ARBiT
it happens here...

Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is a holiday that celebrates the beginning of the year on the traditional Chinese calendar. It is the most important holiday in China and is celebrated by millions of people around the world, including countries with large Chinese populations such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The holiday typically falls between late January and mid-February, and is marked by a variety of cultural traditions and activities. It's also a time for families to come together and celebrate the start of a new year.

राष्ट्रदूत
SUNDAY
22 January 2023
A-B

#JLF DIARIES

Book Lovers, Pay Up

In this digital age, physical books are like unicorns: rare and magical creatures that only a select few appreciate. But instead of being celebrated and revered, book buyers at JLF bookstore are being charged for the privilege of carrying their precious tomes home in some extra carry bags. It's like they're being punished for not succumbing to the Kindle-wielding masses or the endless scroll of TikTok and Reels. But alas, at JLF, the rush for physical books continues, proving that some things truly are worth the extra carry bag fee.

Pee first, read later

At JLF, the hierarchy of needs is clear: apparently, meeting an author is just a fleeting 10-minute dream, while the urgent and pressing need for a restroom takes precedence. The line for the loo is longer than the line to meet the author, especially during the lunch hour. It seems there's no such thing as a "pee lunch." But hey, at least the author's line is shorter, so you can finally meet them and tell them about your exciting bathroom experience.

Festival fuel: Coffee

Looks like the curation of the food stalls at JLF was done by a caffeine-crazed individual, because over eighty percent of the food stalls are serving coffee. From coffee giants like Blue Tokai and The Roastery to homegrown coffee brands, it's like the festival is counting on the attendees to consume enough coffee to stay awake through the sessions, because let's face it, some of those lectures can be pretty snooze-worthy.

Less is More media kit

Looks like the JLF media kit this year is taking the minimalist approach to the extreme. Instead of the usual array of goodies, journalists are left to survive on a diet of apricots and mulberries. No dettol sanitizers to fend off pesky germs, no cutesy diaries to document their literary musings, no books to keep them company during their down-time and no tea to soothe their frazzled nerves. But don't worry, all complaints of a light goodie bag are being compensated with an ordinary notepad and pen, because who needs fancy stationery when you have the gift of imagination!

Digital Detox Delight

Attention all tech-dependents, if you're looking for a digital detox while expanding your literary horizons, look no further than the Clarks Amer Hotel. The network here is so bad, you'll be forced to put your phone down and engage in face-to-face conversations. Say goodbye to dropped calls and hello to uninterrupted book reading. And don't even bother trying to upload that Instagram story, it'll take longer than it takes to read War and Peace. Welcome to JLF, where technology takes a backseat to the written word.

#UNIVERSE

Troublingly Elusive

It all started with a bang. During an unimaginably brief fraction of a second, the embryonic universe ballooned in size with unimaginable swiftness. In a flash, dimples of imperfection stretched into cosmic scars and locked in the universe we experience today, a milieu filled with galaxies, stars, planets, and humans.

A group of astronomers known as the BICEP/Keck collaboration leads the hunt for these "primordial gravitational waves." In 2021 the researchers released their latest results, the culmination of years of painstaking labour in one of the harshest places

on Earth. Once more, they found no sign of their quarry. If an inflating universe reverberated with gravitational waves-as most cosmologists still fully expect it did- it must have done so in a rather subtle way.

The "simplest flavours, we are right now ruling out," says Clem Pryke, an astrophysicist at the University of Minnesota and member of the BICEP/Keck collaboration. "[This result] is killing previously very popular theories of inflation."

The First Instant

The oldest light in the universe has been streaming through space for more than 13 billion years, ever since the cosmos cooled enough to become transparent. Astronomers have precisely mapped this "Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB)" and used it to learn that the universe was, and has remained, strikingly uniform overall. The CMB indicates that when the universe was just 380,000 years old, it had nearly the same density of matter everywhere. And today, astronomers see galaxies in every direction.

But the CMB is ever so slightly clumpy, and it clumps in a special way. Dense and thin spots come in all sizes, from very small to very large. Today we see a related pattern, from single galaxies to giant mega clusters of them.

How did the universe get this way? Inflation winds back the clock even further, attempting to explain how lumps of all sizes developed during the cosmos's first 0.00000000000000000000000000000001 of a second. During this period, the minuscule universe seethed with energy, and quantum theory ruled the day.

The Missing Piece

Or so the story goes. Inflation has become the leading theory of the birth of the cosmos because it explains exactly what astronomers see when they study the large-scale patterns formed by matter, dark matter, and more.

But one pattern has eluded them. The fabric of spacetime itself cannot hold perfectly still at the quantum scale, and inflation should have stretched those initial tremors into proper waves just as it did with matter and everything else. These primordial gravitational waves would have left faint fingerprints in the CMB, specific whorls in the light known as "B-mode polarization." Astronomers have the capability to directly detect these whorls today, if the pattern is prominent enough, but have yet to find any.

Frustratingly, the universe is awash in materials that shine in a similarly whirly way. The BICEP team triumphantly announced the discovery of primordial gravitational waves in 2014, for instance, only to later learn that they had picked up the dim heat glow of dust grains streaming along the magnetic fields that fill the space between stars in the Milky Way.

I don't expect an ideal world, but a decent one: Kapil Dev

> "Every human being has a brain, but it's not used… Who has given anybody the right to take someone else's life? Such brutality on the premises of an educational institution… What's the mindset of today's generation? More than the boys, I'll blame their parents. What values have they instilled?"

Lokendra Pratap Sahi
Senior Journalist

Kapil Dev, India's first captain to win cricket's World Cup, has moved the Supreme Court for justice. Not for himself, but for a female dog (Donna) bludgeoned to death by some students of Don Bosco Technical Institute in the capital's Okhla area.

It is unusual for an icon to pursue such cases, but dogs and cats - both pets and strays - have been a part of Kapil's life. He is, in fact, speaking up for those without a voice via a Writ Petition.

Kapil's wife Romi and activist Anjali Gopalan are co-petitioners, with the Union of India respondent No.1. The Institute is respondent No.38, after every State and Union Territory.

Eminent lawyer Aman Lekhi, a former Additional Solicitor-General of India, is fighting the case pro bono. He is passionate about animals in general and dogs in particular, which explains why somebody of his stature has pitched in so strongly.

A two-member Bench, comprising Justice KM Joseph and Justice BV Nagarathna, has heard the Petition once, on January 2. The next hearing is most probably early next month.

Justice Joseph is also on the Bench hearing the Jallikattu case. The outcome there may impact the Petition filed by the Devs and Ms Gopalan.

Besides justice for the female dog, which apparently was pregnant, the Petition has raised larger issues, including the inadequacy of existing laws to deal with cruelty to animals and the response of law-enforcing agencies when offences get committed.

There is a pressing need to amend what is outdated, recognising the reality of today's world. Quite simply, archaic laws must go.

While the petitioners have gone to the apex court, Ms Divya Puri filed an FIR with the New Friends Colony police station on November 19 last year, the date many in Delhi received a ghastly video of the killing.

Four students were arrested, but released on bail. More than two months have gone by, but the chargesheet is yet to be filed.

If Ms Puri feels frustrated, like other complainants on similar issues, one can only empathise.

The Institute's principal, Brother Thomas, has admitted to an "unfortunate incident" on the "campus" a month prior to December 7. In a letter to Romi, he has mentioned "cruel act" as well. "Dog" finds one reference.

Brother Thomas's letter, however, is silent on the allegation that the female dog was buried on campus. He has been quiet too on the allegation that a few staff members, present when the horrific act was committed, did not stop the students.

Before writing this Column, I made multiple calls to Kapil and Romi, besides talking to Lekhi.

"There has to be respect for life, not just the lives of animals. Nobody has the license to behave in an improper way. There must be effectiveness in deterring," Lekhi said.

As the Petition is still being heard by the Supreme Court, Lekhi did not wish to specifically speak about the case. Understandably so.

Lekhi did, however, talk about his love for animals, besides his one-time high level of interest in cricket.

"I have dogs at home, but they're the desi type. I'm not for pedigreed ones, which become a status symbol. Besides my pets, I care for 60-70 strays in the neighbourhood…

"My residence (in South Extension-II) is actually a feeding ground for animals. Stray dogs, cats, birds, monkeys… It's fine with me…

"I grew up in an era when the radio was a constant companion and one looked forward to the cricket commentary…

"Back then, I used to be a huge admirer of Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil. Gavaskar epitomised character and that's what I look for, not records…

"In fact, if I glance around, what's lacking is character…

"Like character, values also matter to me. The real stalwarts, in my book, have character and espouse values which are worthy of appreciation…

"To be honest, I've never had time for the politically correct ones. Scoring tons of runs, but not speaking up on any issue…

"Of late, I've lost interest of the kind I once had. It's not that I don't appreciate fine performances - from a Virat Kohli, for example - but it's not like the time Gavaskar and Kapil made us proud…

"Call me a traditionalist, but nothing is better than a good Test match. That's my format, "Lekhi pointed out.

A man of many parts would be an apt description.

Lekhi's spouse Meenakshi happens to be a Union minister. She has been a member of the Lok Sabha from 2014.

Icon Kapil Dev with wife Romi & daughter Amiya. The family is all for the welfare of animals.

Kapil Dev with Chikoo at a shelter. When a pup, both hind legs were crushed.

Now for the Q&A with Kapil and Romi…

KAPIL DEV

Q: You watched the painful video on WhatsApp and wept…
Kapil: I grieved because I care for life, care for animals who can't voice their pain like you and I… I've always maintained if you can't love animals, you're incapable of loving anybody.

Q: Subsequently, what did you feel?
Kapil: That every human being has a brain, but it's not used… Who has given anybody the right to take someone else's life? Such brutality on the premises of an educational institution… What's the mindset of today's generation? More than the boys, I'll blame their parents. What values have they instilled?

Q: You're 64 and come from a different generation…
Kapil: Irrespective of the generation you belong to, you have to help somebody who is struggling (to survive), not torture a human/animal to death for fun… I was taught to respect life… Over centuries, it has been established that a dog indeed is man's best friend… Dogs, cats, rabbits, parrots… They give such joy, it's all about them giving and expecting nothing but a bit of love in return.

Q: There would have been some communication between you and the Institute…
Kapil: I wrote a letter on November 21, after the video started circulating, but got no response from the principal… Only after Romi sent a reminder, on December 3, that he replied – four days later. The principal admitted the "unfortunate incident" took place on campus and that "one of the students" had circulated the video recorded by those present.

Q: It is in black and white…
Kapil: Absolutely.

Q: You've mentioned caring… But, almost every day, men/women/children are either killed or raped or assaulted… Life, in India, appears to have no value. You're hoping for an ideal world…
Kapil: I don't expect an ideal world, but a decent one. Terrifying acts, like what happened to helpless Anjali (Singh) on the night of December 31, too reflect a lack of education. Again, I'll say parents have a bigger responsibility than educational institutions. Families must sit down and talk at the dinner table, parents have to keep instilling the right things: Respect for life, respect for women. Otherwise...

Q: Confident that the apex court will give a favourable verdict?
Kapil: We respect the judiciary and have faith… I hope our Petition helps in spreading awareness as well. The fact that you're writing about it is a step in that direction… Like the harmful effects of firecrackers on Diwali, there has to be a campaign to respect animals. Don't kick a helpless cat or dog, show affection… Don't drive your vehicle over animals, allow them to pass... Won't cost you anything.

Q: Lack of respect for life apart, is there something else that worries you after what happened at the Institute?
Kapil: Generally… That some people may have money, but do they have ethics at all? Life mein unke principles kya hain?

Q: Asking out of curiosity… Did you approach any of the cricketers, past or present, who're active on social media, to voice their condemnation on any of the platforms?
Kapil: You've known me for decades, I usually don't ask… I left that part to Romi… She did approach a few who're dog lovers. I'm not aware if they commented on social media. You have to accept everyone has commitments.

Q: Last one… Do you still have Dobermanns as pets?
Kapil: Don and Pachino were my earliest pets, but I realised Dobermanns need space… After them, we had seven dogs, all pedigreed. Then, Romi decided we'd stop going for fancy breeds and adopt instead. Right now, we have two Pomeranians (Cham Cham, TukTuk) inside our house in Sundar Nagar and two strays near the guard room… Romi and I, by the way, are associated with a dog shelter, run by the Udgam Charitable Trust.

ROMI DEV

Q: Who forwarded the video to you?
Romi: I'm a member of a few Delhi-specific WhatsApp groups and it came on one of them… That forward mentioned the gruesome killing was at the Institute… I put it on our family group. While (daughter) Amiya and I couldn't watch it in entirety, Kapil did. He wept on seeing the barbarism.

Q: Nobody else on that WhatsApp group reacted?
Romi: Well, the appropriate sentiments were expressed by everybody, the right words used… But, as is most often seen, nobody went beyond that. I was, however, determined not to let this go unpunished.

Kapil Dev feeding Gutteru as Cham Cham waits for his turn.

Some of the others felt likewise. So, on November 21, a candle light march/vigil was scheduled outside the Institute - in a loosely-organised manner, I could add.

Q: How many attended?
Romi: Somebody mentioned on WhatsApp that the march/vigil was off, which caused confusion. That wasn't so... When my niece and I reached the venue, there were only a handful present. We then started calling friends who'd cancelled the trip thinking it was off. Eventually, there were around 50-60 of us, mostly women. After a while, however, we had to leave as Delhi Police's permission hadn't been taken. The police came and requested us disperse, else they would get into trouble. We obliged, after singing bhajans and lighting candles.

Q: Wasn't Kapil there?
Romi: Kapil was travelling, couldn't have been present.

Q: Didn't anybody from the Institute meet the 50-60 men and women?
Romi: Oh, no. The gate was locked… The few lights that were on when we started assembling, got switched off. That was the response!

Q: As the female dog was a stray, who named her 'Donna'?
Romi: A kind soul in the WhatsApp group, where the video was circulated, very thoughtfully did so. I assume 'Donna' because she was killed on the Don Bosco Technical Institute's premises.

Q: Is Ms Puri, the young lady who filed the FIR, known to Kapil and you?
Romi: No.

Q: How did the Petition come about?
Romi: Look, Kapil and I were intent on taking this forward and a candle light march/vigil just wasn't enough… I forwarded the video to one of our neighbours, Vedant Sharma, who also loves dogs. Distressed, he had a word with Mr Lekhi, under whom he is interning. Besides being a top lawyer, Mr Lekhi is passionate about animals. Naturally, he was upset by what had happened.

Q: Did Lekhi suggest a Writ Petition be filed?
Romi: Yes… Vedant arranged a meeting with Mr Lekhi and it was during my interaction with him that he put forward the idea. Mr Lekhi isn't charging a Rupee.

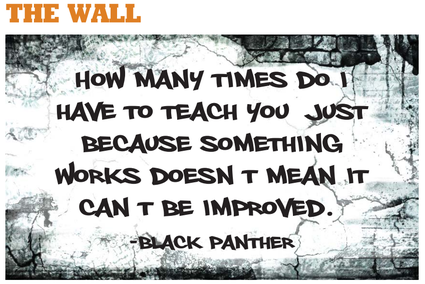
Q: Finally… What message have the "boys" of Don Bosco Technical Institute sent out?
Romi: Let your readers form their own opinion… There are larger issues involved… Unless what's currently being taught at home and in educational institutions is given a hard look, I'm scared to think of what next… Even humans are at risk, forget strays… Given what keeps happening in Delhi, there's a baseball bat and a cane stick in my car. Bat for the driver and the stick for me if we get attacked. Surely, we'll have to defend ourselves. My car has a pepper spray too… Better be safe than sorry… Even a decade after the Nirbhaya episode, there's no end to heart-wrenching stories. Where's that 'Daughter of India' sentiment gone? Forgotten.

writetoarbit@rashtradoot.com

Legal eagle Aman Lekhi, who is passionate about animals, dogs in particular.

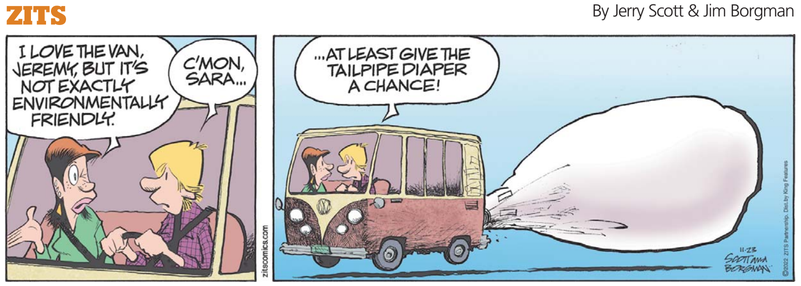
#CARE FOR ANIMALS

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman