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Netanyahu invites Modi to join Flydubai pilot Machchhar for Israel's Independence Day torch-lighting



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to light a torch alongside Indian pilot Smit Machchhar on Israel's Independence Day, praising the pilot for his role in thwarting an alleged attempt to hijack a Tel Aviv-bound flight.In a post on X, Netanyahu said Modi had welcomed the invitation and highlighted the longstanding ties between the two countries."I spoke with my friend, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, and invited him to light a torch alongside a brave Indian pilot on Israel's Independence Day," Netanyahu said."Modi thanked me for the invitation and said that, on the ground and in the air, India and Israel are fighting together against terrorism," he added in posts in Hindi and Hebrew.The invitation comes after Israeli President Isaac Herzog earlier this month invited Machchhar to Israel to honour him with the Presidential Award for Civilian Heroism.Machchhar was injured on September 30 while attempting to stop his co-pilot from allegedly trying to hijack Flydubai flight FZ1073, which was travelling from Dubai to Tel Aviv with 174 passengers on board.Despite being seriously injured in the cockpit attack, Machchhar managed to open the cockpit door, allowing passengers and crew members to overpower the co-pilot. The aircraft made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia, and all passengers reached Israel safely later that day.Machchhar is undergoing treatment at a hospital in the United Arab Emirates. Both Modi and Netanyahu have praised him for his actions.Netanyahu's announcement came on the same day that he spoke with Modi about developments in West Asia and the need to restore peace and stability in the region.According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the two leaders also reviewed bilateral ties and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the Special Strategic Partnership between India and Israel."The leaders also exchanged views on recent developments in West Asia and underscored the urgent need to restore peace and stability in the region. Prime Minister Modi reiterated India's call for dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward," the PMO said in a statement.In a post on X, Modi said the two leaders had reviewed the progress in bilateral relations and discussed the regional situation."We reviewed the sustained momentum in our bilateral ties and reaffirmed our commitment to further strengthening our partnership. We also exchanged views on recent developments in West Asia and underscored the urgent need to restore peace and stability in the region," he said.Modi visited Israel on February 25 and 26. During the visit, the two countries agreed to elevate their relationship to a "Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity". The strategic partnership was first established during Modi's visit to Israel in July 2017.During his February visit, Modi said India's security interests were linked to peace and stability in the Middle East and expressed New Delhi's full support for the Gaza Peace Initiative. The two leaders have also held telephone conversations during the US-Iran and Iran conflict.

President Murmu unveils special Rs 200 coin on Mata Hasi Devi's Bicentenary in Chhattisgarh



RAIPUR: President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday unveiled a special ₹200 commemorative coin in honour of revered spiritual figure Mata Sahib Hasi Devi during a ceremony held at Chhattisgarh Mandapam in Lok Bhawan.Chhattisgarh Governor Ramen Deka and Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai were present during the ceremonial release. Issued by the Union Ministry of Finance, the commemorative coin marks the 200th birth anniversary of Mata Sahib Hasi Devi, the fifth Peethadhish of Shadani Darbar, Raipur.The release represents a momentous occasion and a matter of immense pride for the Sindhi community across India and abroad. Following the official unveiling, the coin will be made available for devotees and numismatists to book through various branches and units of Shadani Darbar.The newly minted coin features an embossed portrait of Mata Hasi Devi on one side, while the reverse bears the Lion Capital of the Ashoka Pillar alongside the ₹200 denomination. The commemorative issue seeks to preserve and transmit her life, teachings, and spiritual contributions to future generations. Sant Yudhishthir Lal, the current Peethadhish of Pujya Shadani Darbar Raipur, delivered the welcome address at the gathering.The event was attended by the state's First Lady Rani Deka Kakoti, Member of Parliament Brijmohan Agrawal, MLAs Purandar Mishra, Sunil Soni, and Motilal Sahu, Chief Secretary Vikas Sheel, Director General of Police Arun Dev Gautam, and Secretary to the Governor Dr. C.R. Prasanna, alongside senior administrative officials, representatives of Shadani Darbar, and Sindhi community leaders from across the country.

No permission needed to hoist Tricolour': Neha Bora questions police notice in HC



The Delhi High Court on Thursday heard a plea by All India Students' Association (AISA) president Neha Bora challenging a Delhi Police notice asking her to show cause why she should not furnish a bond to maintain peace. The court said it would pass an order on Friday, PTI reported.According to PTI, Bora argued before Justice Subramonium Prasad that citizens do not require permission to hoist the national flag, challenging the police's allegation that she had done so without valid permission. Her petition seeks to quash the notice and restrain the police from taking coercive action against her.Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Bora, argued that the notice issued by the special executive magistrate (SEM) lacked independent application of mind and amounted to a "cut-and-paste job". The allegations cited in the notice included shouting loudly at the Mandi House roundabout, participating in protests around Jantar Mantar despite prohibitory orders, instigating people to join an unauthorised demonstration at Central Park in Connaught Place, and hoisting the national flag without valid permission."Maybe they need some instruction on law that we don't need permission to hoist the national flag," Sankaranarayanan said, according to the PTI report.He questioned whether the SEM had independently considered the allegations before issuing the notice and argued that the legal requirements for initiating proceedings had not been met."Before you issue such a notice, you need to show the parameters that such a notice should go," he said, describing the notice as constitutionally flawed."I am not on merits. I am only asking for compliance with the law which is not there and this entitles me to come to the high court under Article 226 of the Constitution," he submitted.PTI reported that the hearing also saw an exchange over a statement allegedly made at a joint press conference: "yeh regime change ki ladai hai and hum regime change kara ke rahenge" (this is a fight for regime change and we will get the regime changed). Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, appearing for Delhi Police, cited the statement during his submissions.Sankaranarayanan said Bora had not made the remark and argued that there was nothing wrong with seeking a change of regime in a democracy.Sharma objected, saying, "You were part of that press conference. I will take exception to this. A regime change in a democracy will happen by votes and not by lumpen elements congregating in the nerve of Delhi."The court asked the police whether there was any material beyond the "kalandra", or police report initiating the proceedings, and whether a separate enquiry had been conducted before the notice was issued. It orally asked the police to hold off until it passed its order.Sharma submitted that there had been 12 violations and that the complete records were available before the SEM, who had independently applied his mind. "It is not a simple case of an innocent woman," he said. He also offered to make a statement if Bora gave an undertaking not to breach the peace.According to PTI, the court observed that Bora's concern was that she had already been branded a wrongdoer and was being asked to promise good conduct. "I am already branded as a bad boy and I have been asked to say that I shall be a good boy," the court said, noting that the issue of stigma also had a bearing on Article 21 of the Constitution.The notice, issued on October 17 under Section 126 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), directed Bora to appear before the SEM on October 19 and show cause why she should not execute a personal bond of Rs 10,000 with one surety to keep the peace during the enquiry.Section 126 empowers authorities to seek a bond when there is credible information that a person is likely to breach the peace, disturb public tranquillity or commit an act that could cause such a disturbance.PTI reported that Bora, who has been at the forefront of protests against alleged irregularities in the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, was preventively detained on October 16 while on her way to join the Cockroach Janta Party's "Lehra Do Tiranga" march. She was released the following day.The SEM proceedings stemmed from allegations of sloganeering at Mandi House on October 16, repeated protests around Jantar Mantar despite prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the BNSS, and efforts to mobilise people for a demonstration at Connaught Place. Bora's petition, settled by lawyer Abhik Chimni, contended that the notice was vague and factually incorrect and that there was no material to establish a likelihood of breach of peace.

Fresh motion against CEC Gyanesh Kumar will be examined as per procedure, says Om Birla



NEW DELHI: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday said any fresh notice seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar would be examined in accordance with established rules and procedures, amid opposition protests over alleged irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls."If any fresh notice comes, we will see and examine it accordingly under rules and procedures," Birla told a press conference when asked about the possibility of opposition moving another impeachment motion against the CEC.The opposition has made two attempts to initiate proceedings for Kumar's removal. Notices submitted during the first attempt were rejected by both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, while notices filed during the second attempt remain pending in the Upper House. Protests demanding Kumar's resignation have intensified with opposition parties alleging irregularities in the revision of voter lists. Under the constitutional framework, the CEC can be removed only through a parliamentary process similar to that applicable to a Supreme Court judge. Removal requires an address supported by a majority of the total membership of each House and a two-thirds majority of members present and voting, on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.The procedure provides for a three-member inquiry committee if a removal motion is admitted. The committee investigates the charges and submits its findings before Parliament takes further action.Separately, Birla said he would expedite proceedings on petitions seeking the disqualification of 20 rebel Trinamool Congress (TMC) MPs after receiving their responses."We will hear from both sides. When the responses come from the members, we will expedite the process," he said, noting that the matter was also under consideration by the Supreme Court.TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee has filed separate petitions seeking the disqualification of the MPs under the anti-defection law, arguing that their decision to join the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI) amounted to voluntarily giving up their membership of the TMC. The rebel MPs have maintained that their move constitutes a valid merger.The Supreme Court on September 23, expressed the expectation that the Speaker would decide the disqualification petitions expeditiously, while acknowledging the limits on its ability to direct him.Birla also defended democratic debate and freedom of expression, saying every MP had the right to raise issues in Parliament. However, he stressed that placards and sloganeering had no place in a democracy. "India always makes efforts to ensure debate and discussion and promote free speech so that the world benefits from it," he said.

Meddlesome and more

U.S. President Donald Trump has been entangled in a quagmire of his own making when, in a joint press conference in Helsinki, Finland, last week with Russian President Vladimir Putin, he refused to accuse Russia of meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (despite allegations by all intelligence agencies in the U.S.). Widespread condemnation of his refusal to endorse the findings of U.S. intelligence agencies has compelled him to walk back his statements at Helsinki. Yet, critics of the President conveniently forget that it was only 15 years ago that these same intelligence agencies fraudulently claimed that Iraq's Saddam Hussain had weapons of mass destruction.

Two further points are lost in the firestorm of protests over the press conference. First, there is no instance that I can recall when journalists have accused one president especially a President of a state as large and powerful as Russia of interfering in the elections of another country in a joint press conference between the two Presidents. In joint press conferences, one head of government is not typically called on to label the other head of government a liar. Rather than discussing global issues, ranging from nuclear disarmament to conflicts in Syria and the Ukraine, journalists were focussed on a domestic issue in the U.S.

Of course, whether Mr. Trump should have gone to Helsinki to meet Mr. Putin at all amidst these allegations is another issue. Perhaps the closest parallel was the 1960 Paris summit between the leaders of France, the U.K., the U.S. and the USSR after the U.S. had lied that its spy plane that had been shot down over the USSR had been a weather plane. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's outburst there against U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower led to a collapse of the summit. Second, and more importantly, setting aside Mr. Trump's remarks at Helsinki, the moral outrage that Russia had subomed the democratic process in the 2016 election breathtakingly ignores the very many times the U.S. has interfered in the elections of other countries and even ousted democratically-elected governments.

In Russia itself when there was a fear that the Communist Party candidate, Gennady Zyuganov (who had received 32% of the vote in the first round of voting in 1996 to Boris Yeltsin's 35%), would win the presidency. U.S. President Bill Clinton pushed the International Monetary Fund to loan $10.2 billion some months before the election and sent a team of political consultants to help the Russian incumbent. Yeltsin's popularity had plummeted as he had implemented the 'shock therapy' advocated by the U.S. and other western advisers and this had led to the evaporation of social protections as deindustrialisation swept across that vast land and the life expectancy of men and women fell from 64 and 74 years to 58 and 71 years between 1991 and 1994.

In an interview with Megyn Kelly earlier this year, Mr. Putin said that U.S. officials did not even deny that they meddled in Russian elections because they said that they were "entitled" to do so as they were "spreading democracy" while the Russians were not. Indeed, Don Levin of Carnegie Mellon University had found that beginning with the Italian elections of 1948, the U.S. interfered in elections in other countries 81 times between then and 2000. In Italy, Mark Wyatt, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operative admitted that they "threw everything including the kitchen sink" to help the Christian Democrats come to power and prevent a Communist Party victory. This included consultants to run political campaigns, subsiding 'pork' projects, and threatening to end U.S. aid if the Communists were to come to power. And that was not the only instance of U.S. meddling in Italian elections.

Similarly, earlier this year, The New York Times quoted Loch Johnson, another CIA agent, saying that the U.S has been interfering in elections ever since the creation of the intelligence agency: "We've used posters, pamphlets, mailers, banners…We've planted false information in foreign newspapers. We've used what the British call 'King George's cavalry': suitcases of cash."

Some of the other more notable instances of U.S. meddling in foreign elections to say nothing of the overthrow of democratically elected governments like that of Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran, Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala or Salvador Allende in Chile have been in the Chilean elections of 1964, the failed 1986 attempt to defeat Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti, in the Nicaraguan and Czechoslovak elections of 1990, the 2000 elections in Serbia, and the Afghan elections of 2009. Election meddling is nothing new. Mr. Levine's study also shows that the USSR/ Russia intervened at least 36 times in overseas elections between 1946 and 2000.

Indeed, the U.S. government today sponsors several agencies such as the National Endowment for Democracy to influence foreign elections. It granted $23,000 in 2006 to a political adversary of Mr. Putin and two years ago $6.8 million to anti-Putin organisations in Russia. Rather than allowing foreign populations to freely exercise their will, these interventions were designed to advance the foreign policy objectives of the U.S.

The current moral outrage in the U.S. of Russian meddling in elections stems also because since the end of the Cold War, mainstream broadcast media have largely balked at airing the viewpoints of foreign adversaries. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, Russians, Palestinians, even Iraqi officials in the run-up to the first Gulf War were regulars on U.S. television networks and news shows, now what passes for 'opposition' views is someone from the party not in the White House.

If such foreign voices had been given airtime, the alleged election interference by the Russians would have been placed in a broader context.

Recognising the long history of states meddling in elections does not of course mean that it should be accepted much less condoned. But it is not the meddling in elections that states have long practised that is at issue here. The indignation over Mr. Trump's refusal to accept the assessments of U.S. intelligence agencies stems primarily because he is undermining a foreign policy consensus in Washington to muscle into the power vacuum in Central and West Asia created by the demise of the Soviet Union.

In early 2014, transcripts of a phone call between then Assistant Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland and the U.S. Ambassador to the Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt in which they discuss the makeup of the Ukrainian government after the impending ouster of President Viktor Yanukovych were released on YouTube, presumably by Russian intelligence. That Mr. Obama's Assistant Secretary had previously served as U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's chief foreign policy adviser and U.S. President George W. Bush's ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation underlines a consensus between Republicans and Democrats on foreign policy and it is this consensus that Mr. Trump is now disrupting.

Mr. Trump's focus is on a trade war with China, the European Union, and with Canada and Mexico. This is what plays to his base supporters even though his argument that these states take away jobs from the U.S. is spurious. Nevertheless, the strategic counterpart of this policy is a détente with Russia. It is this fundamental policy difference that is being occluded by the outrage over Mr. Trump's apparent acceptance of Russian claims of innocence in Helsinki.

Looking for a new clarity

The Supreme Court, this past month, provided us with a useful reminder about its worth to our constitutional democracy. Its intervention in the imbroglio over government formation in Karnataka was flawless. The hearings conducted in the early hours of the morning may have been theatrical, but the court's ultimate decision certainly helped avert a subversion of the Constitution. Yet, much as its decision here deserves appreciation, we must be careful not to allow any ascription of credit to veil the deeper wounds that afflict it, for a litany of problems continues to strike at the court's independence.

Three of these are especially salient. The first involves the rejection by the government of the collegium's recommendation of K.M. Joseph, currently Chief Justice of the Uttarakhand High Court, for elevation to the Supreme Court. The second concerns the need for a systemic mechanism to deal with allegations of corruption in the higher judiciary. The third area of worry concerns the embroiled state of Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, his position as the master of the roster, and the critical question of whether such powers ought to be vested in the hands of one individual.

At first glance, these issues might strike us as unique to the times that we live in, as examples of crises that will eventually pass. But, on closer examination, it becomes clearer that these are, in fact, recurring problems left unaddressed for decades. In trying to resolve the issues, therefore, we must ask ourselves how we got here. As A.G. Noorani recently wrote in Frontline magazine ("Crisis in Judiciary," May 11, 2018): "We have not reached the nadir all of a sudden. The decline was long in process."

In his seminal book, America's Unwritten Constitution: The Precedents and Principles We Live By, Akhil Reed Amar points to how the written constitution often invites us to heed what's unwritten, which in turn, he writes, "refers us back in various ways to its written counterpart. Like the Chinese symbols yin and yang, America's written Constitution and America's unwritten Constitution form two halves of one whole, with each half gesturing toward the other."

India's Constitution is possibly the longest written constitution in the world, but it too leaves much unsaid. Take, for example, Article 124. It states that judges of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President, after consultation with certain authorities, including the CJI. But it does not tell us how these consultations are to be made, or what criteria ought to be applied in deciding who becomes a judge.

Filling these voids, therefore, requires the building of conventions that nonetheless maintain a fidelity to the written word. In 1977, in Union of India v. Sankalchand Sheth, the Supreme Court sought to do precisely this, when it ruled that the word "consultation" can never mean "concurrence". But yet it held in the same case that the President can depart from the CJI's opinion, in making a transfer or an appointment, as the case may be, only in exceptional circumstances. And when the government does so, it must, wrote Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, in his concurring opinion, be prepared to establish in court that it possessed "cogent and convincing reasons" for rejecting the CJI's advice. As a result, in a bid to secure judicial independence, the court, as H.M. Seervai wrote, had read into the Constitution "a requirement which is not there, but which is implicit in the whole object of providing for consultation with the Chief Justice of India."

Unfortunately, though, the court has in a series of cases rendered the verdict in Sheth nugatory. The informed wisdom of Justice Krishna Iyer has been replaced by the undemocratic excesses of the "collegium system". This method grants primacy to the judiciary (specifically to the CJI and his four most senior colleagues) in choosing its own members but allows government the power to reject recommendations on any ground whatsoever, with only one caveat: if the collegium were to re-recommend the same name, the government is obligated to accept the proposition.

Now, in the present environment, for the immediate purposes, there is no doubt that the collegium must re-recommend Justice Joseph's name, to protect at least a veneer of the court's independence. But this still begs the question, what happens if the government vacillates in conforming Justice Joseph's elevation even after such a re-recommendation?

In all of this, therefore, one thing has become abundantly clear: the collegium system is simply unworkable. Its ills are plain to see. It's not only opaque and inequitable, containing not a single constitutionally provided check or balance, but it has done nothing to either improve the judiciary's independence or provide a seamless system of elevating well-qualified persons to the bench.

Efforts to introduce a judicial appointments commission have already been scuttled, after the court struck down the 99th constitutional amendment. But the trend across liberal, constitutional democracies is towards such a commission. Hence, what we need now is a renewed debate on how to reshape the composition of a potential judicial appointments panel, which will preserve, in some regards, the judiciary's primacy (which the Supreme Court now enjoins us to do), while also divorcing its membership completely from the executive.

Simultaneously, as we make an endeavour to be rid of the collegium system, we must also work towards putting in place an independent mechanism to deal with allegations of corruption in the judiciary. The quandary on how to guard the autonomy of the court while ensuring judges remain accountable is age-old. The Roman satirist Juvenal famously asked, Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? (Who will guard the guardians themselves?) Impeachment, as Ronald Dworkin wrote in the context of American Presidents, is a "constitutional nuclear weapon". It ought to be restricted only to the grimmest of emergencies. But, in India, absent any other apparatus to inquire into a charge of judicial corruption, it becomes the only viable option. We must, therefore, strive to find a device that will straddle our concerns for the judiciary's autonomy with a necessity for greater fairness and transparency. Any claim made against a judge of dishonesty, howsoever trivial, must be investigated by a properly constituted panel, which ought to be granted a status separate from all three established wings of government.

Finally, the CJI's position as the "master of the roster" requires serious rethinking.

Slimming surgery puts women at risk of life-threatening condition

Ladies, you may want to rethink going under the knife as according to a recent study, liposuction puts you at the risk of developing a rare genetic condition that can lead to fat globules entering their lungs. Liposuction is a technique in cosmetic surgery for removing excess fat from under the skin by suction. According to researchers, the condition, known as fat embolism syndrome (FES), is a rare but very serious complication, in which fat travels through the body and blocks blood vessels, but it is notoriously difficult to recognise and diagnose.

The team found that a 45-year-old woman developed a serious life threatening condition after having liposuction. The authors stressed that liposuction is generally a safe procedure, but it is important for doctors to consider diagnosis of FES, especially in patients with underlying risk factors, such as high body mass index (BMI) and fluid retention (lymphoedema). Shortly after the procedure, the woman became drowsy and confused and had a high heart rate. Her condition worsened as she was transferred to intensive care where the doctors suspected that she had dangerously low oxygen levels in her body (acute respiratory distress syndrome).

After further tests, the doctors realised that her symptoms pointed to FES. The woman remained in hospital and was given oxygen and drugs to help with her heart rate and her breathing. "FES is a difficult condition to initially diagnose," the authors noted. "What makes it even harder is the lack of a standardised set of diagnostic criteria to assist the clinician in making the diagnosis," they explained. The research appears in the British Medical Journal Case Reports

Detecting prostate cancer through urine sample

Researchers at the University of Texas at San Antonio are working towards developing a non-invasive method to detect prostate cancer through urine sample. Since cells from the prostate are shed into urine naturally, the new method, which aims to make use of a novel microscope based on a photonic crystal bio-sensor, could offer a more accurate diagnosis. "The system we are developing utilises a sensitive bio-sensor, which allows us to distinguish cancer cells from normal cells based on a unique feature of the cells," said Jing Yong Ye, Professor of Biomedical Engineering at University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA).

"If you can detect a cancer cell, you're starting from a more precise place and you can give a more accurate diagnosis," he added in a statement released by UTSA. To support the development of this non-invasive method of detecting prostate cancer, the US National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute has offered Ye a two-year grant of $354,617. The new method could significantly improve accuracy compared to the approach used in current clinical practice. Prostate cancer is the second most prevalent type of cancer, and the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths, in men. Early detection is key to survival, which is why doctors are required to screen all men over the age of 50 for the disease.

To screen patients for prostate cancer, medical professionals take a blood sample and look for prostate-specific antigen (PSA). If a high level of PSA is found, the patient is suspected to have prostate cancer and required to have a prostate biopsy. Unfortunately, PSA tests are far from providing satisfactory diagnoses and result in a large number of unnecessary prostate biopsies due to a high false-positive rate. This is because PSA elevation may also occur in men with infection and chronic inflammation or benign prostatic hyperplasia.

"False positive diagnoses are very common in prostate cancer tests," Ye said. "As a result, a patient may undergo a biopsy he doesn't need, which is painful and could cause an infection. Also, because prostate cancer is highly heterogeneous and even multi-core prostate biopsy only samples a few local areas, it can easily be missed by clinicians," he added. Since about 70 percent of men who go through the biopsy process are found to be cancer-free, Ye wanted to look for a better way. "We need to use every weapon in our arsenal to attack this disease," Ye said. "It's important to think outside the box and use innovation to address these critical issues," he added.

Eating dark chocolates may prevent diabetes

Love to gorge on dark chocolates? According to a study, compounds found in cocoa – the main ingredient of chocolate – can actually help prevent as well as treat diabetes. The findings showed that cocoa compound named epicatechin monomers helps the body release more insulin and responds to increased blood glucose better. When a person has diabetes, their body either does not produce enough insulin or does not process blood sugar properly, because of the failure of beta cells, which produce insulin. However, the study found that the increased presence of epicatechin monomers helped beta cells to remain stronger as well as enhanced their ability to secrete insulin.

"What happens is epicatechin monomers is protecting the cells, increasing their ability to deal with oxidative stress," said lead author Jeffery Tessem, assistant professor at Brigham Young University (BYU), US. "The epicatechin monomers are making the mitochondria in the beta cells stronger, which produces more ATP (a cell's energy source), which then results in more insulin being released," Tessem added.

For the study, published in the Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry, the team first fed the cocoa compound to animals on a high-fat diet. The results showed that by adding it to the high-fat diet, the compound would decrease the level of obesity in the animals and would increase their ability to deal with increased blood glucose levels. "These results will help us get closer to using these compounds more effectively in foods or supplements to maintain normal blood glucose control and potentially even delay or prevent the onset of Type-2 diabetes," said study co-author Andrew Neilson, assistant professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Australia launches 'thunderstorm asthma' warning system

A year after a freak "thunderstorm asthma" outbreak killed nine and led to thousands being hospitalised in the southern Australian city of Melbourne, the Victorian state government on Sunday launched a world-first alert system to prevent a similar disaster in the future. On November 21 last year, a freak event occurred where heavy rain affected pollens in the air, killing nine asthmatics and affecting thousands more, forcing the government to spend more than Australian $15 million ($12 million) in developing a warning system.

On Sunday, Victorian Health Minister Jill Hennessy said the new system would keep authorities ahead of the threat, Xinhua news agency reported. "The great challenge with thunderstorm asthma and epidemic thunderstorm asthma was its scale, its severity, and the fact that we did not have a prediction system in place which would enable us to understand what was coming," she said . Meanwhile, Paul Holman, spokesperson for Ambulance Victoria, said that last year caught both asthma sufferers and authorities off-guard, and the new warning system - which takes data from five new monitoring locations - takes into account pollen levels across the city and weather conditions.

"We never envisaged being overwhelmed (last year), we never envisaged not having ambulances to send to emergencies, we never envisaged not being able to answer (emergency) calls," Holman told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on Sunday. "We didn't have a process to tell people that we couldn't come and we couldn't attend and give them the right advice." "What we had in effect was a major hazardous material, a HazMat, a gas laden with toxic material hitting a whole range of people." The warning system will be active on a website and through a phone app, and will alert users to potentially devastating weather events before they occur.

A failure of governance

The publication of Mr. Gupta's allegations in a newspaper in March this year raised a storm. On March 28, the Chairman of ICICI Bank's Board, M.K. Sharma, issued a statement expressing the board's full confidence in Ms. Kochhar. In April, media reports said that Mr. Sharma had carried out an internal inquiry in 2016 itself and had found no evidence of wrongdoing on Ms. Kochhar's part. End of story, or so the ICICI Bank board would have liked. However, the controversy would not die down. Investors and media analysts have been relentlessly pressing the board for a better response. Following charges made by a whistle-blower, the board has now authorised the chairman of the Audit Committee to select an appropriate person to head an independent probe. Three questions arise. First, after having stood steadfastly by its CEO for over two months, why has the board opted for a probe now? Second, is a probe by an outsider required at all? Third, should Ms. Kochhar continue in office during the period of the inquiry?

Finally, finally, the board of ICICI Bank has ordered a probe into allegations levelled against its CEO, Chanda Kochhar. Does this call for a celebration? No, it doesn't. The probe comes rather late in the day. And the board is having to refer the matter to an outsider only because of its own inadequate response to the initial set of charges made nearly two years ago. These constitute lapses in governance at a bank that has been characterised as "systemically important" by the regulator.

On May 30, the board of directors of ICICI Bank announced that it had ordered an inquiry by an outsider into allegations made by a whistle-blower. These allegations are not to be confused with the ones made by an investor, Arvind Gupta, in 2016. Mr. Gupta had then written to the Prime Minister, with copies to the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and the Chairperson of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), among others.

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However, the controversy would not die down. Investors and media analysts have been relentlessly pressing the board for a better response. Following charges made by a whistle-blower, the board has now authorised the chairman of the Audit Committee to select an appropriate person to head an independent probe. Three questions arise. First, after having stood steadfastly by its CEO for over two months, why has the board opted for a probe now? Second, is a probe by an outsider required at all? Third, should Ms. Kochhar continue in office during the period of the inquiry?

The decision to go in for a probe is clearly prompted by widespread dissatisfaction with the clean chit given by the Chairman last March. It is also possible that the board has been rattled by show-cause notices issued by SEBI on May 24. According to media reports, the notices relate to alleged violation of disclosure requirements on the part of both Ms. Kochhar and ICICI Bank. If the violations are established, the bank could be subject to monetary penalties and the associated reputational damage.

However, the key question, as one veteran banker pointed out to me, is whether an inquiry conducted by an outsider is at all necessary in such a case. Let us recount the salient facts in brief. In April 2012, ICICI Bank made a loan of ?3,250 crore to the Videocon group. Ms. Kochhar was the bank's CEO at the time. Mr. Gupta's letter to the PM had said that Ms. Kochhar's husband had had a business partnership with the Videocon group prior to the sanction of the ICICI loan. There would thus be a clear conflict of interest in Ms. Kochhar being party to the sanction of a loan to Videocon.

The issue at the heart of the controversy is simple enough: did Ms. Kochhar disclose the conflict of interest to the board and recuse herself from all matters concerning Videocon? If she did not do so, it is sufficient ground for the board to ask Ms. Kochhar to step down as CEO. It is not necessary to establish a quid pro quo in the relationship for the board to decide whether Ms. Kochhar should step down. That is a separate matter to be pursued by the law enforcement authorities. Non-disclosure of conflict of interest and non-recusal are grave enough lapses. The line that various people, including government officials, have been putting out "let us await the outcome of investigations" is sheer evasion.

No deep probe, no forensic analysis, no great legal expertise is required to answer the elementary question posed above. The board of directors is perfectly competent to answer it by having the relevant documents placed before it.

That is what the board should have done in March when the controversy erupted. The drama that has unfolded since is uncalled for and could have been avoided if only the board had done the right thing earlier.

Some of the other arguments made in defence of the CEO amount to a red herring drawn by interested parties. For instance, Mr. Sharma has defended Ms. Kochhar on the ground that ICICI Bank had assumed a share of only 10% of the total loan given by a consortium of banks and the loan itself had been made in accordance with the bank's norms. This does not wash. It is not that a conflict of interest arises only when a loan is made in violation of norms; the conflict does not go away even when the loan decision is in conformity with norms.

The conflict of interest does not end with the sanction of a loan. It extends to post-loan monitoring and the readiness of the lender to exit a relationship where problems are brewing. It applies also to recognition of a loan as a non-performing asset and steps taken to effect recovery. It was incumbent on Ms. Kochhar to have distanced herself from all matters related to Videocon.

When a fresh set of allegations surfaced this month, the board must have been in a bind. Since it had solidly backed its CEO thus far, any probe it chose to conduct by itself would have lacked credibility.

Perhaps, that is why the board has opted to entrust the probe to an outsider. It may well be that the whistle-blower has raised issues other than the loan to Videocon. However, it's hard to believe that any issue of impropriety is beyond the competence of a board. The board can always seek the assistance of outside experts where required. The resort to an outsider is a situation of the board's own making.

Now that the board has decided to have a comprehensive probe, one that could stretch over several weeks or months, Ms. Kochhar's status during the period is an important issue.

The board has denied having asked Ms. Kochhar to go on leave. It has said that her current leave had been planned in the normal course. Does this mean that she will continue to helm the company on her return from leave? If yes, it is a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs. Just think of the plight of those reporting to Ms. Kochhar and the morale in the organisation in general when its CEO is the subject of an extended probe. The correct and proper course would be to ask Ms. Kochhar to step down as CEO until the probe is completed.

The board has also denied that it has set up a search committee to find a successor to Ms. Kochhar. It is free not to set up one. But the board is certainly bound by regulations to have a succession plan in place. The board must ensure that it has a choice of candidates it can turn to in the event that Ms. Kochhar is required to step down.

It is not merely the Chairman and independent directors of ICICI Bank who have been found wanting in the controversy. The nominee of the government and the LIC nominee on the board too have been coy about getting a straight answer to the question of conflict of interest involved in this case. They have chosen to stay away from meetings where they had a fiduciary obligation to attend and pose the hard questions. Such behaviour is strange, to say the least, and it completes the story of a breakdown in governance at the bank. As one distinguished banker put it to me, "Would the government have shown the same indulgence to the CEO of a public sector bank?"

Preventing the next health crisis

In March, the government announced that it would release an annual "state of nutrition" report, detailing India's level of stunting, malnutrition and feature best practices for States to scale up nutrition interventions.

It is clear that India has a lot to do to tackle nutrition challenges 26 million children suffer from wasting (a low weight-for-height ratio), more than in any other country.

Yet, the country has the second highest number of obese children in the world 15.3 million in China and 14.4 million in India. While tackling undernutrition through assurance of adequate nutrition (usually interpreted as dietary calories), we need to ensure that it is also about appropriate nutrition (the right balance of nutrients). Our policy response has to move from "food security" to "nutrition security".

India must step up its efforts to fight overweight and obesity just as it has been doing with wasting and stunting. Between 1980and 2015, obesity doubled for children and tripled for adults; an additional 2.6 million children will be obese in India by 2025, a trend that will not reverse without action.

Rising obesity is putting pressure on already fragile health systems in India by posing a high risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and some cancers (clubbed together as non-communicable diseases, or NCDs). Research shows that Indians have higher levels of body fat and lower levels of lean muscle when compared to many other populations. Therefore, the risk of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes operates even below global thresholds for defining overweight and obesity. Hence the urgency to take public health measures.

Apart from a high burden of premature mortality, these threats are something that India can ill-afford to ignore as it looks ambitiously toward a universal health coverage system where everyone can access quality health services that are free of financial burden.

The rise in obesity is deeply concerning because just as growing up underweight gives that person a lifetime of health problems so does a childhood of being overweight. The potent combination of Indian children eating more junk food while becoming increasingly sedentary puts them at an even greater risk. Research has shown that early warning signs for fatty liver disease can be found in children as young as eight if they had larger-than-advised waistlines when they were three.

Fortunately, this year is an ideal opportunity to tackle obesity as global health decision-makers are focussing on how to garner the political will to drive "best buys" such as sugar taxes and mass media campaigns on healthy diets (proven ways of bringing down obesity) while continuing to vigorously pursue efforts to prevent undernutrition. A high-level commission and a UN General Assembly meeting on NCDs are giving new life to existing evidence-based yet largely unimplemented plans of action.

Policy responses should include agricultural systems that promote crop diversity (to enable dietary diversity) as well as regulatory and fiscal measures (to decrease the availability, affordability and promotion of unhealthy foods, while making healthy foods more accessible). For example, taking the lead from a directive by the Delhi High Court, India should ban the sale of junk food in and around schools.

Legislators should also put into practice the results of a recent Lancet study on India. It showed that higher taxes on junk food can actually lead those on lower incomes to live healthier lives.

Even in clinical settings, counselling and care are needed. Instead of being downgraded as ways of managing "poor lifestyle choices", obesity management, prevention and treatment should be provided as essential health services targeted at a condition that undermines health in many ways. This would help reverse the stigma attached to obesity even by health professionals (which has also undermined the response to it).

Further, India should link obesity and undernutrition and treat them as twinned challenges to be jointly addressed under the universal health coverage umbrella. Universal health coverage is encapsulated in the idea that no one should have to suffer financial hardship in order to access essential health care. By tackling obesity through prevention and early care, financially debilitating NCDs can be avoided.

India will be in a better position to fulfil the promise of universal health coverage if it disrupts the cycle whereby poverty leads to NCDs and vice versa. There is compelling evidence that heart disease and diabetes impose high burdens of catastrophic health expenditure, result in a loss of livelihoods and crush people into poverty. With no insurance or personal savings, a heart disease diagnosis can compromise a person's wealth as well as health.

By making connections to both under- and over-nutrition, health advocates should make economic and social arguments to spur a 'whole-of-government' approach to these 'whole-of-society' problems. Tackling obesity benefits the economy and the environment, as healthy and sustainable diets are good for productivity levels and the planet. It is now time to get ahead of this unfolding health crisis and save lives and money in the process.

Sugary drinks with protein-rich meals may make you fat

Consuming a sugar-sweetened drink like fruit juices with a high-protein meal including lean meat, chicken, fish and dairy products may negatively affect energy balance, alter food preferences and cause the body to store more fat, according to a study. The findings showed that the inclusion of a sugar-sweetened drink decreased fat oxidation, which kick-starts the breakdown of fat molecules, after a meal by eight per cent. The combination will also increase the desire to eat more unhealthy junk food for hours after finishing breakfast.

"We were surprised by the impact that the sugar-sweetened drinks had on metabolism when they were paired with higher-protein meals. This combination also increased study subjects' desire to eat savoury and salty foods for four hours after eating," said lead author Shanon Casperson, from USDA-Agricultural Research Service Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Centre in the US. If a sugar-sweetened drink was consumed with a 15 per cent protein meal, fat oxidation decreased by 7.2g on average, while with an intake of 30 per cent protein meal fat oxidation reduced by 12.6g on average. While having a sugar-sweetened drink increased the amount of energy used to metabolise the meal, the increased expenditure did not even out the consumption of additional calories from the drink, the researchers said, in the paper published in the journal BMC Nutrition.

New wearable e-skin sensor boosts health monitoring

Japanese scientists have developed a hypoallergenic electronic sensor that can be worn on the skin to monitor a person's health continuously over a long period. The wearable device, that can be worn for a week without discomfort, has elastic electrodes, made up of breathable nanoscale meshes, that lets the skin breathe, preventing inflammation. The electrodes contains a water-soluble polymer, polyvinyl alcohol (PVA), and a gold layer -- materials considered safe and biologically compatible with the body. "We learned that devices that can be worn for a week or longer for continuous monitoring were needed for practical use in medical and sports applications," said Takao Someya, Professor at the University of Tokyo.

The device can be applied by spraying a tiny amount of water, which dissolves the PVA nanofibers and allows it to stick easily to the skin. It gets conformed seamlessly to curvilinear surfaces of human skin, such as sweat pores and the ridges of an index finger's fingerprint pattern. In addition to nursing care and medical application the new device promises to enable continuous, precise monitoring of athletes' physiological signals and bodily motion without impeding their training or performance.

For the study, detailed in the journal Nature Nanotechnology, the team conducted a skin patch test on 20 subjects and detected no inflammation on the participant's skin after they had worn the device for a week.Furthermore, the device's mechanical durability was proved through the repeated bending and stretching, exceeding 10,000 times, of a conductor attached on the forefinger. Its readings of the electrical activity of muscles were comparable to those obtained through conventional gel electrodes, the researchers said. "It will become possible to monitor patients' vital signs without causing any stress or discomfort," Someya noted.

Ozone pollution tied to cardiovascular health: Study

Exposure to ozone, a powerful greenhouse gas and a widespread air pollutant in many major cities, may cause cardiovascular disease such as heart attack, high blood pressure and stroke, according to a new study of Chinese adults. Ozone is a pollutant formed through a chemical reaction that occurs when sunlight interacts with nitrogen oxides and other organic compounds that are generated by coal-burning, vehicle exhaust and some natural sources.It has long been associated with adverse health effects in children and adults, Xinhua reported on Monday.

"We know that ozone can damage the respiratory system, reduce lung function and cause asthma attacks," said study author Junfeng Zhang, from Duke and Duke Kunshan University. "Here, we wanted to learn whether ozone affects other aspects of human health, specifically the cardiovascular system."Zhang and colleagues studied 89 healthy adults living in Changsha City of China for one year.

They monitored indoor and outdoor ozone levels, along with other pollutants. At four intervals, the study team took participant blood and urine samples and used a breathing test called spirometry to examine a set of factors that could contribute to cardiovascular and respiratory disease.

The team examined inflammation and oxidative stress, arterial stiffness, blood pressure, clotting factors and lung function in participants. They noted blood platelet activation, which is a risk factor for clotting, and an increase in blood pressure, suggesting a possible mechanism by which ozone may affect cardiovascular health.

These effects were found with ozone exposure lower than that which affects respiratory health, and lower than current U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) air quality standards. "This study shows that standards for safe ozone exposure should take into account its effect on cardiovascular disease risk," said Zhang.

These findings, by a team from Duke University, Tsinghua University, Duke Kunshan University and Peking University, were published Monday in the US journal JAMA Internal Medicine. "This study provides mechanistic support to previously observed associations between low-level ozone exposure and cardiovascular disease outcomes," the study concluded.

Tweaking brain circuits may alleviate depression

In a ray of hope for people suffering from social withdrawal and helplessness behaviour, scientists from the University of California San Diego have linked specific wiring in the brain to distinct behavioural symptoms of depression. The team found brain circuits tied to feelings of despair and helplessness and were able to alleviate and even reverse such symptoms in mice. "We took an approach of studying depression in the sense that different brain areas and circuits of the brain might mediate or contribute to very discrete aspects of depression," said study first-author Daniel Knowland, a UC San Diego graduate student.

"For example, brain area A might contribute to loss of appetite, brain area B to social withdrawal and so forth," he added in the study published in the journal Cell. According to Assistant Professor Byungkook Lim, the results require much more study and evaluation to be applied to humans with depression but new research in animal models provides solid grounding. "This is one of the first studies providing clear evidence showing that different brain circuitry is involved in different types of depressive behaviour with specific symptoms," said Lim.

Each area of the brain is different with distinct cell types and connectivity. "If we can confirm that one area of circuitry is more involved in a particular symptom than another, we may eventually be able to treat a depression patient more efficiently than treating everyone the same way," Lim noted. For the research, the scientists identified two populations of neurons in the brain's ventral pallidum region (part of the basal ganglia) as key to underlying depressive behaviour.



Alluring Oshin Brar's catty eyes, enough to mesmerize.

'Raat Ke Saaye Tale' from Bullets raises the mercury

After treating the fans with an entertaining trailer the makers of Bullets have unveiled a steamy song from the film just after the premiere. The song is a perfect weekend treat to raise the mercury. 'Raat Ke Saaye Tale' has been sung by Aakanksha Sharma. The lyrics have been penned by Rohit Sharma. The music has been scored by Raghav Sachar.

Tina and Lolo are bold, badass and brave girls who find themselves on a mission to thwart an illegal arms/weapons deal between two countries. On the quest to gather evidence, a mishap occurs and the duo is suddenly up against an influential politician. They soon find themselves being chased not only by his goons but also by the police. Whilst on the run to save themselves from the repercussions of an incident, they are faced with multiple hurdles.

Will they get arrested, will they get killed or will they be able to complete their mission? Shot in the most stylish and beautiful locales in India and Malaysia, this unpredictable and thrilling chase packed with high octane action will definitely keep you on the edge, craving for more. Along with Sunny Leone & Karishma Tanna, this perfect masala entertainer also sees Deepak Tijori, Viveck Vaswani, Amaan F Khan, Taaha Shah & Mohan Kapur in pivotal roles and is directed by Devang Dholakia.



Varun Dhawan and Alia Bhatt collaborate for their next project





Actress and philanthropist Alia Bhatt has announced the next instalment of her closet sharing initiative 'Mi Wardrobe is Su Wardrobe'. After Anushka Sharma and Sonakshi Sinha, Varun Dhawan is the third celebrity guest to share handpicked favourites from his personal wardrobe, for charity . Proceeds from this wardrobe will support Salaam Bombay Foundation, which works with adolescents growing up in urban slums, to keep them in school through multiple programs that impact their education, health and livelihood. The wardrobe will be available from 20th August on Saltscout.com, an online platform for charity auctions and sales.

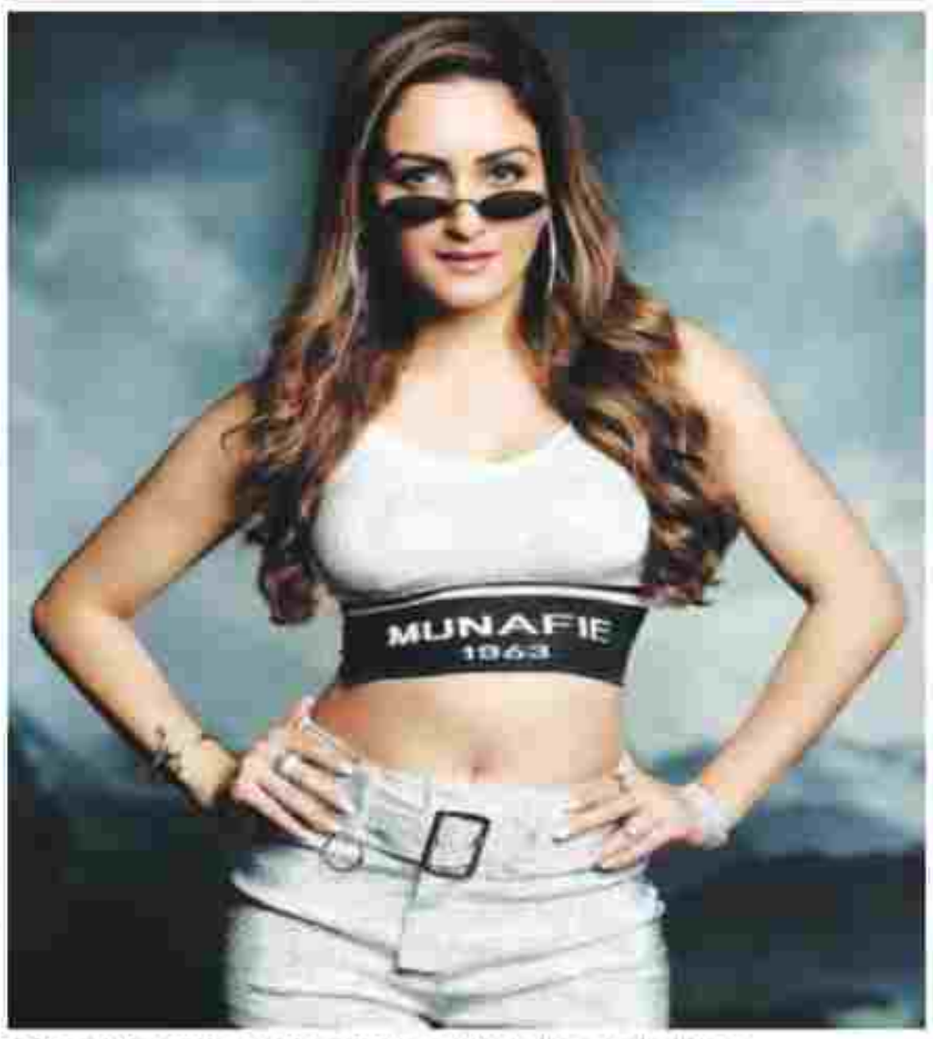
Talking about Varun Dhawan's wardrobe contribution, Alia Bhatt stated,"Varun is making his MiSu debut and I'm really thankful for his support! We need to start adopting a more conscious approach towards buying and discarding garments. We want to encourage more and more people to consider adding quality, preowned garments to their wardrobes and to help our environment by reducing waste.'

Speaking on the association, Varun Dhawan said, 'Sharing a garment is the most fun form of recycling it and keeping it away from landfills. Mi Wardrobe is Su Wardrobe not only gives fans across the world the opportunity to own a garment from my personal closet, but together, we're also doing our bit for the environment."

Mi Wardrobe is Su Wardrobe is a closet sharing initiative conceptualized by Alia Bhatt. The first 2 installments of MiSu saw Alia's wardrobe on sale, proceeds from which supported the Liter of Light program and The Corbett Foundation respectively. The third installment featured fellow eco-warrior Aunshka Sharma's wardrobe and the fourth had Sonakshi Sinha's support. Proceeds from which have supported various causes that the actors have been associated with. Alia Bhatt has been championing the cause of conservation at multiple levels. She started an ecological and animal welfare initiative called Coexist, 2 years ago, followed by Mi Wardrobe is Su Wardrobe last year.

Raima Sen opens up on a 'psychologically tiring job'

Actress Raima Sen found working on her upcoming film Aliya Basu Gayab Hai a psychologically tiring job. The film has only three characters and has largely been shot in a warehouse. "Working on 'Aliya Basu Gayab Hai' was a very psychologically tiring job. It's not easy for an actor to play a character like Aliya where you go through psychological as well as physical stress, but the way this film has come out, I feel it was all worth it," said Raima. "I had a great time working with my co-actors Vinay Pathak who is also an old friend, and Salim Diwan, a hard-working actor with great future ahead. My director and producer Preeti Singh was always clear with her thoughts, and that has helped us a lot in our performances," she added. Vinay enjoyed preparing and working on the film. "It's a psychological thriller that has a twist in the end. It's something I'd never done before. I can't wait to see how today's audience, who in my opinion are very evolved and observant, react to it," he said.



Zaara Yesmin's cool look in a sports bra and shorts.

My character is quite like the real me: Ananya Panday on her upcoming Pan-Indian project



Ananya Panday is on a roll and there's no slowing down, the actress made a strong debut with SOTY 2 in 2019 following which she was seen in Pati Patni Aur Woh. At the same time, the actress was also shooting for Khaali Peeli and most recently, her first Pan-India film with south superstar Vijay Deverakonda was announced. Talking about her character in the Puri Jagannadh movie to a leading daily, Ananya shares, 'My character is quite like the real me. I think young girls will be able to relate to her cute, funny and charming personality. I am working on my Telugu too, learning a few words every day on the set. I will try to dub for myself in as many languages as possible.' The actress has been making all the right moves all year long and won several accolades for her debut performance with the most recent ones being the Filmfare award for best debutante and also the 'Exciting Fresh Face' award at the Femina Beauty Awards. Ananya has a busy line up in 2020 with various projects in the pipeline, the youth sensation has always been up for experimenting with various projects and always looks forward to bringing out the various characters to the audience.

Deepika Padukone is loving this period of creative fertility



Global icon Deepika Padukone who is riding high on the success and glory of her International eye is enjoying and loving this period of creative fertility where the actress is reading new scripts, meeting different directors and exploring a spectrum of creative spaces. Deepika is treating herself by reading a whole range of poetry while also focusing on delving deeper into the characters that she is getting.

The actress, who has always given us some of the most cherished roles is now, closer to finalising her next films, for the upcoming months. Talking about same Deepika Padukone said, 'I find listening to various scripts and ideas the most exciting period in an actors creative journey. I'm always looking forward to those moments of creative discussion and collaboration'.

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