



Poonam Pandey in the video announcing her return. PIC COURTESY/INSTAGRAM

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COMING back from the grave, taking on someone's entire identity, and cloning everything from facial features to voices. What sounds like something right out of a sci-fi novel is now the reality we live with. Influencer and model Poonam Pandey's recent death scare served as an apt reminder of how the best of us can fall prey to misinformation on the Internet. The alarming reminder came right in time after a report by the World Economic Forum last month revealed that India ranks No. 1 in facing the highest risk of misinformation and disinformation in the world. Cyber security experts and investigators share how you can call a bluff the next time something sounds too good to be true.

➔ Pause to reflect

In an age where people hit the share button in the blink of an eye, cyber-crime investigator Ritesh Bhatia suggests taking a moment to practise a basic check called the POV check. "The first step, P, is to pause. Just like you would spend some time gauging the credibility of someone who knocks at your door, pause to understand why a certain post showed up on your feed," he shares. Kalim

Spread no lies

As a recent social media stunt by Poonam Pandey reveals the risks of misinformation in the country, cyber experts share their fact-checking tips and tricks

Flashy pop-up messages on social media platforms can lure users into installing spyware on their devices. REPRESENTATION PICS



Ahmed, digital investigator, agrees. "It's important to be aware of your own biases. Sometimes, social media can be an echo chamber. If a post triggers an emotion in you, that's your cue to sit down and dissect it before sharing," he notes. Bhatia tells us that the O stands for a zero-trust policy to be adopted before moving to V—verification. "It is unfortunate, but always wise to approach any post with suspicion. If you spot something amiss, it's best to deem it untrue and ignore it if you do not have the time and resources to verify it," he adds.

➔ Verify like a pro

Ahmed shares that the first step is to spot discrepancies between the context and the content. He

'One must remember that no government official will ever drop you a message and demand payments'

Ritesh Bhatia

shares an example, "We have been seeing a lot of videos around armed conflicts lately. Take some time out to read about the geographic characteristics, the signs and symbols used, and the languages spoken. No tool can be as useful as being informed."

The investigator shares a peek into his process of reverse-checking visual content. "You can begin by taking screenshots of the picture you received or five clear frames from a video. The next step is to upload these to reverse-image checking websites," he reveals. While most of us are aware of Google's reverse image search, Ahmed suggests lesser-known tools like Baidu, TinEye, and Yandex that can cross-check with a wider sample in some



Kalim Ahmed

➔ Heads up from the experts

Over telephonic calls, the experts warn us of the evolving and complex methodologies



Senior citizens must consult someone familiar with the Internet before clicking on suspicious links

perpetrators have up their sleeves today. Bhatia informs us of a growing trend of victims receiving messages from individuals posing as police or customs officers. "The natural reaction of any law-abiding citizen, driven by fear, is to conform. But one must remember that no government official will ever drop you a message and demand payments." Ahmed points out how AI voice-changing tools

can now be used to mimic the voice of a close contact of the victim. "You might receive a voice-note tomorrow, claiming your friend has been in an accident, and requires money. The speaker might even sound exactly like your friend." The experts unanimously suggest a real-life two factor authentication. "Call them back on their personal number, call mutual friends or family to verify if such claims are true. Do not make decisions in haste."

EXPERTS unanimously stress on the importance of taking a moment to analyse the content you consume through a critical lens and ascertain its credibility before sharing it with friends on social media

➔ The way ahead

If the recent developments around Pandey's death scare reveal anything, it's that the best of us can fall prey to misinformation. Nirali Bhatia, cyber psychologist, reveals why. "Content today is tailor-made to evoke a sense of curiosity. Flashy headlines, gossip taglines and clickbait-y claims make it hard not to click on," she shares. The psychologist shares how individuals who fall for these scams and end up compromising their privacy and security must not hesitate while reaching out for help. "One cannot shift the blame onto victims. They need to be approached with empathy and guided through the concept of media literacy with some extent of hand-holding. There is no shame in asking for help from someone who understands the Internet better."



Nirali Bhatia



(Left to right) Puja Sarup, Barkha Fatnani and Vaishali Bisht

Kids at play

Sign up for two live performances for kids presented by Gillo Repertory Theatre this Saturday

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WITHOUT any limit on age, understanding life through art will always be an evergreen process. Extending this to children through live performances, Gillo Repertory Theatre will host two short plays

in Hindi at Juhu's Prithvi Theatre this weekend. The titles are Poonachi, based on a children's illustrated book in Tamil by Perumal Murugan about a black baby goat which has been adapted and directed by Puja Sarup, and Baal Mithai, an original Hindi play about a museum of sweets that



has been written and directed by Sarup. The performances will be played out by Vaishali Bisht, Puja Sarup, Barkha Fatnani, Purva Pathak, and Shailli Sathyu. The performances are

open to children between six and 12 years of age, along with their parents, and aim to engage young minds in an artistic experience through live performances and stories that speak about common life experiences. Take, for instance, the adventurous and wonder-filled tale of Poonachi who,



Shailli Sathyu

upset with her friends, walks off and goes deeper into the magical yet dark forest where she is truly free. Will she stay alone in the forest or go back to a known world? Or Baal

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1-MINUTE READ

Timeless tales

NIKITA Gill is most popularly known for her poems. However, recently Gill also released her first children's book, *Animal Tales from India: Ten Stories from the Panchatantra* (Nosy Crow Books). When a poet has eight books of poems in their oeuvre, it is interesting to think if writing a collection of fables was a detour for them. But Gill's new book comes across more as a continuation of her beliefs that are reflected in her poems as well. In a 2018 TV interview, she said, "One of the best things about poetry is how it reinvents itself. Each time someone says, 'Poetry is dead', it finds a new audience, a new way to speak to people." One would imagine she believes this to be the case with *Panchatantra*, too. Writers, from time to time, have discovered novel ways of giving these stories to their young readers across the world.

The first thing one might notice in Gill's retelling of 10 stories from the ancient classic is that she refuses to think alone. To imagine the world as a kinder place is to confer possibility, but one that comes through a commonly agreed belief in goodness and a collective effort towards it. Her interjections, such as "Can you think what the lessons might be?", establish this. There is also tenderness in the lessons. Perhaps her source differs from the ones used by other tellers, perhaps not. The lessons that reach the readers have a softer landing, and are often about friendships and family. For instance, in Chandra Rajan's translation (the most widely read translation), the blue jackal meets a brutal end, while escaping

and her view of herself; in this way, the story looks at our own fears and a coming to terms with them. [Showcasing such stories in live performances] adds to children's experiences of life. We take the stories that we enjoy and bring them alive for children."

Nandini Varma

'Showcasing such stories in live performances adds to children's experiences of life'

Shaili Sathyu

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Mithai, an odd sweet invented for a museum of sweets. Will this treat disliked by other sweets have a place in the museum or not? Sathyu shares, "These coming-of-age stories about being away from home and out in the world on your own are universal themes. For instance, Poonachi looks at the goat's view of the world

and her view of herself; in this way, the story looks at our own fears and a coming to terms with them. [Showcasing such stories in live performances] adds to children's experiences of life. We take the stories that we enjoy and bring them alive for children."

ON February 10; 5 pm and 7 pm
AT Prithvi House, Juhu.
ENTRY ₹150



TITLE
Animal
Tales from
India

AUTHOR
Nikita Gill

GENRE
Children's
fiction

PUBLISHER
Nosy Crow
Books

COST
₹1,585

hurriedly from other animals and landing straight into the mouth of a tiger that tears him into pieces. In Gill's reimagining, the jackal survives the animals and is rescued by Clever Snot, his wise jackal friend from home. Gill, therefore, leaves the reader with not only a warning about the consequences of lies and deceit but also a reassurance about the warmth of home and a family that is always waiting to support with open arms. This is Gill's way of making a young reader meditate a little deeper on what it really means to betray, and who gets hurt along the way.

The *Panchatantra's* beauty lies in the several layers of narration that can be seen through its multiple frame narratives — stories told within stories. Albeit a little differently, Gill manages to retain this frame-like structure using a single narrator who then takes readers on multiple journeys. Our personal favourite out of the 10 is the opening story of the mice and the elephant, strengthened spectacularly by Chaaya Prabhat's illustrations. Gill, who is based in London, was in the city last weekend for the first time, sharing her poems for a performing arts festival. Her infectious energy on stage was exactly as one finds tucked in her poems and in the stories she retells in her new book. There was love and vulnerability when she stood in the middle of the stage, surrounded by a sea of people who had found comfort in her poems. All that Gill creates is an endearing reminder of what it means to be a good human being.

Midnights with Taylor Swift

With their latest *Night Shift*, this SoBo venue will witness creator Deep Pathare bring the Taylor Swift experience and flavours of New York to the city's cocktail scene

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AUGUST sipped away/like a bottle of wine,' sang Taylor Swift in the eponymous track, *August*, from the album, *Folklore* (2020). When this writer first heard the song, it reminded them of a Robert Burns poem. But that is the high point of literature and pop-culture that the 2024 Grammy Award-winner for Album Of The Year brings. For content creator Deep Pathare, the artist was more than just a musical icon. She became the inspiration for his latest pop-up behind the bar at KMC* in Fort for a special Taylor Swift night on February 10.

"She is an icon," Pathare remarks over the phone, describing Swift as the biggest thing in pop culture since Madonna in the 1980s. "Her lyrics are so relatable and colour every mood," he notes. Aside from his fandom, this was one of the reasons why Pathare turned to Swift as the inspiration for a special curated cocktail session.

The head mixologist at KMC*, Jishnu A.J, shares, "The *Night Shift* is a platform where we offer creators, and even customers, who are interested in the art of cocktails an opportunity to step behind the



Whiskey on ice/Sunset on vine



bar. Pathare approached us, and we were very interested in the idea of bringing in the themes of Taylor Swift's lyrics into a curation of drinks," he adds.

Swift forms one dimension of the cocktails, Pathare adds. "When we were sitting down for our first discussion, her songs were one of the major themes but also the city of New York. The album 1989, for instance, is inspired by Swift's recollections of the time spent in the city. I am also a big fan of the classic Prohibition Era drinks and cocktails. So,

we worked with Jishnu on themes that were built around the city of New York, the vibe of the classic drinks with the essence of Taylor Swift's songs," notes Pathare.

The result is a curation of four special cocktails named after her songs. "Each of these drinks is a Taylor Swift inspired-take of a classic cocktail. For instance, the *Whiskey on ice/sunset on vine* is inspired by the eponymous lines from the song *Gorgeous* by the pop star. It is a New York sour — whiskey with a dash of red wine, with our own twist of pear cinnamon and Supasawa," Jishnu explains. Remarking about another drink, *Last Christmas*, the mixologist says, "It brings the combination of sponge cake, dry fruits and nuts with a dash of vodka. It will feel like *Christmas in a glass*," he chuckles. Pathare's favourite is a take on the classic *Aviation*, a gin-based drink that defines both New York and the musician's high-flying lyrics.

While it is impossible to reduce Swift to one particular flavour, Pathare remarks, "She is so iconic that it is almost intangible as an experience. She is on her Eras tour, and I hope to catch her in June this year, if I am lucky. But I wanted to share that vibe with people. It is all



Deep Pathare (left) with Jishnu A.J.

Aviation

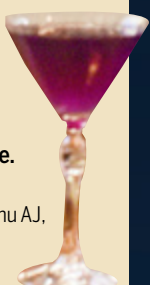
INGREDIENTS

- 60 ml gin
- 10 ml blue pea
- 10 ml elderflower
- 10 ml sugar syrup
- 10 ml Supasawa

METHOD

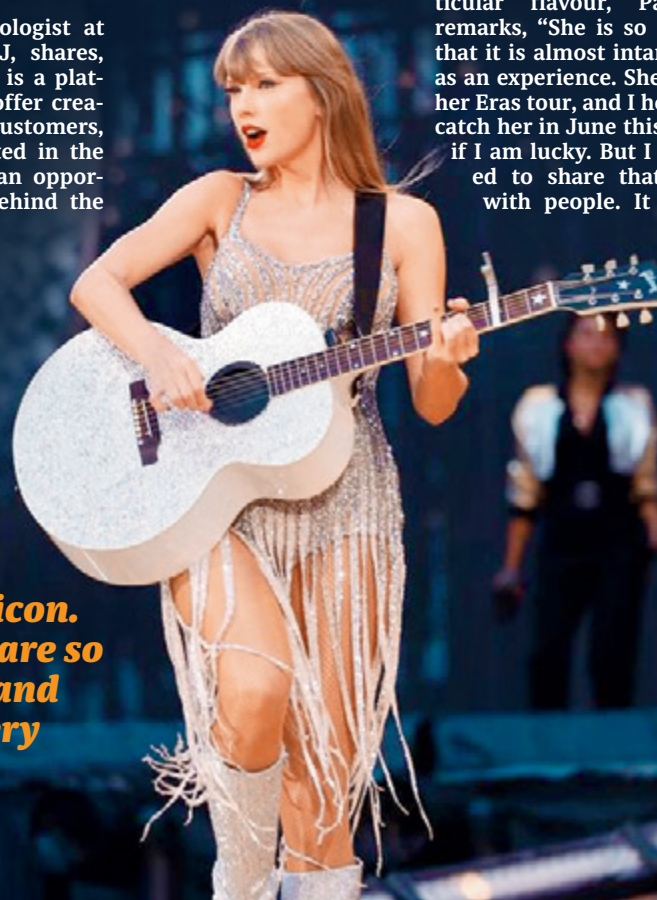
Add the gin, blue pea, elderflower, sugar syrup and supasawa in a shaker with ice, and shake until chilled. Strain into a cocktail glass and serve.

Courtesy: Deep Pathare and Jishnu A.J, head mixologist



about the experience," he says. Does this mean people walking into the bar should dress up to a Swiftie vibe, we ask? "Not really. It is all about the music, the cocktails and the experience. You can expect a vibe that celebrates her lyrics, music and the New York style," Pathare concludes.

ON February 10; 8 pm onwards
AT KMC*, first floor, Kitab Mahal, near Excelsior Cinema, Fort.
CALL 9987653397



Swift at a performance.

PIC COURTESY/INSTAGRAM

'She is an icon. Her lyrics are so relatable and colour every mood'

Deep Pathare