ARBiT
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National Easy-Bake Oven Day: Celebrating a Timeless Culinary Toy

National Easy-Bake Oven Day, celebrated on November 4, honours the iconic toy that has inspired generations of young bakers. Introduced in the 1960s, the Easy-Bake Oven allowed children to create miniature cakes, cookies, and treats safely, sparking creativity and a love for baking from an early age. Beyond its nostalgic charm, the day highlights the joy of experimentation in the kitchen and the confidence that comes from crafting something with your own hands. National Easy-Bake Oven Day is a reminder of how simple tools can ignite imagination, culinary curiosity, and lifelong memories.

राष्ट्रदूत
WEDNESDAY
04 November 2026
A-B

#THAROOR

We Don't Qualify On The Poverty Grail

Bangladesh's Edge: Cheaper Labour and Fewer Tariffs?





According to Tharoor, one of the most crucial reasons for Bangladesh's success lies in labour costs. Bangladesh has maintained significantly lower wages than India, making it an attractive destination for global apparel brands seeking to minimize production expenses.

But wages alone didn't explain the entire picture.

Tharoor emphasizes a major structural advantage Bangladesh enjoyed: its status as a Least Developed Country (LDC). Under international trade agreements, LDCs receive preferential treatment in the global trading system. This includes duty-free and quota-free access to many developed markets, particularly in Europe and North America.

"Bangladeshi cloth can be sold in the developed world, with zero percent duty. Indian cloth, on the other hand, might come in at 10, 15, or even 20 percent duty," Tharoor explained in one discussion.

This created a massive pricing advantage for Bangladesh over India. Even if Indian textile products were of equal or superior quality, the tariff disadvantage often made them less competitive in key export markets.

India's Structural and Policy Challenges

While Bangladesh focused aggressively on scaling its readymade garment (RMG) industry, India struggled with infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory red tape, and labour law rigidity that made it harder for manufacturers to operate efficiently.

India's textile and garment sector has always had enormous potential, given its access to raw materials (like cotton), skilled artisans, and a large domestic market. However, Tharoor suggests that missed policy opportunities and failure to leverage trade agreements held India back from realizing this potential in the global export market.

The Role of International Trade Agreements

Bangladesh's access to tariff-free markets was largely enabled by its participation in Everything But Arms (EBA), an initiative by the European Union that allows LDCs to export all products (except arms and ammunition) duty-free and quota-free.

India, being classified as a developing (not least developed) country, does not qualify for these benefits. Thus, Indian exports often face significant import duties, especially in the European Union.

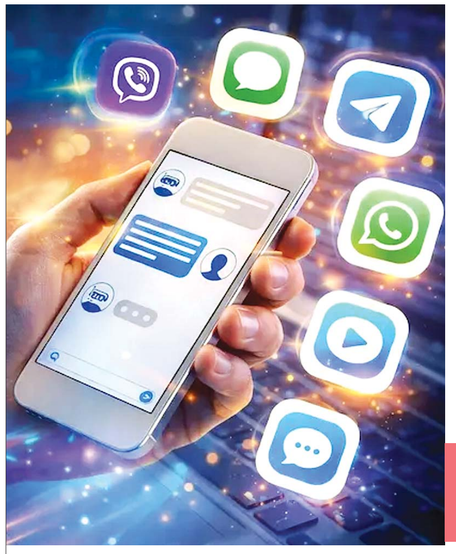
Tharoor points out that this disparity had real-world consequences:

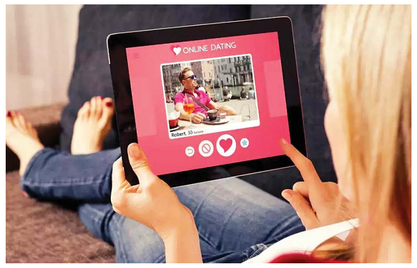
"Therefore, [Bangladesh] became the principal garment exporting country," he noted, pointing to how international classification and policy frameworks can shape industrial outcomes in a very material way.

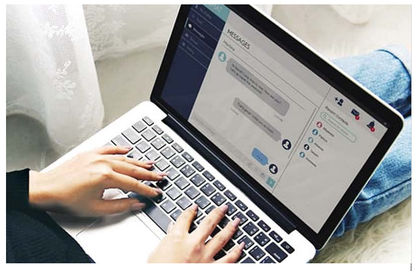
Bangladesh's success as a global garment exporter didn't happen by accident, it was the result of targeted policy, advantageous trade status, and global market alignment. As Shashi Tharoor highlights, India must now reassess its approach, learn from its neighbour's success, and find ways to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market.

The story of Bangladesh's garment industry is not just a case of regional competition, it is a lesson in how global rules, when strategically leveraged, can transform an economy.









Twelve years of dating apps, and more 'hmms' than I can count. In the last part, I go back to a time when strangers on the internet wrote letters, open my oldest chats, and find one woman saying the same thing for years. That woman is me.

Main Yahin Hoon

PART:4



Shailaza Singh
Published Author, Poet and a YouTuber

'Kahan gayab hoooo,' Mr. Byron had written. Before I tell you what I typed back, let me tell you about the short films on my phone.

Many are clearly made with AI, and every one is the same film. A man keeps running to another woman, more glamorous, more lipstick. The woman who loves him waits, and one day quietly picks up her bag and leaves. The moment she leaves, the man wakes up. He runs after her in the rain if the budget allows, and the other woman is left standing there with her lipstick.

Four hundred episodes. Same story. Clearly, the AI has been trained on Indian men.

My phone, it turns out, has been playing the same film for twelve years, with one difference. In the films, the man who runs after the woman gets her back. On the apps, he sends 'kahan gayab ho.'

It was not always like this.

Uh-Oh!

My first chats were on ICQ and Yahoo Messenger, when every new message announced itself with a sound loud enough to wake the whole mohalla. ICQ actually said 'Uh-oh!' The only software in history that knew exactly what was about to happen. More than once, a sentence composed for one gentleman landed in another gentleman's window.

I was the original wrong-window woman. Mr. Bean had his Teddy. I had Yahoo Messenger.

Then, there was MSN Personals, where people wrote about themselves. Not one line. Paragraphs. A name, a photograph, an email address, and a few honest sentences about who they were. The VP of Undergoing's profile was an SUV.

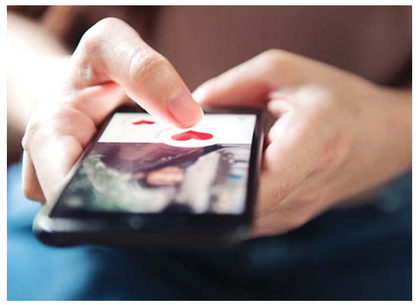
That is where I found Hans, in Denmark. We wrote letters. Real ones, with stamps. I bought onion paper letter pads in those days, the thin kind that crackled, and filled page after page. We exchanged photographs. Nobody wrote 'hmm' in a letter. It would have been a waste of a stamp.

On Yahoo chat, I met Sergeant Brian of the US Army, posted in Afghanistan. He told me about America. He told me he dreamt of visiting India one day.

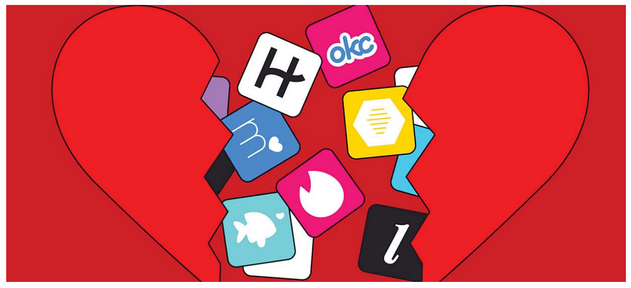
A man sitting in a war zone, dreaming of India. Today's men, sitting in Delhi, cannot dream of visiting Jaipur.

I will be honest. I do not remember a single line Hans or Brian wrote. Nothing was romantic. Nobody asked where I lived, nobody asked to meet, nobody asked whether my kid was okay with it. And when it faded, it simply faded, like a train journey ending at a station. No 'kahan gayab ho.' No 'uth jao g.'

Neither of them ever met me. Neither of them needed to.



#KAHAN GAYAB HO?



Twenty Years Younger

In my twenties, before video calls, I chatted with a man who had a great voice, great humour and great photos. I went to meet him. When I got there, an old uncle was waiting for me. The photos had been taken, at a conservative estimate, twenty years earlier.

I ran. Yes, I stood him up. But he had sent his younger self and turned up as his current one, so, we are even.

And the woman on the chat and the woman who turned up were not always the same person either. One of us had a better filter.

The Father's Ear

And then, there was Vikrant. That is not his name.

We met through a chat. He was nice to talk to, and when we met, he was nice and cool in person too. Then, he started getting possessive. I withdrew. He wanted a relationship. I did not.

So, he threatened me. He would tell my father all about me.

Every Indian girl knows this weapon. It is not a knife. It is her father's ear. It has kept more girls quiet than any lock.

I did not go back. He called my father.

And my father stood up for me. So did my brother. They told him that if he came anywhere near me again, he would have them to deal with. For days after that, the two of them dropped me to work and picked me up, a two-man Z-plus security, minus the safari suits. Vikrant never contacted me again. He had threatened to tell my father. He had not checked whose side my father was on.

So, when a man today asks to meet on the second day, it is not coyness when I say no. I have met a man from a chat before. I know exactly how much a chat can hide.

> Then, there was MSN Personals, where people wrote about themselves. Not one line. Paragraphs. A name, a photograph, an email address, and a few honest sentences about who they were. The VP of Undergoing's profile was an SUV. That is where I found Hans, in Denmark. We wrote letters.

2014: Feku Master

My oldest surviving chat is from January 2014. It began with 'Hey nice pic yar too cute.'

I told him clearly, 'I need a friend nothing more.' 'That's good, same here,' he said, and asked if he could call me. Friendship, it seems, has a very short probation period.

Then, I went quiet, and he did what the men in the short films do. 'Hiiiii.' 'Hiiii, you there?' 'Shellyyyyyyyyy.' Every letter of my app name, and then some 'Yar kuch to bolo.' In November, he found me again. 'Kaha chali gai thi?' He asked if I was single, and when I said yes: 'Gooooddddd. I knew tumhara first boyfriend me hi banunga.'

First boyfriend. At my age. I was flattered and insulted in the same breath. He asked for my number again. 'Nope. Yahin,' I said.

I was like a coconut, he said, 'no nonsense, stubborn and emotionless but very sweet.' Hard outside, sweet inside. Finally, a man who understood me, and he had to go to a fruit market to do it. When I asked why he was wasting his time on me: 'Time waste nahi kar raha, pehli baar time utilize kar raha hu. Baki puri zindagi waste hi kiya tha.'

I asked him if he was a script writer or a feku master.

But the line I keep going back to is his. 'Chatting me feelings nahi ati,' he said. And I, very proudly, replied, 'Feelings are not needed in chats. They are just needed with people u really care about.'

Hold on to that line. It will come back to bite me.

After that, he wrote in January 2017: 'Hi, how are you.' October 2019: 'Hi.' October 2022: 'Hi.' Once every few years, like Halley's comet, except that Halley's comet at least brings a tail.

Breadcrumbing, the young people call it. A crumb every few years, just enough to make sure the bird does not fly away. In my case, the bird flew away in 2014. He is still throwing crumbs.

2022: Three Apps In Three Days

In 2022, a man moved our chat from the app to Telegram. 'This is more comfortable,' he said. Three days later: 'Suno, WhatsApp par connect karein.' 'Why?' 'I feel more comfortable there.' I told him I thought his ghost was speaking.

Three apps in three days. Even my Airbnb guests do not check out this fast.

He asked about me and my son. I have a daughter. Clearly, he had read my profile the way I read terms and conditions. My daughter does not mind whom I chat with, as long as he does not irritate her. This one did not even know she was a girl. By my chat kundli, her gun milan with all of them is a perfect thirty-six. They have never met.

He called once. It lasted one minute. The rest of our great romance happened in 'Gm,' 'Ok,' 'Nice' and 'Hmm.' My own contribution to the literature of that week was 'I apmgoodp.'

Two weeks later: 'Kahan gayab. Koi khabar nahee.'

'Yahin,' I wrote.

Exhibit A: Me

So, here is the one thing I did not expect to find. Me. In every one of these chats.

Asking about wives before saying hello. When I asked the gentleman who loved mathematics, he never replied. Perhaps, he is still solving it. Carry forward one wife.

Saying 'Cool,' 'Ok' and 'Was busy' to men who had written me whole paragraphs.

Telling a man in 2014 that feelings are not needed in chats.

And in 2022, the same woman who cannot stand 'dear' from strangers wrote to one, at 8:47 in the morning, 'Nothing my love..' With a grinning emoji. I have checked. It is my number.

That was the closest I came. Some nights I was tempted to play the woman these men are looking for. Return his I love yous. Call him baby back. I imagined typing 'Missed you, baby.' My thumbs refused. Somewhere inside me sits a satire switch, factory-fitted, no off button. The moment I picture the scene, I start writing the column about it.

Greedy

I am not looking. But I have not stopped noticing. So, what do I actually want? Not a prince. Not a palace. Not even the SUV with the red ribbon.

All I want, at times, is a man who can talk. A man who reads the newspaper and has an opinion on it. Who has a book he loved and one he could not finish, and can tell me why. Who asks how my day was, waits for the answer, and still remembers it on Thursday. And when I am low, does not prescribe honey and cinnamon, just asks, 'Kya hua?' and actually listens.

I want a man who will argue with me. Hold his ground, make me work for mine. And then, if there is logic in what I say, accept it without sulking. Say 'You're right' and not feel smaller for it. Say 'I was wrong' and not feel finished. Yes, I know. Greedy. What I got instead was hmm, okay, acha and dear. Not one of them ever disagreed with me. And no, it was not because I was always right. They simply were not listening.

They reminded me of the nodding toy on a car dashboard. Every bump, it nods. I have seen that toy on a hundred dashboards, and not one of them has ever argued with me either.

Twelve years of dashboard toys. Just once, I would like to lose an argument.

Hans wrote me pages, and never once asked to meet. These men ask to meet, and never once write a page.

And they come looking only when I go quiet. When I reply on time, they reply with 'hmm.' When I disappear, they discover vowels. 'Hiiiii.' 'Shellyyyyy.' 'heloooo.' The longer my silence, the longer their words.

I noticed this long ago. I have learnt to go quiet too.

So, when Mr. Byron's message arrived that night, I typed the same word I had typed in 2014, and again in 2022.

'Yahin.'

Field Notes

And I am. Still on the apps, still chatting. Where else would a VP confess that his divorce is undergoing? Where else would a farmer tell a stranger that every day is Sunday?

So, if you are a gentleman on a chat app, and you have just told a woman in Jaipur that you are separated, kindly check the newspaper.

You may be in it.

Concluded.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com



#LOUVRE

The Stealing Of Mona Lisa

The daring heist, carried out by a man with an unlikely background, shocked the world and led to a global search for the priceless painting





In 1911, one of the most famous art thefts in history took place when Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian handyman, stole Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" from the Louvre Museum in Paris. The daring heist, carried out by a man with an unlikely background, shocked the world and led to a global search for the priceless painting. The theft, which lasted for over two years, ended up changing the history of art and cementing the Mona Lisa's place as one of the most iconic works of art in the world.

Vincenzo Peruggia: The Man Behind the Theft

Vincenzo Peruggia was born in Italy in 1881 and had worked as a painter and handyman in various locations, including in the Louvre Museum. His connection to the art world was not as a master artist, but rather as an ordinary man who had access to the museum's inner workings. Peruggia was not a career criminal, but rather someone driven by a deep sense of patriotism and frustration with the circumstances of the Mona Lisa's whereabouts. Peruggia believed that the painting, which was acquired by King Francis I of France in the early 16th century, belonged in Italy, not France. His theory was that the painting had been stolen from Italy by Napoleon Bonaparte during his conquests, and that it should be returned to its homeland. Driven by this belief, Peruggia set his sights on stealing the Mona Lisa and returning it to Italy.

The Search for the Stolen Masterpiece

For over two years, the Mona Lisa was missing. When the theft was discovered the following day, it caused a massive uproar across France and the world. The Louvre Museum was immediately closed, and authorities launched an extensive investigation to locate the painting. The theft made headlines worldwide, with newspapers covering the story relentlessly. Famous detectives, including those from the French police and international law enforcement, searched for clues, but the Mona Lisa remained elusive.

The Recovery of the Mona Lisa

The breakthrough came in 1913, when Peruggia finally tried to sell the Mona Lisa to an art dealer in Florence, Italy. The dealer, Giovanni Poggi, was suspicious of the authenticity of the painting, so, he contacted museum authorities. After a careful investigation, it was confirmed that the painting was indeed the original Mona Lisa. The authorities quickly arrested Peruggia. His motive, it turned out, had been driven by nationalism, not personal gain. He had no intention of selling the painting for profit but believed that returning the Mona Lisa to Italy would bring pride to his country. His actions were seen as patriotic by some in Italy, but Peruggia was still charged with theft.

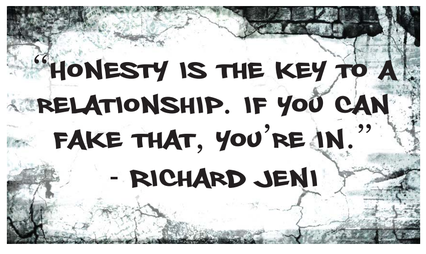
The Aftermath and Legacy

In 1914, Vincenzo Peruggia was tried and convicted for the theft. However, he received a relatively light sentence, just one year and fifteen days in prison. Peruggia's crime was not seen as one of personal greed, but rather as an act of nationalistic fervor. He became something of a folk hero in Italy, with some viewing his actions as a form of resistance against foreign appropriation of Italian culture.

The Mona Lisa was returned to the Louvre in 1913, and its fame soared to unprecedented heights. While it had always been considered a masterpiece, the theft and recovery of the painting only added to its allure. The publicity surrounding the heist helped cement the Mona Lisa as one of the most famous paintings in the world, an icon of Renaissance art.

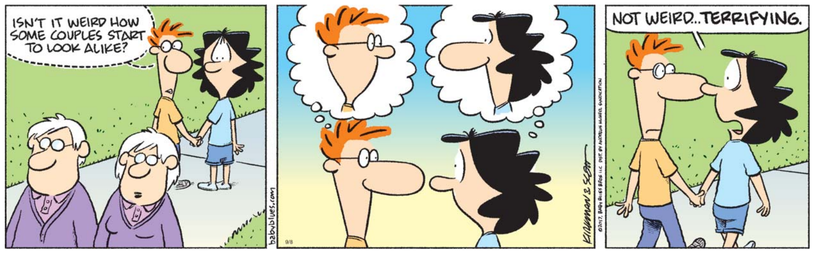


THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

