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Mayday

AT THE **Hindustan Times**

SENIOR EDITORS of this newspaper were about to sit down for their evening news-planning meeting when the smoke alarms started jangling.

Within moments the first floor newsroom filled with thick, billowing smoke. Journalists for both the *Hindustan Times* and its sister Hindi newspaper, *Hindustan*, began to file out and down the stairs. There was no panic. One group, the *HT Horizons* team led by Nalini Menon, was trapped beyond a stairwell by the smoke. They broke a few windowpanes to let in some air while waiting for help. Help arrived soon.

The fire engines started arriving, sirens blaring. All 17 floors of the *HT* building were evacuated without much fuss. A few people had to be helped down ladders by firemen. The fire had broken out on the ground floor, but was contained within a small area. The fire crews went about their work with remarkable calm. The parking lot emptied of cars, and hundreds of people milled around as dusk fell.

Half of the *Hindustan Times*'s eight editions were closed on Tuesday for May Day. Mumbai and Chandigarh were not, and quickly swung into action to help. Mumbai offered to do the bulk of Wednesday's Delhi edition, and Chandigarh said it would do the pages for Delhi's Late City edition. All the pages would be transmitted to the press in Greater Noida. Delhi's Metro reporters walked to a nearby cyber-cafe to file their stories. Photographers went off to transmit their pictures from laptops. Editors, circulation and advertisement managers, and production supervisors stood in the gathering darkness, discussing logistics.

There was never a second's doubt — the *Hindustan Times* would publish as usual on Wednesday.

HT journalists are accustomed to covering news, not making it. Ninety minutes after we left our desks, we were told the fire had been doused. Another half-hour, and the backup lights came on. We walked back into our smoky newsroom, glad to see our computer screens flickering back to life.

While we were waiting outside the building earlier, an SMS arrived from a TV channel, asking for a "phono". Back upstairs, hungry and relieved journalists tucked into *samosas* and *kachoris* brought in by Human Resources. A cheer went up when the newsroom's full lights came on and cool air wafted through the vents. A second SMS arrived, asking if all was well — and asking if there were any jobs going at *HT*.

It was business as usual.

Chaitanya Kalbag

Editor-in-Chief