

'Till today I have not worked for money and that is one of my biggest strengths' – Aamir Khan, the star of the recently released blockbuster Dhoom 3, in an interview with IANS



Video clip catches Tyrese and Will Smith sharing a laugh with Sheikh Hamdan

Going viral on the internet is a video of Tyrese and Will Smith with Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed, the Crown Prince of Dubai, and a few others on their way to a skydiving session at Skydive Dubai. The clip shows Sheikh Hamdan driving the 4x4 and Tyrese raving about Dubai. On Sunday, the singer posted photos and a video of himself and Smith attempting indoor skydiving. Smith and his wife Jada Pinkett Smith flew in from Los Angeles for New Year's Eve and their 16th wedding anniversary, while Tyrese celebrated his 35th birthday on December 29 at the Shangri-La Hotel, Dubai. Tyrese revealed in a tweet that he will soon be back in the UAE: "My brother Vin [Diesel] is coming to Dubai. We're gonna finish shooting #Fast7 here! Get your best cars ready were looking for you. Vroooooom!" – The National staff



Paul Walker's Fast & Furious character to be retired

Fast & Furious 7 is moving on despite the death of Paul Walker in a November 30 car crash and, according to The Hollywood Reporter, Walker's character, Brian O'Conner, will not be killed off in the film, which is now scheduled to be released on April 10 next year. Instead, the plan is to "retire" the character in a way that the studio hopes will satisfy fans of the franchise and make use of the existing footage of Walker, who died halfway through the shoot. In the weeks after the accident, the director James Wan, the writer Chris Morgan and Jeffrey Kirschenbaum, Universal's lead executive on the franchise, decided to edit the existing script so that Walker would remain a part of the story but could be written out, allowing

From top, Paul Walker; Ke\$ha with Pitbull; and Uday Kiran. Giles Keyte; Kevin Winter / Getty Images / AFP; C. V. Subrahmanyam / The Hindu

the franchise to continue without him. The changes will require some additional scenes to be written and shot, but the eight-month delay of the release gives the crew plenty of time. – The National staff

Telugu actor Uday Kiran found dead in his home

The Telugu actor Uday Kiran, one of the youngest winners of India's Filmfare Best Actor award, committed suicide at his residence in

Hyderabad, the capital of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, on Sunday night. Kiran was found hanging from the ceiling of his bedroom. Police said the actor took his life because he was "depressed over not getting films for nearly one year". Kiran shot to fame with films such as Chitram (2000), and the 2001 movies Manasanthu Nuvve and Nuvvu Nenu. The actor was last seen in the action entertainer Jai Sriram (2013). Film personalities across the country took to Twitter early on Monday to express their shock at the news. – The National staff

Pitbull and Ke\$ha top British music charts

The American musicians Ke\$ha and Pitbull claimed the first British No 1 single of 2014 on Sunday, after their collaboration Timber racked up above-average sales for early January. The newly released single sold 139,000 copies to knock Happy by Pharrell Williams off the top spot and into second place. Ke\$ha and Pitbull have each held the No 1 title twice before with solo singles or collaborations, but neither had hit the No 1 spot for more than two years until Sunday. – Reuters



desi girl by Ujala Ali Khan

Parties and ideas of a good time – to each their own

There are certain things one inevitably ends up doing as a UAE resident – such as booking a room at one of the city's five-star hotels for one's anniversary. Having observed that this is the done thing for anniversaries in the city, my husband and I – many years ago, as newlyweds – did the same.

We stood in the marble lobby, handed over our passports for check-in and accepted the keys to our very expensive hotel room. Once inside it, we weren't really sure what to do.

To be perfectly honest, we felt like fakes: we lived just down the road and here we were in a five-star hotel. But we also wanted to be a part of this whole "we spent our wedding weekend at such-and-such hotel" thing that everyone seemed to be doing, so we powered on.

We ventured out to the beach and returned with sand between our toes and seashells weighing down our pockets. Dinner was a strange affair, wedged between tourist families orange from too much sun in too little time.

My husband and I tried to get some shisha after dinner, but the hotel apparently only offered shisha between 5pm and 7.30pm. Who has shisha at that time? Our anniversary weekend was rapidly going downhill.

Back in the hotel room, we flipped channels on the television and then flopped down on the bed, flat on our backs, looking at the ceiling and giggling at each other. This was so not us.

"You know what?" I said, finally throwing in the towel. "Let's just go back home. Let's just fire up our shisha and chill at home."

"Let's," my husband agreed, enthusiastically. We quickly packed back whatever little luggage we had brought and proceeded to check out. Embarrassed to be checking out so early, we pretended I was sick and needed to go see a doctor. We had lasted a total of four-and-a-half hours.

I think that was the last time we followed a prescribed or prevalent formula for how any significant occasion should be observed or celebrated. Not that there is anything wrong with splashing out on a hotel room for one's anniversary weekend, but that just wasn't for us.

Given that sentiment, we usually give New Year party invites a wide berth. Big party at some club on The Palm? No, thank you. Cosy house party at someone's flat in the Marina? No, thank you. Anything that requires driving is forgone in favour of staying at home, spending time with a few close friends, followed by home-baked brownies and watching the fireworks on TV. Not because we're old and boring, but because we think there are better ways to start the new year than being stuck in traffic for two hours trying to get back home.

This year, though, something happened. Something that has changed the way people will look at our preference for a laid-back start to the new year: thousands of would-be New Year's Eve revellers got stranded on and around The Palm, waiting for hours in line, on buses or trudging around in high heels and short skirts.

I followed it all on Twitter – in my PJs, on my couch.

The writer is an honest-to-goodness desi living in Dubai

Resuscitation Theatre in Abu Dhabi is holding casting workshops this month for two new plays, Trojan Women and Woyzeck. The team needs Arabic- and English-speaking actors. Workshops will be held on Saturday at 2pm and Sunday at 7pm. Email resuscitationtheatre@gmail.com



Addressing stereotypes

Rohina Malik's play, Unveiled, opens a door into the Muslim world and encourages audiences to reconsider their notions about the community. Priti Salian reports

"All stereotypes have the potential to be harmful, but negative stereotypes about a group of people are really dangerous," says Rohina Malik, a Chicago-based playwright and actor, who was recently awarded the Lorraine H Morton Woman of Promise Award by the Evanston YWCA for her critically acclaimed play Unveiled.

The London-born Malik, who is of Indian and Pakistani descent, has been privy to several negative notions against Muslims in post-9/11 America. One instance was an ugly encounter between her and an American man, who almost got violent with her in front of her children. The pain of the experience inspired Malik to write her first play, Unveiled.

Unveiled portrays five Muslim women immigrants, four from the US and one from the UK, and the way their lives change after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The common thread among the characters is their hijab and the typical tea from their native countries, which they serve during the course of the play. But what really connects them is their strong yearning for a peaceful and amiable coexistence with people around them.

Since its debut in April 2009 at the 16th Street Theater in Berwyn, Illinois, Malik has been invited to perform Unveiled at theatres, churches, mosques and synagogues across the US and Canada. In a riveting 70-minute monologue, Malik not only entertains with humour, but also compels the audience to rethink any preconceived notions they may have about Muslims.

"As an American Muslim who wears the hijab, I feel the suspicion and racial profiling at airports," Malik says. "I fly often and more often than not it is an unpleasant experience."

It is shocking for audiences to hear the characters in my play explain why they dress their way and do what they do

Rohina Malik playwright

"As a woman, a stereotype that I often come across [in the West] is that I am anti-American, oppressed or that I need to be saved. People also feel I can't think for myself or someone forced me to wear the veil; that I'm weak, submissive and pathetic," says Malik, 36.

In her play, she has dealt with this issue through her character Shabana, a London rapper of Indian descent, who says: "Deal with my mind, not my body. 'Cause that ain't yours to look at! This is my feminism."

Incidentally, Shabana also faces opposition from her mother for wearing the hijab, another story that comes from Malik's own life. "Some mothers think the hijab will hurt their child's prospects of getting married. When I went to university, I met other young Muslim women whose families were also unhappy about their decision to cover," she says. Many outside the Muslim community may not believe that because all they've heard of are the fanatics who ostracise their daughters or wives for not covering.

Malik has witnessed a measure of success in challenging the negativity associated with Muslim women. She recalls a young American man who sobbed in front of her after seeing Unveiled and told her how he hated Muslims, thinking women wore the veil to celebrate the September 11 attacks. "I will never forget the tears streaming down his face as he looked at me and said he was sorry."

"Most people who see the play often tell me that they learnt a lot from it. The presumptions about Muslims are so strong that it is shocking for audiences to hear the characters in my play explain



why they dress their way and do what they do," Malik says, adding that she has heard people say: "I'm not a racist and I'm educated. But I can't deny that I had several preconceptions about Islam and Muslim women and you challenged them."

Having watched the play, many Muslim and Arab women in the US have also broken their silence on their unpleasant experiences.

Of course, there have been negative responses, too, wherein people have walked out saying the play is another form of Islamic propaganda. "I'm OK with that because that is the nature of art," Malik says, adding that she hopes to bring the play to the UAE someday.

artslife@thenational.ae

Malik's other projects

Rohina Malik is chasing her dream of sharing stories of American Muslims through her plays. The Mecca Tales is about five Muslim women who meet and connect over their reasons for going on Hajj. Yasmina's Necklace profiles an Iraqi man who tries to shed his cultural identity, but later realises his mistake. Staged readings of Yasmina's Necklace will be held at Silk Road Rising, Chicago, on January 17, 18 and 19. Malik is now collaborating with a Christian and a Jewish playwright on a play on Abraham and his effect on the three Abrahamic religions. She recently founded Salaam Arts, an organisation that presents all forms of art to challenge preconceptions and promote social justice.

Rohina Malik in her one-woman play, Unveiled, about five Muslim women immigrants in the US and how their lives change after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Courtesy Sadaf Syed