

Now on Air

No friend requests, no signing up. Here's an insight into the Ham radio community, a social networking club powered by radio waves

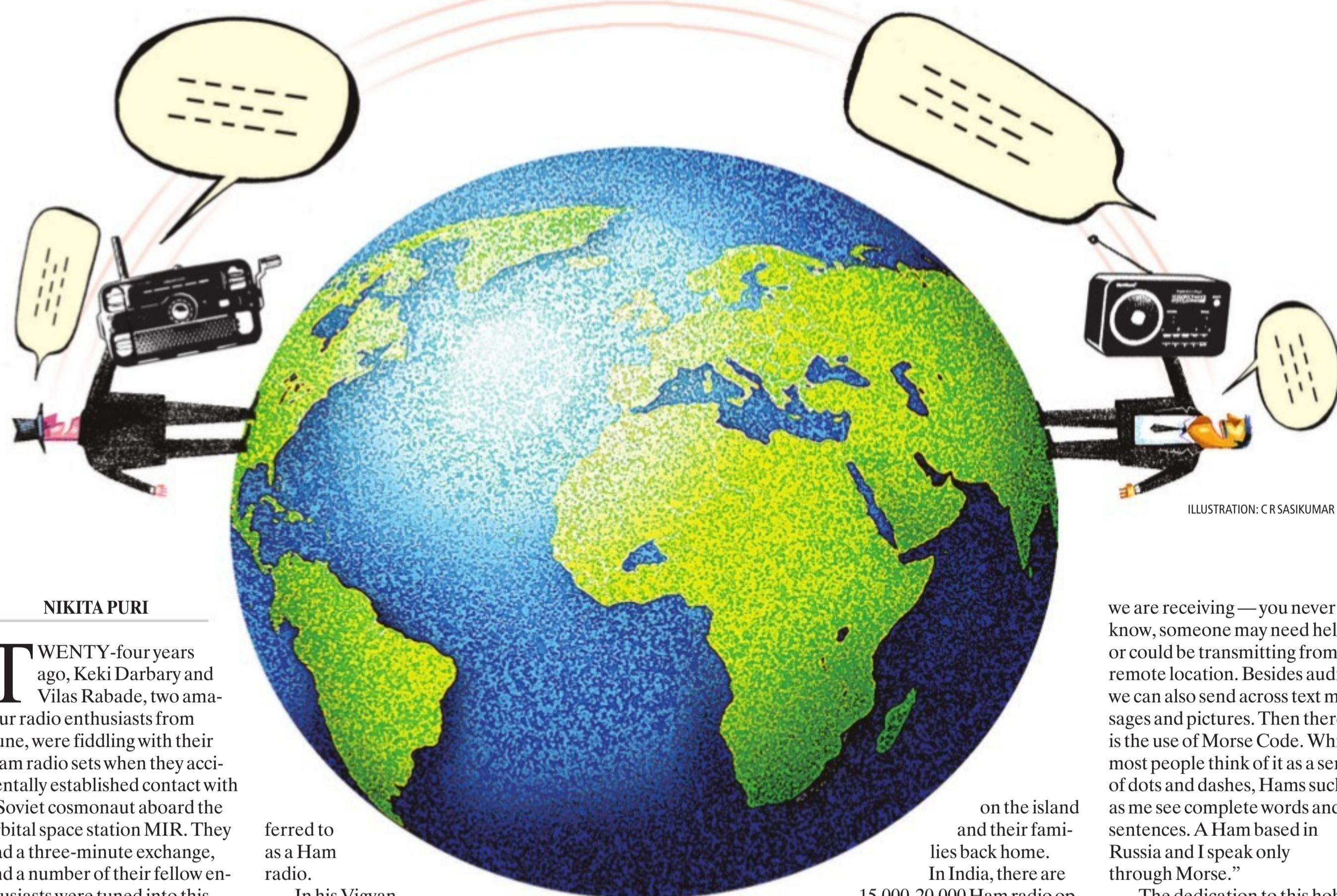


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SASIKUMAR

NIKITA PURI

TWENTY-four years ago, Keki Darbary and Vilas Rabade, two amateur radio enthusiasts from Pune, were fiddling with their Ham radio sets when they accidentally established contact with a Soviet cosmonaut aboard the orbital space station MIR. They had a three-minute exchange, and a number of their fellow enthusiasts were tuned into this conversation that took place on April 14, 1989.

Similarly in 1966, when Ved Prakash Sandlas was a student at IIT Kharagpur, he made contact with a sailor who was on board a vessel travelling from Honolulu to San Francisco. When they exchanged their latitude and longitude coordinates, the sailor said to him, "In one hour, I will be exactly opposite to you on the globe." Sandlas, now in Delhi, still looks back fondly at the confirmatory letter he has, a reminder of a conversation he had with a stranger ages ago.

Salutations from members of a social network who are tuned into a frequency of their own, where your "friend list" thrives on "incidental contacts" established via radio waves. The networking platform here is a wireless transceiver (radio transmitter plus receiver), re-

ferred to as a Ham radio.

In his Vigyan Prasara office in Delhi, a generous portion of Sandeep Baruah's workspace is taken up by his Ham radio equipment, including a device for Morse Code (yes, dots and dashes). "Ham radio is an alternative form of communication. The beauty of this communication is that, while sitting in your room, you can make contact with anyone, anywhere across the globe, provided he also has the required equipment. When disaster strikes and cell-phone services don't work, a ham radio continues to function," says Baruah.

As an example, he cites the time he made contact with Cap'n Fatty Goodlander, an author and sea gypsy who travels the world in his 38 ft boat. Then, there was the time he established contact with Port Blair, when tsunamis had struck, helping relay messages between people stranded

on the island and their families back home.

In India, there are 15,000-20,000 Ham radio operators, or Hams, and a generous portion of this number is based in south India. Delhi has about 40-50 active Hams, who are "on air" every night, at 9.30pm, for a round of "rag chewing" (think group chat). Worldwide, there are more than three million hams, each of whom has a "call sign" which denotes his identity, and country of origin. While Baruah is known as VU2MUE to other Hams, 77-year-old Gopal Madhavan, the president of Bangalore-based Amateur Radio Society of India (ARSI), is VU2GMN. Other clubs in the country include National Institute of Amateur Radio (NIAR), Hyderabad, and the Coimbatore Amateur Radio Club.

"Hams believe in the concept of a global community," says Baruah. "Since most of the contacts are incidental, we give preference to the weakest signal

we are receiving—you never know, someone may need help, or could be transmitting from a remote location. Besides audio, we can also send across text messages and pictures. Then there is the use of Morse Code. While most people think of it as a series of dots and dashes, Hams such as me see complete words and sentences. A Ham based in Russia and I speak only through Morse."

The dedication to this hobby is commendable. To be a Ham, one needs to appear for a test organised by the Wireless Planning Coordination (WPC) wing of the government and get a clearance from the Intelligence Bureau. In India, the minimum age criterion for this is 12 years. Worldwide, the lower age limit varies—in the US, a 10-year old boy has recently become a licensed Ham.

Referring to this kind of networking as the "queen of hobbies," 69-year-old retired DRDO and ISRO scientist Sandlas says, "Ham radio equipment used to be very difficult to procure but, after 1984, Rajiv Gandhi, who was a very active Ham, allowed import of the equipment free of any duty." But many Hams—like Madhavan—still prefer to build their own sets. Cheers to a world tuned to a different frequency.

SLICE OF HAM

ASPIRING HAMS can buy affordable Japanese or Chinese equipment at local stores, or build one up using antennae and wireless transceivers (radio transmitter + receiver)

A HAM licence can be obtained after passing a test organised by the WPC wing of the Ministry of Communications. Basic knowledge of electronics is required, and guidebooks are available for this

IN INDIA, one needs to be over 12 years to be a Ham

SINCE THE PROCESS uses radio waves, one can talk to people across the globe, from space stations to vessels at sea, from hill stations to remote islands

HAMS SERVE as an asset in times of disaster. When all other modes of communication fail, amateur radio talks continue

Not Just Teeth and Bones

Puppeteer Anurupa Roy of Katkatha on directing a 20 ft dinosaur that can bite as well as dance

DIPANITA NATH

UNDER the vast green shade of bamboo trees in Badarpur, where baby birds are learning to fly, on ground that has been sectioned into patches to grow pumpkins, chillies, a variety of saag, maize and pomegranate, now walks a mighty dinosaur. Admittedly, he is made of thermocol, recycled cardboard and common pin, but the T Rex can still pack a punch. "Or bite," says city-based puppeteer Anurupa Roy about her organisation, Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust's latest creation. Designed by former NSDIan Shravan Hegudu and puppeteer Md Shameen, the T Rex will make its first public appearance at the Aha Children and Youth Festival at Ranga Shankara in Bangalore on July 12. In the next few months, it will make its way around Delhi. Excerpts from an interview with Roy, who has directed the show:

Experts in White

WHEREVER we perform, we are going to dig a little earth and from this, we are going to find some bones. Three of us, dressed in white lab coats of paleontologists, start talking to the audience. While we do all of this, the dinosaur comes and stands behind us. The completely obsessed



PHOTOS: PRAVEEN KHANNA

paleontologists start studying it, and one starts fiddling with the dinosaur's teeth and the animal grabs his hand and they realise the T Rex is actually alive. We essentially want the children on our side, so this dinosaur loves music and dances to hip hop. While children will have fun, we are also playing with the heads of adults, who will be interested in the technicalities. We know about dinosaur skeletons, but the colour of its skin is only conjecture. How did they communicate? Did they have a system of language? The paleontologists jabber in bits of Hindi and English but largely in gibberish because science talk seems like gibberish to many of us, including the dinosaur. Our T Rex defies scientists, and pushes people to imagine what a dinosaur could do.

A show called Tamasha

THE DINOSAUR is a part of a show called Tamasha and one of the things about a tamasha is that it was essentially



done on the streets in India. The main idea of the show with the dinosaur is that we can play it in a marketplace, on a foyer or a lawn—essentially places where people don't expect there will be theatre. At Ranga Shankara, we will perform when the audience is lining up for a show. We want a show that keeps growing, and our plan is to make three more sections; T Rex is the first step. After a few weeks, we will add a show which will have only coloured fabric that we will use to tell a love story.

T Rex with Katkatha puppeteers. Anurupa Roy is at the centre

Dino on the Streets

WE ARE getting a feeling that that fewer people are turning up to theaters so we want to take theatre to the people. We had a pterodactyl in 2006, we also had a 13 ft tall Kansa puppet. We always play it on streets and it really works well when this big Kansa walks up. That's how this show with the T Rex came about; we decided not to keep it restricted to proscenium but really bring it out on streets. Now we don't know how to take the dinosaur out to real streets as police are particular about permission, some places are zero-tolerance zones, and you can use certain parks after permissions, but it takes a long time. We will play in the big park in Shadipur, and the one at Badarpur once rainwater recedes, we are also targeting mohallas in Tughlakabad as well as a few markets.



DHRUV KALRA

Metal fans in action at a previous gig

Raging Sound

EARLY this year popular metal outfit Undying Inc released their EP, titled *Ironclad*, and for those who have been waiting to watch them play live, now is the time to land up at blueFROG. A new metal festival is in town and the Delhi-based band will be a part of it on July 13. Titled Outrage, this fest will feature eight bands from across the country.

Outrage has been organised by Karan Mehta (24), the guitarist of Delhi band Colossal Figures, which too will get on stage that night. "There has been a sudden rise in the indie music scene in the last few years in India. While there are a lot of music festivals that happen now, the aim of Outrage is to promote only metal. We are totally dedicated to this genre," says Mehta, who began work on this festival a month ago. Apart from these two Delhi outfits, metalheads will be treated to the metal madness that are Mumbai's Zyneigma, Mizoram's 3rd Sovereign, Shillong's thrash metal act Aberrant and Chennai's Escher's Knot.

Excited about performing in the Capital after one-and-a-half years, Reuben Bhattacharya, bassist of Undying Inc, says, "This festival is a great platform for new bands, and for old bands such as ours since it's been a while since we played in Delhi."

The event will be held at blueFROG on July 13. Time: 5.30 pm. Passes: Rs 600, available at the venue

HIMANSHU VADHERA



A work by Eva Maria Pecheno

But Naturally

EVA MARIA Pecheno equates painting to meditation, as concentration is equal to both. "When I paint, my connection and concentration with the inner self is such as if I'm in meditation," says the Delhi-based artist who is exhibiting at Gallerie Alternatives. Comprising 26 canvases, the show titled "Flow in the Light" depicts Pecheno's love for nature as she wields the brush with blots of acrylic to capture the environs, from floral patterns to birds perching in their nests. "Paintings are the mirrors of the inner and external self," adds the 39-year-old PhD in Fine Art from the University of Barcelona. In India for more than seven years now, Pecheno is hoping that the collection helps "imbibe spirituality" that she intends to inculcate through her work.

The exhibition at Gallerie Alternatives, Gurgaon, is on till July 23. Contact: 0124-4381439

EFS

Advertisement for Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania, featuring the movie poster and a list of theaters showing it.

City	Theater
Delhi	PVR, JCS Plaza, Priya, Rivoli, Saket, Prashant Vihar, Select City, Vikas Park, Naraina, EDI, Kausambi, MAHAGUN, Vaishali, OPULENT MALL - Ghaziabad
Gurgaon	Vasant Kunj, Pacific Mall, Kausambi, ANSAL Vaishali
Noida	Movie Raja Garden, Time, Pitampura, Palal Nagar, Janakpuri, Nehru Place, Wave, Saket, Vasant Kunj, Shalimar Bagh, @GK-2
Ghaziabad	Movie Raja Garden, Time, Pitampura, Palal Nagar, Janakpuri, Nehru Place, Wave, Saket, Vasant Kunj, Shalimar Bagh, @GK-2
Other Cities	Jaipuria, M2K, Rohini, Pitampura, Max, Mohan Nagar, Vaishali, Noida, Indrapuram, G3S, Rohini, Sahibabad, East of Kailash, Movie World, Silver City, Chaudhary, Ghaziabad, Movie Magic, Loni, Innox, Greater Noida, Shila, DLF, Gurgaon, Amba, Vishal, Eros One, Pata Gatti, Abhishek, Samrat, Regal, Ritz, Seble, Milan, Aakash, Gagan, Supreme, Suraj, Nala Mandir, Lokesh
Faridabad	Crown Plaza, MGF, Gurgaon, Ambience Mall, Palam Vihar, Innox, Gurgaon, City Centre, Mega Mall, SRS, Omaxe, Celebration Mall, Sector 12, Eldeco, Prestine, Shubham Tower
Maharashtra	Mahatman, Faridabad