

IN BRIEF


New early human species found: *Homo luzonensis*

TOKYO

The human family tree has got a new branch with the unearthing of an unknown human species that lived on an island in Philippines some 50,000 years ago. The species was dubbed *Homo luzonensis*. Researchers said they were less than four feet tall. AFP


SpaceX postpones first commercial launch

COLORADO SPRINGS

SpaceX postponed its first commercial launch with the Falcon Heavy rocket, citing strong wind in the upper atmosphere. The next window for the mission is on Thursday. AFP

A genetic method to empower conservation

Could be put to several uses using very low-quality DNA

STAFF REPORTER
KOCHI

Scientists have been using genetics to study wild animals for several years now. However, a new genetic method developed by a team, including scientists from Bengaluru's National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), hopes to make studying as well as conserving wild species quicker, easier and cost-effective by deriving information from animal sources containing extremely low-quality DNA – including faeces and cooked meat.

Their method, described in the study published in the international journal *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, relies on identifying multiple, short portions of DNA segments in a single experiment (a 'multiplex PCR'), followed by 'next-generation sequencing', in



It will make conserving wild species quicker, easier and cost-effective.

which multiple fragments of DNA can be decoded simultaneously, and several times, in an automated process.

The team tested their method on Caribbean queen conches and tigers, two "extremely different species that had strong conservation needs," to "show how this approach could be used generally," said co-author Dr. Stephen Palumbi (Stanford University) in a press release.

The team obtained DNA from the faeces, hair and sa-

liva of 75 wild and captive tigers to identify individuals and close relatives, and RNA from 279 queen conch samples. They then decoded between 60 to 100 single nucleotide polymorphisms or SNPs, one of the most common types of change seen in genetic material, in these samples. The team was also able to identify the geographic regions these individuals belonged to. Apart from using this for animal monitoring, it could also potentially be used to obtain intelligence on wildlife trade, co-author Dr. Uma Ramakrishnan (NCBS) said.

Testing several hundred samples simultaneously and decoding up to 1000 SNPs per sample would cost as low as \$5 (less than ₹350). The biggest advantage is that this would take just five days while older methods take at least a month, she added.

Anand Patwardhan's *Reason* breaks into the public domain

The documentary is a deep dive into aggressive Hindu nationalism

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Since filmmaker Anand Patwardhan's sprawling documentary *Vivek (Reason)* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2018, it has made quiet waves at film festivals abroad, winning best feature-length documentary at IDFA (the International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam), but it has not been seen in theatres in India.

Vivek is a hard film to watch. It is long – 261 minutes in a time of short attention spans – but riveting; at a private screening this writer attended, where a large chunk of the invitees were silver-haired or balding, only a handful of people slipped out for toilet breaks despite an over-airconditioned auditorium.

And the film is not an exposé; it is the stuff of our

newspaper headlines, talk shows and social media discourse. It makes us see again what we have seen before and left behind as we move to the next outrage: the muscular Hindu nationalism spreading itself around India, which is arguably the inspiration behind, if not the source of, brutal attacks on views and ways of life that question it or oppose it.

As urgent as this narrative is, until now, you could only read about the film, unless you had seen it at a film festival abroad, or if you were invited to a private screening.

This week, though, chapters of a version of the film with a Hindi voice-over and subtitles have appeared on YouTube, but not from Mr. Patwardhan's own handle, as has happened with some of his work earlier. Mr. Patwardhan, incidentally, has



A poster of *Reason*.
• [HTTP://PATWARDHAN.COM/](http://PATWARDHAN.COM/)

encountered blowback on YouTube before, when the platform stopped his ability to monetise his older films there, *Ram ke Naam* and *Jai Bhim Comrade*, possibly because they were flagged by concerted action by those not wanting his work to be seen.

The Hindu reached out to Mr. Patwardhan to ask whether he had released the

chapters of *Vivek* himself, but he was unavailable.

A short extract

On Wednesday, his YouTube handle released a short extract from the film. It features the son of Mohammed Akhlaq, Sartaj, who is in the Indian Air Force, speaking of his father's killing, goes onto show the beating up of several young Dalit men, and a public meeting in which Dalits pledge not to clear animal carcasses or clean sewers any more, before touching on the philosophies of RSS founder Hedgewar and long-time leader Golwalkar, before coming back to Sartaj, who says that everywhere he finds love, and that he is sure that it is there, that he feels fortunate to be born in India, but that a handful of people want to destroy this. It concludes with the text 'look before you vote.'

Final Solution is free to view, once more

Rakesh Sharma makes his documentary available online 15 years after its first release

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

On Wednesday, filmmaker Rakesh Sharma made available for free viewing his award-winning documentary *Final Solution* (2004). The film documents events in Gujarat in 2002-2003, specifically the pogrom against Muslims that followed the killings of returning pilgrims in Godhra, and the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi's campaign for the BJP to be re-elected in Gujarat's Assembly elections.

Mr. Sharma told *The Hindu* that the decision was in part because, a few days ago, a five-year-old interview he did with the online portal *Scroll* suddenly went viral, and he began getting requests to make the film available. So he decided to upload a higher-resolution version on the video-hosting site Vimeo on Tuesday night. His decision, he said, was not just to acquiesce to demand: "With the kind of pro-



Rakesh Sharma. • S. ANANDAN

paganda we're looking at – through the Modi biopic, the web series, NaMo TV, through all sorts of other video forwards happening on WhatsApp – I felt that however small, there is the need for a counter-narrative to also be there. Otherwise people tend to think what they're being bombarded with is the only reality."

In the 15 years since he first released the film, he says, there are generations who may have heard only

one version of the events his film documented.

A dip into the past

"A lot of our current first-time voters were maybe two, three, four years old in 2002, and a lot of second-time voters were under nine years old. I felt that by making it available in the public realm for the first-time voter at least, they have a chance to dip into the past."

The clips referenced in the *Scroll* story, and the film

itself which, when it was denied certification, Mr. Sharma released privately and encouraged viewers to pirate, did not hinder Mr. Modi's rise to the highest elected office in the country, so what would it do now?

"The largest of truths that filmmakers need to accept is that no film can transform or heavily influence the course of any election in any significant way, unless it's some kind of expose that shatters the credibility of a candidate. The films of the kind that I and Anand [Patwardhan] make, political films with a wider perspective... I'm not looking at being able to immediately reach out and convert somebody's heart; the best I hope for is that my film will provoke many questions that will stay within them and they will be forced to think about it. And having looked at the film, if you still decide to vote for the man responsible for the carnage: your choice," he said.

Defamation case won by Geoffrey Rush

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Academy Award-winner actor Geoffrey Rush won a defamation case on Thursday against Australian newspaper *Daily Telegraph* over its report in 2017 that he behaved in an inappropriate way with an actress during a staging of *King Lear*.

The story claimed that the Sydney Theatre Company received a complaint that Mr. Rush had inappropriately touched a female co-star. A judge ruled that the newspaper had produced a "recklessly irresponsible piece of sensationalist journalism" and awarded Mr. Rush \$6,08,000 in damages.

"There are no winners in this case, it has been extremely distressing for anyone involved," Mr. Rush said.

Justice Michael Wigney said that reasonable readers would assume from the reporting that Mr. Rush was a "pervert" from a series of reports that he ruled were

mostly uncorroborated.

The judge said that actress Eryn Jean Norvill's evidence was inconsistent and that she "was at times prone to exaggeration and embellishment."

Justice Wigney said he would assess further damages for lost earnings at a later date.