

Wide Angle



Joel Indrupati

State Secrets and the Age of Leaks

The secret is out!

This is what newspapers, news-websites and social media tweets, boasted last week.

They announced that when the 90 year old Queen Elizabeth II, the longest ruling monarch of UK, passes away, the secret code that would be used is "London Bridge is down".

When this code is transmitted from Buckingham Palace, to UK's Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, and to BBC Worldwide, the recipients will immediately know that the Queen is no more. And they will swiftly begin the necessary arrangements, make appropriate announcements, and initiate procedures for royal succession.

Apparently, this secrecy is needed in order to prevent switchboard operators, and other intermediaries, at the palace from learning the news, before it is formally announced through official and reliable channels.

But what I found strange and amusing is that,

suddenly, there was an all-pervasive excitement in the world of news. I saw a mysterious awakening among the news-reporters at the very thought of the monarch passing away; and at the revelation of this code.

Many news websites published headlines with attention-grabbing fonts. And it was evident they were over-excited at the prospect of announcing the impending departure of a venerable royal, from this world. It was as if the revelation

of the code was just too startling and too juicy to be contained to news desks.

I keep wondering, however, about how the queen would be reacting, as she reads these news bits and websites - discussing her death and funeral plans.

Of course, she knows, and we know, that all of us must return to our maker one day. And that we have to stop this earthly sojourn and head outward, when we get the call.

But, wouldn't it be a bit unnerving to see the huge hullabaloo around your own death, when you are still alive?

In 1952, when her father King George VI died, the code was "Hyde Park Corner", and in 2002, when her mother, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, died, the code was "Operation Tay Bridge".

But it has been a sixty-five years since the previous UK monarch died.

And, I think, in this long time, many technological advances are making 'state secrecy', a term of

obsolescence.

Even in 2002, when Queen Mother died, smart phones, were still being tested. Facebook, Twitter, or WhatsApp did not exist. And phones with cameras were just making their entrance.

Today, I am sure virtually everyone in the queen's palace is connected to the Internet from their phones.

So, who would wait for the news from the formal BBC channel? Anymore?

These are days of leaks, and hacking. And for all that you know, you might see a tweet, or a Facebook post, or a WhatsApp image, that could leak out the news, even before TV channels announce it.

These days, government organizations with all that huge bureaucratic machinery are finding it hard to conceal classified information.

So, unlike in the past, when the death of King George VI was announced four hours after it happened, the news of the queen's death could actually come out instantaneously.

Here are two questions I still do not have answers for.

One, how often will newspapers keep getting excited, in the next ten years, if the queen stays on, to celebrate her centenary on earth?

Two, how can the royal administration keep the same secret code, when it is no longer a secret?

Whatever the answers, one other thing is worthy of admiration. Prince Charles' patience.

(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of this newspaper.)

Saudi postpones film festival after sandstorm

Riyadh

The launch of Saudi Arabia's main film festival has been postponed to next week due to a sandstorm, organisers said yesterday.

The opening of the fourth Saudi Film Festival, slated to run from March 23-28 in the Gulf coastal city of Dhahran, was suspended after the storm hit the kingdom earlier this week.

The festival will now open on Monday and run for six days.

This is the third consecutive annual film festival in Saudi Arabia after a hiatus of seven years.

The kingdom late last year began a cautious push to introduce entertainment.

Among the events on offer for Saudi spectators have been the New York theatrical group iLuminate, the Comic-Con pop culture festival, and WWE wrestling.

Saudi Arabia has created a government agency to support private firms organising entertainment events, under a wide-ranging "Vision 2030" plan for economic and social reform.

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Missing Pets



DREAMY - Female Chihuahua, 10 yrs, light beige, bald patch (birthmark) on backside, spayed, micro-chipped, not wearing collar or ID tag, gate left open, Karbabad (near Portuguese Fort), 19/3/17. 50BD REWARD. **39889026 or 36689026**



SILVER - Male Himalayan, 6 yrs, responds to name, brown area on mouth, not wearing collar or ID, Muharraq (Municipality Road close to Midway Supermarket), 11/3/17. **33229248**



RICKY - Male German hepherd, long hair, 2 yrs, purple collar - no ID, responds to name, ran out of garage, New Zinj-Bilad Al Qadeen (near Adhari and Mahooz) 21/3/17, EWARD for safe return. 33193340/39432714/33339543/36606072



LOUIE - Male Siamese, 5 yrs, right canine tooth slightly chipped, neutered, not wearing collar or ID, garden cat - went over the high fences, may have been STOLEN, Barbar (near Jawad Dome), BD500 REWARD, 9/2/17. **36326666**



POPPY - Female Miniature Poodle, 2 yrs, micro-chipped, wearing black collar w pink paw print ID tag, has health issue, possibly STOLEN, Budaiya (Beach Villas/by new road works/back of farmers market), 10/3/17, REWARD 200BD, **36636955 or 36366128**



BLUE - Male Red Point Siamese, 1 yr, not wearing collar or ID, gate left open, may have been STOLEN, Saar (Almarkh 35 Ave/ Cinema Saar), 19/1/17, BD50 REWARD, **35637527 or 35016599**