

Editorial

Democracy, economics and governance

Scare visits schools

Amid an unanticipated cloud of fear, nearly 100 schools in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) sent students home early Wednesday upon receiving a bomb threat via email. The police conducted thorough searches, but found nothing suspicious. The scare has sent shockwaves through the community, leaving parents, educators and students grappling with a harrowing reality: The threat of terror is no longer a distant concern but a chilling presence in our midst. The sanctity of schools, once regarded as a safe haven for learning and growth, has been compromised. As we confront this sobering reality, it is imperative that we do not succumb to despair but unite in resilience and resolve. Foremost, we must commend the swift response of school authorities and law enforcement agencies in addressing these threats. Their coordinated efforts have undoubtedly helped reassure people. More importantly, our intelligence agencies need to put their act together; they are the ones who should have seen it coming. We do not have enough specific information to process at the moment and no clue about the intention or the identity of the perpetrator(s); we don't know if it was a real threat or just a mischievous element playing mind games, but such threats cannot be taken lightly, especially when human lives are at risk. The threat emails, reportedly emanating from a Russian IP address, were well-planned and coordinated. Shooting in the US schools is rather rampant; Indian schools are much safer and should stay that way. All we have to do is be vigilant. Also, this small win should not lull us into complacency. We must remain vigilant and proactive in fortifying the security infrastructure of our educational institutions. Beyond bolstering physical security, we must also invest in fostering a culture of vigilance and preparedness within our school communities. Educators play a pivotal role in equipping students with the knowledge and skills to recognise and respond to potential threats. Empowering students with safety protocols and encouraging open dialogue can go a long way in mitigating the impact of terror-induced anxiety. It is equally important that we address the root causes of such terror acts. Socio-economic disparities, marginalisation and ideological extremism often serve as fertile breeding grounds for radicalisation. By addressing these underlying issues through comprehensive social policies and inclusive education, we can strive towards building a more resilient and harmonious society. It is equally important to remain calm and not panic. In times of crisis, it is easy to succumb to fear and division. However, we must remember that our strength lies in our unity and resilience. Now more than ever, we must stand in solidarity with one another, refusing to be cowed by the forces of terror. Together, we can create a future where every child can pursue their education without fear and where schools are not battlegrounds but beacons of hope and enlightenment.

As India goes ahead with its 18th General Elections, the nation finds itself at a crossroads of democracy, economics and governance. The elections, spanning 44 days from April 19 to June 1, are poised to be the lengthiest in Indian history, reflecting both the enormity of the task at hand and the significance of the decisions to be made. Against the backdrop of a burgeoning economy, evolving political landscapes and pressing social challenges, the intersection of elections, electioneering and the economy warrants scrutiny. The magnitude of election expenditures provides a glimpse into the economic dynamics surrounding the electoral process. According to the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), the anticipated expenditure for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections is staggering, surpassing Rs 1.35 lakh crore. This figure, more than double the amount spent in 2019, indicates to the monumental scale of electoral spending in the world's largest democracy. With a projected voter base of 96.6 crore, the per-voter spending is estimated at around Rs 1,400, signifying both

the financial investment and the democratic imperative of

approaches the general elections. Rao's portrayal of a dedicated

growth and employment opportunities across the spectrum.



ensuring widespread participation. However, it's worth noting that the Election Commission's expenditure is expected to constitute only a fraction of the total outlay, pointing towards the diverse economic activities spurred by the electoral process. The Election Commission tirelessly strives to facilitate universal suffrage across the nation. Recognising the pivotal role of public figures in shaping civic consciousness, the Commission enlisted the famed actor Rajkumar Rao as its 'national icon' to galvanise youth engagement and voter turnout as the country

poll officer in the acclaimed film 'Newton,' a poignant exploration of electoral challenges in a Naxal-affected region, resonated deeply with young voters. However, despite the cinematic depiction of electoral fervour, the anticipated 'Newton effect' has yet to materialise in voting patterns in two phases so far. Nonetheless, the indomitable spirit of election officers persists, as they traverse treacherous terrain and surmount logistical obstacles to ensure the integrity of the electoral process. Electioneering acts as a catalyst for various sectors of the economy, fostering

From hospitality and transportation to textiles and advertising, the ripple effects of political campaigns are palpable. As political parties vie for voter attention, rallies, events and promotional activities proliferate, injecting vitality into local economies and stimulating demand for goods and services. Moreover, the advent of digital campaigning has revolutionised the electoral landscape, with professional agencies employed to enhance brand visibility and engagement. The economic dividends of such strategies are evident, as digital platforms emerge as potent tools

for political communication and mobilisation. Amidst the fervour of electoral competition, political manifestos serve as blueprints for governance, delineating policy priorities and economic agendas. The contrasting visions articulated by major political parties underscore the divergent approaches to addressing pressing socio-economic challenges. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), buoyed by its track record and incumbent status, advocates for policy continuity and fiscal consolidation. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on infrastructure development and economic reforms, a BJP-majority Government is poised to prioritise private investment and fiscal prudence, thereby fostering economic stability and growth. Conversely, the Indian National Congress or INDI Block champions a progressive agenda focused on job creation, social welfare and agrarian reforms. Proposals such as Government-led employment initiatives, minimum support price guarantees and education loan waivers underpin the Alliance's commitment to inclusive growth and

equitable development. While political rhetoric often dominates electoral discourse, the economic imperatives transcending partisan lines merit attention. Issues such as water scarcity, climate change and unemployment pose formidable challenges to India's socio-economic fabric, necessitating concerted action beyond the electoral cycle. The water crisis in cities like Bengaluru serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for sustainable resource management and climate resilience. Yet, the conspicuous absence of these issues from political manifestos is very disheartening. There is an urgent need for non-partisan dialogue and policy discourse on environmental sustainability and socio-economic resilience. As India embarks on its electoral journey, the confluence of elections, electioneering and the economy offers both opportunities and challenges. While the democratic process catalyses economic activity and political discourse, the imperatives of inclusive and sustainable development transcend electoral cycles. By transcending electoral exigencies and embracing a shared vision of progress, India can realise its aspirations for a vibrant democracy and a prosperous future for all.

Plug leakages in fertiliser subsidy

As part of the 100-day agenda of Modi 3.0, the Government intends to administer fertiliser subsidies more effectively and cut down on leakages and diversions to build on the success of neem-coated urea. It intends

much higher. The excess cost over MRP is reimbursed to the manufacturer/importer as a subsidy which varies from unit to unit depending on its cost. The MRP of urea is kept unchanged (today's price is more or less

with states - assesses the requirement of fertilisers for each cropping season - kharif (April to September) and rabi (October to March). The Department of Fertilisers (DoF) prepares an agreed supply plan to cover all the urea requirements from domestic production and import. The states allocate all of the urea arrivals and track disbursement up to the district level. The DoF has developed a mobile and a web application - a mobile Fertiliser Monitoring System (m-FMS) that provides information on stock, sale and receipt of fertilisers till the last retail point. The total expenditure on fertiliser subsidy - on both urea and non-urea fertilisers put together - is around Rs 200,000 crore annually. Now, when the Government talks of leakage and diversion, we are reminded of the Economic Survey 2015-16 which said as much as 24 per cent of the subsidy is spent on inefficient producers, 41 per cent is diverted to non-agricultural uses including smuggling to neighbouring countries and 24 per cent is consumed by larger, presumably richer farmers. That leaves a tiny 11 per cent going to small and marginal farmers who constitute the vast majority i.e. nearly 86 per cent of the total number of farmers. At a fundamental level, leakages are inherent in the way the administration of fertiliser subsidies is designed. The Government asks manufacturers to sell fertiliser at a low price - a price it thinks farmers can afford. Having sold at this price, the latter claims from the former an amount equal to the excess of the cost of supply over it as a subsidy. The subsidy could have been given to the farmer directly say, by deposit-

ing the money in her bank account. But, for decades, successive Governments have preferred to route it through manufacturers. Having to deal with a handful of manufacturers instead of crores of farmers (that would have been the case if the subsidy were to be given to them directly), they have found this arrangement convenient. But, there is a big negative to it. Since the subsidy is embodied in the MRP (albeit low), the subsidised fertiliser product must reach the farmer and be used only for growing the crop. If it doesn't reach, then the benefit of subsidy is enjoyed by the person who grabs it. After leaving the factory or the port (in case of imported stuff), fertilisers travel a long distance moving by rails/roads to reach storage points in the district and further movement to retail outlets for sale to the farmers. In the initial years of the fertiliser pricing and subsidy scheme (it was introduced in 1977 for urea and 1980 for other fertilisers), manufacturers were given the bulk of the subsidy on the 'dispatch' of the material from the factory. In due course, the Government shifted to disbursing 95 per cent of the subsidy to urea producers and 85 per cent to producers of non-urea 'on receipt of material at a district's railhead point/approved godown' (balance 5 per cent/15 per cent was paid on confirmation of sales to farmers by states). In March 2018, the Government made disbursement of subsidies to manufacturers conditional upon actual sales to farmers and these getting registered on point-of-sale (PoS) machines.



to conduct a pilot in a few districts on a modified version of the direct benefit transfer (DBT) that seeks to establish a linkage between the land holding of a farmer and nutrient consumption. A proposal in this regard mooted in 2020 is being resurrected. To make urea - a widely used fertiliser that supplies primary nutrient nitrogen or 'N' and constitutes nearly half of India's total fertiliser consumption - affordable to farmers, the Union Government controls its maximum retail price (MRP) at a low level unrelated to the cost of production/import and distribution, which is

the same as in 2002) even as all cost escalations are absorbed by raising the subsidy. In the case of fertilisers supplying phosphate or 'P' and potash or 'K' which constitute the other half (call them non-urea fertilisers), there is a 'uniform' subsidy on a per nutrient basis for all manufacturers under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme. They are free to fix MRP but need to reduce it to the extent of subsidy. Even as the subsidy remains unchanged, rising costs mean ever-increasing MRPs. The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DoAC) - in consultation

Vastu tips

Eight things you shouldn't do after taking bath to avoid loss of wealth

Do not use any sharp object immediately after bathing. You can use a nail cutter before taking a bath.

Don't touch the fire immediately. First, you eat something and then go to the kitchen.

Don't apply makeup immediately after bathing. If your hair is wet, then it is considered taboo to do makeup. Negative energy enters the exposed hair very quickly. So, this thing must be kept in mind.

Wipe out the bathroom after bathing. Do not keep it wet. Do not keep your bathroom untidy and unorganized. Doing this can cause a shortage of money in the house. After the bath, always clean the bathroom properly and organize things, keep the things where they should be kept.

Never leave the wet clothes to wash them later. According to Vastu, doing so weakens your Sun. Therefore, after bathing do not leave wet clothes at all. Rather, it should be washed before taking a bath. Otherwise, due to the weak Sun, the honour and respect of the person will decrease. Along with this, money loss and many struggles may have to be faced.

Clean the bathroom immediately after taking a bath otherwise Rahu, Ketu, and the planet Saturn get annoyed. Due to this, the ill effects of these three planets increase rapidly. You may face financial loss.



According to Vastu, a clean bathroom helps in maintaining prosperity in your home. Dirty washrooms are not good and can lead to loss of wealth. A bathroom is a place that is generally neglected. People do not think about the cleanliness of this place. While according to Vastu this is the place that creates maximum negativity. Due to this, financial losses and hindrances to growth can be seen. So, to avoid it one should follow some important vastu tips.

Do not leave water in the bucket after bathing. If anyone takes a bath with that remaining water, it will affect the life of that person and at the same time.

After taking a bath, do not keep the bucket empty. But According to Vastu, the bucket should be filled with clean water. If you do not want to keep the water filled, then turn the bucket upside down. This will not cause the problem of Vastu defects.

If the hair is wet immediately after bathing, then married women should not apply vermilion. This has a negative effect on them as well as negative thoughts also come to their mind.

Golden rules for a quick and healthy weight loss

Trying to lose weight? Well, there are a few golden rules to losing fat. By following these rules you can achieve your weight loss goal in no time. According to consulting nutritionist and dietician Asma Alam, 'you are what you eat.' She says eating right can help you stay away from illness. The nutritionist shares 7 rules you must follow for healthy weight loss.

Regular exercise

The importance of regular exercise in weight maintenance cannot be overstated. It may assist you in burning off some additional calories and increasing your metabolism, both of which are necessary for achieving energy balance. It's crucial to remember that exercise is most effective for weight loss when accompanied by other lifestyle modifications, such as eating a nutritious diet.

Diet
Fibre-rich foods can help you feel fuller for longer, which is ideal for weight loss. Fruit and vegetables, oats, whole grain bread, brown rice, and pasta, as well as beans, peas, and lentils, are all high in fibre. Fibre-rich foods include fruits and vegetables, oats, whole grain bread, brown rice, and pasta, as well as beans, peas, and lentils. Fruit and vegetables are low in calories, fat, and fibre, which are all important factors in weight loss. They also include a lot of micronutrients. Avoid excluding any foods from your weight-loss strategy, particularly those you enjoy. Prohibiting foods will simply increase your desire for them. There's no reason you can't indulge in a treat now and then as long as you stick to your daily calorie limit.

Hydration
Water is necessary for energy, weight management, and overall health. When you work out and are physically engaged during the day, hydration becomes even more crucial. Water drinking has been shown to have minor weight-loss effects in a few trials. However, these findings should not be interpreted in isolation. At the time, the water's only known and verified effect on weight loss is keeping our bodies hydrated for optimal organ and system functioning. As a result, while drinking more water will not help you lose weight, drinking less water will. Always have a bottle of water on hand, and sip a small amount after every few minutes of exertion.

Opt for healthy versions of your favourite recipes

Your meal preferences are taken into account in a healthy diet. You should never be denied access to your favourite cuisine. As a result, discover the realm of healthy cooking to be able to eat what you want without jeopardizing your weight-loss goals. Experiment with healthy ingredients, versions, and cooking techniques. Learn how to make meal and

ingredient substitutions like a pro. Lean meat, for example, is an excellent substitute for red meat.

Know which foods are acceptable for occasional indulgences and which foods are appropriate for daily usage. When you make nutritious meals as a family, you support each other's weight-loss efforts and have a better chance of sticking to your weight-loss goals.

Adequate rest

For a healthy weight loss, sleep and rest are vital. Sleep not only keeps your body's hormonal and digestive systems in check, but it also offers you the energy to get up and go every morning. You won't rely on sitting and lying down as much if you get enough sleep, which translates to more physical activity in daily tasks.



Skin is an essential part of the body as it is related to both inside and outside. It is imperative to keep your skin healthy as that is how you can keep your health in good shape too. If you are looking for natural ways to keep your skin healthy and glowing, continue reading ahead. This article has listed some fruits that help make your skin look bright and radiant.

According to experts, if you want to extract the maximum benefits from your foods, you must eat ripe, seasonal fruits. People tend to include juice in their diet and feel refreshing and healthy, although it is a myth. Instead of consuming fruit juices, start consuming fruits because that is more beneficial. Eating fruits regularly have some significant benefits like boosting immunity, increasing the content of vital minerals and vitamins in your body, keeping the body hydrated, etc. The vitamins and minerals present in fruits help collagen production, making your skin look radiant, healthy, and firm. Anish Nagpal, Co-Founder, Dermatouch shares a list of fruits that you should include in your diet to have a healthy skin:

Avocado

Avocados, rich in monounsaturated fatty acids, hydrate and protect your skin by significantly reducing the early signs of ageing caused by UVA and UVB rays. Avocados also aid in the absorption of various fat-soluble vitamins, which help in protecting the skin from ultraviolet radiation.

Lemon

Lemon, as we all know, is rich in vitamin C. This powerful antioxidant helps fight free radicals and flushes the toxins out of the body. Besides this, vitamin C also helps shield the skin from hyperpigmentation, and treats inflammation and acne breakouts, giving you glowing, clear skin.

Orange

This tangy, juicy fruit is rich in vitamin C and helps prevent oxidative damage. It is enriched with antioxidants, and oranges aid in preventing DNA damage, reducing inflammation, and boosting collagen production.

Tired of dull and dry skin this summer? Then add these 5 fruits to your diet to get radiant and youthful skin. Anish Nagpal, Co-Founder, Dermatouch shares a list of fruits that you should include in your diet.



Add these fruits in your diet for glowing, healthy and youthful skin

Pineapple

Pineapples are a common ingredient in most face masks. They have a potent enzyme known as bromelain, which helps renew dead skin cells. Bromelain also plays a vital role in minimizing the inflammation of the skin. Pineapple also has a high content of Vitamins A, C, and K, along with essential minerals which play a vital role in maintaining skin health.

Watermelon

Watermelon is a boon for skin, especially for acne-prone skin. Having high water content, watermelons keep the skin hydrated, flush out the toxins and regulate the digestive system. Watermelon is also rich in vitamins A, C, B1, and B6. It is also a rich source of carotenoids, flavonoids, and lycopene. The lycopene present in watermelon helps protect your skin against free radical damage.



Skin care routine for summer:

Benefits of using ice cubes on your face

Eases out acne:

Did you know that icing can ease the acne too? Well Using ice on your skin can naturally ease out breakouts, unwanted zits and can help in reducing blemishes, soreness and can help in giving effervescent glow too.

Helps in improving blood circulation:

Applying ice on your face first thing in the morning can actually improve the blood circulation and can also give an instant glow to your face. It also lends a relaxing and soothing effect on the skin.

Minimizes large pores:

Presence of large pores on the skin can cause dirt and blackheads which can make your skin tone looks dull. This is where an ice facial comes in handy. It's an excellent approach to minimize open pores and, as a result, diminish their look. Ice works as a natural toner, reducing the production of excessive oil on the face.

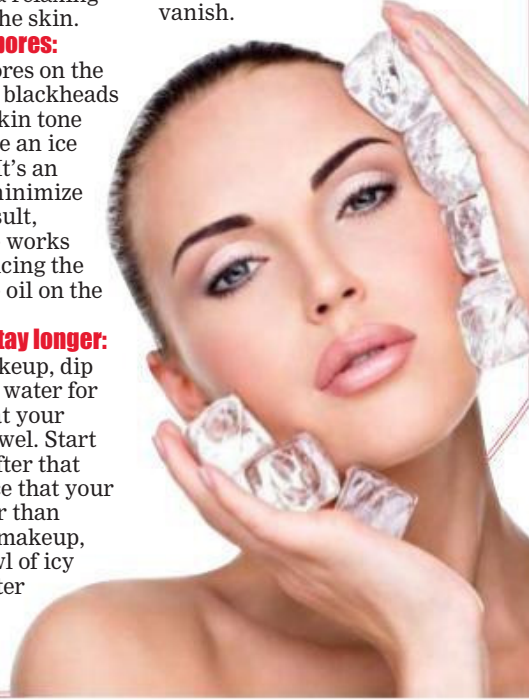
Makes your makeup stay longer:

Before applying makeup, dip your face in bowl of icy water for 5 minutes. After that pat your face dry with a clean towel. Start your makeup routine after that and what you will notice that your makeup will stay longer than usual. Before applying makeup, place your face in a bowl of icy water for 5 minutes. After that, pat your face dry with a clean towel. Start your

makeup routine after that, and you'll notice that your makeup will last longer than usual. This basic but successful strategy is used by the majority of models and actresses.

Reduces puffiness:

Applying ice to the face can actually help in reducing the puffiness or puffy eyes. Puffy eyes are mainly due to insufficient sleep and excessive eye strain. The hydrating properties of ice can help in reducing swellings and make swollen eyes vanish.



We all want our bodies to feel a bit easy this summer and feel fresh, cool, and hydrating. So, what is a better way than to do it with some cool ice? Yes, try this super cool and fun hack that has always been 'ghar ke nuske'. While drinking some chilled beverages, it feels like heaven in summer, just imagine the wonders ice can do to our skin. During summers our skin tends to suffer a lot in various ways such as dullness, dryness, blemishes, open pores, uneven skin tone, and signs of aging as well. Overall our face feels dull and lifeless. That's why the skin icing facial has come to the rescue. In this article, we are going to tell you the 5 benefits of applying ice cubes to the face and what wonders it can do to your skin. Wrap ice cubes with a towel and cloth, and then apply them to your skin. Although it is possible to apply ice directly onto the face, it is advised that you avoid doing so.

Healthy eating is a practice that everyone should know how to. Excess of anything is bad. This can be applied to foods and fruits too. By not adding certain foods to your diet, you are missing out on vital nutrients and proteins that food has to offer. Removing carbohydrates, fat or sugar, you are impacting your health negatively. Ayurveda expert Dr Dixa Bhavsar bursts food myths. The myths are around rice eating, mango and ghee. An excerpt from the caption read, "So do not fear rice, mangoes or ghee- Just eat them acc to your body's need, in moderation and without guilt."



Ayurveda expert bursts top three food myths

Here are the myths you should stop believing in

Rice is fattening

According to Dr Dixa, rice isn't fattening, but your greed is. If you eat rice in moderation daily, then you won't get fat. "Daily intake of basmati rice while leading a sedentary lifestyle can definitely make you fat, give you diabetes & even heart issues. Brown-rice (if you've eaten it for long), Red-rice, sona masuri rice, hand pounded rice, are easiest to digest, aren't heavy on the gut & doesn't lead to obesity. So its best to choose your rice wisely." She suggests khichdi to people who are on a weight loss journey.

Mango leads to diabetes

"Neither do mangoes nor any other sweet fruit like banana, custard apple, etc leads to diabetes. What leads to diabetes is your greed for eating more than you need, not exercising enough and leading a sedentary lifestyle," writes Dr Dixa.

Ghee causes cholesterol

According to Dr Dixa, ghee improves cholesterol. Dr Dixa says, "A2 cow's ghee improves your good cholesterol (HDL), also helps you maintain healthy fat in the body which is needed for the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins like Vit A, Vit D, Vit E and Vit K." She recommends A2 cow's milk and ghee to get maximum benefits. "I do not suggest buffalo ghee as it is fattening to some extent and doesn't suit everybody. Buffalo ghee is good for people who wants to gain weight," writes Dr Dixa.



LITTLE WISER, LESS STUPID!

Actor returns to screen with an OTT series that released on Wednesday globally

A still from Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar

Actor Fardeen Khan, who took a sabbatical after his last film released in 2010, is back on screen with Sanjay Leela Bhansali's dream project,

Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar. In an exclusive conversation with *The Free Press Journal*, the actor reveals about his 14 years gap, working with SLB, and playing a Nawab. Excerpts:

How it feels to be in back in the showbiz business?
It's hard to believe but I hadn't intended to take this long to come back. A lot has changed over these last so many years, almost half a generation has passed by me. Audiences and landscape of filmmaking has changed. However, I have an experience of 27-28 movies behind me and I carry with me. Life teaches you many lessons.

Go on...
When you come back to an industry like this, where typically its a young

man's game. I have massive fears but I am taking one day at a time. The only thing that sustains is the love for what you do in this industry. I consider myself very lucky since I have been receiving warm love from all over. I literally count my blessings.

Mr. Bhansali has captured my part beautifully. He was there to teach and guide me. I just surrendered to his process

To do a comeback with a Sanjay Leela Bhansali project is a task. How did that happen?

I am eternally grateful for this. People don't get chances like this especially after taking such a long gap. Any actor would want to work with SLB. I admire his work a lot. To be a part of his vision is a surreal feeling.

What were your roadblocks?

To be a part of a period drama is itself very challenging. Around 60 percent of the challenge was overcome by the styling. Also, to understand the basic essence of the character makes it easier. For me, I had to find the humanity in it. Mr. Bhansali has captured my part beautifully. He was there to teach and guide me. I just surrendered to his process.

SET SECRETS SPILLED

Actress breaks silence on playing Kaikeyi in Ranbir Kapoor's *Ramayan*

Bollywood actress and former Miss Universe Lara Dutta, who is busy with the promotions of her web series *Ranveer: Balakot & Beyond*, has reacted to reports of playing Kaikeyi in Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayan*. The shooting of the much-awaited film has begun in Mumbai's Film City and several pictures of the actors from the sets have been leaked on social media.

While the makers have not announced anything officially yet, several news reports stated that Lara will be seen as Kaikeyi in the film.

Reacting to the rumours, Lara told a newspaper, "I am hearing it a lot as well. I am leaving the rumours out there. I also like reading and hearing about them so please continue."

She added, "Who wouldn't want to be a part of *Ramayana*? There were so many characters I would have loved to play if they were offered to me - *Surpanakha*, *Mandodari*, I am playing them all."

A few days back, Lara's pictures from the sets went viral on social media. She was spotted with Arun Govil and Sheeba Chadha. However, the makers have maintained secrecy around the project. Reportedly, a Rs 11 crore set has been constructed for *Ramayan* and the makers have tried to bring the city of Ayodhya to life. It was earlier reported that the film will be released in three parts and a major chunk of the first part will be shot at the Ayodhya set.

A formulaic derivative of love, longing, and liberation

TITLE: *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*
DIRECTOR: Sanjay Leela Bhansali
CAST: Manisha Koirala, Aditi Rao Hydari, Sharmin Segal, Taha Shah, Sonakshi Sinha, Waheeda, Sanjeeda Shaikh, Richa Chadha, Fardeen Khan
WHERE: Streaming on Netflix
RATING: ★★★



OTT REVIEW

Heeramandi: *The Diamond Bazaar* emerges as a lavish spectacle in the realm of Indian web series, crafted by the maestro of opulence, Sanjay Leela Bhansali. At its helm is the venerable Manisha Koirala as the aging courtesan Mallikajaan, leading a constellation of stars through a cinematic journey that spans the tumultuous years from 1920 to the late 1940s, against the backdrop of Lahore's iconic neighbourhood, *Heeramandi*. With Bhansali's signature grandeur evident in every frame, the series promises a visual feast akin to his celebrated cinematic ventures.

Set against the canvas of the Indian freedom struggle, *Heeramandi* aspires to depict the lives of courtesans inhabiting this vibrant enclave. Bhansali's meticulous attention to detail is palpable in the extravagant sets that recreate the essence of *Heeramandi* with majestic flair. However, despite the grandiosity of its presentation, the series fails to break new ground in its portrayal of courtesan life, adhering to familiar tropes and narratives.

The narrative unfolds over eight episodes, with the initial chapters laying the groundwork for the intricately woven tapestry of characters and relationships that define *Heeramandi*. While the exposition may feel laborious at times, the series finds its stride with the introduction of Fareedan, portrayed enigmatically by Sonakshi Sinha, injecting a much-needed momentum into the storyline.

As the saga progresses, the focus narrows on the romance between *Alamzeb* and *Tajdar*, portrayed with intensity by Sharmin Segal and Taha Shah. Despite moments of narrative confusion, the series delves into themes of passion, sacrifice, and the celebration of love. However, the integration of the freedom struggle feels somewhat contrived within the overarching narrative.

At the heart of the ensemble cast are Manisha Koirala and Sharmin Segal, who deliver compelling performances as *Mallikajaan* and her daughter *Alamzeb*, respectively. Taha Shah shines as an earnest lover, adding depth to his character with sincerity and conviction. The supporting cast, including Richa Chadha, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Farida Jalal and Sanjeeda Sheikh, lend their talents to enriching the fabric of *Heeramandi*'s narrative tapestry.

Visually, the series is a sumptuous feast for the eyes, with each frame meticulously crafted to evoke the ambience of a bygone era. Yet, amidst the impeccable production values, there lies a sense of artificiality that occasionally detracts from the authenticity of the storytelling, rendering some scenes sterile and synthetic.

The integration of music, though seamless, fails to leave a lasting impression, lacking the catchy melodies and emotional resonance characteristic of Bhansali's

cinematic oeuvre. While the series exudes a sense of grandeur befitting its extravagant budget, it ultimately falls short of transcending the confines of its genre, offering a visually stunning yet narratively familiar tale of love and longing amidst the backdrop of historical upheaval. Overall, this magnum opus despite its visual splendour and earnest performances struggles to transcend the conventions of its genre, offering a narrative that, while engaging, ultimately feels formulaic and predictable.

CAUGHT ON CAM

Celebs were snapped as they were out and about in Mumbai



Parth Samthaan and Khushali Kumar are all smiles as they spotted outside an event

Freddy Daruwala looks dapper in smart casuals as he spotted outside an event

Rajkumar Rao during the promotions of his new film *Srikanth*

From drama to politics

Television actress Rupali Ganguly of *Anupamaa* fame joins BJP



Television actor Rupali Ganguly, who became a household name playing the titular role in the popular soap *Anupamaa*, embarked on a journey outside show business on Wednesday as she joined the *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)*.

Amid the ongoing seven-phased Lok Sabha elections, for which polling has already been conducted for the first two phases, the actor was formally welcomed into the BJP fold at the party's headquarters in the national capital on Wednesday.

Addressing media persons after making her foray into politics official, the actor, flashing a wide smile, said, "Seeing the 'Mahayagya' of development (development push) around me (under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi), I felt that I should also be a part of it. I need your blessings and support as I embark on this new journey. Whatever I do, I always make it a point to do it right...to do it well. I wish to follow in the footsteps of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji and serve fellow citizens in whichever role I am entrusted with. I intend to work under the guidance of Amit Shah ji and make all of my leaders and cadres proud of me." Vinod Tawde, a national general secretary of the *BJP*, was also present at the party headquarters as Rupali embraced saffron.



Nushratt Bharuccha stuns with a gorgeous look as she heads out in the suburbs

Mandira Bedi looks elegant as she spotted outside an event in suburbs