



Sunday Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1865

BHARATHA RASHTRA SAMITHI SILVER JUBILEE GREETINGS



**"25 YEARS STRONG -
THE FIGHT FOR TELANGANA CONTINUES!"**

A dream for Telangana, born of sacrifice and struggle,
became a shining reality.

Under KCR Garu's visionary leadership, millions' hopes
turned into a Golden Telangana.

As we celebrate BRS's Silver Jubilee, we renew our pledge
to protect our progress, rebuild our pride, and reclaim
Telangana's rightful path.

VYALLA HARISH REDDY

BRS Party State Leader, Ramagundam Constituency



Sunday Pioneer Paper with passion since 1865

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PUBLISHED FROM: VIJAYWADA DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD

Model law on anvil to ensure gig workers' welfare

Root cause of slowdown WIDESPREAD real-income stagnation: Ramesh

MM Srilekha, who didn't just SCORE films—She Scored History

QUOTE OF THE DAY The Pioneer Former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy's family is not in any way less harmful than terrorists...

DON'T MISS...

No right for BRS to criticise others

The Minister for IT and Industries, Duddilla Sridhar Babu, lashed out at the BRS, stating that a party which systematically violated the people's democratic rights during its decade-long rule has no moral authority to criticise others...

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Gurukul students felicitated

The Telangana government is giving top priority to education and student welfare, said State Transport and Backward Classes Welfare Minister Ponnampati Prabhakar. Speaking at a felicitation ceremony held on Saturday at Begumpet Tourism Plaza...

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Youth marries 2 women at once

In Kumaram Bheem Asifabad district, a young man marrying two women at the same time and it has caused a sensation. Although Hindu marriage laws only permit monogamy, this incident took place according to tribal customs...

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Govt to unveil fisheries projects

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh will on Monday inaugurate and lay the foundation for key projects for seven coastal states and union territories with a total outlay of Rs 255.30 crore under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)...

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OBTUSE ANGLE



PAHALGAM MASSACRE

Massive crackdown on terrorists

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Authorities in Kashmir have launched a massive crackdown on terrorists and their sympathisers in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, razing homes of the ultras, raiding their safe havens and detaining hundreds of overground workers for questioning...

Houses of five terrorists or their associates have been demolished in the past 48 hours with officials saying similar action will be taken against others involved in terror activities.

Raids were carried out at more than 60 places on Saturday in Srinagar "to dismantle the terrorist ecosystem", a J-K Police spokesman said.

In Anantnag district, search operations are being carried out round-the-clock as security forces step up vigilance. Mobile vehicle checkpoints have been put up across the district to monitor any suspicious movement, the officials said.

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HOUSES RAZED, HUNDREDS DETAINED IN KASHMIR



Pak offers to join 'neutral, transparent' probe

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Pakistan on Saturday offered to join any "neutral and transparent" probe into the Pahalgam terrorist attack that killed 26 people.

"The recent tragedy in Pahalgam is yet another example of this perpetual blame game, which must

come to a grinding halt. Continuing with its role as a responsible country, Pakistan is open to participating in any neutral, transparent and credible investigation," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said while addressing the army-cadets passing-out parade at the Pakistan Military Academy in

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Kakul. Echoing his views, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in a press conference in Lahore said, "If neutral people of any third country carry out a probe into this incident, we are ready to cooperate with them."

Continued on Page 2

Actions will shake Pak, warns Bandi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said that the Pahalgam incident represents the ultimate in terrorist brutality. He warned that those who wield guns will eventually fall to guns. Declaring that the Modi government is committed to eradicating terrorism, he said that the Centre is preparing to take strong actions

that will shake Pakistan to its core.

He added that the Modi government is about to take tough decisions and called upon the nation to support the Centre. Speaking at the 'Rozgar Mela' event held on Saturday at the Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resource Development Centre in Hyderabad, Sanjay was joined by GST Chief Commissioners Sandeep Prakash, V. Sampurna, and others.

Continued on Page 2

Police beef up surveillance of Pakistanis in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Police have intensified surveillance on Pakistani nationals staying in Hyderabad. Notices have been issued to four Pakistanis who were found staying using short-term visas. They have been directed to leave Hyderabad within a day.

Official sources said there are 213 Pakistani nationals staying in

Hyderabad. Of these, 209 individuals possess long-term visas. The Centre has granted exemption to those holding long-term visas, allowing them to stay.

A Pakistani, Mohammed Faiz, was arrested in Hyderabad for illegally entering India via Nepal. He married an Indian woman and had been illegally staying in the city for the last 10 months. Investigation is going on.

DISPROPORTIONATE ASSETS CASE

Gajwel Kaleshwaram ENC Hariram arrested



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a major crackdown connected to the Kaleshwaram Project, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Saturday raided the residence of Bhookeya Hari Ram, the Engineer-in-Chief (ENC) who hails from Gajwel, and 14 other locations linked to him and his relatives.

Hari Ram, who played a key role in the execution of

- Villa in Shaikpet, Villa in Kondapur, Flat in Srinagar, Flat in Madhapur, Flat in Narsingi, Commercial space at Amaravathi, 28 acres of agricultural land in Markook mandal, 20 guntas of land in Patancheru, Two independent houses in Hyd Srinagar Colony, One farmhouse spread over 6 acres with a mango garden at Bommalaramam, A building being constructed at Kothagudem, Open plot at Qutbullapur, Open plot at Miryalaguda, Two four-wheelers, including a BMW car, Gold ornaments, Bank deposits

the Kaleshwaram Project, was under investigation after some serious findings were pointed out in the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) report submitted to the Telangana Government

just two days ago. The NDSA report is said to have raised several critical points regarding Hari Ram's involvement in the project and highlighted allegations of large-scale corruption.

Continued on Page 2

Warangal meet will create political history, asserts KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao called upon people across Telangana to attend the party's historic silver jubilee celebrations at Warangal's Orugallu grounds.

During a teleconference with party leaders from across the state, KTR said that in all villages, BRS workers and people should together hoist the pink flag early in the morning before proceeding to the venue.

Highlighting the significance of the occasion, he appealed to all attendees to wear pink dresses as a mark of solidarity.

He said there is already a huge enthusiasm among the people to participate in the event and asked BRS leaders to plan meticulously so that



all participants could reach the meeting venue on time. "All vehicles coming to the meeting venue should be adorned with pink flags on all sides, and arrangements for drinking water, buttermilk packets, and food must be made in all buses to ensure people are comfortable in the summer heat," he said. He reminded BRS leaders that a detailed route map had

already been circulated to avoid traffic jams and requested everyone to strictly follow the specified routes.

KTR made it clear that no vehicle should stop on the roads within 30 km of the venue. Instead, they must proceed directly to designated parking areas. He said BRS volunteers would be stationed along all routes to guide vehicles and the public.

BRS volunteers would distribute water bottles and buttermilk packets at multiple points to ensure the comfort of everyone arriving at the meeting site, KTR said.

There is tremendous excitement about K. Chandrasekhara Rao's address, and people belonging to all sections are eagerly awaiting his speech, he said.

CM: Become brand ambassadors of 'Telangana Rising'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said the Congress Government has launched a lot of social welfare schemes and development projects, and there is still a lot to be done.

The CM invited all delegates attending the Bharat Summit-2025 to join the Congress's mission to bring about a change in the lives of people.

He appealed to all delegates to share their knowledge with the Telangana Government and become brand ambassadors of 'Telangana Rising'.

Addressing the Bharat Summit-2025 held at the HICC Novotel Hotel on Saturday, the CM said that he is proud that he got an



opportunity to address the summit. "Telangana is endowed with a rich history and a unique culture. The people of Telangana, which was part of United Andhra Pradesh, struggled for a separate state for many decades. Students, trade unions, farmers and women actively participated and led the Telangana Movement.

Continued on Page 2

Politics must shift from 'fear' to 'listening and empathy': Rahul

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Senior Congress Leader Rahul Gandhi, who is also the Leader of the Opposition, delivered a powerful address reflecting on the changing nature of democratic politics around the world. He called for a shift from 'fear and hatred' to 'listening, empathy and love'.

"Democratic politics has fundamentally changed. The rules that applied a decade ago don't work anymore," he said, pointing to how concentrated capital and media



control have reshaped the political landscape.

"This is the new politics, where the opposition is not engaged with but crushed. All our avenues were compromised, including the media.

Continued on Page 2

Advertisement for 'Chalo Warangal' featuring KTR and other leaders, with text in Telugu and English.

"LIFE IS UNCERTAIN.
EAT DESSERT FIRST"
— ERNESTINE ULMER

THE VEGETARIAN
THALI HAD THE LEBU
PATA BHAAT,
BENGALI ALOO DUM,
CHHOLAR DAL,
GOLDA CHINGRI
MALAI KARI AND
MORE TO ENJOY.



BHURI BHOJ Comes Alive In Delhi

Bringing the stories and spices of Bengal to life, Chef Ananya Banerjee curates an unforgettable menu for the Delhiites, for ten days, that celebrates the region's rich love for the food culture, writes ABHI SINGHAL



Chef Ananya Banerjee — The mind and magic behind the creativity and fusion of the Bengali food.

The Bengali culture always makes you feel so alive and the Bengali feast is to die for in the case of food lovers. So, for ten special days, the essence of Bengal will be live at the *The Suryaa, New Delhi* with "Taste of Bengal", that is a grand celebration of food, flavour and nostalgia. The heart behind the entire finger-licking food is Chef Ananya Banerjee, whose love for Bengal's food traditions shines through every plate.

The buffet spread showcases an impressive lineup of Bengali classics. Start with *Bhetki Paturi*, where mustard-marinated fish is gently wrapped in banana leaves and pan-fried to perfection. For the savours of the non-vegetarian you can try the ever-popular *Keema Egg Devil*, a favourite from Kolkata's street food scene that wraps

THE SWEETEST GRAND FINALE

The dessert spread is a poetic end to the Bengali feast. You will get to relish the *Makha Shondesh* served in a crisp kunafa basket — soft, kneaded, and delicately sweet. Then, surrender to the charm of *Kheer Komala*, a silky milk pudding laced with fresh oranges and citrus zest. A gentle, flavourful finale that lingers on the palate long after the last bite.

spiced minced meat around a boiled egg, fried until golden and crisp.

In the starters you also have *Ghugni tart* — a contemporary take on Kolkata's classic yellow pea curry, served in a delicate tart shell, *Beetroot Croquette cylinder* — a crisp, deep-fried beetroot and potato croquette with subtle spice, served with delicate garnish. These will not let you keep up the space for the upcoming main course.

The main courses feature the much-loved *Kosha Mangsho*, a slow-cooked mutton dish rich with

spices. Pair it with puffed *Luchi* or the fragrant yellow *Basanti Pulao* for a truly satisfying plate. And for those with a sweet tooth, the *Baked Rasogolla* is a must — a gentle twist on Bengal's iconic sweet that's both comforting and indulgent.

The *Vegetarian Thali* had the *Lebu pata bhaat* — fragrant gobbindobogh rice infused with citrusy gondhoraj leaves for refreshing aroma, *Bengali Aloo Dum* — baby potatoes slow-cooked in lightly spiced tomato cumin. The taste of *Chholar Dal* with Narkel & Kishmish made with thick Bengal gram dal cooked with coconut slivers and sweet raisin will become your favourite eventually.

The desert is the last and the best. You will have the sweetness of *Makha Shondesh* in kunafa basket — Soft, Kneaded Bengali sandesh delicately in a crisp kunafa nest. The *Kheer Komala* — A velvety milk pudding infused with fresh oranges

and citrus zest will make your taste buds feel

weak on food. But this festival is about more than just what is on the plate. *The Suryaa* has turned its dining space into a little slice of Bengal with Live kitchen counters let diners watch dishes come to life, while traditional music adds a soothing background, completing an atmosphere that feels like stepping into a Bengali home.

FACT SHEET -

Taste of Bengal
Where: The Suryaa, New Delhi
When: 25th April - 4th May 2025
Timings: 7:00 PM - 11:00 PM
Price: Dinner Buffet at INR 2399++



From street snacks to heirloom recipes, "Taste of Bengal" brings Kolkata's kitchen to Delhi under the culinary guidance of Chef Ananya. It promises a meal to remember and is an invitation to connect with a part of India that is rich in warmth, tradition, and taste. So, prepare for a nostalgic food journey as *The Suryaa*.



Passport to World's Street Food



From Tokyo to Mexico, it's a flavourful food world tour at Cafe Delhi Heights, writes ABHI SINGHAL

Street food is an extra happy taste buds experience, a cultural adventure that brings together the flavours and traditions of distant lands. Imagine embarking on a food journey around the globe, all without leaving your seat. With the *International Street Food Festival 2025 at Cafe Delhi Heights*, you can do just that, as this exciting celebration of global cuisine unfolds across all their outlets from April 15 to May 1.

Step into the warm and aesthetic atmosphere of Cafe Delhi Heights, where the scents of sizzling spices, grilling meats, and fresh ingredients fill the

air, setting the stage for a food adventure. The festival's specially formed menu promises to take you on a whirlwind tour across continents, offering a unique twist on iconic street food dishes from around the world.

You can start your journey in Asia with a steaming bowl of Japanese ramen, its rich, savoury broth paired perfectly with tender noodles and a medley of fresh toppings. If you're craving something with a bit of heat, the spicy, tangy kick of Mexican tacos will leave your taste buds dancing. For a touch of Middle Eastern warmth, savour the juicy, flavourful shawarmas, packed with a delicious mix of meats and spices that transport you straight to the bustling streets of Beirut or Cairo.

But the adventure doesn't stop there. Want to travel more? Now, CDH takes you to Spain with a bite of the crispy, sugar-dusted churros, or you can sink teeth into a tender Turkish kebab that captures the essence of Turkey's street food culture. For those who prefer something lighter, the Vietnamese spring rolls offer a refreshing crunch with a burst of herbs

and dipping sauce that's simply irresistible. And for the perfect comfort food, there are American sliders, mini burgers packed with bold flavours that are both familiar and exciting.

The festival adds an interactive twist to the experience with the *Dart World Board* — a fun, paid activity where you throw a dart at a world map that highlights the countries featured in the festival menu. Wherever the dart lands, that's the street food dish you must try. It's an adventurous way to discover new flavours, bringing an element of surprise to your dining experience.

Taste the global street food and something new with the *International Street Food Festival at Cafe Delhi Heights*. Hours of spending time and savouring food will take you through culture, flavour, and the joy of sharing a meal.



FACT SHEET
Location - All Outlets
Café Delhi Heights
Availability - 15th April- 1st May



A Night of Artful Mixology

Bangkok's Rabbit Hole Brings Cocktail Magic to Gurugram at The Leela Ambience, writes GYANESHWAR DAYAL



The art of mixology extends far beyond simply combining drinks — it's a creative craft that merges flavour, balance, technique, and storytelling. A superb cocktail is a sensory journey, where each ingredient is selected with intention and precision to evoke a mood, a memory, or an emotion. From the clink of ice to the swirl of citrus oils, mixology is where culinary science meets artistic expression, turning a simple sip into a memorable experience.

In a dazzling display of global mixology, *The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences* hosted one of Asia's most iconic cocktail destinations for an unforgettable evening. On 23rd April, the celebrated *Rubicon Bar & Cigar Lounge* opened its doors to a special bar takeover by *Rabbit Hole* — Bangkok's legendary speakeasy known for its inventive cocktails and chic, understated charm.

Tucked away behind a nondescript wooden door in Thonglor's vibrant nightlife district, *Rabbit Hole* has earned a reputation for pushing the boundaries of mixology while maintaining a relaxed elegance. For one night only, this distinctive Bangkok spirit was brought to Gurugram, infusing the capital region's cocktail culture with an international flair.

At the heart of the takeover were *Rabbit Hole's* star talents — Depp, the Group Beverage Manager, and Bite, a master mixologist known for

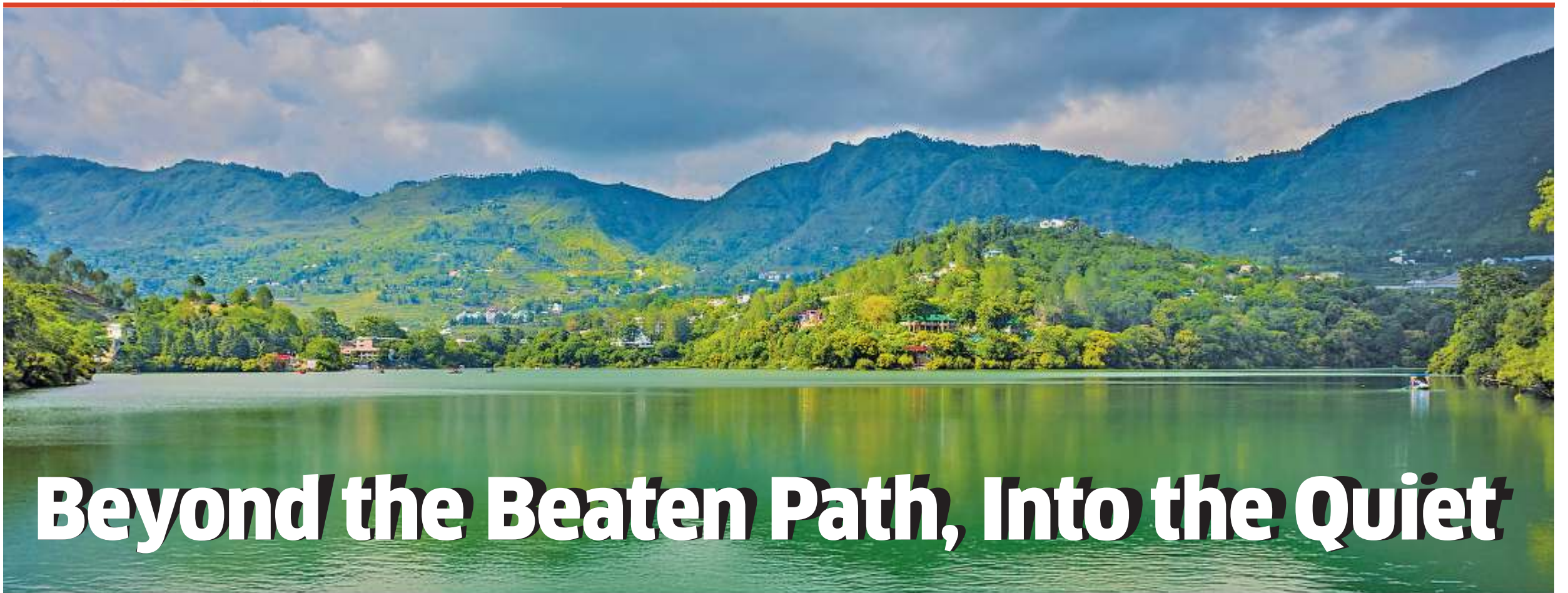
RABBIT HOLE'S SIGNATURE STYLE

Tucked away behind a nondescript wooden door in Thonglor's vibrant nightlife district, *Rabbit Hole* has earned a reputation for pushing the boundaries of mixology while maintaining a relaxed elegance. For one night only, this distinctive Bangkok spirit was brought to Gurugram, infusing the capital region's cocktail culture with an international flair.

his flair, finesse, and storytelling. The duo took over the bar with a menu of meticulously curated cocktails that highlighted their signature creativity, precision, and deep understanding of flavour. Each drink told a story, bridging cultures and delighting the senses of everyone in attendance.

The *Rubicon Bar & Cigar Lounge*, with interiors designed by Japan's renowned *Studio Spin*, provided an opulent yet intimate backdrop for the evening. Featuring rich wood panelling, maroon leather seating, warm ambient lighting, and the refined atmosphere of a private cigar lounge, *Rubicon* served as the perfect stage for *Rabbit Hole's* artistic libations.

This collaboration marks yet another milestone for *The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences* in its mission to deliver world-class hospitality experiences. By partnering with global tastemakers such as *Rabbit Hole*, the hotel continues to elevate Gurugram's luxury scene, offer-



Beyond the Beaten Path, Into the Quiet

A peaceful getaway in the hills, perfect for relaxing, exploring nature, and enjoying quiet moments

Tucked away in the lush folds of the Kumaon hills lies a lake of nine corners, **Naukuchiyatal** — an emerald secret that still shimmers in its serenity, away from the better-trodden paths of Nainital and Bhimtal.

And now, it has a luxurious new address: Naukuchia House, a recently renovated 42 — room property by the Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), the custodians of the iconic Taj brand.

Standing elegantly by the lake, Naukuchia House is not just a hotel — it's a sanctuary. Designed with understated charm and heritage echoes, the property offers panoramic lake views, with a private entry that takes you straight to the shimmering waters. Step out of your room, and you can hop directly onto a boat. I did. A slow ride in the morning mist, a fishing line tossed casually into the glassy lake surface — this isn't just vacationing; it's soul-deep unwinding.

For those chasing rejuvenation rather than adventure, I recommend their signature full-body spa therapy. My masseur was a magician with years of training in her fingertips, and the steam bath that followed was the kind of cleansing city souls long for.

But Naukuchia House doesn't stop there. On one of the afternoons, the hotel arranged a guided walk into the forest, leading to an enchanting village clearing where warm tea and quiet conversations replaced Wi-Fi signals and screens.

And then there's **Kainchi Dham** — just a scenic 30-minute drive away. This modest ashram has turned into a magnetic spiritual hub, drawing global figures like **Mark Zuckerberg**, **Julia Roberts**, and closer to home, **Virat Kohli** and **Anushka Sharma**.

Whether you're a believer or a curious wanderer, the calm of **Shri Neem Karoli Baba's** temple will stay long after you leave. Back at the hotel, there's plenty to indulge in. The temperature — controlled pool makes a dip possible even when the air gets crisp.

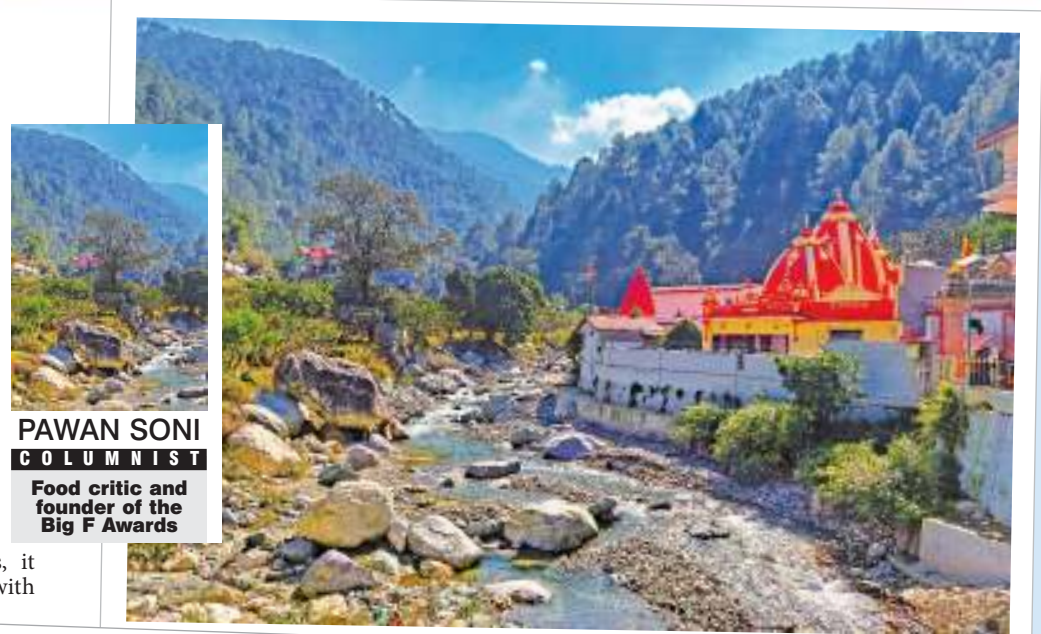
The food?

Their Asian fare is well-balanced, and the Indian kebabs-succulent, smoky, and served with Himalayan charm-are memorable. A chef's nod to modern tastes without losing sight of tradition at **Ija**, their all — day dining restaurant that means 'Mother' in Kumaoni, is worth a praise. Naukuchiyatal is just 5.5 hours by road from Delhi, making it ideal for a 2-3 night escape. Unlike its over-touristed cousins, it offers silence, stars, and stories. And with Naukuchia House now writing its own, there's never been a better time to visit.



NOT TO MISS

The Kumaoni thali is a flavourful ode to the hills. It features **aloo ke gutke**, **lahsuni palak** and hearty **gehat dal**, paired with the region's signature **lal bhaat**. The tangy Kumaoni raita and spicy bhaang ki chutney add layers of taste. For meat lovers, there's tender chicken and a rich shikari mutton curry. The meal ends with a comforting bowl of rice kheer — soulful and satisfying.



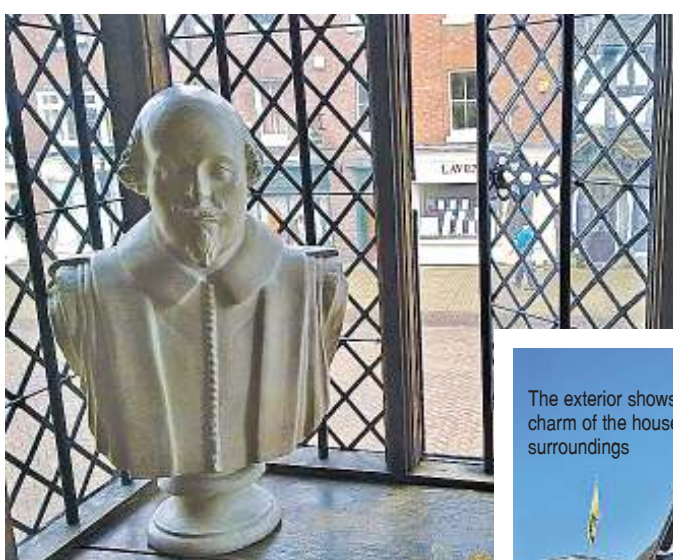
PAWAN SONI
COLUMNIST

Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards



REJUVENATION

Naukuchiyatal Lake, with its nine serene corners, offers peaceful boating and fishing. Nearby, **Kainchi Dham** — home to **Shri Neem Karoli Baba** — draws seekers and celebrities alike for its calm, spiritual aura. Surrounded by pine forests and misty hills, the lake is a hidden gem for nature lovers. Birdwatchers often flock here to spot rare Himalayan species in the tranquil surroundings. Cozy homestays and lakeside cafés add charm to the quiet retreat.



Footsteps in the Halls of Genius

A literary journey in an English town unites two voices across continents and centuries

The exterior shows the historic charm of the house and its surroundings



Shakespeare's House on Henley Street. This timber — framed house is where Shakespeare was born

BY SEEMA ANAND CHOPRA

Trying to take a step backwards into history, on a cool September autumn afternoon I stood looking at the birthplace of Shakespeare and wondered what it was that had drawn me here at this time of the year.

It is just another English house, but for its resident who made it extraordinary — this was home to one of the greatest English writers who hold a universal appeal. His plays and poems continue, till times today, to entice readers and audiences, transcending borders of countries and languages. Undoubtedly, this celebrated author is remembered even after 450 years, for his literary works have proudly, since ages, been imbibed in most school and university syllabuses. So, I went visiting the English town of Stratford-upon-Avon where the historic and skilfully restored house of William Shakespeare is located.

Shakespeare's Birthplace Museum

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was founded in 1847, almost three centuries after his birth, and has been able to preserve his legacy and the five Tudor houses associated with Shakespeare's lifetime. By the 19th century, the house had decayed and was falling apart, but the timely restoration attempts by the famous writer — **Charles Dickens**, helped to save it. He organised performances in towns of England to raise funds to renovate the memorial house! We gathered this information and a lot more at the vivid, engrossing Shakespeare Museum, through which is the entry to Shakespeare's birthplace!

Shakespeare's Birthplace

Subsequently, we reached Shakespeare's birthplace, which is quite lively with radiant colours welcoming all who enter it, echoing the lifestyle of the 16th century. Shakespeare lived here with his parents and many more brothers and sisters. The par-

lour, hall, workshop, bedrooms and the furnishings have been reinstated too.

Also noteworthy is Shakespeare's bedchamber and birthing room from the year 1564, recreated to perfection! We were informed that he sometimes wrote the description of his personal domestic items, furniture etc. in his plays, which has helped the restoration work to a great extent!

Discovery in the Gardens

In the 16th century, the garden of the house was used for various purposes by Shakespeare's father — like wool-dealing activities, glove-making, growing vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants, a barn for pigs, hens and more and also as a storage area. Wandering through one of the five gardens attached to Shakespeare's house, we made a discovery that added excitement to our visit and it was an icon of a true tribute to the 'Voice of India'.

AU REVOIR

It's amazing how such a humble space gave rise to one of the greatest writers ever. Quiet but meaningful. The setting adds to the magic — it's like the whole street tells a story. We drove back with memories of two great poets and writers — **William Shakespeare** and **Rabindranath Tagore**, born centuries and continents apart, yet brought together by little effort and fate at Shakespeare's Birthplace! No wonder that **Rabindranath Tagore** is referred to as the Shakespeare of India! **Rabindranath Tagore's** birth anniversary — 7th May is celebrated annually at Shakespeare's Birthplace by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Tagore at Shakespeare's Birthplace

On the occasion of the upcoming birth anniversary of Nobel Laureate **Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore** on 7th May, I recall my visit to Shakespeare's Birthplace House fondly. After the Shakespeare house tour, we stepped out through one of the back exit doors, wandered through its five gardens attached to the main house, and spotted the bust of **Rabindranath Tagore** — the great Indian poet and writer — it stood there majestically, as a true homage to him. We were at a quiet garden corner of the house and there it was — a fine sculpture on a stone plinth carved with Tagore's poem to Shakespeare, which he wrote on the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death — completion of 300 years in 1916 — titled 'In Honour of William



Shakespeare's Birthing Room. A small, modest room believed to be where Shakespeare was born

Shakespeare! In the poem, he praises Shakespeare as an English poet as well as a world poet — an accolade to Shakespeare's work that inspired Tagore's literary work too! Little did he envision that less than 50 years later, the poem would be back in the limelight when the Calcutta Art Society presented an ivory tablet of the poem at the newly opened Shakespeare Centre in 1964!

— The author is a travel writer and researcher



ADVENTURE

"A person susceptible to wanderlust is not so much addicted to movement as committed to transformation"
— Pico Iyer

When adventure is a way of life!

The Mechukha Adventure Race in Arunachal Pradesh blended high-octane action with national pride, showcasing the region's beauty, writes GYANESHWAR DAYAL

The greatest challenge one can face often lies within — confronting and transcending personal limitations. Pushing these boundaries becomes one of the most rewarding experiences life can offer. This notion came to life both figuratively and literally when 22 teams converged in Mechukha for the 3rd National Adventure Racing Championship, a prestigious event under the Adventure Racing World Series — Asia Series.

In a spectacular blend of adrenaline and assertion, Arunachal Pradesh played host to a high — octane adventure race set against the breathtaking backdrop of Mechukha, located in the Shi Yomi district. Spearheaded by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, which aims to place Mechukha firmly on the global adventure sports map, the choice of location was as strategic as it was scenic.

Nestled near the Chinese border on the far eastern edge of India, Mechukha stands not only as a gateway to natural beauty but also as a testament to national pride and resilience. Pasang Dorjee Sona, the Sports Minister of Arunachal Pradesh and the visionary behind the event's conception, expressed his intent with candor and conviction: "This is our way of telling the world — we are here, waiting to be explored. What you'll find here is an India unlike any other. The race is merely a means to draw global attention and unveil this hidden paradise."

His words carry weight, for Mechukha offers boundless opportunities for adventure tourism — from soaring down one of India's longest zip lines and paragliding over pristine valleys, to braving wild rivers through rafting and kayaking, scaling rugged mountain faces, and trekking through untouched landscapes. Set against the backdrop of the Eastern Himalayas, the race included mountain biking, trail running, river rafting, and rappelling — challenging participants across some of the most



rugged and breathtaking terrain in the region. Mechukha, located near the Indo — Tibet border, offered a dramatic and fitting venue, with its raw beauty and strategic significance. The race covered a route that took participants through dense forests, across suspension bridges, over swift rivers, and into remote tribal hamlets, giving them a taste of the unique culture and unspoiled environment that defines Arunachal Pradesh.

Promoting Adventure Tourism

Organised by the state's Department of Tourism in collaboration with Nth adventure the race was a strategic move to boost adventure tourism in the region. Arunachal Pradesh, often referred to as the "Land of the Rising Sun," boasts immense untapped potential for eco and adventure tourism. Pema Khandu, the dynamic Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, is deeply committed to positioning Mechukha and the state as a whole, as a vibrant tourism hub.

"As a border state, we face certain constraints," he noted, "but significant efforts are underway to enhance infrastructure — from roads to telecommunications — which will give a major boost to the tourism industry. Arunachal Pradesh is a peaceful state with 85 percent forest cover, offering visitors a rejuvenating experience amidst nature."

Speaking at the event, Arunachal Pradesh's Tourism Minister emphasised, "This is our home, and we are proud to showcase its beauty and resilience. Adventure tourism is our bridge to the world, and Mechukha is just the beginning." "It's not just about the race. It's about experiencing India's frontier, the people, the spirit, the message," said a participant from Mumbai.



EXPLORING THE LAST SHANGRI-LA

Nestled in the eastern Himalayas, Mechukha is a pristine valley in the Shi-Yomi district of Arunachal Pradesh, India. Often described as the "Last Shangri-La," this enchanting destination remains largely untouched by commercial tourism, offering an unspoiled glimpse into nature, culture, and thrilling adventures.

A TAPESTRY OF NATURAL BEAUTY

Mechukha is a dreamscape of lush meadows, dense pine forests, winding rivers, and majestic mountains. In spring and summer, the valley is blanketed with wildflowers, while autumn offers crisp air and golden hues. Winters, though chilly, transform Mechukha into a white wonderland, with snow-draped landscapes that look like they're lifted straight from a postcard.

ADVENTURE AWAITS

While tranquility is one of Maichuka's charms, the region also promises adrenaline, pumping adventure for thrill seekers.

TREKKING AND HIKING

Mechukha is surrounded by several unexplored trails that cut through dense forests and mountain passes. The Samten Yongcha trek is a favourite among locals, offering panoramic views of the valley. Hikes to nearby ridges reveal sweeping vistas of snow capped peaks and endless forests.

RIVER RAFTING

The Siyom River, though calm in places, also has rapids suitable for white — water rafting, especially during the summer. For the more laid, back adventurer, angling for local fish species in the river is a peaceful pastime.

PARAGLIDING

Mechukha has also become known as a paragliding hotspot, especially during the annual Adventure Festival organised by the Arunachal Pradesh tourism department. Soaring over pine forests and rivers offers a bird's eye view of the valley's breathtaking landscape.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

With its rugged terrain and offbeat tracks, Maichuka is perfect for mountain biking. Whether you're coasting downhill or navigating rocky trails, the combination of fresh air and scenic backdrops makes every ride memorable.



A SUBTLE YET STRONG MESSAGE TO CHINA

China has consistently refused to recognise Arunachal Pradesh as part of India, referring to it as "South Tibet" in its official maps. The Indian government has repeatedly reaffirmed that Arunachal Pradesh is and will always be an integral part of India. By organising a high-profile adventure event in a border village, India sent a quiet but firm message: governance, development, and public participation in the region are thriving. The presence of Indian security forces, civil authorities, and a large number of Indian participants underlined the reality on the ground.



India's 3rd National Adventure Racing Championship came to Arunachal Pradesh for the first time. As part of the prestigious ARWS Asia Series, the championship offered an experience that combined intense competition, breathtaking landscapes, and rich cultural immersion. Held in the remote and pristine Mechukha Valley, the event lived up to its promise of providing a race like no other. Nestled high in the Himalayas, 6,000 feet above sea level, Mechukha

welcomed competitors with its untouched beauty. The participants not only faced some of the toughest terrains in the country but also had the chance to immerse themselves in the culture and traditions of the region, discovering the warmth and hospitality of the local tribes, including the Membas, Ramos, Bokars, Libos, and Tagin.

The 3rd National Adventure Racing Championship also served as a qualifier for the ARWS Asia Championship 2025, adding an extra layer

of intensity to the competition. With national and international teams coming together to compete, the event attracted some of the best in the field. In addition to the race, the championship offered a generous cash prize pool of Rs 7 lakh, 5 lakh and 3 lakhs. But beyond the competition, the event allowed participants to fully immerse themselves in Mechukha's rich culture. It was an experience that went far beyond the race itself, offering a deep connection to the land.





CUCUMBER & MINT COOLER

A light and refreshing drink perfect for hot summer afternoons.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cucumber (peeled and chopped)
- 1/2 cup fresh mint leaves
- 1 tablespoon honey or agave syrup (optional)
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 cups cold water
- Ice cubes

METHOD:

Blend cucumber, mint leaves, lemon juice, and honey (if using) in a blender until smooth.

Strain the mixture into a jug to remove pulp.

Add cold water and ice cubes.

Stir well and serve chilled, garnished with a sprig of mint.

WATERMELON & FETA SALAD

A sweet and salty combination perfect for summer picnics.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups watermelon cubes
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Fresh basil leaves, torn
- Salt and pepper, to taste

METHOD:

Combine watermelon cubes and feta cheese in a bowl.

Drizzle with olive oil and balsamic vinegar.

Toss gently to combine, then sprinkle with torn basil leaves.

Season with salt and pepper, and serve immediately for a cool, tangy treat.



MANGO LASSI POPSICLES

Turn the classic mango lassi into a frozen treat for those extra hot days.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ripe mango, peeled and chopped
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1/4 cup milk or almond milk
- 2 tablespoons honey or sugar (adjust to taste)
- A pinch of cardamom powder (optional)

METHOD:

Blend mango, yogurt, milk, honey, and cardamom powder in a blender until smooth.

Pour the mixture into popsicle molds.

Freeze for 4-6 hours or overnight.

Once frozen, run warm water over the outside of the molds to release the popsicles. Enjoy!

SPICY ROASTED CHICKPEAS

A crunchy, healthy snack to munch on during summer evenings.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 can of chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin powder
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- Salt to taste

METHOD:

Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C).

Pat chickpeas dry with a towel and toss them in olive oil and the spices.

Spread the chickpeas in a single layer on a baking sheet.

Roast for 25-30 minutes, stirring halfway through, until crispy.

Let cool and enjoy as a crunchy snack.



COCONUT LIME RICE

A tropical twist on plain rice, perfect as a side dish for summer BBQs or grilled seafood.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup basmati rice
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 1/2 cup water
- Zest and juice of 1 lime
- Salt to taste
- Fresh cilantro, chopped (optional)



METHOD:

Rinse the rice until the water runs clear.

In a saucepan, bring coconut milk and water to a simmer.

Add the rice, lime zest, and salt. Cover and cook on low heat for 15-20 minutes, or until the rice is tender.

Remove from heat and fluff with a fork.

Stir in lime juice and garnish with fresh cilantro before serving.

Enjoy these light, flavorful recipes that will help you stay cool and satisfied all summer long!

WHAT'S NEW

STRAIGHT FROM KASHMIR'S SOUL

HERB HEAVEN is your one-stop destination. There is nothing quite like the saffron strands from Kashmir—deep red in color, beautifully aromatic, and rich in taste. Bringing to you the finest quality saffron, sourced directly from the renowned saffron fields of Pampore, Kashmir.



LAVIE LUXE FENNY25 SMALL BOX SLING BAG

Add a bold twist to your everyday style with a bold crossbody bag, where function meets fashion. This distinctive boxy bag is compact yet surprisingly spacious, easily fitting all your daily essentials. Its sleek design and well-crafted inner lining ensure durability and effortless accessibility. Made from premium materials, it's perfect for on-the-go styling. Whether paired with a mini-dress or casual jeans, it adds a touch of personality to any outfit. Key features include two well-organized compartments, an easy-to-carry structure, and ample space for your essentials.



INR 3799/-

CURL CARE'S 3-STEP CURL ROUTINE

Say hello to your best curls ever with Curl Care's 3-Step Curl Routine—made by a curly, for curls and waves! Specially formulated for Indian hair and climate, this vegan and cruelty-free trio gently cleanses, deeply hydrates, and defines curls without sulfates, silicones, or parabens. It includes the Untangled Shampoo to cleanse without stripping, Hydrating Deep Conditioner to moisturize and strengthen, and Define & Shine Curl Cream for all-day bounce and frizz control. Perfect for two washes a week, it transforms dull, dry curls into soft, defined spirals naturally.

INR 1399/-



MAC COSMETICS STROBE BEAM LIQUID BLUSH

Cheeks are having a major moment...and everyone wants to go for the glow. Strobe Beam Liquid Blush puts you in control of the intensity so you can lean in with a cheeky pop of iridescent colour or go bold with layers for a rush of flush. With pigments that bend light for lit-from-within multidimensional luminosity, Strobe Beam Liquid Blush can be used to sculpt, highlight and underpaint any look. Inspired by sunrises and sunsets, each universally flattering shade gives cheeks an ethereal radiance for a "great lighting" effect from day to night.



INR 2900

EPRES HEALTHY HAIR 3-STEP SYSTEM STARTER KIT

This kit is a one-step spray that actively repairs broken disulfide bonds to restore hair's structure in just 10 minutes. One can cleanse with Healthy Hair Shampoo, which protects against damage as you wash, leaving hair cleaner, lighter, and shinier. Then condition with a Healthy Hair Conditioner, which instantly smooths, detangles, and leaves hair quicker to dry with a high-shine finish. Ideal for all hair types and textures, these quat-free formulas deliver high-performance care for stronger, shinier, healthier hair.

price range of starts from INR 1999

STAY COOL THIS SUMMER

Wacoal India unveils its Spring/Summer 2025 Cool Comfort Collection, crafted with revolutionary Cool Touch fabric that lowers body temperature by 2-3°C for a refreshing feel. Designed for hot weather, it features breathable perforated cups, rice-knit fabric, and serene pastel hues. Choose from three stylish bra styles—padded wired, lacy padded non-wired, and padded non-wired—with coordinating panties.

HOROSCOPE



ARIES

Siblings support you, a project gets approved, and your charm, creativity, and ambition shine. Embrace personal growth, health, and success while seeking balance, rest, and joy in challenges.



TAURUS

You'll win appreciation at work, manage financial stress, and connect with family. While craving seclusion, your loyalty and emotional depth strengthen bonds. Embrace change, new ideas and self-care.



GEMINI

Joy and fresh ideas uplift you. Support from peers and loved ones brings success. Travel and new connections boost growth. Separation brings confidence. Your charm, intellect and goodwill shine brightly.



CANCER

Frustration may arise, but resilience lifts you. Support others, stay focused and define goals. Balance emotions, health and ambition. A new contract brings career stability as you reconnect with memories.



LEO

Stay focused despite missed chances and emotional distance. Your drive and insight fuel success. Embrace unexpected love, reflect on family ties and fight setbacks. Balance humility, and ambition wisely.



VRIGO

Joy, introspection, and creativity uplift you. Your caring nature shines, earning love and trust. Support flows in, success follows effort and new experiences build confidence. Romance and fruitful trips await.



LIBRA

Your talent and loyalty win admiration, though delays may hinder progress. Balance ambition with family time. Emotional strength and smart planning help overcome setbacks and bring success in life.



SCORPIO

Your supportive nature benefits all while balancing love, work and self-growth tests you. Emotions may challenge health, but creativity revives you. Embrace recognition and self-discovery amid seclusion.



SAGITTARIUS

Your past efforts begin to pay off. Stay calm amidst all challenges. Romance, support, and clarity uplift you. Trust your intuition, avoid negativity, and embrace rewards through thoughtful actions.



CAPRICORN

New connections spark mental joy but avoid being overly critical. A job change looks promising. Emotional balance and support revive relationships. Recognition and unexpected help fuel your success.



AQUARIUS

Joy, introspection and kindness bring growth, despite feelings of restlessness or criticism. A new relationship offers stability, and a new job brings change. Embrace decisions and overcome doubts.



PISCES

Stay calm in challenging situations. Communicate openly with loved ones and spend time with your children. Trust your philosophy, avoid health risks, and guide others. Proceed thoughtfully with new ideas.

SHILPA RAO: I DON'T SEE EXPECTATIONS AS PRESSURE— ONLY THE NEED TO BE HONEST

In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, celebrated singer **Shilpa Rao** delves deep into the emotional landscape of her new track *Khudaya Ishq* from the film *Abir Gulal*. Known for her soul-stirring vocals and poetic sensibility, she opens up about surrendering to love, singing with vulnerability, and trusting the music to guide her. Rao also reflects on the legacy of honest music, the invisible role of pain in art, and how staying emotionally true is the key to timeless resonance

TEJAL SINHA
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Some voices are heard. Shilpa Rao's is felt. It doesn't merely glide over a melody—it pierces through the noise of the world, anchors itself in your soul, and stays long after the music ends. With *Khudaya Ishq*, her latest track from the evocative film *Abir Gulal*, Shilpa doesn't just sing about love—she dissolves into it. It's not the flutter of first crushes or the fireworks of infatuation—it's love in its rawest, most sacred form: aching, grown, surrendered. The kind that leaves you breathless, not because it's perfect, but because it's true. In this deeply personal reflection, Shilpa opens up about creating from a place of emotional honesty, why heartbreak often holds the key to her most haunting per-



It's always interesting to sing a romantic song because even in love, there are so many different shades and emotions you can show. With every new romantic track, we explore a new phase of love

formances, and how music—when it's real—has the power to become a prayer.

In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, the celebrated singer opens up about her newest track *Khudaya Ishq*, how she taps into emotions while recording, and what makes her music timelessly relevant.

Reflecting on her journey through romantic music, Shilpa shares, "It's always interesting to sing a romantic song because even in love, there are so many different shades and emotions you can show. With every new romantic track, we explore a new phase of love." She describes *Khudaya Ishq* as a song that

stands apart—not young or playful, but deeply mature. "But love is still love," she says, "You are fully involved with the other person. That's what this song is about." *Khudaya Ishq* has an almost prayer-like quality to it, one that evokes longing and surrender. For Shilpa, such a song is deeply personal. "The lyrics and the composition inspire you, and your experiences of love come into play too," she explains. "Being in love is a blessing, and when you draw from your emotions while singing, it feels like you're reliving those moments."

She adds that she hopes everyone, in their own way, gets to experience a love that mirrors the soul of this song.

When asked whether pain helps bring out the best in a singer, Shilpa turns to the core emotion of the track—love. "The strongest feeling in this track was the emotion of falling in love. And when that happens, you don't hold back—you just go all in," she shares. That's exactly what she did while recording *Khudaya Ishq*: "I didn't let doubts or complicated thoughts come in; I just sang it with pure love." The song's lyrical theme revolves around surrender in love, something Shilpa

believes music helps us confront. "That's the power of art," she affirms. "When you're feeling something deeply but don't know how to express it, art gives you the words and the space to let it out. *Khudaya Ishq* helps people express that kind of love."

Her first emotional response upon hearing the composition confirmed this instinctive connection. "Occasionally, it's rare to find lyrics and music that blend so well together. I fell in love with the song the first time I heard it—and that's the feeling I carried while singing it."

On capturing the ache and longing that defines *Khudaya Ishq*, Shilpa kept her approach simple and organic. "The only thing I did was stay fully focused. No overthinking, no fear—just love."

She also touches upon the haunting Sufi undertone that subtly emerges through the track. Rather than planning it consciously, she allowed herself to surrender to the flow. "We don't really plan or compartmentalise while singing. It's best to just feel the moment and go with the flow. Some parts were more rhythmic, and I simply followed what felt natural without overthinking it."

Though the film *Abir Gulal* is visually rich and emotionally layered, Shilpa reveals she wasn't aware of the film's involvement when she initially recorded the song. "Usually, we don't know. We only ask about the character's emotion or situation," she says. However, once she learned about the context, it all made perfect sense. "It felt like the song and the film were a perfect match—like they were made for each other."

Despite her massive fan base, especially among younger audiences, Shilpa doesn't feel the pressure of expectations. "I don't think of it as a burden. The goal is always to be honest and sincere in what you sing. If you're true to the song and your feelings, that's what matters most." She believes that honesty in music leads to timelessness. "If you're musically honest, you'll stay relevant—not just today but in the future too. Many great composers and writers made music not just for their time but for generations. Music is a legacy. The ragas, the notes—they've lasted for centuries, and we're just carrying them forward."

Looking ahead, Shilpa shares her excitement for a few upcoming releases. "There are some really cool songs coming up for *Jewel Thief*. I hope people enjoy that song too. I also have a few indie collaborations releasing this year. I'm excited to share them one by one."



TRENDING

PERSON

POPE FRANCIS



Pope Francis, the 266th pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, has passed away, leaving behind a legacy of compassion, humility, and reform. Known for his progressive views and deep concern for the marginalized, his death marks the end of a transformative papacy that resonated far beyond the Vatican.

VIDEO

KASHMIRI MAN CARRYING INJURED TOURIST

In a powerful act of humanity, a Kashmiri man is seen carrying an injured tourist on his back to safety during the Pahalgam terrorist attack. Amid chaos and violence, this moment shines as a reminder that compassion transcends conflict.



MOVIE

GROUND ZERO



Emraan Hashmi's latest release, *Ground Zero*, has been met with a positive reception from audiences, who are praising his intense performance and the gripping storyline. Fans are flocking to theaters, with many highlighting the film's engaging narrative and Hashmi's compelling portrayal of his character.

SONG

CHOR BAZARI PHIR SE



The makers of the upcoming film *Bhool Chuk Maaf* have dropped their second musical offering—*Chori Bazar Ki Murgi*, and it's already creating waves across digital platforms. Showcasing the sizzling chemistry between Rajkumar Rao and Wamiqa Gabbi, the song teases the vibrant romance between their characters.

PICTURE

SKETCHES OF ATTACKERS RELEASED



Security agencies have released sketches of the three terrorists involved in the Pahalgam attack, following a thorough investigation. The sketches are based on eyewitness accounts and are part of ongoing efforts to apprehend the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

HOT WEATHER, COOL PARENTING

Ensure a safe summer for your child

During the summer season, children's health requires extra attention due to the rising temperatures, increased exposure to the sun, and a heightened risk of dehydration. Young children are especially vulnerable to the heat, as their bodies are still developing and can struggle to regulate temperature efficiently. Ensuring they remain hydrated, eat the right foods, wear appropriate clothing, and get adequate rest is essential for keeping them safe and comfortable. Encourage children to drink water frequently, even if they don't feel thirsty, and limit outdoor activities during peak heat hours.

One of the most crucial aspects of summer care is ensuring that children remain properly hydrated. With the heat and active play, children can lose fluids quickly through sweat, putting them at risk of dehydration. Studies show that over 50% of children do not consume enough water daily, which can impact their energy levels and overall health. Water is the most important drink for staying hydrated, but it's equally important to encourage children to consume other hydrating liquids like coconut water, lemonade, or even buttermilk. These drinks help replenish lost electrolytes, essential for proper body function during hot days. Provide a water bottle when children go outside and encourage them to take small sips frequently to stay hydrated. During outdoor activities instruct children to take 10 gulps of water after every half an hour.

In terms of food, the summer season calls for a diet that helps cool the body, provides energy, and replenishes lost nutrients. Fresh,



hydrating fruits like watermelon, cucumbers, oranges, and strawberries are not only refreshing but also packed with vitamins and minerals that help maintain healthy skin and immune function. These fruits also provide a significant amount of water, aiding in hydration. Light and easily digestible meals such as soups, salads, and smoothies are perfect for hot days as they are gentle on the stomach and help prevent the digestive system from becoming sluggish. Cooling foods such as yogurt, rich in probiotics, promote gut health and boost immunity, while leafy vegetables like lettuce and spinach add hydration and fiber. Avoid spicy, oily, or fried foods as they can increase body heat and cause discomfort.

Clothing plays a crucial role in protecting children from the intense heat of summer. Loose-fitting, lightweight clothing made from natural fabrics like cotton allows the skin to breathe and helps prevent overheating. Cotton

absorbs sweat efficiently, making it an ideal summer fabric. Light-colored clothes reflect sunlight and keep the body cooler, whereas darker colors tend to absorb heat. Protective accessories such as hats, sunglasses, and

light scarves add further protection. A wide-brimmed hat shields the face and neck from harmful UV rays, while sunglasses protect delicate eyes from the sun's glare and UV damage. Sunscreen should be applied generously to exposed skin, especially when children are outdoors, to prevent sunburns and long-term skin damage. Dress children in breathable cotton outfits, apply sunscreen 30 minutes before sun exposure and reapply every 4 hours, and ensure they wear hats when outdoors.

Proper rest is also essential during the summer, as heat can make children feel more tired and lethargic than usual. Adequate sleep and daytime naps help children maintain energy levels and avoid heat exhaustion. Ensure they sleep in a cool, well-ventilated environment, and consider using fans or air conditioning to maintain comfort. Encourage children to rest during the hottest part of the day and avoid excessive physical exertion.

Outdoor play is vital for a child's development, but with the summer heat, it's important to strike a balance. Activities such as swimming, playing in shaded areas, or enjoying water-based games are excellent ways to help children stay active and cool simultaneously. In some cases, it might be advisable to take breaks indoors in a cool space to prevent overexposure to heat. Plan outdoor playtimes early in the morning or late in the evening when temperatures are lower. By maintaining these essential care practices, parents can help ensure their children stay safe, healthy, and comfortable throughout the summer months. A little extra effort in hydration, food, clothing, and rest goes a long way in making summer enjoyable while keeping children protected from its extreme effects.

ESSENTIAL SUMMER CARE TIPS FOR KIDS

- Ensure children drink water and rehydrating liquids at frequent intervals.
- Include hydrating fruits like watermelon, cucumber, and oranges in their diet
- Serve light and easily digestible meals like soups, salads, and yogurt
- Dress children in lightweight, breathable cotton clothes and light colors
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 30 or above) and use hats or sunglasses for protection
- Avoid direct sun exposure between 10 AM and 4 PM
- Provide a cool, ventilated sleeping environment for quality rest
- Encourage indoor or shaded outdoor activities to prevent heat-related illnesses

(The author, Dr. Preeti Sharma, is a Senior Consultant Paediatrician, at Ankura Hospital for Women and Children.)



In the vast and vibrant landscape of Indian cinema, women music directors have been a rare presence. In the South Indian film industry, that rarity narrows even further—there has been only one iconic name: **MM Srilekha**. A true trailblazer, Srilekha made history by becoming a music director at the astonishingly young age of 12, breaking barriers in a space long dominated by men. Born into a family steeped in musical and cinematic brilliance—she is the sister of acclaimed filmmaker **SS Rajamouli** and legendary composer **MM Keeravani**—Srilekha carved her own path with remarkable grit and talent. Over the years, she has composed music for more than 75 films and lent her voice as a playback singer, winning hearts with her versatility and soulful compositions. Celebrated as one of the finest music composers in Indian cinema, Srilekha's journey is not just inspiring—it's a testament to passion, perseverance, and the power of paving the way for future generations of women in music. *The Pioneer's Suresh Kavirayani* in an exclusive chat with the seasoned musical maestro, takes you through a closer look at the visionary, who changed the tune of South Indian cinema.



ANNAYYA'S ASSISTANT MUSIC DIRECTOR

At the same time, I was fascinated by the cars that came to pick up my brother for his music recordings. I once told my father, "I want a car to come for me too." He replied, "If you give good tunes and become a music director, then your car will also wait outside one day." Motivated by my family and uncle's support, my brother Keeravani eventually made me his assistant music director. I got to work on iconic films like Allari Mogudu, Allari Priyudu, Gharana Mogudu, and Kshanam Kshanam under his guidance. People began to recognize that I wasn't just passionate about music—I was serious about making it my life.



COMPOSING FOR THE MASTER BLASTER

In 2014, I had the honor of composing the theme song for the Kerala Blasters football team, which was owned by cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar. Being a huge fan of his, it was a dream come true. Sachin was incredibly humble and down to earth. I'll never forget the moment he spoke about me on the opening day in Kerala, saying that just as he achieved 100 centuries early in life, he wished I would complete 100 films as a music director. As a composer, this was one of the most cherished moments of my life, and it still remains unforgettable.

DEBUT IN TAMIL WITH THALAPATHY VIJAY

My uncle Vijayendra Prasad once went to narrate a story to actor Vijay, and I accompanied him. At that time, Vijay's father, SA Chandrasekhar, was preparing to launch him as a lead actor. The film was titled 'Naalaiya Theerpu', and I was brought on board as the music director. That marked my debut in Tamil cinema with Vijay's first film. From there, my career took off and I stayed busy with multiple projects.



MM SRILEKHA, WHO DIDN'T JUST SCORE FILMS—SHE SCORED HISTORY



CHASING SPB AT AGE OF 5

I was born in a village called Amareshwara Camp, near Raichur, in Karnataka. There is no medical center in that village, so I was born at home. I don't know how it came to me, but I was drawn to music when I was just five years old. One day, after I watched Sankarabharanam, I felt a strong desire to meet SP Balasubrahmanyam to learn music. I asked my parents to take



me to SPB sir for music lessons. They said "okay," but never actually took me. I must have been five or six years old at the time. Determined, I decided to pack my bag and leave the house. I managed to catch a lorry and told the driver that I wanted to go to Chennai, to meet SPB sir. The driver took me along for a few hours and then, concerned, brought me back home. He handed me over to my parents and warned them, "Keep an eye on her—otherwise, she will leave again."

ANNAYYA'S WISE WORDS

At that time, my brother Keeravani was working with music director Chakravarthi and was quite busy. Cars from various production houses would often come to our home to pick him up for recordings. Since I wasn't going to school, my brother began taking me along with him to music sessions. I would silently observe how he worked on compositions and the kinds of discussions that happened in the studio. He always told me one important thing: "Don't copy from anyone. Do it on your own." I was deeply fond of Ilayaraja's music, and I used to play his tunes at home on the harmonium. But my brother would gently remind me — never to imitate, but to create something original.

12-YEAR-OLD WHO IMPRESSED A LEGEND

When I was nearly 12 years old, my uncle, Vijayendra Prasad, went to narrate a story to the legendary director Dasari Narayana Rao. I accompanied him that day. Unlike most girls who would carry dolls at that age, I took my keyboard player with me. Dasari garu noticed this and asked my uncle about me. My uncle replied, "She is my brother's daughter." Dasari garu then turned to me and asked, "What are you studying?" I told him about myself and my interest in music. Playfully, he asked me to compose a tune — which I did, right there on the spot. He was stunned and went into his house. I assumed he was impressed and had gone in to get me a chocolate. But to my surprise, he returned with a cheque for Rs 25,000 and said, "You are the music director for my film Nannagaru, and tomorrow, I will send a car for you." I couldn't believe it. That night, I didn't sleep at all. I remember asking my brother and others how many chocolates and outfits I could buy with Rs 25,000!



MY FIRST FILM RECORDING

The next day, I was thrilled — especially because I too had a car waiting for me like my brother. I went to the recording studio, where Dasari garu's assistant and associate directors, other technicians, and film personalities were already present. Dasari garu narrated a situation from the story — it was for a duet song. He mentioned he would return in the evening, but I requested him to stay for just ten minutes. Within that time, I gave him the tune. He then asked me to compose the charanam (the secondary section of the song), which I completed in another ten minutes. Gangadhara Sastry and Padmapriya rendered the song, both making their debut as playback singers through it. On the same day, the muhurat (auspicious launch) of the film and the recording took place. Many industry stalwarts, including Chiranjeevi and Mohan Babu, attended the event. The film was released, and the songs became a super hit. That's how my debut film happened. Dasari garu was so impressed that he gave me a second opportunity as well — he roped me in for his film Kondapalli Rathaiah, which was produced by another legendary figure, Rama Naidu.

REJECTED BY MY IDOL

MM Keeravani and SS Rajamouli are my brothers, and though we are technically cousins, we all grew up as part of a joint family. Keeravani annayya used to leave his harmonium free on Saturdays and Sundays, so I would take it and play by myself on those two days. During that time, I constantly asked my family members to take me to meet SP Balasubrahmanyam (SPB) sir, as I wanted to sing and learn music from him. One day, they finally took me to SPB sir and told him about my passion for music and my dream to sing. But he immediately rejected me. He told them that I was not fit for singing because my voice wasn't good. After hearing this, my family members asked me to drop the idea of becoming a singer.



MUSICAL JOURNEY WITH RAJAMOULI

My brothers have always been great supporters of my music journey, and I share a special bond with them. I worked with Rajamouli annayya for the serial 'Santhi Nivasam', where we discussed various ideas, including background music (BGM). At that time, CDs were popular, and he would give me new ones to explore. These exchanges shaped my understanding of sound and storytelling through music. Keeravani anna was happy with my progress and praised me. I even sang many songs for his compositions. Interestingly, my first playback singing opportunity came through the film 'Little Soldiers', for which Sri was the music director.

SLOKAS PLANTED THE SEEDS OF MUSIC

When I was eight years old, my uncle noticed my deep interest in music. Seeing my passion, he asked me to memorize Soundaryalahari, the sacred verses written by Adi Shankaracharya. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but since my father encouraged it, I memorized all hundred slokas. Only later did I realize the spiritual depth and power these verses held — and perhaps, it's because of their blessings that I stand today as a music composer.

FLOP THAT LED TO 13 FILMS

As I mentioned earlier, Dasari garu brought me on as the music director for his film Kondapalli Rathaiah. While the songs were appreciated, the film unfortunately turned out to be a flop at the box office. However, Rama Naidu, the producer of the film, recognized my potential and offered me his next project — Taj Mahal. That film marked a turning point in my career. After that, I never looked back. I went on to work with Rama Naidu on 13 films, a journey filled with learning, growth, and memorable music.

SINGING TO THE GODDESS WITH A TOY KEYBOARD

My uncle also introduced me to a few ragas and I began singing them in front of the Goddess. They gave me a small keyboard, and every two hours, I would sit and sing devotional songs. That became my routine. Slowly, I started catching the nuances of tunes and melodies. Whenever my brother Keeravani visited home, I would share the tunes I'd come up with. He used to say, "If you get a really nice tune, I'll buy you an ice cream." That was all the motivation I needed.



DASARI GARU DEFENDED MY MUSIC

When I worked with Dasari garu, after composing four or five songs, some rumors began to spread about my music. People claimed that the songs were actually composed by my brother, MM Keeravani, and that my name was just being used. Even Dasari garu heard about these rumors. To give a fitting reply, he decided to address the issue directly. He called a press conference in Vijayawada, inviting the media and holding a live performance to prove the truth. During the event, he narrated a song situation and asked me to compose the tune on the spot, right in front of everyone. I did it then and there, and later delivered the complete song. Dasari garu stood firmly by my side and told the gathered media, "She is very talented. Don't spread such baseless rumors again." He strictly warned everyone about making false claims and gave me his full support and encouragement. That moment meant the world to me.

FROM REJECTION TO HIT DUET: MY REDEMPTION WITH SPB

As I mentioned earlier, SPB sir had initially rejected me as a playback singer because of my voice. However, I knew music director Koti garu well and requested him for a chance to sing. He gave me an opportunity for the film 'Ayanaki Iddaru', directed by EVV Satyanarayana. SPB sir was also singing in the same project. When he saw me at the studio, he asked, "What are you doing here?" I replied, "To sing a song." He immediately told Koti that I wasn't a good singer. But Koti insisted he listen to me. I completed my portion first. SPB sir heard it and, to my surprise, complimented me, saying: "Kaki kokila eppudu ayindi" (The crow has become the cuckoo). Our duet 'Andalamma Andaalu' became a huge hit, and EVV sir even asked me to sing another song for the same film.

