

JANUARY 15-21, 2023

SUNDAY POST

HERE . NOW



P 3,4
COVER
STORY

TALES OF UNSUNG HEROES

MY SUNDAY

Although she is quite proud of her lineage, being the daughter of legendary Odia singer Md Sikandar Alam, actress Sofia Alam has managed to carve her own space in the entertainment industry. After appearing in TV shows like 'Duhita' and 'Bhagyabidhata', she took it to the next level by acting in movies such as 'Rahichi Rahibi Tori Pain' and 'Bidhata Ra Khela'. Sofia, who looks forward to her next release 'Bapa Superman' with Siddhant Mohapatra, loves to cook Biryani for her family at her leisure



Mom-daughter's day out

My day off is always with the family. I cook some delicious food and most of the day is spent with my daughter at home. I also take her out or help her finish pending homework faster.



With friends



With daughter

Tuning in

Being born to a legendary singer, apart from acting, I am very fond of music. My younger sister Nazia Alam is also a famous vocalist. No wonder, I am a keen listener of classical Odia and Hindi songs.

Stress busting mechanism

I love to cook and I love to eat. My go-to cuisine is Biryani. Cooking Hyderabad Biryani is my way of beating the stress. I am the cook in every picnic we plan. Besides, I bake many things at home and make pretty delicious barbecues.

Wildlife lover

I'm not adventurous in conventional terms but I love nature and wildlife. I like to spend time in the lap of nature. Although I'm not a risk taker, I do visit different sanctuaries whenever I am travelling to any place.

MADHUSMITA SAHU, OP



WhatsApp This Week

Only on Sunday POST!

Send in your most interesting WhatsApp messages and memes received to: features.orissapost@gmail.com And we will publish the best ones

THE BEST MEMES OF THIS ISSUE

- I bought some shoes from a drug dealer. I don't know what he laced them with, but I've been tripping all day.
- Just burned 2,000 calories. That's the last time I leave brownies in the oven while I nap.
- The future, the present and the past walked into a bar. Things got a little tense.
- Atheists don't solve exponential equations because they don't believe in higher powers.



INTREPID BIKERS

Sir, The cover story 'Women on wheels' (Jan 8), featuring four intrepid women bikers was an inspiring read. These daring women have successfully demonstrated to the world that gender is no barrier in pursuing one's dreams and being a woman is not a hurdle to quashing patriarchal stereotypes in a male-dominated sport. Through sheer grit and determination, they have battled all challenges and emerged triumphant in pursuing their biking ambitions. Incidentally, Chithra Priya, the daredevil motorcyclist from Chennai has the unique record of traversing all the way from Kanyakumari to Leh in 158 hours by navigating her bike through treacherous terrains and inclement weather conditions. 'The Bikerni' – India's largest all-women bikers' club has attained national fame for undertaking numerous bike trips across the country. Firdaus Shaikh, an avid biker, who knows motorcycles inside out, has logged more than a lakh kms on her bike. By defying all odds, these brave hearts have dared to do the impossible. As an old saying goes: "Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass; it's about learning how to ride in the rain!"

AMIT BANERJEE, NEW DELHI

LETTERS



A WORD FOR READERS

Sunday POST is serving a platter of delectable fare every week, or so we hope. We want readers to interact with us. Please send in your opinions, queries, comments and contributions to features.orissapost@gmail.com B-15, Industrial Estate, Rasulgarh, Bhubaneswar - 751010, Orissa. Phone (0674) 2549982, 2549948

Tales of unsung heroes

In the midst of the glitz, glamour, fun, euphoria and noise surrounding the Hockey World Cup, a few remember the group of men and women - coaches, support staff, administrators - whose committed and relentless hard work has shaped raw talents into seasoned professionals



DEBI MOHANTY

The spectacular inaugural ceremony of the Men's Hockey World Cup at Cuttack's Barabati Stadium January 11 will be remembered for a long time to come. The hockey enthusiasts are excited about a fortnight (January 13-29) of scintillating contests in Bhubaneswar's Kalinga Stadium and the brand new Birsa Munda International Stadium in Rourkela.

However, in the midst of the glitz, glamour, fun, euphoria and noise surrounding the event, few remember the group of men and women - coaches, support staff, administrators - whose committed and relentless hard work has shaped raw talents into seasoned professionals. They continue to do what they are best at - create sports stars.

80 int'l stars from 'cradle of hockey'

Alone from the tribal Sundargarh district, the 'cradle of hockey', they have successfully



Lazarus Barla

produced over 80 international hockey stars - both men and women.

"We will always remain indebted to our coaches. Without their constant guidance and support, it's difficult to say if we could have reached where we are today," concedes former India hockey star Lazarus Barla.

Stretching his memory back, Odisha's first hockey coach Sylvester Toppo narrates some fascinating events. He tells how in the Panposh sports hostel, a 10-11 years old Lazarus would wait for every opportunity to escape from the hostel.

"Initially he was very home sick, didn't like being away in the hostel. Packing his clothes and other things in a cotton bag, he would prepare to leave. Every time I would spend some time, chat and cajole the boy. Soon Lazarus realised the importance and never thought of going back home," reminisces Toppo who spends a retired life in Rourkela.

On another occasion, on a visit to spot rural talents, when he reached a school in Bihabandh under Rajgangpur tehsil, it was recess time. A group of girls was walking by. Instantly, Toppo asked one of them whether she was interested to take up sports. But, the shy girl didn't respond.

However, as Toppo urged her to attend the talent scouting camp and told her that she would do well in career, the other girls convinced their friend in tribal language to give it a try at least once, which she did.

She is none other than midfielder and Olympian Lilima Minz. "That day changed my life, thanks to Toppo Sir," Lilima says.

Youngest among the six siblings, Lilima says, though she participated in school events, she didn't think of having a career

in sports, ever.

"Everything, the place, surrounding and the people, was new for me. As a 12-year old, it was difficult for me to adjust in the first couple of months. But, all at the hostel were supportive, very nice to us. The coaches were our teachers and guardians alike and stood by us, always," intones Lilima, who last month married former international hockey player Stanley Victor Minz.

Lilima was also part of the squad that represented India in 2016 Summer Olympics after 36 years; she was also part of Asian Cup winning squad in 2017.

"I thought Lilima would do well in athletics, but she excelled in hockey. The rest is history," beams Toppo.

Deep Grace's glory

Like Lilima, vice captain of Indian women's team and the first female sports person from Odisha to have represented the country at two Olympics, Deep Grace Ekka too had been selected for athletics.

The only Odia to have done better is former men's hockey team captain and Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey, who is a triple Olympian (1996 Atlanta, 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens Games).

At the age of 12, Grace was discovered by her relative and also a senior hockey coach Tej Kumar Xess. Before joining Sports Authority of India(SAi)'s facility in

Sundargarh, Grace honed her skills under the watchful eyes of Xess.

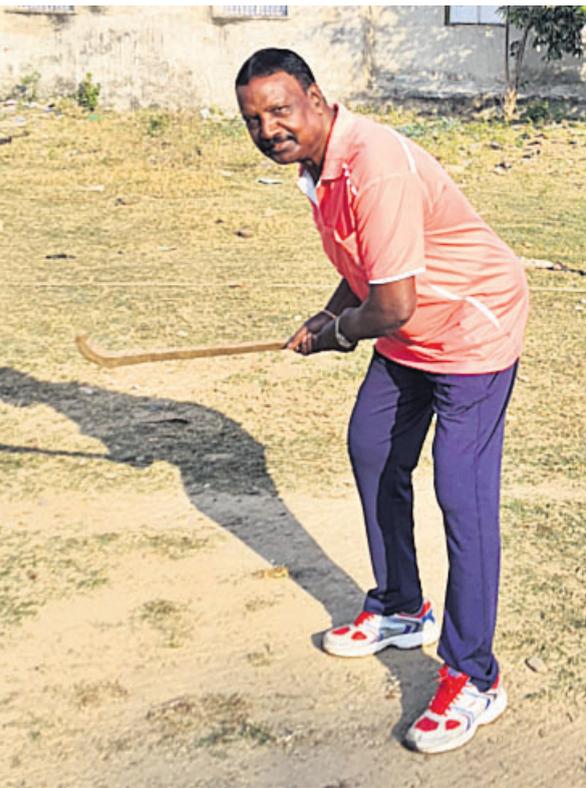
"I picked her on her physical abilities, not hockey skills. I am proud of her today," says Xess, as his eyes are fixed on the newly-laid astro turf on the Sundargarh sports hostel ground.

Lilima and Grace, along with

Sunita Lakra and Namita Toppo (all from Sundargarh) were part of the India team in the Rio Olympics 2016.

Lilima Minz





Initially Lazarus was very home sick, didn't like being away in the hostel. Packing his clothes and other things in a cotton bag, he would prepare to leave. Every time I would spend some time, chat and cajole the boy. Soon he realised the importance and never thought of going back home

SYLVESTER TOPPO | ODISHA'S FIRST HOCKEY COACH



The setting up of the sports hostels in the 1980's during late Chief Minister JB Patnaik's tenure was the game changer. The rural athletes were groomed under professional guidance and also they got to practice on the astro turf that was laid in Panposh hostel ground. This hostel has produced over sixty international hockey players

ABHAY PATNAIK | EX-DISTRICT SPORTS OFFICER



DREAM IN THEIR EYES: A couple of aspiring talents of Sundargarh

AWAY FROM LIMELIGHT: Coach Toppo reminiscing the good old days

'They are our children'

Lilima and a few others recall, how on festive occasions, a lady coach ensured that they had some local delicacies on their plates.

As all the athletes are from poor backgrounds, at times, while going home, many of them ran short of even bus fares. "Often I pay them the amount. They are our children and it's our duty," confides a senior lady coach.

Not only that, a few decades ago, unlike today, road connectivity was terrible at least in the interior pockets of the district. However, the district Sports officials and coaches, in their pursuit to promote new talents, often traversed on bikes.

Once, ex-district

Sports officer Abhay Patnaik was riding his Rajdoot motorcycle with Toppo as the pillion to one such village.

At one point, there was a big rock-like portion on the road. It was steep, slippery. So the duo returned, had a cup of tea by the roadside, under a tree.

There, Abhay declared that he would visit the village, come what may. He also shared his plan with Toppo. While Abhay would try to climb on his bike alone, Toppo's job was to hold Abhay in case he fell.

"It was very risky, but we succeeded. Before return, we had found three youngsters, who became national-level athletes," recalls Toppo.

"You have to give Abhay credit for his efforts in finding raw talents and getting them to the hostels. Scores of these kids have gone on to represent the state and the country," says a senior coach at Sundargarh's SAI facility, which alone has produced over 10-12 international players including Bikash Toppo, Roshan Minz, Banmali Xess and Deep Grace.

"Every coach aspires his athletes reach the heights. Their success is our pride," he adds.

Foundation was laid in the 1980s: Abhay

Watering plants on his terrace garden in the sleepy Sundargarh town, Abhay wears a satisfied look. "All have worked hard for decades together, and it has paid off," he says.

Abhay showers praises on Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik for his tremendous contribution towards promotion of

sports and sporting infrastructure including the Birsa Munda International Hockey Stadium at Rourkela and the new astro turfs in all the 17 blocks of Sundargarh. "It's going to do a lot of good," he thinks.

However, Abhay says, the setting up of the sports hostels in the 1980's during late Chief Minister JB Patnaik's tenure was the game changer. The rural athletes were groomed under professional guidance and also they got to practice on the astro turf that was laid in Panposh hostel ground. This hostel has produced over 60 international hockey players.

Abhay is all excited about the Men's Hockey World Cup 2023.

When asked if he has plans to watch a game in the Birsa Munda Stadium, pat came the reply, "Who will fetch a pass to a retired fellow like me? I will watch on TV at home."



WAITING FOR THEIR TURN: A group of young hockey players ready to break into the big league

'Want global fame for Odisha's art, culture'

Feted with several national and international honours, Bharatanatyam exponent Bala Devi Chandrashekar has so far performed in over 300 shows in more than 30 countries

SMRUTI REKHA BARIK, OP

Aclaimed Bharatanatyam danseuse Bala Devi Chandrashekar is one of the few exponents worldwide who have released nine critically appreciated dance productions such as Nandanar Charithram, Vishwam - The Omnipresent, Tripura - Divine Feminine, Karna Destiny's Child, Brihadeeswara - Form to formless, among others. Of late, she has been showcasing her last production titled Padmavati- An Avatar, based on divine love between 12th century poet Jayadeva, writer of epic poem Geeta Govinda, and his wife Padmavati. The US-based Indian American was recently in Bhubaneswar to perform Padmavati at a Bharatanatyam event. She took some time off from her busy schedule to speak to **Sunday POST**.

Excerpts

Out of all that you're known for - a scholar, performer and a teacher- which one are you the fondest of?

I think none of these can flourish independently, it is an amalgamated process. You cannot be a good guru if you're not a good dancer, or if you don't have the scholarly input to impart to your students. To me, I don't think I can select one, it's all together. And sometimes you are not 100% on this entire forte, you could be 60-40, 70-30 and it doesn't matter.

Who have you always looked up to as your mentor?

I got trained under the tutelage of Guru Jayalakshmi Narayan in Hyderabad and Padma Subrahmanyam in Chennai. And along with them I have had many scholars to guide me throughout and from whom I could learn in the field of literature, music or dance. They constantly study and that makes it more effective for me to stay connected with them and remain a student; because I have always wanted to study

more. The more you get into a subject, you appreciate it and you discover how little you know about it.

Out of all nine of your productions, which is the most cherished and which has been appreciated more by the global audience?

Each of my productions has its own charm as they are based on divine themes. For instance, one is about women power while another is about the story of a warrior. All are pretty diverse and not unidirectional. So it is very difficult to pick one over the other. However, one commonality that I have to cite here is that my productions are not just made for the very wise and the old, they are made for all age groups. Otherwise, they would lose their global appeal. The productions have been designed to pull an impression on all sections of society, not just in India, even abroad despite language and cultural barriers. The operatic and thematic approach of my production is praised globally. All are equally powerful and have stood the test of time for years.

How can we engage the youths who are losing interest in arts, culture and traditions?

I have been performing across the globe starting from a remote village of Thanjavur which is the seat of Bharatanatyam, to villages of Maharashtra, and also in Spain, Berlin, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Chile. My objective is to make an impression on their mind that my dance is the replica of the events happening in daily life. Of late, the youths have felt the need of something swift, quick, and something which makes sense and is relatable. This is because there are so many distractions in their life. I strongly believe that my upcoming show at Bhubaneswar will strike a chord with them. I don't preach, it's a platter that I keep in front of the youngsters and they take whatever is suitable to them. The dictating and advising mode has never worked. Today it is very important that we make it very approachable with love and compassion.

What was the definition of struggle and success when you started

off? Has it changed with time?

I think I have come to terms with the fact that all individuals will have their shares of struggle. When you move on a path of Dharma, you will gradually realise that it's not going to be a bed of roses. But I always try to convert my struggles into opportunities. I never give up easily because it has been very difficult for me looking at where I come from. There have been a lot of challenges, challenges from unlikely quarters. Sometimes your comfort zone turns into a challenge and you wonder if this is a dead end. I always believe that you won't find many along with you when you traverse a path of success. For example A bird flying sky high but alone.

Could you please share your thoughts on your show 'Padmavati'?

Padmavati is the centre of attraction of Jayadeva's immortal classic Geeta Govindam and the production is no exception. I belong to the southern side but I am working on Padmavati, which is a character from the eastern part of India. So I have made shehnai, dhol, and other musical instruments of Odisha as part of my production because it is very important to understand where this poet hails from by showing the anthropological significance. Before delving deep into the theme, I was very much intrigued. Of the Navarasas, Shringara Rasa has much power associated with itself because of its sensuality. Jayadeva and Padmavati had an ordained marriage. You can teach one, 'karm-yog' but you can never teach someone 'bhakti' or devotion. For me, Padmavati is the real avatar; she has shown the way to dedication through 'nrtya-shringar'. I have been meditating for this performance for years and I knew that it had to happen here in Odisha.

And finally, tell us about your experience so far in Odisha.

This is my first visit to Odisha. Starting from the driver to all those who I have met so far, all are nice towards me. Here, people are very soft-hearted. I have come to this state for the first time, but it will certainly not be the last. I'd like to return to Odisha again and again and spread the art and culture of this land across the globe.

Alicia treats 2K Mumbaikars with vegan food



Golden Globe nominee actress Alicia Silverstone treated more than 2000 youngsters at Mumbai's municipal schools to 'super shakti' vegan breakfasts and also contributed to the feeding of over 2000 community animals.

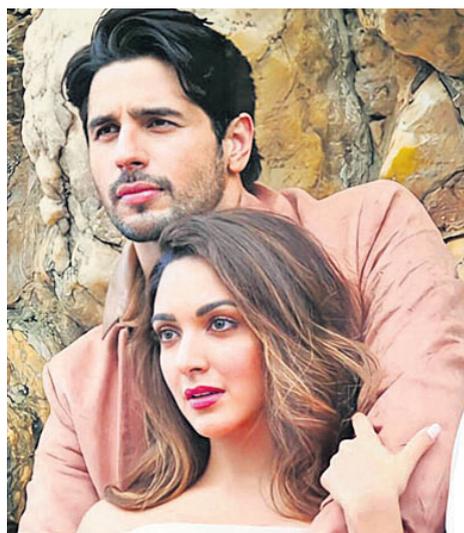
She said, "With India emerging as a global leader in film, technology, and other areas, vitamin- and protein-packed vegan foods can give its youngsters the best chance to succeed."

The vegan breakfasts contained vitamin C-rich corn khichdi, jowar popcorn, and protein-packed kala chana chaat.

The actress joined hands with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) with the giveaway coordinated through the Akshaya Chaitanya Foundation.

Silverstone mentioned, "I'm happy to join my friends at PETA India in celebrating the country's National Youth Day by treating Mumbai school-children to healthy vegan starts to their day. And as animals are loved by children and are members of our communities, thousands of them are being fed, too."

AGENCIES



Sidharth breaks silence on his wedding

Sidharth Malhotra and Kiara Advani, who have been dating for a long time now, have been hitting the headlines for their rumoured wedding of late. The actor has finally broken his silence and addressed the wedding reports.

In an interview with a news portal, Sidharth said that nobody has invited him to the wedding, not even the public. The actor added that he read reports with their wedding dates and all twice. Sidharth added that he was okay if people didn't speculate on his personal life. He would prefer it if people focused on his films instead, the actor said.

Recently, Kiara's new bridal wear commercial set off new rumours about their wedding. In the ad, the actress can be seen wearing a red traditional lehenga with a red veil on her head. The actress played a newlywed bride who stuck to old memories as she arrived at her new home.

A slew of reports confirmed that Sidharth Malhotra and Kiara Advani are set to tie the knot in February and preparations are in full swing.

The couple's pre-wedding functions like mehendi, haldi and sangeet are being planned for February 4 and 5. The couple has booked Jaisalmer Palace Hotel for their nuptials and it will be a grand affair. AGENCIES

Lisa Mishra on her show at WC opening ceremony



Lisa Mishra on her show at WC opening ceremony

Singer-songwriter Lisa Mishra's performance at the inauguration ceremony of the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2023 at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack, Odisha, was special for many reasons. Not just because this was her first time performing at an event of such scale, but also because it gave her the chance to get back to her hometown after 20 years!

Speaking to a portal ahead of her performance last week, Mishra said she is "humbled" to be sharing the stage with big names such as actor Ranveer Singh and music composer Pritam. But, getting to represent her home state is a feeling like no other.

During her 30-minute-long performance, Mishra sang a bunch of hits including the *Sajna Ve*, *Coka* and *Tareefan*.

"Of course, I am extremely humbled and grateful for the fact that I get to share the stage with big stars. But for me, representing Odisha is the most important thing. Stardom comes and goes, but where you come from will always be important," she said, adding, "We moved to the US in 2000s, so its been 20 years since I have been back."

AGENCIES

Whole of Pakistan grew up on Bollywood: Sanam

Pakistani actor Sanam Saeed has said that generations of the 'whole of Pakistan' grew up on films and content from Hindi film industry and they know minute details about India, but Indians are not as exposed to the art and culture of Pakistan.

Sanam found stardom after her TV show *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* opposite Fawad Khan aired in Pakistan in 2012. Two years later, Indian audiences got to watch the show and they became popular in the country as well.

Asked about the kind of films she watches, Sanam told Indian Express in an interview, "Personally, I am more of a Hollywood binge watcher. But the whole of Pakistan has been raised on Bollywood, from our grandparents to us, we know Madhubala, Kareena Kapoor stuff to now Deepika Padukone. We have seen all the generations. We have literally grown-up consuming Bollywood, the song, the dance, the culture, the way they eat, the way they do pooja. *Hum sab jaante hai Indian mein kya hota hai* (We know what happens in India). But India doesn't know what happens in Pakistan."

AGENCIES



Kite flying is a popular festival in India and it takes place during Makar Sankranti in the month of January. The kite festival is celebrated in various states of India and displays amazing collections of simple and fancy kites in different shapes and sizes.

The festival of Uttarayan marks the day when winter begins to turn into summer, according to the Indian calendar. It is the sign for farmers that the sun is back and that harvest season, Makara Sankranti/Mahasankranti, is approaching. This is considered one of the most important harvest days in India as it also marks the end of winter and the beginning of the harvest season. Many cities in Gujarat organize kite competitions among their citizens.

In this region of Gujarat and many other states, Uttarayan is such a huge celebration that it has become a public holiday in India lasting two days. Days before the festival, the market is filled with participants buying their supplies.

Every year, Gujarat celebrates more than 200 festivals. The International Kite Festival (Uttarayan) is one of the biggest festivals celebrated. Months beforehand, homes in Gujarat begin to manufacture kites for the festival.

In 1989, the International Kite Festival was started by the government of Gujarat welcoming kite enthusiasts to fly kites and witness hundreds of tiny, colourful dots on the backdrop of the blue sky.



History of kites

Although no one knows exactly when their use began, it is estimated that kites have been around for more than 2,000 years and likely originated in China. One legend is that a Chinese farmer had trouble keeping his hat on in the wind, so he tied it to a string and when it blew away, he hung on to the end of the string. Thus, the first kite.

Indian perspective

Kite flying in India seems to be more recent, happening approximately 500 years ago as recorded in paintings from the Mogul Period. One theme related to this period was the use of a kite for a young man to drop messages to the young woman he loved who was being held in seclusion away from him.

Many people aren't aware of the fact that International Kite Day originated in India, in the state of Gujarat, which is famous for the amount of festivals taking place there every year. The inhabitants of Gujarat begin manufacturing the kites months in advance so they can be sure to have enough, as millions of people visit Gujarat during it.

The kite festival, called Uttarayan in Hindi, celebrates the day that winter ends and summer begins, as well as the upcoming harvest season. In addition, the kites are meant to symbolise the spirits of the gods that are awaking from their deep winter sleep.

In the past, kite-flying in India had been a sport practiced by royals and the very wealthy,

FROM GIGANTIC SKY-BORNE WHALES, CHINESE FLYING DRAGONS TO LOCAL GUJARATI DELICACIES AND LOCAL HANDICRAFTS AT THE STALLS, INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS THE VARIED CULTURES AND TRADITIONS OF INDIA

but in more recent years it has become a festival for all the people who come from all over the country (and even the world!) to take part in. This might include people from

Japan, Italy, the UK, Canada, Brazil, Indonesia, Australia, the USA, Malaysia, Singapore, France, and China.

Gujarat leading the show

The mention of this festival is in the Rigveda which dates back more than 5000 years. The day marks the beginning of the auspicious six-month period known as Uttarayana. Today, regardless of people's background or beliefs, they are welcome to fly kites with everyone else in Gujarat in January. Most visitors arrive from around India, from Gujarat itself or another state. In major cities of Gujarat, kite flying starts as early as 5 am and goes until late at night. Approximately 8-10 million people participate in the festival.

The International Kite Festival, organised by the Tourism Department of Gujarat, is held every year in Ahmedabad, the kite capital of the state. This year, the festival is taking place at the Sabarmati riverfront, Ahmedabad, from January 8th to January 15th. The festival exhibits kite-making traditions from various countries and draws artists from round the world. The serene blue sky covered with colourful kites look splendid and since morning till evening it remains dotted with the vivid splash of colour with kites in a variety of hues, shapes and sizes.

In 2012, the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat mentioned that the International Kite Festival in Gujarat was attempting to enter the Guinness World Records book due to the participation of 42 countries in it the following year.

In the western part of the nation, 'kai pochhe' ('I have cut the kite' in Gujarati) is heard from

INT'L KITE FESTIVAL

Skies of joy

the rooftops. Gujarat has been, for long, associated with kite flying and houses the Patang Kite Museum, which was conceptualised by Bhanu Shah and is a treasure trove of historical kites. The museum has 33 panels with kites and paintings that he collected from places such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is one of the few museums of its kind in the world.

Theme on G-20

The theme for this year's kite festival has been decided to be the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence and India's hosting of the G-20. As the country is hosting the G-20 Summit for the first time, many facets of it will be visible at the Kite Festival.

Foods

There is also the traditional food festival of Gujarat which takes place during this kite festival, offering sweets like the Undhiyu (a delicacy of vegetables), Jalebi (sweets), Til Ladoo (sweets made of sesame seeds) and Chikki (sweet made from groundnuts and jaggery) for the visitors from different parts of the world



SAMATA

