

# Sunday mid-day

## Banned docu chaos reaches Mumbai



TISS campus becomes fortress with police bandobast as 200 students watch banned BBC film on laptop; BJP workers sloganeer 'Goli maaron saalon ko'. P02

### After dog walking, it's now time for cat sitting

Baby sitting cats in the absence of pet parents is a good side income for animal-friendly Mumbaikars who find it as fulfilling as infant-raising. P16



### What if I am boring but productive?

An enthusiastic staffer who indulges in camaraderie might be over-hyped, say professionals who are fighting for the freedom to be sombre but high performing in office. P22



## INDIAN ENTREPRENEURS ASSURE #LAYOFFS2023 TO ONLY AFFECT THOSE WHO INDULGED IN PANDEMIC HIRING GREED 'WE ARE NOT SINKING. ONLY CLEANSING'



Putting fears of dry spell in Indian job market to rest, HR gurus and startup founders say this is simply correcting investment excess of last two years; highlight fresh advantage for younger firms that can now pick and choose from best talent that's out of a job

JANE BORGES ON P14-15

A happy fallout of the layoffs can be the launch of new startups. If you are now getting a salary lower than what you feel you are worth, you'd rather establish your own business. We may see a substantial number of new startups originating in this market

Vikram Gupta, Venture capitalist

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# HIDE & SEEK

## THE ULTIMATE CHOCOLATE EXPERIENCE



# 'I have never seen a happier elephant'

Debutant director Kartiki Gonsalves, whose movie has been nominated in the Best Short Documentary Film category at the Oscars, tells us about the serendipity that led to chronicling of the extraordinary life of an elephant and his caretaker



Kartiki Gonsalves grew up in Ootacamund and the forests around are home to her. She began shooting the film, *The Elephant Whisperers*, in 2017 after spotting Raghu and Bomman walking together for the evening bath

## MITALI PAREKH

IN 2017, Kartiki Gonsalves was on her way from Bengaluru, where she was living at the time, to Ooty, her home. On the side of the road, she saw a man walking with a young elephant calf. "They were heading for their evening bath," says Gonsalves over a video call from Seattle. "I had never seen a calf so young. It looked up at the man often, and the man looked at him with obvious fatherly love. They were headed down to the water for the elephant's evening bath, and I got off the car and followed them. Their bond was so obvious and deep. The man talked

to the calf all the while, and the calf would wrap his trunk around the man's arm and was clearly attached to him."

That was Bomman and Raghu. The movie, *Elephant Whisperers*, that 36-year-old Gonsalves made on their relationship, has been nominated in the Best Documentary Short Film category at the 2023 Oscars.

Kartiki shot the pair over five years, in two schedules. The first one was shot in 2017 on a DSLR and her phone, and the rushes shown to Netflix which brought Guneet Mongia onboard as producer. Then came the process of applying for



KARTIKI GONSALVES

permissions to shoot in the oldest elephant camp in Asia, Theppakadu, within the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. With Gonsalves based in Ooty, it was only a 30-minute drive. Through Netflix, the documentary has reached 190 countries.

Every elephant story talks

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# Crazy cat carers

A breed of humans take over your homes to tend to your cats when you travel, and they have curious tales to tell

## YUSRA HUSAIN

WHEN I moved to Mumbai a little less than a year ago, the first thing on my mind was to call my parents over. Apart from the plethora of excuses my father had, this one felt a tad bit more strange. "Who will take care of the cats? They'll be lonely," he'd say every time, knowing fully well that our cats in Lucknow have an indoor-outdoors existence, and can hunt or con neighbours for

food with cuteness.

So in December, after several emotional pleas, my parents finally decided to visit Mumbai. The house help was requested to stay the night in our Lucknow home to feed cats, change their litter and make sure they weren't as emotionally bereft as my father imagined.

My parents aren't the only ones; cat parents are known to kill or postpone their travel plans to assure their care. Cat sitters and

boarders, these purrfect lovers of the feline are happy to look after your cat child, often for just the food in your fridge and Wi-Fi access.

Coco, the five-year-old Persian cat, has a human called Arushi Batra. With an existence on Instagram, Coco walks around with an air of entitlement. When the Juhu residents planned a holiday abroad, Google brought them to Dr Neeta Vanjari. "I was apprehensive initial-



Dr Neeta Vanjari has been catboarding in her home for eight years now. She takes care of cats for not more than 20 days at a stretch, so she can adjust more numbers of them in her home and heart



Farzeen Zaiwalla, 38, is boarding 10 cats at her home, of which many are up for adoption. These were stray cats rescued by those who couldn't keep them in their own house.

PIC/SAMEER MARKANDE

Pawpurrfect owner Mrinalini Khusape has a network of cat-sitters and cat-boarders whose background is verified with due diligence. Employees are accompanied by a cat on most days at their Chembur-based office. PIC/SATEJ SHINDE

ly," says the 27-year-old, "because Coco is my baby. But when we met Dr Vanjari at her home and saw how she treated her own cats, we were relieved. Dr Vanjari would send me a photo of him every two hours, and update me about his eating, sleeping and lording around routine. She was available for a video call any part of the day or night. I knew Coco was in safe hands." This punctiliousness built trust and over the past three years, whenever the Batras travelled, Dr Vanjari's home has been Coco's retreat.

Dr Vanjari has always loved cats. "Cat love runs in the family," quips the 42-year-old. "Even my grandmother was a cat lady." She started boarding cats eight years ago in her Oshiwara home. "I was rescuing cats and found there was no safe place to keep them," she says. "So I became that safe place." Dr Vanjari treats humans only four hours a day, and takes on cats for the maximum of 20 days at a stretch. Her professional services include cuddling, spooning and allowing cats to lie on her.

So how does one befriend the stoically choosy feline? "Every cat is different," she says, "You have to go according to her or his behaviour. I let them be by themselves in the room, explore the space at their own pace. Kittens are friendlier than older cats."

Dr Vanjari has "catified" her home for a restful stay. There are toys and wooden shelves at different levels on the wall to satisfy the predatory (and prey's) need for vantage points. And her attachment to these guests is real. "I felt a divine connection with Daisy," she says of a regular boarder. "She would just sit by my legs and I would feel blessed and calm. When her mother shifted to Jaipur after marriage, instead of congratulating her, I burst into tears as it meant that Daisy would not board with me anymore."

The separation anxiety, for the human, is also Sonal Jain's nemesis. The 30-year-old is currently in Goa

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about the man-animal conflict, so Gonsalves wanted to focus only on the positives.

The film briefly touches upon how Raghu's mother was electrocuted, and he was found with his tail cut off, maggots infesting the wound. Gonsalves chipped away all excess, and most of the movie is tight shots of Raghu and Bomman's life together, and the family that builds around them—Bellie, an indigenous woman who has lost her daughter and husband; and another elephant calf, Ammu. You see Raghu spitting out the balls of millet Bellie feeds him, like any toddler, and going instead for the dried coconut and jaggery one; Raghu chiding him for licking the soap he is lathering on him in the river; Raghu chomping on a garland around his neck, and their walks into the forest together.

"I wanted to show the sacred

bond between man and animal," says the cinematographer and social and natural historian.

"This is why we chose not to have a narrator; it's Raghu and Bomman telling their story." Gonsalves also wanted to give the indigenous people of the forest a voice by capturing their symbiotic relationship with their habitat, their knowledge of how to raise calves, the reservoir of natural remedies and medicines to use for them, and their ability to mimic the elephant's natural life as much as possible. "The forests around Ooty are home to me, and I have been around elephants all my life. Honestly, I have never seen happier ones [than Raghu and Ammu]."

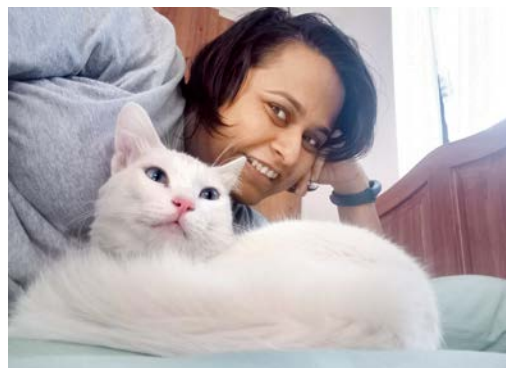
At adolescence, Raghu was transferred to another handler. This separation is the second moment of grief in an otherwise happy movie. "In adolescence," says Gonsalves, "elephants become very stubborn and their primary han-

dlers tend to pamper them. This can be dangerous. Raghu and Ammu live with different handlers now, but in the same camp and see Bellie and Bomman often."

A love story within the love story of Raghu and Bomman, is Bellie and Bomman's. Affection takes root between them when Bellie is brought in to help him. The two marry, and become a family of four. "It was all so fresh," says Gonsalves of the serendipity that helped her witness and chronicle this. "It all just happened as we were filming."

Next on her plate is a documentary about the relationship the First Nation people have with orcas in the Pacific North West. "They have a deep spiritual relationship—they worship and revere them," she says of the project that is still in the research phase. "They believe that when you die, you become an orca; so these are their ancestors."

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Arushi Batra with her son Coco; (right) Sonal Jain with Galaxy, the cat she is sitting in Goa currently

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house-sitting a cat. "I started rescuing cats and sitting them about two years ago," she says, crediting a cat with pulling her out of depression. "It is not a one-way process, the cat gives back so much too," she continues, "S/he reminds me to feed myself, take care of myself, get up from bed even if I am feeling down, because I have to care for him/her, right?" Done with professions that require sole mental work, Jain believes caring for an animal is like caring for an infant, and as fulfilling.

But it is not all fun and play, sitting and boarding a cat requires technical knowledge of behavioural science and a bit of medical knowledge, too.

"Some cats I fostered were geriatric, and needed physiotherapy," says Jain, explaining how it's not enough just to love cats, "some others were on medication. An indoors-outdoors cat can mostly take care of itself, but an indoor cat needs stimulation in the form of toys, enriched environment and engaging play." Jain prefers longer duration cat-sitting. This, she says, requires less travel from her own nomadic life and gives time to bond with and train the cat.

Veterinary knowledge that Jain has picked up over the years of rescuing cats and working with vets stands her in good stead. "It is important for one to recognise

a mite infection in the nose, ear, or eye," she says. "You should know how to take a stool or urine sample for testing."

Jain has sat cats with broken hind legs and those that required diaper changes. Mother and daughter cat duo in Goa, Gaia and Ri, though not in need of special care had the trying eccentricities of any cat. "There was heavy rain," she recalls with a giggle as we speak with her over the phone. "I fed the cats, played with them and put them to bed. When I went to bed, Ri would run into the hall and turn on the lights. She did it three times just to annoy me. It was cute."

Not just individuals, start-ups such as Pawpurrfect have a meticulous network of cat-sitters they take on board only after background verification that is as diligent as that of a bank. Mrinalini Khusape, founded the company two years ago after Mau'mau came into her life from a gutter and she could not find a paid foster parent. "The 10- to 12-day old kitten had to be fed every 2.5 hours," says the Chembur resident, "I would set alarms and this went on for six weeks, I could not go out of the house or make weekend plans. Then I started Pawpurrfect."

She recalls various clients including a senior HR personnel who needed help to care for her sick cat while she fielded back-to-back office calls, and those who wanted to travel with peace of mind. Sitters came to Khusape's rescue. "We had

a cat-sitter, who has since moved," she says, "who would travel to Kurla from Kandivli just for this. Vet students would also house-sit for us and give valuable feedback too."

Asked about the eccentric demands of cat parents, Khusape breaks into a laugh. "My own cat eats dhaniya every morning as a mouth fresher. I have to tell this to cat-sitters. And the coriander has to be two days old and dried out. She won't chew fresh, tender leaves, nor those bought off the internet; only the thela variety for her."

And a cat caregiver expects these eccentricities. These are cats after all. Farzeen Zaiwalla shifted to caring for cats from children when the pandemic took away her job in a school's daycare. She's not shy to say she prefers tending to animals than human kids. Zaiwalla currently has 10 cats in her Kandivli home, and only one of them is hers; the rest are up for adoption.

"These cats have virtual parents," she says, "which means they were rescued but could not be kept by the rescuers, and so they are with me. Their financial care is the responsibility of the virtual parents who come to meet them sometimes. Once the cats are healthy, they are put up for adoption."

However, as any animal person knows, it's a quick slope from one to 22 cats. And foster fails are the norm, not the exception.

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## Turn the other cheek

That's what the body conscious among us are doing in a bid to rid the jaw of some of its weight

## HEENA KHANDELWAL

SUNKEN cheeks and a snatched jawline are the latest Internet fad. And to help mortals with their desire is buccal fat removal surgery, an invasive process that removes a pocket of fat located inside the cheek, making the lower cheek appear contoured and slimmer.

Despite the global cosmetic surgery and procedure market estimated at \$68.9 billion in 2022, even the famous hesitate to make a song and dance about going under the knife. It's been a while since netizens have wondered if Megan Fox, Kim Kardashian, Bella Hadid, Angelina Jolie and Kareena Kapoor Khan have tried it, when the admission by American actress-model Christine Teigen on Instagram added fuel to the fire.

"Buccal fat pad was described centuries ago. The first recorded procedure was done in the 1930s," says Dr Siddharth Prakash, cosmetic and plastic surgeon at Lilavati and Jaslok Hospitals. But social media discussions have stirred an interest among regular Joes and Janes, he thinks. "Until a year ago, about five per cent of the total surgeries in a month that I undertook would be buccal fat removal. Last month, we crossed the 10 per cent mark."

It's no different in Bengaluru. Dr Karishma Kogadu has noticed the procedure finding favour with those looking for facial feminisation surgery or those with pseudohermiation, a condition that sees small rounded fat mass accumulate in the cheek due to a weak buccal fat pad.

The surgery, also called Bichat's procedure after French anatomist Xavier Bichat who described the buccal fat pad in detail in 1802, involves making a small incision inside the mouth for removal of fat tissue, done under local anaesthesia. "Patients need not worry about visible scarring on the outside of their cheek since the procedure is performed on the inside," says plastic and cosmetic surgeon Dr Kogadu, adding, "The



American actress-model Christine Teigen admitted to undergoing buccal fat removal surgery on Instagram. "No shame in my Dr Diamond game," she posted referring to her doctor, world-renowned plastic surgeon Dr Jason Diamond. PIC/GETTY IMAGES

surgery can be done alone or in conjunction with another procedure like a facelift, rhinoplasty, chin implant, lip augmentation, etc." It typically costs ₹40,000 to ₹70,000, is short and easy to recover from. The only prerequisites: eat soft foods for two days and maintain good oral hygiene. "There may be a bit of swelling of the cheeks for three to five days, but this is not obvious to others. The final result may take one or two months to appear," says Dr Prakash, adding that the results are long lasting because buccal fat is unlikely to reappear.

Just like online discussions, our doctors are also divided on the topic. Indian board-certified dermatologist and founder of Ra Skin and Aesthetics in Mumbai, Dr Rashmi Shetty has reservations. "Just because people are engaging in a conversation, doesn't mean everybody is running to a plastic surgeon to yank out their buccal fat," she says, adding that the surgery can make the face appear unusual and artificially gaunt. "Fat in the face, is stored in two areas—deep fat pads and superficial pads. While the superficial pads move downwards and become a sort of excess as we grow old, the deep fat pad in fact, regresses and reduces over time in with ageing. Why would you want to remove the fat and lose the support on your lower face while you are still young?" she wonders, adding that some patients return after a few years to fill in the area using micro-fat grafting.

Wadala-based counsellor and psychotherapist Tanu Puri says, "Low self-esteem, distorted self-image, and emotional insecurity can lead to cosmetic enhancement of oneself." She adds, "This makes us ignore the long-term side effects. And because our identity is so tightly linked to how we look, when the side effects of surgeries begin to show, our psychological health takes another beating."



RASHMI SHETTY



KARISHMA KOGADU



SIDDHARTH PRAKASH



TANU PURI



Buccal fat removal surgery involves making a small incision inside the mouth to remove fat tissue, thereby making the lower cheek appear contoured and slimmer. REPRESENTATION PIC

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