



Justin Timberlake drank beer for a college student's role in his coming movie *Runner Runner*

ODDS

NYPD searches for parachutists

New York: The police here is searching for two men who appear to have parachuted onto a lower Manhattan street near Ground Zero before dawn on Monday and disappeared. Two men wearing black suits and black helmets were spotted by a security camera alighting onto a street near Goldman Sachs Group Inc's lower Manhattan headquarters at 3.07 am on Monday, the New York Police Department's chief spokesman John McCarthy said. They landed near 200 West Street, a 43-story office tower located several blocks west of One World Trade Centre. Cameras near the site captured the final descent, but authorities have yet to determine whether the men jumped from a nearby rooftop or out of an aircraft. "They were seen walking with parachutes away from the location," NYPD commissioner Ray Kelly said. "No banners, notes were left," Kelly said. — Reuters



Snake seller to open a store

Shirley, New York: A Long Island animal control officer found with more than 850 snakes in his garage is moving them to a storage facility until he can open his own store. An attorney for Richard Parrinello said his client is deciding among three properly zoned locations. He says moving the reptiles is difficult because it's the end of their breeding season, when female snakes care for their eggs. — AP

American hand in bringing Mahatma alive in Florida

Arun Sivasankaran tribute

A 7-feet, 800-pound bronze statue of Mahatma installed last year in Davie in South Florida is testimony to the Americans' growing appreciation for role models of non-violence.

Ever since Martin Luther King Jr. and his admiration for Mahatma Gandhi, Americans have known that the frail dhoti-clad man, who led a nation to independence without even once lifting his finger in anger, was someone truly special.

As recently as 18 months ago, Matt Glenn, a well-known sculptor from Provo in the southwestern state of Utah, knew as much about Mahatma Gandhi as the average American. Well enough, but not nearly enough.

As he speaks on the eve of Mahatma Gandhi's 144th birth anniversary, there is increased awareness about the man, and immense respect.

Much of it, if not all, has to do with sculpting a 7-foot, 800-pound bronze statue of the Mahatma, which now attracts a steady stream of visitors to a public park in the town of Davie in South Florida.

"It was definitely an eye-opener," Glenn, president of Big Statues, said, recalling his experience of working on the project. "I had a general idea about Gandhi, but as I did my research, I realised the greatness of the man. He is truly inspirational; it is easy to see why he has left a mark on so many people."

The statue, the only one in Florida and one of only seven in the nation, is part of the Gandhi Square that is spread over 50 cents of land. It was unveiled by former President A.P.J Abdul Kalam on the Mahatma's 143rd birth anniversary.

Glenn says the project is one of the most memorable he has taken up in his career. "We wanted to ensure that it was true to life," he said.



Matt Glenn working on the Gandhi statue.

"From the eyeglasses to the sandals, we wanted to get the details right. We also wanted to evoke emotions such as honor, tradition and peace."

Glenn wasn't the only American to help bring the Mahatma back to life in bronze, said Joy Kuttiyani, former president of Kerala Samajam of South Florida and the project coordinator.

"The project estimate was \$50,000 and we didn't have that kind of money," Kuttiyani said. "Matt bailed us out by getting in touch with the Sculptors Guild and getting the organization to contribute \$35,000 towards the cost of

the statue. It says something about Gandhi's stature that the Guild agreed to do so."

"We initially contacted Kanayi Kunhiraman and a few other sculptors in Kerala as well as Kolkata, but we soon realised that wasn't a feasible option," Kuttiyani said. "Matt turned out to be an inspired choice; Abdul Kalam said it was one of the best statues of the Mahatma that he had seen."

Judy Paul, a retired teacher and the mayor of Davie, is a self confessed Indophile. "I know quite a lot about Gandhi and the greatness of the man.

When the Kerala Samajam came forward with the concept, I was only happy to support it. In this day and age, we need a role model for peace and non-violence, and there is no better role model than Gandhi."

Apart from the American involvement, the project stands out for another reason as well. Piyush Agarwal, who is one of the trustees of Mahatma Gandhi Square Florida Inc., a non profit organization, says he has never seen such unity among various Indian communities, before or since.

"We all claim to be Indian, but our conduct,

unfortunately, is provincial," Agarwal, who has lived in the U.S. for over 40 years, said.

"For this project, that wasn't the case. We were able to make it happen only because we worked as one. The project was more important than anything else."

Babu Varghese, from Thrissur and owner of Abtech Engineering in Davie, was the project engineer.

"I wanted it to appeal to everyone and not just Indians," he said. "I consider the project a success because we were able to start a conversation about India and its culture.

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There were a lot of misconceptions among people, but that is changing."

Hemant Patel has lived in the country long enough to feel the change in attitude among Americans for India and all things Indian.

"There has always been plenty of admiration for Gandhi among the African American community because of Martin Luther King Jr; but of late, he is being accepted more across the board," Patel said.

"Especially after 9/11, people realize his significance. He is a true peace icon."

The Mahatma Gandhi Square Florida Inc. is now focused on increasing Gandhi's profile even further in the country, said Shekhar Reddy, another trustee.

"We are currently having discussions with the school boards in Broward and Miami Dade to sanction field trips of students to the park. We want to make it a true destination point."

(The author is a journalist based in Florida)

Law to check exploitation may hit Indian surrogacy industry

Nita Bhalla & Mansi Thapliyal meanwhile

Dressed in a green surgical gown and cap, British restaurateur Rekha Patel cradled her newborn daughter at the Akanksha clinic in north-western India as her husband Daniel smiled warmly, peering in through a glass door.

"I can't believe we have our own child at last," said Patel, 42, gazing in wonderment at five-day-old Gabrielle.

"We are really grateful to our surrogate mother who managed to get pregnant and kept our little daughter healthy. She gave nine months of her life to give us a child."

It is the perfect promotion for India's booming surrogacy industry that sees thousands of infertile couples, many from overseas, hiring the wombs of local women to carry their embryos through to birth.

But a debate over whether the unregulated industry exploits poor women prompted authorities to draft a law that could make it tougher for foreigners seeking babies made in India.

"There is a need to regulate the sector," said Dr Sudhir Ajja of Surrogacy India, a Mumbai-based fertility bank that has produced 295 surrogate babies — 90 per cent for overseas clients and 40 per cent for same-sex couples — since it opened in 2007.

"But if the new law tightens rules as suggested by the ministry of home affairs, which disallows surrogacy for same-sex couples and single parents, then it will clearly impact the industry and put off clients coming from overseas."



India opened up to commercial surrogacy in 2002. It is among just a handful of countries — including Georgia, Russia, Thailand and Ukraine — and a few US states where women can be paid to carry another's genetic child through a process of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and embryo transfer.

The low-cost technology, skilled doctors, scant bureaucracy and a plentiful

supply of surrogates have made India a preferred destination for fertility tourism, attracting nationals from Britain, the United States, Australia and Japan, to name a few.

There are no official figures on how large the fertility industry is in India. A UN-backed study in July 2012 estimated the surrogacy business at more than \$400 million a year, with over 3,000 fertility clinics across

India. The Akanksha clinic in Anand is the best-known at home and abroad, giving the small town in Gujarat state the reputation as India's "surrogacy capital".

"The surrogates in Anand have become empowered through giving this beautiful gift to others," says Akanksha's owner, IVF specialist Nayana Patel, who shot to fame in 2004 after she helped a patient have a baby

by using the woman's mother - the child's grandmother — as a surrogate.

"With the money, they are able to buy a house, educate their children and even start a small business. These are things they could only dream of before. It's a win-win situation."

Patel, who appeared on US celebrity Oprah Winfrey's talk show in 2007, has produced more than 500 surrogate babies — two-thirds of them for foreigners and people of Indian origin living in over 30 countries.

Charging couples like Rekha and Daniel an average of \$25,000 to \$30,000, a fraction of the cost in the United States, Patel pays her surrogates around 400,000 rupees (\$6,500).

For 33-year-old Naina Patel, who gave birth to Gabrielle, the compensation outweighs the downside. The wife of an autorickshaw driver with three daughters of her own, she had to live in a hostel for nine months with 60 other surrogates so the clinic could monitor her health.

Like most surrogates, she kept her pregnancy a secret due to the social stigma in India's conservative society.

"I was happy to do it but it was not really out of choice because we needed the money," she said in a hospital bed as she recovered from the Caesarean operation for Gabrielle's birth.

India's surrogacy industry is vilified by women's rights groups who say fertility clinics are nothing more than "baby factories" for the rich. In the absence of regulation, they say many poor and uneducated women are lured by agents, hired by clinics, into signing contracts they do not fully understand.

In May last year, surrogate mother Premila Vaghela, 30, died days after delivering a child for an American couple at a clinic in Gujarat. It was

recorded as an "accidental death" by the police.

A recent government-funded study of 100 surrogate mothers in Delhi and Mumbai found there was "no fixed rule" related to compensation and no insurance for post-delivery healthcare. It cited cases where surrogates were implanted with embryos multiple times to raise the chances of success. "In most of these cases, the surrogate mothers are being exploited," said Ranjana Kumari, director of the Centre for Social Research that conducted the study.

Moves to introduce a law, the Assisted Reproductive Technologies Bill, to protect surrogates, the children and the commissioning parents is long overdue, Kumari said.

Revised visa requirements introduced in July have already resulted in foreign same-sex couples and individuals being prohibited from surrogacy in India. The ART bill, expected to come before parliament next year, will tighten things further.

Under the current draft, all fertility clinics must be registered and monitored by a regulatory authority. Surrogates must be between 21 and 35 years old, they will be provided with insurance and notarised contracts must be signed between the women and the commissioning parents.

"Legislation should be there so that this wonderful procedure can be supervised and it is being done by the right people for the right people," said Akanksha's Patel.

"But more bureaucracy will make it difficult for everyone. It will not only mean less commissioning parents from overseas but it will also impact surrogates, who will lose out on the only chance they have to change their lives for the better." — Reuters

Indian promotes Bollywood film dance in Finland

Gunjan Sharma meanwhile

Bollywood film dance has a definite fan following in Finland with its government deciding to introduce Bollywood dance classes in its schools, all courtesy an Indian.

Daniel Praveel Paul alias Danny, a 26-year-old Chennai resident went to Finland in 2008 for pursuing his masters in bioengineering at Tampere University and ended up pursuing his passion for dance and established a Bollywood dance academy in Finland, the only one funded by the Government of Finland.

Danny who says he began dancing at the age 13, used to perform with Jon Brito's troop and had already shared stage with stars including Yana Gupta, Dhanush, Madhavan before he moved to Finland.

He was also the star performer at the south Indian version of reality show *Dancing with the Stars — Jodi No. 1*.

"I was happy to have secured admission here but I was disheartened too because coming here meant that I had to leave my passion. Few weeks after coming to Finland I felt homesick, Skype was a soul's saviour for me until I saw an advertisement on university pop-portal about a Tango dance course organised by Keri — The cultural association of Finland," Danny said.

Soon, Danny transformed into teacher at Keri and initially taught Latin and couple dance styles initially. "In 2009, I spoke to the organisers for teaching Bollywood at Keri and the sudden Bollywood boom in my life began the foundation of Danny's Bollywood Dance Crew, (DBDC)" he said. "When I started here, I realised that people have a very vague definition of Bollywood dance in their minds. Nobody exactly knew what Indian style was all about, it revolved around few haphazard forms put together, which did contribute to an appealing performance at times but it wasn't truly 'Bollywood' style," Danny added. The DBDC has performed over 75 shows in past two years, before the Finland govt realised their potential and offered to fund their studio operations. A call to introduce the Bollywood dance classes in Finnish schools came as an icing on the cake. The crew was the finalist for the biggest reality show on Finland television, *Talent Suomi 2012*. "DBDC did not win Talent Suomi, but they definitely set a path for longevity of Bollywood in Finland," he said. Not limiting to just dance he has combined both Bollywood dance at fitness at the academy as Finnish are known for their craze for fitness. The experimented forms of dance include, B-Burn (Bollywood and aerobics), Mom and Me, Stretch and Relax, Bring out the diva in you, Bollywood weddings, among others. "I have signed a tour all over Finland for 2013. But I wish to take Bollywood across borders to Sweden, Denmark, Norway and more," he said. — PTI