

MARCH 15-21 2026

SUNDAY POST

HERE . NOW



COVER STORY

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International Day of Happiness – March 20

Where true joy lies





From desk to studio

Since I work as an IT professional on weekdays, Sundays are reserved for creativity and relaxation, when I focus on music, shooting videos, recording songs, and experimenting with fresh arrangements.

Multi-talented Odia music creator S Chakra came to limelight after appearing in 'Voice of Odisha Season 4', a reality show aired in 2017. Born in Rayagada, the trained Hindustani classical vocalist studied under Pandit Harihar Rath at Akhila Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. A B.Tech graduate and IT professional, Chakra uniquely fuses technology with music and cinematic storytelling. As an independent artist, he single-handedly sings, scripts, directs, shoots and edits his videos. His hits like 'Rupasi Janha' and 'Chill Maar' have garnered millions of views, while he continues pushing creative boundaries with a series of upcoming projects



With family

Living at two tempos

My ideal Sunday balances creativity and relaxation, spending time on music or creative projects, while also enjoying good food and some time outdoors with friends or family.

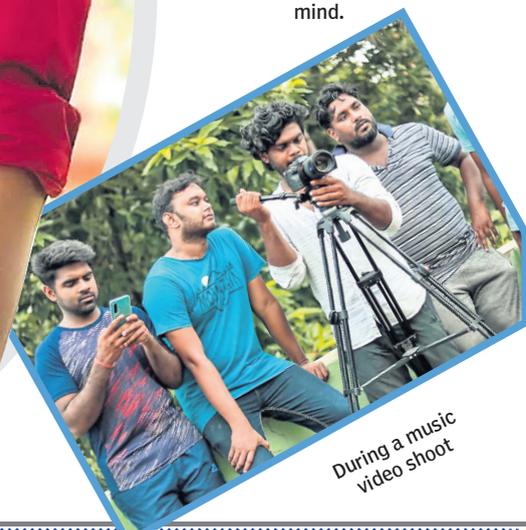
Where Gita meets GPT

I prefer keeping my mind engaged in creative or productive pursuits. In my leisure time, I read Indian scriptures or explore emerging technologies like AI, enjoying activities that help me relax and learn.



People, food and fiction

If I'm not working on music, I enjoy exploring new cafés and restaurants, spending time with friends or family, and watching movies or web series to relax and refresh my mind.



During a music video shoot

ANISHA KHATUN, OP



WhatsApp This Week

Only on **Sunday POST!**

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

THE BEST MEMES OF THIS ISSUE

- I used to build stairs for a living, it's an up and down business.
- The light at the end of the tunnel - are the front lights of a train.
- What is the longest website domain name? smiles.com because there is a "mile" between the s's!
- I intend to live forever... or die trying.

Striking paradox

Sir, This refers to the last week's cover story on International Women's Day (IWD). Every year on IWD, the world celebrates the achievements, resilience and contributions of women. Speeches are delivered, awards are presented, and social media fills with messages of empowerment and solidarity. Yet beneath the celebrations lies a striking paradox: while the day honours progress, it also reminds us how far society still has to go in achieving true gender equality. On the one hand, women today have broken barriers in politics, science, business and the arts. They lead nations, head global corporations and shape cultural narratives. The celebration acknowledges these milestones and inspires younger generations to dream bigger. On the other hand, millions of women continue to face discrimination, wage gaps, violence and limited access to education and opportunities. In many parts of the world, the rights that are celebrated on this day remain distant realities for countless women. Thus, the paradox of IWD lies in its dual nature. It is both a celebration of progress and a reminder of unfinished struggles. The day is not merely symbolic—it is a call to transform admiration into action and ensure equality becomes everyday reality.

SOURAV SENGUPTA, CUTTACK

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. Feel free to send in your opinions, queries, comments and contributions to

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International Day of Happiness – March 20

Where true joy lies



In today's world, marked by chaos and constant uncertainty, staying positive and emotionally balanced often feels like an enormous challenge. Yet, perhaps now more than ever, happiness has emerged as a quiet but powerful necessity

ANISHA KHATUN, OP

In a world overshadowed by conflict, uncertainty and constant upheaval, the pursuit of happiness often feels like a distant dream. Wars continue to displace countless lives, leaving families grieving, hungry and homeless. At the same time, rising unemployment and economic instability have created an atmosphere of insecurity where even those with stable jobs feel the looming shadow of recession. With inflation climbing relentlessly and the cost of living touching new heights every day, many people struggle simply to meet their basic needs.

Amid such turmoil, remaining positive and emotionally balanced can seem like an enormous challenge. Yet, perhaps now more than ever, happiness has become a quiet but powerful necessity. It acts as a source of strength, allowing individuals to endure hardships, nurture hope and continue moving forward despite uncertainty. In the midst of chaos, learning to protect one's inner peace and emotional well-being is not a luxury, it is essential for survival.

Ahead of the International Day of Happiness, people from across different sections of society shared with Sunday POST their thoughts on importance of happiness in today's turbulent world and what simple steps people can take to cultivate genu-

ine happiness in their lives.

'Helping the needy gives me greater joy'

Minati Das, a renowned poet and founding member of Bhubaneswar Sahitya Samaj, one of the oldest literary organisations of Bhubaneswar, believes that happiness lies at the very heart of human existence. According to her, life is inevitably filled with responsibilities, struggles and countless obstacles. Yet, if a person cannot find happiness within these challenges, then the purpose of life itself begins to lose meaning.



Minati says, "As a poet, as a human being and from every aspect of life happiness is the core of life. In life we come across many responsibilities, struggle, and obstacles but within that if we don't find happiness then everything is meaningless. Happiness doesn't mean wealth or any materialistic thing or success or trophy; happiness is contentment. Happiness is something that comes from within. Even if you are going through a rough phase you can keep yourself happy if you are strong from within. If you are not happy internally, you cannot handle any tough situation or fight any battle. We should do things that bring self-satisfaction and where the soul feels content—that is real happiness."

She goes on to add, "Happiness helps both individual growth and the growth of society. It is not something someone can give you; it is something we must discover within ourselves. The key to my happiness lies only with me. The happiness of life depends on one's own will to be happy. Only when a person chooses happiness can they truly feel it; no one else can give it to them. One must first understand what their true happiness is and discover where their interests and joy truly lie."

Das finds happiness in others' joy.

"Helping needy people gives me deep satisfaction. When a small act of kindness brings a smile to someone's face, that feeling itself becomes happiness. Feeding the hungry, providing blankets to someone shivering in the cold, or helping children continue their education can bring immense joy. My life's journey is driven by the desire to gather love for life and tears for death. If one's actions, duties, responsibilities, service, and dedication become a source of strength, confidence, happiness, and smiles for others, for society and the world, then that is true happiness. Such happiness makes one forget personal sorrow, pain, deprivation and struggles and instead fills the heart with deep spiritual joy. Service itself is worship," she adds.

If one's happiness becomes the cause of someone else's sorrow and tears, it is a sin. But if one's own pain and tears

bring happiness and strength to others, it becomes a virtuous act, she says.

'True happiness does not lie in material possessions'

Kajal Satpathy, a yoga instructor and founder of Namami Yoga Academy in Bhubaneswar, says, true happiness is not something that can be achieved through external achievements alone. Instead, it emerges from inner balance, mental calmness, and a healthy body.



She observes that many people often associate happiness with material success, wealth and luxury. However, such achievements only provide temporary satisfaction and rarely offer lasting emotional fulfilment. The constant pursuit of external validation can lead to stress, anxiety and emotional fatigue. According to Satpathy, genuine and sustainable happiness can only be experienced when individuals turn inward and nurture their mental and physical well-being.





“Happiness is very important for maintaining mental and emotional well-being. In today’s fast-paced life, many people experience stress, anxiety and emotional pressure because they search for happiness in materialistic things like money, luxury or external success. These things may give temporary satisfaction, but they are not permanent. True happiness does not lie in material possessions; it lies within us. The more we keep our mind calm and our body healthy, the more we experience real and lasting happiness, happiness that is deeper and more permanent.”

Satpathy further shares, “People can stay positive and happy by adopting a few simple habits in their daily routine. Practices like yoga, pranayama, meditation, and sound healing help calm the mind, reduce stress, and create inner balance. At the same time, maintaining discipline and consistency in whatever we practice is very important. Socialising and connecting with people also keeps the mind fresh and positive. It is helpful to stay active and engaged in meaningful activities rather than leaving the mind idle, because an idle mind often attracts negative thoughts. By keeping the mind focused, staying consistent with healthy practices, and maintaining a balanced routine, people can cultivate a happier and more positive life.”

Through mindful habits, emotional awareness, and a balanced lifestyle, Satpathy believes individuals can rediscover lasting happiness even amid the fast pace of modern life.

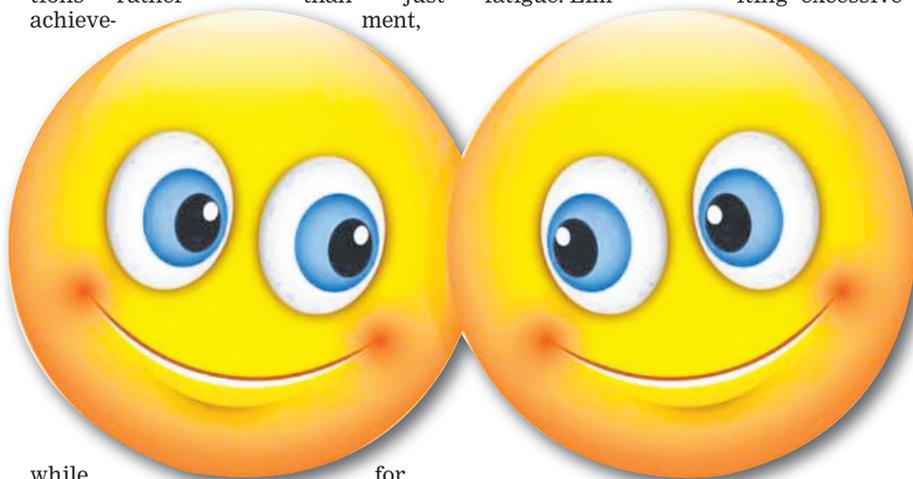
‘Happiness is not just about big life changes’

Dr Nirlipta Dash, Consultant Neuropsychiatrist and Assistant Professor at IMS & SUM Hospital in Bhubaneswar, believes that happiness plays a crucial role in maintaining mental and emotional well-being, especially in today’s fast-paced and demanding world.



Dr Dash, says, “As a psychiatrist my perspective is that happiness is not about constant excitement or being cheerful all the time. It is better understood as emotional equilibrium, which is the ability to experience positive emotions while still coping effectively with stress and uncer-

tainty. In a fast-paced world marked by digital overload, performance pressure, and constant comparison, small experiences of happiness act as psychological buffers. They regulate stress pathways in the brain, reduce cortisol levels, and improve cognitive flexibility and decision-making. Not generalising but on a regular basis what I notice is that for Gen Z happiness often comes from meaning, identity, and making concrete connections rather than just achievement.



while older generations it may come from stability, family bonds, and a sense of purpose. Both perspectives are equally valuable. Positive psychology also shows that individuals who experience regular micro-moments of joy, gratitude, or connection tend to show better resilience against anxiety, burnout, and depression. So happiness isn’t a luxury emotion; it is a protective mental resource that helps the mind recover, adapt, and stay emotionally balanced during life’s inevitable stressors.”

He further emphasises that cultivating happiness does not necessarily require major life changes. Instead, simple and consistent habits in everyday life can significantly enhance emotional well-being and positivity.

“Happiness in daily life usually comes from small, repeatable behaviours rather than big life changes. One practical tool is the ‘3-minute reset’, where you step outside for sunlight, take a few slow breaths, and briefly disengage

from screens. This helps regulate the nervous system and improves mood in real time. Another helpful habit is intentional connection, sending a message, calling a friend, or sharing a meal with family. Human connection is one of the strongest predictors of long-term psychological well-being across all generations. Movement also plays a major role. Even a 10-minute walk can improve mood by releasing endorphins and reducing mental fatigue. Limiting excessive

duration. And if these steps still don’t seem to help, it is always okay to consider seeking professional support. Sometimes talking to a mental health professional can provide clarity and tools that friends or self-help cannot,” he adds.

Reputation on the line

India ranked 118th out of 147 countries in the World Happiness Report 2025, falling behind neighbours like Nepal (92nd) and Pakistan (109th) The report was published by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford in partnership with Gallup, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN).

- 1- Finland
- 2- Denmark
- 3- Iceland
- 4- Sweden
- 5- Netherlands
- 6- Costa Rica
- 7- Norway
- 8- Israel
- 9- Luxembourg
- 10- Mexico
- 92- Nepal
- 109- Pakistan
- 118- India





WORLD SPARROW DAY - MARCH 20

Save the little chirps

ANISHA KHATUN, OP

Once a familiar and comforting presence in our daily lives, the gentle chirping of the house sparrow used to echo through courtyards, windows and bustling streets, bringing a sense of warmth and life to our mornings. Today, that cheerful melody has slowly begun to fade from many urban spaces. These tiny, delicate birds once lived closely alongside us, building nests in our homes and feeding on grains and insects. However, rapid urbanisation, shrinking green spaces and modern lifestyles have pushed them away from their natural habitats. Observed every year **March 20, World Sparrow Day** is a heartfelt reminder of the fragile bond between humans and nature. The day calls upon people to pause, reflect and rediscover their responsibility toward protecting these beautiful little creatures. By nurturing greener surroundings and creating safe spaces for them, we can once again welcome the sweet, soulful song of sparrows back into our lives.

Subhransu Satpathy, environmental activist and popularly known as the Birdman of Odisha from Dhenkanal, has been widely recognised for his dedicated efforts toward environmental conservation. He is particularly known for placing tens of thousands of clay pots filled with water across different locations to help birds survive the harsh summer months. Speaking about the alarming decline in the population of the House Sparrow, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) alumnus says, "The house sparrow is one of the first birds I remember from my childhood. Their sweet chirping once filled our homes, streets, bus stands and railway stations. These tiny birds lived close to us, feeding



on grains and small insects. Sadly, their numbers are now falling rapidly, and spotting a sparrow in cities has become rare. Today, many of us wake up to the noise of garbage trucks instead of the cheerful chirping of birds. World Sparrow Day reminds us to care for and protect these beautiful little birds. If we want the next generation to grow up hearing their joyful chirping, each of us must take small steps to bring them back, because a morning filled with birdsong is far better than a silent sky."

Elaborating on what people can do, he adds, "Grow plants and small trees around your home to create a natural habitat. Avoid using chemical pesticides in gardens, as sparrows feed on insects. Keep a small bowl of water on your balcony, window or terrace, especially during summer. Place grains such as rice, wheat or millet in a feeder for birds."

Besides, one can also install eco-friendly sparrow nest boxes or leave small safe spaces where they can build nests. These small steps from each of us can help bring back the cheerful chirping of sparrows into our lives, he further says.

According to wildlife biologist **Rutika Nath**, several interconnected factors have contributed to the steady disappearance of these once-familiar birds from city neighbourhoods.

She explains that urbanisation has drastically altered the sparrow's natural living conditions. Traditional homes with open spaces, tiled roofs, and small crevices once offered perfect nesting spots for sparrows. However, modern architecture, particularly sealed concrete buildings, has eliminated these natural cavities, leaving sparrows with very few places to build their nests.



"Modern, sealed houses, without nesting cavities, have supplanted traditional homes in rapidly urbanising cities like Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. Overuse of pesticides and insecticides in urban gardens and adjacent agricultural areas reduces insects, which are crucial sources of protein for sparrow chicks. Sparrows now have fewer natural food sources due to better grain storage, cleaner markets and less cereal spillage, unlike rural areas. With growing urban pollution and radiation, sparrows' ability to communicate and breed is getting hampered by air and noise pollution, as well as rising mobile tower radiation. When native hedges and shrubs are removed from urban areas, there are fewer places to find shelter and food."

Beyond these challenges, Nath emphasises that conservation is still possible if communities take simple, practical steps to recreate safe habitats for sparrows. Encouraging natural vegetation, ensuring food and water availability and reducing chemical use can help rebuild an environment where these birds can survive and thrive.

Rutika also points to a promising conservation initiative in the state. "A campaign to install House Sparrow nests in several districts across both rural and urban areas was previously launched by Rabintra Sahu, a conservationist and former wildlife warden in Odisha, with encouraging results. In collaboration with Sahu, the Odisha Biodiversity Board has just brought this programme back to life in 2025. In Ganjam district, the program has already shown results, Agastinuagan Gram Panchayat has reported an increase in sparrow populations. The first step in the strategy is to identify areas where House Sparrow populations are still extremely low. Artificial nest boxes with proper procedure are then positioned in suitable areas to encourage reproduction

and help restore their numbers in urban settings," shared Nath.

Why sparrows matter

The humble house sparrows play a surprisingly important role in maintaining ecological balance. Here are a few reasons why we work on their conservation

Natural pest control: Sparrows feed on insects such as caterpillars, beetles, and aphids, helping farmers and gardeners control harmful pests naturally.

Pollination support: While feeding on nectar and plants, sparrows help in the pollination process, supporting plant growth and biodiversity.

Seed dispersal: By carrying and dropping seeds in different places, sparrows contribute to the spread of vegetation and regeneration of plant life.

Indicator of environmental health: A healthy sparrow population often indicates a balanced ecosystem. Their decline in cities can signal environmental problems such as pollution and habitat loss.

Cultural and ecological value: Sparrows have long lived close to humans, symbolising harmony between nature and urban life while enriching local biodiversity. Protecting sparrows helps maintain healthier ecosystems and reminds us of the delicate balance between humans and nature.

Mumbai's rising AQI

Deepika raises alarm

Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone, who was last seen in *Singham Again*, is questioning the authorities in the Maharashtra administration over their failure to curb the air pollution in the entertainment capital of the country.

The actress took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared the AQI data of the city. The picture shows the average AQI of Mumbai to be around 150.

She wrote in the picture, "This city & its children are choking! How is this okay!? @my_bmc @mybmchealth help".

Deepika's strong stance also comes from her being a mother Dua, her daughter with Ranveer Singh. Dua was born September 8, 2024.

Mumbai has witnessed a noticeable deterioration in air quality over the past year, with several locations recording Air Quality Index (AQI) levels in the "poor" to "very poor" category. In February 2026, citywide AQI readings were reported around 230-250, while areas such as BKC, Ghatkopar and Mulund recorded levels close to 290, approaching the severe category.

A major contributor to the worsening AQI is construction dust from large-scale redevelopment and infrastructure projects across the city. Dust from excavation, demolition, transportation of debris and uncovered construction materials signifi-

cantly increases PM10 and PM2.5 particulate matter, which are the primary pollutants affecting Mumbai's air quality. IANS



Divyanka's relationship rule

A popular name in the television industry, Divyanka Tripathi shared an important relationship rule she makes her actor husband, Vivek Dahiya, follow.

The rule set by the *Yeh Hai Mohabbatein* actress states that Vivek must always oblige whenever she asks him for a picture.

Divyanka took to her official Instagram handle and published a couple of romantic photos of the lovebirds.

While the *Banoo Main Teri Dulhann* actress was seen wearing a black jumpsuit, Vivek kept things more casual in a green t-shirt and blue denim.

The couple was seen posing against a red wall made up of flowers in the post captioned, "Relationship rule: I ask for pictures, he must say yes! (sic)".

For those who do not know, Divyanka and Vivek first met on the sets of the popular show *Yeh Hai Mohabbatein*. While Vivek was the show, Divyanka essayed the titular role of Dr. Ishita. After being in a relationship for some time, these two tied the knot July 8, 2016.

In January, Divyanka termed her decision to marry Vivek within just a few months of courtship as 'brave'.

Marking her 10th engagement anniversary with Vivek, she dropped a set of pictures from their engagement day on social media. IANS



OLLYWOOD ROUNDUP

Poster, audio release of Aafaa



Bhubaneswar: The poster and audio of the upcoming Odia film *Aafaa* were unveiled at a press meet held at the Bhubaneswar Press Club recently. On the occasion, the makers announced that the film will hit theatres March 27.

Produced under the banner of Mystic Claw ClapSS, *Aafaa* is a touching film rooted in Odia family values, culture, and traditions. The movie highlights the importance of organ donation. The film features veteran actor Kuna Tripathy along with Pritiraj Satpathy, Naina Das Tiwari, Hara Rath, Siddharth Tiwari, Swastik Choudhury, Rabi Mishra and Dharitri Khandual in important roles. Anmol Pati will be making his debut as the lead actor in the film.

Pritiraj and Naina are producing the movie, with Siddharth Tiwari serving as the co-producer. Pritiraj is also the director of the film while Naina and Siddharth are the creative directors. Biswajit Kuldi dons the hat of DoP.

Prem Anand has scored the music while the songs have been rendered by Diptirekha, Shashank Shekhar, Biswajit Mahapatra, Ananya Sritam Nanda, Shubhechha and Kuldeep Pattnaik, with lyrics written by Babu Goswami and Divya Kumar Sahu. PNN

Linebala poster, trailer out

Bhubaneswar: The poster and trailer of the upcoming Odia film *Linebala* were unveiled in Bhubaneswar, bringing focus to the lives, struggles and sacrifices of electricity department linemen who work tirelessly to keep power flowing.

The film is produced by Sushant Kumar Mohanty under the banner of Shreehari Motion Pictures and directed by Niranjan Behera. It features Sambeet Acharya, Swapna Priyadarsini, and Ashrumochan Mohanty in prominent roles.

Speaking on the occasion, producer Mohanty said the film has been created as a tribute to linemen working in the power sector. He expressed hope that the movie would raise awareness about the risks associated with the profession and encourage stronger safety measures.

The makers said that if the film helps save even a few lives by spreading awareness about electrical safety, it would achieve its true purpose. PNN



Actress Genelia D'Souza, who is also a mother of two boys - Riaan and Rahyl, reminded all the mothers out there that when it comes to fitness, they should 'focus on progress and not perfection'.

She took to the Stories section of her official Instagram handle and dropped a picture of herself from her latest session at the gym.

Holding a water bottle in one hand, Genelia was seen flaunting her black sweatshirt, which had the print, "Aai" in the back.

In the caption, she shared a little reminder of herself and all the other mothers, saying, "Aai at the gym...Focus on progress...Not perfection... A little reminder to myself and all the mum's out there. (sic)."

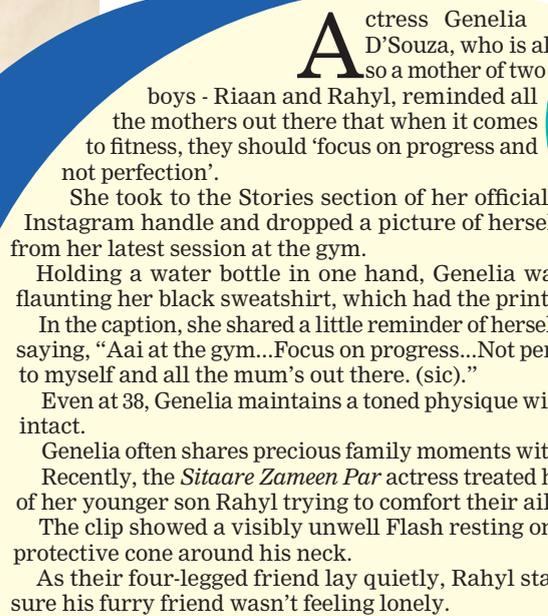
Even at 38, Genelia maintains a toned physique with the girl-next-door charm intact.

Genelia often shares precious family moments with her boys on social media. Recently, the *Sitaare Zameen Par* actress treated her InstaUsers with a video of her younger son Rahyl trying to comfort their ailing pet dog Flash.

The clip showed a visibly unwell Flash resting on the floor while wearing a protective cone around his neck.

As their four-legged friend lay quietly, Rahyl stayed beside Flash, making sure his furry friend wasn't feeling lonely. IANS

Genelia's message for moms





PIC: MUHAMMAD SAAD FROM PIXABAY

Fighting cybercrime across borders

Criminals use phone calls, texts, and trusted branding to impersonate government agencies and businesses, tricking victims, even from thousands of miles away, into giving up money or sensitive information. As these cyber-enabled fraud networks increasingly target Americans, cooperation between the United States and India has become a critical line of defense.

Suhel Daud, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Legal Attaché at U.S. Embassy New Delhi, says countering these networks depends on close international coordination. "The FBI works closely with Indian law enforcement through established legal and operational partnerships," he says. "Our cooperation includes intelligence sharing, joint investigative coordination, capacity building, and technical exchanges."

A rising threat

The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) reports that losses from cyber-enabled crime and fraud reached \$16.6 billion in 2024, up 33 percent from the previous year. As criminals earn more illegal profits, they expand their operations across borders.

Technology fuels this growth. "Criminals adapt quickly," Daud explains. "They use new technologies, social media platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and current events to make scams more convincing." Today, some fraudsters use AI to create fake images, emails, and voices to dupe victims. "This is not a minor nuisance," Daud emphasizes. "It is organized crime operating in the digital space."

Busting fraud networks

Many cyber fraud schemes operate from organized overseas call centers. Some even "contract" services, such as buying contact lists or hiring companies to create fake

websites.

Because victims, evidence, and perpetrators often span multiple countries, investigations demand close coordination. Daud illustrates a typical case: "A call center gets busted in India, but the victims are U.S. citizens, and the financial trail lies in the United States. Indian law enforcement reaches out to the FBI, and the FBI reaches out to the victims and prepares for testifying in Indian courts. The FBI also helps Indian law enforcement finish the financial chain of evidence as the losses are in the United States."

This cooperation ensures accountability. "This evidence and victim testimony ensure that call center operators in India are held accountable in court. Without this cooperation, the case cannot be prosecuted," says Daud.

One recent success shows the impact of U.S.-India collaboration. A joint investigation by the FBI Baltimore Field Office,

the Montgomery County Police Department, and the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office traced fraud schemes targeting Maryland residents and hundreds of other Americans to organized scam call centers in India.

India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) dismantled the call centers in December 2025, arresting six Indian nationals who led the criminal syndicates responsible for stealing almost \$50 million from Americans.

"There have been numerous such examples of success recently. This is all possible due to FBI and Indian law enforcement working hand in hand as partners," Daud notes.

Beyond individual cases, these efforts build long-term disruption by weakening criminal ecosystems—cutting off financial channels, digital infrastructure, and recruitment pipelines that sustain fraud operations.

Why awareness matters

Cyber fraud affects people of all ages and backgrounds. "One common misconception is that cyber fraud only targets

people who are not tech-savvy," Daud explains. "People often believe they would never fall for a scam. These scams exploit human psychology, not technical weakness." Cyber fraud is not a victimless crime. It affects retirees, families, and small businesses. In many cases, the emotional impact equals the financial loss.

"Awareness is one of our strongest defenses," Daud emphasizes. Even a brief pause can help people recognize a scam and avoid financial or emotional harm.

Reporting scams is also critical. "Even if money has already been lost, reporting helps law enforcement identify patterns and disrupt criminal networks," he explains.

"Because of the location of bad actors and the ease with which money can be moved globally, cooperation between all law enforcement agencies has never been more important," Daud says. "Collaboration allows law enforcement to extend across borders, apprehend subjects, and secure justice."

Technology evolves rapidly, and ongoing engagement ensures that investigators stay ahead of criminal tactics. "This partnership," he adds, "is about building durable institutional strength, not just solving isolated cases."

Cybercriminals adapt rapidly, using technology to create convincing scams, including fake images, emails, and voices, underscoring that online fraud is organized crime operating in the digital space.

BLOOD, BRONZE & STARDOM

Roman gladiators were not mere entertainers; they were the celebrity elite of antiquity, their faces recognizable across the empire, their names chanted in streets from Britannia to Mesopotamia



Long before the age of cinema idols, sports superstars and social media influencers, the roaring arenas of ancient Rome had already produced celebrities of astonishing fame. Roman gladiators—fighters trained to battle in grand public spectacles—were not merely warriors. They were icons of strength, bravery and drama, adored by crowds who filled massive amphitheatres to witness their clashes.

These men, many of whom began life as prisoners of war, slaves or criminals, could rise to extraordinary popularity if they demonstrated skill and courage in the arena. Their names were chanted by spectators, their victories celebrated across cities, and their images circulated through mosaics, graffiti and carvings. Successful gladiators became the rock stars of their age.

Crowds admired their disciplined bodies, daring combat style and the sheer spectacle of survival in brutal contests. A fighter who won repeatedly could earn prestige, wealth and sometimes even freedom. Their heroic aura captivated the Roman imagination, turning ordinary fighters into legendary personalities whose reputations spread far beyond the arena walls.

The gladiator brand

The fame of gladiators was so powerful that it spilled into everyday Roman life. Much like modern athletes or actors endorsing products, popular fighters were used to promote goods and businesses. Their images appeared on lamps, cups and

household items. Tavern owners named drinks after them, while merchants used their likeness to attract customers.

In a society fascinated by spectacle, associating a product with a fearless arena champion gave it prestige. A lamp stamped with the image of a famous fighter was more than a simple object—it was a symbol of strength and glamour. Gladiators, intentionally or not, had become marketing tools centuries before advertising agencies existed.

Some historians note that graffiti discovered in ancient Roman cities praises individual fighters in ways that resemble modern fan messages. Admirers wrote lines like “Celadus the Thracian makes the girls sigh,” revealing the emotional pull these warriors had on the public. Their fame crossed social boundaries, captivating nobles, traders and labourers alike. Fame, in the Roman world, could emerge from the dust of the arena.

Toys from the arena

The gladiator craze was not limited to adults. Children too were swept up in the excitement of arena culture. Archaeological discoveries across the Roman world have revealed small clay figurines shaped like gladiators—miniature versions of the fighters who dominated public entertainment.

These objects functioned much like today’s action figures. Young Romans played out imaginary battles with toy swords and tiny clay warriors modeled after the real combatants they watched or heard about. The toys reflected how deeply gladiators had entered the cultural

imagination.

For Roman children, the arena represented heroism, bravery and adventure. A clay figurine of a famous fighter allowed them to recreate the drama of combat on a miniature stage. It also suggests that gladiator culture was woven into daily life in ways that went far beyond the stadium. Entertainment, commerce and childhood fantasy all revolved around the mythic aura of these fighters.

Sweat, beauty and strange beliefs

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of gladiator celebrity culture was the belief surrounding their sweat. Romans often associated physical power with vitality and fertility, and the sweat of gladiators was thought to carry special qualities. According to historical accounts, some women believed it possessed aphrodisiac properties—capable of enhancing attraction or romantic appeal.

After battles, attendants sometimes scraped sweat and oil from the fighters’ bodies using curved metal tools called strigils. This mixture, known as gladiator sweat, was occasionally collected and sold. Wealthy admirers were said to mix it into perfumes, cosmetics or skincare preparations.

While modern science offers no evidence that such substances had magical effects, the practice highlights how deeply Romans revered these warriors. Gladiators symbolized raw masculinity, courage and physical excellence. By incorporating traces of them into beauty rituals, admirers believed they were capturing a fragment of that vitality.

The idea may sound unusual today, but it reflects a broader Roman fascination with strength and symbolism. In their world, the arena was not merely a place of combat—it was a theatre of myth, where fighters embodied ideals of power, endurance

ance and allure. Legends beyond the arena

Despite the brutality of their profession, gladiators left a cultural legacy that continues to fascinate

historians and storytellers. Their lives combined danger, fame, discipline and spectacle in ways that feel strikingly modern.

From product endorsements to children’s toys and unusual beauty rituals, gladiators were far more than anonymous fighters. They were celebrities whose influence extended into fashion, commerce and everyday culture.

In many ways, the Roman arena anticipated the modern world of celebrity worship. The cheers of the crowd, the merchandise, the fan devotion—these are phenomena that still exist today, only in different forms.

Two thousand years ago, under the blazing sun of Roman amphitheatres, the first true sports celebrities stepped into the sand. And for the spectators who adored them, those warriors were not just fighters—they were legends.

Fascinating facts

- Roman gladiators often became celebrities and even endorsed products.
- Children would even play with gladiator ‘action figures’ made out of clay.
- Gladiators’ sweat was considered an aphrodisiac, and women would mix it into their skincare products
- Historians claim that gladiator fights got their start as a blood rite staged at the funerals of wealthy nobles.
- Though they were regularly forced to come to blows in life-or-death combat, gladiators viewed themselves as a kind of brotherhood, and some even organized into unions, or “collegia,” with their own elected leaders and protector deities.

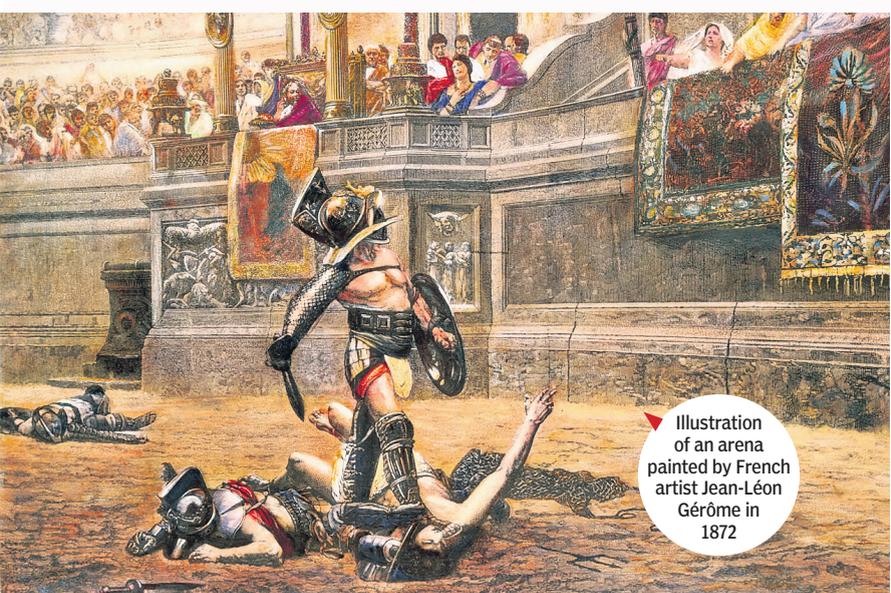


Illustration of an arena painted by French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme in 1872