's voice for the stage was capturing the effortless charm of his

humour. Twain was not a man of theatrical grandiosity — his wit was dry, his sarcasm casual, and his storytelling unforced. Unlike Shakespearean roles, where emotion is projected outward with sweeping gestures and powerful rhetoric, Twain's genius lay in the quiet punchline, the sly remark, the well-timed pause. The script had to reflect that balance — clever, biting, and insightful without feeling overly polished or rehearsed.

Another hurdle was Twain's rhythm of speech. He had an almost musical cadence — folksy yet precise, humorous yet profound. Finding that balance, ensuring that the actor didn't slip into either exaggerated theatricality or overly modern casualness, was a fine-tuned process. It required stripping away the instinct to "perform" and instead embracing the art of "telling" as Twain himself might have done on a lecture stage.

Meet Mark Twain will be staged at The Tollygunge Club on Friday, February 21, at 6.45pm



FOOD

DHAKAI FOOD POP-UP AT USHA IS BRINGING THE FLAVOURS OF BANGLADESH TO THE HEART OF CALCUTTA

Usha restaurant in Ballygunge is offering a vibrant taste of Bangladesh with its Dhakai Food Pop-up. This culinary celebration brings the bold, rich flavours of Dhaka straight to your plate. From the iconic Dhakai Kacchi Biryani to the mouthwatering Cox's Bazar

Roast Chicken, the pop-up offers a true feast for the senses with its classic line-up of dishes from our neighbouring country. The festival is on till February 28.

"Sohini Bhattacharya, our consulting chef, her mother hails from Bangladesh, and she knows the food inside out. With her deep-rooted knowledge, Dhakai Food

Pop-up at Usha is bringing the authentic flavours of Bangladesh to the heart of Calcutta. We've made sure to keep the dishes as authentic as possible, without any fusion twists," Jayanta Chatterjee, co-owner of the restaurant, told t2.

Here's what we liked from the menu.



Usha Ji'r Pochonder Dhakai Paneer Bhaja was an interesting appetiser. The crispy, golden-brown paneer cubes, perfectly seasoned with a mix of aromatic spices, were soft and melt-in-your-mouth on the inside with a satisfying crunch on the outside.



Cox's Bazar Roast Chicken was infused with bold, aromatic spices and slow-cooked. The chicken was beautifully tender and juicy, with the skin crisped to a golden perfection.



Originating from the Borishal region of Bangladesh, the Chicken Borishali Kebabs delighted with their bold flavours and intoxicating aroma. The chicken marinated in a rich blend of aromatic spices, yoghurt, and mustard oil, allows the flavours to deeply penetrate the meat.



Mutton Bhuna was undoubtedly the star on the table. The thick, flavourful gravy, bursting with the warmth of garam masala, cumin, coriander, and a hint of heat, clung to each piece of mutton, making every bite more indulgent than the last.



Thakumar Haather Chicken Jaali Kebab had delicate seasoning, combined with the juiciness of the meat. The crispy edges left us craving for more with every delicious bite.



We loved the Chattogram er Chingri Morich Polao. The delicate sweetness of prawns with the fragrant, spiced rice created a dish that is both rich and aromatic.



The sublime Chicken Dhakai Kacchi Biryani was aromatic and flavourful, with tender chicken and fragrant basmati rice cooked together with a blend of spices.



We ended our delicious meal with the velvety Uttor Bonger Kesar Feni.



Bangladeshi chef Nayana Afroz, who was invited for a tasting session, with Jayanta Chatterjee

Debanjali Nandi
Pictures:
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JAAVED JAAFERI REFLECTS ON HIS OTT OUTING AHEAD OF HIS LATEST RELEASE OOPS AB KYA ON THURSDAY

Jaaved Jaaferi was moonwalking across India around the time when all eyes were on Michael Jackson and his *Dangerous* moves in the US. Jaaferi later hosted the TV dance show *Boogie Woogie*. Although through all these years, the son of comedian Jagdeep was acting in Hindi films as well, mostly in comedies, it is now, with the advent of OTT, that he is facing the camera regularly. t2 speaks to the nimble-footed actor about his latest outing on JioHotstar, *Oops Ab Kya*, inspired by *Jane the Virgin*, a Latin American telenovela. The series, co-starring Shweta Basu Prasad and Sonali Kulkarni, drops on February 20.

What are your Calcutta-specific memories?

I haven't been to Calcutta recently. I shot a film in Murshidabad with Shatabdi Roy two and a half years ago, called *The Jangipur Trial*. It has not released yet. Before that there were always the shows in places like Chandannagar, Midnapore... I did a lot of those shows in the 1990s. In the middle of nowhere, there are 15,000 people waiting. Those shows would go on from 7.30pm to 5am. It was an amazing experience. I had asked them: "Why do you carry on till dawn?" They said we have to either wind up at 10 o'clock or we have to continue till 5pm. There is no public transport after 10pm till 5am. If we end in between, miscreants might create problems. So we would carry on till people had transport to go home in.

Coming to this show, it seems to be a fun family drama based on a medical goof-up involving an accidental artificial insemination.

It's an interesting show, raising issues with old and new value systems. The girl is a virgin but she is pregnant. She is not Mother Mary. So how did she become pregnant? That mystery gets solved but complexities arise. And she has to keep the baby. She knows the guy and he is a married man.

What is your role?
I am the girl's father.

So you are the person most likely to get a heart attack on hearing of the situation.



A poster of *Oops Ab Kya*

No, no. I don't know. I had got married to her mother and we got divorced. She didn't tell me then that she was pregnant. So when certain things happen, after 25 years, I get to know I have a daughter. So this is a new chapter opening in my life. A lot of complexities are arising.

So this comes as a double whammy for you — that you have a daughter and that daughter is



Jaaved Jaaferi.

Picture courtesy: Jaaved Jaaferi (Instagram)

having a child!

My relationship with her mother also comes in under the scanner. I am a fading TV star who was popular at one time. The characters are quite nuanced.

The premise is such that it could be made into a serious show too.

Which road has the series taken?

It has taken the light-hearted road. Otherwise, the show would have become too heavy. But they have made their points intelligently. You will smile, you will laugh and also shed a tear. Lots of moments are there. I don't normally watch such romantic dramas. I prefer thrillers

and drama. But when I worked on this, I found the script to be very interesting. I would sit and watch it. This is drama and comedy — dramedy, you may say.

Comedy has been your forte. Has there been a change in the kind of roles you are getting now from what would be offered in the 1990s and 2000s? Are the stories more intimate?

OTT is a very interesting space. It is between TV series and film. It is like an expanded film, more detailed. A film has to tell a story in two hours. Here you get an opportunity to go deep with the story, character and situation. Even if you plan a second season, one graph is completed. In eight episodes, it comes to some kind of conclusion. Interesting territory is being trodden upon. You don't have to worry about film distributors, territories etc. So one can experiment more, without worrying about formulae of making money. A lot more challenging scripts are being written. It is a great time for the audience. They are getting more variety.

Horror comedy is coming up in a big way. You have acted in one, *Bhoot Police*.

Yes. But these genres have always existed. There was a film called *Bhoot Bungla* (directed by Mehmood) in the 1960s. There is so much expansion. It is also formulaic. One film makes ₹100 crores, so everyone wants to make a horror comedy. This happens in other businesses too. Horror comedies are the flavour of the year. It is a passing phase.

You have also made serious films like *Fire* and *Shaurya* along the way. Do you think all your skill sets were not properly utilised?

I had the skill sets to be a lead. But it didn't happen. Maybe I didn't plan my career well. There is no point looking back and thinking I made a mistake or perceptions were wrong. I have been around for 40 years. Opportunities are coming my way. In the last four months, I have had four web series releases, including *Oops Ab Kya*. And all the roles have been different. So it's a great time.

Sudeshna Banerjee

OTT is a very interesting space. It is between TV series and film. It is like an expanded film, more detailed. A film has to tell a story in two hours. Here you get an opportunity to go deep with the story, character and situation. Even if you plan a second season, one graph is completed. In eight episodes, it comes to some kind of conclusion

WATCHIT!



Having made friends with Lyle, a singing crocodile that lives in the attic of his new home, Josh (Winslow Fegley), a schoolboy, must band together with Lyle's charismatic owner Hector Valenti (Javier Bardem) to protect the friendly reptile from his evil neighbour Mr Grumps.

Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile; Sony Pix, 10.55pm

ENGLISH

MOVIES OF THE DAY

Wonder Woman 1984: Sony Pix, 2.30pm
Night at the Museum, Secret of the Tomb: STAR Movies Select HD, 4.45pm
Blue Beetle: Sony Pix, 5.10pm
Avengers, Infinity War: STAR Movies

Select HD, 6.30pm
Vacancy: &flix, 6.55pm
Gemini: &Prime HD, 7.30pm
Deadpool: STAR Movies Select HD, 9pm
The Legend of Tarzan: Sony Pix, 9pm
America's Sweethearts: &Prime HD, 9pm
The Other Guys: &flix, 9pm
Easy A: &Prime HD, 10.40pm

HINDI

SHOWSTOPPERS

Dil Ko Tumse Pyaar Hua: STAR Plus, 6pm
Suman Indori: Colors, 6.30pm
Pocket Mein Aasmaan: STAR Plus, 6.30pm
Megha Barsenge: Colors, 7pm
Iss Ishq Ka... Rabb Rakha: STAR Plus, 7pm
Bas Itna Sa Khwab Hai: Zee TV, 7pm
Maati Se Bandhi Dor: STAR Plus, 7.30pm
Kaise Mujhe Tum Mil Gaye: Zee TV, 7.30pm
Bhagya Lakshmi: Zee TV, 8pm
Ram Bhavan: Colors, 8.30pm
Advocate Anjali Awasthi: STAR Plus, 8.30pm
Jagriti — Ek Nayi Subah: Zee TV, 8.30pm
Mangal Lakshmi: Colors, 9pm

Udne Ki Aasha: STAR Plus, 9pm
Kumkum Bhagya: Zee TV, 9pm
Jaane Anjaane Hum Miley: Zee TV, 9.30pm
Mannat Har Khushi Paane Ki: Colors, 10pm
Anupamaa: STAR Plus, 10pm
Vasudha: Zee TV, 10pm

BENGALI

MOVIES OF THE DAY

Sasurbari Zindabad: Colors Bangla Cinema, 1pm
Guru: Jalsha Movies, 1.30pm
MLA Phatakeshto: Colors Bangla, 2pm
Geet Sangeet: Zee Bangla Cinema, 2pm
Judge Saheb: Aakash Aath, 3.05pm
Dui Prithibi: Colors Bangla Cinema, 4pm
Sangharsha: Jalsha Movies, 4.45pm
Satya Mithya: Zee Bangla Cinema, 5pm
Khoka 420: Colors Bangla Cinema, 7.30pm
Love Express: Jalsha Movies, 8pm

Abhimaan: Zee Bangla Cinema, 10pm
Yuddha: Colors Bangla Cinema, 10.30pm

SPORT

ICC Men's Champions Trophy, Bangladesh vs India - live: STAR Sports 1 & 1HD, 2.20pm
AFC Champions League Two, Jeonbuk vs Port FC - live: STAR Sports Select 1 & Select 1 HD, 3.20pm
AFC Champions League Two, Lion City Sailors vs Muangthong United - live: STAR Sports Select 1 & Select 1 HD, 5.30pm
ISL, Mohammedan SC vs Jamshedpur - live: EuroSport, 7.30pm
ONE Championship - live: STAR Sports Select 2 & Select 2 HD, 8.30pm
FIH Pro League, Men's - Argentina vs Australia - live: STAR Sports Select 2 & Select 2 HD, 3.30am
FIH Pro League, Women's - Argentina vs Australia - live: STAR Sports Select 2 & Select 2 HD, 6am

STREAMING

Alan Ritchson (right) in Season 3 of *Reacher*, premiering on Prime Video today

The third season of *Reacher* — with Alan Ritchson returning to play the titular character of the former US Army military policeman with formidable strength, intellect, and abilities — drops on Prime Video today. t2 chatted with Lee Child, the writer of the bestselling *Jack Reacher* series, on which the web show is based, over a video call to know more. Child also functions as an executive producer of the series, which drops the first three episodes today and subsequent episodes every Thursday till March 27.

Do the emotions hit differently every time there is a new season of *Reacher*? It is, after all, your work going out into the world season after season...
I love it because that really is the whole point of writing. You want it to go out into the world and you want as many people to know the story as possible. Television has a big, wide range and through it, we are getting millions of new people to know *Reacher*. From my point of view, that is a wonderful feeling.

But it is also such a strange feeling because when I first started, of course, only I knew about *Reacher* and then a small number of people knew and that gave way to a larger number of people. It just

kept growing. I hope it takes over the entire world and also parts of Mars and stuff that we haven't discovered yet! (Laughs)

But is it the same feeling as when the book of yours came out? A book is yours alone, while the TV show belongs to so many others as well...

I can't do television myself and hence I do have to rely on a huge crew of people. We are very lucky that they are excellent professionals, very committed and they work very hard. It is inspiring just to watch them work. So, I am not surprised at how good the result is. With all that brainpower and energy working on it, it has to be good.

You did work on TV for a while, didn't you?

I did. What fascinates me is how some of it is the same, but most of it is different. It is new. Streaming television, bingeing television is very different from what we used to do in the past. It requires a different kind of writing and a different kind of pacing. That is something I am

not used to. The modern generation of people have invented that, and I rely on them to do it.

What do you think makes *Persuader* — the seventh book in the *Jack Reacher* series — potent material for the third season of *Reacher*?



Lee Child

In the first two seasons, we felt that we needed to introduce *Reacher* to the TV audience because we hoped — and it has been proven right — that there are lots of people who didn't read the books, but are now watching the series. So they needed to understand who *Reacher* was. We felt that Seasons 1 and 2 together did that. It

introduced him and the viewer knows who he is now. So in Season 3, we had the freedom to have one of the authentic lone-wolf *Reacher* stories where he is on his own, has no help, no support and is always in danger. We felt it was time to do that.

For that, we felt that *Persuader* was a great choice because it has a great opening. It has two great villains. It has a great location. So

In the first two seasons, we felt that we needed to introduce *Reacher* to the TV audience because we hoped — and it has been proven right — that there are lots of people who didn't read the books, but are now watching the series. In Season 3, we had the freedom to have one of the authentic lone-wolf *Reacher* stories where he is on his own, has no help, no support and is always in danger. We felt it was time to do that

we thought: 'Yeah, this is the one to do.'

Did you take feedback from the reception to the first two seasons and apply them to Season 3?

If it is about 10 people out of millions, then you don't worry about it too much. But if there is a consistent feeling, then you do pay attention to it. We haven't really had any negative feedback. It is really a question of just adjusting it

a little bit to hit the spot. And basically, we do it the way we think it should be done. And if we do that with great confidence, then the viewer will like it.

How do you think that *Reacher* — the series as well as the character — has evolved with every season?

The fascinating thing, from my point of view, was that the first season was also the first book. In that book (*Killing Floor*), *Reacher* is kind of learning to be *Reacher*. He has just come out of the army. He is trying to figure out a new life. He is making his own way. He is learning it as he goes along. And, of course, Alan (Ritchson) was new to playing *Reacher* at that point. So while *Reacher* was learning to be *Reacher*, Alan was also learning to be *Reacher*. And I thought we saw that process really work out very well.

In Season 2, the audience knew who *Reacher* was. Alan was confident in the role and it had a different flavour. Season 3 has Alan at his best. He is just all alone and he does it so well.

What do you think makes *Reacher* stand out as a hero across your books, a film and now the TV series?

This is a character that has existed for a very long time. The idea that a mysterious stranger can show up and solve your problem for you, and then ride off into the sunset. This is a kind of character that has occurred in every culture, every country, every age, because we want that, we need that, we crave that. Wouldn't it be great to have somebody show up and solve your problems? People dream about that. So, he is literally a character for the ages. There have been versions of *Reacher* in the past, there will be versions in the future. Who he is is incredibly central to our human desire.

We know that you came up with the name *Reacher* while out grocery shopping when you 'reached' out to pick up a can at the supermarket. Did you have any other names in mind for the character?

I am terrible with names! I had the character in my head but I didn't know the name. And so that grocery store thing was very lucky for me. But I do not know what he would have been called if that had not happened.

Priyanka Roy

*I am a *Reacher* fan because...
Tell t2@abp.in*

COMING UP

What: Ace Premier League, with The Telegraph

Where: Ace Sportz, 144 Remount Rd, Alipore

When: February 22 and 23; 4pm onwards

What to expect: Ace Premier League 2025 in association with The Telegraph is a celebration of luxury pickleball, elite networking, dynamic divisions and unmatched branding opportunities. A perfect opportunity to embrace the fastest growing sport, Ace Premier League is being staged in the largest pickleball arena in eastern India, which is equipped with six state-of-the-art courts designed for a mix of training, competition and fun. A paddle sport that combines elements of tennis, badminton and ping pong, it is played on a court similar in size to a badminton

court but with a lower net, using a perforated plastic ball (similar to a wiffle ball) and solid paddles. The game can be played in singles

or doubles, and the rules are designed to encourage long rallies and strategic play. The sporting event will be a thrilling competition participated by 10 teams from top corporate organisations in the city. To be held in multiple categories, prize money to the tune of ₹5 lakh and above will be awarded to winning teams and individual players.

The competition will be a one-of-a-kind event, where Calcutta's heritage will blend with the energy of a trending sport. Players

for each participating team were selected through an auction that took place on a grand scale, in which 120 players, including national level players, went under the hammer.

Organiser speak: "Ace Sportz is thrilled to bring together passionate players for a competitive and exciting league showcasing the growing energy and spirit of pickleball in the City of Joy. One hundred and 20 players across 10 corporate teams will dink with power and drive with grace at the first edition of Ace Premier League," said Ace Sportz partners Anant Shroff and Neeraj Sadani.



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The sun shone brightly over Ibiza The Fern Resort & Spa, casting a golden hue over the sprawling greens as the cast and crew of *Shotyi Bole Shotyi Kichhu Nei* arrived for a well-earned day of leisure. The air was filled with laughter and excited chatter as familiar faces reunited, their spirits high after months of working together on the intense legal thriller.

A spacious bungalow had been reserved exclusively for the gathering, its verandah offering a perfect view of the lush surroundings. Dressed in comfortable, casual attire, the director, and the cast — Parambrata Chattopadhyay, Anirban Chakrabarti, Ananya Chatterjee, Rahul Banerjee, Sauraseni Maitra, Kanchan Mullick, Ritwick Chakraborty and Suhotra Mukhopadhyay — mingled freely, slipping into easy camaraderie.

The highlight of the afternoon was a friendly game of cricket — crew members squaring off against the cast. The match began with great energy, and Parambrata was in spectacular form, displaying remarkable agility

on the field. Whether sprinting between wickets or executing precise shots, he played like a man on a mission, much to the delight of his teammates. As the first round concluded with a narrow margin, Parambrata, fired up and unwilling to let the game end so soon, demanded a “best of three” challenge, much to the amusement of all.

Srijit Mukherji, ever the sportsman, took charge, leading his team with infectious enthusiasm. His tactical decisions kept the game engaging, ensuring every player had a role to play. Meanwhile, Kanchan Mullick, stationed on



Sauraseni and Anirban shared some laughs on the field



Rahul Banerjee

Kanchan Mullick



Ananya Chatterjee and Sauraseni Maitra



Ritwick Chakraborty, the captain of their team, had some moves up his sleeve



The delicious spread by Lost & Rare Recipes

the sidelines, kept the crowd entertained with his hilarious commentary. His witty one-liners and exaggerated descriptions of the players' performances had everyone in splits, making it just as much a comedy show as a cricket match.

Talking about sports and films coming together at the picnic, two of his greatest passions, Parambrata said, “I usually play football; it's my favourite sport. But I also enjoy cricket because I can play it for longer. With football, I get exhausted within 15-20 minutes. This whole experience, from shooting to promotions, has been really fun, especially since we've done it in such unconventional locations.”

Following the match, a Bollywood quiz added to the merriment. Teams battled over trivia spanning decades of Indian cinema, with Anirban Chakrabarti proving to be an unexpected reservoir of film knowledge. Laughter erupted as players argued good-naturedly over answers, each determined to outwit the other.

As the afternoon stretched into a lazy, golden-hued evening, the group gathered around for a sumptuous Bengali lunch, curated by *Lost & Rare Recipes*. The spread was a feast for the senses — delicate *doi maach*, a rich *chingri* preparation, fragrant rice, and a variety of traditional delights that evoked nostalgia and home-cooked warmth.

Channeling denim power, Sauraseni Maitra shared, “Picnics have been such an integral part of growing up — whether with cousins, family, or friends. Today brings back so much nostalgia. Growing up with brothers, I often played gully cricket. Today reminded me just how much agility and strength the game truly requires.”

Director Srijit Mukherji summed up the essence of the event, saying, “Since the shoot itself felt like a picnic, the promotions had to be one too! So many old friends, colleagues, and an incredible ensemble cast came together for this film. What better way to celebrate than with a picnic? *Bonde-luchi*, and *deem sheddo* for breakfast, followed by *meethe roddur* (warm winter sunshine), cricket, and a delicious lunch of *pathar mangsho*, *bhat*, and *mishhti*. What more does a Bengali need?”

Amidst shared stories, teasing, and the gentle clink of glasses, the day unfolded like a cherished memory in the making. It was a rare moment away from the hustle of film sets — a day of simplicity, warmth, and bonds strengthened over good food and laughter. As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting an amber glow over the retreat, it was clear that this picnic would be spoken of fondly for years to come.

Sanjali Brahma
Pictures: Pabitra Das

Tillotama Shome as Maya in *Baksho Bondi*.
Picture: Saumyananda Sahi

Baksho Bondi, a film about a woman's resilience in the face of all odds, just had its international premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival. Frontlined by Tillotama Shome — who plays the central role of Maya, a wife and mother who has to fend for the family, even as she emerges as a caregiver of sorts to her husband, a former Army man suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder — *Baksho Bondi/Shadowbox* is the maiden feature film directorial of the husband-wife duo Tanushree Das and Saumyananda Sahi. The film, which is in the Bengali language, counts names like Vikramaditya Motwane, Nikkhil Advani, Jim Sarbh and Shaunak Sen, among many others, in its list of producers and executive producers. Before they headed off to Berlin, t2 chatted with Tillotama and the directors.

How special is it to get to premiere *Baksho Bondi* at the Berlin International Film Festival?
Saumyananda Sahi: When I was 17, I made a short film that took me to the Berlin talent campus and I had workshops with filmmakers like Wim Wenders and Ridley Scott. That changed my life and took me down this path. Getting to premiere our first feature film at Berlin, 20 years after that experience, feels like a full-circle moment.
Tanushree Das: This story is personal to me and to think that the world will watch this story, hear these voices and see these people is a great feeling. There is an (Chimamanda Ngozi) Adichie quote which says that telling your own story is privilege and telling the stories of others is power. I have a turn on that phrase — in India, telling other people's story is privilege but to be able to tell your own story is power. For me, it is a big thing to get to that stage and to be on that platform.
Tillotama Shome: Getting to premiere at Berlin is testament to the hard work that Saumya and Tanushree have put in, and to the purity and strength of their voices,

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their stories and the people that they are. I have never been to Berlin before and this film is a gift that keeps giving.

It has taken a lot of hard work on our part to hold the film together for the last five-six years and I am really looking forward to watching it for the first time with an audience.

What was the starting point of *Baksho Bondi*?

Tanushree: My dad passed away in 2018 when he was only 64. It was late when we discovered he had depression and I was also in the postpartum phase... it was a very dark time. It was also a time when I wanted to make sense of all of it and Saumya was always there for me. The story of this film became a ladder for me to climb out of that darkness.

The inspiration for the film came from seeing my mother and many other women go through their life and do a lot of things and I always wondered where their strength came from. With this film, I wanted to understand where this love and strength stemmed from.
Saumyananda: We shot the film in Tanushree's hometown (Barrackpore), in the area where she grew up and on the same streets that she walked on and played in as

a kid. I was also able to bring in memories of my childhood. I had a friend whose father thought he was 'God' (like Sundar, played by Chandan Bisht, in *Baksho Bondi*)... and he would come and disrupt the classes because he didn't like that his son was being taught by teachers. While my friend was embarrassed, at the same time, he would stand up for his father. If anyone laughed at him, the son would get into a fight. When we were about nine, my friend's father was run over by a train... he tried to stop a train and he died. A year later, there was a writing assignment in school and we were asked to write about a hero. While most of us chose a sportsman and other public figures, my friend had written about his father. He stood up and read it out to the class and the pride he had while doing so remains a very striking memory for me.

When we started working on the script, it was important that the entry point be that of looking at the difficult love of every member of a family, but to see it from the inside and to understand what that love was, what its dynamics were, what the difficulties were, and also the sense of immense pride and resilience that it had.

Tillotama, you are known to embrace your characters like second skin. *Baksho Bondi* is no exception... it seems like you have been Maya all your life. What is it you felt for her that came out on screen so vividly and powerfully?

Tillotama: Saumya and Tanushree were generous to make me a part of the process. I had read many of their drafts, when they were writing the script. There are many scenes that may not be in the film, but they live inside me. Anamika Haksar (theatre director) did a

workshop with Chandan, me and our child (played by Sayan Karnakar) and those workshops became great spaces for me to observe and build my own sense of the story. I observed their bodies, their eyes and the way they move and I created my own memories. Tanushree also shared things personal to Maya... like the kind of music she would listen to, her *rumaal* (handkerchief), her watch, her detailed *hisheer boi* (accounts book)... letters that Sundar and Maya would have exchanged, the images of homes and spaces in Barrackpore... When these things ferment with time inside you, they grow into something. It cannot be explained. Maya is a composite of many women that Saumya and Tanushree knew... that got added to the many women that I knew and that Maya reminded me of. As a result, she grew bigger and bigger. She may have begun as some parts of many women but as she started growing, she took a life of her own.

On a personal level, the script came into my life at a time when I became a caregiver to my mother. It became a living, breathing thing and was no longer something I was trying to empathise with. At that time, my body understood what the wounds of exhaustion were... being a caregiver is not a short-term fix, it is a long haul for which you have to alter your life. We were living the meat and bones of this film on a day-to-day basis. This film came to our lives at a time when we needed it the most.

Authenticity is truly the bedrock of *Baksho Bondi*. There doesn't seem to be a single false note in the film...
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And you always wanted to name it *Baksho Bondi/Shadowbox*?
Tanushree: *Baksho Bondi* felt apt because all the women in the film, even the minor characters, are struggling within their limited



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A lot of prominent names — Vikramaditya Motwane, Nikkhil Advani, Jim Sarbh, Shaunak Sen, among others — have put their weight behind your film. Tillotama herself is a producer in this film. How far do you think that will help *Baksho Bondi* in having long legs, both at festivals and in theatres?

Saumyananda: Yes, we didn't start with 17 producers! (Laughs) We only started with Naren (Chandravarkar), and then people joined in because of necessity at various points of the journey. They came on board because they responded to the script. The fact that we had also worked with some of them previously helped. I had worked with Shaunak and Aman (Mann) on *All That Breathes* and with Prashant (Nair) on *Trial By Fire*, with Vikram (Motwane) on *Black Warrant*. Then through them, other people joined in. The support and the generosity that they have shown has been really overwhelming. They were really insightful and also very sensitive in how they responded, not as producers, but as comrades on this. **Tanushree:** For them, it was never about big names attaching themselves to a relatively small project. Whoever has come at whichever stage, they have been very important at that stage.

Saumyananda: Everyone also came on board with the sentiment that there is a gap that independent Indian films have in terms of finding finance and we don't have that much support from any state funding. So we are looking for international grants whose cycles are very long drawn out and very competitive and even when you get it you still require equity funding. They all felt that by coming on board, they were also giving back in some way to the industry that they were part of and acknowledging the importance of community to help films getting made.

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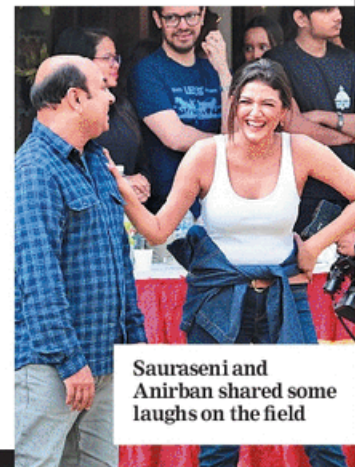
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How special is it to get to premiere *Baksho Bondi* at the Berlin International Film Festival?
Saumyananda Sahi: When I was 17, I made a short film that took me to the Berlin talent campus and I had workshops with filmmakers like Wim Wenders and Ridley Scott. That changed my life and took me down this path. Getting to premiere our first feature film at Berlin, 20 years after that experience, feels like a full-circle moment.
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What was the starting point of *Baksho Bondi*?
Tanushree: My dad passed away in 2018 when he was only 64. It was late when we discovered he had depression and I was also in the postpartum phase... it was a very dark time. It was also a time when I wanted to make sense of all of it and Saumya was always there for me. The story of this film became a ladder for me to climb out of that darkness.

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B.C. by Johnny Hart



Luann by Greg Evans



Peanuts by Charles Schulz



The Wizard of Id by Brant Parker and Johnny Hart



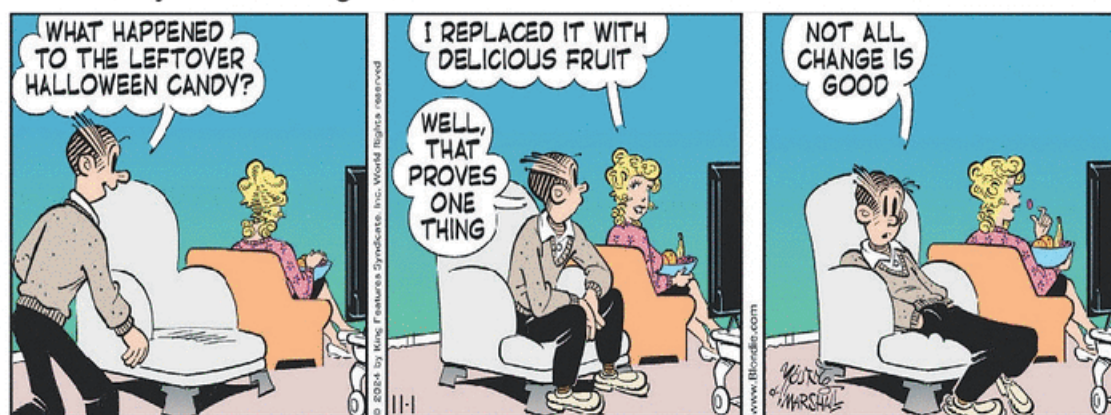
Flash Gordon by Dan Schkade



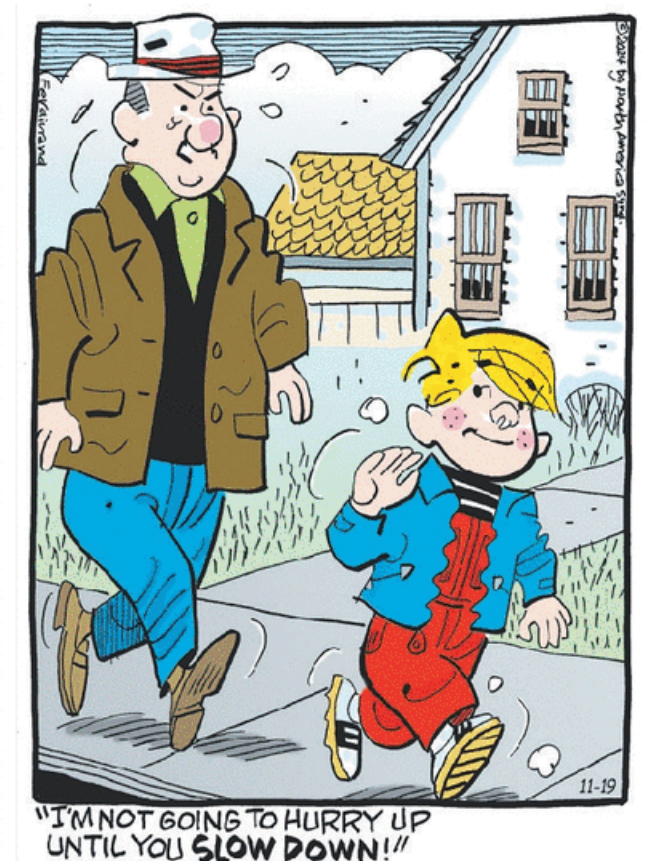
Hagar the Horrible by Chris Browne



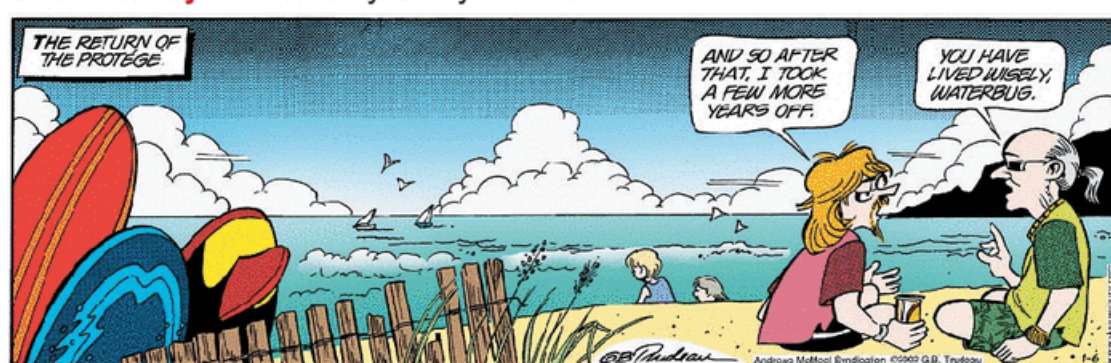
Blondie by Dean Young



Dennis the Menace



Doonesbury Classics by Garry Trudeau



PUZZLE

11494

SUDOKU MODERATE

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

Fill in the 9x9 square grid with the numbers one to nine. The numbers should be arranged in such a way that each row, column and mini-grid contains one of each number. Solution to Sudoku 11492 is on the right

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

By arrangement with The Daily Telegraph Copyright: Michael Mephram 2005

11495

SUDOKU GENTLE

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

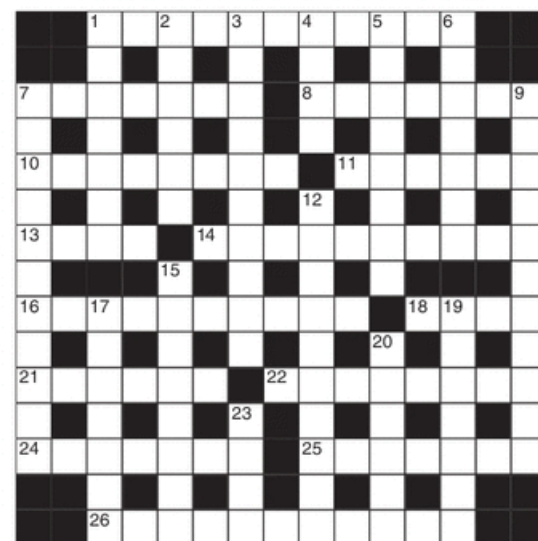
Fill in the 9x9 square grid with the numbers one to nine. The numbers should be arranged in such a way that each row, column and mini-grid contains one of each number. Solution to Sudoku 11493 is on the right

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

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14604

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Celebrity renegotiated pay – Sir Elton? (11)
 7 Security for prisoner provided by fine court official (7)
 8 Charles, say, running through parade (7)
 10 Anti-hero reformed broadcasting (2,3,3)
 11 The French tucked into accompaniment for curry, going back for cake (6)
 13 Jolly escapade in boat filled with animals on lake (4)
 14 Day among EU fans? They're left at the end (10)
 16 Is gent possibly carrying food? Attack it with relish (3,5,2)
 18 Elegant Charlie repeated welcoming greeting (4)
 21 Run through confession made by untanned person? (6)
 22 Liqueur drunk by globetrotter, a man from the east (8)

- 24 After opening of gala, pay attention and sparkle (7)
 25 Daughter follows crazy techno that's groovy? (7)
 26 E.g. president Bush and Ford getting recognition for valour (6,5)

DOWN

- 1 Constable, maybe, isn't stopping perjury after jury's dismissed (7)
 2 Area covered by horseman, a plunderer (6)
 3 Learner in charge, overrun by crime where drinkers spend money (3-7)
 4 Headers from Arsenal's influential midfielders scoring goals (4)
 5 Pope in hostelry with zero cash (8)
 6 Measurement of distance, say, a cart moves northwards (7)
 7 Asking for money, grabbing crooked loot in illegal trade (11)
 9 Keyboard or stringed instrument's current group of notes (11)
 12 A claim isn't working like a charm (10)
 15 Some stylist I let totter in this shoe (8)
 17 Great ingredient put on a pizza (7)
 19 Husband is irritating, creating problems (7)
 20 Grand king meeting von Bismarck, say, in cavern (6)
 23 Spinning round arms is comfortable (4)

Yesterday's solution

SUSHI	DYSPEPSIA
P O M O A N O P	
ALLYPALLY	DRAMA
C V E L O O P R	
ELECTRA	NEWPORT
S U R A E P	
HOARSE	GRADIENT
I N O A R H	
PHANTASM	PALACE
R W T I T M	
PUCCINI	MALAISE
R H T N P E N P	
IDIOT	ALEXANDRA
A S E T D S I R	
MOTORHOME	TRACK

By arrangement with The Daily Telegraph

Jumble

David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

KECER



INATF



SOPEIM



SOMTTU



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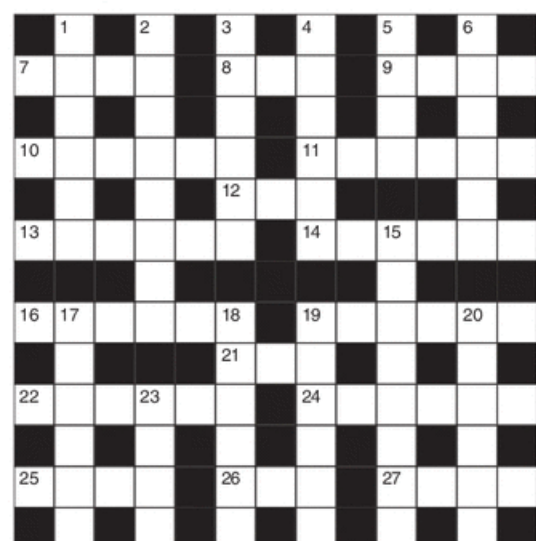
Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: GRAVY TRULY BELONG STURDY
 Answer: The newspaper reporter was gathering information about the marathon to — RUN A STORY

14256

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 7 Flower symbolising purity (4)
 8 Bench (3)
 9 Ostracise (4)
 10 Desolate (6)
 11 Person baring all (6)
 12 Nourish oneself (3)
 13 Account book (6)
 14 Bootlicker (3-3)
 16 Economist, d.

1946 (6)

- 19 Canaletto's city (6)
 21 French friend (3)
 22 Winding sheet (6)
 24 Treading the boards (6)
 25 Leg it (4)
 26 Old measure, about 45" (3)
 27 Sate (4)

DOWN

- 1 Human face (6)
 2 Gaseous element,

atomic symbol H (8)

- 3 First or second batter (6)
 4 A score (6)
 5 Second-hand (4)
 6 Vast country (6)
 15 Make holy (8)
 17 Breathe out (6)
 18 Depress (6)
 19 Feasible (6)
 20 Item on a birthday cake (6)
 23 Sign (4)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Senders; 5 Bread; 8 Ennui; 9 Ovation; 10 Rationale; 12 Ode; 13 Chalet; 14 Bunion; 17 Tea; 18 Australia; 20 Regatta; 21 Gloss; 23 Error; 24 Entente.
 Down: 1 Spear; 2 Nun; 3 Epitome; 4 Slogan; 5 Blade; 6 Editorial; 7 Dungeon; 11 Trafalgar; 13 Coterie; 15 Upright; 16 Escape; 18 Actor; 19 Aisle; 22 Own.

By arrangement with The Daily Telegraph



HERE'S HOW ROUND ONE AND PLATE TROPHY OF IIHM'S YOUNG CHEF OLYMPIAD UNFOLDED. PLUS, A CHAT WITH THE WINNER

The preliminary round of the 11th edition of International Institute of Hotel Management presents Young Chef Olympiad took place in five Indian cities — Pune, Goa, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Delhi. Fifty chef

contestants were divided into five groups to travel to their allotted city and take part in the first round of the competition. The total duration of the round was three hours 30 minutes, where the contestants had to prepare, cook and serve two soft poached eggs made in a pan of open

water, three eggs scrambled and one by three egg rolled into a 'cigar-shaped' mushroom omelette for the skill test. For the culinary challenge, participants had to cook a vegetarian dish and a dessert in the form of choux pastry after choosing their ingredients from a given basket.

MOMENTS FROM ROUND ONE IN BANGALORE



The Bangalore campus welcomed the mentors, contestants and judges by presenting a traditional folk dance performance at its Indiranagar campus where round one of the competition took place, similar to the round one competition in the Goa, Delhi, Pune and Hyderabad campuses.

Like in other years, the competition focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The students of IIHM Bangalore posed with posters of the goals, along with participants and mentors holding the flags of their country, in front of the campus.



A kitchen groufie after the cooking round was a must. Chef Shaun Kenworthy, who was a judge at the Bangalore campus's round one, captured the moment on his phone.



Contestants captured in action during round one at the Bangalore campus.



Chefs Shaun Kenworthy, Paul Jervis, Mario Perera and Enzo Oliveri judged round one of the competition at the Bangalore campus, along with other judges. "Hospitality is about people. AI is a tool that we can add to make things quicker but not to replace. In hospitality, I keep humanity at the core of everything. We can use it in cases where the human memory fails. But in hospitality, not everything should be data-driven. It is all about striking a balance between tradition and modernity," said chef Paul Jervis about the inclusion of AI in hospitality, which was also a theme of the competition this year, besides 'Sustainable Development Goals'. Talking about round one, he said: "They are new chefs and are still learning and gaining experience. One thing that frustrates me is cold plates. Organisation is the most important thing for them in this competition."

"This round went very well for me and I completed my dishes before time. I am very excited to participate in the next round. I wanted to participate in YCO after seeing my country win in one of the categories last year. My dream is to become a chef with my own restaurant," said Sarmila Subba, who represented Bhutan.



"The first round was very enjoyable and I am competing for the first time in a competition like YCO. I wish to be a Michelin Star chef," said Nguema Obono Aquiles Alogo from Equatorial Guinea.



"I prepared Chicken Roulade in a vegetarian way with sweet potato. But I faced a challenge as the colour of the sweet potato is not the same here as in Switzerland, so I had to add more saffron and carrot to make it the right colour. I am hopeful about being a grand finalist in the competition," said Young Choi from Switzerland.

MOMENTS FROM ROUND ONE IN GOA

Indian participant Aliakbar Rampurawala, who was mentored by Gnanesh Kumar, competed in round one at the Goa campus.



For round one, George Mutwiri Liech, a participant from Kenya, prepared Pumpkin and Red Lentil Tortellini, based on a tomato-coconut sauce. For dessert, he did Coffee Craquelin on mango puree.



USA contestant Kayla Anya Atkins prepared a curry dish with eggplant fritter, fried leeks and spiced yoghurt for the vegetarian dish. For dessert, she prepared a mango-based dish with mint garnish.



Armenian contestant Arsen Armenakyan, who won the silver trophy in the competition, explaining his vegetarian dish and dessert to the tasting judge at the Goa campus after the first round.

WHATSUP

THE PLATE TROPHY ROUND IN CALCUTTA

The Plate Trophy is a coveted position in this international culinary competition, right after the gold, silver and bronze titles. While the gold, silver and bronze can be won by the top 10 contestants in the competition, the plate trophy winner is selected from the top 11 to 20

contestants. This year the title was won by Shi-Hyun An of South Korea. For the round, the contestants had to prepare a dish with *bekti* (with skin on) within one hour and 30 minutes. Glimpses from the round held on February 7 at the IIHM Global Campus in Salt Lake.



The winning dish of the Plate Trophy round.

SOUTH KOREA

Plate Trophy winner Shi-Hyun An of South Korea from the Sica Sol International Culinary Arts School prepared Bisque Risotto with Chives and Dill, served with Battered Shrimp and Pan Fried Fish Fillet. "The classification of fish was a challenge for me in this round and I found it hard to cut and it was a bit dry. However, I am happy that I won. I am very interested in Italian and French cuisine and my dream is to open an Italian and French restaurant," said Shi-Hyun An.



SWEDEN

Sweden's Nils Magnus presented a dish called Fish with Arancini and Mangetout Sauce. "I fried the *bekti* in prawn batter and served it with king prawn and white wine sauce. The most challenging thing in this round was time. I had burnt a lemon but couldn't present it. My experience in India has been the best. People here are extremely nice and made us feel very comfortable," said Nils.



MEXICO

Mexican contestant Sabrina Di Costanzo Araujo prepared a dish called Fresh Spiced. "I presented a poached *bekti* with Chinese spices and balsamic vinegar, and served it with beurre blanc. My challenge was time. But the competition was very interesting. I learnt different techniques. Seeing so many chefs increases my desire to become a chef. In this competition, I have learnt that flavours are the most important thing," said Sabrina.



AZERBAIJAN

The winning country of the golden trophy last year, Azerbaijan, was represented by Javid Mammadov. He prepared a dish called Bekti Fish Roll with Herb Mousse. "I presented the *bekti* roll with prawn croquette. The experience of this competition was very good. Though it was a bit stressful, I enjoyed participating in it. It was a new kitchen with different equipment, so it took some time to adjust. My mentor suggested that I enjoy the process and that's what I did," said Javid.



WALES

Rhiannon Bate of Wales prepared a dish called Fish Wellington. "For this round, I made vegetable risotto with fresh herbs and topped it with pan-seared *bekti* in garlic butter and a mushroom puree. I served it with green grapes on the side. The challenge was time and things were different from what I practised. I had to make instant decisions and fix my mistakes. But I am happy with how it went. Everyone is very kind here. India is a beautiful place with beautiful people," said Rhiannon.

THE GOLDEN GLORY

A t2 chat with England's contestant Kamran Taylor, who won the golden trophy, toque and a prize money of \$5,000 at the 11th edition of IIHM Young Chef Olympiad...

Did you expect to win? What was the winning moment like?
I did not expect to win at all. A build up of things in the final round led me to believe I have messed it up. So, I was very surprised when I was announced the winner.

Your country has been participating in this international competition for many years now but this is the first time it won the winner's title...

Yes! After 11 years of YCO, this is the first time England and our college (Westminster Capital City College) have won. There was a lot of pressure to do well throughout the competition rounds but it was also very enjoyable.

It must be a proud moment back home. What are your teachers, mentors, friends and family saying?

I was very proud of myself for achieving such an award. My mentors, lecturers, family, girlfriend and friends are all extremely proud and happy for me. I couldn't have done it without their support.



Kamran Taylor

Who is your inspiration in the culinary world?

I'm inspired most by my lecturers, their knowledge and experience is mind-blowing. But I also particularly like Adam Byatt, his passion for classical cooking is very interesting.

What are your earliest memories of being interested in the culinary world or cooking?

My first memories of cooking would be during lockdown. I had spent much time in the kitchen cooking for my family.

How did you develop the passion?
Seeing my family enjoy what I make encouraged me to keep going and trying new things.

What qualities or techniques do you think helped you to win such



Suborno Bose, founder of YCO and chairman of IIHM and International Hospitality Council, joined him in his winning moment on stage at Wet-O-Wild during the closing ceremony.

a challenging competition?
I think the biggest contribution to winning this competition is time. Sacrificing time to practice, develop and improve on my dishes helped very much. Also, the time given by my lecturers, and mentor Chris Basten, who put a lot of time and energy into training and mentoring me, really helped. Trusting my instinct and being able to think on the spot if something went wrong definitely helped too.

What was your most memorable moment from the Young Chef Olympiad?
I will remember my time with all the other competitors and mentors. Whilst we were competing against each other, everyone was so friendly and I had such a good time throughout the competition.

What do you plan to do with the prize money?
I have no idea what to do with the prize money yet. But I will do something meaningful...

Going ahead, what are your dreams in this field?
My dream is to have my own restaurant, but for now working in London and building my knowledge as much as possible.

Priyanka A. Roy

Pictures: Pabitra Das and IIHM

CALCUTTA SWIMMING CLUB HOSTS THE 50 CRICKET PREMIER LEAGUE, WITH t2

The Calcutta Swimming Club hosted the first edition of The 50 Cricket Premier League, a thrilling 50 ball-a-side cricket tournament in a franchisee format. The tournament saw participation by six teams,

all owned by members of CSC — Cosmic Warriors owned by Aditya Vikram Birla, Heritage Tigers owned by Sailesh Arya, Imperial Reds owned by Amish Naik, Joy Game Changers owned by Raghav Agarwal, SKP Eagles owned by Ankit Patni, and

Sobisco Smashers owned by Anil Agarwal. The tournament was an action-packed, edge-of-the-seat cricket spectacle where 125 members registered from 10 different clubs. An auction was held to allocate members to the franchises, adding a fun twist to the

competition. It was a week and a half of cricketing frenzy, with each team battling fiercely in the league stage for a chance to make it to the grand finale. Snapshots for the unique cricket tournament that blended fun with competition.



Jash Doshi of Sobisco Smashers smashes one out of the park against Cosmic Warriors.



Team Cosmic Warriors, champions of the first edition of CSC's The 50 Cricket Premier League, pose with their trophy



Yuvraj Keshwani of Sobisco Smashers receives the Best Batsman of the Tournament award from Mahesh Punjabi, committee member of CSC.



(L-R) Vedant Saraf; Pratim G Dastidar, sports convenor; Rahul Singhi, sports chairperson; and Siddharth Minni — the team behind CSC The 50 CPL. "We have been very proactive in organising multiple inter-club cricket tournaments for the last three years and the response we have got from all the clubs and members has been overwhelming. Our determination to raise the quality of cricket played among the clubs was the inception of CSC The 50 Cricket Premier League — a format where teams were owned by members of our club but members of various clubs were pitted together to play alongside each other, enabling rivalries to transform into everlasting relationships," said Rahul.



Kannan Tandon, vice-president of CSC, hands over the runners-up trophy to Team Sobisco Smashers



Yashovardhan Kanodia of Cosmic Warriors collects his Most Valuable Player of the Tournament award from Rahul Singhi.



Pratim G Dastidar of Imperial Reds collects the Spirit of the Tournament award on behalf of his team from Rahul Singhi.

Suchismita Maity (t2 intern)
Pictures: Koushik Saha

The Calcutta Swimming Club's Sagar Wali Qawwali was a memorable musical extravaganza, with Sagar Bhatia in the house. The Delhi-based qawwali singer, known for hits like *Kiven mukhre ton* and *Mera ishq*, delivered an electrifying performance. With his signature *shayari*, and infectious energy, Sagar had the audience hanging on to every note. The 1,300-strong audience was mesmerised. DJ Himani Singh joined in too for an act. The fusion of soul-stirring qawwalis with high-voltage beats created an atmosphere of pure, unfiltered joy. Glimpses from the night.

SAGAR WALI QAWWALI, WITH t2, WAS A MUSICAL NIGHT TO REMEMBER



When it's a qawwali night, it has to be magical. Sagar Bhatia set the stage on fire with soulful hits like *Kiven mukhre*, *Tere jeya hor disda*, *Je tu akhiyaan* and many more. The crowd swayed, sang, and joined in for every mesmerising note.

The audience at CSC witnessed Sagar's groovy dance moves



"Sagar's energy and wittiness just dazed the crowd. This is the first time that CSC had a concert concept and it was well appreciated by all. We left no stone unturned to give our members and their guests an unforgettable experience. To satiate the hunger, exotic food was taken care of by Yauatcha and Ambrosia in addition to our regular food partners. The 'X' factor was DJ Himani Singh who made sure that the party spirit was on till the wee hours of the morning. I thank my entertainment committee for making this event a resounding success," said Gaurav Chokhany, president of the Calcutta Swimming Club, with the first lady Meghna.

Rohini Chakraborty
Pictures courtesy:
Calcutta Swimming Club



DJ Himani Singh played groovy Bolly beats for the energetic audience

The audience was surprised by an aerial dance performance



CSC's committee members posed for a picture. "Sagar Bhatia's magic took CSC by storm, delivering a performance that was nothing short of legendary. It was a night of pure magic, and music, one that the 1,300-strong audience won't forget anytime soon," said Dipak Kumar Agarwal (not in the picture), entertainment chair man of CSC.

TECH

TO ERR IS HUMANE BUT DOES IT SIGNAL THE END OF THE ROAD FOR AI-ONLY DEVICES?

A couple of years ago, San Francisco-based electronics company Humane — powered by Apple alumni Imran Chaudhri and Bethany Bongiorno — began a slow marketing campaign to showcase the many possibilities with artificial intelligence features without having to fall back on smartphones. Their winning device was the AI Pin that Naomi Campbell sported while strutting the Coperni runway during Paris Fashion Week in 2023. The startup is selling most of its company to HP for \$116 million and will stop selling AI Pin, the company announced.

The deal includes the majority of Humane's employees, besides its software platform and intellectual property. It will not include Humane's AI Pin device business, which will be wound down.

After the initial slate of negative reviews, Humane tried to promote its flagship device at Mobile World Congress last year. AI Pins that have already been purchased will continue to function normally until February 28. After that Pins will “no longer connect to Humane's servers”, which means features will “no longer include calling, messaging,

File picture of Naomi Campbell sporting Humane AI Pin at Coperni's Paris Fashion Week show in 2023



Imran Chaudhri and Bethany Bongiorno, founders of Humane →

FOUNDERS OF HUMANE WILL FORM A NEW DIVISION AT HP TO HELP INTEGRATE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO THE COMPANY'S PERSONAL COMPUTERS, PRINTERS AND CONNECTED CONFERENCE ROOMS



AI queries/ responses, or cloud access”. Humane is also asking users to download any pictures, videos, and notes stored on their Pins before they are permanently deleted at that shutdown time. After the shutdown, offline features like “battery level” will still work but none of the features that require Cloud connectivity like voice interactions, AI responses and “Center” access.

The team's founders will form a new division at HP to help integrate artificial intelligence into the company's personal computers, printers and connected conference rooms, said Tuan Tran, who leads HP's AI initiatives.

The news shows the prevalence of hype cycles in the tech industry as well as the longevity of smartphones. The Bay Area startup indirectly positioned the AI Pin as a smartphone replacement. According to *The Verge*, at one point last summer, Humane's returns for the AI Pin started outpacing its sales. Next, Humane told customers to stop using the device's charging case, citing battery fire concerns. In October, the company dropped the price of the device by \$200.

The buzz around the startup and the promises excited investors. The company had raised over \$230

million and counted backers such as Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff. Humane had sought to be acquired in May last year for anything between \$750 million and \$1 billion, according to a report from Bloomberg.

HP's interest is largely in Humane's Cosmos. A few months ago, Humane shifted focus away from hardware. It rebranded around what it called Cosmos, an AI operating system for a number of devices in the home and on the go. The software had a new type of architecture built around AI agents.

AI IS THE PROBLEM

The disappearance of the AI Pin raises questions about what former Apple design chief Jony Ive is working on with OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT. Last year, a profile in *The New York Times* confirmed that a collaboration is being worked around an AI device. Ive's design firm LoveFrom is handling the project. But details of what the device might look like remain vague.

The other AI device that created plenty of buzz last year was the Rabbit R1, which also focuses on AI. The problem is not hardware... it's AI. Both AI Pin and Rabbit R1 have given unreliable answers from their AI assistants, along with a mix of poor battery life and missing features. The two devices hardly offered anything more than what the smartphone can do. Be it Apple or Google, both companies are going ahead with their AI plans and are rolling out features every few weeks.

All AI models are in a phase when it has offer warnings next to results, cautioning users about accuracy. If you can't trust what you are seeing on the screen, why would you use the feature? If a good design couldn't sell previous AI hardware, it's difficult to comprehend what Ive can achieve. It makes more sense to pay attention to the companies powering the current functionality of AI devices, rather than how AI hardware looks like.

Mathures Paul

'DEATH' OF A MASCOT CAN GO VIRAL, PROVES DUO KEYSHAUNA RENEE LINGO

Duolingo's popular mascot — Duo the Owl — got its heavenly wings a few days ago after the language-learning platform announced its death.

Killing a popular character usually does not bode well on the popularity meter but Duolingo pulled off the stunt with a cause of death that's outlandish. “He probably died waiting for you to do your lessons, but what do we know,” announced the official handle of the company on X or what we formerly knew as Twitter, which too has killed its avian mascot after an eccentric billionaire named Elon Musk came into the picture. Duolingo CEO (and “Duo's Daddy”) Luis von Ahn in his eulogy said Duo was hit by a Cybertruck. “It seems that every character at Duolingo is dead.... I guess in the end, Duo finally answered the question he posed to so many of us: Spanish or Vanish.”

Duo was hit by a Cybertruck, announced Duolingo CEO Luis von Ahn



Duo Keyshauna Renee Lingo, born in 1000 BC, was the wise and witty face of the company since its creation in 2011, motivating users to complete their daily language lessons. Duo's death has not gone down well with the similarly-named pop star Dua Lipa. “Til' death Duo part,” the *Levitating* singer wrote on X.

Since Ahn's announcement, Duolingo's monthly active Android users jumped 25 per

cent year over year worldwide, according to Similarweb, a digital market intelligence provider. Similarweb also said that global downloads on Android jumped 38 per cent the day after the campaign, and web searches increased by 58 per cent.

And don't forget, Duo's “death by Cybertruck” is making fans of Duolingo channel their anger towards Elon Musk's empire and the steps he is taking, like DOGE

ending many foreign aid programmes, consumer protections and global health initiatives.

Companies like Hilton, Chipotle and Netflix are clawing into some of the buzz. American restaurant Buffalo Wild Wings has posted a video showing Duo's green feathers leading to a tray of its popular dish. Even the World Health Organisation responded to Duo's cause of death — “One thing we know for sure: It's not smallpox, because the disease has been eradicated since 1980.” Accounts for popular games like Halo and Assassin's Creed created images of Duo being mourned by players in the games.

Last year, Duolingo reported a total of 8.6 million paid subscribers, up nearly 50 per cent from 2023.

The way Duo's “death” has been used in a marketing campaign shows how people want to be entertained. Many companies are using their mascot to win fans.

In 2020, another brand killed off its mascot: Mr Peanut was roasted by Planters in an ad that ran before that year's Super Bowl. However, he was resurrected as a baby nut in an ad that ran during the game.

Mathures Paul

BOUJEE HOUSE ON PARK STREET OPENED DOORS WITH A BIG BASH. t2 GETS YOU SNAPSHOTS

Calling itself a cocktail-centric space with global plates, Boujee House is the latest entrant in the city's F&B scene. The chill pad in Celica Park on Park Street opened doors with a launch party that saw the city come forward to check it out. t2 was there.



Owner of Boujee House, Saloni Jhunjhunwala looked resplendent in a black bodycon with pearl detailing on the sleeves



Designer Mehek Talreja too channeled black for the night in a slit dress



(L-R) Sneha Adwani, Rashmi Bachawat and Vedika Kejriwal



Shradha Murarka



Siddhika Jalan



Nupur Arya



Manjri Tibrewal



Rahul and Alankrita Soni



Gaurav Duggar



Siddhartha and Niki Sawansukha



Pepsi Kalwani Hazrat and Hakim Hazrat



Abhimanyu Maheshwari and wife Richa



(L-R) Pragati, Pratick and Dimpy Pitty



Mezzes, tacos, desserts and more, the grazing table saw guests pick, choose and savour their nibbles



Salads, polenta cakes, toasts and more, the spread was vast and covered top treats from different segments of the menu



Silky Sadani and Kamal Talreja



Rishika Das Roy and Neha Gandhi Binrajka twinned in blue



Vasavi and Kushal Shah



Aditya Ladsaria and Anirudh Poddar (right)

Zeba Akhtar Ali
Pictures: Rashbehari Das

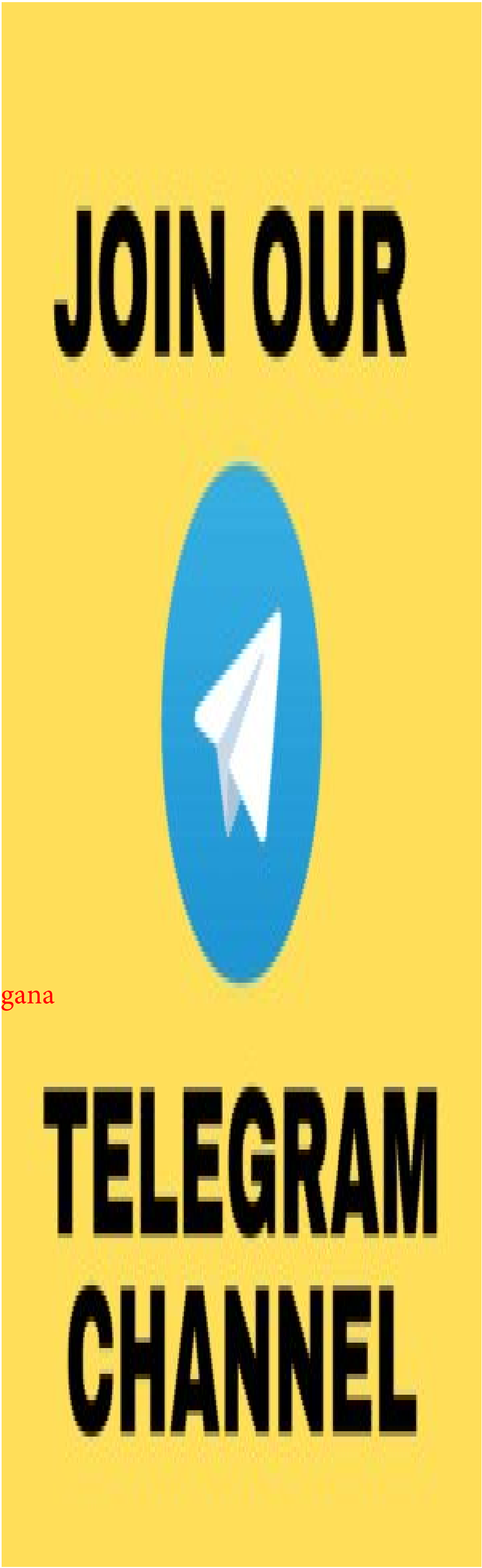
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