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Misinformation to trigger public fear a serious concern, smart policing can prevent it: President Murmu



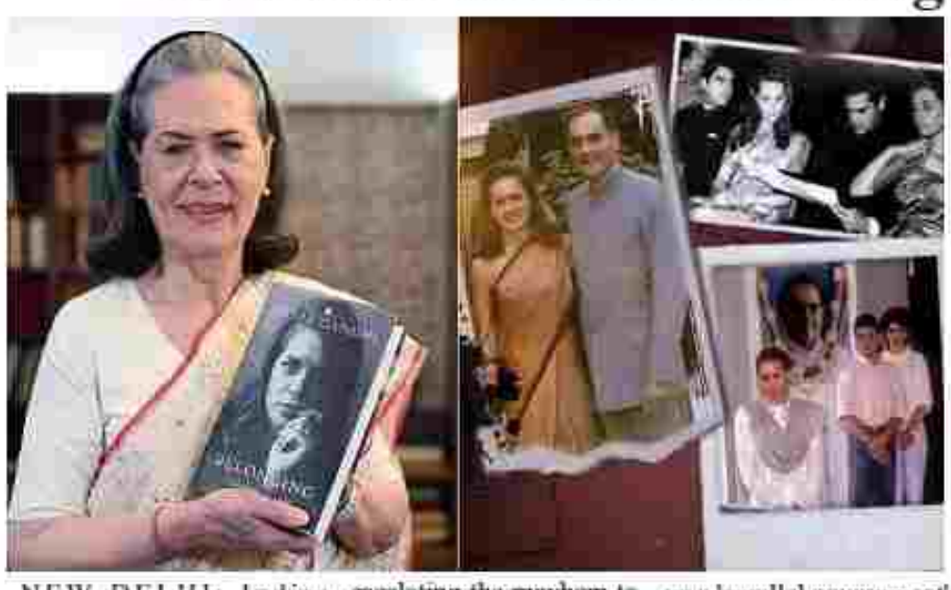
President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday flagged the spread of misinformation to create fear among people as an emerging serious concern, saying smart policing can help prevent situations from becoming too challenging.Addressing probationers of the Indian Police Service (2025 batch), who had called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi, she said that deep-fake content poses new threats and highlighted the need for police officers to always stay ahead of the criminals who use state-of-the-art technologies.The President said that spreading misinformation to trigger fear among the people is emerging as a serious issue. "Impressionable minds, especially the youth, can be swayed by orchestrated disinformation. This kind of orchestrated mischief can happen at local, regional, or even national levels.""Smart policing can prevent such situations from getting too challenging and big," she said.President Murmu said that cybercrimes are getting widespread and more serious and the police have to sensitise society more extensively about the gravity of cybercrimes.She emphasised that police officers should reorient their own approach toward such crimes.The President said that for the citizens, police officers and constables are symbols of governance."People perceive the governance to be good when the police system functions well. People feel immensely supported when a police officer listens to their grievances with sensitivity and attentiveness," she said.President Murmu urged the Indian Police Service (IPS) officers to prioritise alleviating the fears of socially or economically weaker individuals, who generally lack access to senior officials, and addressing their grievances.She said that some of the employees in the system may be more proficient in the use of technology than senior officers and advised the officer trainees not to hesitate to learn even from the most junior members of their team.The President urged them to encourage public participation and teamwork in their working style. She said that by prioritising the welfare of their team members, they will enhance their capabilities and enthusiasm.President Murmu stated that police officers would derive a high level of authority from the laws and rules related to policing."However, they will earn real respect from the people, based on their performance and value system," she was quoted as saying in a statement issued by her office.The President said that they should have a sense of commitment to serving citizens rather than a sense of superiority over them.

India engaging with Moscow, Kyiv on Black Sea shipping safety, grain, energy exports: MEA



India is engaging with both Russia and Ukraine on a range of proposals aimed at de-escalating the nearly five-year conflict, including ensuring the safety of shipping in the Black Sea, facilitating grain and energy exports and exploring possibilities for non-attack arrangements, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Tuesday.The statement came as trilateral talks involving Russia, Ukraine and the United States began in the United Arab Emirates to explore a peaceful resolution to the conflict, which has disrupted global food and energy supplies.External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India had been consistently advocating dialogue and diplomacy, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly stressing the need to move from an "endless war to the end of war"."In keeping with this idea to bring peace, India has been engaged with both sides with certain ideas such as safety of shipping in the Black Sea, addressing immediate concerns of Russia and Ukraine on grain and energy exports, and non-attack possibilities," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing.India's remarks followed a phone conversation between Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday, during which the prime minister reiterated New Delhi's willingness to contribute to efforts to end the conflict.According to Jaiswal, the two leaders exchanged views on the ongoing war, its humanitarian consequences and various initiatives to restore peace. Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to contributing in every possible way towards a peaceful resolution.Jaiswal also said External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had spoken to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about the ongoing diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.On the possibility of establishing food corridors, the spokesperson said India had exchanged ideas and remained in contact with both Moscow and Kyiv, as well as other interested parties, to facilitate the restoration of peace.Following his conversation with Modi, Zelenskyy said the two leaders had discussed Russia's blockade of grain exports through the Black Sea. He said Ukraine was counting on India's willingness to mediate in establishing food corridors."We discussed Russia's blocking of grain exports via the Black Sea. India is ready to mediate in establishing food corridors, and we are counting on these efforts to continue," Zelenskyy said.India's efforts to facilitate an end to the conflict have gathered pace in recent months. Jaishankar had earlier said New Delhi had moved beyond merely advocating peace and was stepping up its engagement with both countries through diplomatic conversations.About a month ago, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Kyiv had received separate ceasefire proposals from India and three other countries.During a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Bishkek in September, Modi had called for an immediate end to the conflict and urged Moscow to move away from an "endless war" towards an "end of war".Jaishankar subsequently visited Kyiv, where he reiterated India's readiness to contribute to efforts to restore peace in Ukraine.Last month, Putin said Modi had "good ideas" for finding a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict.India has maintained that the Russia-Ukraine conflict should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy, while continuing to engage with both sides.

Indira had tears in eyes while watching Operation Blue Star aftermath footage: Sonia Gandhi



NEW DELHI: Indira Gandhi cried while watching the harrowing visuals of the aftermath of Operation Blue Star in 1984, says Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, claiming that there were tears of pain and regret as well as of sorrow in the then PM's eyes at the manner which the siege at the Golden Temple had ended.In her memoir Belonging: A Journey Of Love, Sonia Gandhi says that over 15 years, a formerly unknown Sikh preacher, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, had come to gain prominence in Punjabi politics, and leaders of two warring factions within the Punjab Congress party had allegedly promoted him, each seeking to weaken the other."Now he withdrew his allegiance to them and began to rally people around a series of political demands. Bhindranwale led a violent separatist movement essentially aimed to polarise the Hindu and Sikh communities."Pakistani intelligence agencies had infiltrated the agitation, escalating the mayhem to incite the mass flight of Hindus from Punjab, with the aim of getting the state to secede from India," she says.She recalls that bomb blasts and the killing of innocent people had become the order of the day.There were frequent instances of buses being hijacked, their Hindu passengers being pulled off and mercilessly gunned down, Sonia Gandhi recalls.A rift appeared for the first time after Independence between Sikhs and Hindus, she says in the book."Where the two communities had lived in amity, there was now growing alienation. The most dangerous objective in promoting the hostility was the idea of creating Khalistan, separate sovereign homeland for Sikhs, purportedly to safeguard Sikhism," she says.In 1982, Bhindranwale installed himself in Amritsar's Golden Temple, the most sacred of all Sikh shrines, she recounts."There he set up a 'parallel government' with his own judicial organisation for settling disputes, issuing firmans (edicts) and hit lists. He began to amass weapons, from pistols to Kalashnikovs to mortars, turning the shrine over time into an armed fortress."He also ordered killer squads to systematically eliminate all those who opposed his politics, whether Sikh or Hindu," she says.As these heinous acts continued, month after month, Indira Gandhi continued to hold secret talks with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leadership in order to reach an agreement, she says, adding that the Akalis had been rendered powerless by Bhindranwale.In January 1984, a Khalistani flag was raised above a building outside the revered shrine, she recalls."Then intelligence reports informed Mrs Gandhi that the declaration of Khalistan as an independent state was imminent: Bhindranwale and his cohort planned to announce it and hoist its flag on the Har Mandir Sahib, the Golden Temple, on India's Independence Day, August 15," she says.That would have been nothing less than treason, an act of war against the Indian Union, with perilous consequences for the country, Sonia Gandhi says.Indira Gandhi's own relationship with the Sikh community was a deep and strong one, but the problem was spiralling; she held meetings until late hours of the night, hardly ate her meals and looked disturbed for days, Sonia Gandhi recalls."Reluctantly, feeling she had no choice, she ordered the armed forces to act in the operation code-named Blue Star. The operation began on June 1, 1984, and on June 4, the army entered the Golden Temple complex," she says."It turned out to be fully fortified with heavy weaponry, much more than the security system had reported. After a bitter battle with many casualties on both sides, the armed forces regained control of the holy shrine."The action had resulted in considerable damage and destruction to the complex," she says.To the Sikh community, that was nothing less than sacrilege, Sonia Gandhi adds."A week or so later, an intelligence official brought to Mrs. Gandhi a film with harrowing visuals of the aftermath: bodies on the ground, one of them Bhindranwale, who had been killed in the fierce battle; fortifications, underground traps from where soldiers had been shot; heavy weapons and rocket launchers still in place on turrets and fortified positions."As my mother-in-law watched the slow-moving record, I could see her face wet with tears – tears of pain and regret, I think: sorrow at the manner which the siege had ended, at the large number of lives lost," Sonia Gandhi recounts.After Operation Blue Star, the lives of the Nehru-Gandhi family were shadowed by danger to her mother-in-law, the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) president says."She had asked me not to allow the children to play as they normally did next door in Akbar Road, and certainly not after dusk. There were Sikh members of her security there."She had flatly refused to replace the Sikh guards in all her security details: Such a choice would go against everything she had stood for," Sonia Gandhi says.To her, every citizen of India, regardless of region, caste or creed, deserved equal respect, she adds."She was to pay for her decisions and her principles with a fusillade of bullets fired from machine guns by the two Sikh guards posted at the wicket. One of them had been a regular companion to Rahul and Priyanka in their games in Akbar Road," Sonia Gandhi recalls.

Punjab poll battle moves to roads as parties roll out statewide yatras

CHANDIGARH: With less than four months to go before the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections, the political battle in the state is moving beyond rally grounds and public stages to roads and villages.As parties step up their outreach, yatras, cycle campaigns and constituency-level marches are being employed as key instruments to connect with voters.Leading the Congress's outreach offensive, former chief minister and Jalandhar MP Charanjit Singh Channi will launch the 'Jawani Sambhal Cycle Yatra' from Chamkaur Sahib on November 12.Around 2,000 cyclists are expected to participate in the campaign, which aims to cover nearly 90 of Punjab's 117 Assembly constituencies.The first leg will be an eight-day, 625-km journey, concluding at Khanna on November 19 after passing through 27 constituencies. Punjab Congress affairs in-charge Sachin Pilot will flag off the yatra.Two subsequent legs are proposed from Amritsar to Dera Baba Nanak in the Majha region and from Amritsar to Hussainiwala in Ferozepur, covering parts of Majha and Malwa. The party is planning four cycle yatras during November and December.In each constituency, participants will also hold marches and seek public feedback on illegal mining, drug abuse and law and order. The campaign will be the Congress's first major statewide outreach after Rahul Gandhi's recent rally in Sangrur.

It's time to look at the anti-defection law



In 1985, soon after the Congress won a landslide victory of over 400 seats, Rajiv Gandhi got Parliament to pass the anti-defection law. In essence the law said the following: Any legislator who defied the party leadership on a vote would be seen as a defector and disqualified. Meaning that once the party issued a whip (a written notice to its legislators requesting attendance for a particular vote), the legislator could not vote as s/he chose but had to vote as the party wanted her/him to. Even if the legislator abstained from voting s/he could be disqualified. The vote need not necessarily be a confidence vote, linked to the survival of a government.

The anti-defection law can be invoked for any vote that a party chooses. The law originally shielded legislators voting against their party if one-third of them did so. But in 2004, this aspect was also removed. The logic was that the one-third law encouraged 'wholesale defection'. In a 2007 case (Rajendra Singh Rana vs Swami Prasad Maurya, connected to defections in the Bahujan Samaj Party) the Supreme Court said that even signing a letter to the governor supporting the opposite party was equivalent to defection. This is one reason why the Bharatiya Janata Party did not name the members from the Congress or the Janata Dal-Secular who may have been supporting it in Karnataka.

If their names and signatures had been added by B S Yeddyurappe in his letter to the governor, this could have been fatal for the MLAs concerned. The Union government arguing in the BJP's favour in Karnataka made the claim that because the Karnataka MLAs had not yet been sworn in, the anti-defection law did not apply. The Supreme Court said that this claim was 'preposterous' and 'an open invitation to horse-trading'. Over the years, because of this law, the judiciary has been able to impose itself on what it essentially the prerogative of the legislature. This may be seen by some as being necessary but it is not healthy in a parliamentary democracy.

Over 100 MLAs across India and over 2 dozen MPs have been disqualified under this law over the decades. Other great democracies also have the problem of defying their whip, but their solution or punishment is not as drastic as ours. In the United Kingdom, an MP who defies a three-line whip (meaning a written notice which has been underlined three times to mark its urgency) could be expelled from the party but retains their seat, unlike in India where they lose both.

In Australia the punishment for defying the whip is such things as being denied some party resources. In the United States, members cannot be expelled from political parties and therefore the question of such punishment does not arise. India is the only major democracy where casting a vote against your party directive results in such extreme action.

In 1992, the Supreme Court (Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachilhu) decided that the law was not against free speech or any other freedoms and was not against parliamentary democracy. The court said 'the anti-defection law seeks to recognise the practical need to place the proprieties of political and personal conduct.... above certain theoretical assumptions.'

One need not agree with this, but even if one does, other serious questions remain unanswered. What happens in case the party joins a post-poll alliance with another party whose ideology the legislator is opposed to? Should s/he let down her/his voters merely because her/his party leadership has taken a decision in that direction? This is not an easy question to answer and the anti-defection law ignores it. The anti-defection law was justified because that period saw a lot of legislators changing their party, being bribed with offers of ministries or money. In the late 1960s, a Congress legislator from Haryana, Gaya Lal, changed his party three times in a few days. This action produced the phrase 'Aaya Ram, gaya Ram', referring to those legislators who owed no party loyalty but were in politics purely for themselves.

The anti-defection law was meant to curb such activity. And it has done so to a large extent. However it was too sweeping a solution to what was essentially a problem of morality. If a legislator defied the party on which s/he was voted, surely it was the elector who should punish her/him and not the party. The anti-defection law essentially removed the conscience of the elected representative and was thus a blow against democracy and constitutionalism. It also took away the agency and freedom of the legislator. The law fails us the citizens in two most important ways.

First the loyalty that a legislator must have towards her/his voter and her/his constituents as opposed to her/his party. And second, the assumption, which is false, that the party is always right. The history of independent India shows that no party is perfect and their leaderships are capable of mistakes. The anti-defection law blunts the resistance to such actions. Parliament is the loudest and most powerful forum in a democracy. The anti-defection law has muzzled all forms of internal dissent in it. No matter which side of the divide one is on the matter of the mess in Karnataka, all of us must look again seriously at this law and examine the harm it has done, while acknowledging its benefits.

Rebuilding our cities

Soon after World War II, Americans chose to align their cities not with European ideals but with places that reflected American conditions. That great swathes of cheap land and newer technologies for construction were available meant that the new American city could have denser civic centres, a large component of suburban homes, private cars to access long distances, and a new conception of city life.

The Indian city of the 21st century is a similarly dynamic entity, with palpable differences from its modern conception after Independence. Chandigarh, under Jawaharlal Nehru, began with a minuscule population of 20,000. This has grown to 1.2 million people today and the city's construction has no allegiance to its original conception. Similarly, Delhi began its post-Independence life with less than a million inhabitants. Today, on a GPS map, the National Capital Region's unhindered spread across three States resembles muddy water spreading from a broken drain.

Delhi's per capita GDP rate gives no indication of its true demographics. The city has the largest population of urban poor in the world. Its antiquated urban policies by-laws, civic regulations and building parameters that were drawn for a city of 750,000 middle-class residents are today out of sync for a population of 22 million, of which 80% are poor, homeless, or slum inhabitants. With similar statistics, a continual expansion northwards, and a system out of touch with ground reality, Mumbai is a close second.

The liberalised economy of the last few decades has created two pockets of city life: a small exclusive elite that occupies urban space but remains cloistered and outside of its civic forces, and a majority of dispossessed who fill the empty crevices of the city with meagre possessions and rudimentary needs. A supposedly thriving middle class remains a figment of the bureaucratic imagination, while the overwhelming population is of the poor. What does this say about the future of civic planning and urban life?

If the bureaucrat and the politician wish to deal with the real city today, they must look closely at Lagos and Kumasi rather than Copenhagen or Shanghai. Like Delhi and Mumbai, West African cities are migrant towns whose development and future prospects are tied to the economy of day-to-day minor endeavours. To give civic space to people with nothing, to allow for a spread of temporary commerce, cattle fairs, public festivals and vegetable markets as the mainstay of civic life makes West African towns strikingly similar to Indian cities. A mix of agricultural town, rural outpost and cosmopolitan centre, the city's migrant economy takes centre stage in civic life. Indian towns too rely on the surrounding farming economy or are artisan centres for small-scale often illegal industry.

Consequently, the signals are all directed towards a future urbanity made up of rural inhabitants, where the more pressing needs of civic life will be addressed by informal associations. Norms of space occupation, building design, size and density have to therefore grow out of people's own comfort and familiarity, not as an imposition of imaginary European models or even Indian middle-class values. Civic mayhem is created by persistent and erroneous calls for public space, cultural centres, stadia, etc., rather than open maidans and temporary bazaars where migrant patterns can be openly expressed in city life.

Demographic changes in Indian cities occur much too fast to be acknowledged in government policy. In fact, perceptible changes in the city's public disposition have already begun to project rural patterns. The wide open green space at Delhi's India Gate designed as ceremonial space for government monuments now functions as an unselfconscious city ground for the capital's poor. The northern fringe of hillocks outside Jaipur's old city is a cataclysm of expanding tenements. Mumbai's Marine Drive is public space without intent, as is Chennai's Marina Beach.

Unless there is a serious rethink of the value of urban life, the city will remain mired in its present muddled state of trial, error and miscalculation. Cities throughout India have to be revitalised, for which three serious approaches are available. First, given the trends of migration and the free-for-all approach to civic resources, land and facilities, the government's inclination to appease the larger numbers should take precedence. The city's overriding plan should be directed towards an accommodation of all migratory tasks home, employment, entertainment, and commerce in buildings and public facilities altered to suit their primary needs. This may radically change the overall structure of the city. But when bylaws and regulations are specifically and only written for a migrant city, it would be far more acceptable than the current city profile as desperate slum.

The second idea could adopt a draconian model of restrictions similar to Chinese and some European cities, allowing entry and civic facilities only to those with either home or employment. Physical control and access to roads, parks, housing and utilities becomes a position of fewer people sharing a limited reserve of urban space and resources. As most social scientists now admit, only controlled undemocratic space can be a functioning model for a city.

The third model, which is the most difficult and yet most sought-after, seeks a divergent and all-inclusive solution. It is what American urbanist Jane Jacobs described as 'a cultural cohesion' where the integration of economic disparities is so complete that it resembles a finely woven carpet. The design incorporates all the essential elements of habitation home, commerce, recreation and institution and merges them mysteriously in the carpet weave. The city and its neighbourhoods are no longer a visible intrusion of small private capitalist parts in a larger socialist city-state, or vice-versa, but an unconscious mixing of interdependence.

People live blissfully unaware of the other's presence, class or economic status. Hints of such places are visible in old European and American cities, in small medieval towns in western India, even in some long-established poorer city tenements. Such cities do not follow physical, statistical or design models, but are formed out of a deeper evolutionary social core an intent that despises easy definitions of community, residence, commercial area and public space. It takes a brave government to believe these are worth doing, and an even braver one to attempt such coalescing. The extreme variation in all three approaches still demands decisive thought and implementation. It will take civic municipalities a serious commitment to a task so far given over to a decaying formless city part slum, part farmhouse born out of neglect and complacency.

Physical activity levels may start tailing off at age 7

Dear parents, ask your kids to exercise daily from early childhood, as study warns that level of physical activity may start tailing off as early as the age of seven, rather than during adolescence, which is widely believed. The study was published online in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. "The present study found that 100 percent of boys and girls fitted into longitudinal trajectories which were inconsistent with the orthodox view that physical activity begins to decline at adolescence, declines much more rapidly at adolescence and/or declines much more rapidly in adolescent girls than boys," the researchers explained.

"The study questions the concept of the adolescent girl as a priority for research and policy efforts in physical activity," they pointed out. They tracked the physical activity levels of a representative sample of around 400 children over a period of eight years (2006-15). The physical activity levels were measured when the children were seven, nine, 12 and 15, using a small lightweight portable monitor (Actigraph), worn for seven days at a time. Overall, the total volume of physical activity fell from the age of seven onwards in both boys and girls during this time, with declines no steeper during adolescence than in earlier childhood.

The study found that in 61 percent of boys, moderate levels of physical activity gradually tailed off from the age of seven. However in girls, moderate levels of physical activity that gradually tailed off from the age of seven were 62 percent. "Future research and public health policy should focus on (A) preventing the decline in physical activity which begins in childhood, not adolescence, and (B) providing an improved understanding of the determinants of the different physical activity trajectories, including an understanding of the relative importance of biological and environmental influences," they emphasised.

24 mn Americans to lose coverage under Republican health plan

The Republican proposal to overhaul health care in the US could cause as many as 24 million people to lose their coverage over the next nine years, the Congressional Budget Office said. The study released on Monday was highly anticipated given that the CBO independently evaluates the effects of congressional bills, on both the political and economic levels, Efe news reported. Nevertheless, the proposal to replace the Affordable Care Act achieves one of the key objectives of Republican lawmakers, reducing the federal deficit by $337 billion over 10 years, according to the report.

The US deficit in 2016 amounted to $587 billion. "The reductions in insurance coverage between 2018 and 2026 would stem in large part from changes in Medicaid enrolment - because some states would discontinue their expansion of eligibility, some states that would have expanded eligibility in the future would choose not to do so, and per-enrollee spending in the program would be capped," the report said.

Night shifts may up risk of common cancers in women

If you are a woman and have been assigned night shifts at workplace for long, be a little concerned about your health. According to new research, continous shifts at irregular hours may increase the risk of common cancers among women.The researchers found that overall, long-term night shift work among women increased the risk of cancer by 19 per cent.Of all the occupations analysed, nurses had the highest risk of developing breast cancer if they worked the night shift.

"Our study indicates that night shift work serves as a risk factor for common cancers in women," said Xuelei Ma, co-author of the study from West China Medical Center of Sichuan University in Chengdu, China.For the study, published in the journal Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention, researchers performed a meta-analysis using data from 61 articles comprising 114,628 cancer cases and 3,909,152 participants from North America, Europe, Australia and Asia.

The articles consisted of 26 cohort studies, 24 case-control studies and 11 nested case-control studies. These studies were analysed for an association between long-term night shift work and risk of 11 types of cancer.When analysing specific cancers, the researchers found that this population had an increased risk of skin (41 per cent), breast (32 per cent), and gastrointestinal cancer (18 per cent) compared with women who did not perform long-term night shift work.

A further analysis was conducted which looked specifically at long-term night shift work and risk of six types of cancer among female nurses.Among female nurses alone, those who worked the night shift had an increased risk of breast (58 per cent), gastrointestinal (35 percent) and lung cancer (28 percent) compared with those that did not work night shifts."Nurses that worked the night shift were of a medical background and may have been more likely to undergo screening examinations," the researcher suggested.The results might help establish and implement effective measures to protect female night shifters.

Bariatric surgery during adolescence may help in later life

Bariatric surgery, when performed in adolescence, significant improves cardiovascular disease risk factors later in life, according to a study.Prior to bariatric surgery, 33 percent of the 'Teen Longitudinal Assessment of Bariatric Surgery' (Teen-LABS) study participants had three or more defined cardiovascular disease risk factors.

However, three years post-surgery only 5 percent of study participants had three or more risk factors; representing significant reduction in the overall likelihood of developing cardiovascular disease later in life.Marc P. Michalsky, MD, surgical director of the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's, is the lead author of the latest Teen-LABS publication.The study demonstrated bariatric surgery performed during adolescence may provide unique benefits later in life by altering the probability of the future development of adverse cardiovascular events, including the development and progression of impaired glucose metabolism, atherosclerosis, heart failure and stroke.

"This is the first large-scale analysis of predictors of change in cardiovascular disease risk factors among adolescents following bariatric surgery," said Dr. Michalsky."The study demonstrated early improvement and reduction of cardiometabolic risk factors, offering compelling support for bariatric surgery in adolescents.

"This most recent publication from the Teen-LABS research study extends previous findings describing the baseline prevalence of cardiovascular disease risk factors within the cohort of 242 adolescents. Predictors of change in prevalence of cardiovascular disease risk factors measured included blood pressure, lipids, glucose homeostasis and inflammation..

Three years post-surgery, the study showed a reduction in cardiovascular disease risk factors is associated not only with weight loss, but also with age at the time of surgery, pre-operative body mass index (BMI), sex and race.

Specifically, increased weight loss, female sex and younger age at time of surgery serve to predict a higher probability of risk factor resolution.Younger participants were more likely to resolve dyslipidemia compared to older patients, while females were more likely than males to demonstrate improvements in elevated blood pressure."Although relationships between change in cardiovascular disease risk factors and postoperative weight reduction were not unexpected, we learned younger patients at time of surgery were more likely to experience dyslipidemia remission and normalization of high sensitivity C-reactive protein (a marker of inflammation), suggesting there may be advantages to undergoing bariatric surgery earlier, even among adolescents," said Dr. Michalsky.

The crackdown on civil society

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the modern democratic state, armed with technologies of surveillance and control, possesses the kind of power that has never ever been exercised by any other state in history. In a democracy, the individual transits from subject to citizen. Yet there is no one more vulnerable and more helpless than our rights-bearing citizen if the, otherwise, democratic state decides to terrorise, kill and drill fear and trepidation in the mind of the body politic. The other dominant institution of our times, the market, is completely amoral. It is supremely indifferent to human suffering. It has neither sympathy nor room for citizens exploited by the state, and by its own need for resources, labour, and profit.

The only sphere that stands between the individual and the omnipresent and omnipotent state is civil society. In this figurative space, individuals come together in webs of associational life. Associations have the capacity to challenge the brute power of the state through petitions, protests, dharnas and ultimately judicial activism. Given unresponsive political parties, citizens can access centres of power and privilege only through a vibrant civil society.

Civil society is, of course, a plural sphere, and all manners of associations find space for themselves here, from football clubs to reading groups to film fan societies. Each democratic association is important, but we cannot deny that civil liberty and human rights groups are an essential precondition for human well-being. Some Indian citizens were randomly and arbitrarily imprisoned during the Emergency (1975-77) and the fundamental rights of others were truncated. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the aftermath of the Emergency, the civil liberties movement made a dramatic appearance on to the scene of Indian politics. The movement which developed into, or acted in concert with, the human rights movement took on an extremely significant task, that of protecting the fundamental right to life and liberty granted by the Indian Constitution.

Every political revolution in the world has begun with the rights to life and liberty. These two rights lie at the core of other rights that have been developed and codified as critical for human beings. The two rights stretch from the right not to be tortured or killed, to the right not to be arrested and imprisoned by the lackeys of the state without due cause. The right to life is a basic right, but our lives do not mean anything if we are incarcerated for no rhyme or reason.

In the decades that followed, human rights groups have become the custodian of the Fundamental Rights chapter of the Indian Constitution.

They have investigated cases of arbitrary imprisonment, custodial deaths, deadly encounters and coercion of any citizen who dares to speak up against the state or dominant groups.

These organisations have carefully documented the causes and the triggers of communal and caste violence, and established an excellent archive on the abuse of power by governments. They have asked questions which few Indians have had the courage to ask. And above all, they have protected the rights of vulnerable sections of our own people, the Adivasis, the Dalits and Muslims.

Civil liberty and/or human rights activists are lawyers, academics, journalists and public minded citizens of India. What matters is their very human concern for the poor and the disadvantaged, the dispossessed and the vulnerable. What matters is that civil society activists protect the moral conscience of our society. Not all civil society groups do so, some are in the sole business of getting funds from the state or others. Not all sections of the media do so, they are often cowered down by their corporate bosses, and the lure of fame and lucre. Unhappily, the majority of Indians keep quiet when their own fellow citizens are tortured by the police, stripped of access to resources and livelihoods, lynched, exploited by corporate India, and neglected by the mainstream media. Human rights activists shoulder the fight for the rights of the oppressed.

Their role is crucial for democracy because today we are ruled by a government that openly defies ethics and morality, that casts itself in the mould of realism, and that is supremely indifferent to the plight of millions of its citizens.

We are ruled by leaders who dismiss the need for civil society because the cadres and the front organisations of its ideological backbone, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, seek to dominate the space between the individual, the market and the state. The consequences are serious.

Over 10 years ago, during UPA I, we were speaking of the right to food, to employment, to education, to information and to land. We theorised that India was moving towards a social democratic state vide civil society activism. Today there are few organisations that articulate the right not to be lynched, or who struggle for the right to life and liberty. Human rights activists are among these few organisations. They have courageously taken on the challenge posed by corporates, a ruthless state and its venal police, and the cadres of right-wing organisations that specialise in violence.

Activists have been penalised for their eternal vigilance, which, as Irish lawyer-politician John Curran said in 1790, is the price we pay for liberty. The government and right-wing organisations have pursued and terrorised human rights activists. On August 28, lawyers, poets, academics and activists known for their defence of the dispossessed were targeted by the Maharashtra police. The houses of Sudha Bharadwaj, Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha, Anand Teltumbde and Stan Swamy were raided, and some of them imprisoned.

The reasons for the harassment of these warriors in the cause of justice are unsubstantial and unconvincing. The police simply cannot establish that their speeches at the Elgar Parishad meeting in Pune in December 2017 incited the violence unleashed on a Dalit gathering at Bhima-Koregaon on January 1, 2018. It was earlier reported that the peaceful gathering was attacked by activists belonging to two Hindu right-wing organisations: Shiv Pratishthan led by Sambhaji Bhide, and Hindu Ekta Manch led by Milind Ekbote. Mr. Ekbote, committed to Maratha/Hindu supremacy, was arrested in March 2018. Soon he was cleared by the police and the Maharashtra government. Now a completely different set of agents has been brought in and charged with urban Maoism, a term that has neither a history nor a geography. It is simply silly.

This is the latest blow inflicted on civil society by a party that wishes to see only its own organisations dominating the space of associations. The attempt might just rebound on the party. The well-known Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, jailed by the Mussolini government in the 1920s, set out to answer a crucial question. Why had a revolution occurred in semi-feudal Tsarist Russia, and not in the Western capitalist world as predicted by Marx? He concluded that revolutions only happen when the government directly and unashamedly exercises brute power, as in Russia. They do not happen in countries which possess civil societies, for here projects of domination and resistance can be played out. Citizens just do not need to revolt. Is there a lesson our rulers need to learn from this piece of profound wisdom?

A people's campaign to rebuild Kerala

The material loss due to the Kerala floods has been estimated at Rs. 26,000 crore, but beyond this there has been an immense loss of natural, human, and social capital for which no estimates are available. There is no doubt that the short-sighted attempts in building man-made capital (buildings in hilly forests, encroachments on wetlands and rivers, and stone quarries) while ignoring the attendant degradation of natural, human and social capital have played a significant role in exacerbating the problem. The immediate task in the State is relief and rehabilitation, but it is crucial to simultaneously identify the root causes of the havoc.

These root causes prevail throughout the Western Ghats and, indeed, the rest of the country. The first is the flouting of laws that have been established to safeguard natural capital. The Shah Commission inquiring into illegal mining in Goa observes that mining beyond permissible limits has caused serious damage to water resources, agriculture and biodiversity. Second, we have been ignoring serious degradation of human capital in terms of health and employment. In the case of the Plachimada panchayat in Palakkad district, overuse and pollution of water resources by the Coca Cola factory has resulted in losses to the tune of Rs. 160 crore. Third, scientific knowledge and advice has been continually disregarded. In the case of the proposed Athirappilly hydroelectric project, an analysis by the River Research Centre showed that the project document had seriously overestimated the availability of water. The data examined showed that the likely power production in no way justified the costs of construction and running of the project. And fourth, there has been serious erosion of social capital. For instance, Anoop Vellolippil, a staunch anti-quarry activist engaging in a peaceful demonstration, was killed when he was pelted with stones by those allegedly employed by quarry owners at Kaivoli in Vadakara Taluk of Kozhikkode district on December 16, 2014.

Therefore, it is imperative that we abandon business as usual. We cannot just focus on man-made capital; we must enhance the sum total of man-made, natural, human and social capital. The new regime that we must usher in while keeping this in mind must acknowledge that it is local communities that have a genuine stake in the health of their ecosystems and an understanding of the working of the same. The current system of protecting natural resources through negative incentives in the hands of a coercive and corrupt bureaucracy must give way to positive incentives that can be monitored in a transparent fashion by all concerned citizens.

Our Western Ghats panel proposes several such incentives for example, payment of conservation service charges for protecting important elements of biodiversity such as sacred groves (called Sarpa Kavus in Kerala), and payment towards soil carbon enrichment by switching to organic farming. Turning over a new leaf then, the Kerala government must reassure its people that it will no longer continue the policies of development and conservation by exclusion, and that it will respect the right of local communities to decide what kind of development they want and what kind of conservation measures they would like to see put in place.

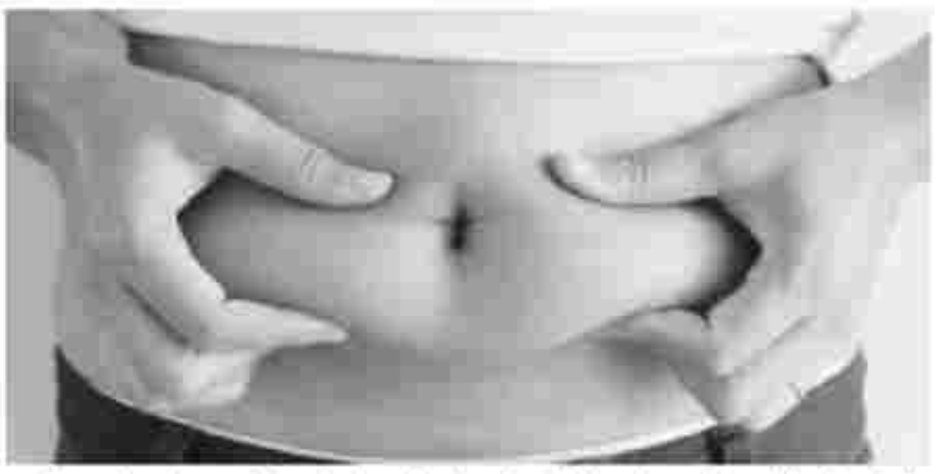
To accomplish this, the government must implement the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in letter and spirit. It must empower local bodies at the ward, gram panchayat, and town and city levels to prepare reports on the status of the environment and to decide on how a substantial portion of the budget should be spent on the basis of these reports. It must set up Biodiversity Management Committees of citizens and empower them to document the status of the local ecosystems and biodiversity resources, and regulate their use. They must be given powers to levy collection charges for access to biodiversity as well as to intellectual property relating to community knowledge.

In particular, it must accord the Biodiversity Management Committees a central place in the preparation of environmental impact assessments and ensure that these assessments begin to reflect the true state of affairs instead of being the uniformly fraudulent documents that are being submitted today. It must fully implement the Forest Rights Act and empower not only tribals, but all traditional forest dwellers to control, manage and market non-timber forest produce. It must stop distortion and suppression of all environment and development-related information and begin uploading information suo moto on websites, as the Right to Information Act demands. It must initiate building a public and transparent database on environmental parameters drawing on the environment status reports, People's Biodiversity Registers, community forest management working schemes, and environmental education projects undertaken by students.

Equipped with this information and all pertinent documents such as from the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, the Kasturirangan Committee, and the Oommen V. Oommen Committee, the State government should ask local bodies about the levels of ecological sensitivity in different parts of the landscape on the basis of topography, hydrology, land use and vegetation, regardless of ownership of the land. The local bodies should provide suggestions on appropriate management regimes for regions of different levels of sensitivity. The government should begin to proactively use modern technologies, including smartphones, in a user-friendly manner so that all the inputs from the various local bodies are transparently available to all citizens. Citizens can then assist in the task of integrating all this information and come up with appropriate conservation and development plans that are properly fine-tuned to locality- and time-specific ecological and social conditions.

This will be a broad-based inclusive approach to conservation and development, and will be in the spirit of the People's Plan Campaign of the 1990s in Kerala, which was spearheaded by the State Finance Minister, Thomas Isaac. I urge Mr. Isaac to renew the spirit of the People's Plan Campaign rather than seek to bury it. Only then can the people of Kerala rebuild nature and society and assure for themselves a sustainable and safe future. I fervently hope that the Kerala government embraces such a progressive approach, so that we will be much better equipped in the years to come to moderate, if not fully prevent, the kind of havoc that visited Kerala recently.

Three super foods that can help you lose belly fat fast



Super foods can help you to detox after overindulging during the festive period and a nutritionist has answered debate over which 'super food' is best, analysing the benefits of green tea, turmeric and cocoa just in time for New Year's resolutions to come into effect.

All three foods have different health benefits - green tea is a natural antioxidant, turmeric is an anti-inflammatory and cocoa is known for its cardiovascular benefits. But, according to nutritionist Georgios Tzenichristos, the overall winner was green tea.

It contains 7 percent of the active molecule EGCG, while turmeric only contains 2 percent of the molecule curcumin and cocoa contains 0.5 percent flavanols. Green tea's polyphenols help to speed the metabolism and boost fat-burning during exercising. Georgios said, "If I had to choose one of those famous super ingredients, that would be the humble green tea. A cup is easy to prepare, costs next to nothing and provides you with a whopping 7 percent active molecules (EGCG), the most of any other drink or food." Meanwhile, Cocoa that is high in flavanols, or plant chemicals, is good for the heart and brain.

According to research from Harvard Medical Schools, it can ward off diseases and help to cut cholesterol. It's also believed that consuming the sweet treat aids serotonin production in the brain. This feel-good chemical helps to regulate the mood and suppress your appetite. To reap the benefits, it's best to consume dark chocolate that contains a high percentage of cocoa. Turmeric has been one of the top health trends of 2017 - and Starbucks even added the ingredient into one of their menu items. The spice contains curcumin, a powerful antioxidant.

This substance helps to rejuvenate the liver and eliminate toxins. There are several ways to work turmeric into your everyday diet. You can take it in capsules, sprinkle it onto your food for flavour or add it to hot drinks. Mr Tzenichristos also pointed out that green tea is easy to prepare, while turmeric can be difficult and stains teeth, and cocoa often needs large amounts of milk and sugar, or a protein shake to mask the unpalatable taste.

Body's own built-in bathroom scales can regulate fat

According to a recent research, a group of researchers have found a previously unidentified body fat regulatory system. The mechanism senses excessive body weight much like bathroom scales, signaling the brain to reduce food intake. More knowledge about the sensing mechanism could lead to a better understanding of the causes of obesity as well as new anti-obesity drugs.

Speaking about the study, lead author John-Olov Jansson said, "Quite simply, we have found support for the existence of internal bathroom scales. The weight of the body is registered in the lower extremities. If the body weight tends to increase, a signal is sent to the brain to decrease food intake and keep the body weight constant." The research was performed on obese rodents that were made artificially heavier by loading with extra weights. The animals lost almost as much weight as the artificial load.

The extra weights caused body fat to decrease and blood glucose levels to improve.

The study also revealed a previously undiscovered mechanism that operates to regulate fat mass entirely independently of leptin. "The mechanism that we have now identified regulates body fat mass independently of leptin, and it's possible that leptin combined with activation of the internal body scales can become an effective treatment for obesity," explained Professor Claes Ohlsson.

One proposition that stems from this new research is that the discovery could potentially explain a frequently observed correlation between the time a person spends sitting and increases in metabolic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. The researchers conclude by saying, "We propose that much sitting time results in decreased loading of osteocytes in the weight-bearing long bones and, thereby, the homeostatic regulation of body weight does not activate its afferent signal to the brain, resulting in obesity."

Study finds nanowire device to detect cancer with a urine test

In a new research, a group of researchers have developed a nanowire device that can detect microscopic levels of cancer markers in the urine, an advance that could help non-invasively diagnose the deadly disease. Cells communicate with each other through a number of different mechanisms. A less familiar mode of cellular transport is the extracellular vesicle (EV), which can be thought of as small "chunks" of a cell that are able to pinch off and circulate throughout the body to deliver messenger cargo to other cells.

These messengers have become increasingly recognised as crucial mediators of cell-to-cell communication. The scientists have developed a novel medical device that can efficiently capture these EVs, and potentially use them to screen for cancer. Talking about the research, study's lead author Takao Yasui explained, "EVs are potentially useful as clinical markers. The composition of the molecules contained in an EV may provide a diagnostic signature for certain diseases. The ongoing challenge for physicians in any field is to find a non-invasive diagnostic tool that allows them to monitor their patients on a regular basis -- for example, a simple urine test."

Yasui further added, "The content of EVs in urine is extremely low, at less than 0.01 percent of the total fluid volume. This is a major barrier to their diagnostic utility. Our solution was to embed zinc oxide nanowires into a specialized polymer to create a material that we believed would be highly efficient at capturing these vesicles. Our findings suggest that the device is indeed quite efficient. We obtained a collection rate of over 99 percent, surpassing ultracentrifugation as well as other methods that are currently being used in the field."

To test the practicality of their device, researchers compared the microRNAs of EVs isolated from healthy patients with those isolated from patients who were already diagnosed with bladder, prostate, and other forms of cancer. The technique required only one millilitre of urine and found a substantially greater number and different types of microRNAs compared with the standard ultracentrifugation approach.



America Ferrera, second from left, producer of the Netflix series "Gentefied," poses with the show's cast members, from left, J.J. Soria, Karrie Martin, Annie Gonzalez and Carlos Santos at the Impact Awards at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

Ritesh Sidhwani's Inside Edge season 2 promises sharper edges this time

After giving us a thrilling season of Inside edge, ace producer Ritesh Sidhwani is back with the season two of Inside Edge and promises that it's going to be sharper than before. The first season was critically acclaimed and highly loved by cricket and non-cricket fans alike, all over the country.

Ritesh took to his social media to give us a sneak peek with the behind the scenes pictures which have certainly started building up excitement for everyone. He shared pictures on his social media with the caption, "The edges are sharper this time! #InsideEdge2 #throwbackthursday"

The series stars Vivek Oberoi, Richa Chada, Siddhant Chaturvedi, Tanuj Virwani and Angad Bedi with Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar as its executive producers.

Recently, the producer also gave us a dose of hint confirming Mirzapur season 2 as well. Ritesh Sidhwani recently delivered a hit with Gully Boy and Made in Heaven as the producer which have been a huge success along with Inside Edge.

Ever since the drop of sneak peeks, the audience is already excited for the second season of Inside edge which is expected to release this year and looking at the overwhelming response, Ritesh does not fail to time and again share the glimpses for the audience.



Juggling between fam-time and work, Sanjay Dutt wraps the schedule of his upcoming next



Sanjay Dutt who is currently on a shooting spree with multiple projects in the pipeline wraps the first schedule of his upcoming movie, Sadak 2. The actor started shooting for Sadak 2 immediately after the shoot of Shamshera, which is another project the actor is shooting for.

Sanjay Dutt will be seen with Alia Bhatt and Aditya Roy Kapur again in Sadak 2 after Kalank.

The fans have been eagerly waiting to watch the superstar on screen with the trail of films announced.

The actor is so busy with the continuous shoot schedule that he hardly gets any time to spend with his family. Hence, squeezing in some time for the family Sanjay Dutt is all set for a holiday in Europe. Interestingly, Maanayata Dutt has planned the entire itinerary herself. It will be after a long time that the Dutt family will be enjoying a vacation together.

The actor missed valuable moments of his life while he was away to serve his term so now he makes it a point that even with his hectic schedule and shooting for multiple projects simultaneously, he takes out time for his children and family while never giving any occasion a miss. Sanjay Dutt with his first release of 2019 'Kalank' has mesmerized everyone with his performance being strong and impactful and for his fans, it is a series of a period drama that will be following! Over the years, Sanjay Dutt has treated the audience with characters which have gone ahead to resonate and strike a chord with the viewers. Known to have a power packed screen presence, the actor hosts a number of strong characters in his diverse repertoire as an actor. With multiple films lined up, Sanjay Dutt is one of the busiest actors in the business. Big budgeted films like Shamshera, Kalank, Panipat, Bhuj: The Pride of India, Prasthanam, Sadak 2 amongst others make a list of his upcoming films.

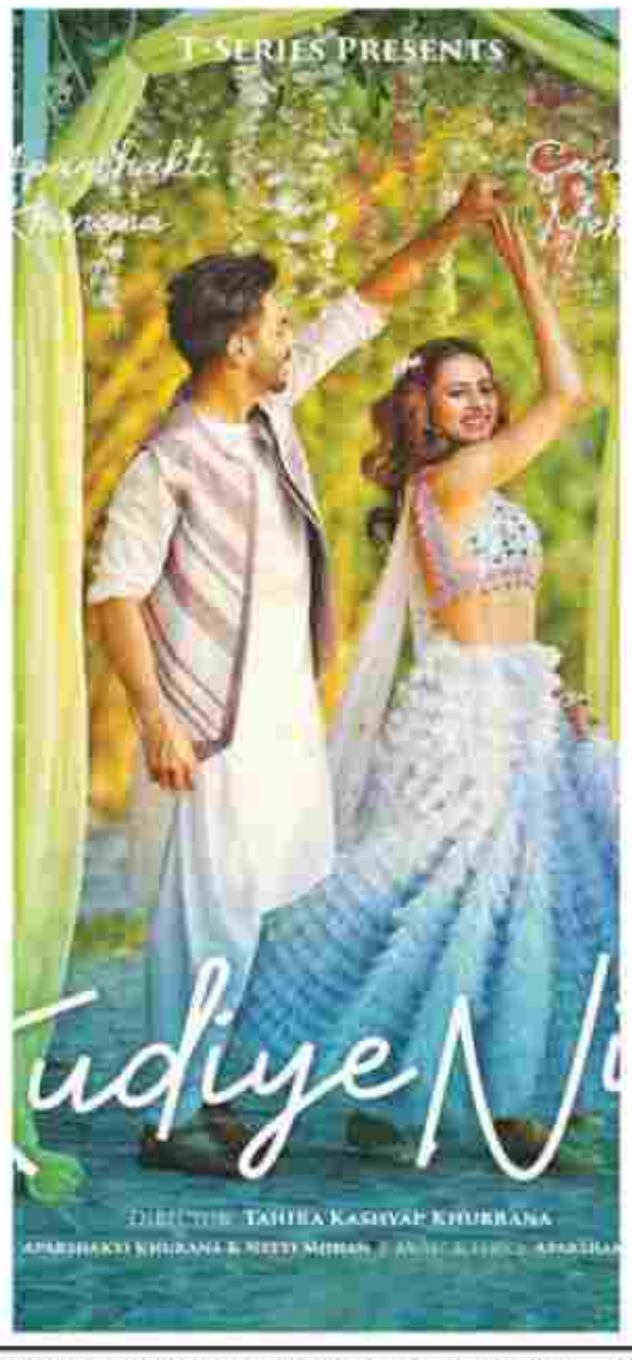
Adah Sharma is set for her web series debut



Adah Sharma will make her web series debut with "The Holiday". A major part of the show, to be shown on The Zoom Studios, will be shot in Mauritius. "I absolutely love to travel and as luck would have it my first digital series is titled 'The Holiday'. It is a super exciting idea and we are shooting in Mauritius, a breathtakingly beautiful destination," Adah said in a statement.

The show depicts a group of friends who decide to go for a holiday and the madness that follows. "I am thrilled to be part of this crazy story of a holiday of a group of people dealing with the reality of what they expected to be an epic outing together," said Adah, who has featured in Hindi films like "1920" and "Hasee Toh Phasee"

Aparshakti Khurana debuts as singer-composer-lyricist with single 'Kudiye Ni'



Aparshakti Khurana, who you have so far known as an actor debuts as a singer-composer and lyricist with his maiden single Kudiye Ni, which released today. Interestingly, in a first once again, the video of Kudiye Ni has been directed by his sister-in-law Tahira Kashyap Khurrana and is produced by Bhushan Kumar of T-Series.

You will be surprised to know that Kudiye Ni was composed and written in exactly five minutes when Aparshakti was shooting for Dangal in Delhi four years ago. The directorial debut of Tahira is a simple song where the boy and girl meet at a common friend's wedding in Chandigarh and indulge in light banter. "You could even call it a musical love conversation between the two," quips, Aparshakti. Besides Aparshakti the song features actor Sargun Mehta in the video.

Further talking about his debut single, Aparshakti says, "I took time to bring this song to the listeners/viewers. I was looking for the right window, the right person to direct it and the right platform and the label to release the song, the right co-actor to feature in it and the right person to render female vocals for it. Who better than a versatile singer and family friend Neeti Mohan? That's why it took four years. I believe everything happens at the right time. I did not want to come out with this single in a hurry for the heck of it."

Director Tahira points out, "Aparshakti came to me with the song and said we have to shoot this video in the next 10 days and I was like okay, let's do it. Suddenly, we were told the shoot has been preponed by 4-5 days. Here, I was thinking this is my debut effort and am going to do a full-on prep but next thing we know we were rolling. It was complete madness but all of us had fun putting together the video."

Strangely, although Sargun was finalised to feature in the video months ago, the actors had to wait for three months to shoot it because they just couldn't lock a date when both of them were free on the same day. Laughing at the memory, Sargun says, "Now also if someone asks for my dates, I can only give them dates in September, not before that but yes I enjoyed working in Kudiye Ni because of the raw vibe and experimental streak that Tahira brought with her. It is a very hummable song and people who often caught me humming it would ask me what is that song?"

Producer Bhushan Kumar adds: "Aparshakti's talent has been revelatory. He is multi-talented just like his brother Ayushmann Khurrana. In Kudiye Ni, he impresses with the simplicity in which he has penned the small town nok-jhok between a boy and a girl. In a traditional set-up, he infuses a contemporary sensibility through the lyrics and the singing. Neeti Mohan matches the tempo in this peppy number through her.



Actress Haley Bennett attends a special screening of "Swallow" at NeueHouse Madison Square in New York.

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