

weekend

WEEKEND

metro PLUS THE HINDU



BATTLES FOR THE SCREEN

Huma Qureshi on female-led stories, working with Rajinikanth, and more **P6**



Hello,

Amarjot Kaur

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Enveloped in the warm embrace of a dupatta, suit-clad expat Indre S navigates the pre-Deepavali nip in the air and Chandigarh's social scene with equal ease at a festive, Indian-attire-themed kitty party early October. For her, this is yet another opportunity to study the diverse, colourful weaves of India's socio-cultural fabric. It has been two years since she became a member of this kitty party group comprising 10 women, all from her neighbourhood and between the ages of 35 and 60. "Initially, I wondered if kitty party had anything to do with the 'Hello, Kitty' Kawaii cult! Now that I am well-adjusted in this group, I have come to understand kitty parties as informal social groups where norms can vary, and long-lasting female friendships can be fostered and, a foreigner like me can learn a lot about India and its people," says Indre, a 43-year-old Lithuanian homemaker married in India for over 10 years.

She says that her kitty group does not follow the standard protocol – that of paying a nominal subscription fee. "The idea," she informs, "is to meet once a month over lunch, play games like tambola, share different experiences (for example, recent trips) and talk about everything under the sun, from new restaurants and shops in town to politics."

Ideally, a kitty party is an informal savings club that traces its roots to North India. Believed to have originated in the early 1950s, soon after the Partition, kitty parties became a way of life for women who wanted to step out of their homes, socialise with other women, and make money while they were at it.

Typically, all members of the kitty are expected to shell out a certain sum of money as a subscription fee. By a draw of lots, one of the members is chosen at every kitty party to whom all members pay the next kitty's fee and in turn the chosen member hosts them for lunch or dinner.

From Delhi, 53-year-old Simmi

kitty!

Beyond the unsparing gaze that reduces kitty parties to rumour mills, they serve as a fiercely ingenuous mechanism of financial agency and emotional support for many women

Chhabra says that she has been part of Delhi's kitty party circuit for 23 years and is associated with two kitty groups at present. As a make-up artiste and aesthetician, she believes kitty parties have been fertile ground for most businesspersons like her to push their brands. "I have one kitty group comprising all female entrepreneurs, which I have been part of since 2008. The other group consists of homemakers. In the world of advertising, word of mouth is considered to be most effective and that is exactly how a brand's reputation travels in social circles; kitty party groups act as catalysts there. Not only do I get to associate with other entrepreneurs, but I also get to meet my potential clients. Everyone supports everyone in the group," she smiles.

When I narrate this story to Sakshi, who owns bridal showrooms and is a pet mom, in Chandigarh, she laughs. "At our kitty, we all chip in at dinner and the chosen host gets to keep the lump sum. Kitty allows women to spend money according to their wish – be it on luxury bags, fixed deposits, jewellery, home, or a gift. This is our money; so, we have financial agency and there's a certain level of satisfaction."

Unlike the scene in *Gullak*, kitty parties have outgrown the at-home lunches and are now expanding to restaurants and upscale cafes. "The idea is to have a good time, hassle-free, without the tension of cooking. The 1990s trend, when parties

her husband offers to cook, clean and entertain the guests. Her sons chip in too. Once the party is over, the men of the house contemplate the fate of the lump sum. Just then, the doorbell rings. The delivery man brings home a mixer-grinder, which Shanti, who wanted an upgrade from the *sil-batta* because of her aching joints, had ordered. When the men in the house question her shopping, she asserts her freedom, her financial agency over the money she "earned" at the committee.

When I narrate this story to Sakshi, who owns bridal showrooms and is a pet mom, in Chandigarh, she laughs. "At our kitty, we all chip in at dinner and the chosen host gets to keep the lump sum. Kitty allows women to spend money according to their wish – be it on luxury bags, fixed deposits, jewellery, home, or a gift. This is our money; so, we have financial agency



The oldest group I am part of is 35 years old and we grew up together, as humans, mothers... So, there's a lot of history and we can count on each other

WANITHA ASHOK



Kitty allows women to spend money according to their wish – be it on luxury bags, fixed deposits, jewellery, home, or a gift. This is our money; so, we have financial agency

AMARJOT KAUR

years of saving all our lump sum, my kitty members put that money into travelling to all the *dhaams* in the country," says Chandigarh-based Shobha Chhabra, 68. She, with her kitty members, is now gunning for a once-a-year travel goal. "We all pitch in ₹5,000 every month, so the idea is to save enough for a trip to one of the temples in the hills next year," she says.

For Shobha, who lost her husband over a decade ago, kitty parties are also about emotional health and connecting with women of different ages. "I live with my daughter, who runs her own business, and I don't want to rest my emotional health entirely on her. So, I have my set of friends. Tomorrow when she is married, I will have my friends to share the void of her absence with," she hopes.

Like Shobha, Wanitha Ashok, 58, fitness professional, motivational speaker and columnist, based in Bengaluru, too feels the need to be part of kitty parties to socialise; for mental health and building support systems. She has been part of the city's kitty party circuit for over 35 years.

"I am in two ladies kitty groups; one has 35 members and the other has 10. I am part of two couple kitties too, with my husband, and that has some 30-50 members. The oldest group I am part of is 35 years old and we grew up together, as humans, mothers... So, there's a lot of history and we can count on each other," she says.

were hosted at homes, is gone now. Also, a lot of men have started to join for couple kitties," says Simmi.

Kitty parties continue to reinvent with the changing tides of time. Their functionality swings between serving financial safety and fostering strong bonds. A lot of it is also to do with travelling together. "In 2023, after five

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pick of the week



Sonic experience

Step into a sonic time warp as Joel Sakkar aka Sakré, brings his genre-bending beats to Chennai. Known for fusing retro South Indian cinema music with lo-fi and experimental hip-hop, the Bengaluru-based producer crafts soundscapes that blur eras and emotions. Expect spontaneous grooves, cinematic textures, and plenty of surprises. At Vinyl & Brew, TTK Road, on November 14, from 6.30pm onwards. Tickets on [fanpit.live](#)



Find your tribe

Some evenings are not just about performances — they are about belonging. Affections: An Evening of Queer Life, hosted by Sunshine House in collaboration with Backyard Adyar, celebrates friendship, identity, and love through an open mic of poetry, storytelling, and music. Join in on November 9, from 3.30pm to 7pm at Backyard Adyar. Entry ₹250. Age 18 and above, tickets at [allevents.in](#). For more info visit [thebackyardclan](#) on Instagram.



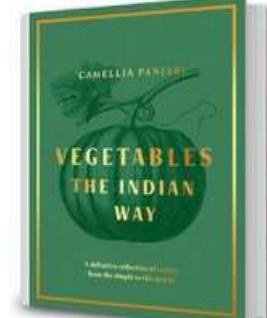
Visit Malaysia

Who needs a passport when your plate can take you to Malaysia? This November, Asia Kitchen hosts the Malaysian Food Festival — a month-long feast featuring nasi lemak, mee goreng mamak, char kueh teow, and more. The menu is curated in collaboration with the Malaysian Tourism Board and Chef Rajesh Khanna. Till November 30, at Asia Kitchen by Mainland China, Somerset Greenways, MRC Nagar. Price for two, ₹2500. Call 8293729372 for reservations.



Jazz up

Jazz gets a passport stamp this November as the East Coast Jazz Movement returns for its second session — a global symphony where modern jazz meets Indian classical, Latin American, and contemporary beats. It features artistes Gaby Echevarria, Moa Guevara, Maarten Visser, Manukrishnan, and Aravind Murali. On November 22, from 7.30pm onwards at the Spotted Deer, The Palomar. Tickets on [fanpit.live](#).



Rooted in vegetables

Camellia Panjabi's Vegetables: The Indian Way celebrates India's rich vegetarian heritage with 120 recipes



Camellia Panjabi has spent the last 25 years thinking about creating a book dedicated to the often ignored ingredient on most menus: the humble vegetable. She has finally brought this thought to fruition with *Vegetables: The Indian Way* (published by Penguin Random House), a cookbook that champions 120 recipes from across the country. "Most people, even if they are non-vegetarian, have most part of their meals vegetarian, whether vegetables, dals, or grains. But not enough attention has been given to make them more attractive," says the restaurateur and author of the bestselling *50 Great Curries of India*.

A Cambridge Economics graduate, Camellia went on to establish Britain's oldest Indian restaurant, Veeraswamy, and others such as Bombay Brasserie, Chutney Mary, Amaya and Masala Zone, also in the UK. "More attention has been paid to progressing non-vegetarian items in terms of novelty and ideas. Most restaurants in the world feature vegetables at the end of a menu, under a section called 'sides'. I am also guilty of doing this in my hotel career," confesses the 84-year-old.

How is the book different from other cookbooks on Indian cuisine, and what does it bring to the table for seasoned Indian cooks? "It is different in many respects," she says, "No cookbooks describe the entire range of vegetables, 30 in this case, and none look at the entire

health profile of each vegetable ie nutrition elements, carbohydrate content, fibre content, effect on gut health, and calories." The recipes are categorised by how vegetables grow:

underground ones such as sweet potatoes, turnips, and carrots; underwater ones like lotus stem, and water chestnut; those like broccoli and pumpkin that grow on the ground; gourds and cucumbers that grow on vines and shrubs; and tree-grown variants like drumstick and banana flowers.

Each recipe comes with related information on ingredients, an analysis of eight kinds of cooking oils, covering the entire aspects of dairy and ghee, Indian superfoods, to name a few. "My mother (who was a

doctor) discussed the idea with me about 25 years ago. I found it fascinating because each vegetable attracts different types of nutrition elements based on how it grows."

All the recipes featured in the book have been collected over five decades, and are of dishes she has found "unusual or

excellent". "My job with Taj hotels involved travelling all over India and many parts of the world. I also had the opportunity to watch outstanding housewives, party caterers, chefs, great cooks, and street food sellers," says Camellia, who worked with the Taj Group of Hotels for three decades.

Most recipes were re-tried by professional chefs who work in her London restaurants, especially during the pandemic when they were closed. Camellia

Most recipes were re-tried by professional chefs who work in her London restaurants, especially during the pandemic when they were closed



started off with 250 recipes, and then edited them to the final 120, and a few new feature on her restaurant menus in the UK. She explains how she took a year to write the book. "I did it by hand. I kept rechecking the facts as I was writing about the origins and nutrition of vegetables and the use of different metals to cook and serve food. I wrote it during the pandemic when I went on a short trip to London, but could not return for over a year. There were no other diversions then and I used to spend close to eight hours every day at the desk," says Camellia.

With *Vegetables: The Indian Way*, she wants to bring the "Indian way of cooking so many vegetables into people's daily lives". Camellia says Indian youth think that Indian food is not as "cool" as Japanese or Italian. "It is true that we haven't moved ahead enough in creating and disseminating the possibilities of Indian cuisine, which to me is the greatest cuisine in the world, for its thorough understanding of health, traditional knowledge and variety and complexity of taste. I hope this book will be of help also to food lovers, young aspiring chefs and nutritionists, and fill some gaps in their quest for knowledge," she concludes.

Priced at ₹1,999, the book is available online



(Clockwise from far left) Stills from *Bugonia*; *Diés Iraé*; and *Eden*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

FOMO FIX

When humans haunt harder

There may be ghosts and creatures in many horror stories, but the scariest of them is human

And I could see why. It was confident, assured slow-burn storytelling. The scares never come from characters screaming but from their frozen inability to say a word while watching it unfold. Pranav plays a commitment-phobic player and the story kicks off when a former lover of his dies by suicide. He believes she's haunting him, playing with his hair every night — so he cuts his hair short, as if ghosts are scared of bald pates?

Diés Iraé takes us along with him on a ride to solve the mystery behind her death before the slow-burn horror and jump-scares escalate in his fancy house. The subversion of *Psycho* gives the film some familiar-but-new scares and there's never a dull or



enjoyed in theatres with suppressed chuckles.

Ghost goes psycho
Immediately after *Bugonia*, I caught actor Pranav Mohanlal in *Diés Iraé* (2025) by Rahul Sadasivan in a full house in Andheri — rare in Mumbai.



predictable moment — until the mandatory sequel-setting stretch that literally made me yawn.

The missed opportunity
Finally, the one that had so much potential: a survival thriller based on true events, directed by Ron Howard and featuring Jude Law, Ana de Armas, Sydney Sweeney, Daniel Brühl and Vanessa Kirby. The film is *Eden*, inspired by a true story of European settlers on a remote Galápagos island.

Maybe it was the savage humid setting, and the cast probably could never settle into the extreme conditions in the Galápagos, or it was the mismatch of their diverse ethnicities and varying European accents of spoken English in the period setting. The cast tries hard, the plot is intriguing enough — a bunch of settlers on a remote island try to survive each other as supplies run out — but the tone is uneven all through, the nudity and sex seem like contractual obligations and everything is too literal and on the nose.

I'll leave you with a telling example: "I curse you with my dying breath," a character curses with his dying breath.

I'm horrified indeed, the eye-roll variety.

From the hottest shows to hidden gems, overlooked classics to guilty pleasures, FOMO Fix is a fortnightly compass through the chaos of content.



Culinary confluence

When Mumbai's boldest kitchen takes over Chennai's most elegant table, you know it is more than just dinner. The Raintree, St Mary's Road x Ekaa brings an evening of imagination and flavour, where every ingredient tells a story.

Helmed by Chef Niyati Rao, the exclusive pop-up features an eight-course tasting menu in both vegetarian and non-vegetarian formats, paired with signature cocktails from Dwadash, Ekaa's award-winning bar.

At The Raintree, St Mary's Road, on November 14 and 15, from 7.30pm onwards. Priced ₹5,999 plus taxes. For reservation call 7824000171.

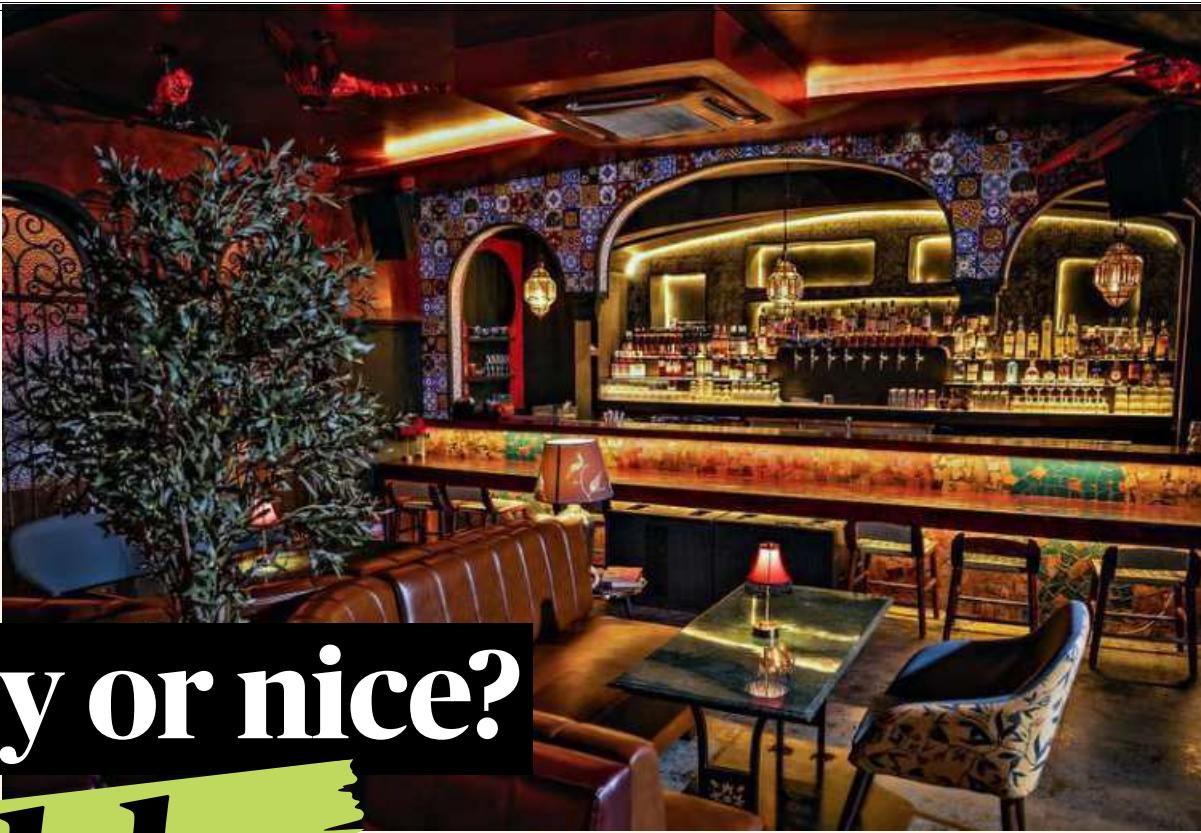


Back to college

There is a certain magic in returning to the place where it all began — the corridors that echo with laughter, the classrooms that shaped dreams, and the friendships that still warm the heart. Stella Maris College invites all Stella Marians to come home for the annual alumnae meet, hosted by the Alumnae Association of Stella Maris College (AASMC). Revived in 1996, the AASMC has been a steadfast bridge between past and present, nurturing connections and supporting students through initiatives like the Career Guidance Cell and the Alumnae Student Support Fund.

On November 15 from 9.30am to 12.30pm in college. The department alumnae meets will be from 10am to 11am in college followed by the annual meet at 11.30am.

With its cheeky games and quirky theme, One Floor Down in Bengaluru has character that may overshadow its innovative cocktails and food



(Clockwise from above) One of the dishes at One Floor Down; the cosy alcove; the Dionysian-themed bar.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

meant for families or kids. The music and menu are as eclectic as the space, no Bollywood music or butter chicken here. Expect Neo-Bistro and modern Indian food such as Sikandari lamb quesadillas with khejur tomato jam, lacy pork in Goan poe with pear chutney, tuna tarte phuchkas with yuzu dill crème fraîche – I enjoy the sushi. Despite the eclectic menu, some dishes are lacklustre.

This aims to be a space where you can take a walk on the wild side. And Pablo is always there making sure everything is under control. He moves from table to table talking to guests. "You can compliment men at other tables, or have a sparkling conversation. If a gentleman wants to buy a lady a drink, he has to route it through Pablo, who then asks the lady in question for her consent and takes it from there," says Pravesh.

He adds that he held numerous brainstorming sessions before setting up the bar. "I spoke to 20 ladies over six months to understand what they feel or want when they step into a bar. Some said they don't feel safe, some want to feel confident and also be complimented, few others said they want the bill to be given to them and not to the man at the table, another group did not want to be stared at when they are dressed up," he says, adding that all these points were taken into consideration while conceptualising One Floor Down.

And how does Pravesh intend to appease the Instagrammers? He smiles, "They just have to capture the experience in their eyes. When we decide to go back to a place we go back for the experience, not for pictures we have taken."

One Floor Down operates Wednesday to Saturday, 5.30pm onwards. There's a cover charge of ₹1,000. Tel: 808230721; Address: 3rd Floor, 90/3, Outer Ring Road, Service Road Balaji Layout, Chandra Layout, Marathahalli, Bengaluru

Naughty or nice?

Pablo decides

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"Good evening, miss! May I have your phone?" says a burly man at the door. We have just been released from the coils of Marathahalli traffic, edging through the bustle of evening commuters into the sudden, conspiratorial hush of a dimly lit reception.

He confiscates my phone, tapes the camera shut and hands it back to me. This is Pablo, the custodian, party starter, secret keeper all rolled into one at One Floor Down by Helen's, Bengaluru's first Dionysian-themed bar. Dionysus is

the Greek god of wine, drama, ecstasy and fertility. And if you want to get in, Pablo is the man you have to impress.

Like all good subversive spaces, there are rules here. To begin with, only those aged 27 and above are allowed entry. Stags are technically not allowed, but you can always try your luck at the door. Photography is forbidden. "Sometimes you don't want to be seen in someone else's video or be identified. It's a safe space where you can reveal your bold, fun side, and where there are no inhibitions," says, Pravesh Pandey, owner of One Floor Down, who also owns Roxie, and Helen's Place. He adds, rather mysteriously, "We wanted to make it a women forward bar where they decide how the evening goes."

Inside, the bar is bathed in intimate red light, making the whole evening seem rather theatrical. Staff in scarlet star-spangled uniforms take orders for cocktails with cheeky names: Hickey, Blindfolded - You Taste Better In The Dark, That Lusty Night, My First Affair - But He Was Married... Put together by Sagar



Sarki, they are spirit forward, and as adventurous as their titles. There are hits and misses.

I try Skinny Dipping (the drink, not the activity; given the tone of this story it was necessary to clarify that) which has rosé, is spicy with gingery and fragrant with rose, basil, curry leaf lillet; and Second Smoke – smooth with a smoky, sweet, and fruity flavour and features mezcal, tequila along with oregano, pineapple, and caramel yoghurt.

Between sips I look up and notice giant dragonflies hanging from the ceiling like art installations, their wings flapping gently, while their bodies emit a soft red glow. My table holds a red lampshade and a placard that reads Curtain one side and Open To Be Entertained on the other. For complete privacy, choose Curtain. But I am feeling adventurous, so I flip the placard. Pablo appears with a chocolate they call LSD (Drug-free obviously, but what it really has is mint and an ingredient I am not allowed to disclose), chased with a sweet, heady cherry liqueur.

Next comes a game of cards. There are two decks: One holds the Nice cards and the other the Naughty ones. "If you complete a dare, you get a drink, and if you don't, you buy me a drink," Pablo laughs. I pick a card from the Naughty deck, and it reads: Crazy Talk. "This means, you have to call or send your ex a voice note and say something naughty," grins Pablo. Do I do it? Well, let's just keep that a secret.

As you have probably figured out by now, One Floor Down is not

the land, its ecology and its crafts. When they lead guests on walks through the village, the connection feels lived-in," Mallika informs me. One afternoon, during a visit to the nearby village, the hotel guide pointed out a century-old tannery still making hand-tooled leather shoes; I also watched artisans fashion lac bangles, their hands moving with the practised grace of generations.

Rather than pushing safaris to Ranthambore or packing the day with activities, I was urged to slow down – to wander the fort's courtyards, linger in its

garden, and return often to stillness.

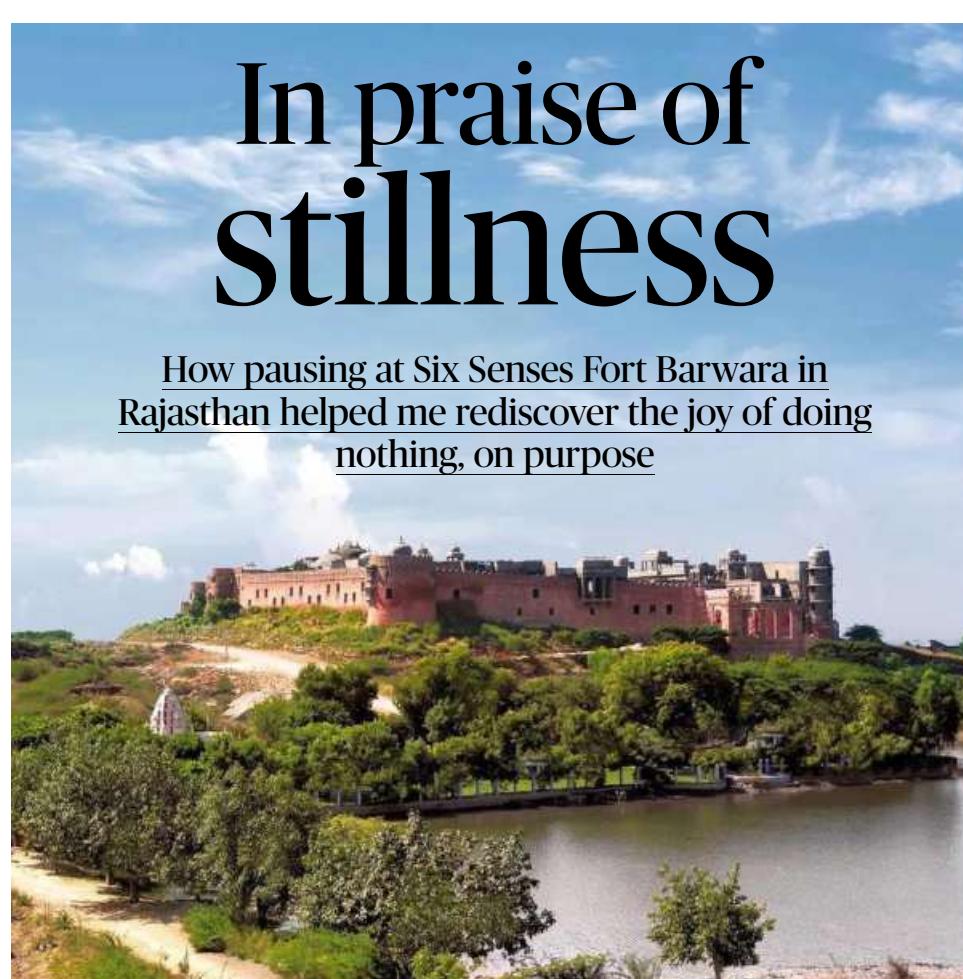
The resort's ethos of mindful luxury has not gone unnoticed. In 2025, Six Senses Fort Barwara was awarded Two MICHELIN Keys, a new distinction recognising hotels that demonstrate exceptional character, service and sustainability.

I left Barwara with the sense that slowness isn't about doing less, it is about doing things with care.

The writer travelled to Six Senses Fort Barwara at the invitation of TealFeel.

In praise of stillness

How pausing at Six Senses Fort Barwara in Rajasthan helped me rediscover the joy of doing nothing, on purpose



simply breathe." In India, TealFeel's itineraries often include visits to craft clusters and local markets – pottery in Rajasthan, block-printing workshops, or textile trails in Tamil Nadu. "The feedback is always amazement – people say, 'I didn't know it was done like this!' We even have a group of women from South Mumbai who travel purely for fabric trails. They've been to Chettinad multiple times, meeting weavers and exploring looms."

The road to discovery

In August, TealFeel crafted a slow-travel itinerary for me to Six Senses Fort Barwara, near Sawai Madhopur in eastern Rajasthan. Housed within a restored 14th-Century fort, Six Senses Fort Barwara is steeped in the quiet rhythms of the region. Around 85% of its ingredients are sourced locally, within a 50-kilometre radius – from farms that grow hardy desert produce such as *kair* (wild berries), *sangri* (bean pods) and *kachri* (wild melon), to nearby gardens filled with root vegetables, edible flowers and herbs in winter.

But what I learned went beyond food. Six Senses operates under a global sustainability mandate, embedded through its Earth Lab programme and Sustainability Fund, which reinvests in conservation and community projects at each property.

"Many of the staff are not originally from Rajasthan but are encouraged to learn about

TravelK (established in 2018 by siblings Karen Mulla, Karl Vazifdar and partner, Mallika Sheth), TealFeel, the conscious travel arm, curates journeys that prioritise depth over distance – from community-run lodges to artist residencies and Nature retreats. The brand encourages travellers to linger, interact with local communities, and travel with a lighter footprint.

TealFeel focusses on unhurried itineraries, slow meals, heritage stays and creative exchanges. "The idea is to turn travel into restoration rather than consumption," says co-founder Mallika. "People may not use the term slow travel, but that's what they want – the freedom to

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The slow life

Salvia is not alone. Many millennials and Gen Z travellers now value presence over itineraries, preferring to feel a place rather than conquer it.

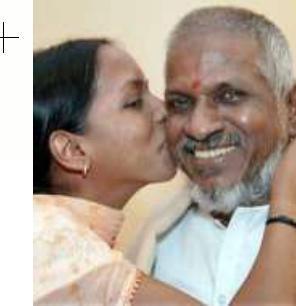
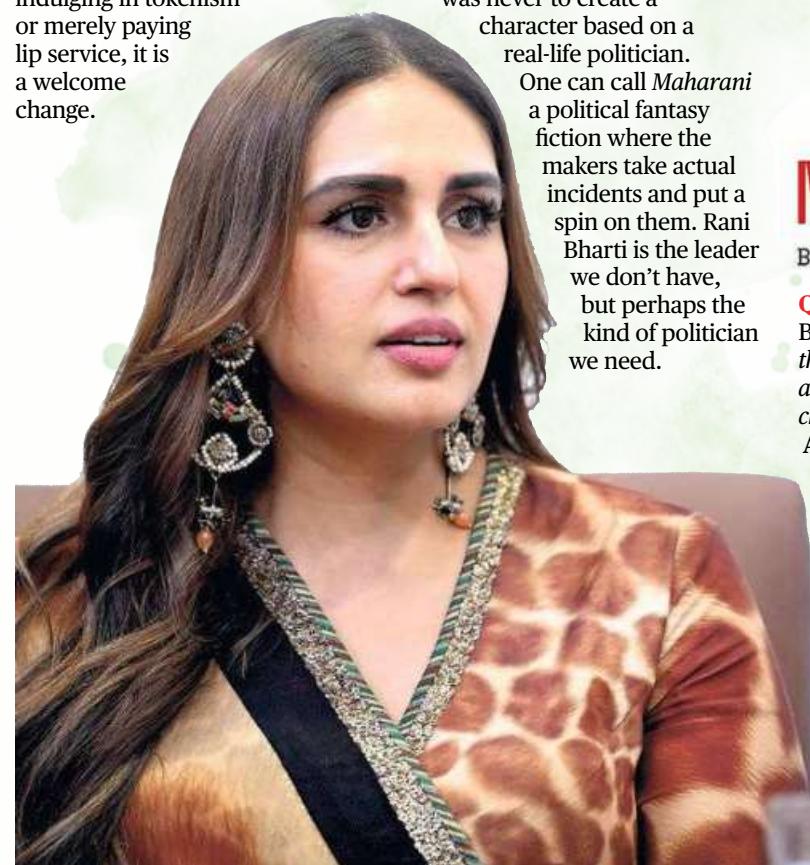
It is this shift that platforms like TealFeel are tapping into. Founded in 2023 as an offshoot of Mumbai-based travel company

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Arare combination of grit and grace, Huma Qureshi is one of the few actors who constantly challenges the patriarchal moulds and conventional tropes that define the Hindi film heroine, both in mainstream and independent cinema. With the fourth season of *Maharani* streaming this week and Bihar going to vote in a keenly contested election, the actor, who plays the Chief Minister of the State in the political drama, speaks her mind on a range of subjects in a freewheeling conversation.

Question: Both in *Maharani* and the Bihar election campaign, women voters are at the centre of politics. What's your take?

Answer: As long as it stems from a real space of actually including women in decision-making, policymaking, and making them real participants rather than indulging in tokenism or merely paying lip service, it is a welcome change.



Music, in memory

Music legend Ilaiyaraaja is all set to organise an all-girls orchestra in memory of his daughter, Bhavatharini. The playback singer passed away on January 26, 2024, in Sri Lanka.

The orchestra has been named Bhavatha Girls Orchestra, and the music maestro has invited samples from aspiring musicians for the event. Those interested, can send their samples, profile and contact details to allgirlsochestra@gmail.com.



Back to the crime scene

The makers of *Delhi Crime* Season 3 have released the trailer of the Netflix show. Starring Shefali Shah and Huma Qureshi, the third part of the hit series is set to premiere on December 13, 2025.

The trailer reveals a chilling network of human trafficking, and at the centre of the storm stands DIG Vartika Chaturvedi (Shefali Shah), who begins connecting the dots between these disappearances and a system fuelled by fear, profit, and silence.

Grit, grace and glory

Actor, writer and producer Huma Qureshi has worn many crowns. But her triumph lies in rewriting the story of what a Hindi film heroine can be

Q: When the series started, the character of Rani Bharti seemed like a reflection of Rabri Devi in *Patna*. By the fourth season, she has evolved into an Indira Gandhi-like figure, headed to Delhi.

A: It is unfortunate that we have very few examples of women in politics. When you play a female politician, you are cast in one of the two moulds. The intention was never to create a character based on a real-life politician.

One can call *Maharani* a political fantasy fiction where the makers take actual incidents and put a spin on them. Rani Bharti is the leader we don't have, but perhaps the kind of politician we need.



MIND
BECAUSE YOU OWN YOURS

Q: From *Gangs of Wasseypur* to *Bayaan*, you tend to play characters that speak up or challenge authority and don't forfeit their agency. Is it by chance or is there a plan to it?

A: That's the Delhi University *chhatri* (student) in me! I would put it down to the time I spent in Gargi College, an all-girl institution, and the way we were raised in my house, as well as outside. There was no separation of work between boys and girls. If I did a play

Huma Qureshi during *The Hindu MIND Series* in New Delhi.
SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

and the lights needed to be fixed, I would not call a male colleague. When I reached the film sets, I found there are certain jobs that men do and some jobs that are assigned to women. I felt that's not fair. Now I find more women working in the camera department. I approach them and tell them, no matter how hard it gets, just keep doing it, because what they are doing is very important. When I find women who congratulate me on being able to speak in front of an authority that was not fair to them, after watching my character, I see it as a victory.

Q: In *Leila*, *Tees*, and *Kaala*, you play characters who are targeted because of their inter-faith relationships. How do you see this expression of hate in films and society?

A: We live in a multicultural country. Even within mainstream religions, there are many sub-sects and beliefs. The way I was raised, I was taught that faith is a matter of personal choice, and I don't need to discuss it or flaunt it. However, for a lot of people, it's a burning issue. If they need to speak about it, I don't feel the need to join them. For example, I'll never do a propaganda film for the simple reason that I would not be able to sleep at night after being part of a film that moves people emotionally to hate another human being. Of course, throughout recorded

history, people have committed many horrible acts, but they have also performed many lovely deeds. If you only focus on the bad, we are actually creating a bigger culture of fear and hostility. So let's correct the focus.

Q: What was it like working with Rajinikanth in *Kaala*?

A: It was like one tick off the bucket list. When Pa Ranjit, a fantastic filmmaker, offered me the part, I jumped in because we had always admired Rajini sir. The experience was very fulfilling. Beyond all the stardom and euphoria lies a straightforward person with simple values who is very easy to talk to. I really enjoyed my conversations and the time I spent with him.

Q: You were supposed to start your career with a Tamil film, isn't it?

A: Yes, I was replaced after being signed for a film with Ajith sir. *Destiny* is such that years later, I got to work with him in *Valimai*. The greatness of Ajit sir is when we met on the sets, he walked up to me and the first thing he said was, 'I am so sorry, I had nothing to do with it.' I didn't expect him to remember it at all.



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Music, in memory

Music legend Ilaiyaraaja is all set to organise an all-girls orchestra in memory of his daughter, Bhavatharini. The playback singer passed away on January 26, 2024, in Sri Lanka.

The orchestra has been named Bhavatha Girls Orchestra, and the music maestro has invited samples from aspiring musicians for the event. Those interested, can send their samples, profile and contact details to allgirlsochestra@gmail.com.

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Malayalam

When horror comes home



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Horror really hits home when it is evoked in the mundane. Only when one encounters it in the unlikeliest of forms would the chill seep slowly, imperceptibly down our spine. In *Dies Irae*, Rahul Sadasivan mines horror out of even a gentle breeze caressing a person's hair, so much so that after the movie, the feeling of wind in the hair somewhat ceases to be exhilarating as it used to be. There is more...fear, passed on to us through something as commonplace as a ray of light or the click sound of a hair clip.

Some of the fear-evoking tropes, including a couple of jump scares, that the filmmaker employs are familiar in the horror genre, but the way he uses them and the atmospherics he conjures up inject new fears. Rohan (Pranav Mohanlal), the scion of an uber-rich family, who feels something is not right within his massive home, is the victim of all those fears. To free himself from the ordeal, he digs all the way to the root of it all.

Unlike Sadasivan's *Bhootakalam*, which operated more in the zone of unseen horrors and even left open the possibility of a rational explanation, *Dies Irae* is more in-your-face. The horror elements here are tangible and even visible. Yet, that does not in any way detract from the film's intended effect. Rather, through intelligent staging and the seamless blend of the sound, visual, editing, and music departments, it delivers some highly satisfying theatrical moments.

One of the memorable sequences arrives shortly before the interval, with a slow buildup of tension, followed by a shift in pace, conveyed through a play of shadows while placing the viewer firmly in the shoes of the terrified protagonist. In such moments, one can sense the presence of a filmmaker, so at home in the horror genre, gleefully cranking up the scare-o-meter. Although not as minimalist as his work in *Bhootakalam* or *Bramayugam*, cinematographer Shehnad Jalal, Sadasivan's trusted lieutenant, uses light and the lack of it in myriad ways to invoke fear.

While the initial parts might give the feeling of a run-of-the-mill horror story, *Dies Irae* soon shifts gears towards a mystery thriller zone. More fireworks are in store in the mystery-unravelling final act, where the screenplay (also by Sadasivan) finds space for an unlikely emotional moment, which fits well. It also leaves the viewer with a deeper subtext to think on when the fears subside. The Latin poem in the title, signifying the Last Judgment, has a feeble connection to the narrative, but all that becomes immaterial considering what the film achieves.

Along with Pranav Mohanlal, the small cast of Gibin Gopinath, Arun Ajikumar, and Jaya Kurup deliver effective performances that convey horror in full measure. Rahul Sadasivan delivers a nightmare of a movie, the kind every horror filmmaker aspires to. *Dies Irae* would certainly rank among the finest horror films the Malayalam industry has ever produced.

Dies Irae is currently running in cinemas

at the movies



SS Rajamouli's grand vision

Condensing the two-part *Baahubali* saga into a 225-minute feature, this re-edited, remastered version feels tailor-made for a grand theatrical celebration

Telugu

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To call this a review required careful thought. Strictly speaking, it is a re-release – marking a decade since *Baahubali: The Beginning* first hit theatres in 2015. But this is no ordinary re-release. After undergoing the required technical upgrades to meet current digital projection standards, the 225-minute-long *Baahubali: The Epic* arrives as a digitally remastered and re-edited film that condenses both parts of the *Baahubali* saga into a whole.

A few indulgent stretches have been trimmed, placing the emphasis on storytelling – SS Rajamouli's greatest strength. In that sense, this new version is an improvement on *Baahubali: The Beginning*, which had whetted audiences' appetite for larger-than-life storytelling but famously ended on a cliffhanger. The question – "Why did Kattappa kill Baahubali?" – sparked a two-year wait and one of Indian cinema's most memorable marketing campaigns.

This time around, Rajamouli acknowledges that anticipation with a touch of humour – a moment best left for audiences to discover in the theatre. Part of the joy of watching a re-release lies in the unrestrained enthusiasm of the viewers, who know every song, dialogue and gesture by heart, joining in as if the film were a live performance. For a phenomenon like *Baahubali*, still vivid in public memory, that energy feels even greater.

At one pivotal moment, when Prabhas as Mahendra Baahubali asks, "Nenu evarni..." ("Who am I?"), an excited fan shouts back, "India's biggest superstar." It's a response that encapsulates not just the popularity *Baahubali* continues to command – but the legacy it has carved into Indian cinema.

Watching the film in Hyderabad, at the iconic Prasads multiplex, is a nostalgic celebration for anyone who remembers

Baahubali: The Epic

Director: SS Rajamouli

Cast: Prabhas, Rana Daggubati, Anushka Shetty, Ramya Krishna, Sathyaraj

Storyline: A young man's discovery of his royal lineage leads him to reclaim his throne and avenge the injustice to his parents.

the frenzy that accompanied the release of the *Baahubali* films.

Set in the fictional kingdom of Mahishmati, at an unspecified time period, this homegrown superhero tale is magnificent in scale yet grounded in emotional storytelling. When Sivagami declares, "Mahendra Baahubali brathakali" ("Mahendra Baahubali must live"), the audience joins in chorus.

For the most part, the re-edit ensures that the narrative flows seamlessly. The only rough patch comes in Rajamouli's voiceover summarising the romance between Avantika (Tannanna Bhatia) and Shivudu, or Mahendra Baahubali (Prabhas), now reduced to a brief montage. The romance was a weak point even in the original, but trimming it is tricky since Avantika plays a crucial role in Shivudu's transformation into Mahendra Baahubali. Thankfully, the rushed voiceover is a minor blip in an otherwise immersive experience. A few songs and sections of the Mahishmati-Kalakeya war have also been shortened or removed.

The joy of rewatching *Baahubali* lies as much in its grandeur as in the smaller moments that build towards it. Take young Shivudu's fascination with the great waterfall and the mountains beyond. Sivagami breathes her last while pointing towards the mighty kingdom above, and the boy is told that ghosts and demons dwell there. After countless failed attempts, he scales the slippery cliffs when the time is right – a metaphor for self-discovery and destiny. The same daring leap reappears later when he devises ingenious methods to storm Mahishmati's fortress for the climactic battle against Bhallaladeva (Rana Daggubati).

Mahendra's knack for using simple, indigenous tools mirrors his father Amarendra Baahubali's (also Prabhas) ingenuity in the war against the Kalakeyas.

The re-edited version also reinforces how larger-than-life action spectacles can still make space for well-written women. Devasena (Anushka Shetty) and Sivagami are central to the drama. Devasena stands tall in her many confrontations with Sivagami and Bhallaladeva, asserting a

woman's right to choose her partner and live with dignity.

The entire segment featuring Devasena and Amarendra retains its original magic, a testament to how effortlessly Anushka Shetty and Prabhas inhabit their characters. Prabhas himself has not quite replicated the same agility and magnetism in his later roles, nor has Anushka found a part that matches Devasena's strength and complexity.

Rana Daggubati's Bhallaladeva is a compelling mix of brute force and quiet yearning – for the throne, and for the woman he could never have. His monologue as he gazes at the long-coveted crown captures both triumph and emptiness. Sathyaraj, as Kattappa – the loyal warrior bound to the throne – delivers a poignant performance in the saga, particularly before he fulfills Sivagami's devastating command.

The appeal of *Baahubali* lies in these quieter moments as much as the larger ones – from the statue unveiling to the coronation. Nothing quite matches the grace of Sivagami silently observing her two sons, recognising which one truly deserves the crown.

The passage of a decade shows in some of the visual effects, particularly in the extended landscapes of Mahishmati. Yet, Sabu Cyril's production design, KK Senthil Kumar's cinematography, and MM Keeravani's rousing, soul-stirring music more than make up for it. The lush greens of the Kuntala kingdom contrast beautifully with Mahishmati's earthy browns, and the swan-shaped ship that soars into the skies with Amarendra and Devasena remains breathtaking even now.

When Devasena watches that same ship glide into Mahishmati's waters with a sense of foreboding, it is impossible not to share her unease.

The prolonged climax does feel slightly overdrawn, especially given the 225-minute runtime of this re-edited version. Yet when the film ends with a note of gratitude from SS Rajamouli, few in the hall move, not before breaking into another round of applause.

Baahubali: The Epic is currently running in cinemas

Vishnu Vishal's dreary psycho thriller collapses from within

Tamil

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In 2018, Vishnu Vishal tasted a career-defining success with *Ratsasan*, the hit psycho-thriller film that was so chic that when he returned with another entry in the genre – *Aaryan*, which hit theatres – he felt the need to make it loud and clear that this is not a *Ratsasan*.

In the case of *Aaryan*, the psycho-thriller is its own *Ratsasan* (re: demon). The film, directed by debutant Praveen K, is an ambitiously written story with a criminally underwhelming screenplay and treatment, along with tacky stretches that test your patience.

Take, for instance, the opening scene that transpires inside a television studio. After a politician cancels his appointment at the last minute, the producers of a popular TV show hosted by acclaimed journalist Nayana (Shraddha Sinathra)



resort to inviting a popular actor who is in the thick of a controversy. In a *Joker*-esque twist, a man in the audience (Selvaraghavan as Azhagar) takes control of the studio and holds everyone hostage with a gun he managed to slip in through the security.

Azhagar declares that six innocent souls will be killed over the next five days, the first of which he murders at the studio. Who is he? What are his demands? How will the cops prevent

these murders? On a conceptual level, this feels like a riveting intro, a feeling that reaches its pinnacle in a twist at the end of the sequence. We will come to the twist in a bit, but the way the sequence is written and staged screams amateur. The digs at sensationalist journalism and the state of stardom that the characters mouth off about do not feel organic, and the staging of the scene lacks the intended urgency. *Aaryan* is one of those films that

collapse from within. Everything rests on that one inventive sleight of hand at the centre in an otherwise run-of-the-mill serial killer story – the twist that seems to have compelled Bollywood perfectionist superstar Aamir Khan to mull over it for hours, according to Vishnu. To be fair, it does sound like an ambitious challenge that very few writers could crack.

However, the effect wanes over time because nothing that follows matches up to that thrill. Arivudai Nambi (Vishnu), the DSP handling the case, investigates the killings, but neither the modus operandi of the killer nor the investigations – which make up a big chunk of the narrative – boast any flair or novelty.

As has been the case with many recent Tamil films, *Aaryan* caves in to the need to become a vessel for didactic social messages – it is, again, a bluff genre filmmakers have long opted for in a bid to secure the bare minimum by appeasing those with a weak emotional quotient. It is certainly a bad time to be an all-good, selfless, noble person, but the way *Aaryan* makes this point is

one for the Hall of Cringe.

In fact, if anything, the very curveball the screenplay mounts so much material on – and haplessly lugs around for the entirety of the runtime – screams for a quirker treatment, which only becomes more apparent in the pockets of dark humour the film forgets to sustain its lenses on.

While one feels compelled to note the eerie environment that inhabits the film – and an intent to make the experience visually and aurally

Aaryan

Director: Praveen K

Cast: Vishnu Vishal, Selvaraghavan, Shraddha Srinath, Maanasa Choudhary

Storyline: A serial-killer threatens to kill six people in the most shocking fashion to achieve a 'perfect crime'. A cat-and-mouse game ensues.

immersive – the many baffling editing lapses and off-putting ideas (such as a trans character portrayed as a woke token) make you care less. Perhaps some material could have been salvaged had at least Vishnu's lead cop gotten a shade or two more – all we get instead is patchily written sentimentality about his divorce.

One feels bad for Vishnu since there just is not enough on paper to make his Nambi feel real, and all he does in much of the film is pout his lips and narrow his eyes.

In one of the most unintentionally hilarious moments in the film, a man tells the killer, who we know seals his fate later, that something "is worth dying for," a phrase that's keenly taken note of. Given all the efforts lead star Vishnu put in for his physical transformation, and the hopes he pinned on the film for years, *Aaryan* wasn't really worth dying for. It certainly isn't a *Ratsasan* – a strawberry to that, oh, sorry, 'raspberry.'

Aaryan is currently running in theatres



Bugonia

Director: Yorgos Lanthimos

Cast: Emma Stone, Jesse Plemons, Aidan Delbis, Stavros Halkias, Alicia Silverstone

Storyline: A conspiracy theorist kidnaps the CEO of a biotech company to rid the world of all its troubles, only to have the somewhat well-laid plot unravel

Snippets



Netflix announces series on IAF's Kargil mission

Streaming platform Netflix on November 2 announced *Operation Safed Sagar*, an upcoming series on the Indian Air Force's pivotal role in the Kargil War. The series was announced at the first-ever Sekhon Indian Air Force Marathon 2025 (SIM-25) in New Delhi.

Created by Abhijeet Singh Parmar and Kushal Srivastava and directed by Oni Sen, the series is headlined by Siddharth, Jimmy Shergill, Abhay Verma, Mihir Ahuja, Taaruk Raina, and Arnav Bhasin, among others.

Netflix India's VP of Content, Monika Shergill, and series head, Tanya Bami, unveiled the first-look teaser to announce the series.

Operation Safed Sagar streams on Netflix in 2026.



First look of Janhvi Kapoor from Ram Charan's film Peddi out

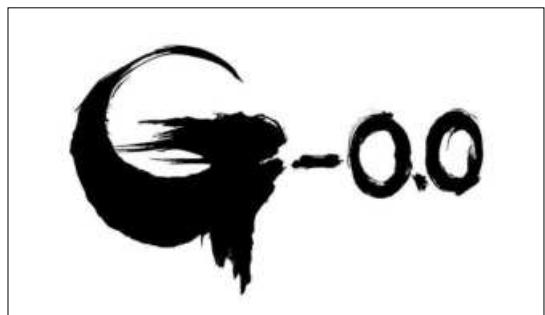
The makers of Telugu superstar Ram Charan's upcoming film *Peddi* have unveiled the first look poster of the female lead Janhvi Kapoor on November 1. Helmed by Buchi Babu Sana, the film also has Shiva Rajkumar, Jagapathi Babu and Divyani Sharma.

The post was shared on the film's official Instagram handle on Saturday, featuring Janhvi as Achiyamma.

Notably, *Peddi* also marks the second Telugu film for Janhvi Kapoor after *Devara*.

Peddi is presented by Mythri Movie Makers and Sukumar Writings under the banner of Vriddhi Cinemas.

It will release in theatres on March 27, 2026.



Toho unveils first teaser for sequel to Oscar-winning *Godzilla Minus One*

The King lives. Toho Studios officially announced *Godzilla Minus Zero* (stylised as *Godzilla -0.0*), the highly anticipated sequel to the 2023 global hit *Godzilla Minus One*. The reveal took place during this year's "Godzilla Day" celebrations in Tokyo, where fans were treated to the film's first teaser logo and artwork — a stark, monochrome design that recalls the minimalism of its predecessor.

Director Takashi Yamazaki, who made history with *Godzilla Minus One* by earning the franchise its first Academy Award for Best Visual Effects, is returning to write, direct, and oversee the film's VFX. *Godzilla Minus Zero* will hit theatres worldwide in late 2026.

Yorgos Lanthimos' mind-bending vision

English

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Bugonia begins with a voice explaining the vital role bees play in the environment and how Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) could lead to planetary destruction, evoking Sherlock Holmes in *Elementary* and his theories on CCD.

We see Teddy (Jesse Plemons) and his neurodivergent cousin, Don (Aidan Delbis), tending to honey bees in their apiary. Teddy and Don are training for a major job — kidnapping Michelle Fuller (Emma Stone), the CEO of a pharmaceutical firm.

Through the film, we learn Teddy's mother, Sandy (Alicia Silverstone), was part of a drug trial for Michelle's

company, which left her in a coma. Michelle's company is paying for Sandy's care. Teddy is convinced Michelle is an alien from the planet Andromeda, and he plans to kidnap her and get her to take him to the emperor to seek reparation for all the ills of the planet.

We first meet Michelle as she gets ready for her day at the office with exercise, healthy food and a handful of pills. She drives off to work in a muscle car in her power suit and sweeps into her office in wickedly high Louboutins proudly flashing their red soles along the corridors.

The contrast with scruffy Teddy and Don in their baggy shorts and t-shirts with unkempt hair and beards pedalling furiously along leafy lanes could not be starker. The kidnapping, while not going exactly as planned, is successful.

Teddy and Don bring Michelle into the basement

of their cosy, isolated home. They shave her head and slather her with antihistamine cream to dampen her alien powers. Being a Yorgos Lanthimos movie means this incredibly clichéd situation of a woman chained in a basement with two disturbed men is going to play out differently from how it would in countless other films.

While one is prepared for a twist and the bloodbath, that operatic finale is as beautiful as it is terrible. *Bugonia* works as a black comedy where tension is cranked up in different ways. A police officer, Casey (Stavros Halkias), coming to the house at a critical moment, seeking to make amends with Teddy — whom he abused as a child when Casey was babysitting him — is nerve-wracking and funny.

The cinematography (Robbie Ryan) is exquisite, with VistaVision lending the frames warmth and shadow.

Stone, who shaved her head for the film, and Plemons are truly at the top of their game, anchoring each absurd flight of fancy in a desperately sad reality.

Bugonia, which comes from the Greek word "bougonia" referring to the ancient Greek belief of bees being born out of animal, particularly oxen carcasses, is a remake of *Jang* Joon-hwan's South Korean film *Save the Green Planet*.

While it does not beat a wholly original path — isolated people schooled entirely in the University of the Internet and cold-hearted money-grabbing technocrats, are not new — the way the film is presented demands a second and third look to fully appreciate all the sly ways it toys with one's sense of reality.

Bugonia is currently running in theatres



Battles, monsters, thieves

Liam Hemsworth manages to do a fair job of filling the large boots of Henry Cavill's Geralt in this middling adaptation of Andrzej Sapkowski's fifth novel, *Baptism of Fire*

Streaming

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The first episode of Season 4 of *The Witcher* based on Andrzej Sapkowski's fantasy novels and the popular game, opens with a nasty, chittering kikimora confronting a broad-shouldered silver-haired man. We see him in profile as he summarily kills the arachnid swamp monster and the first words he says as the camera focuses on him are, "not the worst."

As introduction shots go, it is not the worst and will do for our first glimpse of Liam Hemsworth as the monster hunter, Geralt of Rivia. So much has been written and speculated about Henry Cavill's departure from the series due to creative differences that it is time to move on.

At the end of Season 3, Geralt, his Child of Surprise, the Cintran princess Ciri (Freya Allan), and his lover, the sorceress Yennefer (Anya Chalotra), are separated. Ciri throws in her lot with the merry band of thieves called the Rats who rescued her. She forms a bond with Mistle (Juliette Alexandra) one of the Rats. A fearsome bounty hunter, Leo Bonhart (Sharlto Copley), who has history with the Rats, is

The Witcher Season 4

Episodes: 8

Creator: Lauren Schmidt Hissrich

Starring: Liam Hemsworth, Anya Chalotra, Freya Allan, Eamon Farren, Joey Batey, Laurence Fishburne

Storyline: Geralt, Yennefer and Ciri follow their paths to an uncertain future

looking for Ciri.

Yennefer has set up camp in Montecalvo, gathering the remaining sorceresses to mount a resistance against the powerful sorcerer Vilgefortz (Mahesh Jadu). Geralt's ragtag bunch, comprising "two dwarves, a gnome, a poet, a half-dryad, and a vampire", is on their way to Nilfgaard to rescue Ciri from Emhyr (Bart Edwards), the emperor, who has evil plans for her.

These threads are followed through the show with a dusting of monsters, songs, jokes, battles, and romance. They are framed as a tale within a tale, with an elderly man, Stribog (Clive Russell), telling the tale to a young ingénue, Nimue (Sha Dessim), a hundred years after the events.

Though Geralt has no love for Cahir (Eamon Farren), the Nilfgaardian army commander who invaded Cintra and was hunting Ciri, Cahir helps Geralt's group escape and fights alongside them.

There is also a mysterious barber-surgeon, Regis (Laurence Fishburne), who knows a thing or two about healing and has the best lines including: "I never understood why survival always manifests itself in boiled greens and a reluctance to dig latrines."

Jaskier (Joey Batey), the travelling bard continues to sing and dispense witticisms, on the way to Nilfgaard while Milva (Meng'er Zhang), the half dryad archer, has a secret. The battles are quite well

staged on land, water, in remote windswept castles and on a bridge. The beasties, including the rusulka, who haunt the waterways allowing passage only after solving a riddle, are jolly.

The pacing is slightly off, with stretches of talk interspersed with bursts of action. Geralt's reminiscences of braiding Ciri's hair and the creation of his Witcher name (his first choice was Geralt Roger Eric du Haute-Bellegarde) are sweet and funny.

There is a whole episode, 'The Joy of Cooking', where Geralt's party talks of their past lives. Jaskier speaks of a rival bard who stole his poems, the dwarf Zoltan (Danny Woodburn) recalls being exiled for allegedly selling weapons to humans, and Milva shares memories of her abusive upbringing.

The eight episodes move along smoothly in a flurry of curses, spells, politics and beasties, with nothing particularly standing out. By the time the credits roll on the last episode, 'Baptism of Fire' (also the name of Sapkowski's fifth novel which Season 4 is loosely based on), one would be hard-pressed to remember anything about the show. With filming already wrapped on Season 5, Hemsworth has another chance to prove he can slay the beasties, grunt and get into the hot tub as well as the other chap.

The Witcher is currently streaming on Netflix

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