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Brazil bans X after disinformation row

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Brazil started blocking Elon Musk's social media platform X early Saturday, making it largely inaccessible on both the web and through its mobile app after the company refused to comply with a judge's order.

country," de Moraes wrote in his decision on Friday. The justice said the platform will stay suspended until it complies with his orders, and also set a daily fine of 50,000 reais (\$8,900) for people or companies using VPNs to access it.

STANDOFF CONTINUES



orders to censor his political opponents. "When we attempted to defend ourselves in court, Judge de Moraes threatened our Brazilian legal representative with imprisonment. Even after she resigned, he froze all of her bank accounts," the company wrote.

conduct "clearly intends to continue to encourage posts with extremism, hate speech and anti-democratic discourse, and to try to withdraw them from jurisdictional control."

Meta's WhatsApp, the nation's most widely used messaging app, several times in 2015 and 2016 due to the company's refusal to comply with police requests for user data.

Indian embassy in Laos rescues 47 Indians from cyberscam centres

PTI ■ VIENTIANE

At least 47 Indians trapped in cyber scam centres in Laos have been rescued from the Bokeo province of the country, the Indian embassy in the Southeast Asian country said on Saturday.

Prashant Agrawal, the Ambassador of India to Laos, met the group upon their arrival to discuss the challenges they faced and to advise further course of action.

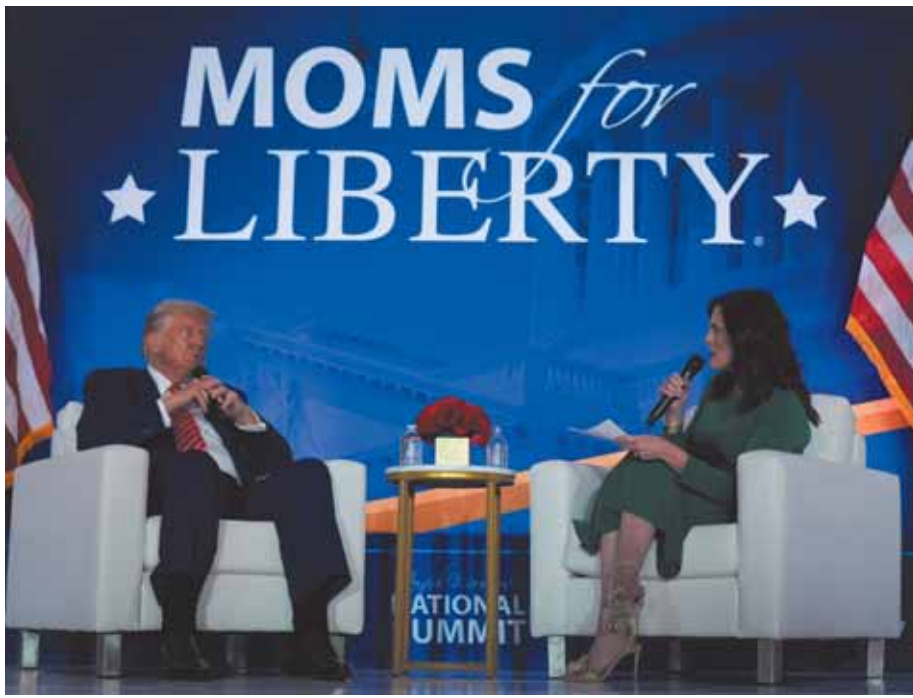
Trump continues personal attacks against Harris

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has launched a fresh personal attack on his Democratic rival Kamala Harris, calling her "defective".

watching and now we see, she's defective," Trump said on Friday at the annual gathering of Moms for Liberty, a conservative nonprofit.

risen since she rose to the top of the Democratic ticket in recent weeks. Earlier, Trump disparaged Harris' physical appearance and insisted that he was "much better looking than her".



Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump speaks with Moms for Liberty co-founder Tiffany Justice during an event at the group's annual convention in Washington.

the interview. "Did you see her on television last night? This is gonna be the president of our country?"

I don't think so," he said. While the outlet aired the interview in its entirety, Trump and his allies criticised

CNN for pre-taping the interview instead of airing it live as a way to cover up potential Harris slipups.

Polio vaccine campaign begins in Gaza

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A campaign to inoculate children in Gaza against polio and prevent the spread of the virus began on Saturday as Palestinians in both the Hamas-governed coastal enclave and in the occupied West Bank reeled from Israel's ongoing campaigns in both regions.

Hamas did not claim the men as its fighters but called the attack a "heroic operation" and a "new slap to the occupation's security system" in a statement early Saturday.

7 US troops hurt in raid with Iraqi forces targeting Islamic State group militants

AP ■ DUBAI

The United States military and Iraq launched a joint raid targeting suspected Islamic State group militants in the country's western desert that killed at least 15 people and saw seven American troops hurt, officials said Saturday.

Iraqi civilians, as well as US citizens, allies, and partners throughout the region and beyond," Central Command said, using an acronym for the militant group.

ed in the raid, while two others suffered injuries from falls during the operation. One who suffered a fall was transported out of the region, while one of the wounded was evacuated for further treatment, the official said.

targeting them. At its peak, the Islamic State group ruled an area half the size of the UK. It attempted to enforce its extreme interpretation of Islam, which included attacks on religious minority groups and harsh punishment of Muslims deemed to be apostates.

British Sikh MP defends record as landlord amid tenant complaints

PTI ■ LONDON

A newly elected British Sikh Labour Member of Parliament has defended his record as a landlord after UK media reports highlighted anonymous complaints from his tenants of being subjected to poor living conditions in properties owned by him.

be completed through immediate action. "I am a renters champion. I'm proud to rent out homes with secure tenancies at below-market rents," Athwal said in a detailed statement.

Athwal, previously a local politician as leader of Redbridge Council, is also required to have a selective property licence in order to rent out a block of seven flats — a system he introduced in 2017 when he was in charge of the council. However, the BBC found the council's public licence register indicated that none of the seven properties had a licence.

calling on the government to abolish Section 21 evictions, further protecting tenants' rights, which was again blocked by the Conservatives."

Houthi rebels fire missiles at container ship

AP ■ DUBAI

Two missiles suspected to have been fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted a Liberian-flagged container ship in the Gulf of Aden late Friday, splashing down nearby without causing any damage, authorities said.

Yemen. The attack Friday saw two missiles "exploding in close proximity to the vessel" some 240 kilometres east of Aden, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said.

Helicopter with 22 onboard missing

Moscow (AP): Rescuers are searching for a helicopter that went missing in Russia's far east on Saturday with 22 people on board. The Mi-8 helicopter took off close to the Vachkazhets volcano in the Kamchatka region, but did not arrive at its destination as scheduled, Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency said in a statement. It said it believed that 19 passengers and three crew members were on board.





"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion"  
— Dalai Lama



# MOSCOW FILM FESTIVAL KICKS OFF WITH FOCUS ON INDIAN CINEMA

*Laapata ladies* and *Kalki* resonate with Russian audience, opening up huge possibilities for Indian cinema in Russia, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**



The Moscow International Films Week, an event that has become a significant cultural bridge between Russia and the world opened up in Moscow with much fanfare at Khudozhestvenny Cinema and with people from film fraternity from around the world in attendance at the gala event. On the first day of the Film Week, screenings of both foreign and domestic films took place, including the nationwide premieres of the Indian sports drama *Field* and the philosophical-mystical drama *Alzheimer* from Iran. This year it is an Indian-themed week with focus on Indian cinema and celebrating Indian art of storytelling on celluloid. The film festival is hosting films from more than 40-countries but the flavour of the festival is completely Indian. The second day was completely dedicated to Indian cinema, with Russian artists performing on Indian songs and Indian cuisine being served at the venue with Bollywood songs playing in the background. The Indian segment of the festival is dedicated to celebrating the richness and diversity of Indian cinema, offering Russian audiences a taste of India's cinematic brilliance through a curated selection of films. Among the highlights are two remarkable Indian films, *Laapata Ladies* and *Kalki*, which have captivated the Russian audience with their unique storytelling and cultural nuances. Indian cinema has long been admired in Russia, with classics from Bollywood making their mark in the past. *Ra Kapoor* was a household name in Russia and 'mera joota hai Japanese', an all-time hit. The Indian-themed week at the Moscow International Films Week is a testament to the enduring connection between the two cultures. This year's selection is not just about showcasing films; it's about highlighting the shared human experiences and emotions that transcend borders. As one Russian filmmaker quipped, "Indian and Russian films are made with heart, the most striking similarity between Indian and Russian films is that the songs are woven into the storyline." This is despite the fact that much is lost in translation and language barrier remains a significant impediment. But that is about to change as Swapna Dutt, the co-producer of *Kalki*, told the Pioneer that they would be releasing the film dubbed in Russian. "Indian films were once very popular in Russia, we want to open that bracket again. I am sure Indian

THE INDIAN SEGMENT OF THE FESTIVAL IS DEDICATED TO CELEBRATING THE RICHNESS AND DIVERSITY OF INDIAN CINEMA, OFFERING RUSSIAN AUDIENCES A TASTE OF INDIA'S CINEMATIC BRILLIANCE THROUGH A CURATED SELECTION OF FILMS. AMONG THE HIGHLIGHTS ARE TWO REMARKABLE INDIAN FILMS, "LAAPATA LADIES" AND "KALKI," WHICH HAVE CAPTIVATED THE RUSSIAN AUDIENCE WITH THEIR UNIQUE STORYTELLING AND CULTURAL NUANCES

films have a huge market here," said Swapna Dutt. *Laapata Ladies*, a film that delves into the complexities of womanhood in contemporary India, has struck a chord with Russian viewers. The film's narrative, which intertwines humor with social commentary, offers a glimpse into the challenges and aspirations of Indian women. The Russian audience, known for its appreciation of nuanced storytelling, has responded positively to the film's portrayal of universal themes such as identity, freedom, and societal expectations. *Kalki*, another standout film screened on the second day, explores themes of mythology and modernity, blending them in a way that is both thought-provoking and visually stunning. The film's exploration of Indian mythology, set against the backdrop of modern societal issues, has intrigued Russian viewers. The film's ability to weave together the old and the new, the mythical and the real, resonates deeply with a culture that values its own rich historical and cultural heritage. The success of *Laapata Ladies* and *Kalki* at the Moscow International Films Week highlights the growing appeal of Indian cinema in Russia. These films, while rooted in Indian culture, address universal themes that resonate with audiences across the world. The Russian viewers have found a connection with the characters and their stories, appreciating the films for their depth, creativity, and the way they tackle complex social issues. The Indian-themed week has also opened doors for cultural exchange, with discussions and workshops that allow Russian audiences to engage more deeply with Indian cinema. This exchange of ideas and cultural narratives fosters a deeper understanding between the two nations, reinforcing the importance of art in bridging cultural gaps. As Indian films continue to gain popularity in Russia, the Indian-themed week at the Moscow International Films Week is likely to become a regular feature, showcasing the best of Indian cinema to Russian audiences. The success of *Laapata Ladies* and *Kalki* is not just a win for the filmmakers but also a testament to the universal appeal of Indian stories that, while deeply rooted in their own cultures, speak to the shared human experience. The Moscow International Films Week's Indian-themed week is more than just a showcase of films; it's a celebration of the cultural connections between India and Russia. The warm reception of films like *Laapata Ladies* and *Kalki* by the Russian audience is a reflection of the power of cinema to transcend borders and bring people together through the shared language of storytelling.





From leading corporate giants to shaping culinary excellence, **PAWAN SONI'S** journey is a celebration of passion and innovation in the food industry, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

## FROM CORPORATE SUCCESS TO CULINARY STARDOM A JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD OF FOOD BLOGGING AND AWARDS

**I**n the culinary world, where flavours tell stories and meals become cherished memories, Pawan Soni has forged an extraordinary path. A former Vice President at global giants like HSBC and GE Capital, Soni made a bold yet passionate shift from the corporate boardroom to the vibrant food scene. Driven by his love for discovering hidden gastronomic gems, he founded Indian Food Freak, a blog that has since grown into one of India's most influential food and travel platforms. His journey took a remarkable turn in 2014 when he launched The Big F Awards, a celebration of culinary excellence that has now become one of Delhi NCR's most prestigious events. Now entering its 11th year, The Big F Awards have distinguished themselves with an unwavering

commitment to transparency and integrity. Built on the principle of not imposing any financial burden on nominees, these awards have earned a reputation as a fair and respected platform for recognising excellence in the food industry. Over the past decade, they have become synonymous with culinary credibility, highlighting the region's finest dining establishments and championing new talents, including home chefs and bakers who bring fresh flavours and creativity to the table.

This year, The Big F Awards embark on an exciting new chapter by expanding their reach to encompass the entire Delhi-NCR region, reinforcing their vision of inclusivity and growth. This grand event will showcase a diverse array of culinary talent, with new categories that reflect the latest trends and celebrate the art of both dining out and home cooking. Attendees can look forward to an immersive experience where innovation, artistry, and passion are celebrated in a truly memorable way. At the heart of this celebration is a distinguished jury, featuring some of India's most renowned culinary experts, such as Chef Kunal Kapur, Chef Nita Mehta, Rocky Singh, and many others. These esteemed judges will rigorously evaluate each nominee, visiting the restaurants and sampling the dishes before casting their votes. This commitment to fairness ensures that the awards remain a beacon of trust and excellence in the food industry.

For Pawan Soni, The Big F Awards are more than just an event, they are a community and a platform for supporting genuine connections and inspiring culinary creativity. As he prepares for the upcoming awards in September, Soni envisions an evening that brings together the best of Delhi NCR's food scene, offering an opportunity to celebrate, connect and elevate the standards of culinary excellence. With a legacy of integrity and innovation, The Big F Awards continue to shine as a cornerstone of the region's vibrant food culture.

Founded in 2014, The Big F Awards have become a symbol of credibility and fairness, consistently upholding the highest standards in the industry. This year's edition promises to build on this legacy, with new surprises, new talents, and new stories to be told. Join Pawan Soni and his esteemed panel in this grand celebration of culinary brilliance, where the finest in food artistry come together to create an unforgettable experience.

### A CONVERSATION WITH PAWAN SONI

Pawan Soni shares insights into his transition from corporate life to food blogging, the challenges he faced in

the early days and his commitment to transparency and excellence in The Big F Awards. He provides valuable perspectives on the growth of his blog, the influence of his corporate background and what to expect from this year's prestigious event.

**You left a successful career as Vice President at MNCs like HSBC and GE Capital to follow your passion for food. What motivated this career shift, and how did your corporate experience shape your approach to food blogging and awards?**

Back in our day, social media wasn't a thing. Like many, I followed the conventional route—completing an MBA and then diving into the corporate world. But food was my escape. Traveling the world, I discovered hidden culinary gems and started writing for newspapers and magazines. Eventually, I launched my own blog, Indian Food Freak. Before I knew it, my passion for food had grown into a full-blown career.

**MY CORPORATE EXPERIENCE WAS THE YEAST THAT HELPED INDIAN FOOD FREAK RISE. THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN ORGANISING THE AWARDS WAS SECURING SPONSORS WHO BELIEVED IN THE VISION BUT DIDN'T INFLUENCE THE RESULTS.**

In foodie terms, my corporate career was a recipe for success, but my love for food was the secret ingredient. I traded PowerPoint for paprika and now, I'm serving up a plate of purpose. Jokes aside, my corporate experience was invaluable. It taught me critical skills in sales, operations, and more, which I still use in my second career. Having worked with ethical companies, I've always prioritized transparency. Even after 11 years of running the food awards, I ensure there's no money exchange involved, whether for nominations, attending the awards or in any other aspect.

**When you started Indian Food Freak food blogging was relatively new in India. How did you introduce the concept to an unfamiliar audience, and what strategies did you use to build your initial following?**

Introducing food blogging to India was like adding a new spice to a traditional recipe—initially unfamiliar, but now indispensable. I focused on creating content that was relatable, authentic, and sprinkled

with humor. I remained honest and objective in all my reviews, even if it meant ruffling a few feathers among friends in the industry. By avoiding fancy jargon and staying true to my readers, I built trust and loyalty. My guiding principle has always been to write for my readers, not for the restaurants.

**How did you address the skepticism or resistance from both the public and industry professionals during the early days of food blogging, especially when it was an emerging field?**

Skeptics are like stale spices - they need to be replaced with fresh perspectives. I proved that food blogging wasn't just a flash in the pan by consistently delivering quality content and building a loyal community. Facebook played a significant role in this, as I created a space where food enthusiasts could exchange opinions and learn from each other.

**What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in creating content for your blog in the early days, and how did you overcome issues related to resources, technology or audience engagement?**

The early days were like cooking with limited ingredients—creativity was key. I tackled challenges by infusing my content with storytelling, leveraging social media, and engaging with my audience like a master chef. Content was never an issue because food is something we encounter daily. To improve the visual appeal, I invested in a DSLR. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

**Indian Food Freak has grown into one of the largest food and travel blogs in India. What were some of the initial challenges you encountered when starting your blog and organising The Big F Awards, and how did your corporate experience help you navigate these obstacles?**

My corporate experience was the yeast that helped Indian Food Freak rise. The biggest challenge in organizing the awards was securing sponsors who believed in the vision but didn't influence the results. My sales and marketing skills were crucial here. Convincing people of the brand visibility that our awards could offer was key, and looking back, I'm proud to say that I delivered on those promises.

**This year, The Big F Awards has expanded to cover the entire Delhi-NCR region. What motivated this expansion, and what new opportunities and challenges do you anticipate?**

Expanding The Big F Awards to Delhi-NCR was like adding a new course to the menu—a natural progression. Since it takes nearly six months to organize the awards, with our jury visiting each restaurant to taste the food before

delivering a verdict, venturing into other cities wasn't feasible. However, Delhi-NCR should be treated as one city, with people frequently traveling for work and pleasure. Including Delhi has given us broader and, in some cases, better choices, helping foodies make informed decisions when they dine out.

**The introduction of categories for home bakers and home chefs is a unique and thoughtful addition. What inspired these new categories, and how do they reflect current trends in the food industry?**

Home bakers and home chefs are the new spice merchants—they're driving innovation and shaping trends. These categories reflect the democratisation of food and the rise of culinary entrepreneurship. I'm pleased to see that home chefs and bakers are now taken seriously. Not only have their businesses expanded, but many new ventures are focused solely on this segment, helping them grow by organising pop-ups at five-star hotels, developing apps for delivery, and introducing them to wider audiences.

**Winning the Best Influencer Award by BBC Good Food in 2018 is a significant achievement. How did this recognition impact your career and the growth of Indian Food Freak and The Big F Awards?**

We all seek acknowledgment and appreciation. Winning the award was a validation that I was on the right path. It boosted my morale and increased confidence in the products and content I deliver.

**The Big F Awards are known for their transparency and integrity. How are you ensuring these values are upheld in this year's expanded edition, especially with the addition of new categories?**

Transparency and integrity are the secret ingredients in The Big F Awards' recipe. We ensure fairness by using a robust judging process, clear criteria, and a commitment to accountability. From selecting the right jury to deliberating each result, we remain steadfast in our dedication to honesty and transparency.

**As you prepare for the 11th edition of The Big F Awards, what are your personal goals for the event, and what do you hope attendees and participants will take away from this year's awards?**

My personal goal for The Big F Awards is to foster a culinary community that's the icing on the cake. I hope attendees and participants leave inspired, with new connections and a renewed passion for the food industry. People don't mind losing as long as they know they lost to a worthy opponent. Our aim is to be fair and just while building camaraderie among all industry professionals.



**PAWAN SONI**  
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards



