



**Delhi excise case: Court sends AAP leader Manish Sisodia to ED custody**

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# Afternoon

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# WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT HAS RECEIVED AN ALLOCATION OF RS. 2,843 CRORE

Under the scheme, 50 centres will be set up across Maharashtra, which will work exclusively for women who have been liberated from sexual exploitation or domestic violence. At these shelters, women will be provided shelter, legal aid, medical care and counseling. The scheme will be executed with the assistance of the Union government, the Budget announced. The government on Thursday made a slew of announcements aimed especially at women. Overall, the women and child development department has received an allocation of Rs 2,843 crore.

Through various welfare schemes in the state Budget, the government seems to have taken forward its efforts to reach out to various communities in Maharashtra, including Dhangar, Lingayat, Wadar, Banjara and Vanjari. The Dhangar community, which has a sizeable presence in western

Maharashtra, played a significant role in helping BJP emerge as the leading political party in the state. The Dhangar community has, for decades, been demanding reservation under ST category. At present, the community gets 3.5 per cent quota in government jobs and education under Nomadic Tribe (C) category, which comes under OBC category. The Dhangar community has a sizeable population of about one crore people, or nine per cent of Maharashtra's 11.25 crore population.

While presenting the Budget on Thursday, Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "The government had undertaken a programme of Rs 1,000 crore for implementation of 22 schemes in 2019, on the lines of Tribal Sub Plan, for the upliftment of the Dhangar community. Sufficient amount will be made available from the General Plan to

complete this programme. These schemes will be monitored by an Empowered Committee authorised by the Cabinet."

Meanwhile, the decision to set up Raje Umaji Naik Arthik Vikas Mahamandal is being seen as a move to reach out to the Ramoshi community, whose members migrated from Telengana to Maharashtra. The community has been fighting for socio-economic upliftment. With an eye on the politically and economically influential community of Lingayats, the government has made a provision for the Mahatma Bashehar Arthik Vikas Mahamandal. With Mumbai civic polls slated to be held later this year, 'Matsyavikas Kosh' will be established with 2 per cent of the project cost or a maximum of Rs 50 crore per project, for the welfare of fishermen's families who have been displaced or temporarily affected due to various projects.

An umbrella insurance scheme of Rs 5 lakh will also be launched from this year for fishermen involved in traditional fishing, with help from the central government. After a Banjara conclave in Jalgaon last month, the state government also announced a new 'Birs Munda Jodaraste Yojana' to connect all tribal areas with good roads. 50 centres to provide aid to women in distress, the government announced construction of 50 hostels in cities for working women who live alone in urban areas. Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis also proposed that special funds will be made available for the Maharashtra Women Economic Development Council. The Maharashtra government on Thursday announced the Shakti Sadan Scheme in its Budget to provide shelter, legal aid and counselling to women in distress.

## Is Suresh Chandrasekhar Influencing BJP by attacking Aam Aadmi Leaders?

Editoritis



Dr. Vaidehi

Young boy from south India, in his early 20s had big dreams of becoming richer in no time. Back in 2010, when Suresh Chandrasekhar met Leena Maria Paul in Chennai, they were both in their 20s. At the time, Leena Paul was an upcoming actor doing small-time roles in Telugu and Tamil films and Chandrasekhar had just entered the high-flying social circles of Chennai with his oratory and brains. Within months the couple fell in love. What kept them going, however, was a series of inventive ruse jobs – hustles worth crores of rupees – investigations into which are going on even as Chandrasekhar is lodged in New Delhi's Mandoli jail. A case of money laundering of 82.5 lakh cash and more than 1 dozen luxury cars was registered

against Suresh Chandrasekhar in the year 2001.

From June 2020 to May 2021, Suresh Chandrasekhar, using some mobile applications and voice modulation software, made several calls to Aditi Singh, wife of former Ranbaxy owner Shivendra Singh who is in jail. Suresh, posing as an officer - sometimes as Law Secretary, Home Secretary, representative of Home Minister Amit Shah, and representative of Prime Minister's Office -- extorted Rs 215 crore from Aditi on the pretext of helping her husband get out of jail. It all started on June 15, 2020, when Aditi received a call on her mobile from a landline number.

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# Editoritis

# Is Suresh Chandrasekhar Influencing BJP by attacking Aam Aadmi Leaders?

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*Suresh, who was impersonating Anoop Kumar, made references to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the submissions made in court by them with regard to an expression made by Aditi's husband to contribute to healthcare through letters sent to the government.*

*Suresh, as Anoop Kumar, also gave specific instructions on the information that was needed to resolve the pending legal issues as well as the mode of communication and protocols that were to be followed as working with the highest offices was very sensitive and a privilege.*

*It was after the first three calls that she was informed by Suresh, as Anoop Kumar, that she was expected to contribute to the party fund and was also openly told that she would need to make a visit to the party office (BJP) or North Block as per instructions in due course of time to meet the seniors.*

A lady asked for her and stated that Anoop Kumar, Law Secretary for the Government of India, would like to speak. Within a few seconds, she transferred the phone and a man came on the phone line and introduced himself as Anoop Kumar, the Law Secretary of India. He stated that he was calling on the instructions of the PMO (Prime Minister's Office).

Suresh, who was impersonating Anoop Kumar, made references to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the submissions made in court by them with regard to an expression made by Aditi's husband to contribute to healthcare through letters sent to the government. He called three times to give specific instructions on protocols of communication with them and drew her attention to the landline numbers that he was calling from the government offices. He advised Aditi to check the numbers on the internet and Truecaller to authenticate the fact of receiving calls from government functionaries.

Suresh, as Anoop Kumar, also gave specific instructions on the information that was needed to resolve the pending legal issues as well as the mode of communication and protocols that were to be followed as working with the highest offices was very sensitive and a privilege. He was also specific about the healthcare work that Aditi's husband would be involved with in the future and made it sound like he would be working in the capacity of an industry advisor. When Aditi checked the number, she found that the number from which she got the call was from the Law Secretary's office.

It was after the first three calls that she was informed by Suresh, as Anoop Kumar, that she was expected to contribute to the party fund and was also openly told that she would need to make a visit to the party office (BJP) or North Block as per instructions in due course of time to meet the seniors. Suresh, as Anoop, later asked Aditi for Rs 20 crores and stated that Abhinav would give her instructions for delivery which were to be followed. Later months, Aditi kept giving money in hope that her husband would come out of jail and business would come on track. This bullying, extortion, threats and intimidation by Suresh, as Abhinav, continued till the lockdown in April 2021. By this time, over Rs 200 crores had been paid to him through a combination of sale of children's assets as well as loans taken

from family and friends on the excuse of legal bills, mounting expenses and children's education. The ED, after a tip off, busted the entire racket and asked Aditi to file a complaint.

Chandrasekhar had reportedly masterminded this entire plot. More recent investigations into the case reveal that he may have also conned actor Jacqueline Fernandez, among other Bollywood personalities. In the last one year, over 1,000 investors have invested a sum of around Rs 10 crore in the schemes run by the Suresh. Chandrasekhar also used to travel in a car with red lights on the top by calling himself the son of the then Chief Minister Karunanidhi. Till he trapped many people in his web of fraud by telling the truth that he is the nephew of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YSR Reddy and Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yeddyurappa. Suresh Chandrasekhar was adept in the art of speaking that he used to easily control people, he always made big people his victims.

Suresh Chandrasekhar was produced before a Delhi Court most recently, where he made claims that Arvind Kejriwal will be arrested next while referring to Manish Sisodia's arrest. In his earlier letter had claimed that Sisodia had "looted commissions" in every department he was in charge of as Delhi's Deputy chief minister. Suresh, who is lodged in Mandoli jail, had said that the AAP leaders Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain only care about their commission. He had also claimed that the Kejriwal government opted to award a contract to a firm in exchange for 20% higher commission. Chandrasekhar also said that CM kejriwal and Jain allegedly on his birthday sang popular song 'Yeh dosti hum nahi todenge' to 'persuade' the con artist to solicit donations from the Middle East and Southern India. No doubt that Suresh is a fraudulent man but all of sudden straining guns at Aam Aadmi leaders is another plot that he is playing to please BJP? Or he is helping BJP to trap Arvind Kejriwal, a political rival of BJP?

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# Voices



## Letters to the Editor

### Forced to remove hijab

The Students are facing difficulties while appearing for examinations amidst an unconstitutional Hijab ban in Karnataka. A student of PU college was compelled to appear for an examination removing her Hijab. Is this gender justice? It is a total attack on the dignity of women and an invasion of their privacy. It's also a clear violation of the Right to education under Article 21-A which is the fundamental right guaranteed by the constitution of India. The judiciary should take action against this unconstitutional ban.

Muzakkir Khan

### Public spat between Rohit & Shastri on eve of an important Test Match is unwarranted!

The public spat between Team India captain Rohit Sharma & former India coach Ravi Shastri on the eve of an important Test Match is unwarranted. It not just lowers the morale of the entire team but creates unnecessary debate among the media which could be demoralizing. Success has a lot of Godfathers but failures none. Team India has fared well in recent times & Ravi Shastri had no business to spike an unnecessary debate on eve of an important game that could decide the finalists for the World Test Championships of which Australia has already qualified.

Ravi Shastri loves to be in the news for all the wrong reasons & Rohit Sharma should ignore his comments & concentrate on the game instead. Players too should be restricted by BCCI to commenting on every accusation made on the team & the best way for Team India is to reply with their performance.

S.N. Kabra

### Avoid wearing gold jewelry

With gold prices on an upward spiral, women in the city are under constant threat from chain snatchers. Keeping in mind rising cases of chain-snatching, I feel that women themselves must avoid wearing gold jewelry, and if at all they wear them, they must be alert. The best way to curb such incidents is that women should start wearing imitation jewelry for daily use. They must keep their original gold jewelry for special occasions like weddings or parties and be cautious whenever they wear them. Though most women are targeted, even men are falling prey to such crimes. We cannot expect the police to remain ever vigilant to curb such incidents across the city. I have no idea of what punishments are awarded to those who are caught in gold thefts, but considering the gold prices, it has become an easy way of making money, and anyone who wears gold be it men or women becomes an easy target for the criminals. Self-restraint is the best measure to avoid being a victim of gold theft.

Jubel D'Cruz

# EARTH HOUR 2023



**W**e must be aware that Earth Hour is the largest grassroots environmental movement in the world and strives to bring millions of people together to show support for both people and the environment.

Earth Hour, which started in Sydney in 2007, has expanded to become one of the biggest environmental grassroots movements in the world, motivating people in more than 190 nations and territories to take practical environmental action.

In an effort to improve the world for coming generations, the initiative helps put conservation and sustainable practices in the spotlight. The Earth Hour campaign is actively supported by WWF-India. Each year, on the final Saturday in March, the event promotes turning off non-essential electric lights for one hour between 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. as a show of support for the environment.

Since its inception, Earth Hour has been a symbolically significant &quot;lights off &quot; campaign to express our collective support for the environment.

As part of efforts to establish

&quot;Biggest Hour for Earth, &quot; WWF's Earth Hour will mobilize people worldwide on March 25, 2023 at 8.30 p.m. to Give an Hour for Earth.

Earth Hour 2023 is a special global event. The purpose of Earth Hour is to demonstrate that we can all make a difference in the fight against climate change by using less energy for one hour. In order to mitigate the effects of climate change, trees, the planet's lungs, are essential. The time has come to pause and cooperate in order to preserve nature and rebuild what has been destroyed. So set aside some time, whether it be 60 seconds, 60 minutes, or even more than an hour, to think about the wonderful things that nature offers us and to work towards a more sustainable future for both people and the earth.

We all require nature. We must always defend nature if we want to preserve it. We anticipate it. There may be a recovery of the environment and wildlife everywhere by 2030.

In the past, Earth Hour has concentrated on the climate crisis, but more lately, it has worked to highlight the urgent problem of

natural loss as well. The public must also comprehend the value of the planet on which we live. In order for humans to have access to food security, clean water, and other natural resources that are essential to our survival, the Earth's environment must be in good shape. The main goal of Earth Hour is to inspire people to conserve the environment and consider reducing their personal energy consumption by having people all across the world observe one hour of darkness. This year's Earth Hour will also be a potent reminder of the value of our planet, the necessity of its preservation, and the short amount of time we have left to accomplish so. All Indians are urged to join the millions of people taking Time Out For Nature &quot;around the world by putting their lights down for one hour as part of Earth Hour.

**Dr. Krishna Kumar Vepakomma**

Columnist

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**No postal letters will be entertained**

(The views expressed are authors' own.)



City

## Shelar demands probe of 'dubious' sale of land of Mt Mary Basilica in Mumbai



Haratiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Ashish Shelar on Friday demanded that government authorities look into alleged fraudulent sale of land belonging to the famous Mount Mary Basilica in Mumbai. Shelar, who heads the BJP's

Mumbai unit, raised the issue in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly through a point of order. "Necessary action must be taken (against those responsible) for fraudulently selling the land of the Clergy home, Retreat and Mount Mary Basilica," he said. The Archdiocese of Bombay had issued a public notice to the person who intended to purchase this land belonging to the Church in Bandra Bandstand, he said. Excise Minister Shambhuraj Desai assured that the government will look into the matter.

## Protest on Mumbai-Agra highway disrupts traffic for an hour



Traffic on the Mumbai-Agra national highway in Maharashtra's Nashik district was disrupted for an hour on Friday due to a protest by Nationalist Congress Party workers over an array of farmer-centric issues, officials said. The

protesters, who spilled onto the busy carriageway at Chandwad, demanded a minimum support price for onion, immediate assessment of losses due to recent unseasonal rains and compensation to farmers and a reduction in fuel prices. "As onions, vegetables and other agro produce are fetching meagre prices, farmers are facing problems again. Also, the recent unseasonal rains have caused a huge loss of crops such as grapes, onions, wheat, gram and vegetables," said party MP Sameer Bhujbal.

## Assistant Sub-Inspector of police dismissed from service

An Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Mumbai Police has been dismissed from service on 'administrative grounds', officials said on Thursday. ASI Sunil Toke, who was dismissed earlier this month, had

filed a Public Interest Litigation in the past alleging large-scale corruption in the traffic police department. He had also filed a complaint against a retired Assistant Commissioner of Police, accusing him of corruption.

## 18 new Covid-19 cases in Mumbai



Mumbai on Thursday reported 18 new Covid-19 cases, taking the overall tally to 11,55,482, while no fresh death linked to the infection was registered in the metropolis, said the local civic body. The death toll remained unchanged at 19,747 with no fresh addition to the figure since the previous day, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said in a bulletin.

## 424 crore project to connect Thane and Vasai creeks

Project worth Rs 424 crore is being undertaken to connect Thane and Vasai creeks for water transport around Mumbai. A project costing Rs 162.20 crore has been approved for the construction of a jetty and related facilities for water transport terminal at Radio Club near the Gateway of India



in Mumbai. It will facilitate water transport from South Mumbai to Kalyan, Dombivli, Thane, Vasai and Navi Mumbai.

## 50 km metro network to be added in Mumbai region this year: Fadnavis



As much as 50 km of metro network will be added in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) in 2023-24, Maharashtra deputy chief

minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Thursday. He made the announcement while presenting the 2023-24 Budget in the state assembly.

## 30 families evacuated from building after major fire in ground-floor shop



Members of at least 30 families residing in a five-storey building in Thane city of Maharashtra were evacuated after a major fire broke out in its ground-floor shop on Friday morning, a civic official said. Nobody was injured in the incident, he said.

"A major fire broke out in a grocery shop located on the ground floor of a five-storey building in Sri Lanka area of Mumbra around 9 am," Avinash Sawant, chief of the Regional Disaster Management Cell (RDMC) of the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC), said.

## Mumbai police seek details of properties rented out by people

The Mumbai police has issued an order asking people to provide relevant details to them when they are renting out or sub-letting properties in the metropolis, an official said on Thursday. The order came into effect for 60 days from

Wednesday and its violators will be booked under relevant section of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), he added. According to the official, the order is aimed at preventing subversive and anti-social elements from seeking hideouts in residential areas.



## Nation

# Delhi excise case: Court sends AAP leader Manish Sisodia to ED custody till March 17



about the 'scam' and that it wanted to unearth the modus operandi of the perpetrators and confront him with the other accused.

The claims of the ED counsel were contested by a battery of lawyers who represented Sisodia. Senior advocates Dayan Krishnan, Mohit Mathur and Siddharth Aggarwal said the excise policy was accepted by the Lieutenant Governor who must have examined it.

Sisodia's lawyers while opposing the ED's plea for his custody, said it is the executive's job to make policy which goes through several layers of scrutiny. "How can ED look into policy making in money-laundering case," the AAP leader's counsel asked the court. "ED has not found a single penny from my client the case is entirely based on hearsay," the lawyer said.

The ED arrested Sisodia on Thursday evening in the Tihar jail, where he was lodged in connection with a case being probed by the CBI pertaining to alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scraped Delhi Excise Policy for 2021-22. PTI

Delhi court, on Friday, sent former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, arrested in a money laundering case related to the excise policy, to the Enforcement Directorate's custody till March 17. Special judge M.K. Nagpal allowed the anti-money laundering probe agency to interrogate the senior AAP leader in custody.

The ED had sought Sisodia's custody for 10 days. Earlier the court heard arguments of the ED and Sisodia's lawyers on the AAP leader's custody. There was heavy security presence within and out-

side the Rouse Avenue Courts.

The lawyer for the federal anti-money laundering probe agency alleged Sisodia made false statements about the 'scam' and that it wanted to unearth the modus operandi of the perpetrators and confront him with the other accused.

ED's counsel Zoheb Hosain also claimed before a special court that Sisodia destroyed his phone, an important piece of evidence in the investigation. The lawyer for the federal anti-money laundering probe agency alleged Sisodia made false statements

# Octogenarian from Hassan becomes first victim of H3N2 in Karnataka



An 82-year old man became the first victim of the H3N2 virus in Karnataka, a Health department official said on Friday. According to the District Health Officer of Hassan, Hire Gowda died due to the virus on March 1. "It is confirmed that Hire Gowda, son of Halage Gowda, 82 years, died of H3N2 virus on March 1," the DHO told PTI. He also said Gowda was a diabetic and suffered from hypertension as well. The Health department official further said the patient was admitted to hospital on February 24 and he died on March 1. The sample, sent for test, confirmed he was infected by the virus on March 6. About five days ago, the state Health Minister Dr

K Sudhakar held a meeting with the officials in view of the sudden spike in H3N2 virus infections.

According to the Health Minister, the Central government in its guidelines has set a target of 25 tests per week and the department is screening 25 cases of Sari and ILI in Victoria and Vani Vilasa Hospitals to keep track of the variants. The infection can be seen in children under 15 years of age, and in senior citizens over 65 years of age, he had told reporters after the meeting. Pregnant women are also more likely to get infected. He said that the spread of the infection can be tackled through measures such as cleanliness, preventing crowding, and hand hygiene. PTI

# 'Bengalis Love Posto': Mamata Urges Centre To Allow Poppy Cultivation In West Bengal

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said she has written to the Centre to allow poppy cultivation in West Bengal so that people of the state can enjoy the delicacies prepared with it. Speaking in the assembly, Banerjee said 'posto' or poppy seeds are costly as it is cultivated only in a few states "Bengalis love posto. Why should it be cultivated in only four states? Why will it not be cultivated in West Bengal, despite it being on our menu every day?" she asked. "Why will we have to purchase posto from other states at high prices? Why will West Bengal not get permission of cultivating posto here? I will ask members of the opposition to write to the Centre on it," she added.

Banerjee said that not all poppies are drugs. "We have said that

we will cultivate it in agriculture farms, we have several such farms. If we can grow poppy in our state we will get them at Rs 100 (per kg), instead of Rs 1,000. At times, we have to take decisions unanimously. Not all poppies are drugs," she claimed. West Bengal has been trying to get permission for the cultivation of the highly-regulated crop as poppy seeds are integral to the Bengali cuisine. Banerjee was speaking on budget discussions relating to the Food and Supplies Department. "Our farmers are earning better now. They are earning four-fold now. Our scientists have done some research work, which helped us in several ways. I had given them this idea. Politically, a few people think I am an idiot. This is my bad luck that I am not acceptable to them," she said. PTI

# Cattle smuggling case: Delhi Court sends TMC's Anubrata Mondal to further 11 days ED remand

Delhi court on Friday sent Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Anubrata Mondal to Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody for further 11 days in an alleged case of cattle smuggling case. ED has recently brought him to Delhi after arresting him in a money laundering case revolving around cattle smuggling case

The Special Judge Raghubir Singh on Friday allowed an ED plea for 11 days further remand of Anubrata Mondal. ED through its Special Public Prosecutor Nitesh Rana argued that Mondal's custodial interrogation is necessary to confront him with several accused and witnesses in the case. Appearing for Mondal, Advocate Mudit Jain submitted that the investigations conducted are closed doors investigations without any sight visit, which makes them lazy and unenterprising.



TMC leader Anubrata Mondal's default bail plea was recently dismissed by the trial Court.

TMC Birbhum district president Anubrata Mondal is said to be a close aide of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He was earlier arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with the same case on July 11. Recently ED arrested him

in the alleged multi-crore cattle smuggling scam after questioning him inside the Asansol jail where he was lodged.

In the case, the court earlier noted that this case of ED is based upon the Scheduled Offence (CBI case), the proceedings of which are going on there at Asansol, West Bengal in a CBI Court and some accused have been running into Judicial custody in connection with those proceedings of the CBI case.

During Sehegal Hussain's (another accused) hearing, the ED had agitated that sources for funding of immovable and movable assets acquired by the accused are to be ascertained and for that purpose, the accused is required to be confronted with certain other persons including his close relation so as to trace the trails of tainted money which allegedly runs into crores of rupees. ANI



World

# Ram Chandra Paudel elected new Nepal President



Ram Chandra Paudel has been elected as the new Nepal president. Paudel secured 33 thousand 8 hundred and 2 electoral votes while his rival Subash Chandra Nembwang secured 15 thousand 5 hundred and 18 electoral votes, according to Nepal's Election Commission. Further, according to Nepal's Election Commission, 313 members of the federal parliament took part in the voting while 518 members from the Province assemblies also participated in the electoral process to pick the next president. The voting took place

at Nepal's Parliament building in New Baneshwar, Kathmandu. The Election Commission in the Himalayan nation had set up two separate polling stations for federal parliamentarians and the Province Assembly members at the Hall. Lawmakers from all provinces have arrived in Kathmandu for the election. A total of 884 members make up the Electoral College, including 275 members of the House of Representatives, 59 of the National Assembly and 550 of the seven provincial assemblies. Paudel was supported by eight parties while

Subash Chandra Nembang, the sole candidate from CPN-UML, was tipped to be backed by independent lawmakers. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) had not supported or proposed any candidate for president. Both Paudel and Nembang had later met RPP chairman Rajendra Lingden and other office-bearers at RPP's office and sought their votes in the election. However, RPP had decided to abstain from voting on the eve of the presidential election. Most of the central working committee members had opined at a five-hour-long meeting on Wednesday that the party should not participate in the presidential election as it stays rooted in its core agenda, which favours the restoration of monarchy. RPP spokesperson Mohan Shrestha confirmed that the central working committee has decided to stay neutral in the presidential election. "It has been unanimously decided to not participate and stay neutral in the presidential election," Shrestha said.

# WHO fires director in Asia following charges of racial misconduct



The World Health Organisation has fired its top official in the Western Pacific after the Associated Press reported last year that dozens of staff members accused him of racist, abusive and unethical behaviour that may have compromised the UN health agency's response to the coronavirus pandemic. In an email sent to employees on Wednesday, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Dr. Takeshi Kasai's appointment had been terminated after an internal investigation resulted in findings of misconduct. Tedros did not refer to Kasai by name, referencing only his title as regional director in the Western Pacific. It is the first time in WHO's history that a regional director has been dismissed. "This has been an unprecedented and challenging journey for all of us," Tedros wrote. He said that the process of naming a new regional director for the Western Pacific would begin next month, with the election to be held in October. The Japanese government, which supported Kasai's nomination for the role, declined to com-

ment. A summary of the internal WHO investigation presented at a meeting of the agency's executive board this week in Geneva found Kasai regularly harassed workers in Asia, including engaging in aggressive communication, public humiliation, (and) making racial comments. Senior WHO directors told the organization's top governing body that Kasai had created a toxic atmosphere, that staff members were afraid of retaliation if they spoke out against him and that there was a lack of trust in WHO. The officials also found Kasai manipulated at least one performance evaluation of a subordinate, according to confidential materials obtained by the AP.

# On Khalistan activists, US says "we condemn terrorism in all its forms"



The United State condemned terrorism in all of its forms including those who resort to violence to achieve their ends, whether they are political or otherwise, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price on being asked about Khalistan. "So we condemn terrorism in all of its forms. We condemn terrorism; we condemn violent extremism. We condemn all of those who resort to violence to achieve their ends, whether they are political or otherwise. There is never a justification to resort to violence. Regardless of the motivation,

regardless of the perpetrator, we take the threat of terrorism around the world, whether that's to regional peace and security or to our own security, extraordinarily seriously," Price said in the press briefing on Wednesday (local time). He was asked to share his views on Khalistani activists that are active in North America and who were responsible for the bombing of Air India in 1985. There have been fears of an upturn in activities by the separatist outfit after suspected Khalistan supporters vandalised temples in Australia.

# World Police Summit: UAE tech company unveils undercover police vehicle

A United Arab Emirates (UAE)-based technology firm has launched an undercover police vehicle, which is customised to assist and enhance surveillance, road security, law enforcement, and crime prevention, according to Khaleej Times. The special vehicle was launched by the tech firm at the Dubai World Police Summit, Khaleej Times reported. Anas Al Zghoul, head of research and development at the tech company 'Tatweer', said, "This is an undercover car where we have mounted a technology device in the front that is an integrated solution customised to assist and enhance surveillance, road security, law enforcement, and crime prevention." "This device or module can be moulded to fit any size and shape on the bumper of the make and model of the car," added Zghoul. Zhogul also stated that the system of the ve-



hicle is integrated with top-notch automatic number plate recognition cameras, surveillance CCTV capabilities, speed detection, law enforcement innovative mobile app and web application - which, together, build the complete ecosystem, according to Khaleej Times. Hosted by Dubai Police, the summit is being held at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 7 to 9 March 2023. The World Police Summit provides an unparalleled platform to explore the current challenges facing police

forces and the latest technological advancements, strategies, and innovations across the law enforcement and security spectrum. Meanwhile, Heruon launched its new breakthrough technology, Artemis, on Wednesday, at the prestige Dubai World Police Summit Building on its award-winning facial and object recognition technology. Artemis can detect Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signals and can be adapted to detect Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) etc.

## Expression

# Divine Experiences or Hallucinatory Tricks?

- M.R. Lalu

It is about 15 years since I had experienced the most divulging spiritual tomfoolery in my life at the banks of mother Ganga in Haridwar. Overwhelmed by the literary inscriptions about the legendary greatness of the holy river in the ancient texts, I was totally thrown into the depth of its unfathomable spiritual realms emotionally and the bedtime stories illustrating its divine perceptions from childhood began to tickle my spiritual impulses once again and I stood amazed and totally lost in the clamour of a noisy crowd around me. I was not bedazzled to see many saffron clad saints on the holy riverside. But the one who came closer to me with a mysterious smile had a notorious intent. Probably, convinced by my stupefied appearance, he asked me to give him 50 rupees so that he could bless me with a divine experience. Deeply animated for an instant divine experience for a pittance was a great spiritual luxury for me. On giving the money, the man with a snake in his hand, magically swayed his hands in the air and returned a bead of rudraksh to me and to my horror I did not know where my currency had disappeared.

Definitely that was not a divine experience but a hallucinatory trick; hence my good sense warned me to stay away from spiritual tricksters. This incident is recalled here to invite the gorge into which our superstitious mind pulls us. India has an ancient tradition that was nurtured by spiritually elevated seers and saints. That was the substratum of our spiritual ideology, without which India remains a mere landscape without soul. Spanning from the days of the Vedas and moving through the enthralling narrations of life intertwined in spiritual values in the epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to the divine perceptions categorically exhibited by saints like Swami Vivekananda and many others, spirituality in India has been an act of seeking and life-giving values being simplified for the common man. Superstition became a nuisance in India's spiritual periphery, probably since the advent of occidental faiths.

Spirituality in India is mistaken as mere superstition by many people. Believers throng into temples and other religious places without understanding their spiritual principles but their visit is to primarily satisfy their personal desires. Most of them further try their luck with Babas and fake gurus who lure them with solutions and affluence. What if you find a pastor bringing a dead child back to life with his miracle touch or with the mere gestures of his fingers bless a blind man to light.

Unfortunately, such spiritual buffoonery gets easily noticed and attractive monkey tricks in television channels get millions of viewers. The more dangerous aspect of this faith industry is that most of the Babas and religious preachers involved in these acts of spiritual skylarking hold serious connections with politicians. India always remained a spiritual society which believed in Karma and Dharma and considered them as the most religious dictums for the society. Dharmic karma, according to the ancient Indian tradition, was the best of ideals that would show you the real essence of divinity.

The Hindu approach, according to the Manusmriti, categorises various elements of Dharma. It says "Dhriti ksama damosteyam sauchamindriyanigraha, Dhirvidya satyamakrodho dasakam dharmalakshanam." Patience, forgiveness, constant discrimination, non-stealing, purity, control of senses, righteous action, knowledge, truth and giving up anger- these are the ten indications of dharma. Any activity performed with all these elements of dharma, played with a significant role in its fulfilment is Dharmic. Superstitious beliefs have entered into a plethora of rituals as people began to selectively manipulate their spiritual ideals for personal wellbeing. The damage is devastating. The very spiritual idea that a religion represents is seen through the prism of suspicion by people with logical minds. Moreover, Babas and miracle healing pastors and many in this clan of spiritual racket would downsize the essential humanitarian values enshrined in different religions.

In essence and practice, Hinduism

is capable of helping its followers to take pace with the natural rhythm of spirituality ordained in its framework. Imprisoned in the superstitious and speculative narratives and adulterated spiritual theories and practices, a large number of people get boomeranged into the insensitive adulation of fake gurus and acharyas and cross wielding pastors. Real spiritual luminaries from the days of Adi Shankaracharya to the modern days have been sincere social reformers, who rose beyond ludicrous mannerisms of societies. Born in 1824, Swami Dayananda Saraswati was one among those polestars of socio-spiritual refinement. He devoted his life to fight the social evils such as untouchability, child marriage, female infanticide and many more distortions in the society. Swami Dayananda's reformist propaganda favouring widow remarriage and women education holds meaning and significance even today. Sree Narayana Guru from the southernmost Kerala was another spiritual luminary who fought casteism and social discrimination tooth and nail. When untouchability prohibited marginalised sections of the society from entering temples, Narayana Guru built temples for them. To those who refuted him with contempt, he retorted, calling the deity he consecrated as a representative of the downtrodden. In fact he consecrated Lord Shiva. Revolutionising spirituality to the extent of eradicating the exasperating superstitious system was the mission of those saints. In this context, Swami Vivekananda cannot be left out. His teachings had a huge impact on the social life of India, spiritualising its emotions and

elevating its patriotic pride.

Unfortunately, today India witnesses Babas, Pastors, fake healers and preachers enlarging their territory by stealthily sneaking into our houses on TV screens and playing with the element of spiritual 'fear' among believers, especially women. Spurious spiritual industry is booming in India while political leaders on the edge of oblivion are seen spear-eagling the power and reach of Babas, who make miraculous success overnight. Totally forgetful of the essence of divinity which is kindness and compassion in itself, millions of people swarm around these fake mediators of God to get healed and blessed and to fulfil their dreams instantaneously. The nexus tailored between Babas and politicians get activated when elections are around. Interestingly, most of the conversion activities among the illiterate, backward tribal communities are done by stage-managed miracle healings by pastors and preachers. You should not be surprised to see a dead man walk and blind woman read. Sinking into the quagmire of frozen intellect, the common man plays into the hands of these fraudsters and fails to reason out the reality. Holy books and real saints become meaningless here. Swami Vivekananda spoke, echoing his sarcasm the best while criticizing superstition. He said, "I would rather see you people as staunch atheists than as superstitious fools. An atheist is alive; he can be of some use. But when superstition takes hold, the brain is almost dead." We need to pay attention to these legendary words.





## Entertainment

# Next decade is going to be India's: Siddharth Roy Kapur on global presence of Indian content

The last few years were dominated by the South Korean wave with their music, cinema and shows transcending borders, and Indian content will reach the same heights in the coming decade, believes producer Siddharth Roy Kapur.

With India being nominated in three categories at the 95th Academy Awards — Original Song, Documentary Feature and Documentary Short — Roy Kapur is optimistic that India is ready to take over the world with its rich storytelling. "Our time will come. I think the next decade is going to be India's, the last decade was South Korean decade, with their music and movies, their food, and their pop culture really breaking through the world. I think the next decade will be India's," the producer told Agency in a virtual interview.

At the Oscars, scheduled to take place on March 12, Telugu track "Naatu Naatu" from SS Rajamouli's period blockbuster "RRR" is the frontrunner in the Original Song category. Shaunak Sen's "All That Breathes" is nominated for Documentary Feature award, while Guneet Monga-backed "The Elephant Whisperers" is competing in the

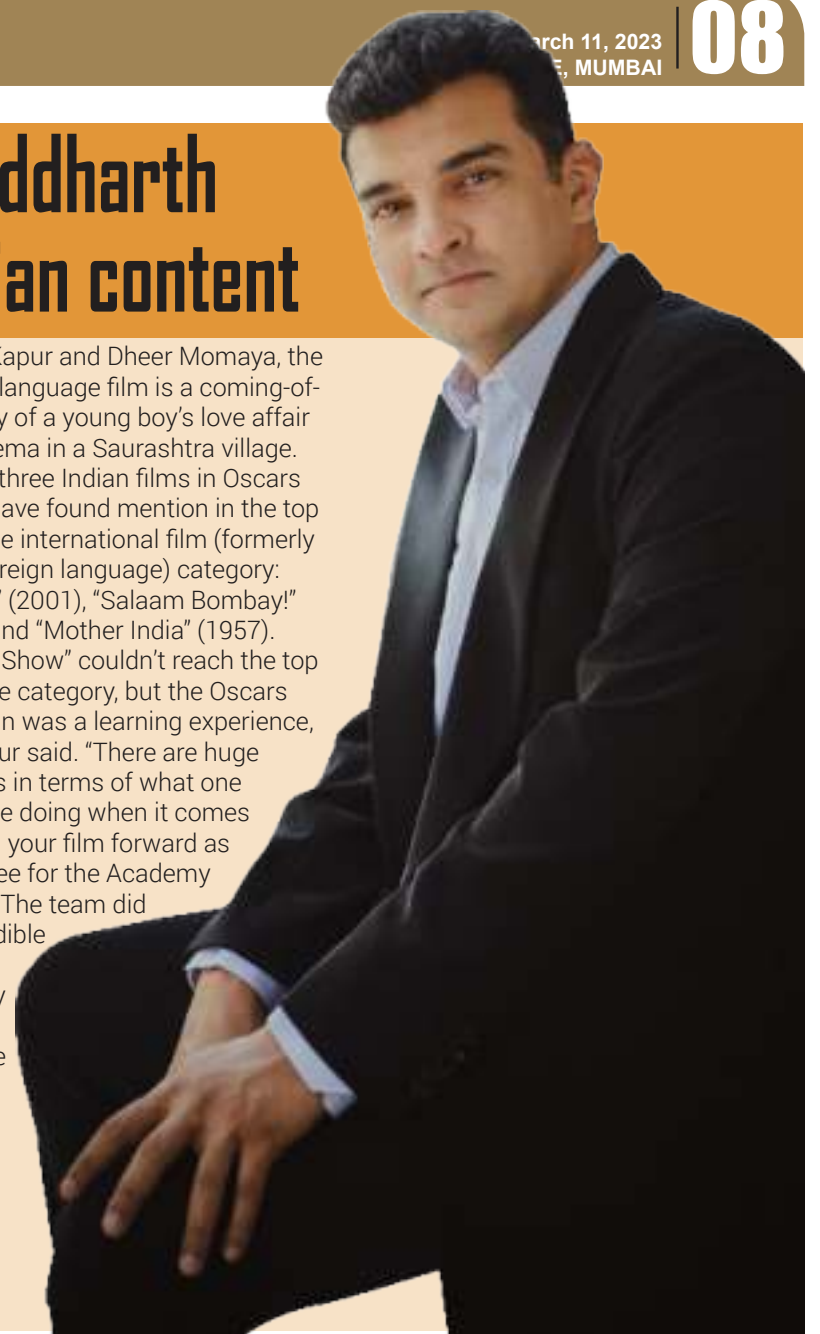
Documentary Short category. Roy Kapur said he is hopeful that Indian films will register multiple wins at this year's Oscars. "I hope all three of them make it. I hope we win, and we bring home three Oscars this time. But even if they don't, just the fact that they have gotten this far means like we are knocking on the doors and those doors will open at some point," he said.

Streaming platforms have played a pivotal role in popularising Indian cinema and shows through its wide reach, the producer added. "Overall we are knocking on the doors, at the Academy, (Golden) Globes, at the Baftas. In all the international spaces, our movies and TV shows are now breaking through and for that I need to give credit to streaming platforms because they have managed to be able to take our content so far and wide, which earlier we would struggle with," he said.

Roy Kapur, known for backing diverse movies such as "Dev D", "The Lunchbox", "Dangal" and "The Sky Is Pink", said he is delighted with the love that his team received for "Chhello Show" ("Last Film Show"), which was India's official entry for Oscars 2023. Directed by Pan Nalin and produced

by Roy Kapur and Dheer Momaya, the Gujarati language film is a coming-of-age story of a young boy's love affair with cinema in a Saurashtra village.

Only three Indian films in Oscars history have found mention in the top five of the international film (formerly called foreign language) category: "Lagaan" (2001), "Salaam Bombay!" (1988), and "Mother India" (1957). "Chhello Show" couldn't reach the top five in the category, but the Oscars campaign was a learning experience, Roy Kapur said. "There are huge learnings in terms of what one should be doing when it comes to taking your film forward as a nominee for the Academy Awards. The team did an incredible job and I am really proud of them," he added.  
PTI



# Deepika Padukone poses, greets paps at Mumbai Airport before flying to US for Oscars



The final countdown has begun. Ahead of the 95th Academy Awards, Deepika Padukone, who has been selected as one of the presenters this year, flew to the US. The pictures and videos of Deepika at Mumbai airport surfaced online on Thursday night. The 'Gehraiyaan' actor was dressed in all-black. She chose a turtle-neck black sweater, teaming it up with a black blazer. The nerdy black glass added to the glam quotient of Deepika. The 'Padmaavat' actor posed for the paparazzi stationed at the airport. She smiled, and greeted them saying 'Thank You.' Even Deepika shared a gratitude emoji on the post of a paparazzo, who shared the video on Instagram.

Deepika took to Instagram on March 3 to share a post with the names of all the presenters. The list also includes Dwayne Johnson, Michael B. Jordan, Riz Ahmed, Emily Blunt, Glenn Close, Troy Kotsur, Dwayne Johnson, Jennifer Connelly, Samuel L. Jackson, Melissa McCarthy, Zoe Saldana, Donnie Yen, Jonathan Majors and Questlove.

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