



'I strive to be honest in front of the camera'

PG 4

DAY'S DIARY

Tata Airlines

On this day in 1932, industrialist JRD Tata piloted the inaugural flight of Tata Airlines, marking the birth of India's aviation industry

PIONEERING FLIGHT

The first flight from Karachi to Mumbai, only carried airmail, but it symbolised the country's growing ambitions in aviation



NATIONAL AIRLINE

Tata Airlines was nationalised in 1953 and became Air India. In 2022, the airline returned to Tata Group ownership



INDUSTRY LEADER

Air India now operates a large fleet of over 100 aircraft, serving both international and domestic routes and employs over 11,000 people

MAHIMA ANNA JACOB

HAIR-LOSS can be hair-raising for many. It's not uncommon to see some standing in front of the mirror and heaving a sigh of frustration. The struggle with a receding hairline often begins in the late twenties. A fleeting thought may arise: "What if I just shaved it all off?"

But most will be hesitant, thanks to societal norms of looks. And in trying to reclaim what's lost, many spend a fortune on treatments, products, and styling.

A recent TNIE report, for instance, noted that people spend between Rs 20,000 and Rs 5 lakh attempting to restore their hair. Clinics in Kerala have noted a "significant surge" in individuals aged 18 to 25 — both men and women — seeking treatment. In Kochi, one clinic saw hair transplant surgeries shoot up from 2 to 17 a day over the past four years.

However, some have chosen to let go, opting for a shaved or ultra-short look, after asking themselves questions like: "Why pretend I am not ageing? Why fear society's expectations? Why not just be free?"

This defiance has led to a "sense of liberation" for many who were fed up of pulling their hair out over balding. Interestingly, October 14 is celebrated as the 'Be Bald and Be Free Day'.

And now, embracing this spirit, Kerala has got its own 'bald & beautiful' community — 'Motta Global'.

Founded by Thrissur-based stand-up comedian Sajeesh Kuttanellur, this group welcomes anyone who has chosen to shave their head. What began as a three-member initiative in August has grown to about 660 members from across Kerala and 20 countries.

With the motto 'Bald head is our style and pride', Motta Global seeks to encourage individuals to embrace baldness as part of their identity. Sajeesh says he felt such a collective was "essential".

He drew from his own experience as a stand-up artist. "For me, good hair was part of looking presentable initially. After experiencing hair-loss, my confidence waned," he recalls.

"I wore a cap to hide my bald patches. Ridicule and snarky comments made me consider going completely bald. Eventually, I found the courage to shave my head. That decision brought a sense of freedom I had never experienced before."

Sajeesh adds that the blade removed "unnecessary worry" as well from his head. Positive feedback that boosted his confidence. "I ig-



Motta Global meet-up in Thrissur



nored criticism. Moreover, I began noticing bald individuals — some of them carried themselves with remarkable self-assurance, which I admired," he says.

'Bald? Then, let's unite'

The idea to start a community was sparked during one of his performances. Spotting three bald men in the audience, he invited them on stage, creating a light-hearted moment with their shiny heads.

Subsequently, he launched a poster online: "Ningal motta aano? Enkil namukku orumikkam (Are you bald? Then let's unite)." Soon, a group of about 60 members was formed.

A gathering in Thrissur's Thekkinkadu Maidan on August 11 attracted much attention, helping to expand their reach to about 660 members as of today.

Motta Global aims to redefine societal standards of style. It plans to launch several campaigns addressing issues related to physical, mental, social, and cultural well-being.

"Bald individuals are often the butt of jokes. Through our initiatives, we aspire to raise our voices against such trends. We, the 'mottas', seek to bring about change. We don't find terms like 'motta' to be derogatory," says

I ignored criticism. Moreover, I began noticing bald individuals — some of them carried themselves with remarkable self-assurance, which I admired
Sajeesh Kuttanellur, founder, Motta Global



MOTTA MASS!

On 'Be Bald & Be Free Day' (October 14), TNIE decided to explore the growing tribe of people shaving their heads as a style statement. Heard of Motta Global?

Sajeesh.

Currently, the group is running a 'Stop Body Shaming' campaign, fostering discussions not only in Kerala but also in the US, New Zealand, Singapore, Australia, and the UAE.

Kochi resident Rajeevan CR, who is part of the Motta Global community, has been rocking the bald look for the last five years. "It is refreshing to see people who have walked in your shoes at least once, and seeing them all under one roof, taking up initiatives that shatter societal norms. We are proud of each other," says the 48-year-old businessman.

Rajeevan adds that deciding to go bald was not easy. "In my 20s, the hairdo was everything. Back then, unlike women, if a man wanted to bring changes to his appearance, it was mainly by experimenting with hair. Losing that sense of control was difficult," he recalls.

"Fortunately, I managed not to let external factors define me, which helped me accept the change. But not everyone has that resilience — some even slip into depression and anxiety."

While hair

may be just a part of the body, it is often seen as an extension of one's personality. Failing to meet "beauty standards" can lead to missed opportunities and discrimination.

US-based Malayali model Manoj Nair found losing his hair young due to a medical condition, combined with the effects of harsh cosmetics and studio lights. "People rarely consider the reasons behind your appearance. Pointing out the obvious can be hurtful," he says.

With the support of family and friends, he returned to the spotlight, only to face more criticism. "The beauty standards in the industry can be harsh. In the US, being bald is a style statement, but Indian-origin models have refused to walk the ramp with me," he says.

"I was once removed from a show a day before it started. One industry fig-



Manoj Nair

SHAVE IS SEXY

A study by the University of Pennsylvania says men with shaved heads are often viewed as more dominant, taller, and stronger than those with hair. The study suggests that this perception

of bald men as "confident" is what is perceived as "sexy". Add to that, stars such as Bruce Willis, Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham, Vin Diesel and, of course, our own FaFa, who have pulled off the

shiny scalp and buzz-cut looks with much poise.

While there hasn't been much research on how baldness affects women's attractiveness, stylists believe that women who choose to go bald challenge traditional notions of femininity and beauty, and it requires some nonchalance to make that decision. This shift in perception is leading to greater acceptance of baldness as a choice that is made to make oneself feel better. Women going bald, according to international reports, are now being seen as beautiful and powerful.

ure in India bluntly told me I didn't belong there because I was bald."

Despite these challenges, Manoj found strength in self-acceptance. "Love yourself — that's my motto. I embraced my transformation and turned what others saw as a flaw into my unique fashion statement," he smiles.

Not all choose to shave their heads due to hair-loss

worry. Thiruvananthapuram-based Dr A Kannan says his decision to tonsure was inspired by a trip from Seattle to Atlanta, where he saw a group of "confident bald men".

"That impressed me, so I shaved my head. Some criticised the look, claiming it didn't suit my profession. Unfortunately, we live in such a society," says the 50-year-old.

"Just imagine the importance society places on hair. I believe going bald liberates you, not just by defying standards, but by being bold enough to



Deepthi V C

do something that you once thought was odd."

It's different for women

For women, societal pressure surrounding hair is way more intense. Long locks are often viewed as the 'ideal' standard, and anything less can invite judgment.

Savithri Bhattathirippad, 27, shaved her head during the pandemic, sparking mixed reactions on social media. "It was an impulsive decision. I was in Bengaluru at that time. There, I didn't feel much concern about my looks. But in Kerala, it was shocking," she says.

"I faced comments like, 'You look weird' and 'You are a woman; act like one'. Many women tried shaving their heads during lockdown, but most hesitate to return to that look. For married women, the situation is even more challenging — some face harsh comments implying that going bald is a bad omen, associated with the death of a spouse."

Deepthi V C, of Thiruvananthapuram, has kept her hair extremely short for over a decade. She says her conditioning lessened once she started to place her com-

fort above everything else.

"Maintaining hair has always been a challenge for me; I have always found it uncomfortable," she laughs.

Deepthi recalls being discouraged by even hairdressers while she initially decided to chop her hair short. "They were keen to push hairstyles with a feminine flair — because I was a woman," she sighs.

Kochi-based tattoo artist Shyama Devi has explored a range of bold looks, from going bald to shaving one side and sporting a velvety stubble. For her, hair is closely linked to confidence — experimenting with her hair helps lift her spirits.

"I believe it's a personal choice," says the 44-year-old. "Kerala still has a long way to go in accepting different styles. However, I don't let others' comments affect me, as those who truly know you will embrace you for who you are."



Shyama Devi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Technology's role in assisting lives may not be a high-lighting aspect for the majority. However, to those who need help to employ their physical faculties for basic interaction, it is indeed a blessing.

The way Assistive Technology (AT) could transform the lives of people with disabilities and aid them in being independent is turning out to be a huge topic of study and deliberation. The National Institute of Speech and Hearing's (NISH) 'Empower 2024' conference aims to further this, bringing together engineering students, industry experts, innovators, academics from organisations such as IIT and entrepreneurs from across the country.

The conference, to be held in Thiruvananthapuram from October 17 to 19, will discuss the role of devices such as hearing aids and screen readers to advanced solutions such



as AI-based prosthetics, and communication tools in dissolving barriers between people of all kinds and society. The meet will also discuss the prospects of a more inclusive world and the AT developments or innovations needed to bring about the change.

This scope the field offers to young professionals who are

working in IT, engineering and healthcare will also be on the highlight, encouraged by the need felt in the sector for skilled personnel who can develop, implement, and vouchsafe for such life-changing tools.

Encapsulating all these aims, the NISH has been conducting the 'Empower' since 2018. The event committee members are from diverse sectors such as NGOs, industry giants, and academic experts from IITs Delhi and Madras.

Along with NISH, this year's event is organised by the National Centre for Assistive Technology, the WHO, IIT, the Kerala Medical Technology Consortium, and the Social Justice Department of Kerala.

INSIDE

DETOXIFY FOR A HEALTHIER HOME

TURN YOUR HOME INTO A CLEAN HAVEN BY REDUCING HIDDEN TOXINS WITH SIMPLE, NATURAL SOLUTIONS FOR A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE **PAGE 3**



Talking technology that assists, empowers

Region's commercial centre of yore

PARVANA K B

ONCE a happening town of merchants, Pettah was the main gateway to the city of Thiruvananthapuram. Its strategic coastal location and proximity to the renowned Padmanabhaswamy Temple made it a favoured destination for traders and pilgrims alike.

The Kotte Heritage Foundation, dedicated to restoring the ancient capital of the Sinhalese kingdom of Kotte in Sri Lanka, throws light on the historical significance of the name 'Pettah.' This term, an Anglo-Indian adaptation of the Tamil word 'pettai', was introduced by the British and referred to areas identified by the Dutch as the 'oude stad' or old town. The Pettah market in Colombo, however, has long been a hub for trade, even during the Dutch era. After that, this term might have been shared by several markets including the one in Thiruvananthapuram.

"There were two major markets in Thiruvananthapuram one is Ananthapuri Pettah and another one is Thirumadhura Pettah," explains historian Malayinkeezh Gopalakrishnan. "Ananthapuri Pettah later



evolved into Chalai Market, while Thirumadhura Pettah became known as Pettah. The term 'Pettah' denotes a commercial or trading centre. Historians continue to debate whether the name 'Thirumadhura Pettah' originated from traders who arrived here from Madurai," he explains.

In ancient times, he says, waterways were the primary path for trade and transport. Even before the construction of the man-made Parvathi Puthanar canal, there were smaller water channels in the area, as per the records. "The construction of

Parvathi Puthanar only strengthened these waterways. Some historians note that goods from various regions were brought to Pettah, where surplus products were sold and exported. And also, thanks to its proximity to the sea, the area became a key trading post for spices such as pepper and cardamom," he says.

The historians also say the place was a significant centre for early Christians in Travancore. The Kollam-Thiruvanan-

thapuram railway line, which started in 1918, ended at Pettah.

The 'Memoir of the Survey of Travancore and Cochin States' by Lieutenants Benjamin Swain Ward and Peter Eyre Conner document Pettah's prominence as a trading centre and densely populated community, primarily made up of traders and members of the 'Mukkuva' community. It is said that this place is also known as a gathering centre for spiritual assemblies of figures such as Chattampi Swamikal, P Sundaram Pillai, Swaminatha Desikar, Velutheri Kesavan Vaidyan, Perunnelli Krishnan Vaidyar, and Narayana Guru.

The prominence of the Pettah market has decreased over time, while Chalai Market continues to thrive.

However, this area, located on the route to Thiruvananthapuram airport and the renowned tourist destination Shangumugham Beach, deserves to be remembered for its significant chapter in history.

WHAT'S IN A NAME
Weekly column on the history of place names. Got any suggestions? Write to cityexpresskoc@newindianexpress.com